BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

**Name:**

Lydia Lee

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**How did you hear about this class?**

Two friends (one business/econ major and one EECS major) recommended it.

**Major(s), class level, and projected date of graduation:**

EECS, third year, May 2017

**Please list previous classes taken, if any, related to law, Asian American Studies, or Ethnic Studies:**

N/A

**Why are you taking this class?**

It came highly recommended by two people from very different fields of study and it fit with my schedule.

**What are your professional and career goals?**

In the short term, I’d like to continue conducting research through academia, a national lab, or a corporate research team. In the long term, I’d like to keep doing that.

**What are your life goals?**

The goal is to be financially stable as early as possible so (1) my family can live in the same level of comfort afforded me as a child when they retire (2) I can give back to hugely beneficial activities like debate where cost is a significant barrier to many teams’ ability to travel and compete (3) I can justify adopting a large number of cats and dogs.

Lydia Lee

The evening of December 11, 1994, the city of Arlington, Texas is experiencing yet another typical frigid Texan winter, and Wendy Hu and her husband Wei-Jen Lee are on their way to the hospital for the third time that day. After two false alarms, they hope the baby will finally come so they can stop apologizing to the hospital staff for wasting their time. Several hours later and roughly midway through what would usually be dinner, their wish is granted by the arrival of a squalling baby girl. Their three year old son is more than a little disappointed; he distinctly remembers saying he wanted a dinosaur.

Like many parents, Wendy and Wei-Jen worry about their children’s educations, and so Lydia’s early years are filled with expensive preschools and classes for Chinese and math every Saturday. The preschools boast diverse student bodies, and the notion of race only arises when the schools’ young charges take it upon themselves to compare hair textures. The Chinese and math classes are led by members of the local Mandarin-speaking community, and the children often compare earlobe size and the height-width ratio of their eyes to see which of them has the “smallest” eyes. After several years, only the nice preschools and the math classes remain, though they are joined by Spanish, informal French thanks to one of the preschool instructors, and weekly piano lessons with a teacher who refers to St. Petersburg as Leningrad.

When it comes time for Lydia to leave preschool and begin kindergarten, her parents decide that it is time for a change of scenery, and they begin surveying local suburbs for a house. They immediately write off Plano with its burgeoning Asian population as too similar to Arlington, and its mediocre academic rankings at the time earn it no favor; Southlake shows promise until they notice that every rider of the neighborhood school bus is blue-eyed and blonde; a few months of searching later, they settle on a small town called Colleyville. With an academic ranking higher than that of other nearby schools and a ridiculously low crime rate, it seems an ideal place to raise two children. A new home decided upon, Lydia and her family move from a predominantly African American and Asian American neighborhood to one where the two combined amount to roughly 15% of the population.

Lydia’s first three years of elementary school are much like those of her classmates, though piano lessons and extracurricular math classes continue. Third grade is her earliest recollection of conflict, and it involves a girl named Alaina Stovall. With both parents working full-time, Alaina and Lydia regularly encounter one another at their after-school care program. The two are not close friends, but their relationship remains cordial until Alaina mocks Lydia and her Korean friend, Jenna, for having what she calls “squinty eyes”. Though similar to the game from Chinese school of comparing eye size, her words and actions bear the unmistakable tone of insult. Pulling outward from the edge of her eyes to make them appear flatter, she laughs while chanting, “Ching chong!” and attaching a stereotypical East Asian accent to sentences about eating rice and bamboo. Lydia runs to authority, but it is not necessary; Jenna’s well-aimed fist ensures Alaina’s left eye stays squinty for the next two weeks.

Come fourth grade, a similar situation arises, this time with a girl named Alyssa Cress. Overweight and not academically gifted, she is the younger sister of two classically beautiful and highly successful grown sisters—a girl people pity until she opens her mouth. In an argument over seating in the cafeteria, she maliciously raises the subject of family and claims that Sarah, the special needs sister of Lydia’s friend, deserved to die from her colon cancer because “she was just a retard”. The following months are marked by quiet wars not unlike those in *Mean Girls*, complete with nasty rumors on both sides, a revival of unkind jokes including the “squinty-eyed” routine, and vicious pranks and tricks meant to humiliate and embarrass. After numerous trips to the principal’s office and no shortage of largely ineffective discipline and counseling, the situation resolves itself when Alyssa’s mother receives a job offer several towns over and moves with her youngest daughter for a more convenient commute. Lydia will never see her again.

In spite of these conflicts, school goes well for Lydia: her outwardly quiet demeanor endears her to her teachers, and academically, she consistently performs well. It is in her final years of elementary school that the notion of “Asians are smart,” begins to appear. On one hand, the stereotype serves as a fantastic ego boost, but on the other, mistakes become a source of shameful weakness and imperfection. The feeling of inadequacy only worsens come middle school with Lydia’s first B in English, and she withdraws into near complete silence. Although her grades and self-confidence right themselves within several months, the silence persists for the next three years.