

*My Story*

For the majority of my life, the illusive ideal of “the perfect Asian daughter” has plagued my life and created all-consuming inhibitions that have driven me to suppress and deny aspects of myself that I only now comprehend and recognize. The quest to embody “the perfect Asian daughter” is a common mindset that is the exhausting culmination of perfectionism and ambition. America has made my hands soft and my life comfortable, but being a first generation immigrant means living constantly caught between the onslaught of influences and innate expectations from your parents culture, and the compulsion to contradict them. It’s being innately connected to a distant rich and vibrant history, and viewing the world through a lens of international perspective, first world privilege and generational discrepancies. It’s simultaneously belonging to both and neither worlds. I grew up feeling eternally indebted to my mother, who remains the most resilient and hardworking human being I’ll ever know.

I grew up with the focus on necessity and realism, so following any of my artistic passions after high school would be completely out of the question. She never had a choice of what she wanted to be, so why should I be given that choice? I knew of the stereotype of immigrant parents arriving in America and work tireless lives of sacrifice to open up every educational opportunity to their children, only to have the kids grow up spoiled by Western notions of self-actualization, and throw away generations of hard work to become idealistic artists. I viewed it as a negative thing, never taking into account that perhaps my parents didn’t just love me as one loves an investment, but loved me as a human being.

It took me so long to realize that there is such a thing as living honestly and making your family proud. Those two things do not have to be mutually exclusive, and my didn’t work so hard so that her child could be a conventionally conservative-dressing picture perfect academic decathlon champion who has long brown hair, no tattoos, and marries a nice man, and is the “perfect Asian daughter.” There is no such thing. She worked so hard so that I could exist and flourish and live free of fear to have the mind behind my eyes and the heart in my chest. To live authentically and to create a life for myself in this world that she will love because she loves me. No matter what. Pursuing my passions does not make me any less intelligent or valuable. I’ll always remember that Mulan was afraid of disappointing her family, but she saved China through the power of cross-dressing, kicking ass, and embracing her strong, non-traditional femininity.

Whether it be irreverent or provocative or the importuneation of social justice, the pursuit of knowledge is the provenance of artistic expression. We become attuned to ourselves, to history, and to the metaphysical attributes of our essence through academia, and by cutting out that part of our world, you are ignoring an integral part of the art making process. Is all that we are but a product of the onslaught of influences that we come into contact with from the moment we are born, or is there an innate desire for individuality and an invisible nature that calls to us to find our preeminent definition? I believe it’s a bit of both. Our understanding of the world is what shapes our identities and intellect, and art is the expression of our identities and intellect. Without context, we are not a part of a society, and without context, art cannot be radical and political. Minorities exist, but with the context of society, our existence becomes political.

Viola Davis once said, “I became an artist—and thank God I did—because we are the only profession that celebrates what it means to live a life.” Humans create art and dispel knowledge because it is the defining act of humanity, and at its core it is all that we have. It is the lifelong process of attempting to articulate our innermost monologues, and education is the bridge between intuition and impact. It is the intersection of visibility and intangibility, and without it, art exists in a one-dimensional homogeneously decorative void. We cannot separate the intellectual from the imaginative without taking our critical thinking along with it.

I grew up at religious schools, and realizing that I was gay in an environment that didn't support or accommodate behavior that deviated from their conservative notions was a bit challenging at times. It led to a conflict within myself where I would be out in certain social circles, and completely closeted in other environments. So, when I went to a public high school, I wanted to make sure that no matter where I was for the rest of my life, I would do everything I could to make sure that the people in that environment did not feel ostracized or alone in their identities. Since then, I have coordinated events at my school such as days of silence for the victims of Pulse and Las Vegas, the walkout and peaceful anti-gun violence protest, and anti-bullying and mental health awareness assemblies. I have also put together art charity fundraisers to raise awareness for female genital mutilation, sex trafficking, and domestic violence. But the project that was dearest to my heart was founding the Gender and Sexualities Alliance club at my school. These last few years have been so amazing, and I have connected with so many students that have found each other and consider their school to be a safe space to be themselves. Although I graduated last year, I know that the club will be in good hands with the underclassmen. I cannot describe how liberating it is to be out in some aspects of your life, and these last few years have taught me just how important safe spaces and Pride celebrations are. For queer youth, feeling safe is not a given, and it is not the default of their lives. So, having a place, whether it is a club at school or a Pride parade, where they can unapologetically exist makes all the difference in their lives.

Being gay has been the light of my life. It has taught me the value of community, kindness, and that mourning and vulnerability are essential. It has taught me to embrace and celebrate your individuality, but most importantly, as humans, there is so much more that unites us than that which divides us. A huge struggle in my life has been finding my true self and coexisting between communities, which is only furthered by being a first generation immigrant, and an Asian American woman. I now understand that when your existence is viewed as political, self-love is a radical, subversive act that allows me to center what I want most out of life. I must integrate my own truth with the power to actively speak out about that oppression, and discover each day what it means to fully challenge a world that wasn't built to recognize us.

I simply will not live my life according to arbitrary notions of womanhood, as to do so would be nothing short of degrading to my mind and potential. The astounding amount of pain and personal and social abasement that a woman experiences from childhood is disgusting and abysmal. It is time for a societal shift, and it is time to abolish the culture of shame and inferiority we have been raised upon.

As human beings we have an inherent responsibility to the fortification of the disenfranchised and subjugated. My goal in life is simply to do all I can so that young girls, young POC, and young gay kids can grow up in a world in which they are less afraid than the generation before them. Representation in media and entertainment is the reflection and celebration of perspectives, and a lack of representation diminishes, discredits, and impairs the assurance of those who don't see themselves. A lack of representation essentially tells you that your story is not worth telling, and you are not worth being shown as a multifaceted, complex human being.

The mission of this company and this program mirrors the most undeniable facets of my core passions. To elevate female experiences through media training emboldens the young voices of an impassioned, provoked generation to take initiative and to revel in hope for the future. For a future of economic and social equality, for a more compassionate and empathetic future, and for a future where we, as women, will not be silenced, deprecated, or disparaged. I live so my life will be the fruition of a rejection of passivity and submission. If only my younger self could see me now. I am a strong woman of color who will never be silenced again.