

*As a part of the Public Scholarship course, students were required to review their educational experiences from pre-k to the present. The goal of this assignment was for them to assess the ways in which they were treated based on their marginalizations or their privileges. Students provided three terms for what their narrative would share — the terms were not to be included in their narrative. After reading their narratives aloud, a class discussion connected their terms to the associated experiences. There are a total of four narratives in this issue, three are also accompanied with a voice recording by the author.*

*The following is one such narrative.*

## An Educational Narrative by Sarah Putulin

I grew up in Palo Alto, a predominantly white town with a strong Asian-American presence. I think that's why I didn't feel the need to fit, because I had people who looked like me walking around my neighborhood and in schools. My parents were lucky and bought our home when the house was still relatively priced back in the early 2000s, but if they tried to buy it now, it wouldn't be possible. My town has become a hub for small but powerful companies as well as the prestigious university that is often called the Yale of the West Coast. Living in the heart of Silicon Valley has made me very fortunate, but the prestige that comes with it brings a lot of pressure to all the students. Our schools are very competitive and sometimes it would get out of hand to the point where students would take their lives if everything was too much to handle.

At my elementary school, there was an almost equal ratio of white to Asian-American students with a lack of Black or Latinx students. However, almost all of my teachers and principals were white. I always knew that race was important in a way because my teachers were always harder on the Black or Latinx students than they were on the white or Asian students. Specifically, my fourth-grade teacher was giving a reading task where everyone had to read a certain passage from a book that was for homework. The class went around, and when it came to my friend who was Latino, he stumbled over the words and couldn't pronounce them. Mrs. Anderson, who was white, walked over and yelled at him saying, "Why can't you get the words right? Did you even do the homework? Maybe you didn't do the homework, knowing you. If you can't get the words right this instant you will be in so much trouble!" My friend then proceeded to cry in his seat. Instead of consoling him or apologizing, she had no remorse and asked the next person to continue reading. When it was my time to read, I stumbled a bit too but when I looked up to see her, she gave me an encouraging smile and said nothing when I finished. I wondered why I didn't get the same treatment he did. After class, I talked to my friend and asked why she was a lot meaner to him than me, and he said, "It's probably because you're Asian. She assumes you're smart, so you just made a mistake." I later learned that he dropped out of school right after eighth grade, because he couldn't take all the hate from his teachers.

Jumping forward to high school, the new challenge was getting into a prestigious college, and feeling like it was one big competition. During senior year, college applications consumed the lives of all of us, and it felt like a bragging contest with my fellow Asian American students as to who could get into the best university. I would get questions and comments like, "What school did you apply to? Is it an Ivy League

it a community college? I haven't heard of that school, so it must not be good." I felt like you weren't Asian enough if you didn't commit to a name brand university or college. I never really believed in those ideas, so at one point when I mentioned the University of Puget Sound, I'm pretty sure I confused my classmates. To make things a little more comical, there was a "rejection wall" outside the library. The wall contained anonymous rejection letters from top schools like Brown, Harvard, and MIT as a way to show that it was okay to be rejected by those schools, but sometimes it caused more pressure in students to succeed. That pressure sometimes pushed people in the worst way. When a student took their life during my senior year, I remember feeling the numbness hit because this sort of thing happened too often at my school and at the rival high school.

The most heartbreaking and upsetting comment I heard around campus in the aftermath was, "Were they Asian? I'm not surprised". All the students who took their lives during my high school career, to my knowledge, were of Asian descent which speaks volumes. There is a need to be perfect in everything you do, and when you feel like you're failing or disappointing your family, it breaks you. I can't help but think about how the hyper competitive way my high school functions perpetuates the way actions happen in my community.

The education system is supposed to propel you through life, not put a strain on your mental health. School's hard enough without having to deal with bullying from teachers or each other. I wonder if the need to be perfect will someday be redefined. We've lost too many students in the race to achieving success, and I'd hate to see another one leave because they felt like they couldn't make it through.

---

## The Three Terms: Model-Minority, Racism, and Culture

---



**Sarah Putulin** is a student at the University of Puget Sound. She is from Palo Alto, California, and is pursuing a major in Communication Studies and a minor in Chinese. She chose this university because it was far enough from home but close enough for easy and affordable travel home. She loves how green Washington State is compared to California, and enjoys the presence of rain. The University of Puget Sound has given her an invaluable education, one that she will cherish for the rest of her life. Sarah believes she has learned more about her identity and the world she lives in through critical discussions in class than she probably would have at a bigger school. She greatly appreciates Puget Sound and all it has done to enrich her life. Sarah will graduate this spring as a part of the Class of 2019.