Personal Statement

Everyone has moments in their lives that they absolutely dread. For some, it's the sound of the alarm early in the morning. For others, it's sitting through Friday afternoon rush hour traffic. For me, it was the first day of class with a new professor. "Michael? Is Michael here?" I'd wait to see if there was anyone named Michael in the class. "Michael Glovinsky?" I realized it must be me. I'd quietly raise my hand and say, "here." The look on the professor's face when they realized I am a female and the quick need to change Michael into a "Michelle?" was my moment of dread. The fear of standing out and being different overpowered me, and I couldn't help but blush and put my head down as if to hide from everyone's stares.

When I was 13, I moved to the United States with my mom, leaving the rest of my family and friends. I went from a large loving community, to a single parent household, in a new country, new culture, language and way of life, in a day. We knew no one in our new home. For me, it was scary and challenging. But my mom was no stranger to immigration, as she had escaped the Soviet Union the moment the borders opened, and had to start a life in a new country once before. Again, she found herself as the only female compiler engineer at her new company at the time. "Some cultures have more females than males in tech, some have less. If you decide to go this route, you may be one of the few," my mom told me. She pushed forward in creating a place for herself both at work and at home, making friends and setting an example for me.

I grew up shadowing my mom in her engineering jobs. I toured cleanrooms in a white gown that was way too big on me, accessed rooms that had every chip and wire imaginable, and attended every kids' science camp they hosted. The world of machines and computers excited me. I loved the intellectual creativity and cutting-edge innovation that I observed among the engineers There

was no doubt in my mind that I would be in such a field one day, but I also knew I would have to work hard to realize my dream of engineering and higher education. In order to succeed, I would need to develop and strengthen my English language skills (my third language), while trying to learn and fit into American life.

As I overcame the language and cultural barriers that came with being an immigrant attending an American high school, I threw myself into my studies and worked hard to succeed. My favorite subjects were mathematics and computer science. Among my female friends, there was a culture of apprehension toward math, few were interested in it, and it was clear that I was again, different. While I was used to being different, I knew that I wanted to change that phenomenon for other girls throughout my academic career.

In college, I decided to pursue my passion for technology and the theoretical world by studying applied mathematics. As an undergraduate, I quickly realized that the STEM world is not so lonely after all for someone like me. I attended my first Association of Women in Mathematics (AWM) club meeting where I discovered fellow math-loving women and even a few supportive men who attended the meetings for more than just the free pizza, as well as an incredible opportunity to give back. AWM chose several members every year to tutor and mentor young girls from low-income immigrant families in the San Luis Obispo community. I immediately knew that this was my calling, and devoted my free time to developing lesson plans. I worked with several students, including Laura and Alexandra, who at first appeared to just struggle with mastering fractions, but it soon became obvious that they had other internal battles going on. As immigrants, they lived in fear of being separated from their parents, and were unsure if they would even graduate high school, let alone attend a university. They felt different from many of their better-off, U.S. born peers, something I could identify with. I wanted to inspire them to see the

possibilities in their futures. I shared several resources that had inspired me in my journey, including powerful TED Talks that featured speakers who had overcome challenges and found success and fulfillment. One talk I shared with the girls was *Teach Girls Bravery, Not Perfection*, by the founder of Girls Who Code. Seeing a woman who came from a similar background, who was both funny and successful, drew the girls in, demonstrating what could be achieved. Between the math lessons and our discussions, Laura and Alexandra became less intimidated by math, and more confident and hopeful about their futures. Laura talked of her interest in becoming a nurse, and Alexandra spoke of opening her own clothing boutique one day. I felt more fulfilled than ever, and learned something myself from my interaction with Laura and Alexandra. I no longer put my head down in shame when faced head-on with my identity. I realized that continuing to be shy about what made me unique would prevent me from becoming the role model I want to be.

Today I am not only proud of my cultural, language and career differences, I also value others' diverse perspectives. What each of us brings to the table is powerful - our unique viewpoints and backgrounds make the outcome of any project or endeavor rich and distinct. As I embark on my next journey in pursuing a doctoral degree, I bring with me the challenges I faced as an immigrant as well as my personal experience with the obstacles minority communities currently face. I hope to work alongside a diverse team of individuals, both in background and gender, and I am committed to helping to motivate and support others in their academic and career goals.