THE "MODEL MINORITY" AGAINST THE GRAIN: INTERGENERATIONAL DUALITY AND DIASPORA IN ASIAN-AMERICAN LITERATURE

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ABSTRACT

Asian Americans have often been called "model minorities" by white Americans, a racist belief that adds to the societal pressure immigrants face. The model minority myth is harmful because, rather than respecting the individual, it prioritizes a person's usefulness to American society. Jessica Hagedorn's *The Gangster of Love*, Malinda Lo's *Last Night at the Telegraph Club*, Andrew X. Pham's *Catfish and Mandala*, and Chang-Rae Lee's *Native Speaker* all feature Asian American protagonists with strained relationships with their parents. The immigrant parents maintain high expectations for their children, feeling that it is necessary for survival in the U.S. These works elucidate the stress that embodying the model minority image causes, as readers witness the toll it takes on characters' communication styles and efforts to realize their identities. In particular, these works expose how gender presentation plays a significant role in the way family members interact with and attempt to understand each other. The four central characters of these works confront their diaspora through shedding the expectations of their parents. These works highlight how the journey towards self-acceptance for Asian Americans is nonlinear and imperfect, and how it involves the sacrificing of homes, jobs, parental satisfaction, and even aspects of identities.

INTRODUCTION

For many Asian immigrant families living in the United States, the questioning of identity that comes with diaspora can cause stress and resentment. Americans thrust the "model minority myth" upon them, claiming that Asians are superior immigrants due to their tendency of valuing work, and yet, they are still seen as "lesser than" white Americans. In Jessica Hagedorn's novel, *The Gangster of Love*, Rocky yearns to be a musician despite an unsupportive mother and Philippine culture. Malinda Lo's novel, *Last Night at the Telegraph Club*, follows Lily as she grapples with her mother's "perfect Chinese daughter" expectations along with the realization she is gay. In his memoir, *Catfish and Mandala: A Two-Wheeled Voyage Through the Landscape and Memory of Vietnam*, Andrew X. Pham returns to Vietnam to rekindle his roots and better understand his dysfunctional relationship with his father. In Chang-Rae Lee's novel, *Native Speaker*, Henry reflects on the ways his communication methods have been affected by his Korean father's stoicism. Success looks different for the four immigrant parents, but regardless of the kind of prosperity they strive for, all of them feel they must achieve model minority status in order to survive in the U.S. This drive negatively affects the ways they communicate with their children, especially in the ways gender should and should not be presented. In learning to understand how diaspora has affected the parent-child bond, children of immigrants break the model minority mold through confronting parental stress, rejecting the notion of American success, and aligning their lives to their own standards.

SUCCESS FOR ASIAN-AMERICANS

In the four works, immigrants strive for success, with their careers being their utmost priority in their lives. In *Native Speaker*, Henry says of his father, "you worked from before sunrise to the dead of night"

(Lee 47). His father has little time to himself, dedicating every moment to his business. In *Catfish and Mandala*, Pham's father, Thong, is also praised for his lack of free time due to his job commitments. Pham remembers, "One of our white neighbors, Mr. Slocum, once asked Dad, 'Why are you people killing yourself working around the clock like that?' Dad replied, 'How can you kill yourself when you are already in heaven?'" (Pham 191). Long, arduous work is a toll that must be paid to stay in America and achieve "heaven," albeit a "heaven" of continuous toil. It is a price that the fathers of Pham and Henry are willing to pay.

More than just *being* successful, the mothers of Lily and Rocky want to *look* the part as well. Lily's mother, Grace, wants to look successful in order to appear more American. Lily understands that her mother dresses nicely in her church suit when shopping at Macy's because, "Even if it was ugly, it declared her investment in respectability. Her mother was a real American wife and mother, not a China doll in a cheongsam, relegated to operating the elevator" (Lo 30). Dressing up formally in public permits Grace to blend in with the American public. Her outfit choice purposefully compares herself to the elevator worker to send the message that she is better than a fellow Chinese woman, as she is more willing to comply to American standards of what a successful woman looks like. Rocky's mother, Milagros, also strives for a successful look, but asserts her place as a Filipina woman, not believing there is any other identity for her to claim. Milagros uses her appearance to be successful in another way: by playing up her sexuality. She flirts with bankers, customers, and landlords to get what she wants, much to the dismay of Rocky. Rocky says of the men, "Milagros Rivera had them all wrapped around her manicured fingers. I like to think she never fucked any of them. My mother teased, flirted, and hypnotized the men with her cooking" (Hagedorn 18-19). Milagros uses her flirtatious charms for gain in her American life, whether it be keeping their housing steady or her business afloat. Her mother's beauty and charm disgusts Rocky, but she is reluctant to vocalize her discomfort in the face of her mother's triumph, as Milagros' charisma is essential to her American prosperity. Milagros and Grace do not need to tell their daughters that appearances matter because they express it through the way they present themselves in a white world.

However, Asian Americans are prevented from enjoying the success they work for. Hard work results in an absence of free time, as Henry laments of his father, "Your family was your life, even though you rarely saw them" (Lee 47). His father toils long hours each day to support his family, but as a result, his connection with them is weakened. The same can be said of Thong, who strains with little reward. He tells Pham to remember, "behind every company CEO is a gang of janitors and a hive of worker bees. Don't ever think America is yours. It isn't" (Pham 191). Thong says that a working-class immigrant, especially an Asian one, does not belong in the same category as the rest of Americans, namely white ones, who have an easier time climbing the corporate ladder. Milagros has success in her business, but like the fathers of Henry and Pham, success separates her from her children. Rocky says, "Voltaire was usually stuck back in my mother's overheated kitchen, rolling lumpias as fast as he could. My mother's big American dream was to have Voltaire become a partner and handle the financial end of business… Voltaire wasn't interested, which hurt and angered my mother" (Hagedorn 20). Milagros expects her children to keep her business afloat by enlisting their work, but ends up treating her son, Voltaire, like a captive. He does not want to be involved in the lumpia business for life, much to his mother's dismay. For these parents, the toll of hard work is paid, but true belonging cannot be reached. The same applies to Lily's family, whose efforts never seem to be enough. When the family's citizenship is threatened, Grace tells Lily, "What we need to do is make sure we show we're a proper American family—because we are. That means you study hard, and you don't have anything to do with the Man Ts'ing" (Lo 70). Lily's father has served as an army captain and as an accomplished doctor, but being Chinese is enough for the FBI to accuse him of being Communist. Even though the family has done everything right, Grace still must pressure her children to keep up their grades and stay away from friends associated with Leftist organizations like the Man Ts'ing. Seeking a beneficial American career puts a lot of pressure on the parents, but on their children as well, as relationships become taut through the emphasis of overwork without reward.

MODEL MINORITIES: A PRESSURE TO CONFORM

Through showing their children the exhaustion that comes with work, the immigrant parents also convey the exhaustion that comes with diaspora. The parents understand that although they work as diligently as they can, they will never be seen as equal to white American workers, which affects their career-climbing abilities and social levels. This is particularly evident in the parents' interactions with the "model minority myth," the idea that Asian Americans are, as the article "Asian Americans as a Model Minority: Self-Perceptions and Perceptions by Other Racial Groups" defines, "prepared, motivated and more likely to have career success" (Wong et al. 95). Indeed, these four parents epitomize the importance of preparedness and motivation because they believe that meeting these expectations set for them makes them more socially tolerable to white Americans. The article "What is Career Success? A New Asian American Psychology of Working" asserts, "The continued presentation of Asian American educational and occupational attainment in the aggregate has perpetuated the perception of Asian Americans as a model minority group who attains upward mobility in the U.S. through sacrifice and hard work" (Tu & Okazaki 674). White Americans may argue that calling Asian Americans a "model minority" is a compliment, but in reality, they are comparing Asians to the Black and Brown communities, saying they are "better" for working harder; therefore, Asians are only "useful" and "good" for the U.S. *because* of the work they do. This racial competition set by white Americans adds insecurity into the lives of people of color. Despite its negativity, the four parents see this stereotype as a way for them to get ahead, although they recognize the prejudice behind it.

This idea of "usefulness" is reflected in American thinking throughout *Catfish and Mandala* and *Last Night at the Telegraph Club*. In the former, Pham writes that although his neighbors were friendly to his parents, their demeanor sent the message: "We're different. Never forget that we are different. You are better than they. You must study hard, work harder, and be better than they in every way" (Pham 191). The "they" refers to other racial minorities. The white neighbors may *want* the Asian family to have success, but they must first prove themselves by treating other minorities as competition. Competition is also a substantial conflict in Lo's novel. Lily's father has his papers revoked for refusing to accuse a patient of Communism, a lie which the FBI urges him to tell. Deportation is a major risk the family faces, as the refusal labels him as an uncooperative Chinese man, which is easily painted as a threat. Grace tells Lily, "They aren't looking for the truth. They are looking for scapegoats. Your father should know this. He should have just told them what they wanted… [his refusal] has put your father in danger, which means it puts you and me and your brothers in danger" (Lo 69). She urges her husband to accuse the boy without proof, seeing it as the only way to protect the family. To be the "model minority" deserving to reside in the U.S., he must turn against his fellow Chinese. Grace feeds into this competition, reiterating that it is their family against this boy, as the law could punish all of them for not cooperating. Both works exhibit that protecting one's own people involves harming others.

Henry's father also avoids conflict with white patrons, urging his son to do the same. In *Native Speaker*, a white woman takes a bite of an apple and puts it back. Henry walks over to confront her, but his father intercepts him, "smiling in Korean, as if he were complimenting me, 'She's a steady customer.' He nudged me back to my station. I had to wait until she left to replace the ruined apple with a fresh one" (Lee 54). Henry's father hides his displeasure, even though the woman has disrespected his store. She additionally disrespects Henry and the other Korean workers, calling them "Oriental Jews" (Lee 53), making no effort to disguise her dislike for them. The father continues to serve her, ignoring the rudeness to keep a reliable sale. The insecurity of being an immigrant mingles with the stress of work to create an identity governed by diaspora, wherein white Americans do not let Asian Americans forget their "subordinate" place.

SINGLE IDENTITIES AND DOUBLE IDENTITIES

The parents wish to keep their identities and be successful, but the disrespect they receive along with their arduous efforts make them resent not just America, but their children, too. Tu & Okazaki write, "Though they had immigrated primarily to provide a better future for their children, many parents struggled to participate meaningfully in their children's development" (673). Connections are difficult for parents to cultivate when they are busy with constant work. To create a "better future" for their children,

they wish to design the future for them, whether it be picking their career for them (as Milagros does) or choosing who they are allowed to spend time with (as Grace and Henry's father do). Lisa Lowe discusses in her article, "Canon, Institutionalization, Identity: Asian American Studies," that the "complex" strife of conforming to two cultures "troubles the closure and reconciliation of the bildungsroman form. Whether the novel is read as a narrative of immigrant assimilation or even as a narrative of successful self-determination… both characterizations privilege a telos of development that closes off the most interesting conflicts and indeterminacies in the text" (46). Lowe writes that although much of American literature concludes with the protagonist's maturity, self-actualization, and security, Asian American stories do not end in the same bildungsroman-style of achievement and confidence. The characters struggle socially due to their diasporas, causing them to either latch to the assertion of their Asian identity or their newfound American identity, but not both.

Meanwhile, their children are more open to adopting *both* identities, a multiplicity that their parents have a difficult time understanding. In his article, "Model Minority Discourse and the Course of Healing," David Liu writes, "There is, therefore, a doubleness in Asian American literary texts, which serve as representations of an eccentric "ethnic" literature as well as models of successful assimilation to the core" (396). Asian American literature, says Liu, is largely based on the discovery and development of two identities: ethnic and assimilatory. The children of immigrants in the four novels voice curiosity and exploration of their dual Asian American identities, but the parents attempt to block this merging of the two.

Some immigrant parents are offended by their children's Westernization, claiming that they are first and foremost Asian. In *The Gangster of Love*, Rocky says, "My mother is one of those people who means 'white' when she refers to Americans. It doesn't matter who was here first, or how many generations they'd been in America: the Greens are Negroes, Mexicans are Mexicans, Jews are Jews, and the Chinese are most definitely always Chinese" (Hagedorn 25). Milagros may live her "American dream" by running her prosperous lumpia business, but she does not even consider herself American. "American" is the way someone *looks*, not who they *are*, in her eyes. Even though she cannot "look" American, she can harness her looks to bring success, which she does through her glamorous appearance and flirtatious demeanor. The American "look" is a schema that Henry's father repeats to him when Henry voices his plan to take a white girl to a school dance. His father tells him, "This American girl, she nobody for you. She don't know nothing about you. You Korean man. So so different. Also, she know we live in expensive area… You real dummy, Henry. Don't you know? You just free dance ticket. She just using you" (Lee 74). He cannot imagine the thought that someone who is white would be romantically interested in his Asian son. Like Milagros, he does not see his family as American in any way, calling the white girl "American" and Henry strictly "Korean," despite the country he lives in. Milagros and Henry's father want their children to understand that Asian is their only identity.

Other immigrant parents feel the opposite, that they need to leave behind their ethnicity completely in place of a new wholly-American self. The model minority stereotype "capitalizes the values of the middle class or 'silent majority' for minority groups in society to assume. The assimilation model suggests that… minority group members who strongly identify with the majority group are doing so at the expense of denying their own ethnic identity" (Wong et al. 99-100). These words echo Grace's attitude. When accused of being Communist, she tells Lily, "we need to show that we're Americans first" (Lo 67). Assimilation, for Grace, is rejection of cultural and ethnic background, a self color blindness that disregards race. They "deny" themselves of their past for a future they know does not accept them, but they attempt to fit into anyway.

One product of diaspora is the expansion of different communication styles between parents and children, a major conflict in all four works. In their article, "Acculturative Family Distancing, Mother–Daughter Relationship, and Well-Being Among Asian Americans," Stacy Y. Ko and Meifen Wei write, "Breakdowns in communication may arise when messages between parent and child are not accurately relayed and perceived… misunderstandings may occur in trying to understand one another's norms and expectations for nonverbal communication (e.g., Asian parents may show less physical affection, which may be interpreted by children as being cold or distant)" (Ko & Wei). While the protagonists go through

ethnic diasporas, their places as children in Western society can also be seen as a diaspora. The parents have a difficult time understanding how communication style differences break parent-child bonds apart.

THE SILENCING OF MEN

In *Native Speaker*, Henry is resented by his father for his English speech, just as he is used for it. Having an English-speaking son is beneficial for his business, but it is detrimental to the father's confidence. Henry remembers fighting his father, "making sure I was speaking in complete sentences about his cowardice and unfairness… until he slammed both palms on the table and demanded, 'You shut up! You shut up!' I kept at him anyway, using the biggest words I knew" (Lee 63). Henry combats his father's violence with a violence of his own; knowing that English is a difficult way for his father to communicate, Henry uses it to his advantage to give himself power and play into his father's insecurity. Henry's father considers silence and stoicism to be the makings of a man. Besides his anger, he is noted for his lack of emotion, from his absent compassion for his employees to his neutrality following his wife's death. Anger and disinterest are the two emotions Henry learns from a young age to associate with his father, and thus, successful men. He remembers "how I sat with him in those restaurants, both of us eating without savor, joyousness, and my wanting to show him that I could be as steely as he, my chin as rigid and unwavering as any of his displays" (59). The way he treats people, especially women, is reflective of his father; as his father was never affectionate with his mother, Henry is emotionally distant with his own wife. Learning to be emotionless damages relationships both romantic and platonic. He is taught to avoid expression, which impedes his ability to form meaningful connections.

Pham's father adopts the same value of silence by encouraging it through generational, patriarchal abuse. In *Catfish and Mandala*, the Pham family is subject to the abusive male members of their family. One day, while being abused by his father, Pham stops cowering and takes the beating. He remembers, "I did not cry. I just looked at him, taking the full brunt of his anger wherever it landed… I looked at him, pitted my mettle against his. My steel against his fire. His arms tired; the stroked slowed, then ceased… [he was] never to raise a hand against me again" (Pham 169-170). In the face of great pain, Pham learns to hide his fear and agony, which results in his father stopping the attack, defeated. In standing emotionless during the violence for the first time, Pham proves he is no longer a child, but a man. Emotional stoicism, then, depicts endurance and perseverance, making one a "mature adult" in the eyes of his father's Vietnamese culture. The continuance of violence allows it to be normalized, so that children learn that the physical release of anger is something expected and understandable of men. Violence passes from the father, to Pham, to his younger brothers, as he notes, "The rage was passed on to another generation. A monster in me, for I am violent. A few years down the road, I cane Hien with a spark of Father's fury. And Hien, barely ten, comes back at me with a knife" (170). Trauma from the Vietnam war and from the struggles of moving to a country that looks down on them leads adults to release their rage out on children, who are not at fault for the stress. Family members do not communicate their feelings healthily through conversation, but through threats and fear, resulting in an unending cycle of rage that travels from Vietnam to the U.S. with the Pham family. The fathers in *Catfish and Mandala* and *Native Speaker* both teach their sons that violence and emotionlessness are appropriate ways for men to act, and thus, part of the Asian identity. These ideologies may come from their ethnic cultures, but the stress of American life exacerbates them.

THE SILENCING OF WOMEN

While the men ingrain into their sons that silence is the respectable way to act, they do not necessarily punish their children for speaking. The mothers, on the other hand, punish their daughters through guilt-tripping. When they do as they please, they are told they are bad daughters. When Lily's mother finds out Lily was at the Telegraph Club, a meeting place for lesbians, she yells, "There are no homosexuals in this family… Are you my daughter?" (Lo 329). Lily learns, as she expected, that her mother's love and respect for her are conditional upon whether she meets the qualities Grace considers to be of the "perfect daughter," a model minority of a daughter. Rocky is also accused of moving away from family values.

When her mother is ill, she gives Rocky the silent treatment, as "She doesn't answer" (Hagedorn 277) anything Rocky says to her. Her daughter moving away from her and starting her own life was considered so offensive that she does not talk to her. Milagros and Grace both treat their daughters with disownment when they choose to act out of the coveted standard of an obedient, close daughter. The distance Rocky and Lily place between themselves and their mothers is reciprocated, ruining their relationships further.

Father-son and mother-daughter communication is similar but different. As men, Pham and Henry are able to speak as they please, although they have been conditioned not to. They could do what they want with just resentment from their fathers. For women, the consequence is more dire. A study, "College Women's Sexual and Reproductive Health Screening Behaviors and the Role of Mother–Daughter Communication," found that, compared to their white counterparts, Asian American daughters talk less about uncomfortable topics with their mothers. It concludes, "These differences may in part stem from differences in communication styles. Asian Americans have been shown to engage in more high context communication, which emphasizes implicit and indirect messages" (Gibson et al. 358). The men are taught silence because any communication about life struggles turns into argument and violence, whereas, as the article discusses, women are taught silence more indirectly, not through fighting but through shame. This is seen through Lily's disownment and Rocky being ignored by their angry mothers. Women are expected to be more attached to family, so they are guilted into silence, because when they vocalize their individuality, they are seen as bad daughters. Grace would have preferred for Lily to keep her homosexuality to herself, and Milogros would have preferred for Rocky to live close by; the daughters' decisions not to are an affront to them. The difference between the conditioned silence of men and women, then, is this: the son is considered rebellious, and the daughter is considered no longer family. One connection has been weakened, but the other has been cut.

REBELLION OF THE MODEL MINORITY

By the conclusions of their novels, the protagonists break away from the singularity of identity and move to a dual identity, though men seem to do so with more ease than women. The male characters find their identities by breaking away from what society expects from them. In his book, *Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century*, James Clifford writes, "Entanglement is not necessarily cooptation" (276), meaning that just because an immigrant is "entangled" in their ethnic and American statuses does not mean that they must be swayed or manipulated into changing sides again and again. Pham finds that exploration of *both* his Vietnamese and American identities provides a new sense of agency. After his transgender brother, Minh, commits suicide, Pham reckons with the trauma that immigration and abuse have wrecked on his family. His grandmother says that Minh's death was foretold in a Vietnamese fortune at birth, and when she asks if Pham would like to read his own fortune, he runs away: "Grandmother closed her hands over mine and asked me quietly if I wanted to read my birth fortune… I said no, quit my job, and bicycled into the Mexican desert" (Pham 3). Pham rejects both what Vietnamese culture expects of him (in the fortune) *and* what American culture expects of him (dedication to work). He is the one to decide to leave work and home to rediscover himself, so the trip is a form of self-advocacy. Minh died because he could not make sense of his identity, so Pham wants to discover how his own identities "entangle"—as Clifford says—with each other. In spontaneously quitting his job for travel, he runs from the destiny planned for him, hoping instead to explore the world as he explores his own diasporic existence in the wake of trauma.

Clifford's words also apply to Henry's identity journey. As a child, there was a lot of pressure for Henry to use English correctly, as he had to do well in school, avoid bullying, and use it to help his Korean-speaking father in the grocery store. His language abilities were part of his childhood survival, but also a duty for the welfare of his parents. By the novel's conclusion, he quits his soulless job and teaches speech with his wife and finds that what was once so threatening is now something he is passionate about. He says, "I like my job. I wear a green rubber hood and act in my role as the Speech Monster. I play it well. I gobble up kids but I cower when anyone repeats the day's secret phrase" (Lee 349). Whereas he was once one of these children scared to speak English in fear of messing up, now he

plays with speech to make it seem less daunting. He has a new sense of agency, as *he* is the one able to dictate how language can be used: imperfect, silly, not just for survival but namely for connection. He uses this new agency to repair negative thinking about language in the next generation of English learners, that it is okay to make mistakes with language as it is learned, and that it can be played with until it is understood. Henry and Pham both leave careers that they dislike and abandon what is expected of them to live the lives they want.

The female characters attempt rebellion from Asian and American standards alike, but unlike the men, end up more ingrained in their societal roles. Their statuses as Asian women in American society strip them of their agency. Throughout the novel, Rocky engages in a power-battle with her mother, but she comes to realize that her own motherhood makes her resemble Milagros. In her article, "Difference: A Special Third-World Women Issue," Trinh T. Minh-ha says, "I shall loudly assert my right, as a woman, and an exemplary one, to have access to equal opportunity; on the other hand, I shall quietly maintain my privileges by helping the master perpetuate his cycle of oppression" (86-87). Rocky reflects Minh-ha's thoughts through her loyalty to the "rebel life" she wants to live: musicianship, sex, and substance use. She chases this "equal opportunity" promised to her in the American dream, that toil results in success. Instead, she faces sexism, racism, and resentment from peers and, of course, her mother. Rocky continues to use substances once her daughter is born, admitting to "getting high with a certain amount of guilt that is new and burdensome. 'Motherhood's the ultimate self-censorship'" (Hagedorn 243). She submits to forcing her old lifestyle in the small increments she finds, freedom gone. Rocky was never what American standards would call a model minority, which follows her into motherhood, as her substance-abuse issues continue. Like Milagros, she cannot put away her attention-seeking ways to be a responsible parent, aligning neither with Asian nor American ideals. As a result, Rocky does not enjoy motherhood, nor her identity as a mother, as it takes her from the lifestyle she has always wanted to live.

Lily is also further imprisoned in societal confinement by her rebellion, not just as a woman, but also as a queer individual. When she sits down with her parents to discuss her involvement in the Telegraph Club, Grace makes Lily realize that, on top of the political threats her family already faces, "Adding in the corrupting influence of homosexuals made it exponentially worse, and not only for her, but also potentially for her father… Her mother was practically begging for her to lie" (Lo 375). Like Grace, Lily knows that being found out as gay would make it more difficult for her father to retain his immigration papers and increases the threat of deportation, as it would reflect poorly not just on her, but the whole family. Grace urges her to conceal this part of herself and lie, just like she begged her husband to do, but Lily is tired of hiding. Unwilling to submit as a model minority—as in, heterosexual—she becomes a liability to her family. She has no choice: in deciding not to suppress her sexuality, she *has* to be sent away in order to protect her family's ability of remaining in the U.S.

THE STRUGGLE FOR WOMEN TO ADOPT A DUAL ASIAN-AMERICAN IDENTITY

Rocky and Lily do not find the same identity security as Pham and Henry do because of the harsher treatment they receive as women when they do not follow the model minority expectation. Although Milagros is bitter towards both of her children, she is evidently more-so with Rocky, as she is blamed for Voltaire's behavior and emotions, which are often negative due to his mental illness. Milagros fumes, "*You* and Elvis and your pal Keiko promised to take him to something. He waited all night. All night!... I stayed up with him, of course" (Hagedorn 52). Milagros resents Rocky for Voltaire's behavior, as she is quick to hold her daughter accountable but not her son. Lily also has a lot of stress placed on her as a daughter, which makes her mother equally resentful. In a flashback, young Lily is drawn to a chemistry set with "two boys [with] blond heads" on the box picture. Grace offers her a doll instead, but when she complains, "Her mother's face had hardened instantly, and she saw her hand jerk as if she were about to strike her" (Lo 29). Science is not a career path expected of 1950s women, especially not minority women. It is certainly not part of the "perfect Chinese daughter" archetype that Grace tries to shape her to be, so that she fits American society as a "model" Asian. Lily and Rocky are not able to make their own choices, not just in the toys they play with and how they pass their time, but in gender expression and

responsibility, which come to govern how they live their lives. The mothers both expect their daughters to take on feminine, motherly roles, and are offended when they do not.

Although Rocky and Lily struggle due to their minority statuses, many scholars argue that diaspora and its symptoms do not have to be labeled as negative. In his article, "Rethinking Diaspora(s): Stateless Power in the Transnational Moment," Khachig Tölölyan says, "diaspora is an example, for both the homeland's and hostland's nation-states, of the possibility of living, even thriving in the regimes of multiplicity which are increasingly the global condition" (8). While diasporic groups may live through times of great injustice, says Tölölyan, there is pride in what an ethnic group has endured. Hagedorn's and Lo's novels can be seen as bildungsroman, as Lowe discusses: stories that follow a character as they grow, change, and find their identity. Rocky and Lily spend their novels as Asian American women who do not feel at home within themselves, but in confronting the "model minority" figure that has always shadowed them, they start to make the steps to figure out who they are meant to be.

The women are only able to create a sense of agency and harness their Asian American identities by moving from the place of entrapment: home. The yo-yo, a Filipino invention, is used as a metaphor for identity and immigration throughout *The Gangster of Love*. Rocky says, "I read somewhere that in Tagalog, *yo-yo* means 'to return.' I've also been told that *yo-yo* comes from *yau-yau*, which means 'to cast out'" (Hagedorn 285). After several failed music careers, love affairs, and attempts at happiness, Rocky feels "cast out" of the U.S. No one is there to make her stay anymore, with her mother dead, brother back in the Philippines, and her relationship with her baby's father strained. She returns to the Philippines to reconnect, not just with her remaining family, but with the Asian part of herself that she has brushed off for so long.

Lily's novel also ends with her departure, but while Rocky is "cast out" by the feeling that America has nothing to offer her, Lily is literally "cast out." Her parents send her to San Diego to hide the shame she has brought to the family and all of Chinatown as a homosexual. The act of being sent away from Chinatown initially horrifies Lily, but she finds that it gives her new freedom. Lo writes, "Lily realized she had never been this far from San Francisco before, and a fleeting thrill went through her. This was the world" (Lo 386). Chinatown has inhibited and rejected her, but San Diego provides her with an opportunity to contemplate her queer identity away from familiar, judgmental eyes. While homosexuality is challenged everywhere, here she is dichotomized from her prying community. In a place where she is unknown, she can discover herself and start anew. Rocky and Lily fail in achieving model minority status, resulting in their mothers' resentment; moving allows them to leave behind the establishments that placed this label on them first, both in a tight-knit community sense like Chinatown and in the larger sense of America. Moving permits Rocky and Lily to discover—and rediscover—their identities as Asians. Their exodus prompts them to consider where the American parts of themselves lie: as a piece of identity that can be "cast out" in resentment, or as an identity that can be renewed with a fresh start.

CONCLUSION

Rebellion from the model minority myth allows the men to forge security in their dual Asian American identities; however, the women's novels conclude with their rejection and continued identity plight. Just as their parents feel the need to make themselves useful to American society to be tolerated, the children are expected to make themselves useful to parents by doing the same: working hard, being good, without individuality. Communication and bonds are injured by the need to fit into the mold America sets for Asian immigrants, though society is never satiated. Both parents and children fail to satisfy their audiences, never quite a "model" citizen or a "model" child.

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