CONFLICT AND TRAUMA IN TRANSITION:
THE YOUNG ADULT EXPERIENCE FROM SELECT TEXTS

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Conflict and Trauma in Transition:

The Young Adult Experience from Select Texts

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Submitted

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CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the thesis entitled "Conflict and Trauma in Transition: The Young Adult Experience from Select Texts" written by Lydia Lalduhawmi for the award of Doctor of Philosophy in English and Culture Studies has been written under my supervision.

She has fulfilled all the requested norms laid down under the Ph. D. UGC Regulations 2016 of Mizoram University. The thesis incorporates the student's bona fide research and no part of it has been submitted for award of any degree in this or any other University or Institute of Learning.

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I, Lydia Lalduhawmi, hereby declare that the subject matter of this thesis is the record of work done by me, that the contents of this thesis did not form the basis of the award of any previous degree to me or to the best of my knowledge to anybody else, and that the thesis has not been submitted by me for any research degree in any other University/Institute.

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CHAPTER 1

THE ASIAN YOUNG ADULT AND YOUNG ADULT LITERATURE

Young Adult (Y.A) Literature can be described as narratives in which the main characters are teenagers dealing with issues that other teen readers can relate to. The genre uses a variety of themes such as sexuality, race, gender issues and science fiction. Y.A literary scholars argue that while young people are often portrayed as passive and submissive in literature as a whole, a close analysis of popular Y.A literature deals with themes demonstrating the protagonists as fully capable of engaging meaningfully in the world.

While Y.A literature have successfully dealt with themes that were once considered censored and taboo like menstruation, suicide and even teen sexuality, these factors are dealt mainly by white characters to target the American and European teen readers and little other cultural backgrounds are represented. There are few characters of ethnic origin or background to show more diverse backgrounds and if there are, they are relegated to minor roles with no plot lines highlighting their backgrounds. Thus, ethnic Asian writers targeting the mainstream reading culture have had to create and settle their characters in familiar mainstream surroundings that the majority of the reading public can connect to. These characters with Asian backgrounds are placed into a foreign setting to highlight the severity of the difference in customs and traditions and the compliance in identity that could arise out of the assimilation. For instance, the protagonists chosen for this study are all of Asian descent growing up in America where their core cultural background is among the minority.

The Y.A texts chosen for this study also provides the chance for the characters to show how difficult assimilation is for them and the resulting trauma that can come from it. In order to counter the stereotypes and marginalization, multi - ethnic YA books are trying to demonstrate that for most of the adolescents that belongs to a minority community in the United States, everyday life bears little or no resemblance to the “over - generalized, arrested forms of representation [that] perpetuate the perception that …people still look and act the same as they may have hundreds or even thousands of years ago” (Engles 36).

Identity formation, being one of the most vital themes in Y.A literature often depicts self-conscious and emotionally challenged protagonists coming to a new notion of who and what they are. Their growth and transformation become a document for the teenagers who read and learn about themselves in the narratives. This transformation of identity however, never occurs in isolation, and the narratives become a source of knowledge that can encourage social awareness and individual growth by focusing on how various social contexts and norms impacts the process of identity formation. The narratives identify the characters in terms of racial identity and can build up a profile for the understanding of "relational identity formation" (Engles 55). This theory helps in the acknowledgement that each individual identity is framed on the principle of perceptions – by how the individual is perceived by others. For instance, racial minority groups like Hispanic, Asian Americans, Blacks and Whites are perceived as belonging to different and more importantly, hierarchically different racial categories. Thus, identity formation is affected by the more privilege that is associated by the set perceptions. The majority culture have formed normative identities by taking certain qualities from the minorities and thus conceptualizes themselves as the very opposite. The reverse can happen but with a crucial difference in that because of the perceived normality of being white and the more explicit naming and stereotyping of non – white culture, the majority culture in the United States tend to be less conscious in their perception on the struggles and racial difference than people of minority.

To truly understand this concept, Y.A literature creates the existence of characters who gain sense and strength of who and what they are by their perception of others and their relation to others. These styles of narratives prompt the younger readers to expand their view to include broader group identifications, which can then "produce sets of binaries—boys vs. girls, students vs. teachers, workers vs. bosses, slaves vs. masters, and so on" (56). Through this process, the narrative exposes how identifying as a member of one cultural identity or group often has a lot to do with not being a member of a much considered minority group that is systematically labeled its opposite. .

Young readers of Y.A literature can observe how race works in terms of relational identity formation by seeing the explicitness of white identity and its place as the cultural “norm” in the United States. The hyphenated identity is always the minority as made explicitly clear by Morrison's *Playing in the Dark*: "American means white, and Africanist people struggle to make the term applicable to themselves with ethnicity and hyphen after hyphen after hyphen" (56). In her study, Morrison clarifies a significant point of how narratives always represents the white Americans that are "ordinary" or generic Americans whose whiteness are unmarked, and thus in a sense invisible, at least to other white observers. This in turn vividly highlights the portrayal of the other minority groups. Y.A literature also helps identify the trauma that arises out of hyphenated identity transformations and the repercussions on the perceptions on one’s cultural identity.

Trauma studies, an area of cultural studies that gained reputation in the early 1990s, prides itself on its clear commitment to the ethics in which it has its roots. Cathy Caruth, one of the leading figures in trauma studies insists that by bringing the insights of deconstructive and psychoanalytic scholarship to the analysis of cultural artifacts that bear witness to traumatic histories, critics can gain access to extreme events and experiences that defy understanding and representation thus, also giving voice to the individual with the traumatic memory. (Craps 1)

In “a catastrophic age” such as ours, according to Caruth, “trauma itself may provide the very link between cultures "(Caruth 11). In the traditional trauma model she states that trauma is seen as an event that “fragments consciousness and prevents direct linguistic representation” (3). The model shows that traumatic experience permanently damages the consciousness in certain ways. According to Caruth, trauma “is an unassimilated event that shatters identity and remains outside normal memory and narrative representation” (6). If the event of the trauma is collective, it can stir up collective sentiment, and often results in the shift of a entire society’s culture and mass actions. In regards to this study, the collective trauma found in the selected narratives includes the political Internment of thousands of Japanese American families to reservations after the attack on Pearl Harbor, the experiences of

Chinese sweat shop factory workers and the identity of Asians having to live up to the concept called the model minority.

Traumatic experiences that are neither narrated nor identified acts like a cancerous tumor that wounds the individual‘s mental state and psychological state. It exerts a harmful pathological effect on consciousness and memory that dissuades the remembrance of the past from becoming integrated into a present life narrative. For instance, with regards to the Internment of Japanese Americans during World War II, sixty two percent of the internees were already individuals with United States citizenships. Caruth’s model emphasizes on the pain that are caused by external sources that makes inner changes to the psyche and irrevocably changes personal identity as well as collective identity. The vital emphasis on trauma’s ‘unspeakability’ declares that extreme experience fractures both language and awareness of the conscious mind, causing lasting damage and demanding unique narrative expressions. Treatment is hardly effective when the damage is collective and thus, narratives dealing with the memories of such events are detrimental to the healing process.

Caruth explains:

> The event is absent in normal consciousness but preserved just beyond the limits of understanding in a timeless, wordless state and continues to inflict pain on the psyche. Trauma’s strange absence yet ghostlike presence in consciousness, its lack of normal integration into memory and narration, casts a shadow that indirectly points toward trauma’s meaning and the truth of the past (Caruth 3).

With traumatic experiences forming a link between different historical experiences, reading about the traumatic experiences of another could contribute to cross - cultural commonality and perhaps lead to the creation of new forms of communities. This is evident in the genres found in Y.A literature which seek to find more middle grounds in regards to multicultural communities with their myriad of traditional and cultural practices. Y.A authors frequently incorporate characters from different cultures to try and show the solidarity and harmony that can exist in society

amidst racism and stereotyping that have become concrete structures of human society. Labelling and stereotyping of people have always been an unyielding way to control and identify what is considered to be deviant behaviour or way of life.

The study aims to bring into perspective the conflict faced in transition by the teenage characters of the select texts because of their Asian origin and the trauma that resulted in the building up of personal and collective attributes. 'Asian', in its most basic sense, is a signifier referring to the inhabitants of the continental location of Asia, one of the biggest continents in the world. However, it is impossible to contain Asia's spatial and cultural coordinates, the home of multiple cultural practices, civilizations, religions and ideologies, within a continental boundary as it represents a cultural heterogeneity. Therefore, while the geo - political term of labelling might be necessary in defining Asia in relation to other countries like Europe or Africa, the term 'Asian', like other continental markers, is essentialist and homogenizing:

> It is homogenizing in its impulse to club together different people and regions with diverse histories, languages and religions. It is essentializing in its isolation of stereotypical Asian characteristics to differentiate Asia from its continental 'others'. (Roy 2)

The transitioning from one culture to another is rarely a choice made by the main characters chosen for this study, but rather a by-product of their parent's hopes and dreams that the characters have to fulfil. Choices that are abundant to the average white characters are otherwise very limited in terms of the characters chosen for this study. The transition is hardly easy – fighting poverty as children, battling to cope with new languages in their American environment riddled with slangs and unique cliques formed in school are some of the background stories found in the narratives. That in itself creates trauma for a child who must be entirely 'Asian' with her elders and immediate environment but must be very 'American' with her peers. Identity becomes a circus act for the character that must continually transition between two identities even throughout the course of a single day.

Bringing into perspective four writers with different Asian background, the research aims to locate traumatic experiences of the main characters in their adopted environments and the modes used by them to challenge and counter their cultural subordination. The characters selected thus have issues that is the result of their migration as well as angst and insecurities that irrevocably develop during the teenage years. They are heavily invested by autobiographical elements. All the young protagonists are all struggling with their ethnic identity on their own. While their American teen peers and mostly in this case, the white population does not have to deal with the fear and stereotype that comes from having different coloured skin or facial features, the characters are limited by the colour of their skin and their different cultural background.

Cynthia Kadohata is a Japanese – American writer who has won the Newbery Medal (2005) and the National Book Award in Young People's Literature (2013) *Weedflower* was published in 2006. It is based on real events of the Poston internment camp where her father was imprisoned during World War II (Nilson 317). It is interesting to highlight that the stories of the internment camps are rarely documented in American history and appears to be a part of history that the country is not particularly proud of. The narrative thus provides a sense of the suspicion and the general behavior of how Japanese Americans were viewed during the Second World War.

In writing *Weedflower,* Kadohata mentioned in an interview with Alleen Nilsen who met her at the Children's Literature Association meeting that by targeting younger audiences, she had to censor certain historical facts and keep the narrative age - appropriate. For example, she talks about readers who might know a Japanese family that immigrated to the United States in the 1920s or '30s, or ones that lived in one of the internment camps –a situation very much like the one in her narrative. In another separate interview with Lynda Comerford, Kadohata talks more in depth about *Weedflower,* saying :

> I'd always wanted to write an [internment] "camp" book. It became more important to me as my father [who was interned during WWII] grew older. I

> wanted to make sure the book got written before he died…Some, like my father, were reluctant to talk about their experiences. I remember one man telling me, "They [camps] weren't so bad." Then he began crying. That contradiction between his words and his demeanor told me a lot. (Comerford)

Weedflower is the story of a 12 –year -old Japanese American girl named Sumiko living in California in the years leading up to World War II. At the start of the narrative, prejudice is just beginning to build against the Japanese. It is a difficult time for the young girl as she herself has done nothing wrong to deserve the hate of the white society that she found herself placed in. It is the year 1941 and with the bombing of Pearl Harbour, Sumiko's uncle and grandfather are arrested and taken with other community leaders to a camp in North Dakota, not because they are guilty but as a precaution. These elders are separated from the rest of the Japanese American community and thus, only known from Sumiko's letters that the suspicion follows them even in their seclusion.

Following this, all of the Japanese families are moved from their homes to the Poston Relocation Center, located on a Mohave reservation near Parker, Arizona, USA. There, Sumiko and her family are basically prisoners along with the other Japanese families. They are given limited amenities and not allowed to leave the reservation. It also created a rift between Native Americans and Japanese Americans as the Native Americans had been forced to share what they considered to be their land with the Japanese Americans. So, there was always the double feeling of being twice an interloper. Kadohata mentions how she found a California state web site that provided oral histories of Japanese - Americans and how she belatedly learned that much resentment has been there between Japanese Americans and Native Americans in camps. Native Americans had viewed the Japanese Americans as being "wasteful" and having an "abundance" compared to how they normally lived. In turn, Japanese Americans were resentful that so much had been taken away from them and tensions were always high inside the camps. (Comerford)

It is rather humbling to witness Sumiko's struggle as she goes from a schoolgirl who just wants to be accepted by her classmates to a girl who has to share

the burden of taking care of her elderly relatives as the men of the household are imprisoned. All through this, she tries valiantly to adapt and thrive in the encampments and be useful as well. The adults too were afraid of looking useless and thus, tried very hard to look indispensable by trying to cultivating the desert lands surrounding their Internment camps. Sumiko surmised that to survive she would have to be indispensable as well. Thus, she employs the only tools at her disposal – her knowledge of planting and dirt. Her difference to other girls her age is highlighted as such:

> Once, in third grade, Sumiko's teacher has asked everybody to write a paragraph about their favorite thing. She had titled her paper "Dirt". Some of the other girls had made fun of her for that, and when she read her paper, they giggled and laughed at her. Some of the other girls had made fun of her for that, and when she read her paper, they giggled and laughed at her. The other girls liked dancing and music and dolls. One girl even liked cars. But not dirt. Sumiko loved dolls, but she loved dirt more. (Kadohata 19)

The narrative also gives an insight with the character of Frank, the Native American boy who became friends with Sumiko on the reservation. Through Frank's point of view, readers are able to witness how the Native American elders feel about the government officials making them share their land with the Japanese Americans. On one hand, they resent the way the Japanese Americans are 'dumped' into their land, however they also reluctantly respect that the Japanese with their self - sufficient ways and water supply from the government are vital to turning their barren land into one that is able to bear crops. In this aspect, it can be seen that the two different cultures are forced into cohabitation by circumstances beyond their control. It is easily seen how the Japanese Americans and Native Americans are racially different from the norm of the white society and thus, are both ostracized in the eyes of white community.

Weedflower offers a different and unique view of WWII, through the eyes of a young Japanese – American girl and her family providing for the readers material capable of evoking deeper understanding of the complexity of this period in

American history. (Landt 23) The internment of Japanese American citizens in the course of American history is a rarely told story. Through the eyes of Sumiko, readers are able to experience the type of segregation faced by the Japanese Americans during the period. The effect of the segregation as seen in the narrative is limited only to the point of view of Sumiko but it is a deep insight into the kind of trauma that a group of people can face as a result of the differences in their ethnic and cultural background.

An Na is a South Korea - born American children's book author born in 1972. Na turned to writing novels after taking a young adult literature class and gained success with her very first novel *A Step From Heaven*, published in 2001. It won the annual Michael L. Printz Award from the American Library Association. Na mentions that she started writing the novel as a way to 'capture memory', like capturing the image of getting her hair permed before immigrating to the States. In an essay posted on the Front Street Books Web site, she noted that *A Step from Heaven* "grew from a need to express some of the longings and frustrations that I felt as an immigrant growing up in America. Many people ask me if this novel is autobiographical, and I always respond by saying yes and no.... What the protagonists and I do share are some of the feelings of yearning, joy, and shame that come with trying to negotiate a foreign culture." (Sidelights 316)

Na talks about how she looks back at her youth and could see "two distinct personalities" forming her. One was the "real me, which was gregarious, liked to laugh and have fun, who showed up at my Korean church." The other personality was the shy one who was always in the minority at school, quiet, soft spoken, and hardly raised her hand. Na mentions how she felt at home and in control at her church but felt timid and shy in social situations occurring at school. There was also the other conflict that was happening between home and school, as she explained to Rochman in a Booklist interview. She was torn between "learning to be independent and speak my mind at school, and then coming home to be a Korean daughter, demure, soft - spoken, obedient." Na also says she often felt dislocated because of her Korean origins. "I went to a pretty affluent high school and it was difficult being

in honors classes, feeling kind of poor and out of place because I was Korean American." (316)

A Step from Heaven is about a four year old Young Ju's journey from her pre-school years in South Korea through her immigration to Mi Gook (America) and eventually to her early teenage years. While expecting an easier and more blissful life in America, Young Ju soon experience that the problematic cultural adjustment and language barrier are the reasons behind her family unit's breakdown.

Mi Gook (America) represents the idea of prosperity for many immigrants from Asia to the United States of America. Throughout the narrative, Mi Gook always is synonymous to Young Ju as 'heaven'– a place without suffering and where her family could escape poverty. Young Ju and her family are ready to make sacrifices and the first sacrifice that Young Ju has to make is changing her beautiful straight hair. Her 'uhmma' believed that she would be more acceptable with curly hair because she believed that American girls all have beautiful, curly ringlets. Thus, even though Young Ju hated her new hair, she had to pretend that she liked the new change:

> … Uhmma is smiling. Happy lots of teeth smile. Happy as the letter about Mi Gook. Happy at me. Even though Uhmma tells me I should always tell the truth, and Halmoni says God will be very angry if you lie, I want Uhmma to smile lots of teeth to me (Na 14).

There is always hope that the American dream would apply to the immigrants. However, the reality is harsh as on top of working in middle management or manual labour jobs, the immigrants often have to deal with rascist and stereotypical views of their new adopted country. Young Ju's struggle is refreshingly poignant and heartrending as it is seen through her young eyes. She is portrayed as a young girl valiantly trying to rebuild what she has left behind, however one can see the 'little adult' that poverty stricken children are so often apt to become.

This ‘little adult’ figure is often universally observed in narratives dealing with migration and poverty as it features prominently in the lives of new immigrants. Even as Young Ju starts to climb above her language barrier, she learns to hide the truth of her extreme poverty from her more economically stable friend Amanda. Moral sentiments of right and wrong, truth and lies are blended as they cannot afford to be morally right. Young Ju too hides the truth even from her best friend for a very long time :

> Amanda and her parents do not know where I live. We have always hung out at Amanda’s house because I lied and said Uhmma and Apa owned a restaurant and kept them working long hours so there was usually no one home. (100)

Young Ju’s family life suffers further trauma as her father starts to drink. The narrative highlights how alcohol becomes the father’s way of dealing with the indignity of having to struggle with language and menial work. Young Ju’s younger brother Joon does not have to deal with the changes as rigidly as she does. Patriarchal values are very much still revered in South Korea and thus, Young Ju’s father sows these values in regards to his only son, Joon. Not only does Young Ju face the challenges of a completely new culture, she has to battle and strive for her father’s affection. As a daughter, she has less value in her father’s eyes. She does not feel good enough even though she is the one to help her parents adapt to their new rules of living. Joon, on the other hand, as the sibling born in the country could easily grasp the culture and language but have to strive to live up to his father’s inane and ridiculous expectations of being a true tough Korean man.

This view of enforced patriarchal rules is also one of reason Young Ju’s father unravels towards the end of the narrative. He feels the immediate and necessary need to provide a stable life for his family but at the same time could not converse with the new language to get anything above menial jobs. When their Halmoni (grandmother) dies in their motherland, they cannot afford the tickets to fly back for her funeral:

> Apa shakes his head. He runs his hands through his hair, gripping his scalp, his neck. He whispers, I cannot even be at her funeral. What kind of son am I? What kind of son am I? His shoulders shake and shake. (87)

Young Ju's father eventually starts to drink excessively which eventually leads him to be arrested because of a DUI and loses his driver's license. The marriage also dwindles causing even Joon to withdraw from his education and the family. Young Ju suffers from various forms of trauma throughout the narrative. She has to eventually report and get her father arrested by the police to save her mother from physical abuse. Her father also eventually decides to go back home to South Korea. Even though Young Ju feelst immense relief that her family will not have to deal with abuse anymore, she also feels the trepidation of living in her adopted country without her father. Due to this, her mother's cultivates her own source of strength through her children. She tells Young Ju, "Now it is my turn to do the right thing for you. For us …My strong children and I will be fine without Apa" (137). Young Ju eventually gains enough perspective to study harder and eventually even finds the strength and resources to go to college, earning herself a scholarship.

Another hyphenated American who writes about the struggles of immigrants in the American society is Jean Kwok. She is a contemporary Chinese American writer and the bestselling author of the novel - *Girl in Translation* (2010). Kwok's family immigrated to the States when she was only five years old and much of her childhood consisted of working in a clothing factory located in Chinatown, New York. Kwok's debut novel *Girl in Translation* became a New York Times bestseller and was translated into 16 languages. Kwok draws upon her personal and family experience to produce a narrative that illustrates the experiences of an exceptionally bright young girl Kimberley Chang, also called Ah-Kim who leads a double life in an exclusive private school and a Chinatown sweatshop. They live in the slums of Brooklyn, New York in a rundown apartment building that does not have central heating to get them through the cold and bitter winters. Disguising the more difficult truths of her life, Kimberly with an indelible voice learns to constantly translate not just her language but herself. The narrative draws attention to the struggles of an

immigrant girl growing up in two cultures, never fully understanding or belonging to either as the other narratives chosen for this purpose of this study.

According to Kwok, it was traumatizing to re-experience the world she had left behind by writing about it. In an interview, she mentions that:

> It was a difficult life, most especially because my parents went from being parents to being people who were even more lost and confused than I was. The physical hardships — the fabric dust in the sweatshop, the bitter cold in our apartment, the rats that ran over our blankets as we slept — were more bearable than feeling unprotected and alone. (Haupt)

Kimberly is fondly called by the Chinese variation of her name – Ah - Kim by her mother and factory workers. In the sweat shop, she is comfortable and does not feel the need to hide her poverty as everyone is equally poor. She only feels ashamed of the fact that she is no longer the brightest student in her class as she barely understood the rapid English of her teacher and peers. This inferiority complex that stems out of not being able to communicate is also seen through their adulthood where the characters find it still difficult to express themselves in their new language. However, the thought of living in their run down flat and working in a sweat shop for the rest of her life scared her more than the mockery from her classmates and this drove her to work harder. She is eventually able to gain a full scholarship to Harrison High school, a prestigious high school.

In the narrative, Kimberly's mother is wary of her even having the one friend as Annette is not from the same cultural background. Annette is from a well – to - do middle class family and she often invites Kimberly to visit her house. This is extremely cumbersome to Kimberly's mother as she thinks that they should repay the hospitability that Annette's mother bestows onto her daughter and she does not have the means to do the same. Kimberly and her mother feel embarrassed that Annette and her family would see their dilapidated apartment building and pity them. This however immediately resolved when Annette finally see the condition of their living space. Instead of pitying them, Annette recruited her mother, a real estate worker who immediately finds a cozy and more affordable flat for them in another part of

town. Annette though a good friend, does not truly understand what Kimberley goes through in her daily life. Kimberly is often afraid that Annette will treat her as a social project than as a fried. When she finally confesses the truth of working in a factory, Annette is horrified and Kimberley has to disclose the truth with:

> "This is not some abstract idea in your head. This is my life. If you do something to protest, we could lose our job…We need the work" (Kwok 179)

Kimberly too, is a 'little adult' compared to the other students at her prestigious school. At school, she is able to play the role of a normal student but this is contradicted as soon as she leaves the premises of her school. She and her mother often calculate their expenditure in terms of the skirts they finish daily at the factory. Kimberly does not have any time left for extracurricular activities after school. When her classmates Sheryl and many of the other girls decide to see a show and drink beers, they invite Kimberly along but she declines the invitation 'but feels pleased by her invitation. It allowed me to imagine that I could have been one of the other kids, for a moment' (148)

Tanuja Desai Hidier is an Indian – American writer currently living in London. *Born Confused* is a 2002 young adult novel about an Indian – American girl growing up in New Jersey. Hidlier explains her motivation for writing the novel:

> I hadn't read any books I could recall with a South Asian American teen protagonist. To the best of my knowledge *Born Confused* was the first book with a US female teen desi heroine; that was one of the reasons my publisher wanted it, and it is certainly one of the reasons I wrote it. . . . It was, and is, important to me that a young South Asian American have a voice, and that it be heard and read by people of all backgrounds and ages. And it is just as important that other South Asian American voices be heard; the more out there the more we can begin to approximate expressing the richness and diversity of this culture . . . a culture that is as diverse as the number of people who make it up. (Hughes -Hassell 220)

Born Confused tells the story of seventeen year old Dimple Lala, a seventeen –year – old firs t generation Indian American growing up in New Jersey. Dimple is too American in India, and yet struggling to conform in America. She is constantly divided between two elements – her ethnic identity or the one she has adopted, her jealousy and admiration of her friend Gwyn for being white and flawlessly navigating through life and hating and loving her parents and other family members who she feels are more culturally stable. Towards the end of her junior year in high school, she realizes that she is an ABCD — an American Born Confused Desi:

> So I was an ABCD. Why hadn't anyone told me? Why didn't they put this in those spots where they say race doesn't matter but please check one of the following? Growing up, I was always exing Asian / Pacific Islander, even though I didn't understand why they were treated as the same thing. It would have been so much easier to check ABCD. . . I wondered if I'd ever be an ABCD. . . . But for now I was an ABCD. I didn't really know what that meant. But I suppose that was the point. (Hidier 108)

Both resisting and begrudgingly embracing her family's culture and traditions, Dimple navigates "suitable yet unsuitable" boy Karsh Kapoor and her interest in photography despite her parent's opposition. Dimple feels uncomfortable in her own skin and constantly worships her friend, Gwyn and labels herself as 'the other one' (2). She accepts and glorifies in her invisibility next to her flamboyant friend.

In the narrative, Dimple is fond of taking pictures. It is a defence mechanism she uses as it makes her disappear behind the camera. She prefers to be invisible in an environment where she felt equally inept to circumvent. Her favourite subject to capture is Gwyn and this shows that Dimple envies the natural way Gwyn navigates through her everyday life. Even the choice of her favourite subject to capture on the camera is telling as it projects her inner most desire and that is to be like Gwyn. However, Dimple also resents the easy way that Gwyn can assimilate into her culture with examples of readily borrowing clothes and supposedly falling for Karsh Kapoor, the suitable but 'unsuitable' meant for Dimple. The trauma of feeling

'lesser' than Gwyn all throughout the narrative becomes a reason for Gwyn to fight her emotions towards Karsh.

Karsh is an element introduced in the narrative that clearly highlights Dimple's dilemma with the culture she was born into. She feels that Karsh is 'unsuitable' for her because he is the 'good boy' that her parents clearly want to marry off to. She and Karsh have the same cultural background and that is unacceptable to Dimple who wants to desperately fit in with the American high school crowd. On the other hand, Dimple feels that Karsh is a cool and artistic person who can D.J and get along with her idiosyncrasies. Karsh is 'suitable' to her as a person but it is her double cultural background that makes her question his suitability. However, towards the end of the narrative, Dimple finds peace with her cultural roots by accepting her budding feelings for Karsh and confronting Gwyn about her cultural appropriation.

The term "Asian American" is a blanket definition often used in reference to all immigrants, inhabitants and American born citizens of Asian origin in America. The term originated from the Asian American Movement of the 1960s. The movement was a social movement for racial justice and fair treatment in regards to institutional education, housing facilities and healthcare. As one of its signal achievements, the Movement created the category "Asian American," to encompass the different and multiple Asian ethnic groups who have migrated. King – Kok Cheung explains in *The Greenwood Encyclopaedia of Asian American Literature* (vol.1) that the term ensued out of vexation and anger that many American born citizens with Asian ancestors were always treated as foreigners and outsiders in America even though their predecessors in America could be traced back to multiple generations (42). The term "Asian American", thus coined by Yuji Ichioka, was thus born out of defiance and a way to counter the rather derogatory term Oriental. A vast body of literature portraying Asians and Asian Americans has already existed in very limited portrayal of roles – the good and the bad, the wise and the dumb. The first immigrants were not learned and did not know English and thus, automatically slide under the radar of the dumb. The luxury and privilege of finding their voice was not

available to the new immigrants who had the more important issue of daily livelihood to ponder about.

In the attempt to talk about the myriad issues of Asian - American issues like displacement, hybrid cultures, fragmented selves and marginal voices, it is important to take into perspective the background of each select writer. Ono examines that while Asian - American have shared racial status that comes with immigration, the respective select texts shows the richness of their origins as the power of ‘‘otherness’’ and the celebration of marginality is studied. However, there must be a pause to think about why the complexity and diversity of a minority discourse expressed in Asian American literature are unique (Ono 197).

The select texts all bring into play the breaking of tradition by the characters, although it thematizes another sort of stratification among Y.A female characters. The fluent English speaking daughters rose in social structure than her Cantonese, Japanese or culture based speaking parents. They are fed knowledge by the sweat of factories and hard – labour but are given the chance to assimilate themselves better than their elders. Thus, economic relations in the society they belong to forces them to supervise their elders, and this required behavior subverts the need to demonstrate the traditional respect and reverence they owed to their parents and elders. Kimberly feels that her mother is not truly adjusting to the ‘American dream’ that they have come to chase, instead she is just as timid relying on the meager kindness of her sister and Kimberly’s aunt. Kimberly’s education has afforded her dreams far beyond the confines of the sweatshop that her mother continues to slave in.

The deprivation of language for the hyphenated- Americans has contributed to the lack of a more integrated culture and dependency on the adopted culture. Language is a medium of culture and binds the community by recognizing and organizing the codes of their shared experiences. Without the ability to speak fluently in an alien language, the culture and sensibility is lopped off. The dual individuality of the hyphenated – American deprives them from forming their own terms of self - definition. The hyphenated- American are already subjugated into defining themselves in terms that are not theirs or of their origins. This tyranny in the misuse

of language has even excluded and suppresses the cultures and sensibility of the Asian descent citizens from entering the mainstream of American consciousness.

The selected texts also show the disruption and distortion of a culture's traditional practice. Conflict rises as a part of entering a society with different class stratifications and different constructions of gender roles where the practice of filial duty or respecting hierarchies of age has no place at the forefront of the changing value system. This conflict that arises in the values between the young and old leads to trauma among the older generation who views the younger generation as something entirely foreign, the losing of cultural values being the example shown in the chosen texts. The younger generation in turn, who are trying extremely hard to assimilate themselves into their adopted cultures feels that their ancestors' cultural practices and beliefs are antiquated. The traumatic feeling of never truly belonging into their adopted new culture is deepened by the new generation who perpetuates the need to abandon their old belief system.

Trauma can cause people to fragment and dissociate with their immediate reality. Quite often the person may be present in a dissociative state and talk in a fragmented way or become silent altogether. These kinds of symptoms are present in the elders found in the narratives. Their disassociation to their present surroundings stems from their inability to assimilate themselves into the new culture they have adopted and silence is involuntary as it is due to the language barrier. Sumiko's family situates themselves in the immigrant Japanese community thus, alienating themselves from the white neighbourhoods leaving Sumiko no chance for herself to intergrate into the other community. The person going through the traumatic experience may lose the continuity of his or her story, which could result in a fragmented personality and narrative. This case is similar to that of Young Ju's father who could not reconcile his old life with the new one which resulted to his dependence on alcohol. This substance abuse spiral into the physical abuse of his family and eventually its disintegration as well. Dimple also has a fragmented reality compared to her best friend Gwyn. Dimple finds it easier to view the world through her camera and view Gwyn navigates the white world easily and effortlessly. Being behind the lens also keeps everybody else at a distance. This stunted the growth of

her personality and thus, made her feel much younger than Gwyn. Compared to Dimple, Gwyn thus has a more mature outlook in terms of communicating and forging relations.

For teens of colour and those belonging to ethnic backgrounds, the process of coming of age is integrally tied to the process of racial and ethnic identity formation. A teen born and brought up into one's racial background does not have to circumvent between two racial backgrounds that result from migration and the transition from child to teenager into adulthood is easier for one in such a stable background. An Indian or Japanese teen has an otherwise easier coming of age when he or she is surrounded by peers located in one location and thus, trauma is contained in terms of life experiences and teen angst. "Although identity formation is a critical task for all, adolescence researchers have found that adolescents of colour and indigenous teens are more likely to be actively engaged in exploring their racial and ethnic identity than are white adolescents" (Tatum 77). As Beverly Tatum explains, when placed in a setting where they are the minority, teens of colour, indigenous teens, and biracial teens think of their identity in terms of race or ethnicity because that is how the rest of the world sees them and this resulted in the need for acceptance that arises from the conflict of not belonging (89). On a daily basis, the "model minorities" must navigate a world where other people keep making assumptions about who they are or meant to be and what they can achieve based solely on their skin colour. There is more pressure for these minorities to be 'acceptable' in the society that is always watching them.

Psychologist William Cross has developed a process of racial identity development in which the first two stages contains processes called pre-encounter and encounter. In the pre-encounter stage, children of colour and children of minority backgrounds absorb and start to imitate many of the beliefs and values of the dominant white culture as it is their immediate and primary environment. This includes the belief that it is better to belong to the majority culture as it includes the benefits of inclusion:

> Stereotypes, omissions, and distortions, combined with an image of white superiority, to some degree socialize children of colour and indigenous children to value the role models, lifestyles, and images of beauty of white culture over those of their own cultural group (Cross 144).

In the stage that Cross regards as the encounter stage, children of colour and indigenous children begin to show awareness about the impact of racism. It occurs from as early as late childhood to late adolescence, depending on their immediate environment. During the course of this stage, children of colour and culturally minority background begin to perceive what it is to be identified as different and the racism behind the curiosity (161). Often this awakening is precipitated by an event or a series of events such as the case with Kimberley Chang's mother's mode of earning a living. Most Chinese immigrants are stereotyped as sweatshop factory workers even when they are not. In the case of Girl *in Translation*, the author has used the most stereotypical mode of earning a living to showcase the truth behind being a sweatshop worker and earning minimum wage. The author Kwok has deign to subvert what has been a stereotypical representation of an immigrant worker and given herself voice in the process as she was also from a family employed in the sweatshop clothing industry.

Stereotyping in terms of occupation is rampant among citizens belonging to the cultural minority of Asian descent in the western countries. For instance, Chinese immigrants are immediately stereotyped to be in the clothing factories, Japanese in the agricultural industry and Indians ranging from the medical and academic field or bad taxi drivers. These citizens are then urged to be 'successful' in their perspective careers and perform better than their white counterparts to be considered a thriving dutiful citizen of their adopted societies. Stereotypical portrayal of minorities in white communities also include the sexualizing of Latin women and the criminalization of Hispanic and Black males, the labelling of black environment as 'hood' and reducing the identity of Mexican communities to their food culture. As Tatum points out :

> To find one's racial or ethnic identity, one must deal with these negative stereotypes, resist internalizing negative self - perceptions, and affirm the meaning of ethnicity for oneself " (165–66).

This leads to the questioning of individualistic identity as can be perceived in the characters chosen for the purpose of this research. Sumiko, Young Ju, Kimberly Chang and Dimple Lala questions themselves on what it is to be a Japanese , Korean, Chinese or Indian Americans respectively. What should I do to be accepted? How should I act to seen American? are the questions from their younger mindset while the adults have questions like How should I live to not be perceived as a threat? and other questions regarding their livelihood and economy.

As the teenagers struggle with these questions and seek to integrate themselves into the new culture, they often seek support from teenagers from the same racial, ethnic or cultural group background who would understand their circumstance, perspective and experienced similar stereotypes or prejudices. This way to relate lessens the effects of their trauma and bands them together to resolve some of the conflict that arises from racial disparity. Thus, the introduction of multicultural literature is essential as it can play a powerful role as it recognizes the need of these multicultural citizens. Multicultural literature "gives voice to those who have been taught to hide their emotions" (Delgado 1989). It speaks to the power of not only the individual but also the collective as it portrays teenagers of colour and indigenous origins defining themselves in their own way and engaging in problem solving, emphasizing the importance of self – reliance and self - determination (169). It also allows teenagers belonging to the majority culture to observe how the world looks from somebody else's perspective for a change and thus, widening their horizons. It challenges their assumptions, jars their complacency, and invites them to action (Delgado 244). By reading multicultural literature, teens of color and indigenous teens gain insight into how other teens who share their racial, ethnic, or cultural background have affirmed their own identities:

> One of the key goals of counter-storytelling is to give voice to the lived experiences of groups that have traditionally been marginalized and oppressed in the United States (Matsuda 14).

In her essay, 'Globalization and "Asian Values" : Teaching and Theorizing Asian American Literature', Yuan Shu examines the need to "demystify " Asian values" as essential truths cherished by all Asian peoples, and interrogate these values as cultural inventions pursued by Asian national governments for their cultural imaginary and political convenience at the postcolonial moment" (Shu 88). She suggests the need to recognize the extent of American capitalism in changing Asian Americans so that one can glimpse the heterogeneity and multiplicity of Asian American cultural production. In most narratives, many Asian American portray immigration and the transition to a new culture in terms of a loss of the ''original'' culture in exchange for the new ''American'' culture. However, the emergence and increase in acknowledging "Asian values" in the American context was political to undermine the cultural minorities itself:

> As observed by historian Roger Daniels, "Asian values" in the American context have been closely related to the "model minority" myth, a term that was first coined and used by William Peterson to describe Japanese Americans in his article published in the New York Times Magazine on January 6, 1966. (96)

The model minority concept also reinforces the issue that racism is no longer an issue in the United States. It promotes the myth that the society gives equal opportunities to everyone regardless of class, race, gender or sexual orientation. The hard work and labour is then awarded with upward economic mobility. This false notion also cements the idea that anyone who falls off this scheme is due to their own poor choices or inferiority in culture. This white – constructed label did not protect any of the Asian Americans from prejudice and the rampant racism but manages to further an inferior status to minorities who 'behave' decently and apply for the 'American dream'. The 'model minority' also serves as an ideological framework. Such an ideological framework not only shapes how other cultural backgrounds view

the Asian Americans but how they view themselves. This is made abundantly clear in the literature that rises out of such communities where the characters are close to obsession in their need to succeed. It further drives the rifts between parents and offspring apart which already are present due to the cultural exposure. This mentality has permeated the whole Asian community and rarely does one find a lazy unsuccessful character in the characterization of the Asian origin narratives.

The article by Roger Daniels perpetuates that Japanese Americans evoke positive "cultural values" as they had not only worked hard enough to overcome the racial barriers in American society, but had also been able to leave behind their internment experience during the Second World War. Second, in calling attention to Japanese Americans, the article also intended to convey the message that other racial minorities, such as "African Americans, Native Americans, and Chicano/as should emulate the exemplary performance of Japanese Americans and achieve the American Dream by their own efforts rather than through the federal government's preferential programs and policies "(318). This blatant attempt to further segregate the minor cultural communities was successful as it gives rise for said communities to conform to the mold of the "model minority" and this stigma has been carried even to the standard of living in contemporary Asian American living. It even further alienated the Japanese American community from other Asian American communities. It was and still is deemed unbecoming of an Asian American to remain jobless or uneducated as this idea is continually transplanted even into the minds of the new generation. The trauma results in the constant expectation to succeed further divides up the older and younger generations – the younger generation feeling the compulsion to fit in rather than the need for financial security thus, creating the dividing of what adults term as family values.

This also gives rise to concept of parenting known as tiger parenting. A largely Chinese - American concept at the time of its origin, the term draws parallels to strict parenting styles typically enforced throughout households in descendants of East Asia, South Asia and Southeast Asia. The term "tiger mother" was first coined by Yale Law School professor Amy Chua in her 2011 memoir *Battle Hymn of the Tiger Mother* (2011). Confucianism is the backdrop for this concept and promotes

attributes such as “filial piety, family values, hard work, enduring hardship, honesty, and dedicating oneself towards academic excellence through the pursuit of knowledge.” (Chua 22). Chua cites her parents’ immigration experience and the intense struggle to set down stable roots in their new environment as the sole reason that prompted them to adopt a more utilitarian methodic approach to raising their children. In her memoir, Chua brings up the teachings of Confucius to elucidate the reason why Chinese parents feel that their children are indebted to them due to all the sacrifices the previous parental generation made to secure a better life for their children.

Just as the parents were subservient to the needs of their children, tiger parents are under the impression that the children should be subservient to them in adulthood. This is a severe contradiction to how a typical American family runs itself. In a typical American family, teenagers as young as eighteen usually move out of the parent’s nest to pursue their own life. Their pay checks become their own and even the parents are no longer required to provide them financial aid. This is loosely referred to as helicopter parenting as supervision is done only from a distance. Tiger parents enforce high expectations in regards to their offspring’s academic performance without regards to mental health. Emotional blackmail is also one of the controlling factors as the parents use emotional bonds of love to enforce their expectations. Chua’s experience represents the majority of the teenagers that grew up in such a controlling household. In the texts chosen for this study, we also see that all the young characters are set on the course of academic education to better themselves and their families. Economic stability is set on their young shoulders and this, they learn at very young ages.

Sumiko in *Weedflower* is an appropriate example for the concept. She helps with the household and also their family’s flower farm. Her work is to disbud the carnations:

> Disbudding required quick judgement, because you needed to decide which bud was the strongest on a plant. You pinched or clipped off the weakest buds

> in favor of the one strong bud, so as to end up with one beautiful, strong flower (24).

At only 12 years old, Sumiko has duties to help the family survive. In a very similar way, Kimberley Chang helps her mother with sewing at the factory - at the same time diligently pursuing her academic studies. They both have to live up to the family's expectations in terms of familial duties and academic attributes. Young Ju in *A Step from Heaven* does not help with the economic side of her family but she nevertheless learns early that they simply do not have enough to live a comfortable life. Her focus point became academic excellence as this could later contribute to her family's stability. Dimple is the only character among the chosen narratives who does not have to worry about the economic stability of her family. However, she is also pushed towards excellence in different fields.

It has also become a rather bitter necessity for Asian Americans to have to contend with the practice of the total devaluation of their Asian ethnicity. If they show tolerance for it, they show an inclination to become acceptable to a racist society which devalues their ethnic identity. In a 1972 essay titled "Racist Love," Frank Chin and Jeffery Paul Chan points out the idea that Asian Americans habitually adopt internalization of white judgment as an "expedient tactic of survival":

> For the subject to operate efficiently as an instrument of white supremacy, he is conditioned to accept and live in a state of euphemized self - contempt. This self- contempt itself is nothing more than the subject's acceptance of white standards of objectivity, beauty, behaviour, and achievement as being morally absolute, and his acknowledgment of the fact that, because he is not white, he can never fully measure up to white standards. (Sau ling Wong 77)

According to the essay, Chin introduces the concept that white America imposes standards upon minor non-Whites which then form the basis of perceived reality and thus ultimately influencing the identity construction of the minority groups. The consequence that results is that of self-contempt and self-destruction as can be seen in the four protagonist of this particular study. The characters, as young

as they were, all have perceived notions of what they deem appropriate to be accepted into their adopted communities and therefore, have certain degrees of contempt for the way that their parents choose to live their life in the new environment. The self-destruction as observed in the adults of the narratives also reflects the ideology perpetrated by Chin. He also writes that the stereotype "operates as a model of behaviour. It conditions the mass society's perceptions and expectations. Society is conditioned to accept the given minority only within the bounds of the stereotype" (Chin 66). It is the general function of any racial stereotype to establish and preserve order between different elements of society to sustain the growth and further the progress of White civilization as it becomes authenticated with the passage of time. It becomes a model of behaviour to which the minorities are conditioned to exist under a set rule of acceptability for the majority. A precise example of the distorted self identity perpetuated in the Asian American community by racism, according to Chin, is the concrete belief that in America, culture, success, and money all falls under the umbrella of the white community. Such a concept is weighed down with self-contempt for it encourages the minorities to look at the collective success of white Americans in the extent to which the yardstick have been set and accepted by Americans and thus, this leads to the measurement of their own acceptance in terms of the degree to which the white man has rejected other minorities.

According to Chin, language is also a medium of cultural performance, including the style of manhood. The ability to comprehend the tongue of one's immediate neighbour coheres the community into the organization of their shared experiences. "Stunt the tongue and you've lopped off the culture and sensibility" (77). Even at the simplest, a man speaks for himself – having the ability to express his innermost thoughts. In most Asian countries where manhood and patriarchy are norms of cultural practice as evident in the male characters of the narrative, it is evidently clear how the characters feel in the loss of their fluent articulation. Taken away from this ability, a human being is little more than a 'ventriloquist's dummy'. The concept of having dual personalities robs the individual of expressing themselves in their own definitions and forces them to use terms that has nothing to

do with their cultural makeup. Chin further explains how the tyranny of language is used by white culture to suppress the Asian American culture and sensibility and exclude them from their full operation into the mainstream community.

In this sense, it is evidently clear that in the Y.A narratives dealing with those of Asian descent, young adults deals more with the culture based identity trauma compared to the narratives dealing with their white counterparts. Sumiko (*Weedflower*), Young Ju (*A Step from Heaven*), Kimberly (*Girl in Translation*) and Dimple (*Born Confused*) all focuse their friendships on people with cultural backgrounds different from theirs. Deliberately befriending someone from a different cultural background also highlights their sensitivity towards the need to belong. Sumiko desperately wants to attend the most popular girl's birthday party and partake of the cake with the rest of her classmates which to her symbolized acceptance of not only her as a person but as racially different person. However, she is turned away at the door simply for the fact that she is of Japanese descent. This kind of rejection also haunts the other characters as Dimple regularly compares herself to her white best friend Gwen, never feeling 'white' enough to show off in her own clothes as Gwen effortlessly does. Kimberly Chang hides from her friend Annette that she has to help her mother at the factory after school and Young Ju's relationship with the outside world is compacted between communication problems and family problems. For Young Ju, the outside world could not be permitted into her family as her parents were too stabilized into their Korean ancestry. The trauma caused by the dislocation in culture also opens the door to separation anxiety, as evident in the need to cling to familiarity of one's culture.

Teeming with trends, Y.A literature continues to be the fastest growing area of genre in the publishing industry. Whether the genre of Y.A literature is narrowly or broadly defined, much of its value cannot be quantified as the results are to be found in how the topics found in the narratives address the needs of its young readers. That is why the genre has often been described as "developmental," as the needs they depict recognize that young adults are at the age of transition, in search of their true, independent and more permanent personalities.

By addressing the needs for growth and change, Y.A literature is made significant by its originality and creativity but also by its relevance in regards to the individual response on the lives of its readers. By giving young readers a structure of reference and orientation, the genre becomes a guiding source that helps the readers find role models – of finding a way to pursue the personality they want to be, make sense of the world they live in and hopefully develop a personal philosophy of right and wrong.

CHAPTER 2

YOUNG ADULT LITERATURE AS A FORM OF COUNTER – STORYTELLING

Counter – storytelling is defined by Daniel Solórzano and Tara Yosso as "a method of telling the stories of those people whose experiences are not often told," including people who belong to minority groups based on color, cultural ethnicity, women, sexuality and the economically unfortunate (Solórzano 26). They are a method of giving voice to individuals or a set of individuals who belong to minority groups whose voices have been silent or suppressed. Counter – storytelling in Y.A helps highlights the minor voices and gives them representation which can bridge the vast differences that identifies different cultures.

The protagonists of this study belong to at least two of each point of minority mentioned. Being Asian in a widely white populated area, being of the female gender and with the exception of Dimple, being extremely poor brings out perspective on the need for counter - storytelling. Their stories represent a piece of the culture they come from and as a result, they aim "to cast doubt on the validity of accepted premises or myths, especially ones held by the majority" (Delgado 144). The texts selected for this study offer a perspective that helps both the readers to understand what life is like for others outside of their immediate cultural background, and invite the readers to empathize by bringing them into a new and unfamiliar world where style of living and cultural practices are different and unique to each minor ethnicity. Each Asian – American culture has their own set of unique traditions and style of culture and carries their own sub cultural traumas that must be equally represented.

Richard Delgado states that counter - stories "can quicken and engage the conscience," stirring the "imagination in ways in which discourse that is more conventional cannot" (2415). Counter - stories against the unyielding narrative of the 'single story' can demonstrate to the readers that perception can change; and what they believe to be true can in turn be false and that grey areas exist between the unyielding rules of black and white. The process can highlight the need to challenge set practices and policies that the cultural majority has practiced. Trauma caused by the voicing of only the 'single story' can be repaired and contested with counter – stories. This process includes the process of getting rid of certain stereotypes like the sexualizing and fetishizing of certain Asian cultures. Stereotypes that include the

mysticism of beliefs, body types and manipulation can all be questioned under the validity of counter – storytelling.

Delgado believes that counter - storytelling can even "help us understand when it is time to reallocate power". He states that stories, parables, narratives and other forms of representation are powerful means for establishing the mindset of an individual – "the bundle of presuppositions, received wisdoms, and shared understandings against a background of which legal and political discourse takes place" (2413). Power is always located with the cultural majority. By relocating power to the minor groups, certain levels of trauma can be resolved. With that uneven display of power by a few shows the uneven distribution of resources among members of the community. Thus, while some members of a community are abundantly represented in terms of education and economical development, laws, policing etc, the people who are a part of the minority culture are often secondary. This hampers their own ability to give voice to themselves as they have to fight for the basic sources of survival.

Delgado further outlines a number of ways to illustrate how counter - storytelling benefits groups that have traditionally been marginalized and oppressed in the background of white majority. By having the ability to tell their own versions of the historical narratives and hearing counter - stories, members of minority and marginalized groups can assuage themselves from the psychological trauma by becoming familiar with their own historic oppression and victimization. The narratives will help them realize that what they are experiencing is not a singular memory and will help them identify that others have the same traumas and experiences. Collective healing therefore, starts when they are willing to stop blaming themselves for their marginal position and representation; and construct additional counter - stories to challenge the dominant single story. Collective trauma is often easier to deal with than an individual trauma as the collective idea of a trauma present that there are others who are suffering from the same affliction and thus, healing can be done with the help of others who have the same group experience. A counter-story can help disrupt what Nigerian writer Chimamanda Adichie refers to as the "single story" (Hughes – Hassell 216).

Hughes – Hassell brings up the question of the importance in the validity of multicultural literature among young adults:

> Why is the continued lack of multicultural literature problematic? Why is the race or ethnicity of the people portrayed in books so important? "Why," as I had a white student ask me once, "can't minority teens just imagine the characters to be their race or ethnicity? My cultural perspective doesn't affect my reading. I just feel like I am reading about people." (213)

It is true that the validity of counter – storytelling is often in question as the portrayal of a set of minor culture – its unique culture and tradition cannot be understood often by readers across multiple cultures. However, this can become the main reason why counter – storytelling is important as the narratives detail insights with the use of "insider" words – terms and phrases that are connected and cemented into each individual culture. There are certain terms uniquely used by each culture to define objects. For instance, in *A step From Heaven*, Na used the word Mi Gook to define America. This use of the word throughout the narrative validates Young Ju's and her family as someone who is definitely not American. Terms like Uhmma to define the mother, Apa to define the father and Halmoni to define the grandmother all help substantiate the narrative as a counter – story and would be further validated by Korean – Americans.

The more young adults read a counter - story, the clearer it would become that every narrative is filled with such elements, little details and nuances that only an insider to a minority group – whether they are Mexican- American, Asian – American or African – American. They would know, understand and be able to situate themselves in the narratives. Counter – stories contains insider words, phrases, jokes and sounds — peeks into a world easily recognizable by hyphenated teenagers, but had never before seen within a book's pages representing their culture in such detail. For teenagers and young adults, seeing themselves represented in a narrative would absolve them from certain conflict and trauma that rises out of certain teen angst borne out of being always invisible and alienated, abandonment issues, repressed sexuality connected with cultural or religious restriction. Culturally

relevant literature allows teens to establish deep and profound personal connections with the characters of a narrative, which also increase the likelihood of reading becoming an appealing activity (Heflin 818).

Counter – stories help the readers identify with their own culture and see it from the point of view of an observer. It engenders in them an appreciation for the diversity that occurs both within and across racial and cultural groups (Bishop 6). The Asian – American authors of Y.A literature have made it clear that it is essential to give voice to their culture and have it read and experienced by people from other backgrounds. This would not only be educational but help dispel the stereotypes that have always pervaded those in the culture. Many white cultures even in contemporary times cannot tell the differences between the Asian countries so, to dispel this view counter – storytelling could be a tool to help in the differentiation of the cultures and practices.

Writers have indicated that counter - stories have great potential and attributed many outcomes in general perception. Counter - stories help the minor groups to unify their communities, and process the opinions made against these minority communities in the more dominant narrative. This process of analyzing and eliminating arms the minorities and helps them defend themselves from such claims. Often, minorities are viewed as romantic "Other"— for example, as 'noble savages,' 'exotic orient', 'gangsta rappers,' the 'model minority' or the 'silent help'. This hides their identities from being viewed as contemporary individuals with diverse cultures and narratives. While many factors often contribute to this particular paradigm, these misrepresentations of identities often reinforce historically incorrect ideas of perceiving others that becomes perpetuated over time by both sides of the majority and minority.

In particular, the model minority is perpetuated by hyphenated Asian – Americans in particular as evident in the texts chosen. From a very young age, the characters are taught that success is the key to a better life and the key to acceptance in the environment they have chosen. For them, America is the new land of dreams – where the idea is that everyone's voice is equal and everyone has a chance to achieve

the American dream. In *A Step from Heaven,* America (Mi Gook) is equivalent to heaven. Young Ju's family left everything behind – the comfort of one's culture and cycle of living, even Young Ju's frail old grandmother to start a new life. To her, heaven – America imagines how much easier, blissful and full of opportunities life would become. Just like this mindset, Kimberly Chang's mother moves them to their broken – windowed Brooklyn apartment where they are undeniably cut off by an alien language. In *Girl in Translation,* the narrative highlights how Kimberly Chang and her mother struggle to fit themselves into the box that being a model minority signifies. They are happy enough to not attract attention from anybody as they both felt that too much attraction would cause problems for their future as American citizens.

The main characters from the two aforementioned narratives have family backgrounds that they cannot depend on in terms of financial aid and their triumphs in overcoming the language barrier is build on what they achieve through school and peer performance. School that is otherwise a hindrance or a chore to others of more privilege background becomes their only means of escape from the constant poverty that surrounds their family. Because of their model – minority mindset, Young Ju's parents and Kimberly and her mother are afraid of failure. To go back to their respective motherlands as failures is not an option for either family. As everyone who had migrated before them are all believers of the 'American dream', anyone who is not willing to work hard and achieve results is considered 'surplus' in their little communities. Thus, the education at school is their first step towards economical and social stability.

The notion of societies as a multicultural entity falls at least in three different aspects (Berry 97). The first is that naturally all contemporary society is filled with cultural diversity, in the sense that there is no society or country that has only a single cultural or ethnic group within its vast population – none with only a single hierarchically dominant language spoken by all members of said society, and none in which all members of the society distribute into a single cultural or civic identity (Berry 112). This particular existence of many cultural groups within a community in

a country may be referred to as “multiculturalism as fact,” or “multiculturalism as cultural pluralism” in a society.

The second aspect that can be seen is the presence or absence of a policy to deal with this cultural diversity. Some societies seek to reduce or even to eliminate cultural diversity as it is human nature to eliminate potential threats to one’s standard of living (Sabatier 98). For instance, each contemporary society has stereotypical views about the foreign elements introduced into their community. Asian – Americans rarely are seen past as middle management nor are seen as capable of committing crime either. Even the concept of having to be hyphenated in a society reinforced the idea of them never having full acceptance from the culture in power.

The third aspect is the degree to which an individual holds positive or negative attitudes toward cultural diversity as fact and as policy (Berry 98). The attitudes whether positive or negative can often be directed toward the culture or ethnic group that they belong to or toward a different group. So, they are always seen in the paradigm of the branch of society with unique faces and exotic backgrounds that the white community is in awe of – but does not accept. Especially in terms of hyphenated – Americans whose parents are both from their own non – white community, the negative attitudes in such cases outweighs the positive and they bear the stereotypes heavily. It is also hard to learn about new traditions and practices when the immediate influence is the family unit in such cases.

In this aspect, readers can definitely observe how the teachers of Young Ju and Kimberly Chang treat them in regards to them being in charge of a multicultural classroom. Both the girls on entering school are found without the ability to converse in the English language. The teachers are kind to the girls but altogether not equipped to deal with such problems nor do they realize the conflict that arises into the character’s psyche from being social outcasts. In both the narratives of *A Step from Heaven* and *Weedflower*, both girls are observed to rapidly learn the English language at home and at school. So, when Kimberly does too well on her tests at school, she is accused by Dr. Copeland – one of her teachers of cheating and has to take an oral test to prove that she indeed know the contents of her lessons. Young Ju

too is tolerated by her teachers as long as she can keep her marks. The teacher figures tend to discriminate and minimize their academic achievements to the level of their race. There is always the underlying condition of feeling proud of their ability to quickly grasp the English language but at the same time, these teachers simply took it for granted that the girls will quickly learn their new adopted language and thus not comprehend their struggles. There is no thought spared of the underlying conflict and trauma that they would suffer in transitioning from the language they share with their parents – language that is filled with the familiar to a new language that is alien to their parents and does not carry the cultural connotations that comes with it.

According to Berry, in the case of integration, migrants try to maintain their own culture in spite of the danger of total assimilation while engaging in tentative contact with members of the dominant culture (Berry113). This is true to all the older generations as seen in the texts. More stabilized in terms of emotions, the adults could penetrate through the haze of their borrowed culture and preserve parts of their original culture. This is true to the parents of Dimple who are confident in filling their home with culturally relevant and significant decorations. They also regularly partake in food that reminds them of their traditional background but at the same time, never forcing their daughter to partake in the practices that is so important to them. They tried to make Dimple's transition as smooth as they were able.

Migrants who partially assimilate regard contact with members of the dominant culture as important and vital. These immigrants place less value on the maintenance and performance of their original culture as the adopted culture is already what surrounds their immediate vicinity. For instance, this is observed in terms of Dimple's earlier mentality regarding her Indian background. She shows severe disdain for the culture that is irrevocably imbedded in her parent's lifestyle and she desperately tries to hide from it. However, she could neither hide nor distort her features that were clearly not Caucasian so she tries to be as invisible as possible, hiding behind her camera. In terms of migration, when migrants do not wish to assimilate and wish to maintain their own culture even in the new environment and are not interested in contact with members of the dominant culture, this term of reference is known as "separation". This is also evident in the way Kimberly Chang

and her mother live. Kimberly Chang although already living in the U.S has minimal contact with the white culture situated around her. She works in a factory located in the part of China Town where all her co-workers are Chinese immigrants too and the culture is not diluted with other influences. Although her contact is minimal, her mother has even lesser contact with their new environment.

Young Ju and Joon are examples of two types of assimilation. While Young Ju is only partially assimilated in terms of the circumstance of her birth which was not in the U.S, Joon is entirely different as he is born in the country with no contact to their ancestral country except through his family. Young Ju struggles through many problems that Joon does not have to. The language barrier, the cultural nuances and everyday way of living has to be relearned in her case. Economically, they both suffered but Joon does not have to struggle as hard as she has to.

In societies that are filled with multiple diversities that are constantly changing - with merit based principles and focus on individualistic autonomy, an individual develops identities based on their merit of their environment. For example if Sumiko, Young Ju, Dimple and Kimberly have not been uprooted from their traditional culture, it would be normal for them to have a strong identity relating each to their traditional ones – Japanese, Korean, Indian and Chinese respectively. For example, cross- gender friendships are never considered appropriate in many of the Asian cultures but this rule has lost its rigidity in the new American culture. Sumiko is able to be friends with Frank without censor and Dimple is introduced to Karsh so that she would find him suitable for possible future matrimonial arrangements. Not only are the characters allowed to be friends with members of the opposite sex, they are allowed to spend time with them without censorship.

This construction of dual identities from the family circle and the second immediate environment like schools and neighbourhoods however, needs to be combined or balanced with the identity of an individual eager to seek placement and acceptance from a society predominantly white. Most individuals with dual – identities nevertheless endeavour to balance the two by acting in a ‘context - sensitive manner’ (Vedder and Phinney 337). Young adults respond sensitively to

different social settings that shape their growth and their cognitive behaviour and feelings in terms of their perceptions to situations. If Asian – American young adults should feel the need to integrate themselves in the dominant society by shedding their old culture, then it is a form of self preservation stemming from the need to be accepted and not considered an 'other'.

This mode of preservation is evident with the character of Dimple. She desperately tries to be invisible by looking and observing only through her camera lens, hopelessly in denial of her identity. It is because she rejects her traditional culture that Dimple cannot properly progress emotionally and psychologically. She denies that anything from her traditional culture is 'cool'. As the narrative progresses she begins to observe Karsh who she felt is 'uncool' as he has the same background as her. When she finds that Karsh can manipulate the traditional and foreign elements in his life, Dimple begins to see that she could preserve both the traditions without being 'uncool'.

Adolescence is the time when the role of family members, peers, and a multitude of other influences shape and creates the identities that becomes more complex as the young people starts to form appreciations for particular values and norms of certain social groups. A sense of belonging to groups and networks has been associated with self - esteem, self - efficacy, and life satisfaction (Daley and Buchanan 196), the ease of transition from the teen years to adulthood, and coping ability. All the shared experiences in these social groups will nourish the development of the young adult Asian - American. The results vary on their ability to make sense of these events through exploring the events that rises out of daily life, the ability to interpret the circumstances that would often result into conflict with their dual cultural identities and the ensuing trauma that results out of it.

In *Girl in Translation*, Kimberly Chang has two different versions of peer shared experience – that of the bond she has with Matt who also works at the sweatshop factory and that of the one she has with Annette. Matt is someone close to her age that Kimberly can relate with in terms of her cultural background. Matt in the narrative is very much undiluted in terms of his interpretation as a Chinese American

with their traditional background. He is courteous towards the elders in their part of China Town and he finds comfort only in being surrounded by his people who are of the same background. Kimberly observes this about him on their date out:

> When we passed the guy at the newspaper stand, Matt would call out, "Hey, you need a break? I'll take the stand for you while you take a leak."… Matt would look at me and say '"You mind? Poor man's cooped up in there all day" (Kwok 265).

Matt does not have a good educational background like Kimberly so at times he is threatened by her success – especially her acceptance to Yale. When she tells him that she would soon take them all away from the squalor in their lives, he voice his opposition with, "How about if I don't want to be rescued?" and that his "climbing couldn't reach her heights" (261). So, it is no wonder that they do not end up together even after Kimberly got pregnant. He cannot feel comfortable with the idea of moving away from the familiarity of their China town. He ends up instead with Vivian who represents the docile, traditional version of Chinese women that is very prevalent even in contemporary society. Kimberly who is exposed to the ideals of both cultures finds herself in conflict with the singularity of Matt's ideals. He is further intimidated by her intelligence. Thus, they could not look past the conflict that rises out of their multicultural identities. Matt wants Kimberly to stay as he is – traditional in thoughts and actions but Kimberly instead strongly believes she have an obligation to her mother to use the resources afforded her. He ultimately cannot help her obtain a stability that could help herself and her mother.

Identity development in the case of multicultural societies has to do with the development of personal agency that can have access to resources to increase growth and understanding. Khanna and Johnson (2010) clarify the need for this in their studies of asserting identities to others. Passing as white or as close as whiteness allows a person to have "access to valued resources or roles that otherwise would not be accessible due to safeguards of the majority or more powerful groups" (339). It involves manipulation of one's identity to suit the standards of the majority in power. The Asian – American communities in America have always been scrutinized and

modelled to fit the ‘model’ image that is always perpetuated in terms of the feminine gender. Culturally, Asian – Americans have to live up to the ‘model’ image.

Success is equivalent to the Asian – American image which has everything to do with carrying out the ‘model minority’’ image. There is policing within each family or societal unit to ensure that the members are being productive. The policing are done mostly in the family unit where the younger generations are modelled and pressured to usher their family into more respectable social standings. This way, they help to build the stereotype that Asians are dutiful and liable to contribute to the economical growth of their environment.

Failure is meted out with harsh judgment and punishments as can be seen in the case of Young Ju’s Apa. His inability to connect with his new environment led him to his inability to hold down a job for long. This inability creates a complex in him. He felt the pressure of being a proud Asian man who has always had pride in his masculinity to be the family man and provide enough for his family. The trauma of being unable to hold this position and relying on his wife’s earnings eventually make him turn to alcohol. Joon could converse fluently in English than he does and does not revere him as much as he wishes him to. Young Ju’s achievements even begin to give him a complex and anger him further. He does not feel good being the father of a family who leads a productive life while he is the only one not able to adjust.

Contemporary Y.A multicultural narratives desperately try to shed the stereotypical images that have situated the Asian- American narrative in popular culture. For instance, while the texts chosen for this study all feature Asian – American main characters fashioned by authors with Asian backgrounds, characters with Asian backgrounds from non – Asian authors are often problematic and sidelined by white characters. Such is the case of the character of Hazel Wong in Robin Stevens’ narrative *Murder Most Unladylike* series (2014 - 2020). The series have eight books in total detailing the different adventures of Hazel Wong and Daisy Wells.

The narrator Hazel Wong is a thirteen year old girl from Hong Kong who is sent to a London's boarding school for girls. She is from an elitist background back at home– having economical advantages for good education and thus is able to converse freely in English to the other girls at school. However, from the very start of the narrative which is in first person narration by Hazel Wong herself, her thoughts and opinions are shaped by Daisy Wells, her English friend. Though the girls are both in the third form standards, Hazel observes Daisy as more grown up – with the ability to manipulate the adults around her. In the first text of the series, the two girls attempt to solve the murder that took place at their institution. Hazel Wong writes:

> Daisy is the President of the Detective Society, and I, Hazel Wong, am its Secretary. Daisy says that this makes her Sherlock Holmes, and me Watson. This is probably fair. After all, I am much too short to be the heroine of this story, and who ever heard of a Chinese Sherlock Holmes? (Stevens 2)

This type of disparaging and reproachful remarks towards herself and culture are spread throughout the narratives. She describes Daisy as an "absolutely English girl(s) with blue eyes and golden hair" but continues to describe herself as having " bulge all over like Bibendum the Michelin Man; my cheeks are moony – round and my hair and eyes are stubbornly dark brown"(3). In the narrative, Hazel is sent off from Hong Kong to have an English education because her father himself has been educated at Cambridge. The narratives stress that Mr. Wong is obsessed with all thing 'English' and even their house have been decorated to suit his 'English' sentimentality and stress the importance of Hazel's secondary language learning even before the decision to enter a Boarding school has taken place.

Hazel is so desperate to fit in with the schoolgirls; she decides to play the role of the 'don't – care' image the girls cultivate as well. She calls it 'camouflaging' herself so she cuts up her shoelaces to have a 'satisfyingly authentic – looking frayed shoelace'. She also proceeds to whack her schoolbag with a hockey stick to bend her books as though they have been mistreated for months. She scuffs her clean, shiny shoes along the dirty paths and kicks them against the low wall next to the lawn. She

rubs her fingernails on her mud covered shoes and catches all the dirt she can. Although she has been brought up with very strict rules and what she is doing would not have been appreciated at her Hong Kong home, Hazel continues to play her new role – getting her sums wrong on purpose and translating her French wrong. This helps her close the alienation against the girls but at the cost of shedding the values that she has learnt at home (156).

The narrative itself is light hearted enough – two boarding school girls blundering through to solve a murder. However, taken into context the age group the narrative is aimed at, it is apparent that young readers from Asia would see the visible secondary role of Hazel Wong. Such portrayal of characters could further help in the cause of internalized "other - ness". It can be extremely harmful to the Asian young adult's growing mental awareness of the culture that is theirs and the ones that surrounds them.

The threat of stereotyping not only negatively influences the individual's achievement and growth in a number of ways but also arouses conflict within the community itself. The protest against these stereotyping often gives further license for the dominant power to give validity to the mistreatment that are already practiced. For instance, even though Hazel Wong's father is an affluent and powerful banker in Hong Kong, almost all the girls at Deepdeen Boarding School believes him to be an opium trader. The drug opium and its trade have always been linked to the Far East even though opium has already been in use in the U.S during the American Revolution. With the stereotyping of opium as originating mainly from the Asian continent, there is always the afterthought of regarding the 'others' as dangerous traders, smugglers and gang members – uncivilized villains who would kill, maim or torture and sell women to brothels.

This type of negative stereotyping in narratives sets the precedent for further portrayals in other forms of popular culture. It causes trauma for the minority groups who wants to escape this stereotyping so they have no choice but to follow the standard of behaviour set by the majority. This not only "raise fear of failure to levels that actually lead to lower performance than expected on the basis of competence". It

can lead to the withdrawal of effort to preserve one's culture and to simply embrace the new adopted culture without the thought to preserve one's roots. It also defines success by the yardstick of the dominant culture and that can deter the growth of a culture. The multilayered challenge entailed in the stereotype is that the individual would need to comprehend and understand the stereotype as a conditioning done to the mental state and why they are susceptible to it. Most Asian – Americans do not even comprehend that they have been conditioned anymore as can be said with Dimple's character. As she invariable thought that Gwyn, her white best friend was superior to herself all throughout the narrative, Dimple had to re-condition herself from this mentality when she began to spend more time with people from her own cultural background.

In the case of Hazel Wong, she clearly sees herself as secondary to Daisy Wells and this is not further conditioned by Daisy who reiterate again and again about how her detection skills was superior to Hazel's. This clearly deters personal psychological growth and development as it made her constantly question the significance of her cultural background. The book series progresses with Hazel feeling lost and unapproved in the cultural background she finds herself. Daisy in turn has it evidently easier even with the way she could converse with the other characters. As she is blonde and blue eyed and so very English, she is never under the scrutiny of distrust as often as Hazel finds herself in. Several younger boarding girls like Betsy North and the 'Marys' – a group of three girls have schoolgirl 'pashes' (crushes) on Daisy and this too, she accepts as something that is inevitable.

According to Phinney, Horenczyk, and Vedder, (2001) unfiltered influences coming from a dominant power can have a devastating influence on a young adult's bicultural identity. For example, if a young adult is denied access to one's biological culture then it creates a vortex of alienation from the rest of his or her familial background. For instance, peers or other community members may urge the individual to shirk the responsibilities of learning about one's culture. They write, "Others may try to convince the same adolescent to adapt to the national group even if it is at the expense of involvement in the ethnic group" (Phinney 342). In inducing and stimulating these kinds of attitudes in an individual towards other cultures, the

young adult's peers may model prejudice and the justification of discrimination. The conditioning is subtle when it comes from one's peer groups.

In the narrative *Born Confused*, Gwyn as the best friend is the closest contact of white culture that Dimple has. Gwyn is also unconscious of the fact that she is fetishizing Dimple's culture cementing Dimple's foreignness. She constantly is amazed at the colours of Dimple's traditional clothes and the spices in her home cooked meals. She takes notes of them by pointing out how different they are from her regular life and in turn, Dimple too is again and again reminded of the difference between them. As she finds Dimple exotic due to her rich cultural background, Gwyn loves to feel exotic and different herself when surrounded by people of Dimple's cultural background. Thus, she constantly and forcefully integrates herself into social settings with Dimple who has internalized this and discriminates shamelessly on her own culture. Gwyn is constantly by her side to point out the difference between the two cultures she was brought up in and as a young adult who just wants to fit in, Dimple is constantly confused. Gwyn herself does it unconsciously – the narrative does not show a malicious reason for why she does it. However, by constantly bringing out the difference in the setting of Dimple's home and cultural life, she sets the grounds for Dimple's status as the one in the minority to feel as an 'other' and not someone who would fit into the community effortlessly like Gwyn.

Dimple does not feel Indian enough to understand or appreciate her parent's culture that is constantly the background in her life. She does not feel special or exotic as Gwyn does when she is surrounded by white people in a school or social setting. So, despite being good friends there is conflict with the way they feels towards each other. This makes it difficult to identify with either cultural groups and therefore frustrates the development of Dimple's bicultural identity. Members of the dominant cultural group sometimes directly or indirectly frustrate young adult minorities' growth and development of bicultural identities. Some actions may be often unconsciously done like disparaging remarks against certain ideologies and belief systems. For example, the belief in the sanctity of the various food items is a point of difference in modern contemporary American culture. While many Hindu Americans do not eat beef, the majority of white culture does not comprehend the

various sects of religion that are present in India and only reiterate the limited thought that all Indians do not eat beef. They often do not comprehend the reasons behind the sanctity of the cow and discriminate against the Indian – Americans as superstitious and religious fanatics.

Often, these differences exclude the hyphenated - Americans from opportunities that could improve their social standing. Exclusion is an especially harsh punishment for teenagers and young adults who desperately want to fit in and have a sense of belonging. Conflict and trauma rises out of the feeling of alienation from one's peer group. The sense of belonging is the most important aspect of teen development. Research indicates that group life and social identity can assist teenagers make transitions when coming of age has always been a painful and stressful process. The process of identifying and belonging to peer groups helps the youth to cope with changing social dynamics and helps with the severing of familial connections from their parents (Barber, Eccles, and Stone 429).

The processes of 'self' and other forms of regulating that are ideally central for the identity development of teenagers are also strongly manifested in negotiations between child and parent. When a child starts to reach the stage of adolescence, they start to form cognitive recognition and become capable of differentiating among the behaviours and intentions of people in terms of belonging to a cultural environment. As a result, they develop greater self-awareness and find context within their ascribed identity i.e. social identities that are placed upon an individual by another party not particularly one that they identify with.

An ascribed identity for Asian – Americans is often a reflection and a product of their parents' own cultural or bicultural identity because parents are the primary care-givers to children. They interact with them on a daily basis instilling into the children basic knowledge of values, belief systems, cultural knowledge and social practices. This socialization development is especially prominent for immigrant families living in societies whose norms and ways do not correspond with their own traditional cultural norms. Parents always want their children to follow their own traditional values that have been passed down from their own ancestors. The

offspring is often the link to reconfirm their cultural roots. The transmitting process is not an easy task for any parent. In *Weedflower*, Sumiko's family is poor – living on means they get from their flower farm. They cannot afford luxuries like the silk flowered scarf she made her Uncle buy for Marsha Melrose's birthday present. However, Sumiko cannot comprehend how the price of the scarf could burden her family. She can only think of the delight that could come from gaining acceptance and approval when she finally five the scarf to Marsha. The scarf cost four dollars which make Sumiko's Aunt clasp her chest:

> Four dollars! That was more than a day's wages for some men. Sumiko felt guilty, and ecstatic, and guilty, and ecstatic. After dinner Auntie helped her wrap the scarf. Three times she muttered, "Four dollars", and Sumiko felt guilty again (Kadohata 31).

Comprehending the difference set of rules in multicultural communities is trying for the characters as the parents or the primary care-givers' preferences are always modelled more to their traditional culture. A study by Sirén, (1991) observes how such preferences may or may not be well balanced and further cement the bias towards one's cultural tradition. For example, the child might be expected to be proficient in both the native language of the parents and the main language of the adopted culture. He / She might be expected to follow and keep all the traditional values of the parents. According to Siren:

> Whatever identity they intend to transmit to the child, the realization strongly depends on their own behaviour and identity, including their way of communicating with other people. Through their own behaviour, they either support or hamper the achievement of the ascribed identity (345)

Sirén showed in her study that immigrant parents preferred bilingual competence for their children but often were not in position of the necessary settings conducive to this particular goal. Most immigrant parents struggle financially in a new country thus, they often consciously and unconsciously put extreme pressure on their children to learn through school environment and peer socializing. Identity development is thus, regulated by the social settings and practices the children

participate in or in which they find themselves embedded. In terms of multicultural narratives, the character's ascribed identities come from two sources – the traditional and cultural image that their parents subscribe to and the identity of being an 'other' by the rest of the white community. Bi-cultural young adults are barely given time or space to create or subscribe to identities that they are comfortable with. They are pressured more to succeed – to contribute to the family's economical growth.

In Y.A literature, since the genre has become the catalyst for the voices of youth, the texts are able to show characters who can assert their identity comfortably and confidently. They also showcase the ones that are not sure of how to identify themselves. The conflict and trauma identifies the self – awareness of the characters regarding the difference in the multiple cultures they belong to. According to Erikson, the process of identifying self – awareness in teenagers who are coming of age is an important step of progression involved in multicultural identity development. He states:

> . . . the experience of having a personal identity is based on two combined and simultaneous observations: first, the awareness of self – sameness and implied continuity in space and time, and second, the recognition of this self – sameness by others (Erikson 345).

For teenagers who are coming of age in a multicultural community and developing a dual identity, their ability to deal and function with multiple identity frames is not necessarily equivalent to attaining the ideal identity. Interviews done by Phinney and Devich - Navarro among bicultural adolescents find considerable differences in the ways the young adults positioned themselves regarding their dual identities. The young people all identify as belonging to two cultures and refer to the ways they transition from one culture to another. However, the study identifies two contrasting tendencies with regards to the identification of the young adults. While some deny or minimize the differences by stating that they are a part of both cultures others were more aware of the contrasts. The first group states that they were not one or the 'other' but undeniably both – depicting America as a country filled with diverse prospects that exclude no particular group. The second group only strongly

figures as ‘Americans’ but does not throw away the distinctiveness of being hyphenated. However, the double identity is downplayed in terms of the identification of the second group (Phinney 347)

In the narratives chosen for this study, Sumiko and Dimple wants to desperately figure more as ‘American’ and perform their traditional culture only to the minimum. Sumiko and Dimple do not have any problem conversing with the English language having already acquired as both are apparently born in America. They do not struggle to understand the different nuances of daily lives nor do they have trouble connecting to members of the white community. In both their cases, it is their immediate white American community that is not as accepting of them as they are of being ‘American’. So, even in the case of them strongly identifying only as ‘American’, the reality of contemporary narrative is that the difference is still perpetrated by the culture more powerful.

In the case of Young Ju and her parents, Kimberly and her mother and even Sumiko’s aunt and uncle, they do not readily identify as ‘American’. This is mainly first of all, due to the language barrier. Young Ju’s family migrates to America when she was just a young child and they all quickly have to adapt to the new language as well as the new culture. Joon is partially spared from the problems that his sister and parents faced as he is born in America and the only norms of living he knows is the one in America. However, he too is mentally affected by the stress that all the other members of his family are facing. This affects his psychological growth and development. Since his family is his immediate contact into the society he is living in, Joon though ‘American’ by birth faces the trauma of belonging to parents who could be deported if they do not get their citizenship.

The circumstance is the same for Kimberly and her mother who had to relearn how to survive in an environment that was cold and harsh with only the most basic essentials. The portrayal of America in Na’s and Kadohata’s narrative is less forgiving than the hopeful narration by Dimple and Sumiko. The view of daily life although hopeful is bleak as these characters are plagued by the constant differences of physical features, language and cultural practices. It is a sad truth that what

Americans learn of Asian cultures are mostly out of the popular media's portrayal of their tradition. Asian cultures are distorted and fetishized by popular media to the extent that Asian – Americans are expected to accommodate to these stereotyping. As evident by the older man living in their neighbourhood who was the owner of an used – furniture store. Kimberly narrates:

> Suddenly, he leaped up in front of us and sprang into a one - legged martial art pose with his arms outstretched, "hi - yah" he yelled. Ma and I both screamed. He burst into laughter, and then started speaking English. "I got cha moves, don't I? I'm sorry forscaring you ladies. I love Kung fu. My name is Al". (Kwok 17)

Al, all though physically harmless becomes the representation of the dominant culture's tendencies to minimalize an entire culture to one particular scope that has been circulated by popular media. Al can be considered friendly and accommodating to the mother – daughter duo but nevertheless, he reinforces their difference over and over again by mentioning 'kung fu' every time they pass him on the road. He limits them to their traditional culture which denotes that he does not see the 'American' identity in them. This is limiting and degrading and it has been the source of outrage for many Asian - Americans.

Popular contemporary culture is mostly the primary source for the limitation of image roles for hyphenated Americans. An example would be the Japanese with the image of the geisha that was further popularized by American author Arthur Golden with the publication of *Memoirs of a Geisha* (1997) and its release as a film in 2005. It is about the life of a young nine year old girl Chiyo who was sold off to an Okiya – a geisha boarding house by her father. The narrative details her training to be a geisha, the bidding war for her mizuage (a deflowering ceremony) and the need for a danna – a patron in their old age to live a comfortable life. The film even won numerous awards but several Asian critics have acclaimed its popularity was because of the continuation of the sexual fetishizing of Asian women. The text could be considered a multicultural form of story - telling but the focus of the narrative is

still a single story as its introduction to mainstream culture reduced the image of the 'geisha' as no more than 'fallen women' and 'prostitutes'.

Solórzano and Yosso explained that counter - stories are a "tool for exposing, analyzing, and challenging the majoritarian stories of racial privilege" that can "shatter complacency; challenge the dominant discourse on race, and further the struggle for racial reform" (Solórzano and Yosso 27). For instance, the chosen texts challenge the already single story that is prevalent in the course of Y.A literature publishing. In a research done by Backman, Sundt and Dahlen covering the statistics of Asian – American literature published from the year 2010 to 2016 and catalogued in a mid - western urban public library system with a sizable Asian American population, Y.A literature including Asian characters only amounted to two percent from the hundred percentile data. Their data further shows that out of the 2870 Y.A narratives officially catalogued, the total amount of authors who identified as Asian hyphenated amounted to only 36. The youths depending on the library system in the white prevalent community are being served by a profession that is predominantly white - 88% nationwide and they are being taught by a profession that is also very white i.e. 82%. This kind of imbalance can lead to biases in selecting what books would be good in the library or classroom (16). The school systems also do not cater to this multicultural community. Consequently, this shows the immediate need to challenge the course of the single story that can be traumatic to other hyphenated Americans situated in the country.

The need to successfully situate oneself into a foreign environment coupled with the need to assimilate and adhere to the concept of the model minority can otherwise be very traumatizing as evidenced by the characters from the chosen texts. Despite the demographic diversity of the United States, many of the citizens still live in segregated communities, where they are unlikely to encounter and integrate themselves with individuals who are racially, ethnically, and socio-economically different from themselves (Hughes – Hassell 216). Multicultural literature especially targeted towards young adults helps in the bridging the cultural and class-based isolation that prevents the communication across racial, ethnic, class, and cultural lines. Young Kimberly Chang and her friend Annette are prime examples as their

story progresses to show that Annette is at liberty to try and sample new things in school. In the eleventh grade, she falls in love with theatre and even though Kimberly loves to watch her practicing, she never has the chance to see the performance as they take place in the afternoon when she has to work at the factory. For Annette who can use her free time after school for frivolous purposes, the concept of having to work instead is incomprehensible and foreign.

The advantage that Annette has is especially clear as she dabbles fleetingly into many extra-curricular activities and fancies. She is privilege to social excursions to the mall and Kimberly has to hide from her mother as they were deemed 'unimportant'. They cannot afford for Kimberly to take part in school extracurricular activities as their relatives Aunt Paula's family who is extremely jealous of Kimberly's small academic achievements. Her son Nelson is able to attend a private school on Staten Island without the need for scholarship and even able to find placement on the debate team. This also shows how the concept of the model minority comes into play as Aunt Paula feels the constant need for Nelson to beat Kimberly in all academic platforms. She cannot handle that impoverished Kimberly could amount to something more than her son. In turn, Kimberly's mother unconsciously pushes her to achieve as much as she was able to finance security.Both mothers pressure their children to succeed - Aunt Paula verbally and mentally by belittling Kimberly in front of her son. Even though they are of similar age, Kimberly and Nelson can never get along because of this reason.

This concept of the model minority – the need to be seen as useful and not expendable evaded the camps even in Sumiko's narrative *Weedflower*. Gotanda contends that it is difficult to ''situate this racial category without succumbing to the model minority stereotype'' (Kawai 109) The Japanese Americans in the camps starts to irrigate the desert as best as they could to appear useful and harmless. Sumiko even starts a small garden with Mr. Moto, her neighbour. Due to this, she is considered strange by many adults especially as she started "gathering organic matter" from the camps chicken coops. All the adults would joke, "All Sumiko cares about is dirt" (Kadohata 154). However, the results paid off as Sumiko is able to win third place with Mr. Moto for the top gardens among the camps. What is endearing

about Sumiko is her rather innocent first person narrative that helps creates space for the experiences and knowledge of marginalized populations. The forced relocation and incarceration of citizens with Japanese ancestry in concentration camps during the Second World War is a narrative that is often overlooked by critical theorist that holds the power which permeates all relationships. Mainstream narratives and practices buttress the master narrative and do not always create space for the minority to have their sides exposed. So, Kadohata's narrative is essential as it brings about a small part of history that has been minimally challenged before.

Members of the dominant culture in a cultural setting too benefit from hearing counter-stories. Delgado points out that counter-stories can help them overcome their "ethnocentrism and the unthinking conviction that their way of seeing the world is the only one — that the way things are is inevitable, natural, just, and best" (Delgado 2439). For this reason, the counter-stories narrative by minority and marginalized groups offer precious statistics and data for researchers working in the critical race tradition and educators who work with young learners from communities diverse enough with counter-stories. The proliferation of counter-stories is not an accident or coincidence either. Oppressed groups have always known instinctively that one's narratives are essential tools to the survival and liberation of one's culture from domination by those in power. Members belonging to minority groups are able to use the narratives in two basic ways (2437).

The first method is as a means of collective self - preservation. A principal cause of the demoralization of marginalized groups is self - condemnation (2438). It becomes easy for the minority groups to internalize the images and stereotypes that society thrusts on them like the image of the exotic east and yellow peril which is the racist ideology that derives from a concept said to have been most popular in its dogmatic forms in the first half of the 20th century

The concept of the yellow peril is a racial stereotype that has been constructed in the west to politically counter the growing fear of the rising powers of the east. It has a longer political background than the concept of the model minority stereotype in the United States. The term is believed to have been named and

popularized by German Kaiser, Wilhelm II in the late 19th century although its root can be traced back to the medieval history of Genghis Khan and Mongolian invasion of Europe. Yuko Kawai writes:

> In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the West feared the yellow race as a menace that would threaten the domination of the White race, which stemmed from the large population size of East Asia, China's potential military and economic power, and Japan's rise as an imperial power after Japan defeated China in the Sino – Japanese war in 1885 and Russia in the Russo - Japanese war in 1905 (Okihiro 110).

Okihiro (1994) points out that the concept of the yellow peril does not derive exclusively from the alleged peril posed by the Asian race to the white race in terms of their 'holiest possessions' i.e. civilization and religious beliefs pertaining to Christianity - but from non - White social groups, as a collective group, and their 'contestation of white supremacy' (120). The yellow peril refers to cultural threat as well as economic and military threats with regards to the White race and the bid for supremacy. As a result, it is not hard for the Asian – Americans to conform to the idea that their lowly position is their own fault and is indeed responsible for their own traumatic experiences. The therapy to combat such trauma is to narrate their versions of histories which progress is already tainted by the model minority mindset. By becoming acquainted with the facts of their own historic oppression, steps towards healing can be gained when one learns the reasons leading up to oppression and segregation.

The second method is as a means of lessening their subordination. By corresponding to two narratives by which a narrative can be viewed – that of narrator and that of the corresponding listener – the narrative gains body and substance. The narrator gains by having their voices heard. The listener gains by having their morals and epistemology challenged. As a tool, multicultural narratives give a platform to the multitude of unheard voices and whose lives are at best misrepresented in mainstream discourse. To challenge the single story gives a powerful sense of 'affirmation and validation' (121). Multicultural narratives especially directed from a

young adult and even pre - teen point of view challenge readers whose existence has been shaped by privileged class and race. It assures them to reconsider how the world functions for different groups of people that have traditionally been marginalized and oppressed. It also helps raise awareness about the inequalities the less unfortunate individuals face on a day to day basis.

For instance, the character of Gwyn in *Born Confused* is essential to show the difference between her and Dimple. In terms of the characters of this study, Dimple is the most privilege in terms of family life and stable financial conditions. Gwyn is ignorant about Dimple's family traditional social practices and when to stop the line at cultural appropriation. To her, Dimple's colourful traditional dresses are adventurous outfits that only heighten her physical beauty. Though it is difficult to set the bar as to how far one can appreciate another's culture before it becomes inappropriate, the way Gwyn appropriates Dimple's cultural background is wrong. It not only left Dimple feeling uncomfortable but it also made her feel like Gwyn is stealing something that is undeniably hers.

Dimple is never really Gwyn's equal even when they profess to be best friends. Gwyn leads them in situations that Dimple finds uncomfortable. It is only towards the end when Dimple challenges Gwyn's absolute rule that cracks starts to form in the friendship. In this way, Dimple's narrative also shows aspect of how white culture subdues the minority's point of originality to mould popular stream of thought. For Gwyn, she feels better when Dimple is a subordinate who agrees to her whims. Gwyn feels superior in terms of emotional maturity as she leads Dimple around the social settings presented before them.

In multicultural narratives, friendships between hyphenated Americans and characters from the white community are always fraught with the underlying power struggle of two cultures. It is complicated as the social structure is between members of minor cultures and the culture in power. In *A Step from Heaven*, Young Ju in a bid to be noticeable to her classmates declares her brother dead. She so desperately wants to say something interesting to the other second graders. Even in her young mind, Young Ju knows that her poverty and family issues cannot be shown to the

public. Her family is her own personal dark secret and thus, she plan and lie for attention– something the other children does not have to do. So, to be more interesting and visible, she declares that her little brother died to her classmates and teacher in exchange for 'warm fuzzies' from everyone that day. She is elated as:

> … today I am special. I play with my fuzzies, scratch and sniff my stickers, and think about how nice it is that my brother is dead. (Na 37)

Another friendship that appears in the narratives is that of Kimberly Chang and Annette. While the friendship paradigm is not that different from Dimple and Gwyn's relationship, Annette does not understand the perpetual poverty that Kimberly and her mother live in. She care and empathize but never really understand the extent of the cultural division between them. Annette cannot breach the reason to why Kimberly has to work in the factory after school as Annette is too privilege and does not have to worry about the central heating system or going home to a freezing apartment in winter. All she can see is that it is illegal by law and that she wants to do something in terms of human rights and wages. She cannot understand that if the factory closed down, Kimberly and her mother would be left jobless and have no other source of income. Kimberly has to severely caution Annette not to pursue the idea. She questions why Kimberly does not invite her over to their apartment and never questions the act of gift giving. Annette is liberal in giving gifts to Kimberley which inadvertently puts pressure on Kimberly and her mom to return the favour. It is beyond her comprehension that the mother – daughter duo have to calculate all purchases in the terms of the skirts they could finish at the factory.

The friendship that is most equal in terms of social background is Sumiko's friendship with the boy Frank who is a Native American. Frank's family lives with the rest of his people in a reservation nearby. Frank belongs to the hyphenated term of Native - American which is also a minority in the U.S. The Native – Americans resents that their space had to be shared with the Nikkei people. Frank too resents at first that the Nikkei were given much more benefits than his people had ever received. It can be observed that he had never even seen ice before. When Sumiko's brother Tak-Tak offers it to him, Frank is curious and asks why the white people

were treating them so well when they were the ones to bomb Pearl Harbor. Even as a young boy, he sees the clear inequality on how they are treated. He snaps at Sumiko and Tak-Tak at what he felt was their wasteful existence:

> They take our land and put you on it. They give you electricity. They give you ice. I found a sandwich one of you threw on the road. (Kadohata 143)

However, Sumiko and Frank both begins to build a friendship - the foundation being Sumiko's access to ice in the dry atmosphere of the desert and the 'Indians' fascination with the Nikkei's ability to plough their rough and barren land. Frank tells Sumiko that The Office of Indian Affairs has decided to tolerate them for the sake of their land. He told her "…The government is spending money to bring water to the reservation. You're cultivating the land" to which Sumiko replies with "That's because we're slave labor" (160).

Both Frank and Sumiko are extremely clear on how expendable they are even as citizens of America. Once the Nikkei people are gone, Frank informs her that other "Indians' like the Hopi and Navajo tribes are to be moved into their already cultivated lands and barracks. What is very significant about Sumiko and Frank's friendship is that they each represented a history of hyphenated Americans that have been subjugated and controlled by the white race. Their people have both been supplanted into the middle of the desert to survive as best as they can. The Native – Americans have always been removed to reservoirs to be monitored – their freedom a facade. The narrative *Weedflower* depicts two sides of history that have been overlooked countless of times.

Although there have been numerous attempts to overthrow perceived and stereotypical views on hyphenated Americans with the use of multicultural narratives, it is not an easy process to change decades of preconceived notions. Absented, whitewashed, and problematic misrepresentations of Asian Americans are not isolated to Y.A literature. This pervasive stereotyping persists across all contemporary mainstream culture. The minimal portrayal of Asian characters in mainstream culture is often limited to the mind of the white creator. Nancy Wang Yuen comments on the large issue of minimal representation, "Far from neutral,

mass media institutions such as Hollywood are major transmitters of racist ideologies . . . . Hollywood's dominant narratives of whites as heroes and actors of colour as side-kicks or villains legitimate and reproduce hierarchies' existent in US society" (31). Rajgopal points out in her study of Asian women in the popular movie industry, when Asian Americans are given roles in Hollywood, they are often stereotyped and one – dimensional characters who highlight the importance of the main characters. Men are stripped of their masculinity unless they play villain roles. Women are unfairly painted as either a "dragon lady" or a "china doll", with the sexualizing of traditional practices thrown in the mix (Rajgopal 24). There is also portrayal of Asians and hyphenated Asians as "nerds," "computer whiz kids" who are hopelessly awkward in social situations with an exaggerated accent. These characters subsist always just on the periphery of the plot – their "otherness" exaggerated, their passive roles without dimension.

Though they are largely fictional, on – screen flat portrayal of a character do shape and modify views of reality and because of this mainstream media becomes a powerful source of negative force on white perception towards people of minority culture. Studies show that the consumer of a particular TV show or book series often substitute stereotypes they see or read about for authenticity in the real world when they have not had any direct communications or interactions with the particular racial groups portrayed in the media or narrative. For instance, cultural stereotyping in contemporary consumed media can lead the consumers to negatively associate immigration with increased unemployment, crime and death rates of the majority culture. They can also exacerbate pre-existing racist fears. For example, people who identify that they live in a neighbourhood surrounded by a high percentage of non – whites are more likely to fear crime after watching or reading scripted crime narratives than those who do not hold that perception. In that way, such neighbourhoods are always the 'bad part of town' and white main characters are often cautioned from entering establishments in such places. Racism packaged in the form of entertainment has always twisted the outcome to the way people understand and categorize each other.

The erasure, censorship and negative portrayals of minority culture not only cause racial tension but also affect the way people of minorities view themselves. This can be seen in the way the protagonists view themselves as compared to their white counterparts. There is always a sense of disillusionment and frustration in the way they collectively execute their identities. Prolonged unsupervised exposure to any form of popular media can lead to the decrease in self - esteem for all consumers – young and old. Not only that, young impressionable minds find it necessary to copy the biased portrayal and versions of their culture. To this effect, it is easy to comprehend how such concept as model minority and sexualizing of their own eastern cultures are so internalized. The ubiquity of racist imagery thus has collective effects on all society. One simply cannot dismiss popular media's differential portrayals of racial groups as mere entertainment. The dominant and more privilege group has always justified their advantage by means of narratives – "stock explanations that construct reality" that is favourable to them (Delgado 2438). These narratives are drastically at odds with the way hyphenated Americans would describe their social or economic conditions.

Internalized "other - ness" that starts from a young age causes trauma in the mental growth of an individual. Since Asian - American young adults are particularly susceptible to this portrayal as they are the ones trying to fit in with the white dominant environment, ensuing trauma often develops when they try to relearn their cultural norms and tradition. For instance, Dimple loathes how little of her parent's heritage she has consumed when she finally decides to embrace and learn about it. She has always been very removed from everything that would make her otherwise "other" from Gwyn. From the small things like detesting oily food to the way she cannot relate to her cousins shows how determined Dimple have been to fit into her white environment. It is only when she clearly begins to see Karsh that she begins to recognize the way Karsh is able to maintain his personality without insulting the two backgrounds he belongs to. Dimple has felt that her traditional background had been 'uncool' before.

Counter - stories can assail the complacency of the majority culture. What is more, they can achieve results in ways that promise at least the possibility of a

semblance of success i.e. without the use of methods that singles out the minority groups as (the)'others'. For instance, the use of violence would only condemn the hyphenated Americans to the label of being uncultured, uncultured and savagery that they have already tried to escape. Although there is never a way to protest peacefully as peaceful protests are often overlooked.

Counter - narratives at times can overcome that otherness, hold that 'instinctive resistance in suspension' (Delgado 377). As narratives are the oldest and primordial base for sharing human experiences, their appeal would help in providing a most effecting of overcoming differences and might be grounds enough for forming a " new collectivity based on the shared story". In this sense, narrative work has a fastidious appeal for individuals who are components of 'outgroups', or "groups whose marginality defines the boundaries of the mainstream, whose voice and perspective – whose consciousness – has been suppressed, devalued, and abnormalized" (378). Especially in a country like America where the culture is diverse and unique to each groups and sub - groups, there are always 'outgroups' that are valued only because of the contributions they have in the society.

The process of counter – storytelling which members of minority groups tell to themselves and others helps to document the unheard pain and voices, even validate a 'counter - reality' and therefore, becomes catalysts for trauma healing. As Christa Schönfelder writes, literary trauma narratives facilitate for the readers specific functions that centre on its 'fictionality':

> Twentieth – century trauma narratives remain connected, at least in principle, to a long tradition of literary representations of 'other people's pain', whose ethical implications are tied to their fictional status and to the fact that the other people and their fates whose pain the reader is witnessing or sharing are the fates of imaginary people in a depragmatized and metadiscursive space of textuality, which however may paradoxically enhance its communicational intensity and its signifying power towards a collectively experienced historical reality (166).

According to Schönfelder, the narratives dealing with trauma have powerful impact on the readers because they operate in a fictional realm that makes them imaginary but believable. Young adult readers who recognize themselves and their voices in these narratives can use the process to ease their trauma. While the specific purpose of trauma fiction may vary from narrative to narrative - depending on each narrative's depiction of individual, social, cultural or political trauma, literary trauma writing can be the main form of trauma healing for young adults whose social life are mostly still based on school peers.

Schönfelder postulates further that literary trauma texts often expose the paradox that characterizes trauma narratives. They attempt to converse with trauma experiences that defies "ordinary processes of remembering and narrating, of representation and comprehension". The process of Y.A narratives dealing in trauma raise the importance of verbalizing the unspeakable and often what have been considered as taboo. Rape, teen sexuality, mental illness, teen menstruation, peer pressure and the ensuing trauma are boundaries that are tested and verbalized. Trauma narratives point to the "narrative / anti-narrative tension at the core of trauma" (80, 83).

The chosen texts place different emphasis on the limitations of a 'single story' written in a foreign language in relation to understanding the process of trauma. In this effect, while Mi Gook (America) is equivalent to the child Young Ju, simply putting down 'America' in the narrative undermines the Mi Gook that Na is trying to portray in her writing. Mi Gook becomes more than a location – it represents wealth, economical stability, shiny dreams and most of all – hope. Just like the word 'Mi Gook' means more than a location for Young Ju, the word 'Nikkei' means more than its definition of Japanese immigrants for Sumiko. For her, the word 'Nikkei' encompasses not only her entire little world as it includes everyone she loves – her family but it is also a double edged sword for her. 'Nikkei' contains not being truly American – different and not to be trusted. So, the word becomes a source of collective trauma for the people she surrounds herself with.

Cathy Caruth's *Trauma and Unclaimed Experience* shows a paradigm for theorizing trauma towards a favourable fictional narration. Caruth allocates the possibility of a trauma narrative being transformed to make sense of the taboo and the incomprehensible. The existence of mental and physical trauma scars can be transformed into narrative memory that allows the story to be communicated in the form of verbal words. The trauma introduced in Y.A literature thus can be integrated as one's own. The recalling and the verbalizing of such conflict that cause trauma can then lose their sharp precision behind what causes the knowledge of "traumatic recall" (Caruth 153). According to Caruth:

> … trauma demands a mode of representation that textually performs trauma and its incomprehensibility through, for example, gaps and silences, the repeated breakdown of language, and the collapse of understanding (115).

One of the benefits of reading diverse Y.A literature is to increase the understanding of minority cultures. Since the coming – of – age period is universal for all adolescents, many issues of conflict are the same across various cultures. Through counter - storytelling, young adults can envision that though their circumstances maybe different; their essential concerns about life do not change. The one problem that does not change is the desire of belonging and this core component can be found in Y.A literature.

Counter – storytelling helps readers find common ground in their experiences of alienation and thus, lessening the effects of trauma that results from such culture based alienation. It can be seen through Kimberly's unquestioned connection to Matt Yu, who shares the same lowly circumstance of living as herself. Matt struggles in the factory with her, contributing to his family income and does not have wild dreams of stardom as Kimberly's white friends. All Kimberly wants is a stable life – an ordinary life that cannot be understood by her friends who have more privilege backgrounds. Kimberly and Matt could join hands in their alienation from the rest of Kimberly's peers. These narratives increase the flow of understanding by creating more empathic views into the lives of young people from other cultures.

Y.A literature filled with diversity has the ability to bind its readers across all cultures with their universal teen experiences. For instance, a young adult reader may not fully comprehend being segregated from society like Sumiko and the' Nikkei' but they could empathize with her desperate need for acceptance from her peers. Likewise, whether they are of the same culture as Young Ju and Kimberly or not, young adult readers across different cultures can understand the goal towards the need to contribute to society. These forms of counter – storytelling improves the self esteem and builds up confidence of minority culture readers and this encourage further collective trauma healing. As it teaches readers that it is all right to legitimize certain varied experiences, Y.A literature dealing with multi – ethnicity helps in fostering and creating individual thought. Stereotypes that showcase Asians as good engineers, doctors or computer wizards can be instead supplanted.

Y.A counter - narratives also spread social awareness. As the genre is consumed in large numbers in the US and considering the insular nature of the communities found there, individuals living in a specific cultural community are often unaware of the struggles of the other communities. Steven Wolk even advocates for the use of multicultural Y.A literature in the classroom "to awaken their students' consciousness to the world and help them develop the knowledge and inspiration to make a better world, from local to global" (Wolk 665). According to Wolk, literature is a crucial intersection to current and historical events and can therefore, be a supplement to historical and social studies. He acknowledges how literature is the connection of readers and narratives that contains civic awareness that essentially builds law makers and community leaders. Readers can connect to narratives that are beyond the 'single story', engaging them in the stories of hope and triumphs that are beyond the experiences available in their community.

Fostering these kinds of qualities in adolescents and young adults is an important first step in exposing them to a variety of world views. Multicultural counter – storytelling challenges stereotypes by helping to reduce the marginalization of minority groups and curbing the feelings of superiority of the cultures in power. As Williams (2004) explained, "No one envisions counter storytelling as a magic solution to inequities constructed around race" (188). Counter – stories may produce

tension and frustration for the readers and even the educators before they can guide them towards an ideal transformation. The aim of counter - narratives is to act as catalyst for the understanding and acceptance of marginalized groups and cultures. It is not to determine the validity of one experience over others. As Atwood and López (2014) explained, “Counter strories do not aim to provide a truer understanding of truth, but rather, to complicate our understanding of truth” (p. 1145)

CHAPTER 3

SEXUAL CONFLICT AND BODY IMAGE IN THE PRESENCE OF CULTURAL DIVISION

Young Adult literature has continued to expose how cultural assumptions and societal constraints are reinforced in the physical and sexual representations of young people. The genre also reveals the many new ways in which Y.A novels reject the various age old constraints dealing with young adult sexuality. They construct and create new structures that resist and reject traditional and regressive ideas of young adult sexuality and constructed body image. These narratives bridge even the differences that are often the result of cultural difference.

The transitional period of the teen years is a period of turmoil that is between childhood and adulthood and is invariably hard to navigate. While factors like culture, economy and familial backgrounds produce different experiences for every individual, common factors such as questions on sexuality and the performance of it, acceptance of body images are present through each individual's progress into adulthood. This period is when the performance of sex and sexuality becomes most important and intriguing to young individuals. The chosen texts shows how the young female protagonists question the growing changes happening in their respective bodies and the conflict that rises out of body images that don't conform to the white community norm.

According to Hyeouk Chris Hahm, Maureen Lahiff and Rose M. Barreto, there are many factors that are associated with the adolescent's initiation into the act of sexual activity namely age, ethnicity, gender, parental association, use of substance most likely drugs and socio - economic status. A high stage of acculturation is also connected with higher rates of precarious sexual activities among ethnic minority adolescents. "Acculturation is the complex psychological process of adaptation to a different culture, by which members of an ethnic group gradually change their behaviors and attitudes to be more like those of the host society" (Hahm 29).

The protagonists selected for this study diverge on the acculturation scale as high acculturation suggests adopting without hesitation the values, language and various cultural beliefs of the new environment whereas low acculturation suggests the retaining of the various values, languages and cultural norms and beliefs of the original culture. However, from the aspect of studying about the sexual conflict and body image problems of Asian – American adolescent girls, the process of low

acculturation becomes a hindrance for the girls in terms of their freedom. “A critical aspect of acculturation is renegotiating or redefining gender roles in the new cultural context” (Hahm 29). The occurrence of gender role acculturation can be observed as all four protagonists are invariably influenced by the host culture’s gender role norms which are invariably different than the ones that their parents follow.

Asian American adolescents, particularly of the feminine gender have to survive and adapt themselves to a bicultural world where they have to experience certain contradictions between their two cultures. They experience and are encouraged to participate in the American notions of gender and its performance in social situations like school while at the same time; they still have to uphold the Eastern notions and values of gender roles through their families and community groups. In such cases where characterization of a person is already torn in two, highly acculturated Asian American females who are already adults may easily adopt gender roles shaped by American values which would emphasize more freedom in terms of the distribution of power and freedom in sexuality. However, the case is different for younger girls who are still under their parent’s guidance. During this period, they cannot be highly acculturated and certain gender norms may be internalized which could subject them to certain passivity and taboo oriented teachings on sexual activity.

Adolescent girls across all cultures struggle to fit in even with their closest peers. The situation is even more severe especially for immigrant young girls who find that no one is really like them at school or in social situation. Not fitting in with peers due to different social and cultural issues is a topic of concern that the young protagonists in the chosen texts struggle with. Dimple does not have any other Indian students at her school and she is surrounded by white, American adolescents. She struggles with the fact that she physically does not look like what she perceives to be the ideal American girl compared to her best friend:

> Gwyn appeared the very image of the American Dream itself, the blond rooted, blond - haired, blue - eyed Marilyn for the skinny generation. And if I was her reverse twin— the negative to her positive—that made me? The Indian nightmare? The American scream?" (Hidier 12)

Dimple's regularly compare herself to Gwyn who seems more 'mature' because she seems much more comfortable in her body and her easy comradeship with individuals of the opposite sex. Dimple does not feel feminine or attractive enough in her own skin. The question of sexuality is often forefront in the case of young individuals who are situated in terms of privilege economic stability and cultural backgrounds. Hormonal change does not differentiate against imposed differences and thus, Dimple with different roots than Gwyn has more impediments that hamper the expression of her sexuality. Gwyn in turn does not have to navigate the cultural nuances like Dimple and thus, she could explore her new budding sexuality more freely.

In regards to the four main protagonists of the four texts of this study – *Weedflower*, *Girl in Translation*, *A Step from Heaven* and *Born Confused*, Dimple is the only one who has a relatively stable economic and social background. She has the time to worry over the performance of her sexuality. For the others – Sumiko, Kimberly and Young Ju, sexuality is repressed by their economic – socio backgrounds. Poverty becomes the main factor for the repression of their sexuality. While Dimple and Gwyn had time to explore their budding femininity and sexuality, the others had to limit their time to help their families stay afloat economically.

As her body develops and matures, Dimple develops an increasingly awareness to sex and sexuality with the appearance of Karsh Kapoor. Here too, Dimple's budding entrance to sexual attraction is hampered by her cultural background and her social setting. It is a challenging aspect of her life as she is undeniably attracted to Karsh although she has regarded him as an 'unsuitable' boy. The first reason being that he has been introduced to her through her parents. The second reason being her and Karsh has a similar cultural background which is ultimately an impediment her assimilation into the white community. Dimple is already torn between wanting to fit in with her secondary background with Gwyn and feels that Karsh is the element that could upset her already precarious social setting.

Unlike Dimple, Young Ju and Sumiko does not have space or time to perform their budding femininity and sexuality. They are economically hindered as well. For Young Ju, combating the cultural and language barrier and her displacement into

their secondary background gained precedence over every other aspect of her young life. The only aspect of her femininity is centered on the behavior of her father towards her brother and herself. While her father took a toxic interest in the performance of masculinity with her brother Joon, Young Ju's insight into femininity is through her haggard working mother. To Young Ju, being a good girl meant performing well in her studies and helping with the household chores. Even though Joon is allowed to play and be a child, Young Ju as young as she is have to play at being the second maternal figure to Joon. There is never any time for her to ponder about the state of her sexuality.

Young Ju has to be the safe harbor for her mother and Joon as well. When her father would get violent with drink, her small body has to be the shield and her mind has to come up with safe topics that could defuse the tension in the home. So, she barely has time to adjust into being a young lady. As she understands the new cultural system better than her parents, as young as she is; Young Ju has to take the role of matriarch – a role that belonged to her grandmother back in South Korea. Readers can also find from the narrative that the grandmother does not receive anything but passing obeisance from her son, Young Ju's father. In a jarringly similar way, Young Ju also is not acknowledged for her role in the family or her achievements.

The same is for Sumiko as for most of her narrative; she is in the Internment camps. Not only is their social placement not sure, they have to combat being like prisoners with minimal space and food. In that kind of atmosphere, Sumiko has no space to cultivate her sexuality or ponder about her body image. Before the political situation escalated, Young Ju was at leisure to admire the images of the other white girls in her class. However, after they were encamped she had to direct all her time and minimal physical space to creating her garden. The repression for Sumiko as well as Young Ju came from their regressive traditional norms as well as from the social conditions that bound them. As most Asian cultures are made up of patriarchal norms that label the female gender with certain roles, the result is that teen girls in such sub-groups have to overcome not only the societal barriers of their new environment but the ones that are considered normative by their ancestors as well.

In any culture, the process of awakening to a budding sexuality is undeniably more difficult for girls as boys are more often encouraged to display their growth. It is also the unbearably traumatic period that they begin to understand that the female adolescents are not as encouraged to display their sexuality as often as boys are. While this stage of growth is equally hard for both sexes, it is easy to observe that there are more restrictions placed on the adolescents disguised with well – meaning intentions such as 'protection' 'shielding' 'safe-guard' etc. The difference in the handling of their sexes nevertheless creates conflict in the way that the sexes even observe themselves. Regarding adolescence particularly for girls, Lyn Mikel Brown and Carol Gilligan in *Meeting at the Crossroads* describes the period as:

> "a crossroads in women's development: a meeting between girl and woman, an intersection between psychological health and cultural regeneration, a watershed in women's psychology which affects both women and men" (Gilligan 23).

While boys are allowed to be boys with old age adages cementing their right to be rowdy and their right to expression, girls are often expected to be dutiful, demure and be wiser in courtesy and manner than their male counterparts. In a society that often values beauty more than accomplishment; young girls are often given conflicting messages about their right to sexuality and body image. A young girl expressing her sexuality often easily becomes an uncomfortable topic. Craig LeCroy and Janice Daley argue in *Empowering Adolescent Girls*:

> "While girls are exposed to media messages that encourage them to acquire a highly sexualized appearance, they are also met with many adults' reluctance to discuss sex in a forthright manner" (LeCroy 15).

Silencing adolescent sexuality is damaging and is usually more rampant in Asian families where the traditional values are still practiced by the parents. Even Dimple is not free of this as the circumstances in her meeting Karsh have been the precursor to a more formal arranged marriage meeting. The expression of female sexuality is often hindered and controlled – marriage being the only agreeable form of expression. Sex and the display of sexuality are only acceptable with ties to marriage. Dimple who would like to be acceptable in her current environment longed for the chance to date and flirt effortlessly as Gwyn does. The idea of meeting Karsh

that could lead to a possible arranged marriage does not satisfy her curiosity nor answer her questions about sexuality.

The terms sex and sexuality have always been intertwined with a culture's particular understanding of gender. "Race is not so intimately wed to a layman's understanding of sex, sexuality, and gender" (Chou 3). However, race is fundamental to how sexuality can be understood in the lives of Asian Americans. White hegemonic ideals of femininity, body structure and beauty often determine which gender gets to explore their sexuality. When identities are so complexly intertwined, it is the social norms and hegemonic social programming that pulls individuals in a set standard of survival. However, when there are two or more conflicting sets of social norms, the individual stuck in those norms invariably develops a conflict in their individualistic ideals as well.

In the case of one of the protagonists, Kimberly Chang does not immediately have opportunity to explore her sexuality. Since she and her mother are so poor, she has to contribute her time to helping her mother at the factory. She is also on a special scholarship and has to perform exclusively for school as well. Factoring the little time left to herself, she only has time to be at first casually acquainted with Matt who she abundantly sees at the factory. It is only after their situation gets more stable with her admission at Yale University that Kimberly decides to explore her sexuality. First she casually dates Curt from school but eventually finds that she loves Matt because he could understand her cultural background and her future aspirations of living a dull but stable suburban life. Unconsciously or not, Kimberly does not have a sexual relationship with Curt even though he is attracted to her. Kimberly too, as sophisticated as she has became from when she first arrived could not escape the belief that 'good' Asian – American girls like her do not engage in frivolous sexual acts with boys from another race.

When Kimberly finally has sex, it is because of ignorance that she made Matt use two condoms. She has no one to guide her regarding such things as often in Asian mother – daughter relationships; sexuality is rarely discussed - impeded as it is by a sense of propriety and modesty. However, due to this particular foray into a sexual act, Kimberly gets pregnant as the "two condoms had rubbed against each other and they'd both torn" (Kwok 252). She even hides the fact that she is pregnant

from Matt because she knows how clearly Matt is struggling financially in caring for his little brother. When her friend Annette tells her that he has the right to know, Kimberly knows that Matt would dutifully want to marry her. She replies "…He'll want to keep married and get married. He'll want us to stay in Chinatown" (270). She desperately loves Matt but she fears that Matt would happily continue to live in the squalor of Chinatown as he often indicates that he is comfortable with their people and does not want to leave. Kimberly voices her anguish "I don't want to force him to be with me. I don't even know if I can make him happy in the long run. What kind of wife would I be for him? Poor, stressed, frustrated, with all my potential unfulfilled" (270).

Kimberly's narrative not only deals with a view of an Asian – American adolescent belonging to the working class but that of the sensitive topic of teen pregnancy. Kimberly's narrative provides a safe space for adolescents to read about themselves with topics that are often deemed taboo in adolescent literary fiction. Kimberly's ultimate dilemma whether to keep the baby or not, the decision to raise it without Matt and her struggles to elevate her small family's economical condition also points to how harder it is for girls from working class families to explore their sexuality –teen pregnancies narratives often highlighting the threat of being a single teen mother with no economical standing. In Kimberly's case, the threat is reversed as she later completes her dream of becoming a surgeon as well as successfully taking care of her child without Matt's assistance.

Sumie Okazaki writes that "sexual activity is closely linked to procreation in most Asian cultures" (Okazaki 34). She details how even though Japanese and Chinese erotica date back to ancient times but it is altogether with a different approach when it comes to their contemporary culture. It has been relegated as a taboo subject. Gupta also mentions on the subject of sex that "sexuality was not a taboo subject in ancient Hindu culture" (Gupta 57) as long as it was within the legalized ambit of marriage. Rather, he highlights how ancient Indians openly discuss sexuality in religious and fictional texts such as the Atharvaveda and the Kama Sutra. However, regardless of an Asian culture's openness on sexuality or expressions on sexual discourse, sexual activities outside hetero - normative bonds of marriage are considered highly inappropriate. Okazaki writes:

> Most Asian cultures are highly collectivistic and patriarchal; thus, sexuality that is allowed open expression (particularly among women) would represent a threat to the highly interdependent social order as well as to the integrity of the family (Okazaki 35).

Numerous Asian cultural traditions and practices place high emphasis on propriety and the observance of strict moral and social conduct particularly for the conduct of the female gender and thus the image of modesty and restrained sexuality are valued. However, male sexual desire is altogether represented even in the majority of Y.A literature as normal and natural. When male characters explore their sexuality, it is often humorously narrated.

In turn, female characters and the expression of sexuality is tentative and riddled with 'warning' signs. It is more taboo with characters of ancient descent in white community settings where the girls are not only be model citizens but model daughters. The idea of Asian 'honour' becomes a thriving, living thing that is as alive as their bodies. This is why female sexuality and desire is frequently riddled with dangerous signs. The labelling of the female characters as 'fallen' 'whores' and 'sluts' are perpetuated more frequently in literature of high school settings than canonical women's literature. While these young women have to deal with the accusation of being branded, they must deal with the trauma of their bodies undergoing change.

The expression of sexuality is often countered with the threat of teen pregnancy. However, in recent Y.A literature, this portrayal of pregnancy as punishment for the sexually active girls has instead been turned into life lessons and also serves as guide books should young readers find themselves in the same condition. The pregnancy does not simply mean the end of the young girl's life anymore. Y.A Literature shows that a young adult female can be more than a teen mother as with the case of Kimberly Chang who became a surgeon after giving birth. Pregnancy usually serves different purposes when presented in Y.A literature. It conveys that a young lady has become sexually active as a way of signifying her transition from childhood to adulthood.

In Y.A pregnancy - problem novels, the narrative highlights on the unplanned pregnancy of the teenagers. These teenagers in such portrayals are usually

naïve and without experience as in the case of Kimberly Chang who gets pregnant with her first sexual encounter as well. These pregnant teen protagonists are then made to deal with the situation and end the novels with their resolution to carry their pregnancies to term. Even though the pregnancies in such narratives are not considered punishments for being sexually active, there is always the moral obligation for the young girl to fulfil her duty by having the baby – the father already reduced to a non - performing role and without half the responsibility that the young girl must now carry. Beth Younger's research on teen pregnancies in Y.A literature reveals that almost "four decades of Y.A novels (beginning with the first YA pregnancy novel, published in 1966, and continuing to 2004) reveal a continuing cultural interest in adolescent pregnant bodies" (Younger 25). The publication of contemporary Y.A literature dealing with teen pregnancies also no longer labels these young characters as sluts or loose.

Accepted traditional roles for young women which are both implied and explicitly stated includes their roles in school, extracurricular activities, household duties and chores which will eventually leads to marriage and children. These explicit traditional rules do not often have room for the role of a teenager giving birth and since the powerful social forces includes parents, teachers, and political leaders; the expression of teen sexuality especially among girls is treated as taboo. The taboo factor also stems from the belief that a child needs a traditional valued family structure in order to grow up to be a normal and balanced person in society.

Pregnancy is also the disruption of the supposed ideal image of a female i.e. the losing her of her virginity. Purity is doubly enforced by tying the concept of young woman's virginity to her self - worth. The idea of teen female sexuality is always under scrutiny is it also often omitted in order to preserve the pure image of the young person. The idea of purity and virginity are closely associated for first – generation Asian Americans but not so much for their descendants. In this instant, the parents often find it difficult to balance their traditional old - world values with that of their new environment. Thus, several practices shape how they try to raise their children especially regarding gender and sexual differences. The idea of the importance of purity and virginity is profoundly instilled into their daughters and it is

constructed in such a way that sexual contact before marriage is considered the most profound taboo.

Regarding the parents of Young Ju in *A Step from Heaven*, it is seen that certain old values have permeated into their new lives in Mi Gook (America). The gender inequity is clear as the privileges awarded to Joon are far greater with fewer responsibilities than the ones on Young Ju's young shoulders. Not only must she help her mother around the house with chores, she has to become both big sister and second mother to Joon as well. Since her mother has to work as well because of their financial conditions, Young Ju has to juggle many responsibilities which include developing her English language skills. Young Ju being in school could develop her language skills more proficiently than her parents and this makes it easier for her to navigate certain social aspects for her family.

There are always clear gender sanctions that exist even after their relocation into a new environment. Young Ju's father is a prime example of a man set in patriarchal ways. Not only does he regard the upbringing of Joon more important than of Young Ju's but he also refuse to listen to his wife and his daughter on account of their being women. When the father – daughter pair has to go to the office of the Department of Immigration and Naturalization Services, Young Ju is the one who could read the directions and navigate their way to the correct window. Even when the office official gives them instructions that they could take the paperwork home and simply mail in the renewal fee, form and photographs, her father does not trust her translation and continues to argue with the official. This is embarrassing for the young girl as there were many people behind them in line. Even as she urge her father to move from the line he shouts at her "Yah…what did I say? I am the one who is talking now" (Na 81). The official has to urge her father two more times to get out of the line but he refuses to budge and proceeds to check the paperwork on the spot.

> Apa picks them up and holds them to his face as though he is reading closely. The way Apa takes his time, licking his fingertips to separate each page from the next, makes the blood crest under my cheeks. I gaze down at my feet and take a deep breath (Na 82).

Even though he cannot read the forms, he adamantly continues to refuse to listen to his daughter. Even as he relies heavily on her, he states"Read these forms carefully, I do not want to go back to that office. Make sure" (83). He however still places all the hope of the family's economical development on Joon who is still a child. Common practices in their home country often shape the conditions in which they raise their children even in their new environment. So, Young Ju cannot be censured for feeling less valued than her brother. Since basic emotions are the standard and basis of more adolescent emotions, Young Ju is traumatized by her father's treatment.

Young Ju is nevertheless the centre of her family. However, even though there is no fault in the way she presents herself to the outer world, she is still censured even from her one faithful friend, Amanda. From her own testimony, Young Ju states:

> It is Amanda's first party. A beach birthday party. With boys. I can't go. Uhmma and Apa do not like it that my best friend is an American, a girl who might influence in the wrong ways. Fast American ways. Supposedly, American girls do not study, they are boy-crazy, and they do not think of anyone but themselves. Uhmma and Apa do not want me to end up like them (Na 97).

Adolescent girls are viewed as the most powerless in any culture – rules and conditions are continually imposed on how they should live and behave. So, even though Young Ju's parents are pleased that Young Ju could assimilate herself into Mi Gook environment, they could not trust her to socialize with boys. This is even more prevalent with Asian parents based in foreign settings. The tiger parenting concept mentioned in chapter one again comes into play as with such parents.

Tiger parents usually beyond controlling the basic lives of their children on grounds of school and other activities also try to control the sexual expressions of their children as well. While the bodies of the young girls are continually examined critically; ultimately Asian American young women have very little control of their lives. Virginity under the disguise of the honour and purity is severely imprinted into their minds from a very young age. For instance, Dimple's parents do not censure her friendship with Gwyn but instead frequently invites Dimple's cousins to visit and

keep company with her. They figure that by trying to balance Gwyn's influence, they could instil some of the traditional views that are so important to them. Even their attempt to match Dimple with Karsh highlights their need for Dimple to be in a significant relationship before any progression into sexual activity.

Karsh's introduction into Dimple's life shows the extension of the tiger parents' need to control their daughters 'lives. The first instance is that Karsh is a 'suitable boy' – one that has roots from their old world. Karsh is suitable just as Matt is suitable for Kimberly's mother. Instinctively knowing this, Kimberly does not introduce or report her other high school romantic liaisons to her mother. She knows it would only worry her mother and create conflict between her and her mother. Even with her casual American high school boyfriend Curt, Kimberly recounts "I felt safe with him, knowing that he wasn't going to demand anything from me I didn't want to give" (Kwok 248). She does not shy away from physical contact with Curt – innocent kisses and hand holding, there is always the underlying need to connect with one who has similar roots as her own. Asian parents even dislocated from their original roots are still focused on the values and norms concerning the relationships of their off springs.

The parents became the main source of trauma for these characters. Even though their assimilation into their new environment depends very heavily on their children and though they want their children to thrive, their toleration does not include these off springs' relationships. From the characters, it is evident that the parents are most comfortable only with the relationships formed with people from their respective backgrounds. They are encouraged to nurture such relationships but this is not often always possible.

The main protagonists all tries their best to assimilate themselves and help their families assimilate. It can be easily seen how big their workload is and how as young as they are, they try hard to steer their families towards economical development. However, to do this they must plant their own seeds, form alliances and bridge the differences of two cultures. To understand the discrepancy of their new adopted country, they could not help but form friendships and new contacts in their new environment. As the trauma originates from the parents in such instances where teen sexuality is concerned, conflict rises between the relationships of parents

and the children. For instance with Sumiko, she is much too young to exhibit any form of sexual experience, however she is already censored for forming a budding friendship with her Native American friend Frank.

The situation is different for Sumiko compared to the other protagonists. She is stuck in an internment camp with people with the same background and roots. In spite of this, she could form a friendship with someone outside their cultural background. While the tension escalates with the Japanese Americans and Native Americans because of their shared land, Sumiko is kind enough to share little treats with Frank and look past the political tension.

The study of the body of the young female adolescent and the expression of sexuality has always been considered a cultural battleground. It is only under Y.A literature that young girls are given the opportunity to voice the messages that their bodies carry. Topics such as the aforementioned teen pregnancy, sexual assault, rape, trauma, retelling fairy tales and weaponizing young girls are all concepts that find their place under Y.A literature. Female sexuality, and more importantly who is allowed to control and construct it, has always been a contested area. It is often the primary care-givers who try to regulate and instil the idea of virginity and its connection to purity to the young girls.

In her study of Asian American sexuality, Okazaki found that on a survey of over two thousand high school students in Los Angeles County, Asian American adolescents were more likely to be virgins than any other hyphenated Americans and White Americans by 73 %. The study further shows that in term of sexual activity with penetration, Asian Americans were less likely to initiate the contact and were even less likely to report in the participation of genital sexual activity than their non – Asian counterparts. The study also showed a higher level of sexual activity in teens with Asian Americans parents who converse in English and where English was the primary language of the household. “Asian American adolescents were also more likely than non - Asian Americans to think that their parents and friends would disapprove if they had vaginal intercourse and that people their own age should not have vaginal intercourse” (Okazaki 35).

In the introduction to *The Sex Lives of Teenagers: Revealing the Secret World of Adolescent Boys and Girls (2000*), Lynn Ponton asserts that “sexuality is a vital

aspect of teens' lives." Ponton who has studied adolescents for more than two decades acknowledges that the idea of teen sexuality studies in any aspect and capacity is a controversial topic. As a psychiatrist who specializes as a teen counsellor, Ponton argues that:

> Sexuality in general and adolescent sexuality in particular has become part of an intense political struggle with some supporting celibacy, and others advocating a full range of sexual activity for young teens. The media, which uses adolescent sexuality to create excitement and sell products, only adds to the confusion (xv).

Ponton advocates that it is imperative to have "sensible, down – to - earth discussions" about the sexual dilemmas teenagers are facing. She also reports that teenage sexual activity is rarely the result of impulsive, hormone – driven lust but rather "a largely conscious decision, thought about rationally" (194). Whereas teenage sexual behaviour is often represented and misrepresented in media and popular culture as wild and frantic that is solely based on hormones, the truth is far from simple. Ponton's study finds that there is essential need for information to help teenagers deal with sexuality As such, what teenagers learn about sex and sexuality are never from direct care-givers but through multimedia, peers and books, it is vital to provide correct and precise information for consumption.

According to Younger, Y.A literature often seem to be burdened with the sole responsibility of providing useful and practical information for young readers especially on subjects dealing with the sexuality of adolescents. Younger's studies have shown that:

> The innocent teen romances of the early 1940s and 1950s aptly depict the oppressive sexual double standards of that era, such as compulsory virginity and chaste kisses. Then, in the more liberal 1960s and 1970s, adolescent books began to portray more realistic versions of sexual standards and included such topics as foreplay, birth control, and abortion (Younger xv).

Y.A literature has always existed to counter dominant and conventional social and traditional rules and regulations. For instance, the texts chosen for this study illustrates issues of representations of Asian Americans by exposing certain ideologies and questioning the validity of such customs. To examine these narratives

by their sexual content or lack thereof by situating them in a social context, the results tend to reveal the complication that a custom moirés can have on the complexity of teen sexuality.

Asian Americans still share many Asian cultural characteristics such as the primeval wishes of the collective over the individual. Pertaining to this concept is clear in the way that Asian – Americans function in their new environment by setting up little locations of 'safety' where they can share their needs to emphasis their own set of social codes. The sense of propriety in such case is most prevalent. Girls and women are actively encouraged not to fraternize with the American men and boys thus forming the bonds of sexual restraints that are outside the context of marriage. Dimple's pseudo – engagement is chaperoned from start to end first by her parents and then by her cousins and even Gwyn. Similarly, Kimberly Chang's first few interactions with Matt are around the other adults working in the factory. Even when they date, it is always in Chinatown where they are supervised by the hundreds of shopkeepers, daily labourers and workers living in the area.

Contrary to popular belief, the physical structure of the body also affects girls of all ethnicities in terms of sexuality. Girls that belong to African American or Latino based communities are stereotypically thought to be curvier and stockier in body structure which negatively presents them as sexual beings. This also impedes their images from being bone thin girls while thin body structures have always been considered as the ideal and generally approved body structure for the feminine gender. Generally, in turn females that are Asian descent are assumed and stereotyped to be perpetually slender. These perceptions are all stereotypical just as much as the portrayal that all western female adolescents need to be bone thin. It is a culturally structured image fashioned to control not only the ideals of the feminine gender but a way to sexually define what is desirable or not. For all hyphenated Americans settling in their new environment, the western standard is facilitated to become the norm.

In many Y.A novels, the image of the thin body structure represents characteristics of control and responsibility. This is evident from the image that Sumiko, Young Ju and Kimberly Chang portray. While the authors do not comment on the body structures of the characters, it can be assumed that they would not be

heavy in terms of their body mass as they constantly live in poverty with barely enough to eat – considering too that they have limited time to even eat leisurely. Sumiko is a girl in an internment camp who gets rations that would not have been good quality ingredients as it was during war time and they were basically held together as potential spies. Young Ju's daily meal would also consist of leftovers brought home from her mother's work which could not have been wholesome or nutritious for a growing girl. Kimberly and her mom are so poor and live in such a dilapidated building that even the small amount of groceries they could afford would be swarmed by cockroaches. Since they could barely afford the bare essentials, there is no way that they could afford any storage systems much less a refrigerator when their building could not even keep the radiator systems.

However, in Y.A literature, conflict arises often out of characters with heavier body structures. These characters are portrayed as being less assertive and more passive in their characterization. While girls with leaner body structures are portrayed as sexually confident, girls that are fat are indirectly or directly body shamed with descriptions of them ranging from 'dumpy' 'sweaty' and various comparisons to heavy animals. The binary opposition causes trauma for both the two body structures. For instance, body image is one that causes conflict for the girls. When Dimple compares herself to Gwyn, she has adopted the western beauty standard and does not feel that she can compare. It is a ritual for her parents to take her shopping for her birthday.

Dimple narrates, "The ritual usually worked according to an unspoken barter system: one proper item for every errant - ways one. For example, last year I'd received a "nice" dress (white, long sleeves, with a sort of pinafore that seemed ideal for bobbing for apples) "(Hidier 20). While her parents tries to enforce the innocence of her childhood by presenting her with white dresses and points her in the direction of "a ("pleasant" nightgown for me (a Victorian contraption that even Jane Eyre might find constraining)" (20), it is Dimple's deep desire to be more like Gwyn. However, her parents' attempts to preserve her childlike innocence by such methods further alienate Dimple. She already considers herself not as pretty or vivacious as Gwyn and although she could not admit it to herself, she envies how gracefully Gwyn could go and engage with the opposite sex. As she is so self conscious about

her physical appearance, Dimple has already convinced herself that she is content to be behind her lenses – being a spectator is enough for her.

On their shopping trip, Dimple suggests going to Style Child because it is Gwyn's favorite shop. However, when her mother sees the shop with its 'androgynous pink – haired punk rock mannequins' and stuffed Dalmatian puppies with snake belt leashes, she immediately understands what her daughter is trying to do and disapproves of not only the clothes but her daughter's blind devotion to Gwyn. Dimple further states:

> One mannequin was in a white mini with zips all the way up both sides. A studded metallic belt that was itself half the width of the mini (we were getting into nano - fractions here) slunk angling down the front. The top was a white skin-tight one – shoulder – bare deal with a single sleeve. It was the kind of outfit Gwyn could pull off sans problem but that set alarm bells off through my head (21).

The entire shopping adventure is narrated by Dimple in a depreciating tone directed at her physical structure. Gwyn with her long limbs, blond hair and blue eyes is the epitome of beauty that Dimple strives for. She feels less pretty, more passive and doubts her ability to attract the opposite sex. So, in panic she begins collecting clothes to try in the changing room 'acting like I was Gwyn' - tiny tees, body - hugger and boot - cut jeans. Her mother in concern asks "Have you checked the sizes, beta?" and Dimple who has already felt targeted from the salesgirls menacing stares because she is collecting clothing that would not fit her feels very upset. When her mother asks her to get the right sizes if she insists on wearing the ' naggudy – faggudy things' rather than be like Gwyn, it sparks an argument between the mother and daughter :

—I'm not trying to be Gwyn! I picked these because I like them! All by myself! Come on, give me a little credit. I'm almost seventeen already, hello.

—But they're not your size.

—But I refuse to fit in a bigger size than that, I said with end – of – discussion authority. (Hidier 22)

When the shop girl mistakes her bra for a top, Dimple felt helpless in her misery. She goes into the changing room that has a three way mirror. She scans the

mirror to see if it was a skinny mirror and describes herself as ‘harpoonable’ and she could probably make ‘granny panties look like a G - string’. Essentially comparing herself to a whale even though she is only curvier than Gwyn, Dimple’s stance on her body structure is clear. Her disgust for her curvier body permeates across the pages that her beauty standard is Gwyn. Her misery for not being able to fit into the clothes is so pronounced that her mother has to intervene:

—Dimple, she said. —You are a beautiful girl. You have hips. They’re not going anywhere. This is the Indian body. We are not like these straight curve less Americans.

—Mom, I am American.

—Dimple, no matter how much you try you cannot change your bones. Your body is your temple; your body is your home. It tells you where you are from.

—My body’s the whole country’s home! I sniffed. —Look at it! All these hips, boobs, butts. Why can’t I just be normal? (23).

Dimple’s two fold problems are highlighted in the sentences above as it is evident that there are two reasons for her trauma. First, she is undeniable an Asian – American with parents having different roots. While she undeniably looks Indian, she is brought up in American. Dimple’s problem is that she identifies as American but she does not look American. She is also going through the teenage years when hormones are the forefront of cognitive structures. It is undeniable that she is also interested in boys and interacting with them. However, her difference in physical attributes affects her psychologically and became impediments to her characteristic growth.

In many Y.A novels all too often the thin characters are fashioned in ways young readers can see as representing control, leadership qualities and even sexual assertiveness. They are indirectly represented as models of appropriate body choice. Dimple’s view of her body as ‘the whole country’s home’ and her revulsion is indicative of how express herself. She indirectly points to the fact that she is not considered to have the appropriate body image next to her long limbed friend and also points to her undeniable background as an Asian American. Her brown skin is not idyllic for her white environment. She feels different when as a teenager; all she wants to do is fit in with her peers. Dimple’s desolate remarks about her body are

also indicative of the correlation between body size and sexual behaviour. While Gwyn engages into activities that are sexual, Dimple's reluctance is because she feels herself that she does not have the appropriate or attractive figure.

More often than not, teen girls perform body assessments on themselves because what they learn about body figures is from popular media that propagate that thinness is the only suitable body figure. Y.A recent narratives have included weight issues and body images depiction as aspects of conflicts in their plots wherein they are addressed as problematic facets in a teenager life. Characters of the narratives embody the struggles of young girls who must torture their bodies to conform to an ideal body type that is not too fat or too thin. Since sexual attraction is definitely connected to body type, there is societal condemnation for girls who do not conform to the archetypal body ideal.

In the texts, the authors also depict how young women are taught to uphold unrealistic ideals of honour and duty which then decrees the way sexuality is expressed. In most Asian families, dutiful daughters became the standard for beauty. So, to uphold that sense of duty is to forfeit all sense of one's individuality for the young protagonists. In western white culture, physical beauty is considered most important and the girls know that they would never be considered 'ideal' because of the way they look. The 'Lookism' concept pervades throughout any adolescent phase where self – assessment is done by the teen themselves and are invariably found wanting. So, the narratives show that the self – assessment done on themselves by the protagonist proves to be lacking.

In *Weedflower*, before Sumiko and her fellow Nikkei are shipped off to the internment camps, she leads a normal life. However, she feels she have to try much harder than Susan and Marsha, the white girls from her class. The narrative opens with Sumiko's abject loneliness even though she lives with her family and has other Nikkei people who are neighbors all around:

THIS IS WHAT IT FELT TO BE LONELY.

1. Like everyone was looking at you. Sumiko felt this once in a while.
2. Like nobody was looking at all. Sumiko felt this a lot.
3. Like you didn't care about anything at all. She felt this maybe once a week.

4. Like you were just about to cry over every little thing. She felt this about once daily (Kadohata 1).

Sumiko's loneliness stems from her different physical appearance and different social values that encompass her in her primary environment. As a young teen, Sumiko's longing to belong is reflected in how she views her older cousin Ichiro who seems so much more sophisticated because on the outside he has adapted himself flawlessly into their new environment. "Ichiro was a dandy. . . he smeared grease through his hair. Sumiko could smell it from where she was sitting across the table. And he was actually wearing gold suspenders a girlfriend had made him. . . He liked girls and he spent a lot of his money on clothes "(Kadahota 16).

There is a tone of admiration in Sumiko's tone when she talks about this particular cousin. There is longing in the way she admires his clothes and freedom. Sumiko's narrative too boasts the binary opposition in Sumiko's two cousins – Ichiro and Bull. Bull being the complete opposite of Ichiro, Sumiko often marvels how different they are. "Bull didn't even pick out his own clothes – Auntie made him overalls and shirts. He rarely went out for fun except when he played baseball with other Nissei" (16). From Sumiko's perspective, Bull is the dutiful son who always works hard on their farms – the son who is most dependable for her aunt and uncle. Ichiro is however the one who has assimilated into their community. The characterization of the two cousins coincides to express Sumiko's desire to be a dutiful daughter and still assimilate smoothly into the white community.

The Y.A texts chosen provide strong examples of how cultural background and female body structures are sources for sexual anxiety. In the new environment that the protagonists find themselves: magazines, television and other popular cultural propaganda would have perpetuated and reinforce the ideal beauty standard i.e. the white, skinny beauty standard. By exposing the cultural influence behind such ideals, Y.A literature reveals that these narratives are more than just stories for and about young adolescents. They reveal culturally influenced portrayals of girls and the sources that could repress their sexuality and the issues that must be addressed for social change.

Although the characters are dealing with cultural issues, they are still adolescent girls who want to traverse their respective paths. Donald R. Gallo says

immigrant adolescents are like American adolescents in many ways. "They feel insecure, uncertain, lonely; they want to be accepted, loved, respected. They want to succeed" (Gallo x). So, they must be viewed as capable of authoring their own coming –of- age experience. As Mary Amanda Stewart writes, although sparse, the narratives exist to show the "positive effects of adolescent immigrants reading texts to which they can personally relate" (Stewart 18).

CHAPTER 4

IDENTITIES: READING FOOD IN ASIAN AMERICAN Y.A

Food studies observe people's relationships with food and reveal information about the psychology of groups of people. Food choices expose the system of cultural beliefs, passions, systematic knowledge, traditional assumptions and behavioural patterns and personalities. Kittler, Sucher, and Nelms coined the term food habits (also known as food culture or food ways) to describe that "consumption is not just the conversion of food into nutrients in the human body, but also includes gaining the food's physical properties as well—hence the phrase 'You are what you eat'" (Kittler 2). They highlight how the correlation between the food that people eat and how they characterize themselves is striking. The process of creating food habits is unique to each culture – deeply rooted to their ancestors and cultural rites.

Each culture's food traditions function as a system of representation as signs of comparison over against others in terms of food practices. Some food practices are thus termed crude and unsophisticated when compared to one's cultural food habits. Comparisons and significations are assigned to the consuming of food. Examples given by Kittler, Sucher and Nelms includes the eating of walnuts that look like miniature brains by many Asian cultures in the belief that they make them more intelligent or some of the Native Americans belief system that milk is only meant for children and weaken adults instead.

Thus, the process of consuming the same food creates solidarity among the members in a community. It stratifies the participating individual in the food practices and makes them compliant to a hegemony that is exercised through appetite and desire. This division is set along the lines of culture, race, gender, sex, ethnicity and even sexuality and this hegemony is most effectively inscribed in Asian-American youths than any other ideological hegemony as they are consumed through food. As food is a regular staple of life, the ideologies behind each food system are representative of cultural practices and traditions. Thus, Intolerance of other cultures is often than not expressed by the repugnance one feels towards their food. Lukanuski writes:

> How food is consumed is a powerful method of further defining a community. A group who follows proscriptions forbidding certain foods, and

> or combinations of foods, immediately separate themselves. A sense of order, place, and discipline is created: the tacit understanding, beside any divine command, is that without such regulations the community would fall victim to its individual appetites. Once members of the community were pursuing their own desires, the community would disintegrate. (Lukanuski 113)

The protagonist of *Weedflower* – Sumiko, as a child situated in a Japanese family in an American neighbourhood is also separated from the other girls by her family's certain food practices. At the beginning of the narrative, Sumiko is a sixth – grader and the only Japanese girl in her class. Marsha Melrose has invited everyone in the class to the party and although this is not a personal invitation, it signifies a sense of belonging to the young protagonist. Sumiko spent all her spare time daydreaming about the party. What she looks forward to the most is Marsha Melrose's birthday cake. "Sumiko's most favourite cake ever was the strawberry cake that Mrs. Muramoto had served one year at the Muramotos' annual New Year's Day party. If Marsha's mother served strawberry cake, she wasn't sure whether it would be considered rude to ask for a second slice (Kadohata 14). By having the chance to eat this cake, Sumiko's young self believes that her classmates would finally treat her as their equal and not as the strange interloper in their social setting. Sumiko's family could never afford such an extravagance like a chocolate birthday cake and this signifies an opening for her - an opening to a society in which she is always an onlooker.

However, during this time Nikkei people were starting to be moved to internment camps, the elder ones imprisoned on grounds of suspiscion. Despite this delicate political situation, Sumiko is adamant to go to the party. She even makes her uncle buy her four dollars worth scarf as a present. However, when she reach the party, she is met with silence by the other guests and Marsha's mother, Mrs Melrose quickly move Sumiko to the front porch and explain that because of her cultural background, Sumiko could not be allowed to fraternize with her daughter and her friends. Sumiko is given a piece of chocolate cake on a napkin and asked to leave. At home, this piece of chocolate cake is distributed among her family. The cake which has first signifies hope thus becomes a symbol of rejection to Sumiko. Sumiko's

family has to scrutinize their family intake because of their precarious condition in their environment. Thus, their need for frugality does not have space for any kind of lavish birthday cake. Their frugality is further highlighted by Sumiko in the way they make use of the water connection:

> To keep the water clean for as many days as possible, they all washed themselves off with sponges, soap, and a bucket before they got into the tub. By the time Sumiko bathed, both the water and the air had cooled off. Sumiko could not remember ever taking a hot bath in a nice steamy room (Kadohata 12).

When Sumiko and her family are moved to the Poston Mohave internment camps - officially called the Colorado River Relocation Centre, they are made to live in barracks with minimal spaces for the whole community. The place is practically a desert with scorpions roaming inside the barracks but the people resourcefully got rid of the cumbersome insects as well. In this camp, Sumiko befriends a man called Mr. Moto who keeps snakes in cages which he later use as meat. This is due to the fact that the thousands living in these camps rarely have good food supplied to them in their respective halls. In this internment camp, the food they get is barely edible. Sumiko notes how "Breakfast was about two tablespoons of scrambled eggs and two pieces of bacon the size of postage stamps" (91). The people in the internment camps at first consume this small fare and typical American style breakfast to appear more unproblematic.

> At dinnertime Sumiko got in line with her family and the kitchen staff fills her rice bowl, plate, and cup. The cup held milk, she wasn't sure what was on the plate and in the bowl. It wasn't rice in the bowl, it was … something else. Something mushy. (112)

Bull comments that it looks like "beef tongue in tomato sauce" (112). The younger people even playfully guess what was in their bowls. Since the food is far from wholesome, Sumiko starve for a while until she begins to fantasize even about the taste of Mr. Moto's fried snake. She has decline when he first offered it to her. However, when he hands her a fried snake, she takes it willingly and feels that it

taste pretty good with a little shoyu and ginger. She even compared it to unagi (eel). The food intake here indicates how far away they - as a group of people are from the dream they have come to chase in America. Instead of living the American dream, they have instead ended up in camps like prisoners. Once dreaming to be like all the white girls in her class with their shiny dresses and kitchens full of food, the image of Sumiko squatting in the middle of the desert with roasted snake on a stick provides a sharp contrast. In Sumiko's narrative, the eating of the roasted snake by the people in the camps also represents re-acceptance of their cultural background. When Sumiko finally accepts the fried snake meat from Mr. Moto, it can be seen her reclaiming her culture. Before, she has been so accepting of the chocolate birthday cake – even yearning for it. It is the bursting of the American dream for the people in the camps.

There has been constant turmoil with being constantly under surveillance and being transplanted from their homes. Moreover, the food supplied to them is definitely not suitable to the Japanese palate and so miniscule that they start to farm the rough desert lands around them. Their resourceful talents are soon seen as the various camps started poultry farms and hog farms to counter their food problems.

In the narrative, shortage of food is rampant and this is especially clear in the letter exchanged between Sumiko and her Jiichan (grandfather) who have been separated from their family. All the elder men are sent to different internment camps for 'surveillance". Sumiko notes that her grandfather's "whole letter was about food" and that "he just talked about all the foods he used to eat in their old life and how much he missed all that" (Kadohata 154).

Although their nationality is not the same, this similar circumstance of shortage of food can be found in Jean Kwok's *Girl in Translation* (2010). In the narrative, the difference between newly arrived eleven year old Kimberly Chang and her same age cousin Nelson shows readers their very first difference. Nelson is a 'fat boy with skinny legs' or as Kimberly describes 'a potato with incense legs for sticks' whereas Nelson insults her as a 'rake filled with dust'. The hope for Kimberly's mother is seeing her daughter to be more filled out than the 'rake' she resembles. However, this does not materialize as for most of her high school years; Kimberly

has to help her mother at the sweatshop after school and all her energy goes to keeping their little family afloat. So, the little food that Kimberly consumes could never add to her weight like her mother hoped. To Kimberly's mother, Nelson's plump figure became a constant reminder and conflict to highlight the social stratification between the two families. Further, Kimberly's bony stature serves to remind her of the trauma of poverty that they left behind and are still constantly facing. It also further reminds her that as a care-giver, she has not been able to provide the bare essentials for her daughter.

While Nelson mother's Aunt Paula lives in a house that seems luxurious to Kimberly, the apartment that they could afford is a rundown building ready for demolition, without central heating, proper window panes and numerous bugs. The mother daughter duo has to struggle for survival for food in this bug infested place. The food they could afford has to be covered immediately with a steel mesh to prevent it being infested. Hunger became a constant as they have to pay their debts to Aunt Paula for paying their fare into America. As the building does not have any central heating system, the cold apartment makes their soy sauce and other food congeal on their plates. In summer, the mother daughter duo has to fight off more bugs and cockroaches. The constant battle to preserve their food from the bugs is seen throughout the narrative. Kimberly notes that for the bugs they are also the only source of food in the apartment building.

Even at school, Kimberly has to battle this hunger for food. She has not cultivate a taste for American food, thus even when she is served food at the cafeteria, she cannot feel satiated. At her first day in school, Kimberly cannot follow the language and thus ends up in the cafeteria with:

> minced meat in the form of a saucer, potatoes that were not round but had been crushed into a paste like substance, a sauce similar to soy sauce but less dark and salty, a roll and milk. I had hardly ever drunk cow's milk before and it gave me a stomachache. The rest of the food was interesting, although there was no rice, so I felt as if I hadn't really eaten. (Kwok 35)

Even though the general agreement is that high school cafeteria is considered basically inedible, Kimberly adapts to it quickly. After all, the food came free of cost and it could lessen the burden of their economical problems. So, even as the other students take the cafeteria food for granted, for Kimberly it is a blessing that lessens the constant hunger that surrounds the immediate people in her sweatshop factory. At home and at the sweatshop, with people like her – food is too precious to share. So, the abundance of the cafeteria is a novelty. It is her first glimpse into the kind of abundance that the American dream could offer.

In their small apartment, Kimberly notes how her mother is wary of using the beaten down refrigerator because they had never had one before. Even then, they do not have much to keep inside. One evening while her mother is still as the factory, Kimberly became hungry and opens the fridge to find "only a few small pieces of leftover chicken, the bones protruding from under the fatty skin, some yellowing vegetables with cold rice, and a shallow container of oyster sauce". She relates that she is even afraid to get a glass of water by herself and have been taught never to eat anything without thoroughly heating it first. To provide a sharp contrast to her traumatic setting, the television keeps playing the commercial of kids "eating cheese sandwiches with apples and milk". Even though these does not appeal to her taste, Kimberly begins to fantasize about the warm snack that her mother would make for her after school in Hong Kong – "steamed mackerel in black beans, roasted pork skins, winter melon soup, fried rice with scallions". In the commercials, Kimberly sees "gleaming toy kitchens, bouncing balls large enough for kids to sit on, kids eating cookies in tree houses. There was a commercial with a family at a long table laden with food" (Kwok 39). She is filled with longing. The clear and distinctive images of Kimberly's dismal apartment setting and the pristine image on the television shows an even more contradictory picture in the way the protagonist lives.

Kimberly and her mother's transition to the United States is very traumatizing as they hardly have anyone to help them find their feet in their new cultural background. Because of this situation and the language barrier, Kimberly could barely communicate and does not even attempt to build relationships with the other people at the factory. It is Matt who first approaches her and even then she only

noticed him because he is “munching on a roasted pork bun. The crisp crust glistened” and Kimberly narrates that she “could almost taste the sweet and luscious meat in my mouth”. When Matt offers her a piece of the roasted pork bun, Kimberly is still hesitant to accept it. This scenario shows the trauma of the past that she came from as she narrates “It isn’t Chinese to eat from someone else’s food. No kid in Hong Kong had ever offered any to me” (Kwok 32). However, she cannot resist the savory treat as the mother daughter duo is in no position to spend money on pork treats and thus, reluctantly she accepts when Matt offers her a piece. Matt even confesses that he has swiped the bun from Kimberly’s aunt and this shows how the young boy too is just as poor and starved as Kimberly.

The process of obtaining food also becomes a source of conflict between mother and daughter. It is displayed clearly when they go to the nearest seafood market. Kimberly’s mother tries to bargain with the shopkeeper as she has done in Hong Kong and because she could not do so fluently ask Kimberly to translate for her. Kimberly is very embarrassed and tries to explain that the method of bargaining is not really done in the United States but her mother insisted anyway. Not only do she has to run errands outside Chinatown but she fervently wish she has a capable adult to rely on. There is deep seated trauma for Kimberly Chang in the process of this navigating for daily sustenance as a young girl; she is just as lost and intimidated by their new environment. At times, her narrative shows that she resents her mother because of this too.

In *A Step from Heaven* (2001), the protagonist Young Ju recounts how she and her brother would have to wait outside Johnny’s Steak House when their mother would work the late shift. She recounts having to sit down on the curb and eating whatever her mother could get from the restaurant. It might be “ginger chicken, spicy hot, fire on the tongue. But most times it is soup and rice in a bowl, all mixed together so you can eat it with one big spoon” or other times it is “two dry old hamburgers and a big carton of milk (Na 55). As pitiful as it is, this develops into one of her favorite memories from her childhood.

When the manager is on a break, Young Ju's mother use to usher them inside for a while and they would bask in the compliments of the other cooks and waitresses. When the Chinese cook offered her some soup, Young Ju narrates "I nodded my happiness and waited for my reward of a small, warm bowl" (56). It is also the smell and the sound of continuous chopping knives that attracts Young Ju to the place. The unstable meals and the setting for their evening meals highlight the state of cultural dislocation, alienation and poverty from the point of view of the young girl. As their parents are often too busy to eat dinner together, the communication between the family members become more and more strained. Young Ju as the eldest daughter has to navigate the little uncertainties of daily living for her parents as well. Her childhood thus, is filled with more responsibilities than Joon. In the text, one can see that she has a certain level of resentment towards especially her father who could not conform to certain aspects of their new environment.

The narrative also exposes the hardships that many immigrant families are forced to confront in a new country. Mi Gook (America) is 'a magic word' to the young Young Ju. At first, Yong Ju thinks Mi Gook is heaven as they need to fly across the sky to reach it. However, this comparison of Mi Gook dissipates soon after. Besides the language barrier, it is the constant hunt for 'acceptable' food that wearies the family. As eating is a fundamental human activity that is both necessary for survival and inextricably connected with social function, Young Ju could observe that her Uhmma and Apa are undeniably stressed from the many obstacles that comes their way with the relocation. However, the family bonds are tested again and again when they have to save every little penny for their basic food and necessities. Thus, eating itself becomes traumatic for the younger generation as they are told repeatedly that food is precious but they cannot really comprehend this statement as they are not the ones working for their financial stability.

The very act of consuming food is also equally traumatic for the adults - the parents and grandparents of the four narratives. It is a human condition to want to provide for one's children. However, considering each family's economic condition and ability to transit fluidly into their new environment, the situation is as conflicting

as the children's. For instant, Sumiko's grandparents are flower farm workers who would have spend most of their time on the farm. Their only news from outside their farm areas occasionally come from their nephews and niece so, the idea of going into town daily and socializing with the town people would have been daunting and overwhelming. Young Ju's mother is stuck in the cooking area of the restaurant she works in and Young Ju's father has to rely on his youngest daughter to fill up their immigration forms. He cannot adjust himself to the environment he finds himself in and thus eventually abandons his family to go back to Korea.

In Tanuja Hidier Desai's *Born Confused* (2002), the protagonist Dimple Lala is a confused American - Indian girl – "the brown little girl who existed as if she were still umbilically attached to her parents" (Hidier 12). Dimple is too American among Indians and too Indian for her American high school peers. She struggles to blend into the two cultures of her Indian ancestry and New Jersey upbringing. Dimple does everything to adapt into the American culture that surrounds her. She deems her parent's culture archaic and obsolete. However, it is through her mother's food that she finds a connection to her ancestry. Even this, she does reluctantly and under special circumstance. Dimple's family is economically stable compared to the other three narratives of this study and the way that Dimple view food is frivolous and only at the level of questioning her identity.

Dimple's understanding of food is not about survival. When the family is about to be visited by one of Dimple's cousins, she highlights, "All day the house had smelled of spices, and now before our eyes lay the resulting combustion of all that kitchen chemistry. The feast my mother had conjured up was extravagant, and I realized how hungry I was; I wasn't a big fan of Indian food, at least not on a daily basis, but today the sight of it was sheer poetry" (Hidier 135). For her parents, preparing this food is like declaring to their relatives that they are still connected to their roots. It is also a way for them to show their economic stability from their other relatives that they have left behind in India. Although unconsciously done, the abundant food highlights their economic superiority. However, Dimple is adamant not to 'like' Indian food because it reminds her yet again that she is not entirely American. As a typical teenager, Dimple finds it distasteful to display this opulence.

When her parents further comments on how scrawny her cousin used to be when she was a child, Dimple is mortified and becomes further self – conscious about the abundance on their table.

Dimple narrates the abundant food that her parents has spread out for her visiting cousin "Brown sugar roti and cloud - puff puris just itching to be popped. Coconut rice fluffed up over the silver pot like a sweet – smelling pillow. Samosas transparent, peas bundling just below the surface. Spinach with nymph - finger cloves of garlic that sank like butter on the tongue. A vat of cucumber raita, the two - percent yogurt thickened with sour cream (which my mom added when we had guests, though she denied it when asked; I'd seen the empty carton, not a kitten lick left). And the centerpiece: a deep serving dish of lamb curry, the pieces melting tenderly off the bone. Oh, and of course, small but deep bowls of kheer, coronated with crushed pistachios and strands of saffron, vermillion like tiny cuts in the foamy surface" (136). She recounts how the table creaked with the weight of it all. She also brings out the point of how in typical Indian style - the sweet and salty dishes are all laid side by side and further describes the trauma of realizing that this is considered disgusting and confusing to her classmates in her school. Dimple further realizes this while describing how they regarded her with disgust when she brought a cupcake and fish – and – chutney sandwich for lunch and ate it in the cafeteria. This incident is one of the first incidents regarding food that Dimple noted as the cause of her conflict between her two cultures.

In Wong's *Reading Asian American Literature: From Necessity to Extravagance* (1993); she shows the much deserved attention of the relationship food, ethnicity, race, and culture in the literary tradition. Wong theorizes a thematic binary that refers to "two contrasting modes of existence": the "survival - driven" world of the immigrant generation, and the freedom – seeking nature of the American - born generation (Wong 13). Thus, Wong explores the narratives of different experiences and behavior of the Asian - and American – born by paying attention to the contrast between the usually frugal eating habits of first - generation immigrants and the more whimsical and pleasure – driven tastes of their descendants.

Frugal eating caused by poverty and culture based prejudices and caution are shown by Kimberly Chang's mother, the grandparents of Sumiko and even Young Ju's parents whereas the young people are more adventurous and are also driven by the hunger of not only their stomach but the hunger to feel like they actually belong. Sumiko finds acceptance with the snake meat after her first try. The cafeteria food becomes essential to Kimberly. Every food prepared at home and at her mother's workplace is heartily consumed by Young Ju and her brother Joon. They simply do not have even the luxury of preference.

The frugal eating practice, the practice of sitting down properly to a meal and caution in food traditions in terms of cultural origin are seen in the chosen texts. As Dimple's parents are immigrants, they still distrust the idea of the American 'fast food' culture and seriously invoke the proper and correct time of dinner. This idea of formality clash with their daughter who has situate herself into the lifestyle of fast food consumerism to appear 'cool' and 'hip'. Frugal eating practices are also seen in the other three texts of this study as the case with Sumiko's family who only afford the bare minimum to fill their bellies and it is clearly indicated that certain type of food like cakes and fast food are luxury items. They do not even entertain the idea of spending money for such luxuries. Even Ichiro, Sumiko's cousin's inclination for clothes and fashion is looked at with disapproval. He is immediately deemed a 'dandy' and significantly more unreliable than Bull, the other cousin who only works in the fields and does not waste money and time on clothes and girls.

The constant hunger for food and the need for frugality is clear in the narrative regarding Young Ju as seen in the way the family behaves at their dinner table. Young Ju is never allowed to leave the table until she scrapes every rice kernels from her bowl. When she finishes, she shows the bowl to her Uhmma and only then, she is allowed to leave the table. The family simply does not have enough to be wasted. There is no money to spare for in between snacks and thus, meal times are always ceremonious in the household. As their economic status does not guarantee where their next meal iscoming from, every bite of food was calculated and measured by the adults of the narrative.

In terms of frugality, Kimberly Chang and her mother have to calculate everything they bought by the amount of skirts they can sew. “Ma also gave me $2.99 to buy a paperback Webster’s dictionary. This cost us almost two hundred finished skirts, since we were paid 1.5 cents per skirt. For years, I calculated whether or not something was expensive by how many skirts it cost” (Kwok 58). Because they had to calculate every expense by the amount of labour that they can put in, Kimberly Chang and her other spend the bare minimum for food. They spend everything they can to further Kimberly’s education. The only time their extravagance is shown is at the time of the Chinese New Year when her mother “made us the traditional yellow steamed pastries and a vegetarian monk’s meal for lunch, and for the night she’d bought us a roasted chicken from Chinatown” (78). The next day, they observe the religious ceremonies to remember and honor the dead. For this, they set out food and wine in front of the five altars they had erected in their kitchen. Kimberly and her mother would promise the gods roast pork next year if they could make it through the year safely. To the mother – daughter duo, the idea of offering roast pork to the gods is beyond their expenditure.

It is only Dimple who has the economic stability to have preferences on what she consumes as seen from the texts. She does not have to be frugal as the others. However, in her choice making, she often belittles the food prepared at home by her parents. By refusing to consume the food and expressing her distaste for it, Dimple creates her own conflict between her two cultures. Either way, she cannot escape her parent’s cultural background and it reflects in the way she looks and acts. Even then, she unconsciously keeps undermining her cultural background and thus opens the gateway for traumatic experiences to plague her mental capabilities.

Semioticians have compared the use of food in society and culture to language as it is also a means of communication. While food plays a role in bringing the others closer to their individual culture as it contributes to their identity, Dimple’s refusal to consume and connect to the everyday food of her culture resulted in not only the loss of her individual identity but can be taken as a rejection of her cultural heritage. It is elementary that food is more than something which is sustenance and nourishment. Community feelings are cemented when one partakes of the same

tradition and societal practices and that usually includes food habits. According to Roland Barthes,

> When he (modern consumer) buys an item of food, consumes it, or services it, modern man does not manipulate a simple object in a purely transitive fashion; this item of foods sums up and transmits a situation; it constitutes information; it signifies (Barthes 28).

This perspective is further developed by Claude Levi - Stauss, who identifies that food can be observed as a separate language that expresses and conveys the differences in social structures and cultural systems. He posits that food "must not only be good to eat, but also good to think (with)" (Dusselier 381). To properly identify a food, the individual has to "think" it, to understand its place in a community, society or the world and therefore understand its value and to differentiate the order and organize the varied elements it contains. For Dimple, when she thinks of her parent's cultural food, she first tag it as something she dislike because it implies that she is more than just a typical teenager – it reminds her again and again of her hyphenated status and that in itself is traumatic for her. She believes at the beginning of her narrative that by dismissing one culture - that of her parents', she would be able to easily transit into the American culture.

Dimple's food language is complex and varies between her New Jersey upbringing and Indian ancestry. However, this also favorably helps her navigate between the two cultures. While other Indian cultures and practices cannot be forced on her, she still has to consume the food prepared at home. Though unwilling, she inadvertently consumes her parent's original culture through the food and is not altogether cut off from them. She is not like the other protagonists, while Sumiko, Young Ju and Kimberly enjoy and consume food from their original cultures with a sense of reverence, Dimple in her urgent bid to be 'all – American' consumes her cultural food only out of filial duty to her parents. This negligence on her part stems from the fact that because of her economic superiority to the other protagonists of the study, she is able to focus on the development of her identity.

The food consumed by Dimple at her home and the rest of her American surroundings made her realize the cultural differences between her and Gwyn. Dimple does not speak the language of her parents' birthplace and thus she is even alienated from the Indian community that is situated around them in New Jersey. The food that she finds at home becomes the connection that opens up the connection to her parent's community. Likewise, when is on the verge of giving up eating the food at home, she is unintentionally trying to give up one way of communication. In this way, food can be viewed as a form of communication because it is a nonverbal means by which certain cultural significance and undertones are shared with others. As Roland Barthes has written, food is

> A system of communication, a body of images, a protocol of usages, situations, and behavior. Information about food must be gathered wherever it can be found: by direct observation in the economy, in techniques, usages and advertising; and by indirect observation in the mental life of a given society. (Barthes 29)

The eating of the fried snake by Sumiko and the others in the Internment camps in this sense is a form of communication of shared experience. It conveys their shared desperation and community feeling. It indicates the use of a shared non verbal language and views food consumption as adhering to the similar application of language use. Food thus then becomes a code that can be used to express social and cultural patterns. When the protagonists are deprived of expressing their culture regarding their food, one form of communication between community members becomes lost. When the people at the camps are served meals that have no cultural background and significance to them, it is a sign that demands their conformity and if they refuse to participate in these meals, it would have raised the suspicion on them. In the same way, Dimple's rigid statement about disliking Indian food indicates her reluctance to conform to her parent's culture.

When Dimple does not recognize the cultural significance of the daily food she eats, she loses the ability to really understand and communicate with her parents, her cousins and eventually Karsh Kapoor who unapologetically is very confident in

navigating between two cultures. As communication can take many forms which may involve conventional or unconventional signals, linguistic or non - linguistic forms and carries emotional significance, Dimple is often observed to have no emphatic feelings towards her parent's reverence towards the culture and tradition that they had left behind.

One of the main reason why food should be viewed as a form of communication is because it is directly linked to ritual and culture (Xu 77). Shared memories linked to emotions always contained food relevance in them. It is often the centerpiece of every important or traumatic event in the life of an individual. Be it weddings, birthdays, holidays, funerals and mourning rites, food traditions are always present to give more importance to the occasion. Wenying Xu continues to make the important perspective that food is one of the ways that human beings engage with, and understand, other cultures. Xu states that ''Food operates as one of the key cultural signs that structure people's identities and their concepts of others' (Xu 103). For instance, Kimberly's mother on the last day of school decides to meet her daughter's teacher and thank him in the best way she knows how – by offering him meat which is contained in a take – out box. When Mr. Bogart flips open the cover of the container, it is to "reveal a large soy sauce drumstick inside". Kimberly notes that this is far worse than she expects. "For Ma, this was a luxury that we could rarely afford ourselves, but to give Mr. Bogart something as common as a drumstick . . ." (Kwok 73). Mr. Bogart's expression is caught between disdain and something else that she cannot identify. Mr. Bogart has not been particularly kind to Kimberly, considering her a little slow because of her language but he toois stunned into silence by this gesture. Kimberly at first is extremely embarrassed with the incident but she understands what her mother is trying to do. Still very limited in her English, her mother has tried to endear her to her teacher in the only way she knew – by offering what is to them a luxurious piece of food.

Offering food especially meat has cultural significance in many ancient and contemporary Asian cultures. Meat often denotes the importance of the individual. It denotes stability between the relations of two individuals as well. When Sumiko finally accepts the fried snake from Mr. Moto, it signifies that their bond has

strengthened and in the same way, when Sumiko brought some ice and fried snake for Frank, her Native American friend' it shows her reverence and courtesy. The exchange between the two also highlights two different culture's conduct towards certain food. When Frank refuses the snake meat from Sumiko, she feels insulted because it is done as an offering on her part. However he explains "Mohave believe that some animals may be some of our ancestors come to visit us. So we can't exactly eat them" (Kadohata 164).

Certain food habits especially from the Asian cultures have continually been fetishized in contemporary American culture. For instance, in the case of Dimple who hopelessly wants to fit in, her circumstance is not improved in the least as her best friend Gwyn reinforces on her the label of 'exotic'. Gwyn while often being an understanding best friend would thoughtlessly plant the idea of the exotic into Dimple. The 'exoticness' of her parent's culture – their food, clothes and jewelry becomes a heavy burden because of Gwyn's enthusiasm in pointing out their 'otherness'. Gwyn's enthusiasm has no boundaries and Dimple is too insecure to refuse when Gwyn goes through her jewelry box to acquire two 'rakhis' that she promptly decides to wear to a night club. In Indian culture, Rakhis are used for Rakshabandhan, the holiday where sisters celebrate their brothers and even as Dimple tells all this to Gwyn, she does not remove the 'rakhis'. Instead she tells Dimple "If I were you I'd just go on and wrap myself in the Indian flag and go to school—I'm serious! Put a little magic in lame old Springfield" (Hidier 62) which highlights Dimple's 'otherness'.

It has always been the stigma that Asian cultures whether it is food habits, fashion or traditional practices are considered exotic. One good example is the fortune cookie that is popularized and is still very popular with Chinese takeout restaurants in contemporary American society. Fortune cookies are often served as a dessert in Chinese restaurants in the United States and other Western countries, but are not a tradition that originated in any way from China. There is no such tradition of giving luck through cookies in China at all. Looking to Lisa Lowe's theory introduced *in Immigrant Acts: On Asian American Cultural Politics* (1996), the trajectory of the fortune cookie reveals, on the one hand, the "heterogeneity" and

"multiplicity" of the Asian American experience in terms of its ethnic diversity and economic status.

The fortune cookie also represents the irregular contact and power relations of a variety of diverse cultures in a social and gastronomic "border zone". Thus, the "hybrid" nature of the fortune cookie — a product brought to the U.S. by the Japanese, but adapted and made popular by the Chinese according to American consumer's tastes and availability, does not seem to match a 'straight – line' and 'passive development of assimilation' (Lowe 70). However, it highlights and symbolizes the Asian American community's history of endurance and survival in a society that is constantly irregular— and often unfavorable in terms of social, political, and material conditions. This is also the same with the popularization of sushi. Many of the characters in the narratives tried their absolute best to get rid of the 'exotic' that was assigned to them by trying to blend in with their clothes and the food they consume. They played their roles – of belonging and being part of the culture at the expense of their own culture.

In contemporary society, much of this 'exotic' stigma has been erased. However, in western culture, one is considered 'cultured' if one knows the proper way of choosing and eating sushi. In contemporary America, how an individual treats sushi and Asian food continues to be the yardstick in measuring how cultured a person is. The same can be said of any other food culture of Asian countries introduced in the western countries. To eat Asian cuisine is to be adventurous and exotic as is the case with Gwyn's character. She can clearly be observed to view the Lala family as exotic. She is thrilled to visit and assimilate herself into Dimple's family – partaking in their home-made food and borrowing Dimple's ethnic clothes without the reverence shown to the culture. In that, she accepts Dimple's culture but it does not stop her from viewing Dimple as 'other' and fetishizing it. This trauma reflects on Dimple in such a way that it affects her personality development. She becomes much more introverted than Gwyn and doubts whether anyone could really like her for herself. It affects her relationship with her parents, her cousins and Karsh. Her confusion can be seen in the lines:

> "And it now occurred to me that maybe the whole point was, in fact, to lose yourself. But not in the sense of confusion -- in the sense of connection to something bigger than yourself ... Getting lost to be found." (Hidier 280)

Recent psychoanalytic theory suggests that eating practices are essential to self-identity and are often instrumental in defining family, class, and even ethnic identity. Although food and related imagery have long been part of literature, it is only recently that psychological theories have led to the examination of food and eating as a universal experience. In the consumption of the fast food, Dimple displays hunger which can be seen in two ways – the hunger for food and the hunger to identify and situate herself with the people in her immediate surroundings. Thus, the action of coming home to partake in her mother's food also represents her hyphenated status and the disenchanted role she played in both her societies. Hunger in terms of the other protagonists also represented a longing and craving for conformity and consistency in their respective backgrounds.

When Sumiko with the rest of the Japanese – American people are relocated from their homes and farms, they soon begins growing their own crops, flower farms and even tending to livestock in a distressing attempt to capture their lost lives. Their hunger is for recognition and roots besides the hunger of the stomach. By trying to turn the acrid and desert lands into a resourceful farmland, they are studiously trying to put down roots like their crops. There is always the threat that they might be deported and extradited from the U.S so, the imagery of their crops taking root in the dry and harsh desert land can be compared to their own hunger to put down roots as well.

Out of Kimberly's hunger for food comes the need for economic stability. She knows that her little family depends on her academic success for a better future and a better standard of living. Thus, this is the main reason why Kimberly could not settle down with Matt even after she becomes pregnant. She knows that Matt is not as ambitious as she is and is content to spend his life in China town with people and sights he is familiar with. Her hunger to sustain herself strives to take her away from their dilapidated apartment building and into an ordinary house in a suburban street.

Interestingly, while food may have been a blind spot for studies in terms of cultural or identity aspects, an important aspect of food communication is its commonality in an individual's life. The intricate protagonists of the selected texts demonstrate that food studies can be used to help understand and research the relationships that an individual with a cultural background can have with food. To this effect, Lukanuski writes:

> A group, who follows proscriptions forbidding certain foods, and or combinations of foods, immediately separate themselves. A sense of order, place, and discipline is created: the tacit understanding, beside any divine command, is that without such regulations the community would fall victim to its individual appetites. Once members of the community were pursuing their own desires, the community would disintegrate (Lukanuski 113).

As food habits and the act of eating induces an intangible feeling of solidarity among participating members in a community, it stratifies in a way that the eating and food habits render the members compliant and submissive to analysis that can happen along the lines of culture, age, gender, class and ethnicity. It is a hegemony that is most effective in the psyche of an individual as food is something that is consumed everyday out of necessity and pleasure. Intolerance of other cultures are often expressed by the repugnance and disgust one feels towards their cuisine and food habits, one's cosmopolitan and sophistication self is also expressed by trying and relishing exotic dishes.

For instance, among the many food materials highlighted in this study, one can see this binary demonstration. Assessing the food practices of other cultures operates from a sense of superiority or order that has been subconsciously implanted in the thought process. Even Sumiko at first detest the idea of the fried snake because she as a young girl has been conditioned in an American school system that certain things are presentable - the bulk of which is undoubtedly approved by American society. So, as bleak as their political situation was, the time shared with her people in the encampment adjusted not only her mindset but her taste buds as well. The fried snake finally becomes edible.

For Kimberly and her mother, in their cockroach and bug infested apartment, none of the food would have been deemed clean enough for the other observers like Annette's family and even classmates. This being one of the reasons why she would not invite her best friend Annette to visit her, Kimberly feels that anything she could offer her would be treated with disgust, no matter how open – minded Annette is in certain ways. Xu writes that in the differentiation of food ways, each culture believes that their food not only tastes better but is healthier and cleaner than others. So, Kimberly is afraid of the censorship that might come her way from her only friend at school. This does not mean that Kimberly dislike their food culture in the same way that Dimple does. Not once does she show hatred for her culture's cuisine but feels safer and comfortable when she consumes it. She finds the food in their school cafeteria unwholesome. She only consumes it dutifully because it lessens the economic burden that she and her mother are under.

In the classification of food, Dimple is the only one who shows that she feels the American food habits and cuisine are sophisticated. She discards the historical and culture significance prepared by her mother deeming them unhygienic. When Karsh and his mother are to visit them for the first time, her mother had cooked endlessly. Dimple has described this scene with terse words:

> On the four - range stove at least six pots clamored for attention. An economy bottle of Mazola corn oil — one that could be confused size wise with a tank of super – unleaded — irradiated to the side, perilously lidless. A high pile of pakoras lay cooling, oil drenching the paper towels between them and plate; in close proximity, a billiard of balls of sesame – flecked kachori awaited the same deep – fried fate (Hidier 169).

Dimple often complains throughout the narrative that she finds this type of cuisine too fattening and harmful for her health. Moreover, since types of food consumption often stratifies in terms of class, race and ethnicity, she feels that the food that her mother make showcase their 'otherness' – something she tries to vehemently forget. Xu explains that "Our system of ordering culinary matters socializes our taste buds and metabolisms, which in turn stand in the front line of

demarcating the border between them and us. Such demarcation is never simply a line drawn between good and bad cuisine or even clean and filthy food" (Xu 6).

The construction of a culture's food habits always informs the structure of a particular social group. Those discriminated to eat 'filthy' foods are assumed to yield to filthy habits and behaviour. Food habits occupy a central and significant place in the prejudice of Asian – Americans. Racial profiling of Asian – Americans has been accomplished due to mainstream representation and appropriation of Asian food ways. As Asians have been profiled to eat the meat of dogs, birds, cats, rats etc - these examples of food choice heightened by mainstream media become dietary accusations against Asians. Though only a portion of these accusations are true, their 'filthy' food ways are told with intentions to defame and establish the parameters of 'otherness'. Food and eating serve as an index of historical survival and ingenuity in overcoming adversities of Asian – Americans. Jennifer Ho points out:

> "American media's representation of Asian Americans is irrevocably associated with "the food of their ethnic ancestries. Indeed, it is fair to say that Asian Americans are almost invariably portrayed through food ways in television and film" (Ho 11).

The racial profiling of food is clearly observable in the chosen texts. Sumiko is so convinced that the everyday food she gets at home is banal and unappetizing that she longs to be invited to parties where she could play at being an American schoolgirl. She has profiled her own cultural food and feels it wanting. Marsha Melrose's chocolate birthday cake becomes the epitome of sophistication and belonging. In her narrative, their food does not have the label of the 'exotic' but is clear on the 'otherness' paradigm.

However, one must consider that they are all adolescents and it is detrimental for them to have peer appreciation. Considering that all their major peers are Americans must also be taken into account when characters like Dimple exoticize her own cultural food. Her best friend Gwyn is head strong and influences what Dimple declares as 'cool'. Gwyn is unabashedly white in her perspective and

whether unconsciously done or not, continues to infuse Dimple's 'exotic' cultural background into their friendship.

While it is easy to focus on the negative aspects brought on by mainstream consumption and labelling of minority food ways, Uma Narayan's article "Eating Culture: Incorporation, Identity, and Indian Food" (1997) focuses on the question of food exchange tourism shifting the focal point to give a more optimistic interpretation of current ethnic food consumption. According to Narayan, adaptation of cuisine culture by mainstream population means that it tries to create a bridge between the two cultures through their food:

> [A] willingness to eat the food of Others seems to indicate at least a growing democracy of the palate. While eating "ethnic foods" in restaurants might result only in shallow, commodified, and consumerist interaction with an "other" culinary culture, it seems preferable at least to the complete lack of acquaintance that permits the different foods of "Others" to appear simply as marks of their "strangeness" and "otherness" (Narayan 180).

Narayan posits that food should be studied as an effective 'contact zone' to bridge between cultures. She accentuates that food should serve as a vehicle to connect the differences between mainstream and ethnic minority cultures. By positioning food at the forefront of literary and culture studies, the complex cultural landscape could be traversed with the dynamics of food consumption. Even though Narayan highlights these optimistic views in the dynamics of food habits in the U.S., she also recognizes the fact that mainstream eaters perform the role of "privileged consumers" (182), who seem to "eat more than they understand" (183).

Introducing food and food – inspired memories especially in Y.A literature as powerful figures of language and communication is not new. The emotional memories connected with food acts as a cultural artefact. It also becomes the backbone of many Asian American narratives in their themes of alienation, displacement, conflict and the ensuing trauma that results from it. Food, to the immigrants and the hyphenated Americans carries a poignant and nostalgic sentiment. What is pungent to the American nose would invoke an array of cultural

intonations and homesickness for the person whose memory is connected to the smell. Food habits can be the trigger to memory even if the memory is connected to a happier or traumatic time.

What food studies try to portray is that smell and tastes are not senses that can usually recalled at will. Thus, when a certain cuisine connected to childhood or a particular strong memory is served, the sensations and awareness that they can encode can thus be activated and then decoded through the stimuli of tastes or the process of cooking that particular meal. It becomes link to the memory of the past and that of the person's cultural background. It could also showcase behaviour that is connected to emotions related to kindness.

In the narrative by Kwok, kindness is often measured by the food the protagonist and her mother receive from their surroundings. Kimberly vividly recalls her only free day away from school and work which is Sunday. Here her memories of feeling safe and content are triggered by the actions of the Chinese nuns who served them simple but memorable food. She recalls how she loves going to the Shaolin Temple in Chinatown.

> It was run by true Chinese nuns, complete with shaved heads and black robes, and they always served free and delicious vegetarian food: fried noodles with tofu, rice and thin, ruffle edged black mushrooms called cloud ears. When the nuns handed me my food, I could feel how present they were in every gesture of kindness…. I felt at peace in the temple, as if we had never left Hong Kong. (Kwok 180)

The lines show that the feeling of safety is very important for the young speaker. Thus, her memory is further affirmed by the smell and taste that would accompany the noodles and the clarity of its ingredients like the black mushroom. Food thus becomes the link to provide awareness and mend the conflict that arises out of trauma.

While food is often featured as having a positive and affirming stimuli to create fond memories, it can also activate the trauma of the past. In Mrs. Lala's case,

food is affirming and positive – a tool to conjure happier memories of the past. As one of the minor characters, Mrs. Lala, Dimple's mother does not leave a heavy impact on the course of her daughter's narrative. However, she is portrayed as a mother who continually cooks for her family. It thus seems likely that Mrs. Lala would have felt the solitude and the alienation when she first moved to America. It is also highly likely that she would have tried to infuse her cooking with her culture to avoid the stifling cultural estrangement she would feel in her new background. The food she prepares would have been an emotional anchor from the trauma that she suffers daily in her displacement. Her daughter refusing to appreciate her food would also create conflict in her mental makeup.

While Mrs. Lala's traditional food habits invokes a feeling of connection and peace to her original culture, the same cannot be said for her daughter. To Dimple, her mother's sense of peace brings her conflict and trauma. The connection between the mother and daughter is hampered by this conflict in interest. While the displacement that Mrs. Lala feels is healed by her food, Dimple who does not feel the dislocation but is nevertheless connected to it must tolerate the food even though she feels that she has no emotional connection to it. For Dimple, this food habit becomes a source of trauma – something that constantly implied her 'otherness' in their cultural background.

In Sumiko's case too, the central foods portrayed are of binary oppositions like Marsha's birthday cake and Mr. Moto's fried snake. After they have been relocated to the encampments, the cake would have signified a sense of rejection for Sumiko. Eating the birthday cake has represented belonging and connection to the other girls in her community. Sumiko thinks that it would have rid her of her difference and alienation. However, it becomes the source of memory that could further traumatize her. In turn, Mr. Moto's fried snake initially unappetizing would raise more profound emotion that could establish shared memory and communication.

The protagonists chosen for this study all have longing and nostalgia for a feeling of community belonging which are mirrored in their need for culinary rituals

and practices, particularly in their relationship with their own individual cultural cuisines. Food thus assuages the sadness caused by being uprooted from their original cultural environment. Food thus stimulates the sense of sight, smell, taste and touch that constitutes in bringing about memories of shared belonging, communication and community feeling. This tasks also constitutes a "means to escape" (Manalansan 65); a way to travel beyond the blurred edges of physical location.

Food also becomes a way to territorialize one's boundary in their new environment. The Nikkei people's attempt to farm the dry and cracked desert lands near their encampment signifies their efforts to territorialize their place after their sudden dislocation. The pathological need that Kimberly's Frank felt towards Chinese food also symbolizes his need to form a territory in their environment. This further show in Frank's hesitation to leave China town. To him, staying in this small space indicates his attempt to re-territorialize a space that does not culturally feels as his own.

In conclusion, understanding a culture and individual identity through food is an interesting process because once a person starts pondering over the questions of how something is made, what ingredients are in it, or why it is named a certain way, the answers obtained go beyond culinary learning. In these answers, food shows the way trauma can be minimize in the relationship of food and individual.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

Y.A narratives are an important source of identity formation in that they offer frameworks for critical studies that centre on teenagers and young - adults. This study has focused on four writers from different Asian backgrounds in the attempt to provide a perspective to trauma faced in the transition between cultures. The young adult protagonists aim to locate their own traumatic experiences and try to navigate themselves in their cultural background.

Y.A narratives are often argued to be 'juvenile' by literary scholars as they often deal with teenage emotions and passive problem solving however, a closer analysis of contemporary Y.A literature explore themes of race, sex, teen pregnancy, poverty, rape and traumatic events. Y.A narratives explore the protagonist's 'coming – of – age' amidst problems they are challenged with. "Between 2002 and 2012, publishers have doubled the rate of YA books being acquired and sold. A study from 2016 showed that of those age-group between 18-29, 80% had read at least one book in the last year" (Snook).

Miller a professor of Early Childhood Development on the Fort Belknap Indian Reservation reports on the importance of finding one's own identity through representation in Y.A literature. In her study, Miller tries to gauge the extent of the importance of identity and race representation in Y.A literature. Miller states:

> Offering young adult literature that features Native American protagonists is one way to address the issues of identity formation, reading motivation, and literacy development for American Indian youth. With such literature, we promote and honor cultural identity. When readers see themselves represented in stories, they realize that they matter, that their experiences count" (Miller 29).

Identity is such a key theme in Y.A literature however, this transformation of identity almost never occurs in isolation. Encouragement has to be nurtured in social awareness and identity development by the society that one belongs to. Cultural relevance motivates not only reading culture but encourages critical thinking skills. Rawson examines the statistics of over two hundred Y.A titles which included over a 100 award – winning titles, 92 bestsellers and 74 titles that were Teens' Top Ten novels. She concludes that for the bulk of the narratives, urban dwelling protagonists

marked over “one fourth of the books studied when in reality, over half (58.2 percent) of teens lived in urban areas “(Rawson).

Character wise in Y.A, white protagonists still make up at least 80 percent. Rawson further finds that “while award - winning lists include more diversity on the whole than Teens’ Top Ten lists or bestsellers lists, no single list, or even a combination of these lists, is sufficient across all aspects of diversity studied here.” Rawson argues that teenagers should be able to find books where they can locate themselves and where characters are relatable to them. Rawson highlights that in such cases, librarians of school and public settings must be willing to embrace “a broad view of diversity – looking beyond simply protagonists’ race or ethnicity – and take the time to locate and purchase titles featuring protagonists from marginalized groups who are portrayed accurately and compassionately” (Rawson). Thus, this encourages social awareness by focusing on social context.

Even in the Y.A genre which contains a myriad of sub - genres, white people and hyphenated people are perceived as belonging to different and often hierarchically racial categories, the concept of identity is conversely affected by the privilege associated with having this perception. For instance, the concept of ‘yellow peril’ in Asian - Americans is created to denote that they were somewhat dangerous just because of their non – whiteness and thus, politically suspicious. Reverse categorizing happens as well but the crucial difference is that perceived normality is always with the Whites. As seen from the texts chosen for this study, the white characters tend to be less conscious of their racial status than people of colour. The difference in how the hyphenated characters view themselves adds to the traumatic effects they are under.

Trauma in the Y.A literature chosen for this study, aims to illuminate the range of scarring experiences that can happen because of racism, poverty and segregation. Trauma, according to Cathy Caruth has come to designate the expressive limit caused by an event so life – threatening, it displaces preconceived notions of the world in intolerable ways. She notes that trauma studies shows an inclination to turn to literary narratives that characterizes trauma as a way to project and work through, understanding the historical background and alter and heal the projected memory from it. “Above and over other disciplines, literary studies is the

only one that embraces and configures the nebulous space not just between knowing and not knowing, but between speaking and the inability to speak as well" writes Kathleen Ong XinWei. Thus, Y.A literature is able to voice trauma as it 'licences' resistance toward narrative structures that are conventional. It challenges the 'single' story. Cathy Caruth observes that, "The wound of the mind—the breach in the mind's experience of time, self and the world—is not, like the wound of the body, a simple and healable event, but rather an event that…is experienced too soon, too unexpectedly, to be fully known" (Caruth 4).

To truly appreciate this concept, Y.A narratives are created for the existence of characters that grow their sense of identity using their perception of others and their relation to them. This can be seen in the growth of the main protagonist– Sumiko, Young Ju, Kimberly Chang and Dimple Lala. Their alternative story of growing up in a white community provoke the readers to expand their perceptions to include group identification which can reset the normative set of binaries like white vs colored, girls vs boys, gay vs straight and so on.

According to Caruth, traumatic experiences that are neither narrated nor identified clearly behaves as a cancerous tumor that aggravate the individual's mental state and psychological state. It exerts a harmful effect on consciousness and memory that blocks the memory of past events that should be integrated into present narrative. For example, the historical event of Japanese Internment during the Second World War is often looked – over and forgotten in the course of American history. Even though the majority of the interned Japanese – American already had the United States citizenship during this time, it was not taken into consideration.

Caruth's model of trauma study emphasizes on the pain that can be caused by external sources that makes inner changes to the psyche and irrevocably changes distinctive identity as well as collective identity. The Japanese – Americans do not understand this internment as they are 'model citizens'. They are citizens who uplift and follow the laws but they are suddenly considered 'suspicious' citizens who have to be separated from the general white population because of the war.

In this study, the transitioning from one culture to another is rarely a choice made by the main characters, but rather a by-product of their parent's hopes and

dreams. This transition from one culture to another culture where their main culture became a minority is very traumatizing for the characters. Their choices in life became limited compared to the other white characters in the narratives. These white characters showcase the binaries of structurally normative and the 'other'. For instance, Sumiko's binary is Marsha Melrose, the most liked girl in the class with the rich parents, cool friends, appropriate clothes and luxurious food. In the beginning of Weedflower (2006), Sumiko's greatest desire is obvious even to the readers. She longs to be like Marsha Melrose and be stable in term of social and economic stature. However, after the Internment she relearned how to be proud of her cultural background.

More binaries are seen in the study like Dimple Lala and Gwyn, her blonde American best friend. It is Dimple's greatest wish throughout *Born Confused* (2003) to be like Gwyn who she considers more beautiful, skinny, mature and vivacious than herself. Readers can see that Dimple is very conflicted about her attributes that seem to be the opposite of Gwyn whom she considers is the epitome of 'cool American'. She becomes traumatised by taking cover behind her camera, preferring invisibility. She does not voice this problem at first allowing her trauma to fester until she begins to alienate herself from her own Indian cultural background. It is only when she begins to establish relationships with her cousins and Karsh Kapoor that she begin to change her perception of 'suitable' where before anyone having the same cultural background as her is considered 'unsuitable'.

The transition from one perspective to another, one culture to another is not easy for the characters. They have to circumvent societal aspects like adulthood, poverty and class alienation with their families all the while learning the language and slang of the school community they were placed in. This in itself creates traumatic memories for individuals who are also battling their teenage years when peer pressure is at its height. The study highlights that these characters must value and perform their 'Asian' lineage with their elders and immediate Asian environment but must also be entirely 'American' with their peers. Identity formation becomes a circus act for the characters that must continually transition between two identities.

These texts as mentioned by their respective authors are heavily invested by autobiographical elements. All the young protagonists struggle with the performance of their own identities while their white peers do not have to question the race they belong to. They have to deal with the insecurity and fear that comes from looking different all the while having to navigate society that constantly reminds them of their 'other' status. Masako Ishii – Kuntz mentions that studies that examine Asian - American families focus on how these families circumvent in society to contribute to the occupational and academic successes of their descendants. "Researchers often attribute Asian Americans' relative success to emphasis on education, a strong parent-child bond, and Asian cultural values" (Ishii – Kuntz 23). These findings reinforce the model minority myth that is placed on Asian – Americans. It enforces an image on them that are further enforced by their own older generations.

Ishii – Kuntz also uses the term 'adult child' for the Asian – American child and overall younger generations as they are the ones who have to navigate the white societal rules for their traditional elders. The configuration of an Asian adult child according to Ishii – Kuntz is "distance between an adult child's residence and his / her parents' residence, financial resources of the adult child, the elderly parents' embeddedness in supportive networks beyond their offspring, the elderly parents' need for assistance, and the extent of assistance given by other offspring as predictors of an adult child's support for his / her parents" (24).

With respect to the configuration of an adult child's network, it is more likely that the first – born in the new adopted country or the eldest during the time of immigration is more likely to be the one who is expected to be most filial. The characters of this study all have this burden to carry. Even though Dimple and Kimberly do not have siblings, the expectation of bringing their families into a more stable economic standing rest on them. Kimberly has her younger brother Tak – Tak who she has to cater to everywhere in the encampment. She has to see to it that he is fed, bathe and away from danger. Filial expectations from her parents are more severe for Young Ju than on Joon, her younger brother who they allow to run and play outside. Young Ju on the other hand, even while she was in middle school have to help with household chores, making food, navigate her father in government

offices regarding their visa all the while keeping a top grade in school. It is also found that later – born children are not expected to cater to these filial expectations (Uba 45). This, as highlighted before in the other chapters can also be seen as the cause of trauma in the younger generations.

The select texts all brought up the breaking apart of such traumatic filial connections, although it schematizes another sort of stratification among Y.A characters. They become more fluent not only in their new language but are given more chance to assimilate into the society due to their educational backgrounds. They are able to rise in social structure than their Japanese, Korean or culture based speaking parent. However, this ability is fed by their sweat shop factory or hard working parents. Thus, an economic relation in the society she belongs to forces her to supervise her elders, and this action subverts the need to demonstrate the traditional respect and reverence she owes her parents and elders. Young Ju truly sees that it is hard for her parents to grasp the English language but nonetheless it embarrasses her when she is the one to help her father in filling up the forms for their immigration forms. She is mortified that he further refuses to believe her translation even as the office worker tells them that they can take the forms home. Young Ju's education has given her dreams that no longer confine her to the physical labour jobs or the humid kitchen at her mom's restaurant job.

The selected texts also show the disruption and distortion of a culture's traditional practice. Conflict arises out of belonging to a new society where filial duties are not at the forefront of a constantly changing value system. This conflict of value system between the young and old Asian – Americans impacts the older generation harder than the younger generation. Trauma is created because of the miscommunications and the loss of a culture which has its own language. The younger generation in turn, are trying extremely hard to assimilate themselves into their adopted cultures and felt that their ancestors' cultural practices and beliefs have become antiquated and obsolete. There is deprivation of language between the two conflicting generations that cannot often be resolved easily as seen in Sumiko's narrative where her father, weary and bone-tired and lost in Mi Gook, (America), decides to go back to South Korea.

It is easily observable that the deprivation of language for the hyphenated-Americans has contributed to the lack of a more integrated culture and dependency on the adopted culture. Language is a very important medium of culture and unites the community by recognizing and organizing the codes of their shared experiences. Without the ability to speak fluently in an alien language, it creates conflict with the ability to relate to the culture and sensibility is severed.

The dual individuality of the hyphenated American deprives them from forming their own expressions of self – definition and identity. The hyphenated-American are already subjugated into defining themselves in terms that are not theirs or of their origins. In the attempt to talk about the myriad issues of Asian - American issues like displacement, hybrid cultures, fragmented selves and marginal voices, it can be observed that while Asian - American have shared racial status that comes with immigration, the respective select texts highlights the richness of their origins as the power of ‘‘otherness’’ and the celebration of marginality is taken into consideration.

Trauma can cause the individual to fragment and dissociate oneself with his or her immediate reality. Silence and the inability to be active in their contemporary world and function only in a dissociative way are all symptoms of fragmentation by trauma. These symptoms of silence and disassociation are clearly reflected in Dimple who at the beginning of her narrative does not wish to communicate to her parents and wish to view the world only through her camera. She cannot express the conflict she feels with being an Indian - American when her only standard of ‘suitable’ and right is Gwyn. These kinds of symptoms are also present in the elders found in the chosen texts. Their disassociation to their present surroundings stems from their inability to assimilate themselves into the new culture they have adopted. Silence on their part is even involuntary because of the language barrier. They lack even the sources to voice their trauma. After Sumiko’s family find themselves situated in the Internment Japanese camps, they are alienated from the white neighbourhoods leaving no chance for them to further integrate into the white community.

For young adults of hyphenated status with minority ethnic backgrounds, the transition of the childhood to the teenage years to adulthood are integrally tied to their racial and ethnic identity formation. A young individual brought up in two conflicting cultures must learn to circumvent the two backgrounds that they undeniably belong to. As Beverly Tatum explains, when placed in a setting where they are the minority, indigenous teens and biracial teens think of their identity in terms of their connection to race or ethnicity because that is how the rest of the world sees them and this results in the need for acceptance that arises from the conflict of not belonging (Tatum 89). The teenagers belonging to the minorities are already targeted as belonging to the 'model minority' and they have to navigate a cultural world where they are 'acceptable' only with the way they behave and not with the way they look.

According to Phinney, ethnic identities and their ability to adapt can be best understood in the way they interact and the responses they receive from the culture they are trying to assimilate into. Immigrant groups or individuals when they arrive into a new culture have differing attitudes about retaining their original culture and becoming a member of a new culture. According to Phinney, "Ethnic identity is likely to be strong when immigrants have a strong desire to retain their identities and when pluralism is encouraged or accepted. When there is pressure toward assimilation and groups feel accepted, the national identity is likely to be strong. In the face of real or perceived hostility toward immigrants or toward particular groups, some immigrants may downplay or reject their own ethnic identity; others may assert their pride in their cultural group and emphasize solidarity as a way of dealing with negative attitudes" (Phinney 494).

As this study deals with Y.A Literature, the mode of ethnic identity development as proposed by psychologist William Cross can be connected for the young protagonists. In the pre-encounter stage, young individuals of ethnicity and children of minority backgrounds absorb and start to imitate many of the beliefs and values of the dominant white culture as it is their immediate and primary environment. As all the protagonists are seen to be doing at their school environment where they mimic their white peers and form judgement on what is 'cool' or not.

However, they end their day at home where they still have to uphold the values and traditions of their households thus birthing the conflict in their personal psyche.

In the stage that Cross regards as the encounter stage, these young individuals of ethnicity becomes aware of their difference on a more profound level in recognizing the impact of racism. It occurs from as early as late childhood to late adolescence, depending on their immediate environment. (Cross 161). Often this awakening is precipitated by an event or a series of events such as the case with Sumiko with her budding friendship with Frank, a Native – American boy who lives in the reservation near their Internment camps. She begins to question the reason behind their segregation – Frank on his reservoir and her on the camps. The author Kadohata shows subversion to a piece of American history by making a young girl voice the ugly truth behind veiled racism. In the same way, Kimberley Chang's mother's mode of earning a living is shown in Kwok's narrative. Most Chinese immigrants are stereotyped as sweatshop factory workers even when they are not. In the case of *Girl in Translation,* the author has used the most stereotypical mode of earning a living to showcase the truth behind being a sweatshop worker and earning minimum wage. The author Kwok here subverts what has been a stereotypical representation of an immigrant worker and gives herself voice in the process as she comes from a family employed in the sweatshop clothing industry.

As mentioned in the study, cultural based stereotyping has an extremely negative effect on the psyche of hyphenated – Americans. It is extensive in the chosen texts as Chinese immigrants are often stereotyped as working in the clothing or sweatshop industries, Japanese and Koreans at menial jobs and the agriculture industry while Indians at technical and medical fields which are stereotypical occupational identities. The authors of these texts have placed their characters in the same menial station that stereotyping have put them but shows the history behind each station, countering the single story. These hyphenated minorities are then termed 'successful' in each of their respective fields and raised as 'model' citizens. They are not free of these restrictions as they themselves have police their descendants to follow this code of living and to live outside these restrictions goes against the norm.

In their *Young Adult Literature: Exploration, Evaluation, and Appreciation* (2006), Katherine Bucher and M. Lee Manning, for instance, explain that "Contemporary realistic fiction, sometimes called the problem novel, uses plots, themes, settings, and characters to reflect the world as we know it" (Bucher and Manning 86). As such, the realistic nature of these narratives acts as a platform for young readers who would find acknowledgement and also learn to acknowledge the different ethnicities that surrounds them. They expressed how it is important to acknowledge the cultural identity that Y.A narratives can elide. The way young adults identify themselves and the community they belong to will depend on the acceptance or resistance they can recognize in any given narrative as an “example of realism -that is, as being about a "we" in which they can recognize themselves” (Stetz 47).

This leads to the questioning of individualistic identity as can be perceived in the characters of Sumiko, Young Ju, Kimberly Chang and Dimple Lala. These characters question themselves on what it is to be a Japanese, Korean, Chinese or Indian Americans respectively. As these hyphenated characters struggle with these questions of identity and belonging, they often seek to integrate themselves into the new culture. However, they also seek support from peers from the same racial, ethnic or cultural group background who would understand their circumstance, perspective and experienced similar stereotypes or prejudices. For instance, this is why the friendship between Sumiko and Frank is full of understanding as they both belong to minority groups. Their community had both been cordoned off from the white community they so longed to and despised at the same time. This type of bond does not happen between Kimberly and Annette or Dimple and Gwyn because the hyphenated characters all felt that they had to hide the different sides of their culture to appear wholesomely American. Kimberly or Dimple was never comfortable to be proud of their hyphenated status when they were with their friends. The discomfiture is added by their difference in economic status.

This lessens the effects of their trauma and bands them together to resolve some of the conflict that arises from racial disparity. Thus, as mentioned in this study, ‘multicultural’ literature is essential to recognize and represent the hyphenated

and minority identities. It emphasizes the need for young readers of minorities to define themselves in a language that is universal to them. It also allows teenagers belonging to the majority culture to observe how the world looks from somebody else's perspective and thus, challenge the way they view their horizons. It challenges their assumptions of the importance of minority culture and lifestyle, jars them out of their complacency, and invites them to contemplate their racial privilege. (Delgado 244).

Being Asian in a widely white populated area, being of the female gender and with the exception of Dimple, being extremely underprivileged in terms of financial status brings out perspective on the need for counter – storytelling which is mainly what multicultural narratives try to do. The narratives from minority cultures represent a piece of culture they come from and they thus, question the validity of already accepted premises or traditions that are held by the majority. (Delgado 144).

Richard Delgado states in his study that counter - stories quicken and build the conscience and stirs the imagination in ways conventional discourse cannot. (2415). Counter – storytelling demonstrate to the readers that there is more than one perspective to the single story. For instance, *Weedflower* (2006) not only highlights the historical side of the Japanese Internment camps during World War II but also gave a valuable insight to Frank, a Mohave boy in a reservation nearby. Paul Lai comments on this use of 'counter-storytelling' to point out that while militarism's rule reach into the social and familial fabric of American lives even outside the battlefield, the individuals living in these spaces challenges these military efforts by establishing their own cultures in the very soil. This can be viewed in the way the Japanese resumes their farming not only to sustain them but to counter the efforts of the government who was trying to segregate them from the society.

The process of counter-storytelling' can highlight the need to challenge set practices and policies that cultivates prejudices that the cultural majority has adopted. This process includes the process of getting rid of certain stereotypes like the sexualizing and fetishizing of certain Asian cultures that include historical beliefs, food ways and even the women. According to Delgado, 'counter- storytelling'

benefits the marginalized and minority groups that have been traditionally overlooked in literary representation. By having the ability to tell their own versions of the historical narratives and hearing counter - stories, members of minority and marginalized groups can gain healing from the psychological trauma by becoming familiar with their own historic oppression and victimization.

Hughes – Hassell in "Multicultural Young Adult Literature as a Form of Counter - Storytelling" mentions how stereotypical portrayal of hyphenated and minority teenagers are grounds for traumatic effects. She learns that:

> Teenagers of colour as well as indigenous people are often victims of a single story. Latino teens are routinely depicted in the mainstream discourse as "low achievers, high school dropouts, teen parents, or violent gang members, all stereotypes that paint a picture of an unassimilated population marked primarily by exclusion and difference". The dominant narrative regularly portrays young African American males as criminals, crime victims, and predators and African American girls as having one asset—their sexuality. Asian Pacific Americans as a rule are depicted as "star students" especially in, supported by industrious, entrepreneurial, and upwardly mobile parents". And American Indians are "typically portrayed as people of the past, not of the present or the future" (Hughes – Hassell 216).

Stewart and Atkinson states that it is more suitable to view multicultural Y.A as "ethnic" literature first because it can act as a "doorway for entry to understanding another culture, an entry to understanding another way of viewing the world" with secondary consideration given to the age group for which it was written (Stewart 2) The Y.A narratives that especially detail trauma will help these minority groups to realize that what they are experiencing is not a singular memory and will help them identity that others have the same traumas and experiences. Collective memory will lead to healing therefore, realisation that their marginalized identities are not their fault will help them process the conflict in their identity formation. Delgado also highlights that they will then construct additional counter - stories to challenge the dominant single story. Chimamanda Adichie argues that the single story is dangerous

and hazardous in the literary works. She explains: “The single story creates stereotypes, and the problem with stereotypes is not that they are untrue, but that they are incomplete. They make one story become the only story”—the definitive story of a people (Adichie). In most cases, the single story reinforces a deficit stance towards teenagers of minority cultures where it represents their race, culture and language as having limitations.

The more young adults read a counter - story, the clearer it would become that every narrative is filled with such elements, little details and nuances that only an insider to a minority group – whether they are Mexican- American, Asian – American or African – American. They would know, understand and be able to situate themselves in the narratives. Counter – storytelling contains the nuances that culture contains like inside words pertaining to that culture, inside jokes and sounds — peeks into a world hyphenated teenagers knows well, but had never before seen within a book’s pages representing their culture in such detail. “Multicultural literature can not only challenge the single story, as Johnson’s novel does, but also encourage and empower teens of colour and indigenous peoples to take action in their own lives and in the world around them. It does this not by denying the hardship and prejudice that many of them face but by showing that, despite the disadvantages that correlate with their skin colour, culture, and/or social class, they can overcome the constraints placed on them by the dominant culture as represented by the single story” (Hughes – Hassell 217).

Counter – stories helps the readers identify with their own culture and see it from the point of view of an observer. It engenders in them an appreciation for the diversity that occurs both within and across racial and cultural groups (Bishop 6). The Asian – American authors of Y.A literature has made it clear that it is essential to give voice to their culture and have it read and experienced by people from other backgrounds. This would be educational and dispel the stereotypical images associated with minority groups. As many white communities even in contemporary society have difficulty navigating the differences between not only Asian – American communities but other minorities as well, ‘counter - storytelling’ can be an useful tool to help them differentiate these differences.

The narratives presented for this study offer a perspective that helps both the readers to understand what life is like for others outside of their immediate cultural background, and invite the readers to empathize by bringing them into a new and unfamiliar world where style of living and cultural practices are different and unique to each minor ethnicity. In Margaret d. Stetz “Chinese, Japanese, What's the Difference?” she states "In asserting racial and cultural difference" from their white counterparts, 'Asian Americans run the risk of being dismissed as irretrievably and irrevocably ‘Other”(Stetz 50). It is important to remember that each Asian – American culture has their own set of unique traditions and style of culture and this is what this study also aims to put into perspective.

Counter - stories help the minor groups to unify their community feeling and help them analyze and eliminate the racist and dehumanizing claims against them. More often than not, minorities are viewed with certain “Other” qualities – over sexualizing of Asian women, eroticising of locations and food, fetishizing the aestheticism of Asian religion, the ideal view of ‘model minority’ etc. This hides the identities of the Asian – Americans from being viewed as contemporary individuals with diverse cultures and narratives. While many factors often contribute to this particular paradigm, these misrepresentations of identities often reinforce historically incorrect ideas of perceiving others that becomes perpetuated over time by both sides of the majority and minority divide.

Y.A literature also continues to expose how cultural assumptions and societal constraints are reinforced in the physical and sexual representations of young people which provide another source of conflict for the hyphenated teenagers. The genre also reveals the many new ways in which Y.A novels reject the various age old constraints dealing with young adult sexuality. They construct and create new structures that resist and reject traditional and regressive ideas of young adult sexuality and constructed body image.

The transitional time of the teen years is a limbo stage of life that is filled with teenage hormonal development. While many factors like culture, economy and familial backgrounds produce different experiences for every individual, common factors of sexuality and the performance of it, body image dilemma are present

through each individual's progress into adulthood. This period of time is when the performance of sex becomes most intriguing to young individuals. So, Y.A narratives are significant in providing this knowledge that could guide the young readers to a certain set of knowledge.

The narratives of this study shows how the young female protagonists also questions the growing changes happening in their respective bodies and the conflict that arises out of body images that don't conform to the norm of the white community. The adolescent's initiation into the act of sexual activity is the result of many factors namely age, ethnicity, gender, parental association and socio - economic status. Acculturation as mentioned in this study is the process of adaptation to a different culture, by which hyphenated and minority groups gradually change their cultural behaviours to be more like that of the host culture. Statistically, a high acculturation is connected with higher sexual activity among minority cultures.

Asian - American adolescents, particularly of the feminine gender have to adapt themselves to their bicultural world. They are encouraged to experience and participate in the white concept of gender and sexual freedom in social situations outside of their homes. However, at the same time they still have to uphold their tradition values that discourage them from blatant sexual expressions. In such cases where characterization of a person is already torn in two, highly acculturated Asian American females who are already adults may easily adopt gender roles shaped by American values which would emphasize more freedom in terms of the distribution of power and freedom in sexuality. The case is entirely different for younger girls who still rely on their parents for financial support. This period seeded conflict in their mental psyche as they are subjected to certain passivity and taboo oriented teachings on sexual activity. These social constructions of young women's bodies become accepted norms, and mirror "intimate and minute elements of the construction of space, time, desire, and embodiment" as Susan Bordo explains in *Unbearable Weight: Feminism, Western Culture and the Body* (Bordo 27)

Peer pressure is one of the situations even more severe for hyphenated teens who do not find representation in contemporary society. Not fitting in with peers due to different social and cultural issues is an issue that the young protagonists in the chosen texts struggle with. For instance, Dimple is surrounded by what she views as

vivacious and confident white American adolescents. She cannot help but continuously compare herself to them and especially to Gwyn, her closest confidant. Gwyn easily navigates the social cliques of their high school and seems comfortable in any situation.

The study of the body of the young female adolescent and the expression of sexuality has always been considered a cultural battleground. It is only under Y.A literature are young girls given the chance to voice the messages that their bodies contains. Topics such as teen pregnancy, sexual assault, rape, trauma, retelling fairy tales and weaponizing young girls are all concepts that find their place under Y.A literature. Female sexuality, and more importantly who is allowed to control and construct it, has always been a contested area. It is often the primary caregivers who try to regulate and instil the idea of virginity and its connection to purity to the budding girls. Y.A has its own drawback even as it provides a platform for young girls a chance to survey their own bodies; it fixes a pattern that connects body image, economic structure, cultural background and sexuality. This problem can be seen in the protagonists of the study as they are all from a minority background with economic problems although less severe in Dimple's case. The question of 'desirability' is put into question as all these factors reinforce negative ideas about body image, and signal the reader to read these characters of minority origin as sexually suspect. Authors of Y.A Literature usually struggle with the idea of portraying sexuality as acceptable unless the characters fall into the stereotypical view of a sexually desirable character that is the right size of 'thin' and other features like race, economic stability and mental disability are not called into question. When the race of a character is not specifically demarcated, the race is also always assumed to be white.

Contrary to popular belief, the structure of body structure also affects girls of all ethnicities in terms of sexuality. Girls that belong to African American or Latino based communities are stereotypically thought to be curvier and stockier in body structure which negatively highlights them as sexual beings. This also impedes their images from being bone thin girls while thin body structures have always been always been the ideal and generally approved body structure for the feminine gender. Generally, in turn females that are Asian descent are assumed to be perpetually thin.

These perceptions are all stereotypical just as much as the portrayal that all western female adolescents need to be bone thin. It is a culturally structured image fashioned to control not only the ideals of the feminine gender but a way to sexually define what is desirable or not. For all hyphenated Americans settling in their new environment, the western standard is facilitated to become the norm.

In the best-selling *Reviving Ophelia* (1994), Mary Pipher shows that "while peers can be satisfying and growth-producing, they can also be growth-destroying, especially in early adolescence. Many girls can describe a universal American phenomenon—the scape - goating of girls by one another" (Pipher 136). According to Pipher, many girls become 'good haters' of those who do not wish to conform sufficiently to the cultural ideas about acceptable femininity and body structure. The shunning takes its toll. She writes:

> Adolescents are exposed, via music, television, movies and pornography, to models of sexuality that are brutal and callous. Girls are caught in the cross fire of our culture's mixed sexual messages. Sex is considered both a sacred act between two people united by God and the best way to sell suntan lotion. (137)

In many Y.A novels, the image of the thin body structure represents characteristics of control and responsibility. This is evident from the image that Sumiko, Young Ju and Kimberly Chang portray. While the authors do not forthright comment on the body structures of these characters, it can be assumed that they would not be 'heavy' in term of their body mass as they constantly live in poverty with barely enough to eat – considering too that they have limited time to even eat leisurely. Sumiko's food rations at the Internment camp are unappetizing and unfulfilling. Kimberly's meals at home consist of sparsely salvaged vegetables from the insects that infested their apartment that would not have been essentially nutritious for a growing girl. Young Ju and Joon's meals consisted of leftovers her mother would bring home from work or the greasy fast foods she bought them between her work shifts.

However, in Y.A literature, conflict arises often out of characters with heavier body structures. These characters are portrayed as being less assertive and more passive in their characterization. While girls with leaner body structures are

portrayed as sexually confident, girls that are fat are indirectly or directly body shamed with descriptions of them ranging from ‘dumpy’ ‘sweaty’ and various comparisons to heavy animals. The binary opposition causes trauma for both the two body structures. For instance, the view of body image is one that causes conflict for the girls – when Dimple compares herself to Gwyn, she has appropriate the western beauty standard and does not feel that she can compare. She feels fat and undesirable thus, equating this to the reason why she does not go out on dates. The need to be ‘thin’ and sexual desirability is connected universally. Pipher finds that “Girls compare their own bodies to our cultural ideals and find them wanting. Dieting and dissatisfaction with bodies have become normal reactions to puberty” (Pipher 365). Dimple is disappointed with her curvier body structure can no longer appreciate the ‘greasy’ fried food she eats at home. This hesitancy to enjoy food is also another conflict that can traumatise the way girls view their own bodies. Eating disorders are developed when the culture insists on a standard of beauty that cannot be obtained by being healthy. Y.A studies show that young girls have been “culturally conditioned to hate their bodies, which are after all themselves” (366). By exposing the cultural influence behind such ideals, Y.A literature shows that these narratives are more than just stories for and about young adolescents.

Food studies constitute an important factor in the study of trauma in Y.A literature. Each culture’s food habits function as a system of representation as signs of comparison over against others. Some food practices are thus termed crude and unsophisticated when compared to other’s cultural food habits. Comparisons and signifiers are assigned to the act of consuming certain food.

The process of consuming the same kind of food creates the feeling of solidarity among members who belong to the same community. It stratifies the participating individual to a hegemony that is exercised through appetite and desire which is powerful enough to connect certain signifiers as comfortable and acceptable in the mental psyche. The division of acceptability or crude food ways is set along the lines of culture, race, gender, sex, ethnicity and even sexuality and this hegemony is most effectively inscribed in Asian- American youths than any other ideological hegemony as they are consumed through food. As food is a common occurrence in

everyday life, each food system with its own ideologies and customs are representatives of cultural practices.

While food is a commonplace item in most Y.A narratives, it is not so for the characters chosen for this study. In *Girl in Translation* (2010), Kimberly Chang and her mother have to save every penny they get from the sweat shop factory for Kimberly's education so, food becomes a secondary item in their lives. Even then, they eat tiny portions and never buy anything that could be considered an extravagance. Just like this mother – daughter duo, Sumiko and the Nikkei people in the Internment camps have to consume food that was unnatural to them. Sumiko notes how "Breakfast was about two tablespoons of scrambled eggs and two pieces of bacon the size of postage stamps" (Kadohata 91). Sumiko eventually has to partake in the eating of Mr. Moto's fried snake because the fare they get in the kitchens is so unappetizing.

For instance, among the many food items highlighted in this study, one can see this binary demonstration of superiority and inferiority. When an individual assess the food practices of another culture, it is always from the vantage point of superiority that has subconsciously been implanted in the thought process. When Sumiko first rejects the fried snake meat, it is because she has been conditioned by the American school system and she undeniably even feels superior to the people she is confined with. The conflict that Sumiko feels when she is first confined with the other Nikkei people is resolved when she finally accepts the fried snake meat.

The construction of a culture's food ways always informs the construction of a particular social group. Those demarcated to eat 'filthy' foods are assumed to yield to filthy habits and behaviour. Food habits occupy a central and significant place in the subjectivity of Asian – Americans. Due to mainstream media's influence, racial profiling of Asian – Americans' food culture is rampant and dietary accusations have happened. Their 'filthy' food ways are told with intentions to defame and establish the parameters of 'otherness' by the media and this further alienates the hyphenated Americans from the mainstream culture.

Semioticians have compared the use of food in society and culture to language as it is also a means of communicating. Food plays a role in bringing the other protagonists closer to their individual culture. It is not quite clear as with Dimple whose refusal to consume and connect to the everyday food of her culture results in not only the loss of her individual identity but is taken as a rejection of her tradition. As food is more than just nourishment and sustenance, certain community feelings are stronger when one partakes of the same tradition and societal practices that are embedded in food habits.

Claude Levi – Stauss identifies that food can be observed as a separate language that expresses and convey the differences in social structures and cultural systems. He posits that food "must not only be good to eat, but also good to think (with)" (Dusselier 381). To properly identify food habits, the individual has to visualize it to understand it. For Dimple, when she thinks of her parent's cultural food, she identifies it as something that signifies her 'Otherness. She thus has immense dislike for it towards the beginning of her narrative. The everyday food that her mother serves reminds her over and over of her hyphenated status and that is traumatic for her. Her mother's food is a separate language that she refuses to interpret.

In this thesis, food also becomes a weapon for the hyphenated characters to re-territorialize one's boundary in their new environment. The Nikkei people's attempt to farm the dry and cracked desert lands near their encampment signifies their efforts to territorialize their place after their sudden dislocation. The pathological need that Kimberly's friend and ultimately, boyfriend Frank feels towards Chinese food also symbolizes his need to form a territory in their environment. Frank's hesitancy to leave their part of China town with the familiarity of sights and sounds contributed to the conflict between the two young people.

Food should be viewed as a form of communication because it is directly linked to ritual and culture as well as the established fact that without language there can be no form of organized communication (Xu 77). This is essentially important to recognize in terms of trauma studies as it is important to establish communicational systems. Be it weddings, birthdays, holidays, funerals and mourning rites, food

signifiers are always present to give more importance to the occasion. In ritual practices, food often stands in for expressions of life, love, happiness or grief.

Interestingly, while food may have been a blind spot for studies in terms of cultural or identity aspects, an important aspect of food studies to countering trauma is its commonness in everyday existence. The intricate protagonists of the selected texts demonstrate that food studies can be used to help understand and research the relationships that an individual with a cultural background can have with food. How food is consumed is a powerful method of defining a community. Lukanuski writes:

> A group, who follows proscriptions forbidding certain foods, and or combinations of foods, immediately separate themselves. A sense of order, place, and discipline is created: the tacit understanding, beside any divine command, is that without such regulations the community would fall victim to its individual appetites (Lukanuski 113).

Sumiko desperately wants to attend the most popular girl's birthday party and eat cake with the rest of her classmates which to her symbolize acceptance of not only her as a person but as racially different person. However, she is turned away at the door simply for the fact that she is of Japanese descent. This kind of rejection also haunts the other characters as Dimple regularly compares herself to her white best friend Gwen, never feeling 'white' enough to show off in her own cultural clothes as Gwen would praise and exoticize them. For Young Ju, she feels that her parents tried to keep the outside world at bay because they are too set in their Korean ancestry. Kimberly Chang hides from her friend Annette that she has to help her mother at the factory after school and Young Ju's relationship with the outside world is compacts between communication problems and family problems. The trauma caused by the dislocation in culture also opens the door to separation anxiety, as evident in the need to cling to familiarity of one's culture.

It is undeniably visible to note that Y.A literature continues to be the fastest growing area of genre in the contemporary publishing industry. Even with the shortcomings presented by identity politics and representation for hyphenated teenagers in contemporary society, Y.A literature continues to provide space for multicultural authors to challenge established ideologies. In narrating their stories,

the Asian – Americans and other hyphenated minorities face their traumas and reveal their secrets to a new generation of adolescents in an accessible manner that encourages understanding and empathy. Y.A literature by authors from diverse backgrounds has the power to bring about real world ‘activism’ and inspire real change.

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ABSTRACT

CONFLICT AND TRAUMA IN TRANSITION:
THE YOUNG ADULT EXPERIENCE FROM SELECT TEXTS

AN ABSTRACT SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

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SCHOOL OF HUMANITIES AND LANGUAGES

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Conflict and Trauma in Transition:

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In partial fulfillment of the requirements of the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in English & Culture Studies of Mizoram University, Aizawl.

Young Adult (Y.A) Literature can be described as narratives in which the main characters are adolescents dealing with issues that other teen readers can relate to. The genre uses a variety of themes such as sexuality, race, gender issues and science fiction. While Y.A literature have successfully dealt with themes that were once considered censored and taboo like menstruation, suicide and even teen sexuality, these factors are dealt mainly by white characters to target the American and European adolescent readers and little other cultural backgrounds are represented. Thus, ethnic Asian writers targeting the mainstream reading culture have had to create and settle their characters in familiar mainstream surroundings that the majority of the reading public can connect to. These characters with Asian backgrounds are placed into a foreign setting to highlight the severity of the difference in customs and traditions and the compliance in identity that could rise out of the assimilation. For instance, the protagonists chosen for this study are all of Asian descent growing up in America where their core cultural background is among the minority.

The thesis aims to bring into perspective the conflict faced in transition by the teenage characters of the select texts because of their Asian origin and the trauma that resulted in the build-up of personal and collective attributes. The characters selected thus have issues that are the result of their migration as well as angst and insecurities that irrevocably develop during the teenage years. They are heavily invested by autobiographical elements. All the young protagonists are all struggling with their ethnic identity on their own. While their American teen peers and mostly in this case, the white population do not have to deal with the fear and stereotype that come from having different coloured skin or facial features, the characters are limited by the colour of their skin and their different cultural background.

Weedflower (2006) by Cynthia Kadohata is based on real events of the Japanese Poston internment camps during World War II (Nilson 317). It follows 12 – year -old Japanese American girl named Sumiko living in California in the years leading up to World War II. At the start of the narrative, prejudice is just beginning to build against the Japanese. It is a difficult time for the young girl as she herself has done nothing wrong to deserve the hate of the white society that she found herself

placed in. It is the year 1941 and with the bombing of Pearl Harbour, Sumiko's uncle and grandfather are arrested and taken with other community leaders to a camp in North Dakota, not because they are guilty but as a precaution. Following this, all of the Japanese families are moved from their homes to the Poston Relocation Center, located on a Mohave reservation near Parker, Arizona. There, Sumiko and her family are basically prisoners along with the other Japanese families.

An Na's *A Step From Heaven* was published in 2001. It is about a four year old Young Ju's journey from her pre-school years in South Korea through her immigration to Mi Gook (America) and eventually to her early teenage years. Mi Gook represents the idea of prosperity for many immigrants from Asia to the United States of America. Throughout the narrative, Mi Gook always is synonymous to Young Ju as 'heaven'– a place without suffering and where her family could escape poverty.

Another hyphenated American who writes about the struggles of immigrants in the American society is Jean Kwok. She is a contemporary Chinese American writer and the bestselling author of the novel - *Girl in Translation* (2010). Kwok drew upon her personal and family experience to produce a narrative that illustrates the experiences of an exceptionally bright young girl Kimberley Chang, also called Ah-Kim who leads a double life in an exclusive private school and a Chinatown sweatshop. They live in the slums of Brooklyn, New York in a rundown apartment building that does not have central heating to get them through the cold and bitter winters. Disguising the more difficult truths of her life, Kimberly with an indelible voice learns to constantly translate not just her language but herself. The narrative draws attention to the struggles of an immigrant girl growing up in two cultures, never fully understanding or belonging to either as the other narratives chosen for this purpose of this study.

Tanuja Desai Hidier's *Born Confused* is a 2002 young adult novel about an Indian – American girl growing up in New Jersey. *Born Confused* tells the story of seventeen year old Dimple Lala, a seventeen –year – old firs t generation Indian American growing up in New Jersey. Dimple is too American in India, and yet

struggling to conform in America. She is constantly divided between two elements – her ethnic identity or the one she has adopted, her jealousy and admiration of her friend Gwyn for being white and flawlessly navigating through life and hating and loving her parents and other family members who she feels are more culturally stable. Towards the end of her junior year in high school, she realizes that she is an ABCD — an American Born Confused Desi:

> So I was an ABCD. Why hadn't anyone told me? Why didn't they put this in those spots where they say race doesn't matter but please check one of the following? Growing up, I was always exing Asian / Pacific Islander, even though I didn't understand why they were treated as the same thing. It would have been so much easier to check ABCD. . . I wondered if I'd ever be an ABCD. . . . But for now I was an ABCD. I didn't really know what that meant. But I suppose that was the point. (Hidier 108)

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION: THE ASIAN YOUNG ADULT AND YOUNG ADULT LITERATURE

Identity formation, being one of the most vital themes in Y.A literature often depicts self-conscious and emotionally challenged protagonists coming to a new notion of who and what they are. Their growth and transformation become a document for the teenagers who read and learn about themselves in the narratives. This transformation of identity however, never occurs in isolation, and the narratives become a source of knowledge that can encourage social awareness and individual growth by focusing on how various social contexts and norms impact the process of identity formation. The narratives identify the characters in terms of racial identity and can build up a profile for the understanding of "relational identity formation" (Engles 55). This theory helps in the acknowledgement that each individual identity is framed on the principle of perceptions – by how the individual is perceived by others. For instance, racial minority groups like Hispanic, Asian Americans, Blacks and Whites are perceived as belonging to different and more importantly, hierarchically different racial categories. Thus, identity formation is affected by the more privilege that is associated by the set perceptions. The majority culture have

formed normative identities by taking certain qualities from the minorities and thus conceptualizes themselves as the very opposite.

To truly understand this concept, Y.A literature creates the existence of characters who gain sense and strength of who and what they are by their perception of others and their relation to others. These styles of narratives prompt the younger readers to expand their view to include broader group identifications. Through this process, the narrative exposes how identifying as a member of one cultural identity or group often has a lot to do with not being a member of a much considered minority group that is systematically labelled its opposite.

Trauma can cause people to fragment and dissociate with their immediate reality. Quite often the person may be present in a dissociative state and talk in a fragmented way or become silent altogether. These kinds of symptoms are present in the elders found in the narratives. Their disassociation to their present surroundings stems from their inability to assimilate themselves into the new culture they have adopted and silence is involuntary as it is due to the language barrier. Sumiko's family situates themselves in the immigrant Japanese community thus, alienating themselves from the white neighbourhoods leaving Sumiko no chance for herself to integrate into the other community. This case is similar to that of Young Ju's father who cannot reconcile his old life with the new one which results to his alcoholism. This substance abuse spirals into the physical abuse of his family and eventually its disintegration as well. Dimple also has a fragmented reality compared to her best friend Gwyn. Dimple finds it easier to view the world through her camera and is able to view Gwyn navigating the white world easily and effortlessly. Being behind the lens also keeps everybody else at a distance. This stunts the growth of her personality and thus, makes her feel much younger than Gwyn.

Traumatic experiences that are neither narrated nor identified acts like a cancerous tumor that wounds the individual's mental state and psychological state. It exerts a harmful pathological effect on consciousness and memory that dissuades the remembrance of the past from becoming integrated into a present life narrative. For instance, with regards to the Internment of Japanese Americans during World War II,

sixty two percent of the internees were already individuals with United States citizenships. Caruth's model emphasizes on the pain that are caused by external sources that makes inner changes to the psyche and irrevocably changes personal identity as well as collective identity. The vital emphasis on trauma's 'unspeakability' declares that extreme experience fractures both language and awareness of the conscious mind, causing lasting damage and demanding unique narrative expressions.

Caruth explains:

> The event is absent in normal consciousness but preserved just beyond the limits of understanding in a timeless, wordless state and continues to inflict pain on the psyche. Trauma's strange absence yet ghostlike presence in consciousness, its lack of normal integration into memory and narration, casts a shadow that indirectly points toward trauma's meaning and the truth of the past (Caruth 3).

It has also become a rather bitter necessity for Asian Americans to have to contend with the practice of the total devaluation of their Asian ethnicity. If they show tolerance for it, they show an inclination to become acceptable to a racist society which devalues their ethnic identity. In a 1972 essay titled "Racist Love," Frank Chin and Jeffery Paul Chan points out the idea that Asian Americans habitually adopt internalization of white judgment as an "expedient tactic of survival":

> For the subject to operate efficiently as an instrument of white supremacy, he is conditioned to accept and live in a state of euphemized self - contempt. This self- contempt itself is nothing more than the subject's acceptance of white standards of objectivity, beauty, behaviour, and achievement as being morally absolute, and his acknowledgment of the fact that, because he is not white, he can never fully measure up to white standards. (Sau ling Wong 77)

According to the essay, Chin introduces the concept that white America imposes standards upon minor non-Whites which then form the basis of perceived

reality and thus ultimately influencing the identity construction of the minority groups. The consequence that results is that of self-contempt and self-destruction as can be seen in the four protagonists of this particular study. The characters, as young as they are, all have perceived notions of what they deem appropriate to be accepted into their adopted communities and therefore, have certain degrees of contempt for the way that their parents choose to live their life in the new environment. He also writes that the stereotype "operates as a model of behaviour. It conditions the mass society's perceptions and expectations. Society is conditioned to accept the given minority only within the bounds of the stereotype" (Chin 66).

CHAPTER 2: YOUNG ADULT LITERATURE AS A FORM OF COUNTER – STORYTELLING:

Counter – storytelling is defined by Daniel Solórzano and Tara Yosso as "a method of telling the stories of those people whose experiences are not often told," including people who belong to minority groups based on colour, cultural ethnicity, women, sexuality and the economically unfortunate (Solórzano 26). The protagonists of this study represent a piece of the culture they come from and as a result, they aim "to cast doubt on the validity of accepted premises or myths, especially ones held by the majority" (Delgado 144). Richard Delgado states that counter - stories "can quicken and engage the conscience," stirring the "imagination in ways in which discourse that is more conventional cannot" (2415). Trauma caused by the voicing of only the 'single story' can be repaired and contested with counter – stories. Delgado states that stories, parables, narratives and other forms of representation are powerful means for establishing the mindset of an individual – "the bundle of presuppositions, received wisdoms, and shared understandings against a background of which legal and political discourse takes place" (2413). By relocating power to the minor groups, certain levels of trauma can be resolved.

It is true that the validity of counter – storytelling is often in question as the portrayal of a set of minor culture – its unique culture and tradition cannot be understood often by readers across multiple cultures. However, this can become the main reason why counter – storytelling is important as the narratives detail insights with the use of "insider" words – terms and phrases that are connected and cemented

into each individual culture. There are certain terms uniquely used by each culture to define objects. For instance, in *A step From Heaven*, Na used the word 'Mi Gook' to define America. This use of the word throughout the narrative validates Young Ju's and her family as someone who are definitely not American. Terms like'Uhmma' to define the mother, 'Apa' to define the father and 'Halmoni' to define the grandmother all help substantiate the narrative as a counter – story and would be further validated by Korean – Americans.

Identity development in the case of multicultural societies has to do with the development of personal agency that can have access to resources to increase growth and understanding. Khanna and Johnson clarify the need for this in their studies of asserting identities to others. Passing as white or as close as whiteness allows a person to have "access to valued resources or roles that otherwise would not be accessible due to safeguards of the majority or more powerful groups" (339). It involves manipulation of one's identity to suit the standards of the majority in power. The Asian – American communities in America have always been scrutinized and modelled to fit the 'model' image that is always perpetuated in terms of the feminine gender. Culturally, Asian – Americans have to live up to the 'model' image.

Failure to conform is meted out with harsh judgment and punishments as can be seen in the case of Young Ju's Apa. His inability to connect with his new environment makes him unable to hold a stable job. This inability creates a complex in him. The trauma of being unable to hold his position as the head of a family and relying on his wife's earnings eventually make him turn to alcohol. Joon, his son can converse fluently in English and does not revere him as much as the father wishes him to. Young Ju's achievements even begin to heighten his complex and anger him further.

Members of the dominant culture in a cultural setting too benefit from hearing counter-stories. Delgado points out that counter-stories can help them overcome their "ethnocentrism and the unthinking conviction that their way of seeing the world is the only one — that the way things are is inevitable, natural, just, and best" (Delgado 2439). For this reason, the counter-stories by minority and marginalized groups offer precious statistics and data for researchers working in the

critical race tradition and educators who work with young learners from communities diverse enough with counter-stories.

Although there have been numerous attempts to overthrow perceived and stereotypical views on hyphenated Americans with the use of multicultural narratives, it is not an easy process to change decades of preconceived notions. Absented, whitewashed, and problematic misrepresentations of Asian Americans are not isolated to Y.A literature. This pervasive stereotyping persists across all contemporary mainstream culture. Nancy Wang Yuen comments on the large issue of minimal representation, "Far from neutral, mass media institutions such as Hollywood are major transmitters of racist ideologies . . . . Hollywood's dominant narratives of whites as heroes and actors of colour as side-kicks or villains legitimate and reproduce hierarchies' existent in US society" (31). Rajgopal points out in her study of Asian women in the popular movie industry, when Asian Americans are given roles in Hollywood, they are often stereotyped and one – dimensional characters who highlight the importance of the main characters. Men are stripped of their masculinity unless they play villain roles. Women are unfairly painted as either a "dragon lady" or a "china doll", with the sexualizing of traditional practices thrown in the mix (Rajgopal 24).

Counter - narratives at times can overcome that otherness, hold that 'instinctive resistance in suspension' (Delgado 377). As narratives are the oldest and primordial base for sharing human experiences, their appeal would help in providing a most effecting of overcoming differences and might be grounds enough for forming a " new collectivity based on the shared story". In this sense, narrative work has a fastidious appeal for individuals who are components of 'outgroups', or "groups whose marginality defines the boundaries of the mainstream, whose voice and perspective – whose consciousness – have been suppressed, devalued, and abnormalized" (378).

The process of counter – storytelling which members of minority groups tell to themselves and others helps to document the unheard pain and voices, even validate a 'counter - reality' and therefore, becomes catalysts for trauma healing. As

Christa Schönfelder writes, literary trauma narratives facilitate for the readers specific functions that center on its 'fictionality':

> Twentieth – century trauma narratives remain connected, at least in principle, to a long tradition of literary representations of 'other people's pain', whose ethical implications are tied to their fictional status and to the fact that the other people and their fates whose pain the reader is witnessing or sharing are the fates of imaginary people in a depragmatized and metadiscursive space of textuality, which however may paradoxically enhance its communicational intensity and its signifying power towards a collectively experienced historical reality (166).

CHAPTER 3: SEXUAL CONFLICT IN THE PRESENCE OF CULTURAL DIVISION

Young Adult literature has continued to expose how cultural assumptions and societal constraints are reinforced in the physical and sexual representations of young people. The transitional period of the teen years is a period of turmoil that is between childhood and adulthood and is invariably hard to navigate. While factors like culture, economy and familial backgrounds produce different experiences for every individual, common factors such as questions on sexuality and the performance of it, acceptance of body images are present through each individual's progress into adulthood.

According to Hyeouk Chris Hahm, Maureen Lahiff and Rose M. Barreto, there are many factors that are associated with the adolescent's initiation into the act of sexual activity namely age, ethnicity, gender, parental association, use of substance most likely drugs and socio - economic status. A high stage of acculturation is also connected with higher rates of precarious sexual activities among ethnic minority adolescents. "Acculturation is the complex psychological process of adaptation to a different culture, by which members of an ethnic group gradually change their behaviours and attitudes to be more like those of the host society" (Hahm 29).

The protagonists selected for this study diverge on the acculturation scale as high acculturation suggests adopting without hesitation the values, language and various cultural beliefs of the new environment whereas low acculturation suggests the retaining of the various values, languages and cultural norms and beliefs of the original culture. However, from the aspect of studying about the sexual conflict and body image problems of Asian – American adolescent girls, the process of low acculturation becomes a hindrance for the girls in terms of their freedom. "A critical aspect of acculturation is renegotiating or redefining gender roles in the new cultural context" (Hahm 29). The occurrence of gender role acculturation can be observed as all four protagonists are invariably influenced by the host culture's gender role norms which are invariably different than the ones that their parents follow.

In regards to the four main protagonists of the four texts of this study – *Weedflower*, *Girl in Translation*, *A Step from Heaven* and *Born Confused*, Dimple is the only one who has a relatively stable economic and social background. She has the time to worry over the performance of her sexuality. For the others – Sumiko, Kimberly and Young Ju, sexuality is repressed by their economic – socio backgrounds. Poverty becomes the main factor for the repression of their sexuality. While Dimple and Gwyn had time to explore their budding femininity and sexuality, the others had to limit their time to help their families stay afloat economically.

As her body develops and matures, Dimple develops an increasing awareness to sex and sexuality with the appearance of Karsh Kapoor. Here too, Dimple's budding entrance to sexual attraction is hampered by her cultural background and her social setting. It is a challenging aspect of her life as she is undeniably attracted to Karsh although she has regarded him as an 'unsuitable' boy. The first reason being that he has been introduced to her through her parents. The second reason being, she and Karsh has a similar cultural background which is ultimately an impediment to her assimilation into the white community.

Unlike Dimple, Young Ju and Sumiko does not have space or time to perform their budding femininity and sexuality. They are economically hindered as well. For Young Ju, combating the cultural and language barrier and her displacement into their secondary background gained precedence over every other aspect of her young life. The only aspect of her femininity is centered on the behaviour of her father

towards her brother and herself. While her father has a toxic interest in the performance of masculinity with her brother Joon, Young Ju's insight into femininity is through her haggard working mother. To Young Ju, being a good girl meant performing well in her studies and helping with the household chores. Even though Joon is allowed to play and be a child, Young Ju as young as she is have to play at being the second maternal figure to Joon. There is never any time for her to ponder about the state of her sexuality.

Young Ju has to be the safe harbor for her mother and Joon as well. When her father would get violent with drink, her small body has to be the shield and her mind has to come up with safe topics that could defuse the tension in the home. So, she barely has time to adjust into being a young lady. As she understands the new cultural system better than her parents, as young as she is; Young Ju has to take the role of a matriarch – a role that belonged to her grandmother back in South Korea. Readers can also find from the narrative that the grandmother does not receive anything but passing obeisance from her son, Young Ju's father. In a jarringly similar way, Young Ju also is not acknowledged for her role in the family or her achievements.

The same is for Sumiko who lives mainly in the Internment camps. Not only is their social placement not sure, they have to combat being like prisoners with minimal space and food. In that kind of atmosphere, Sumiko has no space to cultivate her sexuality or ponder about her body image. Before the political situation escalated, Young Ju was at leisure to admire the images of the other white girls in her class. However, after they were encamped she had to direct all her time and minimal physical space to creating her garden. Regarding adolescence particularly for girls, Lyn Mikel Brown and Carol Gilligan in *Meeting at the Crossroads* describes the period as:

> "a crossroads in women's development: a meeting between girl and woman, an intersection between psychological health and cultural regeneration, a watershed in women's psychology which affects both women and men" (Gilligan 23).

While boys are allowed to be boys with old age adages cementing their right to be rowdy and their right to expression, girls are often expected to be dutiful,

demure and be wiser in courtesy and manner than their male counterparts. In a society that often values beauty more than accomplishment; young girls are often given conflicting messages about their right to sexuality and body image. A young girl expressing her sexuality often easily becomes an uncomfortable topic. Craig LeCroy and Janice Daley argue in *Empowering Adolescent Girls*:

> "While girls are exposed to media messages that encourage them to acquire a highly sexualized appearance, they are also met with many adults' reluctance to discuss sex in a forthright manner" (LeCroy 15).

Silencing adolescent sexuality is damaging and is usually more rampant in Asian families where the traditional values are still practiced by the parents. Even Dimple is not free of this as the circumstances in her meeting Karsh have been the precursor to a more formal arranged marriage meeting. The expression of female sexuality is often hindered and controlled – marriage being the only agreeable form of expression. Sex and the display of sexuality are only acceptable with ties to marriage. Dimple who would like to be acceptable in her current environment longed for the chance to date and flirt effortlessly as Gwyn does. The idea of meeting Karsh that could lead to a possible arranged marriage does not satisfy her curiosity nor answer her questions about sexuality.

The terms sex and sexuality have always been intertwined with a culture's particular understanding of gender. "Race is not so intimately wed to a layman's understanding of sex, sexuality, and gender" (Chou 3). However, race is fundamental to how sexuality can be understood in the lives of Asian Americans. White hegemonic ideals of femininity, body structure and beauty often determine which gender gets to explore their sexuality. When identities are so complexly intertwined, it is the social norms and hegemonic social programming that pulls individuals in a set standard of survival. However, when there are two or more conflicting sets of social norms, the individual stuck in those norms invariably develops a conflict in their individualistic ideals as well.

In the texts, the authors also depict how young women are taught to uphold unrealistic ideals of honour and duty which then decrees the way sexuality is expressed. In most Asian families, dutiful daughters became the standard for beauty. So, to uphold that sense of duty is to forfeit all sense of one's individuality for the

young protagonists. In western white culture, physical beauty is considered most important and the girls know that they would never be considered 'ideal' because of the way they look. The 'Lookism' concept pervades throughout any adolescent phase where self – assessment is done by the teen themselves and are invariably found wanting. So, the narratives show that the self – assessment done on themselves by the protagonists proves to find themselves lacking.

CHAPTER 4: IDENTITIES: READING FOOD IN ASIAN AMERICAN Y.A

Food studies observe people's relationships with food and reveal information about the psychology of groups of people. Food choices expose the system of cultural beliefs, passions, systematic knowledge, traditional assumptions and behavioural patterns and personalities. Kittler, Sucher, and Nelms coined the term food habits (also known as food culture or foodways) to describe that "consumption is not just the conversion of food into nutrients in the human body, but also includes gaining the food's physical properties as well—hence the phrase 'You are what you eat'" (Kittler 2). They highlight how the correlation between the food that people eat and how they characterize themselves is striking. The process of creating food habits is unique to each culture – deeply rooted to their ancestors and cultural rites.

Each culture's food tradition functions as a system of representation as signs of comparison over against others in terms of food practices. Some food practices are thus termed crude and unsophisticated when compared to one's cultural food habits. Comparisons and significations are assigned to the consuming of food. Examples given by Kittler, Sucher and Nelms include the eating of walnuts that look like miniature brains by many Asian cultures in the belief that they make them more intelligent or some of the Native Americans belief system that milk is only meant for children and weaken adults instead.

Thus, the process of consuming the same food creates solidarity among the members in a community. It stratifies the participating individual in the food practices and makes them compliant to a hegemony that is exercised through appetite and desire. This division is set along the lines of culture, race, gender, sex, ethnicity and even sexuality and this hegemony is most effectively inscribed in Asian-

American youths than any other ideological hegemony as they are consumed through food. As food is a regular staple of life, the ideologies behind each food system are representative of cultural practices and traditions. Thus, intolerance of other cultures is often than not expressed by the repugnance one feels towards their food. Lukanuski writes:

> How food is consumed is a powerful method of further defining a community. A group, who follows proscriptions forbidding certain foods, and or combinations of foods, immediately separate themselves. A sense of order, place, and discipline is created: the tacit understanding, beside any divine command, is that without such regulations the community would fall victim to its individual appetites. Once members of the community were pursuing their own desires, the community would disintegrate. (Lukanuski 113)

When Sumiko and her family are moved to the Poston Mohave internment camps - officially called the Colorado River Relocation Centre, they are made to live in barracks with minimal spaces for the whole community. The place is practically a desert with scorpions roaming inside the barracks but the people resourcefully got rid of the cumbersome insects as well. In this camp, Sumiko befriends a man called Mr. Moto who keeps snakes in cages which he later uses as meat. This is due to the fact that the thousands living in these camps rarely have good food supplied to them in their respective halls. In this internment camp, the food they get is barely edible. Sumiko notes how "Breakfast was about two tablespoons of scrambled eggs and two pieces of bacon the size of postage stamps" (Kadohata 91). The people in the internment camps at first consume this small fare and typical American style breakfast to appear more unproblematic.

> At dinnertime Sumiko got in line with her family and the kitchen staff fills her rice bowl, plate, and cup. The cup held milk, she wasn't sure what was on the plate and in the bowl. It wasn't rice in the bowl, it was … something else. Something mushy. (112)

In Wong's *Reading Asian American Literature: From Necessity to Extravagance* (1993); she shows the much deserved attention of the relationship

food, ethnicity, race, and culture in the literary tradition. Wong theorizes a thematic binary that refers to "two contrasting modes of existence": the "survival - driven" world of the immigrant generation, and the freedom – seeking nature of the American - born generation (Wong 13). Thus, Wong explores the narratives of different experiences and behaviour of the Asian - and American – born by paying attention to the contrast between the usually frugal eating habits of first - generation immigrants and the more whimsical and pleasure – driven tastes of their descendants.

Frugal eating caused by poverty and culture based prejudices and caution are shown by Kimberly Chang's mother, the grandparents of Sumiko and even Young Ju's parents whereas the young people are more adventurous and are also driven by the hunger of not only their stomach but the hunger to feel like they actually belong. Sumiko finds acceptance with the snake meat after her first try. The cafeteria food becomes essential to Kimberly. Every food prepared at home and at her mother's workplace is heartily consumed by Young Ju and her brother Joon. They simply do not have even the luxury of preference. The frugal eating practice, the practice of sitting down properly to a meal and caution in food traditions in terms of cultural origin are seen in the chosen texts. As Dimple's parents are immigrants, they still distrust the idea of the American 'fast food' culture and seriously invoke the proper and correct time of dinner. This idea of formality clashes with their daughter who has situated herself into the lifestyle of fast food consumerism to appear 'cool' and 'hip'.

Chapter 5: CONCLUSION

Y.A narratives are often argued to be 'juvenile' by literary scholars as they often deal with teenage emotions and passive problem solving however, a closer analysis of contemporary Y.A literature explore themes of race, sex, teen pregnancy, poverty, rape and traumatic events. Y.A narratives explore the protagonist's 'coming – of – age' amidst problems they are challenged with.

Cultural relevance motivates not only reading culture but encourages critical thinking skills. Cathy Caruth observes that, "The wound of the mind—the breach in

the mind's experience of time, self and the world—is not, like the wound of the body, a simple and healable event, but rather an event that…is experienced too soon, too unexpectedly, to be fully known" (Caruth 4). To truly appreciate this concept, Y.A narratives are created for the existence of characters that grow their sense of identity using their perception of others and their relation to them. This can be seen in the growth of the main protagonist– Sumiko, Young Ju, Kimberly Chang and Dimple Lala. Their alternative story of growing up in a white community provoke the readers to expand their perceptions to include group identification which can reset the normative set of binaries like white vs. coloured, girls vs. boys, gay vs. straight and so on.

Adolescents who belong to minority groups are disproportionately still bullied and harassed due to their cultural background. The selected texts also show the disruption and distortion of a culture's traditional practice due to this conflict. This conflict of value system between the young and old Asian – Americans impacts the older generation harder than the younger generation. Trauma is created because of the miscommunications and the loss of a culture which has its own language. The younger generation in turn, are trying extremely hard to assimilate themselves into their adopted cultures and felt that their ancestors' cultural practices and beliefs have become antiquated and obsolete. There is deprivation of language between the two conflicting generations that cannot often be resolved easily as seen in Sumiko's narrative where her father, weary and bone-tired and lost in Mi Gook, (America), decides to go back to South Korea.

As mentioned in the study, cultural based stereotyping has an extremely negative effect on the psyche of hyphenated – Americans. It is extensive in the chosen texts as Chinese immigrants are often stereotyped as working in the clothing or sweatshop industries, Japanese and Koreans at menial jobs and the agriculture industry while Indians at technical and medical fields which are stereotypical occupational identities. The authors of these texts have placed their characters in the same menial station that stereotyping have put them but shows the history behind each station, countering the single story. These hyphenated minorities are then termed 'successful' in each of their respective fields and raised as 'model' citizens. They are not free of these restrictions as they themselves have police their

descendants to follow this code of living and to live outside these restrictions goes against the norm. Y.A literature does provide space for this conflict to be highlighted and resolve through comprehensive contemplation.

It is undeniable to note that Y.A literature continues to be the fastest growing area of genre in the contemporary publishing industry. It continues to provide space for multicultural authors to challenge established ideologies. In narrating their stories, the Asian – Americans and other hyphenated minorities face their traumas and reveal their secrets to a new generation of adolescents in an accessible manner that encourages understanding and empathy. Y.A literature by authors from diverse backgrounds has the power to bring about real world 'activism' and inspire real change.

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