Wong, Lindsay. (2018). The Woo-Woo: How I Survived Ice Hockey, Drug Raids, Demons, and My Crazy Chinese Family. Vancouver: Arsenal Pulp Press.

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Lindsay Wong's book, "The Woo-Woo: How I Survived Ice Hockey, Drug Raids, Demons, and My Crazy Chinese Family", is a memoir that describes her family's mental health issues utilizing a dark and comedic tone from their unique perspective of a Chinese immigrant family living in the crime stricken Vancouver suburbs. The Wong family suffers from generational mental health issues that, combined with their prominent superstitions, culminate into a family culture that depicts any physiological ailments, including basic emotions such as empathy or remorse as possessive ghosts, which they called the "Woo-Woo" (p. 9). In her book, Wong highlights the harrowing effects of mental health issues on her family with topics ranging from the changing family dynamics through maturation, family and community violence, absence and distrust in the western medical field, and coping mechanisms. The book follows Wong's perspective chronologically throughout her life from early childhood up until graduate school, where she manages to complete her MFA in non-fiction at Columbia University shortly after being diagnosed with severe migraine-related vestibulopathy.

Wong's personal growth is to be noted as her and her family dynamics continuously grow and evolve even while other aspects seem to remain the same. Throughout the early stages of the

book, signifying Wong's early childhood, she describes herself as a firstborn child classically wanting all the attention; which, in a family deprived of any typical nurturing qualities, was like "not being invited to a birthday party whose host you detested, yet everyone you knew had been invited and came back raving about the laser tag and the seven-layer ice cream cake" (p. 16). This longing for attention that never seemed attainable made Wong lash out at home and in school, using negative reinforcement as a stand-in for basic human affection. However, as she grew older and in the later stages of the book, Wong was exposed to different forms of family life, whether that was depicted through media outlets or her school peers, and it changed her desire from wanting to fit into this hectic family to being "terrified that I'd end up, broken and emotionally unmoored, like my mother and grandmother" (pp. 85-86).

Throughout the memoir, we also witness a shift in the family's behaviours, caused in part by legitimate personal growth from various members but also -almost more importantly- by a new insightful clarity in which Wong herself sees them. Early in the book, her mother is, and is perceived by Wong as a neurotic superstitious woman prone to episodic mental breakdowns who, besides feeding the children, provided no other nurturing support. While the change in her mother is minimal and perhaps mainly due to the change in perspective occurred by Wong, it remains an important insight into the dynamics of family life. At the end of the book, Wong is able to see her mother as someone who "only sought to protect their offspring from dead people" which, at least for her "Woo-Woo" inflicted mother, served as the utmost importance and signified a warped version of affection (p. 175). While her mother goes through a seemingly positive change, her favourite auntie is less fortunate. The aunt is seen as the one and only family role model for Wong

early on with no apparent signs of mental issues, which in this family are characterized as anyone that "performed tasks outside the house and was decently paid" (p. 46). However, the similarities Wong was once proud to share with her aunt quickly turned to terror after her aunt's tragic, and very public, suicide attempt on the Ironworkers Memorial Bridge.

The violence that takes place in Wong's family and community, which appears in different facets, represents the bleak reality that mental health issues can produce. In the Wong family, verbal abuse is rampant and no more so than Wong's father, a man that hides all emotional reactions behind sadistic jests. "If you won all your hockey game. . . she'd have stayed. No one like to watch loser. You need to win MVP so she will like you" (p. 36). Harsh examples such as this quote are found throughout the book, which generally represents a mask for Wong's father so that he does not have to face any of his insecurities head on.

Much of the family also relied heavily on physical violence, with Wong's entire life being a constant battle against her family and community. Wong describes herself "as a bad-tempered teenager, [who] had been forced to be my own mother and parent, only knowing how to solve issues with blunt force and violence" (p. 86). Whether it was fighting at school, having the most minutes in the penalty box, her own mom lighting her foot on fire, or beating on her little siblings and cousins, Wong was both victimized and a perpetrator of violence. Wong's tendencies for violence is also attributed to the neighbourhood that she grew up in. Living on "Pot Mountain", an isolated suburb, crime and violence were the norm, with police raids and gang wars happening regularly (p. 22). This environment, combined with the family's indifference to violence, led to a youth that communicated with fists rather than words and can be used as an important reminder of

the influence an unstable ecological system can have on a developing mind.

The notion of leaving violence unchecked is captured in the many instances in Wong's life where half-hearted attempts of support from medical professionals and other community members were never given a second look, and the already present distrust in western treatments was left to propagate. Wong and her family had multiple contacts with the medical field; however, no proper treatment was ever received. The family's negative predispositions towards western medicine are well documented throughout the book, which created a major barrier for medical professionals to provide any help. As Wong describes this predicament, "we still didn't believe in Western medication or psychiatrists, which meant that we prolonged our suffering" (p. 60). Wong herself also had several teachers and principles attempt to reach out to her parents, but the cultural and mental health barriers proved to be too strong, resulting in Wong's constant relocation of schools.

Wong's family despising western medicine and instead leaned towards their superstitious beliefs as an answer for all is part of another overarching theme in the book: the use of irregular coping mechanisms in an attempt to mask or stabilize emotions. As previously mentioned, the father's cruel jokes serve as his unique way to avoid any emotional regulations. However, coping mechanisms can be used in numerous ways, and the book did well in highlighting some of the damages that can be incurred while using them. Wong displayed a more classic coping mechanism by binge eating whenever she was faced with stress or other negative emotions, which is effectively depicted in the passage:

But everything that pooled and clamped onto my tongue tasted wrong and disloyal. No matter how much I ate, I did not feel like myself, and there was a queasiness, which could only be caused by the Woo-Woo and made me feel as if I were waiting to skydive off a crashing mini plane with no parachute.... And here I had genuinely thought that I could delay the Woo-

Woo by hiding out in a delusional fairy tale, pretending to be a carefree McPrincess.... Someone who did not have to worry about a family member who may have died a nine-hour time difference away. Someone who did not have to worry about becoming insane.... "Lindsay?" C.C. asked, looking worried, as she picked at her sludgy gelato. And I was immediately ashamed that I told her to fuck off. This was right before I puked on the café's sidewalk, sick splashing over our pedicured feet (p.137).

The memoir serves as an excellent and raw look into a family's mental health issues and the issues that develop as a result. Wong gives an in-depth and unfiltered insight into her family that can be used to shed light on the usually darkened and hidden topic of mental health. This book can be used as an anecdotal case study for disciplines including social work, child and youth care, psychology, and sociology, to name a few. While the book can be used in fields of academics involved both in child and family dynamics, Wong also describes the usage of the book for "anyone who has ever felt like an extraterrestrial bystander on Earth" (p. 5). While the book's unfiltered and authentic description of a family's battle with mental health is essential, it is worth mentioning that Wong's memoir can contain insensitive language and concepts that may not suit all audiences. Overall, the book is a unique addition to the sometimes overly clinical nature pertaining to mental health titles.