



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" is a coming-of-age memoir that uses dark and satirical humour to illustrate her dangerously bizarre upbringing in her Chinese immigrant household. In her recollections, Lindsay presents various critical aspects of her life that all include the Woo-Woo. The Woo-Woo's existence and the stories associated with it cause most to differentiate their childhoods from that of the author, leading to emotions such as dejection and pity. Her borderline abusive childhood and the resulting trauma lead Lindsay to reflect on her family's personality. Altogether, Lindsay narrates a powerful story and the events causing her pain. She also depicts overcoming these obstacles, leading to a transformative read. The book separates Lindsay's tales on a chapter basis, leading to a choppy organized memoir with the overarching theme of the Woo-Woo.

The Woo-Woo is a stand-in term for mental illness and describes those afflicted with mental disturbances or those who perform irrational behaviour. Throughout the book, it hereditarily advances through the family's women, sourcing from the author's maternal bloodline with her grandmother, Poh-Poh as the predecessor. As Lindsay reached the age of twenty, she questioned, "was the Woo-Woo an ineluctable punishment for the female descendants of Poh-

Poh” which hints and furthers the notion that it is a hereditary illness (p. 145). Continually, the

Wong’s are described as “inclined to nervous breakdowns, mainly in exciting, psychotic installments”, allowing many to believe that the Wong family were “more prone than other people for demonic possession” (p. 15).

However, Lindsay’s family believes the Woo-Woo is linked with the supernatural, including ghosts, ghost possession, and bad luck, explaining “our Chinese family still believed that these supernatural ghosts were responsible for irrational behaviour” (p. 60). Due to this, they believe that western medicine is fraudulent since “white people don’t know anything about ghosts” (pp. 169-170), leading their cultural beliefs to plague them in this sense without their realization.

Notably, the Woo-Woo is a Chinese cultural belief, mentioning it as the “vicious Chinese Woo-Woo” (p. 16). The intersection of being Canadian-Chinese while discussing the topic of mental health is difficult to explore for Lindsay. She is a second-generation immigrant and is aware of the Canadian health system but has beliefs of the Woo-Woo clouding her judgement. As she states, “we still didn’t believe in Western medication or psychiatrists, which meant that we prolonged our suffering” (p. 60). The only plausible cause for strange happenings, according to her family, would be ghosts. Being from a Chinese household with the Woo-Woo’s dominant view led to Lindsay suffering through her life.

Throughout Lindsay’s recollections, the belief that showing emotion meant that you were weak is continually brought forward, particularly from her father. He would make fun of Lindsay and her mother for their outbursts and used his first-rate dark humour to mock them. Being ‘weak’ in this sense is what would warrant demonic possession of the Woo-Woo.

This environment would lead any child to become socially deficient and emotionally repressed. Her immediate and extended family's constant verbal abuse caused Lindsay to only portray the emotions of anger, violence, and anxiety while reflecting her father's dark-humour. On several occasions, Lindsay used violence or harsh words to vent her internal feelings on anyone or anything that was unfortunately near. In her youth, she is confronted for having no empathy. She mentions:

'Empathy' was not a word my family could define, so of course I was raised to be 'empty.' Feelings, I had been taught, were for unseemly Poh-Pohs, pathetic people prone to demonic possession. The more vulnerable emotions, such as sadness, fear, and even affection, were seen as threats. Empathy was a luxury reserved for those with enough emotional reserves to care for more than themselves, who were beyond survival mode. My family had not gone beyond survival. I frequently rotated between fear and anger, spiraling into anxiety, and then plummeting into distress, but I could not explain the godawful WooWoo emotions inside me (p. 74).

Lindsay's childhood is borderline abusive, as descriptions of her childhood primarily contained her struggles and tragic events.

Unapologetically, the wording and description of events are curt, dark, and satirical. Lindsay uses humour as a coping mechanism, which is learned at a young age and expressed throughout the entirety of "The Woo-Woo". The illustration of characters' personalities and physical characteristics shows readers how filthy and obscene Lindsay's childhood was. For example, the newly moved-in pot-growing neighbour known as Lesser Michael Jackson has the description of "[having] teeth [that] were blackish yellow and fanged. The skin on her face had been badly bleached (there were still slug-coloured spots that someone had missed)" (p. 26). Lindsay would typically use her humour in scenarios that included these characters and the Woo-

Woo, as it often interested, confused, and scared her. However, it served as a medium for personal growth throughout her book.

Lindsay's memoir serves as a transformative coming-of-age story for overcoming hardship. Through the descriptions of harsh upbringing and lack of freedom, she has to hurdle over a final obstacle; migraine-related vestibulopathy. The intersection of being Chinese-Canadian brought her to a rational conclusion of a biological disturbance. Still, she always worried about the Woo-Woo's possibility and becoming 'possessed' just like her grandmother. Fortunately, being forced to pursue her future allowed her to accept who she could be, regardless of the outcome, and how to live with her newfound disease. Drawing her book to a close, the author concludes, "I felt that I had not been entirely Chosen by the Woo-Woo, and I was somewhat safe for now. So I slipped off my shoes, removed my jacket and belt, and watched them float, as if by sheer miraculous gravitation, past me on the conveyor belt" (pp. 177-178).

Dramatic examples, repetitive wording, and dark humour all lead to Lindsay's recollection of her childhood and illustrate her story. Although not directly mentioned, the audience can infer that various intersections played a prominent role in Lindsay's life and the hardships she lived through. The final chapter highlights that Lindsay's story is far from finished, leaving the audience on a high-note for such a depressingly humorous read. Since this book is a coming-of-age memoir, the author does not leave any direct purpose for the reader. However, her stories allow us to introspect and analyze ourselves and our own stories.

Lindsay's storytelling's humour and cynical nature make it a fun read for most people above the age of sixteen. Regardless of the field of study, people can enjoy this reading for what

it is, a dark-humoured memoir. Those who wish to use this as a comparative or research material would have to be from the social sciences such as sociology, politics, or psychology as those fields would find the most value. However, due to the constant swearing, it shortens the list of who should or want to read Lindsay's book.

Although Lindsay Wong weaved her story in a fun way that I am unfamiliar with, there were some complaints. There were moments that Lindsay used herself at the expense of the story, by which some of her recollections added very little to her development and how she became the person she is today. Her personality and actions seemed near-identical throughout each chapter. While remaining two dimensional, she elaborated on secondary characters such as Beautiful One and her mother, Quiet Snow, much more than herself. While other moments, I asked myself, "what is the point of this chapter" throughout the read.

The use of definitive language strongly conveys a point trying to be portrayed. Rather than using vague language, swapping to definitive language can promptly solve some of the outlined issues. I would also recommend including other transformative events that do not include the Woo-Woo. As it allows the author to expand on her person and give full context to the solidified traits she portrays herself with, such as angry or anxiety-ridden.

Overall, Lindsay Wong's "The Woo-Woo" was a comfortable read and was quite enjoyable all around. She showcases her own experience in a Chinese-Immigrant household and how her family interacts with their cultural beliefs, namely the Woo-Woo. It elaborates on mental illness and how she adjusted to interacting with the Woo-Woo. I would recommend this read to anyone interested in mental illness or those who have a dark sense of humour.