**What is the relationship between community and power in “Tradition” by Maria T. Allocco, and why does this matter?**

Older generation: Throughout the essay, I refer to older generations as those who lived through or those who faced the negative effects of the Korean War (June 25, 1950 - July 27, 1953) and prior.

The turmoil of searching for one’s identity and community through their parents is typical for children, but the Korean War and its aftermaths created a bitter climate for self-discovery to those who personally lived through it. Older generations during this period experienced unprecedented cultural transformations, divisions, poverty and living in ways which cannot be understood by younger generations. Younger generations, feeling burdened by the stories of the older generations, sought to be accepted and to empathize with their past, the archaic, Confucian and patriarchal traditions which restrained people from true happiness and freedom. Power from within acted as a catalyst for many younger generations to reflect on their identities and to determine which community they associate the most with. “Tradition” by Maria T. Allocco chronicles the realities and expectations of the author, growing up as a mixed, Korean-Italian, female in America. Being a mixed-race gives the author a sense of community within a society which she largely doesn’t identify with. However, as she learns more about her Korean heritage, it becomes clear that she conflates her personal identity not with the past ideals of the group, ultimately inhibiting her personal growth.

Younger generations are taught and introduced to their parents' culture early on to pass the traditions to future generations, despite not directly experiencing or having the same perspective with that community. Though the author is a mixed-race who grew up in a different generation and environment from her Korean ancestors, she grew up celebrating Korean traditions and cuisines as a child. At the beginning of the piece, the author presents a vivid description of a traditional Korean cuisine eaten during Lunar New Year -- dumpling soup (Mandu gook). At her grandmother’s house, she experienced the -- “miraculous luxuries” -- countryside of Korea where foods and resources are gathered directly from “mountain stream[s]” and nearby forests, where people are content with “scraps of meat and an egg.” As a child, the author is exposed to Korean traditions such as Lunar New Year and cultural embracement such as visiting the countryside when living in South Korea, majorly due to her mother’s desire for her to familiarize and embrace their Korean roots. While the author initially consumes her mother’s culture, she increasingly distances herself from her Korean identity because she feels that the traditions of “to never shame a mother” and to simply accept whatever the elders teach you feels authoritative and hindering her self-discovery. Retrospectively, with hindsight, I should have questioned my early introduction to my parent’s Korean culture and asked myself what I gain by frequently traveling to my grandparent’s house, learning and speaking the language, and celebrating traditional holidays such as Lunar New Year and Chuseok (Harvest Moon Festival), strongly maintaining my Korean identity in America. Growing up, I faced numerous burdens where I had to bow to a complete stranger simply because it is part of a greeting culture, nod in agreement to what elders say, and to embrace awkward group gatherings on traditional holidays. While the author’s mother’s intentions are to expose her daughters to various experiences, languages and cultures early, her excessive emphasis of their Korean identity places unintentional burden upon them such as “to keep suffering in” or “to never shame a mother” to the extent where the author feels obligated to accept all traditions even when she does not fit with that community. Furthermore, because the author and I identify more with our American identity, we are not able to understand the ideals of the Korean culture.

Having a sense of belonging and power is crucial for youths in order to feel happy in their communities. This is certainly the case for the author, whose mother and older generations don’t understand her. They carry out conventional lifestyles while reminiscing on their past and constantly criticizing her for not appreciating their sacrifices and neglecting her future possibilities of success. The author’s mother would “hold out her half-open fist” to show how small her portions were a day while the author was eating “pasta, stew and steak.” Despite having the luxury of eating home cooked dinner every night, the author is never fully satisfied because she feels weighed down by guilt. Rather, she is self-conscious on how she should behave and utilize her given opportunities. Because she realizes how difficult it was for her parents to immigrate to America and to provide her the privileges of food, shelter, and education, she feels obligated to succeed and to become even better than her mother who managed to be the “top student (in every subject)” at her school “while starving.” Increasing generation gap discourse within my community exists due to different cultural backgrounds, childhood experiences, and privileges. While I grew up speaking Korean predominantly in the household, it is still inevitable to feel as an outlier when my experiences are highly privileged than to my parents. Like the author, I was given the opportunity to become a native English speaker, to study with phenomenal teachers, resources and peers, and to explore various clubs and sports. While the author is appreciative of her parent’s sacrifices, because she cannot relate to their responsibilities and exclusion from society because they were poor and immigrants, it ultimately obstructs her sense of belonging in her community happily.

Communities are powerful yet tend to be oppressive towards those who do not belong. This is reflective of the author who faces biases that she will not be able to understand their heritage because she is not entirely Korean and lived in a more fortunate upbringing. While it is partially true that the author will never comprehend the older generation’s way of normalizing corruption and discrimination such as how educational systems were permitted to receive bribes and physically beat students, her issues were overlooked and compared to their past which is still a form of oppression. Similarly, second generations including myself face this issue when we try to explain our issues to the older generations but to only get a dry response along the nuance of “oh, well back in my day…” By neglecting and comparing youth’s real problems, older generations unintentionally discredit their power within that community. Because of recurring moments of belittlement, the author is stressed by her identity to the extent where she starves herself in order to share their experiences and feel less like a “parasite” in her family. This illustrates how not all communities are inclusive or fitting to every personality and character.

Cancel culture -- an act of boycotting or exhibiting immoral behavior -- is an effective method to gain power or to make a bold statement in a community. In the case for the author’s mother, when she felt powerless and discriminated within her community or when the richest girl in school – the daughter of a government official befriended her, she took pride in herself on “never needing anyone” by acting coldly and rejecting everyone. Rather, she reflected upon herself and refused to be looked down upon despite her lowly status, turning away with her “head held high” as if she was equal in status as the daughter of the government official. Alike, due to numerous comparative harangues and outcast treatment by her parents and their community, the author boycotted by deliberately starving herself, a form of self-harm that functioned as a shield to protect herself from hatred and to empathize with her parents, but it simultaneously leaves her isolated and alone. Personally, I can’t help but to feel powerless when I speak to my grandparents or my father because I can’t respectfully disagree with them without coming off as disgraceful. This is because some older generations tend to be extremely conservative, homophobic and male-dominating, so it is expected that one perform the socially accepted role in order to avoid being victimized. Because of these instances, it is significant to recognize that identity is not static or an essentialized thing but rather a fluid term defined by a series of social constructions and expectations. Because identity is unique to one’s personality, it is beneficial to recognize that younger generations (especially mixed individuals) are struggling because they do not fit into traditional roles that are often expected and glorified by some older generations.

One way the author tries to empathize and to understand the significance of her community is by indirectly replicating and learning about their history. Influenced by China, Confucianism emerged and became a fundamental normative in Korea. The role that woman plays in the “Tradition” hints at a male/female binary which is reflected in Korea’s Confucius patriarchal morals, where females are seen as passive figures, as less valuable than men, as sex objects or as a luxury for those with financial leniency. During the Korean War, it was “precious to have a daughter;” at the time, “many were thrown away” because it was a normalized tradition to abandon their daughters in order to survive. Because older generations of Korea hold a conservative and Confucius mindset, younger generations (i.e. author and myself) face unwritten yet understood rules of hierarchy within gender, age and financial status. While modern perspectives of hierarchy are more adaptive, older generations who undermine the achievements of women and expect younger generations to follow still dominate authoritative positions in politics and in the workforce. Thus, it is crucial that both modern and older generations learn to create a more open community, allowing individuals with different aspects of race, genders, traditions, and status to establish a more inclusive community, ultimately decreasing the burden and expectations upon future generations.

Instead of prioritizing traditions and expectations, both generations need to learn empathy in order to mend broken relationships and find happiness. This is because empathy can assist individuals to ask the simple yet direct question -- what they should have done differently. At the end of the piece, the author and mother share a brief moment of empathy where the mother apologizes and the author says, “If I could expel all our suffering and feed her, I would,” indicating that both are attempting to improve, reflect, and respect their different communities. Empathy may be a solution one can learn in order to strengthen relationships but also to gain humility and broader perspectives. While the author’s mother’s intentions are to share her personal traditions, the author feels that she has more memories of her mother’s childhood than her own because the mother overshares her painful memories. However, it is understandable that the mother lacks empathy because not everyone is “a natural” nor comfortable with showing a state of vulnerability.

“Tradition” is an elaborate piece that brings the themes of tradition and relationships between the older generation and younger generation as well as an individual to their community. While the piece highlights the perspective of the author who resides more with the younger generation, the concept of cultural transformations and class divisions after the Korean War, Confucian beliefs and traditions, and the bittersweet moments of power and identity crises provides the readers with insight on how both generations are restricted from true happiness and freedom. Because the older generations are tied down by their painful past and the younger generations feel burdened by their stories, it is important to first recognize whether that individual wants to associate with that community, especially if they did not experience or grow up in the same circumstances. Allocco quintessentially asserts that because communities are exclusive and oppressive to those who do not belong, it is vital to find a positive balance and relationship between where one belongs in their community and whether they believe, accept and have a voice in their community through empathy in order to truly embrace their cultural traditions and differences.