

Family relationships in "the moths" and "saving sourdi" essay



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The progression from adolescence to adulthood is one of the most complicated periods in one's life.

Naivete and inexperience become insecurities, and the expectations a family places on children sometimes overwhelm their desire to thrive. Although society likes to paint pictures of perfect family relationships and what they are expected to be, they are more often riddled with trials and tribulations that do not always have a happy ending. "The Moths" by Helena Maria Viramontes and "Saving Sourdi" by May-lee Chai are prime examples of youth struggling to achieve acceptance. In "The Moths", the narrator realizes that she does not satisfy her family's expectations, but she is not willing to relent to the pressure they put on her to conform. As a result, she embraces a rebellious attitude and counters with violence to her sister's constant ridicule: "

. . my sisters laughed and called me bull hands with their cute waterlike voices. So I began keeping a piece of jagged brick in my sock to bash my sisters or anyone who called me bull hands" (168). As expected, her father responds with whippings and her mother simply sends her to Mama Luna's to "avoid another fight and another whipping" (168).

What she saw as a personal moral decision her family saw as unbecoming behavior. Her father "would pound his hands on the table, rocking the sugar dish or spilling a cup of coffee and scream that if I didn't go to Mass every Sunday to save my goddamn sinning soul, then I had no reason to go out of the house, period. Punto final" (169). On top of these Page 2 Hardships, the narrator is also dealing with an image problem and feels like she "isn't even

pretty or nice like [her] older sisters and just couldn't do the girl things they could do" (168). Nea, from May-lee Chai's "Saving Sourdi", has multiple conflicts as well. Nea seems to be dealing with a similar image issue as the narrator from the other story: "She was smooth where I had angles and soft where I was bone.

. . Looking at Sourdi, I could pretend I was beautiful, too" (113). Another struggle is how Nea sees her big sister as sort of a father figure, and in that way her conflicts loosely relate to Freud's Electra Complex because the men in Sourdi's life seem to smother Sourdi's love for Nea. Along with these "daddy issues," Nea was also conflicted with her family's ideals of love and marriage, arranged marriage in this case. She pleads with Sourdi, "You're only twenty, for Chrissake.

You don't have to live like this. Ma is wrong. You can be anything" (122). The narrator in "The Moths" finds in her grandmother a sanctuary from the turmoil she experiences at home, "I always felt her gray eye on me.

It made me feel, in a strange sort of way, safe and guarded and not alone. Like God was supposed to make you feel" (168-69). Her grandmother helps her realize that there can be a halfway point between femininity and strength, as well as freewill and tenderness. Her grandmother's guidance develops the narrator's capacity to follow her heart. In the other story, Nea reveals a deep-rooted closeness with her older sister, Sourdi, in a couple of different ways: "We used to say that we'd run away, Sourdi and me. When we were older.

After she graduated. She'd be my legal guardian. The sisters shared the same dream of escaping to Cambodia "to light incense for the bones of our father," and Sourdi openly expressed dread at the thought that they could be separated, "They could take you away. The police, they could put you in a foster home. All of us" (112). As with the narrator's feelings of alienation when she was away from her grandmother, Nea also felt alone unless she was with Sourdi, as evidenced by the statement that she "would stay awake all night, pinching the inside of Sourdi's arm, the soft flesh of her thigh, to keep my sister from falling asleep and leaving me alone" (112).

Unfortunately, the only thing certain in life is death. The narrator in "The Moths" soon loses her foundation of strength as her grandmother dies. Her grandmother's moment of death is described as the moment of "illumination, where the sun and the earth meet, a final burst of burning red orange fury, reminding that although endings are inevitable, they are necessary for re-births" (171). Even as her grandmother's life ended, her moral fiber, wisdom, and values were passed along to her granddaughter. Nea's relationship with Sourdi did not end in physical death, but rather in the death of their relationship.

Sourdi's acceptance of the arranged marriage that their mother set up signaled the initiation of the relationship's decline. What happens in fact, is that Sourdi chooses reality over Nea and continuing their shared dream of escaping. She hides away her love for Nea in order to ground herself in her prearranged life. Nea described the experience with an anecdote about "a magic serpent, the Naga, with a mouth so large, it could swallow people whole," but in losing her sister, she finds that she has "no magic powers. <https://assignbuster.com/family-relationships-in-the-moths-and-saving-sourdi-essay/>

None whatsoever" (123). Whereas the narrator from "The Moths" gleans experience and wisdom from her loved one, Nea walks away feeling disenchanted, depressed, and destroyed.

Through the experiences in these stories and through probable experiences grounded in real life, it can be concluded that the fairytale family relationship that society favors is more myth than reality. While it feels warm and fuzzy to hear about ideal family relationships, they can't exist in reality because the fact of the matter is that life is riddled with trials and tribulations that do not always have a happy ending. Page 4 Works Cited Meyer, Michael, Ed. The Compact Bedford Introduction to Literature. 4th ed.

Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's Press 2005. Chai, May-lee. "Saving Sourdi.

" Meyer, 110-123. Viramontes, Helena Maria. "The Moths." Meyer, 168-171.