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### **Bridging the Fragmented Identities and Experiences of Immigrant and Queer Women of Color: A Queer Analysis of the Film *Everything Everywhere All at Once***

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Bridging the Fragmented Identities and Experiences of Immigrant and Queer Women of Color:

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

The film *Everything Everywhere All at Once* (2022) has forged historical bridges across the concepts of multimedia, intersectionality, and radical identities. Written and directed by directorial duo Daniel Kwan and Daniel Schienert, known as the Daniels, the project originally birthed in 2010 has received worldwide critical acclaim for its formidable storytelling, directing, editing, and acting and has recently made history as the most-awarded film. Starring Michelle Yeoh, Ke Huy Quan, and Stephanie Hsu, this film tells the story of an interdimensional battle between Asian American mother-daughter duo Evelyn and Joy Wong. This battle at its core explores the queer identities of both characters, who eventually become sources of strength for each other by way of their unique experiences that once seemed to only alienate them. The story in *Everything Everywhere All at Once* (EEAAO) has been told many times before, queer daughter at odds with an immigrant mother who is uncomfortable with her child's unfamiliar identity. Yet, this film opts out of conventional political righteousness and token LGBTQ+ representation. This is not a film where the main character runs away from home to a more accepting space or where the mother eagerly signs up to become a left-wing activist in blind support of her child. Instead, EEAAO takes the time to explore the depth and history behind the pain that exists in a family like that of Evelyn (Yeoh), Waymond (Quan), and Joy Wong (Hsu). This exploration aims to achieve a new, empathetic, and hopeful resolution for the wounded bodies at the center of the film and bridges these experiences and identities in ways rarely seen in media.

The film develops its plot through the concept of the multiverse, a popular tool in recent films used to explore realities outside of original plot lines and the consequences of stepping outside of one's own universe. This concept is used by the Daniels to explore the main

characters' intersectional identities as queer women, women of color, immigrants, and first-generation women, and, as I will discuss in this paper, the fragmentation and liminality that comes with these unique experiences. Evelyn and Joy's ability to interact with the multiverse by "verse-jumping" into alternate versions of themselves opens the conversation surrounding the value of identity, life, relationships, etc. The introduction of the antagonist Jobu Tupaki, who is in fact an alternate version of Joy from a different universe, brings to the table a nihilistic, anti-system, and self-destructive perspective that is shown to be a painful consequence of existing in an extremely liminal and fragmented state through which identity becomes futile. While Jobu is an exaggerated example of this state, the film seamlessly ties aspects of Jobu to Evelyn herself suggesting that the pain Evelyn deals with is not far off from what has left Joy detached from life. The radical storytelling and fascinating directing of this film manage to tell a familiar tale of silent suffering and discord in the lives of immigrants and queer folk, powerfully depicting the ways in which the wounds inflicted are not loud and visible but still powerful and haunting.

*Everything Everywhere All at Once* successfully communicates the effects of these silent and invisible wounds on these equally silent and invisible bodies, and the incredibly queer experiences that result for many people in these communities. As Joy Wong becomes the main antagonist Jobu Tupaki we see her embody queer liminality and wield it as her main source of power and protection, echoing writings of queer scholars who explore the power of wounds and invisibility in the communities at the center of EEAAO (Mohammad, June). Similarly, Evelyn Wong must learn to use the wounds of her fragmented identity as sources of strength to save her daughter who is being consumed by the painful state she is stuck in. Accordingly, a film such as this one calls into question the way fragmented and liminal identities bridge communities and

experiences across all genders, ethnicities, and sexualities. In *Everything Everywhere All at Once* queer experiences are centered through a revolutionary exploration of the fragmented. The intersectionality of Evelyn and Joy's different identities is achieved by the film through the acknowledgment of their queerly fragmented states of existence. Thus, the film finds a conclusion that gives hope to the lost and unwanted parts of each of us that have kept many trapped in this liminal, fragmented state; hope that we may not be alone.

Building off the work of scholars who explore fragmentation and wounded female bodies, queer experiences in immigrant and woman communities, and the liminality present in these, I aim to posit the film *Everything Everywhere All at Once* as an important contemporary exploration of queer theory and the intersectionality between queer studies, immigration studies, and Asian American studies. This paper will establish how this film bridges the stories of immigrant and queer communities by exploring the experiences of both groups as queer experiences. I will begin by discussing the queer existence and impact of the antagonist Jobu Tupaki, then explore the queer existence of Evelyn as an immigrant woman, to finally present how their individual fragmented identities are brought together to resist the structures that have been harming them. Additionally, I will supplementally explore the contextual history of Asian American immigration, Asian cinema and directorial influences, and the marginalized communities in this film.

Before heading into the main arguments of my paper I would like to develop the concept of fragmentation as it will be read and cited in this paper. Fragmentation has been written about usually as a style of writing and telling stories in both modern and postmodern literature. Yet, another concept of fragmentation arises through the conversation surrounding identity and self-perception. In this analysis, fragmentation and liminality are codependent although not

interchangeable terms. I draw from uses of the term by scholars who study literature that deals with the experiences of queer women of color, and often immigrant experiences as well. The book "The Fragmented Body and Identity" by Pamela B. June explores the fragmented stories, identities, and experiences of what she refers to as multiethnic women in different writings by women of color. In the introduction of her book June writes, "the fragmented female body becomes the means through which women recognize their shared historical wounds and can thus potentially unite in order to resist oppressions caused by patriarchy, racism, and heteronormativity" (2).

Throughout my research for this analysis, I have found that many scholars seem to agree on the empowerment that is born and wielded by immigrant groups, queer communities, and women of color that experience fragmented and liminal concepts of life and self. As June states, "The fragmented body is often wounded, scarred, or mutilated in some way, symbolizing a violent history of oppression based on gender, race, ethnicity, class or sexuality" (3).

Fragmentation is born out of oppression and pain, the same way the liminal experience is born out of silence and invisibility. These states of being are the backbone to many of the stories told by and for the groups whom I speak to in this paper, and to the queer exploration at the center of *Everything Everywhere All at Once*. Thus, this paper argues that the fragmentation of the mind and the concept of identity, illustrated by Jobu Tupaki, is equally as important as the fragmentation of the body in the stories of women of color that June analyzes.

## **2. JOBU TUPAKI AS A QUEER CHARACTER**

Jobu Tupaki stems from a radically queer and intersectional identity that can be incredibly hard to navigate. Before Evelyn Wong comes to understand the origins of Jobu and her motivations, Jobu is described as chaotic and destructive, "with no real motives or desires"

*(Everything Everywhere All at Once 36:10)*; a relentless force set out to destroy the universe.

This initial understanding of Jobu is not that much different from the language used to address the LGBTQ+ community and even immigrant and POC communities. The topics of sexuality, gender, immigration, inter-racial couples, and so forth are often treated as threatening forces by those desperate to hang on to traditional concepts of identity and life typically aligned with whiteness. Gender politics and LGBTQ+ rights are often deemed as agendas set out to destroy the foundations of everything we know, echoing sentiments from Alpha Waymond who warns Evelyn as he says, "Our institutions are crumbling" (*Everything Everywhere All at Once 37:13*). Immigrants too have been referred to as destructive and corruptive forces to American society by anti-immigrant advocates. Consequently, we can understand that the incredibly intersectional identity of Evelyn's daughter Joy, a lesbian, first-generation, Asian woman, is no accident. Stemming from Joy's intersectional identity, Jobu's ability to feel everything, as she describes it, produces a being capable of understanding the universe around her in a radically queer way.

Similarly, to understand this film in its complexity one first must tackle the queerness Jobu represents, but more importantly why her queerness was sought out by many to eradicate it. As Jobu becomes the driving force in transforming Evelyn and their relationship as mother and daughter, she is presented with the possibility of changing the world. In embodying an unapologetically queer existence, Jobu represents the fears of many people who are desperate to be validated by the same systems that oppress them. Fears that encompass what it might mean to step outside of these systems and find unity in something other than what has been imposed on society for decades. When Stephanie Hsu first appears on screen as Jobu there is a striking scene in which she kills, or rather eradicates, a police officer who is speaking to her using the term

'can't' as he attempts to escort her out of the building. "Is it that I can't be here? Or that I'm not allowed? ... See I can physically be here, but what you meant to say is you're not allowing me to be here" (*Everything Everywhere All at Once* 53:45-54:09). Jobu's hyper fixation on the meaning of 'can't' is an immediate introduction to her destabilizing nature. Questioning a police officer for starters is an action many, especially in minority communities, would not dare to do. Jobu represents literally and metaphorically a deep questioning of the way people are policed and at the core of that idea, the fear of resisting such policing.

In considering Jobu's identity as the intersectional Joy, it becomes apparent that her liminality allows Jobu to take on these challenging positions in the world around her. Sabrina Alimohamad explores the existence of queer women of color, specifically their invisibility in their many communities and identities, and the newfound mobility and empowerment through this. "Their invisibility translates to a flexibility that challenges allegiance to any one space or political position, which offers room to maneuver" (Alimohamad 154). Joy's sense of invisibility is not hard to understand, for in only the first ten minutes of the film the audience can feel the barriers between Joy and her mother as Evelyn ignores the conversation Joy is trying to have with her about coming out to Joy's grandfather. This introduction presents Joy's inability to be fully seen, heard, or comprehended. In this universe, as a queer woman of color, it can be inferred that this was not the only relationship or community dynamic in which Joy was invisible. We later see how Joy's inability to communicate with her grandfather is taken advantage of by her mother who interjects and robs Joy of the opportunity to come out to him. If this is her experience in her own home, one can only imagine that this is no different to what Joy experiences on a day-to-day basis in other spaces.

Joy, still before the introduction of Jobu, is already a subject that only exists liminally, between the boundaries of who she is expected to be as an Asian daughter and woman, and who she desires to be. Alimohamad further explains, "Their (queer WOC) presumed foreignness posits them as temporary and ephemeral subjects. It is precisely their 'not really here nor there' subject location that shapes their exclusion and frames their creative ability to resist" (154). Because queer women of color are believed incapable of fulfilling any of their identities in the ways society expects them to, they become easily dismissible and marginalized in each of their communities. This description of the existence of queer women of color is an incredibly accurate depiction of the later introduced Jobu Tupaki, who is contemplated by everyone as a foreign and threatening force that must be terminated. Despite this perception of her, Jobu can simultaneously exist and move silently between universes getting the best of her opponents, reflecting what Alimohamad described as creative ways to resist.

Interestingly, while it is not stated if and what other versions of Joy/Jobu identified as queer, the audience can understand that at the very least all versions of her still felt this invisibility, primarily because of her mother Evelyn. In the Alpha-verse Joy (who may have been gay or straight) was unheard, unadvocated for, and uncared for. Alpha Joy lacked the autonomy to stand up for herself and reject the processes and goals her mother had already set for her. Regardless of an explicitly queer identity, we can understand that Joy's felt invisibility led to and garnered her the strength to become the force of Jobu Tupaki. In this way, one can gather that liminality and fragmented identity plays a key part in queer experience and empowerment for the characters in this film, apart from labels. Ultimately, this is what makes Jobu Tupaki a radically queer character, as she reaches a state of being where identity binaries such as sexuality become such a minuscule part of who she is and what she wants. Though acceptance is undoubtedly a

key part of the final moral lesson, the film constantly pushes further leading to the central idea of existing to the fullest by disregarding the noise that makes it hard to exist.

It is interesting to note that although Jobu is the revered and almost all-powerful force of the film who pushes everyone to learn this radical queer truth, her intention for 98 percent of the film's run-time was to end her life. Though the power she finds in her queer and intersectional identity makes her a revered figure, it eventually becomes the source of a nihilistic understanding of the universe: something that is temporary, meaningless, and futile. Jobu Tupaki did not want the end of the film to be a queer awakening for her mother and herself as they learned to love each other. Jobu Tupaki had no clue that by the end of a chaotic multi-dimensional battle she would feel free in her painfully broken self. Jobu already had a truth through the Everything Bagel, a bagel that represented the black hole of her existence under the weight of so many expectations, disappointments, and sufferings. In this light, the film leads us to the conclusion that a queer understanding of life is not enough to move forward outside of the limbo that is being a queer person, or an immigrant, or simply lost. There is more to queer theory than the idea that "nothing matters". Beyond destroying norms, labels, and burning down oppressive systems, how can we actually move forward? How can one actually live?

The answer is bleak and perhaps underwhelming, but the film does not shy away from it. The film's protagonist Evelyn openly admits there is no way that at least in any of our current lifetimes we will be free from the wounds that have marked us, or the harmful systems that are to blame. Yet, her care for her daughter both as Joy and as Jobu motivates her to keep hoping and fighting for seconds of happiness and love with her. If fragmentation is all they have, then she will love every fragment of Joy. If liminality is all they can ever reach, then she will exist liminally next to Joy. In this newfound hope of existence, Joy and Evelyn vow to live every

moment together to the fullest regardless of how short or sensible. Though this hope may not amount to any legislative or substantial change in the systemically oppressive world around them, the audience can feel that what these two characters gain is beyond the world they are enclosed in. In the end, Evelyn helps Jobu reach this ultimately queer awakening as she saves her from suicide, but it was Jobu's initial queerness that had to come first in order to challenge Evelyn and the systems around them that had not yet been questioned.

### **3. EVELYN WONG: UNDERSTANDING THE IMMIGRANT EXPERIENCE AS QUEER**

Evelyn Wong is introduced in a fast-paced shot as she deals with income tax documentation, washing machines breaking down, a hungry elderly father, and a queer daughter who she has no time to listen to or accommodate. For anyone with an immigrant family this is a familiar picture of a mother who simply has too much on her plate. For the viewers of *Everything Everywhere All at Once*, this serves as an introduction to the fragmented identity of Michelle Yeoh as Evelyn even before Jobu appears on screen. Evelyn is a mother, wife, daughter, business owner, and several other things before she can be Evelyn. Her suppressed desires and dreams come through during small moments, like when she dissociates looking at a musical playing in the background of her locale or when the IRS auditor calls out all the hobbies Evelyn tries to claim as businesses. When Jobu appears as a villain that is being chased by the whole universe, Evelyn is called upon by Alpha-Waymond, a version of her husband Waymond that is charismatic, strong, and smart, to join him in defeating her daughter. Alpha-Waymond, when introducing Evelyn to the multiverse, introduces her to all the lives she could have lived. In fact, he states Evelyn has the ability to match Jobu because she is at her worst in this life, giving her access to the endless possibilities she's missed out on. Here the film explores the concept of the

multiverse and "verse-jumping", a technique that allows characters to connect to alternate versions of themselves with unique identities, emotions, and skills. Evelyn Wong, having a plethora of unfulfilled desires, dreams, and skills, learns so much about herself through the multiverse and becomes powerful through her current fragmented and liminal state. The film highlights that many of the other selves Evelyn gains new skills from are single, have not immigrated, or both. Through this, the film informs the audience that Evelyn's identity is so lacking as a direct result of her intersectional identity as an Asian American immigrant, woman, mother, and so forth. This places Evelyn Wong as equally fragmented and liminal a character as her queer daughter and antithesis. This is an element of Evelyn that can be understood further through reading on the Asian American identity and experience that show liminality has been present in this community for decades, at times stemming and reaching outside of the confines of life in America.

Starting from around the 1850's with Chinese immigrant labor happening in waves to supply manpower for the Transcontinental Railroad, the Asian American collective joined other non-white ethnic groups in being evaluated based on their potential whiteness. As many other groups faced, the identity and experience of Asian Americans would be based on how removed from Black people they could be. As explained by scholar Claire Jean Kim, this resulted in a racial triangulation that places Asian Americans as "superior to Blacks yet permanently foreign and unassimilable with Whites" (Kim 109). This type of racialization would fluctuate based on the needs and wants of the white community and on the political meaning of one's individual identity as Asian American, i.e., a Japanese American person during World War II would move further away from whiteness during that time. This type of unstable identity undoubtedly presents a liminal existence for the community, especially through the fluctuations of the labels

Asian, Asian-American, and American. Kim explains how this racialization and triangulation would become coded after the Civil Rights Movement with emerging concepts in race and ethnic issues such as color blindness, Affirmative Action, and the Model Minority Myth (Kim 116-122).

Scholars also discuss the fragmentation of these identities through other lenses, such as understanding Asian American immigration through U.S. neo-imperialism in regions such as Vietnam, South Korea, and the Philippines (Eng 37). Queer and Asian American studies scholar David L. Eng writes about queerness in the Asian American community that stems from this beyond-the-border existence in which the otherness of immigrants is instilled at times even before they migrate. As Eng writes, "queerness comes to describe, affect, and encompass a much larger Asian American constituency— whatever their sexual identity or practices— whose historically disavowed status as U.S citizen-subjects under punitive immigration and exclusion laws render them "queer" as such" (41). Eng's article, "Out Here and Over There: Queerness and Diaspora in Asian American Studies, " explores queerness as existing intersectionality through different "formations" (42) that only exist in relation to each other. While Eng does not use the words liminal or fragmented to describe these modes of existing, it is clear through his exploration of identities beyond the borders of the U.S, the instability of home for Asian American communities, and the queerness of the immigrant community that there is a common sense of liminality that provides room for this discourse surrounding the community.

Along with the struggles of existing in the confines of motherhood and all the other roles she has been tasked with, Evelyn Wong also carries the weight of the liminality that comes with her Asian American identity. On top of the many concepts that it explores, this film does not overlook the wounded and lost side of immigrant Evelyn who after so many years in the U.S. is

still struggling to navigate the systems that have not been built for her and refuse to nudge. One of the main struggles the film showcases is her relationship with her father, symbolizing the generational differences and sexism Evelyn has felt. When Evelyn first gets introduced to verse-jumping, there is a scene where her current life flashes before her eyes from the moment she was born. This short montage shows two critical moments that define Evelyn's relationship with her father known in the film as Gong-Gong: her birth, when Gong-Gong makes a sour face after being told the sex of his child, and her departure from her home country, in which Gong-Gong makes no attempt to stop her. Evelyn's departure is proven time and time again to be a point of uncertainty and regret for her, as all her alternate realities seem to be heavily impacted by her decision to immigrate or stay behind. However, we learn that her father's lack of care turned out to be a painful part of her identity when Evelyn stops Alpha Gong-Gong from killing Jobu/Joy saying "I am no longer willing to do to my daughter what you did to me. How did you let me go? How on earth did you do it so easily?" (*Everything Everywhere All at Once* 1:59:42-54).

This seemingly generational struggle, in which Evelyn suffers her father's detachment and is later detached from her queer daughter, proves to lean into a struggle of identity. A focus on this detachment can provide a new understanding when it comes to the issue of Asian American racial identity and liminal existence, especially when considering where exactly this identity might begin. As Eng explains, the history of colonization and U.S. involvement in the displacement of Asian communities' results in the need for understanding Asian American racialization "in relation to a model of subjection and subordination beyond the real or imaginary borders of the U.S" (37). This quote then begs the question: does the detachment from one's home begin before or after immigration? If the borders of the U.S. have proven to be imaginary,

considering the ways American ideology, language, and culture extend beyond the states, then how stable is the idea of a home or a nation to begin with? Consequently, Evelyn's strained and distant relationships with her father and daughter can be understood as inevitable when it has been decided they too shall have unstable identities regardless of the merits and efforts of them individually or of Evelyn herself. This parallels the systems that are in place in the world's leading nation, in which racism, sexism, and other oppressive structures prove time and time again to still impact one's racialized identity, opportunities, and even one's survival. What results is a completely queer and liminal experience of the "other" for the Asian American community as claimed by scholars like Eng, who recognize that the total intersectionality of immigrant and POC communities render an understanding that can only come from recognizing their own complexity and queerness.

What precedes Evelyn is as important as what creates Jobu Tupaki, and similarly cannot be disregarded. The history of exclusion, oppression, and othering is a legacy that cannot be brushed off and must not be ignored when aiming to analyze the queer and liminal experiences of the communities at the center of a film such as *Everything Everywhere All at Once*. Evelyn's fragmentation happens literally in the film as she becomes like Jobu, breaking her mind to travel interdimensionally in hopes to save her daughter. Yet, her ability to reach the precipice of a queer experience such as this stems from her own intersectional identity showcasing that she is more than an antithesis of Jobu Tupaki, she is a direct parallel of her. Evelyn's experience in her marginalized identity offers her the same level of power to combat and resist that we see in her daughter. Thus, understanding the immigrant experience as queer in this sense opens the conversation up to a plethora of intersections that arise from the large history both Evelyn and Joy/Jobu carry, especially as women in these marginalized spaces.

#### **4. BRIDGING IMMIGRANT AND QUEER IDENTITIES & EXPERIENCES**

Through the film we see how as Evelyn explored her wounds without restraints for the first time, she unlocked repressed hopes and dreams that she realized were accessible precisely because of her liminal existence. Correspondingly, a closer look at Jobu's powerful and momentous nature shows that she was born out of the wounds that had previously caged her in a fragmented and liminal identity. Tying this back to her identity as Joy Wong, the lesbian daughter of immigrants, paving the way for a clear message about immigrant, queer, women of color experiences. Still, it is undeniable the complete queerness of Jobu arises because she is the manifestation (although a grim one) of refusing any and all boundaries such as is proposed by many Queer scholars. As explained by an essay from Kellie Toyama, "... Jobu Tupaki is queer because she likes women, but also because of her campy, comical, nihilistic, yet sensitive character that aims to disrupt reality in her "fractured" state of mind..."(2). Jobu's catchphrase "nothing matters" is a nihilistic take on the work of queer scholars and theorists who aim to think beyond heteronormative, sexist, classist systems that dictate our lives. Jobu's queer identity is important, but still more crucial to this story is her disregard for labels and categories and expectations that have led to the total collapse of her identity. Though her queerness emerges through her experience as a queer Asian American woman, Joy learns how to live in this intersectional body in a way that she is not bound by it. To empathize and understand her daughter on the brink of suicide, Evelyn must also reach this completely queer empowerment.

Such existence echoes writings and claims of intersectional scholars from decades prior such as Gloria Anzaldua, that demonstrate they are still relevant in the conversation around the female body and how it navigates intersectional and liminal identity. In Anzaldúa's *Borderlands*, she explores the ambiguous identity of "La Mestiza" who juggles being perceived and likewise

how to perform all her identities from different points of view such as Indian, Anglo, and Mexican (78). Anzaldúa writes "she is subjected to a swamping of her psychological borders. She has discovered that she can't hold concepts or ideas in rigid boundaries" (79). While *Everything Everywhere All at Once* focuses on the Asian American and queer story, Anzaldúa's sentiments resonate deeply with scholars like Alimohamad; both at their core analyzing how the female body deals with and empowers herself from the same oppressions positing her in such a marginalized state and liminal existence. Through Anzaldúa's claims, one can also draw back to Eng who specifically tackles queer and Asian American identity, specifically the instability of how and where it begins, which Anzaldúa refers to as ambiguity throughout her book. These scholars present the importance of honoring and analyzing unique identities and communities, while simultaneously acknowledging the formidable refusal or rather inability of these identities to be restricted by borders, boundaries, and labels.

Another key concept is presented in the scene where Alpha-Waymond explains to Evelyn why they must stop Jobu's threatening queer existence naming one of the primary motives as "how to get it back", it being a stable life in the institutions widely known and accepted though usually predatory and oppressive. This nostalgia for a seemingly stable past rooted in systemically superficial acts of nationalism, heterosexuality, even familial performances (perhaps of the perfect daughter in Evelyn's case) lends itself only to a queer understanding through the fragmented and wounded body. In the book, *Impossible Desires*, Gayatri Gopinath explains, "what is remembered through queer diasporic desire and the queer diasporic body is a past time and place riven with contradictions and the violences of multiple uprootings, displacements, and exiles" (4). Gopinath explores the instability of queer identities resulting from the inflicted violences on queer bodies through histories of sexism, queerphobia, and more. This is

reminiscent of Eng's exploration of the liminal Asian American identity produced by colonialism and displacement of these communities. Jobu's intersectional identity as an Asian American queer woman thus results in a heightened state of fragmentation which is explored in the film.

What remains is a universal experience at hand for these otherized groups; the queer nostalgia for a whole or otherwise a home. This demonstrates how the queer experience encompasses the liminal, fragmented and nostalgic desires of these communities. Gopinath continues, "Queer diasporic cultural forms and practices point to submerged histories of racist and colonialist violence that continue to resonate in the present ... By making female subjectivity central to a queer diasporic project, it begins instead to conceptualize diaspora in ways that do not ... replicate heteronormative and patriarchal structures..." (4-5). This is an important thought to consider as this paper analyzes two female bodies at the center of this film utilized to bridge communities and stories that are not often regarded in relation to each other. The connection of these two characters, each queer, fragmented and empowered in their own way, allows for an analysis that considers the intersections and shared experiences of two marginalized groups. However, the subjugation of two liminal and fragmented female bodies at the core of these unique experiences calls into question more than what could be contemplated otherwise due to the immense oppression, silencing, and violence produced against the female body even inside their marginalized communities.

The importance of analyzing migrant experiences and queer experiences in relation to each other is a concept that Gopinath and other queer scholars have emphasized. Works from queer scholars, such as the book *Impossible Desires and Borderlands*, highlight the value in analyzing stories of queer life and migration together, as they should not be seen as "distinct, separate, and incommensurate" (Gopinath 16). *Everything Everywhere All at Once* reflects this

idea through the unique and yet intersectional women portrayed at the center film. The discussion being had surrounding the liminality and fragmentation of the characters of this film in relation to each other and in relation to their own identities is a crucial part of placing this film at the center of intersectional and queer discourse. As Gopinath writes, "If 'diaspora' needs 'queerness' in order to rescue it from its genealogical implications, 'queerness' also needs 'diaspora' in order to make it more supple in relation to questions of race, colonialism, migration, and globalization" (11). A queer analysis of the film showcases this exact idea as the individual journeys of Evelyn and Jobu are explored and consequently highlight ways that they ultimately relied on each other to reach a queer state of existence together. Through this, the film highlights the inescapable need of togetherness as one tackles the fragmented and liminal experiences produced by the equally inescapable intersections of identity. In *Everything Everywhere All at Once*, the intersections that overwhelm one's ability to have a self are not ignored, instead they used to empower the silenced bodies amid them.

Taking on the topic of queer diasporas, the bridging of Evelyn and Jobu in *Everything Everywhere All at Once* as uniquely fractured characters can be traced back to decades of research done by scholars surrounding the queer experiences in migration. Scholar Anne-Marie Fortier explores the precarious concept of home in queer migratory movement in an article where she tackles "queer as 'movement out of place'" (406). Building off scholars like Eng and Gopinath who address the problematics of 'home', Fortier addresses "narratives of queer migration as homecoming, where 'home' is a destination rather than an origin" (407). The film acknowledges this desire of homecoming explicitly in the scene when Evelyn saves Joy. "Maybe it's like you said. Maybe there is something out there, some new discovery that will make us feel like even smaller pieces of shit. Something that explains why you still went looking

for me through all of this noise. And why, no matter what, I still want to be here with you." (*Everything Everywhere All at Once* 2:06:09-38). This burning desire to reach a home leads the protagonists to find the strength to exist in the 'here', amidst all the factors that make existing near impossible. This is a marker of how this film presents a radically queer and significant story for minority communities. As we understand the complexities of home for Evelyn as an Asian American immigrant, we too can understand Joy had been struggling with home and belonging in her queer identity all along. Scholar Jason Bryant writes, "Like 'home', we can imagine queer as a concept of be/longing. For, to "be" queer is to be just who one is. And to "long" is to imagine, to pine for, or to claim agency as a creative practice..." (263). Thus, it can be understood that the film bridges the stories of their protagonists in ways that queer scholars have been doing for decades in dissecting the issues of home and queer immigrant experiences. What can be revealed through this type of analysis is how Evelyn and Joy had been fighting the same battle, unable to see each other's struggles, and ultimately came together to survive them. The key word here is survive. To use 'overcoming' risks leaving out of the picture the cruel realities that the communities spoken to in this film face every day. On top of navigating a liminal existence in the eyes of a system that has little interest in your experiences and hardships, there is also real persecution at play for many communities both overtly and covertly. The film highlights this persecution as Evelyn and Joy are hunted down by people from all over the universe attempting to shut down and destroy what their power could result in especially if the mother-daughter duo were to unite.

While not the initial goal of either Evelyn or Jobu, their unison becomes the real answer amidst all their uncertainty. Still, in some ways the film's ending message of unity is too contradictory to all the explorations of fragmented history, identity, and experience analyzed in

this paper. How unity can be achieved and felt by these communities off screen remains a burning question even after Evelyn's loving embrace of Joy. There seems to be too much pain, too much hate, and too much noise to survive. However, the connection between Evelyn and Jobu represents a unity that does not require fighting to survive. Evelyn and Jobu never talk about destroying the systems Alpha-Waymond claims are threatened, or the ones mentioned in this essay. Nor do they become social justice activists that pioneer change. Evelyn in a last effort to save her daughter gives up on bringing down her enemies or changing their minds radically. Instead, with help of her husband Waymond, Evelyn concludes that there is a healing to be done by everyone and that it will not come from fighting. The fears that Jobu's existence represents for everyone out to destroy her can be traced back to individual wounds of each agent that Alpha Gong-Gong calls to destroy his daughter and granddaughter. In a turn of events, the film shows that the wounds that united characters against the mother-daughter duo are healed to instead unite everyone to help Evelyn save Jobu. Ultimately, *Everything Everywhere All at Once* presents a story that achieves the unification of a queer daughter and her immigrant mother, while also unifying diverse communities of people with similarly intersectional and fragmented experiences, resulting in the bridging of queer experiences across a range of identities and communities. Consequently, the film illustrates the empowerment that can be found within us and in each other, allowing the message of unity to reach audiences despite how unachievable it may seem from a distance.

##### **5. *EVERYTHING EVERYWHERE ALL AT ONCE*: STRIKING CINEMA**

Daniel Kwan and Daniel Scheinert, known as the Daniels, have received critical acclaim for their 2022 film *Everything Everywhere All at Once*. The writing, cinematography, direction, and visual effects (VFX) of the film have been notable across multiple boards from analyses such

as this one that discusses its impact in minority stories, to conversations about a new age of cinema in a hypermodern world ("The Terror of *Everything Everywhere All at Once*"). While the main analysis of queer experiences in this film was presented through close readings of the characters, I wanted to nod at the effectiveness of these characters facilitated by the cinematographic aspects of the film. Of these aspects, the concept of the multiverse allows for a unique approach on numerous degrees of filmmaking used to incorporate the themes and imagery of alternate realities. Fundamentally, the concept of the multiverse allows for a queer exploration of queer experiences, encompassing fragmented identity and liminality throughout the realms of multiple/alternate realities.

To solidify the concept of the multiverse, the Daniels incorporate cinematography and visual effects that clearly present ideas of fragmentation and liminality. Notably, this is seen through sharp, yet seamless transitions from one reality to another. One memorable example is a fight sequence in which Alpha Gong-Gong calls agents to attack Evelyn and Joy. In this scene Joy is unaware of the situation, as Jobu seems to have left Evelyn's current universe and thus Joy's current body. As Evelyn is fighting off the attackers alone, she begins to fracture her mind by accessing a plethora of universes rapidly, ranging from Sign Spinning Evelyn to Opera Singing Evelyn (*Everything Everywhere All at Once* 01:12:48-01:15:10). In this sequence the camera follows Evelyn closely in both universes/scenes, cutting from one to another precisely to showcase Evelyn in both places at the same time. Later in the film, a fight sequence between Evelyn and Jobu showcases a similar technique amplified to show the two characters moving between universes seamlessly as they face each other (*Everything Everywhere All at Once* 02:02:10-02:03:35). As the film progresses and these sequences become more complex (showing multiple universes, sets, and costumes at once) the audience can gather how skilled the two

characters have become in their fragmented states. Not only does the multiverse serve as a useful tool in showcasing a queer story in this film, but it also helps explore fragmentation and liminality on screen brilliantly and coherently.

*Everything Everywhere All at Once* also pays tribute to a staple Asian cinema director Wong Kar-Wai, known for using concepts of liminality and fragmentation in Asian communities through notable movies such as *Fallen Angels* (1995), *Chungking Express* (1994), and *In the Mood for Love* (2000). Taking inspiration from the betrayal-ridden slow sequences of Wong Kar-Wai that encompass love in liminal spaces (Agustin 6), the Daniels include a scene in which Waymond painfully declares his love for Evelyn amidst everything going on in the film. Film scholar Hannah Keziah Agustin writes about Wong's cinematic works, "Time passes by quickly, unforgiving in its speed, consigning moments of possibility and hope—for human connection, intimacy, and love—to the hopelessness of the irrecoverable past" (6). Hence, it can be inferred Wong too was exploring queer nostalgia, longing for home, and liminality of the queer experience through Asian stories such as discovered in this analysis of an Asian American film. On the surface, the Daniels pay tribute to Wong's cinematic impact through use of reminiscent techniques like shaky sequences and lighting, but at its core *Everything Everywhere All at Once* continues a legacy of liminal experience and storytelling that has been present in Asian communities for decades. In this manner, the film proves to be a striking piece of modern cinema, encompassing techniques, themes, and writing that work beautifully together to tell a moving story for the Asian American community that can resonate with the world.

## **6. CONCLUSION**

The queer experiences of groups outside of the LGBTQ+ community have been acknowledged by scholars for decades in queer scholarship. The otherization, racialization, and

oppression of groups such as Asian American and immigrant communities has proved to result in wounds that produce fragmented and liminal experiences that are essentially queer, especially for women in these minority spaces. Building off the work of queer scholars such as David L. Eng, Sabrina Alimohamad, Gayatri Gopinath and more, this thesis aims to showcase the way the film *Everything Everywhere All at Once* presents a radically queer story about queer, Asian American, and immigrant experiences. This analysis is initially approached by a close reading of the mother-daughter duo Jobu Tupaki/Joy Wong and Evelyn Wong to understand how the film presents queer identities and experiences, to then analyze how the film bridges these two characters and the implications of such bridging. A focus is taken on the concepts of fragmentation and liminality as understood by queer and feminist scholars like Sabrina Alimohamad and Pamela B. June who describe the empowerment that is derived from wounded and silenced POC and queer female bodies. Striking cinematographic aspects of the film are also considered in their effectiveness to explore this Asian American film as queer, such as the concept of the multiverse, the directorial tribute to liminal explorer and filmmaker Wong Kar-Wai, and clever camera work. More importantly, the central questions of queer migration, queer diasporas, and empowerment through queer experiences are examined in this queer analysis of the film. These questions are not only helpful to understand the film, but also to better understand the stories of communities the film is speaking to. Thus, this analysis helps us understand the intersectionality, liminality, and fragmentation of the characters and communities at the center of *Everything Everywhere All at Once* that makes them undeniably queer. While the character Jobu Tupaki is an important embodiment of queer existence through her nihilistic and radical view of the universe, the film teaches us the importance of other queer experiences such as Evelyn's as an immigrant mother. The relationship of these two queer characters pushes the

film's message further into a bridging of these experiences, through which Evelyn and Jobu are able to unite and empower each other through their uniquely queer existences.

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