In “Heterogeneity, Hybridity, Multiplicity: Asian American Differences,” the third chapter from the work *Immigrant Acts*, published in 1991, Lisa Lowe criticizes the “reduction of cultural politics of… Asian Americans” in literature, as part of a larger conversation on how the homogenization of the Asian American experience ignores individual differences. How has this Eurocentric perception persisted into the 21st century, especially within the multicultural society of America? In the episode “Phillip Goldstein,” from the American sitcom *Fresh Off the Boat*, director Nahnatchka Khan uses comedy to highlight racism in education and the effects of the “model minority” myth on family structure in order to criticize the generalization of Asian Americans. In this episode, Principal Hunter, a white man, tries to integrate a new Asian American student, Phillip, into Abraham Lincoln Middle School, by associating him with Eddie Huang — both of whom are Chinese American. Meanwhile, Eddie’s mother loves Phillip because he embodies the academic values that she has continuously tried to, and failed to, instill in Eddie. Through Principal Hunter’s racist generalizations of Phillip and Eddie and Jessica’s continuous criticisms of Eddie for not meeting the expectations of the ideal Chinese American, Khan emphasizes that white people propagate sweeping assumptions of minorities for their own personal gain, and those assumptions are internalized by Asian Americans themselves, creating conflict among them. She warns people that cultural generalities, while they appear to create common ground between individuals of the same culture, result in unrealistic expectations that drive those individuals apart, and that we must be aware of this oppression against Asian Americans and, looking forward, work towards building equality in ways that, regardless of good intention, do not generalize minorities.

Although Principal Hunter’s efforts to build a friendship between Eddie and Phillip initially seem well-intentioned, Hunter relies on racist generalizations and assumptions about
Philip and Eddie’s compatibility to further his own image as an accepting and tolerant principal; his efforts represent the Eurocentric perception and treatment of Asian culture that serve white Americans at the expense of Asian Americans. When Eddie asks why he has been asked to “be a first day friend for a new student… show them around the school… [and] teach them the ropes,” Principal Hunter says that “[he] feel[s] like [they] have mutual interests and experiences.” When Eddie asks him if he paired them up simply because Eddie is Chinese, Hunter replies with “What? No. Is he? Gosh, I'm not sure,” chuckling nervously. His lie about his uncertainty of student information that he should definitely know as a principal, accompanied by his anxious reaction to Eddie’s question, clearly reveals that Eddie’s hunch is accurate. His belief that “they have mutual interest and experiences” illustrates his assumptions about Asian Americans being alike simply due to their race, ignoring the vast differences that Eddie and Phillip share as individuals. His “not [being] sure” about Phillip’s race is also indicative of his colorblind perspective: when he is interrogated by Eddie, Hunter claims that he does not see the race of Philip and that he is putting him and Eddie together on “mutual interests and experiences,” even though their common Chinese American-ness is the clear underlying motive for his actions. By claiming to ignore race, Hunter can capitalize on the interaction between Eddie and Phillip to improve his reputation as a principal, at the expense of Eddie and Phillip’s social experience, who, despite their common race, eventually hate each other's company. An example of Hunter’s exploitation of Eddie and Philip for his personal gain occurs when Hunter later approaches Eddie and Phillip sitting together at lunch, exclaiming “Look who’s best friends!” posing for a picture with the school cameraman saying “This is going to get me back with my ex wife for sure!” During this interaction, Hunter never engages in a conversation with Eddie or Philip, demonstrating his apathy for their well being as students. As demonstrated in his posing with the school camera, Hunter is more concerned with his image to his ex-wife and colleagues rather
than whether Phillip has truly integrated into school. The postcard that Hunter makes from the picture says “See Rebecca! I can be open-minded. Please come back.” This demonstrates Hunter’s motives to depict himself to his ex wife as non-prejudiced and unbiased, rather than to improve the circumstances that new students and minority students face. In the photo, Hunter is smiling while Eddie and Phillip look miserable, illustrating that his actions are mainly for his personal gains at their expense. Hunter assumes the Asian experience to be monolithic and pervasive across all Asian Americans, and he uses this generalization to bring Eddie and Philip together, in order to present himself as an “open minded” principal, at the expense of Eddie and Phillip’s happiness.

Although some may perceive these generalizations to be harmless because they do not comprise “physical” or “actual” racism, Khan illustrate the dangers of the essentialization of minorities through Principal Hunter’s increasingly racist and discriminatory behaviors, switching from striving to integrate Phillip into the school with Eddie’s help, to physically isolating Philip and Eddie from the rest of the school due to their race. The stereotypes that are responsible for Hunter’s actions are directly correlated to the categorization of Asians as “Orientals” in the 1970s, which, out of several negative consequences, prevented them from immigrating to the United States due to their “foreignness” and solidified factless perceptions about Chinese Americans. According to Cynthia Tolentino, the Chicago School determined that people “viewed Oriental culture as having foreign, far away origins and as being in opposition to native and white American culture,” which, to this day, continues to “reproduce the foreignness of Asians and enables new forms of discrimination” (Tolentino 5, 14). This essentialization has a direct impact on Hunter’s response to Eddie’s complaints about dealing with microaggressions in the classroom. When Eddie complains to the school board that teachers are being racist by always encouraging them to be partners with each other, Hunter responds by starting “The Pacific Rim
Club,” a “safe haven to celebrate [their] unique culture,” which only Philip and Eddie are a part of. Using stereotypes and sweeping generalizations about Asian Americans, he identifies ancestral geography as the one and only source of common ground that can bring Philip and Eddie together. With a smirk, Hunter leaves them a “box of watercolors and parchment … to express themselves,” and immediately leaves the classroom. He believes that he has done his job by simply putting Philip and Eddie together in the same room with artistic utensils, but does not actually work towards facilitating open communication or cultural pride among them. Hunter’s nonchalance and the little time that he actually spends with Eddie and Phillip in the classroom demonstrates how little he truly cares about them and their experiences as minorities. At the end of this scene, Philip and Eddie express a look of disgust at each other, illustrating that Hunter’s actions have actually worsened their relationship instead of unifying them under a cultural umbrella. Essentially, Hunters’ Orientalism and perception of the Asian American experience as a “unique culture” cause him to physically and emotionally isolate Philip and Eddie from everyone else, which comprises racism because these actions homogenize Eddie and Phillip’s individualities to just a racial background; this is indicative of how racial generalizations make minorities’ experiences more difficult by preventing them from integrating into and finding their way in a white-dominated America.

However, while the essentialization, isolation, and discrimination against Asian Americans, as illustrated by Principal Hunter’s treatment of Eddie and Phillip, is primarily due to Eurocentric culture, Asian Americans also contribute to the continuation of such oppression by internalizing the Eurocentric perspective themselves. For example, Jessica, Eddie’s mother, has adopted the Eurocentric belief of a “good Chinese boy,” and, as a result, holds Eddie and Phillip to stereotyped expectations of Asian Americanness. She criticizes Eddie and approves of Phillip for respectively failing to meet the expectations of and adhering to the values of the “model
minority” myth, which, according to Chih-Chieh Chou, is a “stereotyped understanding of Asian tradition,” in which Asians “respect authority, assimilate well and work hard” (Chou 221). However, this generalization “lock[s] individuals and groups” to “essentialist ideas of cultural traditions,” neglecting differences among Asian Americans which confines them to the status of the “minor foreigner” (Chou 223). By internalizing the “model minority” myth and a Westernized perception of Asian culture, Jessica rejects Eddie as an individual. For example, when Jessica denies Eddie’s request for her to let him go to a Beastie Boys concert, he asks her, “Why can’t you support something that I like for once?” She responds, “Well, why can’t you be a good Chinese boy like Evan and Emery? They both study hard, play violin, wear button-up shirts properly, not like you with the music you listen to, the way you talk…” The odd specificities of her conceptualization of a “good Chinese boy,” including playing the violin and wearing button-up shirts, contributes to the episode’s larger message of highlighting the ridiculousness of such Asian American stereotypes; because of these stereotypes, Jessica holds Eddie to a standard that contradicts his selfhood and identity. Meanwhile, this essentialization also causes Jessica to have immediately positive first impressions of Philip due to her assumptions of his values as a Chinese American. At the end of the first day of school, when Jessica comes to pick Eddie up, she sees Philip nearby and exclaims “Another Chinese boy in school! Hey, come on! Let’s give you a ride home!” despite Eddie’s objections and complaints. Although Phillip was raised under white parents and culturally identifies with the Jewish faith — a background that is vastly different from the stereotypical Asian American background — Jessica believes that Eddie and Phillip share common experiences and “can look out for each other.” Jessica approves of Phillip even more when she interrogates him regarding his musicianship. She asks him about his practice times, how much he practices per day, and whether he plays in an orchestra or solo through a series of one or two-word questions; this
manner of interrogation illustrates Jessica evaluates Phillip solely based on a checklist of requirements that adhere to the “model minority” myth, rather than his character or individual values. Jessica ultimately appears to admire Phillip more than Eddie because Phillip’s interests and activities align with those of the “model minority” myth, while those of Eddie do not. White America’s sweeping assumptions of minorities not only cause microaggressions against Asians, but also affect Asians’ perceptions of each other, resulting in the suffering of and disapproval shown towards those like Eddie, whose individuality fails to meet overgeneralized expectations.

The generalizations of Asian Americans, especially with the “model minority” myth, result in subtle acts of racism displayed towards Asians, which are internalized by Asians themselves and neglect the distinct experiences and identities of Asian American individuals. Through this episode, Khan demonstrates that by essentializing the minority experience, the American majority determines the perception of the Asian American and thus maintains a higher status in society over the minorities whose identities they define. Eddie is neglected as an individual due to the principal’s racist treatment of him and Phillip as well as Jessica’s comparison of Eddie to the “model minority.” The cultural essentialization of minorities, thus, is the new form of minority oppression and Eurocentric domination; to stop this, we must break stereotypes that oversimplify marginalized populations’ experiences, create conflict amongst those of the same marginalized population, and separate them from other Americans. Many of us question how the recognition and appreciation of variability and nonconformity among a group of individuals strengthens the community they come from. Although it may seem counterintuitive, perhaps the acceptance of individuality instills more self-esteem and confidence in minorities, allowing them to develop greater respect for others who have different values, and a greater appreciation for the culture and values that they grew up with, which ultimately strengthens their minority group. We must recognize the diversity of individuals within minority
groups and eradicate generalizations in order to strengthen those minorities, break harmful Eurocentric stereotypes, and make strides towards a truly equal society.

Works Cited
