NUSSBAUM AS HECUBA

MARIA MATILDE MORALES

Can we rely on compassion, despite its limitations? This is the question that Martha C. Nussbaum, a philosopher and professor of law and ethics at the University of Chicago, seeks to answer in her essay "Compassion & Terror." She is concerned with this emotion's difficulty in crossing "lines of time, place, and nation—and also," she adds as an afterthought, "the line of sex, perhaps more difficult yet to cross" (11), a problem she identifies as she close reads Euripides's tragedy *The Trojan Women*:

> But did those imaginations really cross those lines? Think again of that invocation of Zeus. Trojans, if they worshipped Zeus as king of gods at all, surely did not refer to him as the president of the city council; *prytanis* is strictly an Athenian legal term. So it would appear that Hecuba is not a Trojan but a Greek. And her imagination is a Greek democratic (and, we might add, mostly male) imagination. Maybe that's a good thing, in the sense that the audience is surely invited to view her as their fellow and equal. But it still should give us pause. (11)

Nussbaum's essay ends on a more hopeful note: while it's hard to imagine another's position, if we listen to both our emotions and the voices of those toward whom we're feeling compassionate, it is possible to "cross those lines." However, many of her examples are curious in that they require little imagination and are painfully close to home. "America's towers, too, have burned" (11), she states, echoing her first line: "The towers of Troy are burning" (10). She compares the scene of a Greek audience witnessing *The Trojan Women* to that of America after the events of September 11, and this is only the first in a long list of examples specific to American culture. True, by grounding her ideas in contemporary events, she makes them more accessible to the public, but—echoing Nussbaum's words—it gives me pause. Was it not enough that Troy's towers were burning? Did Nussbaum distrust the ability of her readers' imaginations to "cross those lines"?

At first reading, the essay seems to suggest that yes, she did—and worse, that she herself was not able to think outside of her immediate reality. September 11 sets the scene, but the examples are plentiful. The materialistic culture of Seneca's Rome is the same as that of America (25). A national baseball game that leads the spectators to chant "U-S-A" to the umpire (13) serves as a counterpart for Adam Smith's "man of humanity in Europe" who reacts rather indifferently to the whole of China being erased from the face of Earth (qtd. in Nussbaum 12). Nussbaum's focus is on America even when she ventures out of the philosophical canon and into modern psychology: pathologically narcissistic American boys, rich American teenagers (24–25). Nussbaum

points out Euripides's "engagement with contemporary events" (11), and she seems to be copying his method, with the disadvantage that she falls into the type of ethnocentric imagining that she recognizes as poisonous.

What is Nussbaum telling us with these examples? Let's go back to the towers: they are burning, and the terror of their burning makes an audience feel compassionate. In the case of Troy's towers, this audience is made up of the descendants of "the conquering Greeks" (10) who set fire to the towers: the assailants pitying their victims. In the case of America's towers, the tragic spectatorship has a narrower scope: the audience *is* America, feeling sorry for herself and demonizing her 'assailants,' "dividing the world into an 'us' and a 'them'" (13). Nussbaum doubts that Euripides's audience did actually "cross those lines," (11), given the assimilation of Hecuba's imagination into "a Greek democratic . . . imagination" (11), but for the Americans there is never a line to cross, no otherness to assimilate. Except that, on a metatextual level, there is an assimilation going on: that of the Greek scene into an American one. It appears that Nussbaum is, once again, copying Euripides's method. However, one point is unclear: for whom is she copying him? Euripides is writing for the Athenians; who exactly is Nussbaum's audience?

We ascertain that she is speaking to Americans, and this is no surprise: Nussbaum herself is American, and "Compassion & Terror" was delivered as a conference paper at Columbia University and later published by another American university. Beyond the real audience, there is a target one, the people Nussbaum had in mind as she composed "Compassion & Terror," and her use of the deceptively all-encompassing first-person plural makes it easy to determine who Nussbaum's audience is. If we look at her examples as situations of "us vs. them," in which the "us" is the agent of flawed compassion and the "them" is the object of compassion, what we find supports the idea that Nussbaum had a well-defined audience in mind. The "us," which is equivalent to the "we" that narrates the essay, is made up of Americans. The "them" is more diverse; it ranges from American minorities to people on the other side of the world, including animals, gods, and surprisingly, women: "[I]f we don't think a social order unjust for denying women the vote, or subordinating African-Americans, then we won't see the predicament of women and African-Americans as bad, and we won't have compassion for them" (16).

In this passage, Nussbaum's usage of "we" is particularly striking because it makes her both the agent and the object of compassion. Both can't be true, and since she identifies as female, then she can't be part of the "we." The seemingly casual "—and also, the line of sex, perhaps more difficult yet to cross," (11), the "(and, we might add, mostly male)" (11), added as if in a hurry and separated from the rest of the text through punctuation, take on a completely new light. Nussbaum's unexplored suggestions of gender as a factor that can get in the way of compassion are her most obvious indicators of the essay's target reader, but the fact that the agent and object of compassion should not overlap is true of all of the examples and it allows us to

finish delimiting Nussbaum's target audience by removing every "them" from the general "us" with which we started.

"Those sentiments stop short at the national boundary" (13), affirms Nussbaum, and while this might be true of her real audience, it is too generous a description of her target reader, who turns out to be not only specifically American, but also specifically white, specifically male, and financially secure. To answer my original question, Nussbaum does not trust her readers' imaginations to be cross-cultural, and this is the source of the ethnocentrism we see throughout "Compassion & Terror." Rather than evidence a limitation of Nussbaum's reasoning, this tells the reader something about the particular group whom she chose as her target audience. A look at Columbia's demographic distribution will tell you that this group is far from being the majority of the student body, so Nussbaum's choice of her target reader is certainly interesting, considering that this is the group that exercises the most institutional privilege within the country. When we revisit the text with this choice in mind, we find its effect and its cause.

The effect is that it narrows the scope of her criticism, ultimately giving a more positive outlook on the state of compassion in society. The faults she finds in compassion are not intrinsic to the emotion but rather the shortcomings of the people who feel it. Since Nussbaum is implicitly examining only affluent white American men, then the less her readers fit into that group, the better at cross-cultural imagining they must be. Nussbaum supports her criticism of education with Kindlon's study about how boys are taught to neglect their emotions (24). This study does not apply to girls, whom society encourages to be vulnerable, in the same way that his study about the materialism of rich teenagers (25) does not apply to their less affluent counterparts. Can this be true? Is every single person outside of the target audience adequately compassionate? It seems so. Just look at how, as these people read Nussbaum's essay, they are able to engage in an exercise of self-criticism that wasn't intended for them.

The reason why she directs her essay to this privileged group is tied to the nature of her project. Nussbaum emphasizes that "an education in common human weakness and vulnerability should be a very profound part of the education of all children" (24). Her solution is future-oriented: how "we" can raise our children to be better at compassion than "us." And since education is institutionalized, in order for it to change, the established notions of what education is must change. The group that holds the most institutional power has to be aware of change needing to happen; this group coincides with Nussbaum's target audience.

To talk to this grown-up version of Kindlon's teenager, to make this emotionally stunted man whose imagination's ability to "cross those lines" (11) can't be trusted, understand her voice, Nussbaum has to take one last cue from Euripides. She has to invite her target audience to see her as their fellow and equal by speaking to them in their language, and that is the root of the ethnocentrism of her essay. Nussbaum

becomes another Hecuba, calling out in Greek to an audience that can, however momentarily, listen.

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ELOQUENT SILENCES: INACTION AS INVITATION IN EULA BISS'S "NO-MAN'S-LAND"

AMBER OFFICER-NARVASA

Not every problem demands a solution. Some problems are so petty that to describe them and their self-evident explanations is trivial and unnecessary. Some are so abstract that any single solution would be an exercise in futility. But others, through the sheer force of their relevance, insist upon our involvement. They beg for resolution and entreat us to act, assuring us that we will not rest easy until something is done. In the essay "No-Man's-Land," Eula Biss illuminates just such a problem: the persistence of unfounded fear inspired by racial prejudice. In her essay, she demonstrates the prevalence of this fear and brings us to care about its harmful consequences. However, she does not attempt to remedy this problem or suggest any proposal for action, and so it seems we are left with no directives for a way forward.

The groundless fears that divide the residents of Biss's gentrifying Chicago neighborhood are exemplified by what she refers to in her subtitle as "the historically troubling attitude of American pioneers" (1). Tracing this attitude from the racially fraught prairie of Laura Ingalls Wilder's classic book to the urban frontiers of present-day America, she argues that the pioneer mentality has resulted in a culture of damaging paranoia. "This is our inheritance, those of us who imagine ourselves as pioneers," she writes; "we have inherited a ring of wolves around a door . . . inherited padlocks on our pantries" (24). This legacy is what has caused her white neighbors to feel "besieged" by the largely black neighborhood they have moved into (24). The prevailing idea in American society that fear will keep people safe, Biss argues, is "promoted by the government as a kind of policy" (19).

Throughout her essay, Biss deploys language and imagery that play upon our emotions, convincing us of the heartbreaking effects that cyclical paranoia has upon us all. She names fear a "cruelty" (14) and a "violence" (19), as we are told the story of a large man who cried at remembering the hesitance of small women afraid to pass him in the street (14). She writes of her own anger that "so many of us have agreed to live within a delusion" (13). By describing fear as a de facto act of brutality, Biss tacitly argues that it is not an emotion passively felt, but a weapon we actively deploy—an eradicable toxin that we unleash upon the world. It is all the more unsettling, then, to witness Biss shrug and return this weapon to her holster, where it chafes uncomfortably against her conscience.

Despite Biss's assertive stance against ungrounded fear, she is surprisingly ambiguous about how we should reckon with its presence. In an essay in which so much is said, it is the silences that speak the loudest, leaving us unsure of what is truly meant. "It is difficult to know what to be afraid of," the author writes, "when there

are so many imagined dangers in the world" (16–17). Biss never does tell us how to distinguish real fears from imagined ones. If imagined fear is the cause of so much damage, how can Biss—and the reader—be content with the explanation that fearing correctly is a formidable endeavor? Will we ever be able to discern the line between fantasy and reality? Similarly, there is no explanation for why she does not go to beat meetings to complain about the polices' racial profiling of her neighbors, or why she allows herself to be conquered by her fear of the teenagers who challenge her and her husband (14–15). These instances are indicative of a larger silence that pervades the essay: the seeming absence of any concrete suggestions for how to make, out of all the disparate parts, a better world. It is unsettling to be presented with the painful details of a problem and then be left without a model for solving it, to see a narrator wrestle with a harmful issue only to accept its presence as inevitable.

However, upon closer interrogation, these unfinished gestures reveal themselves to be just as impassioned and deliberate an appeal as Biss's description of groundless fear. Directly after stating that "fear is a cruelty to those who are feared," Biss admits her own fear of her young black neighbors (14). We are meant to question the narrator's behavior here, to realize that she is perpetuating the very cruelty she just denounced. After the emotional image of the football-proportioned man breaking down in tears, we are forced to comprehend the sadness that lies behind her neighbors' joking call of "Don't be afraid of us!" (14). Biss could have allayed the pain of this moment in a small way by responding that she wasn't afraid, and yet she allows paranoia to get the better of her. She is on the precipice of breaking the cycle of hurt and fear, and yet she doesn't.

Rather she lingers in terror, describing her fear of open water to further demonstrate the ludicrousness of unfounded fear. She writes that she was once caught by a riptide in Northern California, but it is not riptides that haunt her. It is her own image of "grabbing hands and spinning metal blades and dark sucking voids" (15). Although she has had dangerous experiences in open water, the unrealistic description of her fear undermines its validity. She claims that it is difficult to distinguish between real and imagined dangers, but she tacitly contradicts this argument through her own example. Though her fears of a world beneath the water's surface are obviously imagined, she still allows these fantasies to influence her behavior, causing her to stay "closer to shore" (16). More than newspaper statistics or secondhand narratives could, her oversize descriptions in this passage demonstrate the folly of unsubstantiated fear and suggest to us how Biss could have chosen to move beyond it.

Similarly, when Biss watches the police pat down black teenagers without provocation yet does not go to the beat meeting to complain, we are presented with the humanizing imagery of the scene: the boys' "IDs in clear cases," the "bottle of Tide" set down on the sidewalk (33). These details paint a compassionate picture of the teenagers, exacting our sympathy and intensifying the frustrating nature of Biss's inaction.

By forcing us to dwell in these irksome moments with her, isn't Biss doing something more than merely presenting a problem? Her tone—casual yet unsettling—and her deliberate omission of any reasoning behind her choices highlight how possible it would be to start pushing back against fear. For example, Biss writes that she considers making "some kind" of complaint, but does not (34). In the absence of any details about the kind of claim Biss would make, the reader is left to ponder. It is easy to imagine what she might complain about at the meeting: racial profiling, unprovoked police harassment, tensions between law enforcement and the community, the fear that causes police to suspect every black male of criminal activity—but even so, Biss could have defined her potential complaint in clearer terms. However, in leaving the complaint undefined and allowing us to easily generate its content, she is showing us how simple it is to take small steps against prejudice and fear. By causing us to fill in the spaces of her writing, she is inviting us to fill in the spaces left by all that she fails to do.

While it initially seems that Biss's lack of initiative or guidelines for abolishing fear is in contradiction with her intense aversion to prejudice, as the aforementioned passages show, these empty spaces in the narrative serve to further her purpose. They make us deeply uncomfortable with the issue she discusses, and to urge us to eradicate fear in our own lives. They are thoughtfully constructed appeals that highlight the folly of fearing without purpose, of witnessing discrimination and doing nothing about it. In enacting for us the painful feeling of not changing things that we know are wrong, Biss is paradoxically urging us to action.

When we understand these silences not as contradictions but as moments that help to define the author's argument, we start to have a different understanding of the text and the narrator. While Biss is flawed, she is not at all blind to the frustrating nature of her inaction. She understands that it is a crucial part of a larger problem, and challenges us to do something about it. We begin to see the essay not as a series of inconsistencies, but as a cohesive argument in which even the narrator's faults serve to suggest the small steps by which we might start to remedy the issue.

Perhaps Biss began going to beat meetings after this essay was written, or perhaps not. She may continue to accept the presence of unfounded fear in her own psyche, or maybe not. Regardless, she shows us a clear way forward through her shortcomings, through all that she does not seem to have the courage to do herself. The way forward can be found in the meetings that she did not attend, in the lingering response to the teenage bikers that was never spoken, in her failure to move beyond her fears about a fantastic nightmare world beneath the water. Even the Rawlsian final scene offers some hope, in its portrayal of a different kind of "no-man's land" where dialogue and diversity are embraced. Are we willing to fill the void left by her unrealized actions? In its lack of a stated proposal for eradicating fear, Biss's eloquent silence asks the most important question of all.

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MASCULINITY AND THE POLITICS OF SEX SCANDALS

BRYAN KIM

It isn't often that you see someone stand up for an adulterer on national television. And yet, that's precisely what happened on a recent episode of *Real Time with Bill Maher* addressing the Anthony Weiner sex scandal. In the midst of the scandal, comedian Bill Maher invited Mr. Weiner, the former U.S. congressional representative, down to the studio for an interview and, surprisingly enough, gave him a very sympathetic reception. Not satisfied with merely consoling Weiner, Maher went further, raising a very provocative question: Why are we so critical of Weiner given that "what John F. Kennedy did was so much more dangerous and so much more consequential for the nation, and Clinton, too?" ("Bill Maher to Anthony Wiener"). The question is an excellent one and seemingly without an obvious answer. Those of us who have been following the media witch hunt of Weiner know that his "crime" was circulating embarrassingly sexual online messages along with pictures of his penis and bare chest. Not very flattering behavior, to be sure, but by most moral standards a lot more tame than the actual sexual infidelity committed by Kennedy and Bill Clinton.

Not only did Kennedy and Clinton have actual physical relations with a number of women while married, these men were presidents, politicians serving in our nation's highest office. And, for the most part, they got away with it. Clinton came out of the Monica Lewinsky sex scandal and associated impeachment proceedings more popular than he went in (Saad). Even today, in 2014, he remains a popular and respected elder statesman (Saad). Kennedy, too, benefited from the same apparent generosity. His numerous and well-publicized sex scandals with the likes of Marilyn Monroe didn't end his political career; arguably, they added to his public stature and mystique. These men's sex scandals were admired, or at least tolerated. And yet, Weiner wasn't treated with nearly as much understanding.

The double standard identified by Maher is clearly a real and puzzling one. Why have we, the American public, decided to treat Weiner so differently? One possibility is that Kennedy and Clinton were more charismatic, successful politicians, and because we liked them more, we were willing to let them off the hook. Even so, it is a deeply unsatisfying explanation for how such a glaring double standard could be allowed to exist. For a politician, natural charm can go a long way, but we still view certain misdeeds as universally punishable. Adultery isn't supposed to be commendable for some and reproachable for others. What, then, could be going on?

One possible explanation for this apparent contradiction lies in the realm of masculinity and male gender roles. Michael Kimmel, a sociologist specializing in gender studies, argues in his essay "Masculinity as Homophobia: Fear, Shame, and

Silence in the Construction of Gender Identity" that, in the words of David Leverenz, "'ideologies of manhood have functioned primarily in relation to the gaze of male peers and male authority'" (qtd. in Kimmel 24). Masculinity, in other words, is a "homosocial enactment," a show of power meant primarily for the benefit of other men (23). In Kimmel's conception, men are constantly attempting to signal their manhood to their peers, who "watch [them], rank [them], [and] grant [their] acceptance into the realm of manhood" (23). Successful enactment earns acceptance from male peers, while failure leads to emasculation and being "unmasked" as something less than a man. Precisely because of this constant environment of masculine performance, Kimmel observes, men are "under the constant careful scrutiny of other men" (23). Kimmel's framework for understanding masculinity is meant to be broadly applicable to male social interactions. Arguably, it is particularly relevant to male politicians, who are under even more intense public scrutiny than most men. And, of course, few things bring more attention to a politician than a sex scandal.

Sex scandals, like most events in politics, are closely tied to optics and personal image. Accordingly, it makes sense to examine more carefully the relationship between masculinity, as understood by Kimmel, and appearances. Prominent art critic and scholar John Berger analyzes the link between gender and appearances in the third chapter of his book *Ways of Seeing*. His primary focus in that chapter is the depiction of nude women in European art, but many of his observations about male and female appearances are broadly applicable to the study of masculinity and femininity. Berger posits that "A man's presence is dependent upon the promise of power which he embodies" (45). When a man or an artistic depiction of a man is observed, characteristics such as vitality, power, and agency are associated with manhood. A woman, on the other hand, Berger argues, "has to survey everything she is and everything she does" (Berger 46). Because women's bodies are constantly judged by men, Berger argues that they are commonly cast as objects under the gaze of another. Womanhood and femininity are therefore commonly associated with receptiveness and the presentation of oneself as an object, rather than as an actor. As Berger concisely puts it, the difference between the two is that "men act and women appear" (47).

Here, though, there appears to be a contradiction. Berger seems to claim that the defining difference between masculine and feminine imagery is that "men act and women appear" (47). But Kimmel argues that masculinity is characterized by "the constant careful scrutiny of other men" (23). If action is associated with manhood and being scrutinized with femininity, how does this square with the fact that men are constantly being watched and watching each other?

In spite of the apparent contradiction, in truth the two observations are intimately related. Berger's assertion that "men act and women appear" is not stating that men aren't the targets of scrutiny. Indeed, men are, as Kimmel points out, "under the constant careful scrutiny of other men." Rather, what Berger is observing is that when

it comes to masculinity and femininity, the nature of the scrutiny is very different. The feminine is expected to "appear," to cater to a (typically male) gaze. "Men survey women before treating them" (Berger 46), so the expectation is that women take the role of a surveyed object. Men under scrutiny, on the other hand, are expected to "act"—that is, to indicate agency, power, and masculinity. It is failing to meet these expectations that, as Kimmel notes, risks letting other men "unmask us, emasculate us, reveal to us and the world that we do not measure up, that we are not real men" (24). Berger's observations about how men present themselves are just one example of Kimmel's "homosocial enactment" of masculinity.

To apply the concepts of homosocial masculinity and masculine display to the case of Weiner, it is necessary to reexamine the differences between his behavior and the behavior of other adulterous politicians. Whereas Clinton and Kennedy had actual physical relationships with their partners, Weiner's actions were limited to sending explicit messages images of himself to the women he was involved with. As Maher contemptuously remarks in one of his other segments on Weiner, "Edwards and Clinton banged butterfaces, and that's embarrassing enough, but [Weiner] just came up with [his] hand" ("New Rule: Hand Solo" 0:40-0:53). At first glance, this statement seems as if it should be an argument for lenience towards Weiner in comparison to Clinton, former U.S. senator John Edwards, or Kennedy. In reality, the exact opposite occurred: Weiner was ostracized and Clinton and Kennedy lionized.

It is through the lens of masculinity and masculine display that the important difference between Weiner's sexual misdeeds and those of Clinton or Kennedy becomes apparent. Although adultery by politicians is almost universally frowned upon, this does not mean it is unaffected by expectations of masculinity. As Maher rather succinctly puts it, "If you're going to be the pathetic laughingstock of a tawdry, lie-riddled sex scandal, at least get laid!" ("New Rule: Hand Solo" 0:00-0:12). Although both Weiner and Clinton succeeded in conducting adulterous relationships, Weiner failed when it came to the expectation of masculine display. He didn't get physical with the women. Rather, he sent images of his naked body to his partners for their viewing pleasure. His behavior was certainly sexual, but Berger and Kimmel would argue that it failed to meet the "true" masculine standard for sex. And this is reflected in what Maher jokingly says about him. "[Weiner's] name shouldn't even be Weiner, wieners are for closers! [Weiner's] name should be hand, congressman Anthony Hand" ("New Rule: Hand Solo" 0:53-1:06). Instead of taking the active role of inducing and participating in physical intercourse, Weiner stopped short at sending nude photos: from the perspective of homosocial masculinity, a resounding failure.

In some ways, this verdict seems peculiar given that the penis, which Weiner photographed and flaunted, is presumably the most masculine organ of all. Although it isn't quite as powerful a display of masculine agency as physical intercourse, sending pictures of one's penis to women seems as though it should constitute, to some degree, a successful display of masculinity. Applying Berger's criteria of masculinity makes it

apparent why this is not, in fact, the whole story. As Berger notes, the very idea of images and one's being viewed has a significant gendered component. Instead of taking on the traditionally male role of acting, Mr. Weiner made himself the object of a woman's gaze: he made himself a sight and exposed himself. In doing so, he allowed his masculine sense of self to be "supplanted by a sense of being appreciated . . . by another" (Berger 46), traditionally a female role. Within Berger's framework, willingly displaying oneself is an act of femininity, not masculinity. Although Mr. Weiner himself undoubtedly derived some pleasure from sending those pictures and being appreciated by his partners, the act of being sexually objectified by a viewer is fundamentally contrary to the masculinity described by Kimmel and Berger. On top of the obvious moral transgression of adultery, Weiner crossed a further line by exposing himself in a way that was distinctly "non-masculine."

This is precisely why Weiner compares unfavorably with the likes of Clinton or Kennedy in the public eye. As morally reprehensible as their actions were, in the context of masculinity, they behaved in a way that affirmed their manhood: actively seeking sex and using their public stature as a tool in sexual conquest. In fact, when it comes to evaluation of masculinity, sexual conquest is considered praiseworthy, not shameful. As Kimmel notes, "moments of heroic conquest of women carry, I believe, a current of homosocial evaluation" (24). Even as their behavior lowered voters' opinions of their personal morality, it affirmed their masculine credentials. It is exactly this view that Maher is playing off of when he points out with admiration that "Say what you will about Bill Clinton, but at least when he whipped out his dick on a woman, she didn't have to wait for it to start buffering" ("New Rule: Hand Solo" 3:30-3:37). Maher draws a clear distinction between Weiner's presentation of his penis as an object for appreciation and Clinton's use of his penis for physical intercourse. It is important to note that Maher doesn't deny the sense of disgust and guilt associated with Clinton's behavior. He acknowledges it by prefacing his statement with "say what you will." Within that framework, though, he indicates that as a fellow man, he was impressed by Clinton's masculine ability to "score" and disappointed by Weiner's failure to do so.

It's difficult not to feel that there is something very wrong with a standard that suggests that sexual misconduct is OK, as long as you nail the girl. Unfortunately, our traditional view of masculinity is not easily done away with. We can hope, though, that attitudes of masculinity, like so many others, will change and evolve with time. Hopefully, we will eventually see the day when sexual misconduct by our political leaders is no longer punished arbitrarily and irregularly. Then, finally, we will be able to hold all of our elected representatives to the same high standard. That is not to say, of course, that all we can do is wait and hope. Even before that day comes, we should make every effort to ensure that we aren't subjecting our politicians and our democracy to a harmful double standard. Politicians, like everyone else, make mistakes, and if, as a forgiving nation, we were willing to let JFK and Clinton off the hook, maybe we owe

the Weiners of the world another chance, too. As Bill Maher put it: "This country needs to grow up a little. We are losing too much talent" ("Bill Maher to Anthony Wiener").

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IN DEFENSE OF SINGLISH: A CULTURAL INTREPRETATION OF SINGAPORE ENGLISH

WESLEY LEE

Last year, when I was still living in Singapore, I attended a public lecture that was part of a national linguistic initiative called the "Speak Good English Movement." In the opening speech, the speaker made a contrived attempt at humor:

> Ladies and gentlemen, we have no guest of honor for this year's launch of the Speak Good English Movement. No, we have not been stood up. We did not invite one. This is because we want grammar to take center stage. Today, grammar rules.

Amid the strained smiles and forced laughter, I was squirming in my seat. But it was not just the affected humor that made me feel uncomfortable. What I was hearing was in fact a poorly executed rallying call of sorts to denounce the use of Singlish, a creolized variety of English spoken widely in Singapore, in favor of Standard (British) English.[1]

Singlish has its roots as far back as the establishment of British colonial rule in Singapore. Over time, British English became creolized with linguistic influences from the predominant ethno-migrant communities in Singapore's early history. That resulted in an early pidgin form of Singlish used primarily for communication with the British colonists. But now Singlish thrives in both the public streets and domestic spaces of independent Singapore. It is spoken along a continuum: usage varies with the respective ethnic influences of the speaker, and it is veritably neither standard nor singular.

This is the raison d'etre of the Speak Good English Movement, which is a governmental response to the perceived threat of linguistic nonconformity on a national level. The underlying paradigm is clear: if language is primarily a tool for communication, standardization and conformity should improve its comprehensibility. Despite fifteen years of attempted linguistic engineering, the government is nowhere close to eradicating all vestiges of Singlish. Many Singaporeans continue to speak Singlish, and foreigners continue to associate it with the distinctive Singaporean identity. What the Singaporean government failed to recognize early on is that language is not simply a communicative tool, but an experienced reality. When the government appraises the value of Singlish with an instrumentalist pragmatism, it risks the possibility of misconstruing what language genuinely is—a kind of cultural capital and lived experience. Singlish is the product of Singaporeans' collective

consciousness, formed by reinventing themselves in the aftermath of their colonial experience.

In the English-speaking world, the discourse on language has drawn in lexicographers, linguists, and writers from various backgrounds. The late David Foster Wallace, who was a professional writer and English professor, dichotomizes the debate into two broad camps in his essay "Tense Present." According to Wallace, the Prescriptivists, in the same spirit as the policymakers behind the Speak Good English Movement, are fervent proponents of precise grammatical usage, while the Descriptivists are those who characterize "[language] as self-exploratory and expressive rather than communicative" (Wallace 45). Given its heterogeneous roots and variable usage, Singlish more faithfully embodies the Descriptivist philosophy.

Wallace, who presents himself as a Prescriptivist,[2] observes that language was invented primarily as an instrument of communication. He compares linguistic rules to social norms: "The whole point of norms is to help us evaluate our actions (including utterances) according to what we as a community have decided our real interests and purposes are" (48). Adhering to these standardized rules ensures that a speaker's meaning is conveyed both accurately and economically when he communicates with his intended audience, or what Wallace terms the "Discourse Community" (50). When people are "judged" based on how faithfully they adhere to the rules of a given language, the result involves the "actual acceptance or rejection of somebody's bid to be regarded as a peer, a member of somebody else's collective or community or Group" (50). This philosophy is central to the Singapore Government's earliest position on Singlish. Shortly after gaining independence from the British in 1959 and later from Malaysia in 1965, Singapore's political leaders were compelled by circumstances to promote Singapore as a viable and attractive business hub for Western companies and capitalists. Consequently, Standard English was instituted as the lingua franca of public administration and commerce. Politicians feared that a lack of proficiency in Standard English among locals could potentially threaten the economic viability of the nascent city-state (Teo).

Certainly, Wallace's perspective on language offers a pragmatic rationale for adhering to the rigid rules of Standard English usage. But those were the unforgiving economic realities of the 1970s and 80s; the Speak Good English Movement was, ironically, conceived in the early 2000s. This was long after Singapore had achieved a considerable degree of prosperity and unquestionably had demonstrated its sustainability as an autonomous nation-state. Therefore, the government's utilitarian justification for standardized language seems scarcely germane.

Indeed, the mainspring in the emergence of the usage war against Singlish must lie elsewhere. Novelist and essayist Zadie Smith repudiates the idea that language is primarily a tool for communication and challenges the principle of language as an autonomous, self-governing semantic system. In her essay "Speaking in Tongues," Smith discusses how language is a reflection of our experiences with different "worlds,

ideas, cultures, [and] voices" (3). The individual constantly thinks, feels, and perceives; wanting to express those thoughts, feelings, and perceptions is part of the human condition. Ordinarily, the purpose of linguistic expression is to convey this interiority to other people, but this is not always the case. There are moments when the individual needs language to frame his inner thoughts. For instance, it is not entirely outrageous to think of a person reasoning to himself—in his own language—within the privacy of his own heart. All of this is done in the absence of a "Discourse Community." The common denominator in these dissimilar uses of language is not communication with others but individuality. If language is to be anything, it is not a tool but a living experience, or what Smith calls a "voice."

A voice is, by definition, idiosyncratic and thus reflective of the speaker's identity. Voices are also powerfully evocative of specific worlds and cultures because identity is often socialized. Smith illustrates this argument through her own experience of different worlds and voices: "Willesden was a big, colorful, working-class sea; Cambridge was a smaller, posher pond, and almost univocal; the literary world is a puddle" (2). In the same vein, Singlish evokes the cosmopolitan society that is Singapore, with its culturally diverse history and heritage.

More crucially, Smith resists the idea that "voices are meant to be unchanging and singular" (2). This reluctance reveals an important distinction between how Wallace and Smith perceive the semantic processes behind language. Russian philosopher Mikhail Bakhtin developed this distinction as the foundation for his cultural theory on language in his work *The Dialogic Imagination*. He distinguishes language as either dialectical or dialogic. Wallace views language as a dialectical process, which involves the interaction and resolution of competing paradigms. That was the entire point about "norms": society agrees on one putative set of language conventions that establishes primacy over all others. Conversely, Smith sees language as a dialogic process, which emphasizes relativism and change. Language does not exist in a vacuum; it can neither escape from its history of usage nor insulate itself from external influences. In turn, language is emblematic of a living conversation, containing a multiplicity of voices. The dialogic contrasts with the dialectical because in the dialogic, there is no one "best" voice or language.

Indeed, the semantic and cultural interpretation of Singlish would seem to confirm its status as a dialogic language. In its early stages, Singlish underwent a process of calquing words that had no English equivalent from languages such as Malay, Tamil, and Chinese. Moreover, grammatical conventions in Singlish are a far cry from their British parentage. The language adopted many of its conventions from dialectal varieties of Chinese, including Hokkien, Cantonese, Hakka, and Teochew (Platt 364). Literacy in Singlish therefore demands a quasi-fluency in all the languages that have contributed to what Smith might call its "collective human messiness" (6).[3] As she writes of George Bernard Shaw's play *Pygmalion*, Singlish is like "an orchestra of many

voices, simultaneously and perfectly rendered, with no shade of color or tone sacrificed" (4).

Hence, in Smith's view, Wallace's understanding of language is incomplete at best and discriminatory at worst. Although Wallace is supportive of dialectal diversity in the English language, he sees dialects as realities that are parallel to, but ultimately separate from, Standard White English (SWE). Furthermore, Wallace believes that the desire to be "taken seriously" (Wallace 54) justifies the acceptance of and conformity to SWE. In "Tense Present," he relates his failed attempt to convince an African-American student to adopt SWE over Standard Black English. Even Wallace confesses that the reasons for this were "baldly elitist" (53) and might even seem racist (54).

Smith offers a radically different solution to the problem of interpersonal connection raised by Wallace. She proposes a "voice [that] relinquishes ownership of itself [and] develops a creative sense of dissociation in which the claims that are particular to it seem no stronger than anyone else's" (Smith 13). In the case of Singlish, it allows its speakers to express meanings and ways of thinking traditionally associated with at least four different cultures (including the Anglo-Saxon one), and thus fully captures Singapore's experiential realities, with its essence of interculturalism (Wierzbicka 330). Interculturalism is not the same thing as multiculturalism. In a multicultural society, multiple cultures can coexist without significant amalgamation (330), as evidenced by the myriad of dialects and native tongues spoken in the United States. In Singapore, however, different cultural traditions interpenetrate one another. Singlish reflects this, and thus conveys distinctively Singaporean ways of thinking and relating to people. In the context of a young independent nation, Singaporeans have created a new voice that is, to borrow Zadie Smith's words, a "synthesis of disparate things" (1) in order to quell what she calls our "anxiety about voice" (7).

The symbiotic relationship between ways of thinking and language is also important in understanding the hidden dangers of the Singaporean government's war against Singlish. In his essay "Politics and the English Language," George Orwell argues, "If thought corrupts language, language can also corrupt thought" (Orwell 137). He is railing against what he terms "ready-made" language, which is reinforced by standardized forms of language (137). The phrase "ready-made" describes the "bad habits" (128) of writing that, according to Orwell, "spread by imitation" (128) and produce passages plagued by "staleness of imagery" (129). This is reminiscent of the kind of language promulgated by the Speak Good English Movement: it promotes the use of Standard English that is extensively modeled on Standard British English. Against the backdrop of a culturally diverse Singapore, grammatically correct Standard English, which is utterly devoid of culturally relevant imagery, would therefore be considered insincere. Also, many of the older generations of Singaporeans simply did not receive a formal education in speaking Standard English, as English-medium schools in the past tended to be exclusively reserved for wealthier segments of Singapore society. This exclusion was a direct consequence of our colonial legacy.

Thus, a speaker also risks sounding aloof if he speaks only Standard English to a Singlish speaker. Orwell's argument about the insincerity of language is applicable to underlying issues of linguistic elitism that operate within the ranks of the Singapore government. Many of Singapore's political leaders, past and present, received their education at English-speaking universities in the United Kingdom, such as Oxford and Cambridge. Consequently, what one finds in modern-day Singapore is a ruling technocracy that privileges speakers of Standard English, particularly in the political sphere.

With this in mind, the government's linguistic initiative seems all the more insidious. By cultivating a generation of Singaporeans who speak only Standard English, the government can come close to producing a citizenry that speaks in its own voice and replicates its own thoughts. Orwell explicitly warns against the dangers of becoming victim to dictated language: "A speaker who uses that kind of phraseology has gone some distance towards turning himself into a machine. . . . And this reduced state of consciousness, if not indispensable, is at any rate favourable to political conformity" (136). Noticeably, Orwell's theories explain the practical implications of language policies beyond Wallace's dichotomy between Prescriptivism and Descriptivism. The campaign against Singlish is not merely a stereotypical conflict between conservatism and progressivism in language usage. It is part of a broader political struggle between the technocratic elite and the individual citizen.

Orwell appropriates the fundamental tenets underpinning Prescriptivism to advocate for an attitude towards political thought that is Descriptivist in nature. By eliminating the manifestations of conformist language, "one can think more clearly, and to think clearly is a necessary first step towards political regeneration" (128). The ideological subjugation of an entire citizenry, one that earned its independence from colonialism only in recent history, is too steep a price to be paid for the expediency of standardized language. In order to avoid a regressive homogenization of political thought, all Singaporeans must exercise autonomy in their language choices—whether they use Standard English or Singlish. Singapore, as a fledgling nation, needs that kind of dynamism and diversity.

I certainly think of my homeland, Singapore, when Zadie Smith describes "Dream City" as "a place of many voices, where the unified singular self is an illusion" (6). My fellow countrymen are people born, as she says, "between cultures, between voices, [who cannot] help but be aware of the extreme contingency of culture" (15). Today, Singlish is more than a simple linguistic choice: it is an affirmation of our newly earned independence and identity. Even though the Singaporean government continues to wage its war against misplaced modifiers and truant articles, it is unlikely that it will succeed in eradicating Singlish. The failure of the Speak Good English Movement is thus a compelling reminder of the indomitable spirit of language as it lives on in the hearts and minds of people.

NOTES

1. See Platt's "The Singapore English Speech Continuum and Its Basilect 'Singlish' as a 'Creoloid'" for a more detailed historical survey of Singlish.
2. In "Tense Present," Wallace refutes several of the principles that underpin Descriptivism. He is more sympathetic towards the Prescriptivist camp but concedes that its position is based on an erroneous sense of elitism.
3. Although Singlish was derived from Standard British English, it has been so syntactically altered and phonologically transposed that its current form is virtually incomprehensible to an Anglophone's untrained ear.

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HEATED HUMOR: GENDER SUBVERSION THROUGH BEHAVIOR AND JOKES IN *THE HEAT*

SAVANNAH MUDD

"Whether categorized as road movies, Westerns, comedies, or cop action films, all buddy films embrace the same premise: two men of differing personalities and/or backgrounds are thrown together, and their initial lack of understanding of one another is eventually transformed into friendship and mutual respect" (Gates 73-74). Before the two contrasting leads arrive at that mutual respect, in most buddy films "the comedy comes from pure aggravation" (Goldstein). The 2013 film *The Heat* follows this traditional buddy-cop action comedy formula: brash, lewd, hilarious Boston cop Shannon Mullins (Melissa McCarthy) is reluctantly forced to work with uptight FBI agent Sarah Ashburn (Sandra Bullock) on a critical Boston drug case. The twist? Both cops are women.

One does not need to read past titles of reviews to see that *The Heat* was immediately hailed by critics for being feminist precisely because the only shift in the buddy-cop paradigm was the use of female leads. Monika Bartyzel titles her review in *The Week* "*The Heat* Breaks New Ground by *Not* Being Groundbreaking"; NPR reviewer Linda Holmes claims "*The Heat* is Absolutely Revolutionary, for Being Mostly Ordinary." These reviews and others argue that all *The Heat* had to do to be feminist was to genderswap the main characters of the buddy cop genre, thus "combating the idea that having a vagina requires an entirely distinct set of behaviors and expectations than having a penis" (Bartyzel). But is simply replacing the male characters with females truly subversive? And is this the only subversion *The Heat* accomplishes—or is there a shift in the humor as well that benefits feminist theory? Linguistics professor Janet Bing believes that "the most empowering feminist jokes are not those that frame males as oppressive and females as victims, but those that celebrate the values and perspectives of feminist women" (22). Does *The Heat* reach this ideal feminist humor, or does it remain trapped in buddy-cop comedy paradigms?

When considering the film's plot, it is undeniable that *The Heat* breaks ground in terms of female representation in cop action films. Virginia Tech sociology professor Neal King undertook a survey of 291 cop action films (every Hollywood film from 1967-2006 categorized via his method, detailed on pages 245-246, as "cop action") to analyze patterns of gender representation in the genre. Of the 291 films, just twenty-four had female cop action heroes, whereas 267 starred only men (King 238). If even twenty-four out of 291 sounds surprisingly high, consider this: Women were "four times as likely as men to be rookies" (246), "more than three times as likely to hunt serial killers" (248), and killed or maimed half the number of people that men did

(250), among various other distinctions (246-52). Taken as a whole, the data lead King to announce:

> We hear, from Hollywood storytellers, of women who can excel at certain forms of a historically masculine job. But those women work as heroes in small numbers, mostly excluding women of color, rarely in solidarity, still in constrained, nonviolent ways, and far from the crucible in which men forge and break bonds of state power. (258)

The Heat breaks many of these gendered conventions in cop action cinemas. The case Mullins and Ashburn work on is a drug case. Neither of the women is a rookie, and in fact Ashburn takes the case in the hopes of gaining a large promotion. The many interrogation and confrontation scenes, such as when Mullins uses a game of Russian Roulette to threaten her detainee with castration during interrogation, are a change from King's findings that "women never work cases that mainly require such approaches as interrogation, surveillance, witness protection, or repeated confrontation and sabotage of criminals" (248). As for women being excluded from combat, *The Heat* raised concerns in reviews about its exceedingly "high body count" (O'Hehir).

The violent techniques of *The Heat's* leading ladies, while a break from stereotypical portrayals, were seen not as a feminist triumph by some critics but instead as a troubling continuation of the problems of the buddy-cop genre. In his *Salon* review, Andrew O'Hehir says, "[*The Heat* screenwriter] Dippold's screenplay seems driven by a confused machismo, as if she feels the need to assert that women on the screen, behind the camera and in the audience can be just as morally reckless as men. Well, OK, they can!" O'Hehir mocks the idea that it is groundbreaking to show women being violent, yet his choice of the word "machismo" conflates violence with masculinity. He undermines his own claim that it's unnecessary for the screenwriter to assert that women can be as morally reckless; he is part of the audience that, Bartyzel argues, is "still applying gendered expectations to women behind and on the screen." She believes "*The Heat* strives to level the playing field and abolish the notion that women are so different than men" (Bartyzel), but many critics such as O'Hehir indicate, overtly or otherwise, that violence is the domain of men and thus *The Heat* only inserts women into a male experience, as opposed to centering around women in a true feminist fashion.

The last film accused of simply placing women in the roles of men was the female-driven smash hit *Bridesmaids* (2011), directed by Paul Feig, who also directed *The Heat*. The infamous food poisoning scene, during which the bride-to-be comically defecates in the street in a bridal gown, caused critic Lou Lumenick to wince at the idea that "women among themselves behave every bit as grossly as men. Maybe it's the romantic in me, but I'd sure like to think this is not really true." Yet as Mary Elizabeth Williams

reminds us in her review, "to be female is to be deeply enmeshed in the viscera of life" both through the human bodily functions of vomiting and defecating as well as through the blood of motherhood. Thus, "*Bridesmaids* isn't a comedy cross-dresser. It's a movie that succeeds, often beautifully, not by forcing its characters to be as naughty and gross and pathetic as men are. It soars by letting them be as naughty and gross and pathetic as women are" (Williams).

Still, radical female feminists as well as male movie reviewers question the worth of putting women in traditionally male roles. In Jeffrey Brown's article on the rise of "hardbody heroines," he analyzes those "hardbody, hardware, hard-as-nails heroines who can take it, and give it, with the biggest and baddest men of the action cinema" (52). Though neither of the leads is truly a "hardbody heroine"—Ashburn is lithe but not overly muscular, while Mullins is quite overweight—both can give and take it with the biggest and baddest men in the film. In one of the earliest scenes, Mullins chases down and tackles a drug dealer; her size and "softbody" physique do not prevent her from being an action heroine. In fact, at first, she uses her physicality more often and more violently than Ashburn, though Ashburn looks to be a more traditional action heroine.

Brown explores how traditional action heroines have been viewed by feminist critics. Contrary to what one might assume, many were not enthused by the rise of female action protagonists but instead were suspicious that "the action heroine is just a sheep in wolf's clothing, rather than a legitimate role for women" (53). He analyzes the response to the action movie *Terminator 2,* which featured hardbody heroine Sarah Connors (Linda Hamilton) as the main aggressor and the Terminator (Arnold Schwarzenegger) as the main caretaker of the child John Connors. The critical reactions to these characterizations baffled Brown, because "rather than aggressiveness being deemed legitimate for women and compassion acceptable for men, both Sarah Connors and [the Terminator] are suspected of transvestitism" (60). The Terminator, a cyborg killing machine, inverts audience expectation by acting not as a violent, emotionless robot but instead by forming an attachment to John Connors and serving as a compassionate, caring father figure. Brown claims that the fact "that a cyborg Schwarzenegger can be read as the more feminine role is an indication of how overdetermined our cultural notions of appropriate gender behavior are" (60). *Terminator 2* was released in 1991, and more than two decades later, some reviewers harbor similar suspicions about *The Heat* embodying "machismo." However, the large number of reviews celebrating the film as feminist at least partially because it shows women as violent indicates that perhaps people's views of gender expression and behavior are beginning to shift.

The fact that *The Heat* replaces men with women in a buddy-cop film clearly challenges stereotypes such as women's exclusion from violence and aggression or their status as rookies, justifying the reviews of Holmes and Bartyzel. It is feminist and groundbreaking to replicate the buddy-cop formula with women. This feat is not

"comedy cross-dressing" (Williams), but a step towards undermining our "overdetermined . . . cultural notions" (Brown 60) of women's behavior and showcasing the diversity of the women's experiences. But though this is true, analysis of *The Heat* cannot simply stop at this conclusion.

Yes, the genderswapping and genderbending are feminist, but is the humor? *The Heat* does not just challenge ideas of women in the police force, it challenges ideas of women as comedians. Rosie White asserts in her short essay *Funny Women* that

> a comedian is like a surgeon—while the word is ostensibly unmarked by gender it contains the traces of learned prejudices about male and female behaviours. The comedian is presumed to be a masculine figure, with certain forms of comedy such as stand-up predicated on an aggressive, confident style of delivery deemed unlikely to suit female performers, as if to be aggressive and confident is unfeminine. (355)

The Heat already challenges ideas about aggression and confidence among women by showing Mullins and Ashburn's violent actions, among them breaking an adulterer's hand, dropping a man off a balcony, and shooting head villain Larkin in the crotch. The film further challenges these ideas in a subtler way as well, by centering Mullins and Ashburn not just as cops but as hilarious cops. The three above-mentioned violent moments are supposed to be comedic. Film critic Laura Holmes asserts that the "real feat" of *The Heat* is that "about 95 percent of *The Heat* could be made *and would still be considered comedy* if both of the protagonists were (1) men, and (2) thin." Though Holmes focuses on and is intrigued by the ninety-five percent, her claim leaves room for the five percent of comedy that is changed by the fact that the leads are women. The true distinction to be made is not whether the comedy would still be present if men were the leads—the scenes listed above would still be funny if men enacted them—but rather if the comedy would be the same. If a male cop broke the adulterer's hand, the joke based around the man's pleading and the cop's violent reactions wouldn't fall flat, but because Mullins is a woman the joke takes on the added connotation of a female avenger. Similarly, Larkin's demise from a crotch shot would be hilarious no matter who shot him. However, because Ashburn—who throughout the movie has faced sexism from her male colleagues—shoots him, the funny finale becomes a symbolic takedown of the patriarchal institutions. She defeats the villain by defeating his manhood. Though *The Heat* uses the same physical humor as male buddy-cop movies, the female leads do not just re-enact this humor but further it, lending it a gendered nuance that transcends the simple slapstick buddy comedy.

Gendered nuance is present in all comedy humor created by women, according to American culture professor Sevda Caliskan. She writes in her frequently cited piece "Is There Such a Thing as Women's Humor?" that

> Comedy and humor are perhaps more gender-specific than anything else because of their social foundations. If it is at all possible to talk and write about "universals," humor is a field where they do not apply. As Joanna Russ points out, a woman writer who sticks to male myths and male cultural values betrays herself and falsifies her experience. "Part of life is obviously common to both sexes—we all eat, we all get stomach-aches, and we all grow old and die—but a great deal of life is not shared by men and women," she writes. (53)

Interestingly enough, the part of life that Joanna Russ and Sevda Caliskan highlight as "common to both sexes" is the physiological part, the realm of the body, which traditionally has been a kind of humor accessible only by men. Women are still supposed to pretend we don't get sick or shit or age (another progressive part of *The Heat*: both lead actresses are over 40); we're not supposed to discuss sex openly. While *Bridesmaids* tackles these issues of women's body humor more broadly, *The Heat*, too, incorporates jokes about bodies that extend far beyond the trope of the "funny fat person" and avoid the sexist jokes of many buddy cops. When an ex-lover confronts Mullins, she irritatedly brushes him off; when he doesn't leave her alone, she tries to deflect him to Ashburn. Mullins tells her ex-lover that "[Ashburn's] lady business is like an old dirty attic full of broken Christmas lights and like doll shoes and shit. Why don't you clean that out for her?" Ashburn stands stunned, then, before quickly escaping, mutters, "That's a misrepresentation of my vagina." This kind of lewd body humor expresses truths about the body, yet it also centers on the female experience. Women-made jokes about their vaginas are fundamentally different from male ones; while both are crass, women discussing their own anatomy openly is still revolutionary, even if it is couched in a joke. Though the joke is insulting, and directed as a throwaway line to a man, it does not center his desire or give him the chance to respond through a comment or further advances. Ashburn literally does not let a man define her vagina. Thus, the joke centered on female anatomy is centered on women as a whole, and Caliskan's assertion that humor is gender-specific goes further than she even claimed, for even jokes about supposedly shared bodily experiences of men and women can revolve around the "viscera of life" (Williams) that women are enmeshed in.

Since Mullins is defending herself against a man's verbal attack, this joke is not exactly in line with Janet Bing's idea of "feminist humor" as one that "is not the humor of the oppressed, but empowering humor that recognizes the value of the female experience" (22), yet it approaches this concept. Bing wants to challenge "the assumption that males should always be central and females peripheral" (30). Thus, she contradicts Caliskan, because Bing argues that it is rare for jokes to center on women and thus comedy is not inherently gender specific. This joke fits Bing and Caliskan's ideas of feminist humor, because it does not entertain the thoughts or response of the man but instead focuses on the lewdness of Mullins and the shock of Ashburn.

Oftentimes, *The Heat* fails to reach Bing's criteria of "feminist humor," not, as one might expect, because it employs a "masculine" humor of lewdness, but because it still employs the "humor of the oppressed," a female humor that focuses on the position of women as oppressed by men, instead of on female experiences without men. Garrett Craig, the misogynistic albino DEA agent who fights Mullins and Ashburn for the lead on the drug case, often tries to deter their work through his sexist insults; his horrific statements like "shave above the knee next time" are met with anger and equally cruel comments from Ashburn and Mullins. Ashburn retorts that women naturally grow hair, and though she stammers it out, most people would consider this comedic moment to be feminist humor as she defends women's bodies. Again, Bing would disagree: though it is empowering for women to discuss their bodies openly, here they are doing it in a way that frames women as victims and men as oppressors. The comedy in this scene is centered around a man being oppressive, and the scene escalates into a verbal battle of the sexes. This "divisive humor" can "reinforce assumptions about males and females being essentially and categorically different" (Bing 27). The divisive humor around sexism in the workplace reappears again when Ashburn storms into a meeting of officers who are mocking Mullins. She defends Mullins in a moment of solidarity, then yells "Fuck you" followed by a string of ever increasing and odd curse words at the officers while frantically waving her middle fingers around. The scene is hilarious, but it relies on tropes of women being discriminated against in the workforce, and thus revolves around the men making the joke about Mullins rather than around Ashburn's righteous rage.

The divisive humor employed throughout much of *The Heat* undercuts its progressive plotlines and the handful of female-centered jokes. The "revolutionary" aspects of its gender swapping do not always translate to a revolution in the humor used, yet this does not mean that feminist critics should disregard the movie. Bartyzel points out that "For some, it's not enough for a film like *The Heat* to treat and display women equally; it must also infuse its story with added social responsibility . . . a movie like *The Heat* is expected to transcend its genre, be a feminist icon, right other imbalances, and fix any perceived thematic weaknesses of the past." This "unfair expectation of activism" (Bartyzel) burdens *The Heat*, *Bridesmaids*, and similar female-centric films, while male films are usually not held to the same level of scrutiny. Despite *The Heat*'s failings, in particular its moments of humor that, according to Bing, could reinforce the gender essentialism that the film tries so hard to undermine, it still significantly advances female representation in comedy and action. As more feminist films are made, the undue burden of activism, no longer tied to a small handful of films, will dissipate, and female film representation, less hindered by sexist institutions and incredibly high feminist standards, will truly progress.

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A LESSON IN INEQUALITY: AN EXAMINATION OF RACIAL AND GENDERED DISPARITY IN EDUCATIONAL DISCIPLINE

BEN SWANSON

During my senior year at Henry Clay High School, a new principal implemented an unpopular policy of stricter enforcement of hall-pass rules. At the beginning of the year, universal application of this rule prevented anyone from being out of class without a signed pass. As the year went on, the list of exceptions to the rules grew longer and enforcement of the rules slackened such that I was soon able to find ways to circumvent them: walking with purpose, wearing a backpack, carrying a brightly colored slip of paper that could be mistaken for a hall pass, and knowing which teachers enforced which hallways. Within a month of school starting, I did not worry about hall-pass restrictions.

Many of my fellow white classmates followed suit, but when black students attempted to do so, and particularly black males, the rules suddenly seemed to be enforced again. Hall passes were strictly required, black students were informed. When I walked with black friends, I found that the rules suddenly applied to me again even when passing through hallways I had walked through unbothered the previous day. As hall-pass enforcement became more discretionary, so, too, it became more discriminatory.

The Fayette County Board of Education, the governing body for the public education system where I received my K-12 education, proudly echoes federal nondiscrimination language on its website: "The Fayette County Board of Education does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, age, religion, sex, genetic information (in employment activities) or disability in employment, educational programs or activities" (Board of Education). The Student Code of Conduct for the district explicitly bans "Limiting student access to educational tools, such as computers, based on the student's gender, race, color, religion, national origin, or disability" (Board of Education 42). Yet the Board of Education in Fayette County supervises a disciplinary system that engages in disciplinary actions that violate its own nondiscrimination statement and rules by disproportionately punishing black male students: "while black students made up about 28 percent of Fayette County's enrollment, they accounted for more than 60 percent of suspensions" and "black students were about six times more likely to get sent to the office than white students" (Honeycutt Spears). Hall-pass enforcement is but one visible manifestation of a broader system of unequitable discipline.

In many ways, Fayette County, which contains the small city of Lexington, is not an unusual place. Situated in Kentucky, a Southern and Appalachian state with Midwestern ties, Lexington is a university town, with racial diversity roughly equivalent

to national levels (United States Census Bureau). The Fayette County educational system is seen as respectable because it is one of the strongest county school systems in a state with overall poor education indicators. Yet Fayette County displays the same patterns of disciplinary inequity found to a more extreme degree in places like Chicago and Los Angeles. Black males across the country consistently receive more punishment than any other group, "even after controlling for the socioeconomic status of the students" (Booker and Mitchell 195). The demographic factors with the most explanatory power for the discipline gap and the ones on which this essay will focus are gender and race, with Fayette County Public Schools (FCPS) used to demonstrate a typical manifestation of the discipline gap. Data demonstrate that pronounced disparities exist for Latino male students as well, but this paper will focus on black male students because of limited evidence on Latino students and because of certain qualitative differences between black and Latino populations, most notably the prevalence of non-native English speakers among Latino populations and issues relating to immigration within Latino populations, including in Lexington's Latino populations.

In examining the experiences of black male students within the discipline system, it is useful to employ intersectional analysis, which attempts to explain the circumstances of a particular subgroup through the combined and interactive effects of their multiple identities. Kimberlé Crenshaw, originator of much of the scholarship on intersectionality, explains that while identity politics "frequently conflates or ignores intragroup differences," intersectional recognition of the multidimensionality of identity allows for more complete analyses (1242). Peggy McIntosh, a feminist scholar, tracks her transition to intersectional thinking in a personal essay about her coming to terms with her white privilege, beginning with her realization of how she is disadvantaged as a woman, "I realized . . . the extent to which men work from a base of unacknowledged privilege," and progressing to a later realization that she, too, "enjoy[s] unearned skin privilege" (2). Crucially, intersectionality differs from aggregating identity analyses—in other words, the experiences of women of color cannot be summed up from the experiences of women plus the experiences of people of color. Crenshaw explains that intersectional subordination "is frequently the consequence of the imposition of one burden that interacts with preexisting vulnerabilities to create yet another division of disempowerment" (1249). In other words, intersectional analysis is not merely a matter of discerning who has the most disadvantages. As McIntosh notes, "hierarchies in our society are interlocking," which helps explain why black men fare worse than black women in the school educational system (1).

One of the principal mechanisms by which maleness interacts with blackness to disadvantage black boys in the discipline system is threat perception. Jim Sidanius and Rosemary Veniegas, social theory researchers, argue that the "double-jeopardy hypothesis," which posits that people are disadvantaged principally on the basis of

which disadvantaged classes they belong to (and, therefore, black women face greater disadvantage than black men by virtue of belonging to a subordinated gender), does not reflect the realities of criminal justice, education, health care, and the labor market (12). Instead, Sidanius and Veniegas provide a framework within social dominance theory of the "subordinate male target hypothesis" (13). Under this framework,

> it is primarily outgroup males rather than outgroup females who will be the primary targets of arbitrary-set [racial] discrimination. . . . The reasoning behind this expectation is that arbitrary-set discrimination is primarily a form of intrasexual competition perpetrated by males and directed against males. (13)

Sidanius and Veniegas ultimately conclude that the reason that outgroup men are targeted moreso within these sectors than outgroup women is the perception that outgroup men threaten the dominant social hierarchy: "they [ingroup men] will regard subordinate males as potentially dangerous rivals and threats" (22). In other words, the additional power held by black men that black women do not hold operates as a liability, exposing black men to fear-motivated discrimination.

Threat perception is evident in media coverage of racially charged issues such as crack cocaine and gang violence, through overt racism in the public sphere—for instance, when Stanford graduate and professional football player Richard Sherman, a black man, was labelled a "thug"—and within the educational discipline gap (Wilson). Language targeted at this perceived threat permeates educational literature and school behavioral codes. In *A Notion at Risk*, an anthology edited by Richard Kahlenberg, the chapter on discipline, written by Paul Barton, employs threat response language. Schools in "poor neighborhoods," Barton argues, "have higher levels of disorder, disruption, and fear" (Kahlenberg 223). While Barton rightly points out the effects of poor behavior on the academic achievement of those behaving well, he neglects the welfare of students accused of behaving poorly. Additionally, in generally categorizing schools in "poor neighborhoods" as adverse educational environments, he perpetuates a communal threat perception whereby certain schools, generally those populated by students of color, are seen by the broader community as dangerous and dysfunctional. The solution to disciplinary issues, he argues, is more "disciplinary control" and an increasingly strict disciplinary regime (Kahlenberg 230). In other words, he fails to recognize that the way in which disciplinary codes are written and enforced influences the data he cites as evidence that low-income schools are hotbeds of disruption and criminality. When he does turn to the factors that lead to misbehavior, he adopts a valuable and insightful "public health viewpoint" in which various cultural and individual "risk factors" increase the likelihood of student misbehavior (Kahlenberg 241). Yet by failing to recognize inadequacies in codes of conduct and inequities in the enforcement of codes of conduct, Barton neglects two important factors in the discipline gap.

Explanations for the discipline gap can be provided on three levels. First, as Barton does, we must deal with the behavior of students. While teacher bias and problematic discipline codes play important roles in disciplinary disparity and will be addressed later, there does exist a behavioral gap that contributes to the disciplinary gap. This behavioral gap must be analyzed very carefully. First, as sociologist Pedro Noguera points out, most black male students do not misbehave: "Although it is true that many Black males are confronted with a vast array of risks, obstacles, and social pressures, the majority manages to navigate these with some degree of success" (435). The issue, then, is not that black males behave poorly, but rather that a disproportionate number of students who behave poorly are black males. In concrete terms, this means that although only 11% of Henry Clay High School students are black males, my observations suggest that far more than 11% of the students who walk the halls during class in violation of school policy are black males (Fayette County Public Schools "Henry Clay"). Importantly, the principle that black males are not inherently likelier to misbehave than any other demographic group is not merely an ideological conclusion but also "a conclusion drawn from a vast body of research on human development and from research on the learning styles of Black children" (Noguera 433). Accepting, then, that a disproportionate amount of students misbehaving are black males, and that this misbehavior is not inherent, we turn to its causes.

Noguera provides a valuable framework for analyzing these causes. First, he describes the dichotomy of culturalism versus structuralism, where culturalism attributes misbehavior or failure to "beliefs, values, norms, and socialization" while structuralism emphasizes "political economy, the availability of jobs and economic opportunities, class structure, and social geography" (Noguera 438-39). These two frameworks, however, are inadequate. Culturalism embraces a "blame-the-victim" mentality and discounts the influence of external factors, concluding that low-income and other "problem" communities are destined to stay as such because of their own intransigence. Structuralism, conversely, deprives these same communities of agency, positioning them as utterly powerless in the face of a larger, oppressive system. Because neither approach fully satisfies the issue of misbehavior and failure, Noguera follows in a recent tradition of synthesizing the two frameworks that proves helpful for our analysis as well. He explains, "Both structural and cultural forces influence choices and actions, but neither has the power to act as the sole determinant of behavior because human beings also have the ability to produce cultural forms that can counter these pressures" (Noguera 440). Winburn Middle School, the second poorest middle school in the Fayette County system, has implemented a disciplinary policy centered on an understanding of both cultural and structural challenges. As a result, Winburn Middle is one of two middle schools in the district, which contains 12 middle schools, that has successfully reduced its suspension rate (Honeycutt Spears; Fayette County Public Schools "Middle schools"). Teachers and administrators work with students with the understanding that these students generally come from

challenging backgrounds, with higher-than-average rates of poverty, single parenthood, poor health indicators, and other stressors, and with the understanding that the Winburn area community deals with problems like rates of violent crime and drug abuse that far exceed Lexington averages. With that recognition, teachers and administrators nevertheless expect and encourage students to transcend these deterministic limitations in order to succeed in school.

Tragically, structuralism at times seems to win, as when my former classmate Patrick Puckett was fatally shot in May 2013 (Honeycutt Spears, Fields, and Eads). I remember Patrick as a student from the low-income neighborhood immediately surrounding Winburn Middle who struggled in school and, though socially and athletically successful, became academically disengaged. I later heard that he had become involved in drug abuse; the altercation in which he ultimately lost his life was drug related. Like the poor decisions of so many others, Patrick's poor decisions were heavily influenced by his adverse situation. Yet Patrick's story need not be typical, and at Winburn Middle, the experiences of students like Patrick and an understanding of structuralism do not engender fatalism: by recognizing the tension between challenging backgrounds and the need to transcend these limitations, Winburn Middle has taken steps towards reducing its discipline gap. To more fully understand how the discipline gap is linked to student behavior, we now move to analyzing how these cultural and structural factors influence students.

Psychologists Duane Thomas and Howard Stevenson provide a mechanism by which injustice, particularly racial, translates into misbehavior: confronted by regular discrimination, some black male students turn to "anger expression" and "rejection sensitivity," both means of protecting themselves from psychological harm (170-171). As Thomas and Stevenson point out, "The expression of anger is a reality among African Americans who are frustrated with their racial status in life, and it is used in different ways to mediate the psychological effects of racial provocation" (169). Sometimes, this manifests in "hypervigilance," or extreme care to not be seen as angry or dangerous (169-170). Conversely, it can manifest as hypermasculinity and "more outward displays of anger, such as noncompliance, insubordination, and direct physical aggression" (Thomas and Stevenson 170). Relatedly, rejection sensitivity can cause "a lowered threshold for perception of negativity, an increased propensity for personalizing negative cues, and intense affective reactions—all of which can lead to an anxious, hostile, and aggressive interpersonal style" (Thomas and Stevenson 171). Both hypervigilance and hypermasculinity can be understood as responses to threat perception, where hypervigilance is an attempt to minimize the perceived threat and hypermasculinity is an acceptance that one is perceived as threatening and a belief that avoiding this perception is futile. In summary, the injustices experienced by black boys within and outside of the educational system can increase their misbehavior at school.

Beyond the psychological components of misbehavior, sociocultural forces impact behavior as well. Low expectations of black boys, adopted by their communities and

by the boys themselves, as well as by teachers and administrators, devalue good behavior. Noguera points to the all-too-common "location of Black males within school, in remedial classes or waiting for punishment outside the principal's office," which creates an expectation of misbehavior or at least erodes the expectation of good behavior (445). In Fayette County, the SAFE program (Suspension and Failure Eliminated), the most serious in-school disciplinary measure available, creates these corrosive norms of black male misbehavior. SAFE is held in a single room in each school, and I noticed in both middle school and high school that SAFE was disproportionately and visibly populated by black males. Seeing this discrepancy affects the expectations of the students themselves. This erosion of norms of good behavior couples with a structural perception that academic success does not operate as a means of improving one's life: often presented with unfavorable odds and limited visible role models, black males may struggle to motivate themselves based on their (often accurate) perceptions of "an ominous array of social and economic hardships" (Noguera 432). Therefore, black males may struggle with motivation because their payoffs do not seem to match those of their white counterparts.

Disciplinary codes themselves, while very rarely overtly discriminatory, permit ambiguity in what constitutes a violation and how violations should be punished; this ambiguity in turn permits disparate application of discipline. Take, for instance, the disciplinary violation of "willful disobedience" or disruption. In the Fayette County Public School system, failure to follow directions or rules is defined as "Willful refusal by a student to follow directives of authorized school personnel (including failure to identify oneself when requested) or to accept in-school disciplinary measures" (Board of Education 14). In this language, teachers and administrators are presumed to be acting either correctly or at least reasonably; in the reality of an often arbitrary and discriminatory enforcement regime, this rule penalizes resistance or a failure "to accept" punishment regardless of the justice of that punishment. In many school district behavior codes, "willful defiance" is punishable by suspension, and this rule, unsurprisingly, is applied disproportionately to males of color. As Christina Hoag of the Associated Press notes:

> In California, defiance is a key reason behind high suspension rates, particularly for black and Latino students. A University of California Los Angeles report found students of color are most often suspended for infractions relating to disrespect, defiance and disobedience.

"Defiance" reflects the threat perception that exposes black males to discipline from school authorities; under the subordinate male target hypothesis, it is unsurprising that black males are often sanctioned for the nebulous and vague act of defiance. "Disruptive behavior," similarly, is ill-defined in the FCPS Student Code of Conduct as "Disruptions that impede the delivery of instruction or alter the flow or

school or district related business" (Board of Education 51). Defining "disruptive behavior" as "disruptions" does little to concretize this unclear disciplinary violation, which is grounds for discretionary punishments running the gamut from classroom discipline to short- and long-term suspensions. The terms disruption and defiance both demonstrate ambiguities in codes of conduct and disciplinary guidelines that expose black male students to the full force of threat perception and other discriminatory attitudes held by teachers and administrators.

These teachers and administrators do, indeed, often hold discriminatory attitudes. A survey from the National Center for Education Information in 2011 found that teachers were eighty-four percent white and eighty-four percent female (Feistritzer 11). While formal data on the racial and gender breakdown of FCPS teachers does not publicly exist, my informal observations suggest that Fayette County specific data appear similar. Teachers often hold significant racial and gender biases that strongly influence their interactions with students. According to a study of seventh-grade public school students, white students "received the most favorable treatment by teachers and initiated the most student-teacher contact" while even in predisciplinary stages, "teachers tended to interact less positively with the African American boys" (Thomas and Stevenson 167–168). Teachers expect lower achievement and poorer behavior from black boys, and these "negative teacher perceptions have also been associated with teachers' use of inflexible and punitive classroom management strategies" and with "unnecessary disciplinary and special education referrals" (Thomas and Stevenson 167). Teachers' poor expectations of black boys both contribute to worse behavior in those students, similarly to how black boys' poor expectations of themselves can have the same effect, and also skew the application of discipline. Furthermore, a particular brand of threat perception born of racial ignorance by teachers can disadvantage black boys in the application of discipline: "White teachers perceived African American male students' movement styles and cultural expressions (e.g., stroll walk and neighborhood jargon) to be higher in aggression" (Thomas and Stevenson 168). Teachers thus conclude that black boys are acting up because of their threat perceptions and racial misinterpretation, intentional or otherwise, and apply discipline more readily to black males than to anyone else.

While the disproportionate presence of whites and females in the teaching profession certainly augments the level of bias to which black boys are subjected, it is important to note that even black teachers and black male teachers can apply discipline in an inequitable manner. Thomas and Stevenson point out that:

> Irrespective of the teacher's race, teachers often misinterpret culturally relevant movement and language styles as being aggressive and disrespectful . . . although African American teachers recognized styling behaviors associated with African American males, they were less favorable toward these students when they engaged in culturally sanctioned behaviors. (168)

This phenomenon likely exists as a function of broader restrictions placed on black behavior; while the perception that black boys are a threat, a risk, or destined to fail may not be held by black teachers themselves, their acceptance that society holds black boys as unlikely to succeed may bias black teachers' application of discipline. Indeed, the chapter on discipline in Ann Ferguson's *Bad Boys*, a sociological study of black males in one public school, positions black disciplinarians as reluctant enforcers of societal sanctions placed on black males. School resource coordinators, one male and one female, apply discipline in a detention room, while a third disciplinarian applies discipline in a special "Jailhouse" reserved for particularly difficult students. All three staff are black, and while they recognize that most of the students they discipline are black and express frustration with this fact, they nevertheless act as authority figures in these students' lives (Ferguson 34-35). The men are tall, muscular, and deep-voiced; the woman "fusses, exhorts, despairs, and chides"; in attempting to correct and, indeed, to help these black boys, the disciplinarians of Rosa Parks Elementary School participate in a system designed to do quite the opposite (Ferguson 33). At my high school, we had five administrators charged with discipline: one female, the rest male; one white, one Latino, and the rest black. All the men were above six feet tall, and all but one of them had played college or professional athletics. With booming voices, stern manners, and imposing physiques, these men acted as the enforcers of a system they did not design or control—yet nevertheless, one which they perpetuated.

At the confluence of behavior socialization that leads to worse behavior, ambiguous discipline codes, and uneven enforcement by school employees exists a tremendous educational discipline gap. While several factors influence which students receive the most discipline, blackness and maleness are more associated with punishment than any other indicators, and indeed, the challenges faced by this population extend beyond educational discipline. This phenomenon within the educational system mirrors the criminal justice system, also disproportionately populated by black men. One in fifteen black men is incarcerated, as compared to one in 106 white men (Kerby). While criminal justice disparities reflect a broader range of factors such as drug policy and employment discrimination, the factors that lead to the educational discipline gap also contribute to the criminal justice gap. And indeed, the educational discipline gap itself may contribute to the criminal justice gap. Similar rhetoric further links the disparities in the two systems. At the sixty-eight percent black Martin Luther King Jr. Academy for Excellence, a school for Fayette County students "who have caused disciplinary problems at their assigned schools," "the perception is that they don't leave," just as criminal recidivism fosters the same perception of hopelessly cyclical punishment and violation (Honeycutt Spears).

Reactions to the prejudices that inform discrimination in criminal justice and in education were most visible in the 1960s, when James Baldwin gave his "A Talk to Teachers." In the talk, Baldwin describes children as starting from a point of naïveté

but not stupidity, and "it isn't long—in fact it begins when he is in school—before he discovers the shape of his oppression." School is a place where black students, and especially black boys, learn about this oppression by experiencing it, whether by being checked more often for hall passes or suspended more easily than their non-black and non-male counterparts for disciplinary violations. The inequities in the discipline system soon provide a lesson to black boys more powerful than anything formally taught: a lesson of criminalization, discrimination, and injustice.

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MORE THAN JUST TOFU: EXAMINING KOREEDA HIROKAZU'S *STILL WALKING* IN RELATION TO THE JAPANESE "FAMILY DRAMA" GENRE

WINSTON TOH GHEE WEI

Hirokazu Koreeda's film *Still Walking* begins with Toshiko Yokoyama (Kirin Kirin) and Chinami Kataoka (You) in the kitchen preparing vegetables for the family feast. Mother and daughter exchange cooking tips over the sound of carrots being grated, radishes being chopped, and sesame oil sizzling in the pan. The opening scene provides a portrait of the Yokoyama family that resembles ordinary family life in Japan. Natural light filters throughout the space of the set, creating a comforting, naturalistic vision of a typical family moment. The sound of chatter intermingling with that of cooking evokes a strong sense of nostalgia and sentimentality. This beguilingly typical scene of a lighthearted family affair, however, belies a darker undertone, which reveals itself following a conversation between the patriarch of the Yokoyama family, Kyohei Yokoyama (Yoshio Harada), and a neighbor (Haruko Kato) about aging. The elderly lady laments to her former family doctor that she can no longer eat anything but "cold noodles," perhaps indicating that her "time could be any day now."

Food, which starts out as a symbol of familiarity, rapidly becomes a metaphor for death. *Still Walking* tells the story of the Yokoyama family coming together to commemorate the death of the eldest son, Junpei, who died 15 years ago while attempting to save the life of another boy. In the opening scene, the contrast between cooked food and stale "cold noodles" represents the difference between the vitality of youth and the enervation of old age. For the elderly neighbor, food is now a barometer of age, and an omen of impending death. From its opening scene, *Still Walking* vacillates between portraits of idealized family life and moments that touch on broad themes such as aging, the inevitability of death, and memory.

It is because the film is so multifaceted that critics struggled to find a category to encapsulate it. Upon its release to universal acclaim, many hailed *Still Walking* as an homage to the acclaimed Japanese filmmaker Yasujiro Ozu, who was known for his Shōshimin (family drama) films. Yet Koreeda has been quick to distance himself from Ozu in multiple interviews, preferring instead to associate his style with the "worldview" of another legendary filmmaker, Mikio Naruse, whose characters are "more openly anguished" (Lim). Dennis Lim, a film critic who has written commentaries on Koreeda's films, acknowledged as much, saying that Koreeda's characters are "pricklier and less reconciled" compared to Ozu's.

Indeed, *Still Walking* retains many of the conventions of the Shōshimin genre, albeit with significant variations. The focus of *Still Walking*, as many critics have pointed out,

is unequivocally on the Japanese family. Through the setting of an intimate family gathering, Koreeda exposes underlying tensions among family members, revealing insecurities rooted in Japanese society and culture. Like Ozu's, Koreeda's style is contemplative and minimalist. Nonetheless, to say that this similarity in style defines *Still Walking* as a Shōshimin film is to misunderstand the genre. Ozu's Shōshimin films from the 1920s to the 1950s were interested in capturing portraits of members of the Japanese white-collar middle class as they endured the rapid environmental and social changes that accompanied this period of modernization (Joo 259). Contrastingly, Koreeda's film seems to be more concerned with the emotional struggles of people as they respond to the challenges of life and to the pain provoked by death.

Making Tofu: Shōshimin in the style of Ozu

Ozu once famously declared: "I only know how to make tofu. . . . I can make fried tofu, boiled tofu, and stuffed tofu. Cutlets and other fancy stuff, that's for other directors" (Schilling, "Re-examining Yasujiro Ozu on Film"). The late master's exaltation of the bland food reflects his preference for minimalist filmmaking—a style very much associated with Koreeda today. Ozu was famous for his introspective, contemplative, and humanistic style of filming. *Tokyo Story*, a film about an elderly Japanese couple travelling from a small town in southwest Japan to visit their children in Tokyo, is arguably the crowning jewel amongst the pantheon of Shōshimin films by Ozu. In the film, scenes unfold with effortless grace, transitioning from "pillow shots" of natural landscape to conversations between the characters. These pillow shots capture a still image of scenery, or an empty room, and are sustained for a period of four to five seconds. Apart from creating a "sense of calm and serenity," these shots create moments of pause, so that the audience can reflect in quietude upon the array of feelings exposed on screen (Schneider).

Ozu's films extensively explore the relationship between an environment and its people. The American film critic Paul Schrader contends that "the greatest conflict in . . . Ozu's films is not political, psychological, or domestic, but is, for want of a better term, 'environmental'" (35). Specifically, the Japanese concept of "zen," balance in the environment, was disrupted by rapid development during the 1950s. *Tokyo Story* shows how economic forces had intruded into the family sphere. A gulf emerges between the children, who are too busy with work in Tokyo to entertain their parents, and the elderly couple, who struggle to come to grips with these developments in society. In this sense, Ozu's work is more sociological than philosophical. His film is mainly concerned with the Japanese concept of "traditional oneness" at stake in a rapidly changing world (Schrader 35).

And yet, it would not be fair to dismiss Ozu's films as insular and completely unrelatable to a broader audience. In the words of the film critic Mark Schilling, Ozu's "genius was to transform everyday things into eternal truths, in ways immediately recognizable as utterly his own" ("Re-examining Yasujiro Ozu on Film"). Schilling has

rightly credited Ozu for being concerned with "eternal truths" since many of Ozu's themes, such as economic displacement and the emergence of an intergenerational gulf, are ideas that transcend historical and geographical contexts. Nonetheless, Ozu's films are ultimately about Japan specifically. These eternal truths are embedded within Japanese philosophy and the Japanese worldview. In the words of Schrader, "it is very difficult for a western audience to appreciate the *aware* of Ozu's themes and the *wabi* of his techniques" (34). *Aware* and *wabi* are both concepts from the Japanese worldview that refer to an acceptance of impermanence (Schrader 34). Ozu's characters respond to sweeping changes in a unique manner of restrained acceptance that would not be intuitively apparent to an audience not educated about Japanese culture.

Is *Still Walking* an homage to Ozu?

Despite Koreeda's reluctance to associate *Still Walking* with Ozu's Shōshimin, there are elements of his film that appeal more to a local audience then an international one. In one particular scene, the adults in the Yokoyama family reminisce about the past over a meal in the family home while the children play outside in the yard. Toshiko, the matriarch, mentions Junpei's widow, Yukie-San, and wonders how she is doing. Toshiko laments that if only Yukie-San had had children with Junpei, then perhaps she could have been invited to join the family. Now that Yukie-San has remarried, she can no longer visit. Following a moment of pause, Toshiko then goes on to remark: "Perhaps it's better that they did not have children. A widowed single mom is harder to marry off." Another pause ensues.

Koreeda employs no frills, nor makes any attempt to dramatize the dialogue surrounding the topic of re-marrying upon death, an act considered "immoral" in a Japanese context (Fuess 70). His characters demonstrate incredible restraint, which may not be distinguishable upon first glance. Yukari Yokoyama (Natsukawa Yui), the wife of the second son, Ryota Yokoyama (Hiroshi Abe), is silent and expressionless throughout the entirety of the conversation despite being a married widow herself. Here, the film critic A. O. Scott's commendation of Ozu for being a "master at evoking the feelings that his characters are conditioned not to express" explains this particular scene (Johnson). Yukari's composure provokes a strong sense of pathos for her predicament. She is the innocent bystander who unwittingly has to grapple with the collateral damage of her in-laws' insensitivity. The pauses accentuate the tension in the scene. They highlight a subtle conflict between the parents, who harbor a more conservative view on remarriage, and their daughter-in-law, who is eager to assimilate into the family, yet is rebuffed by their candor. The juxtaposition between the callousness of Toshiko's words and Yukari's composure also serves to criticize traditional Japanese attitudes towards remarriage. To Toshiko, it is perhaps "natural" to associate the worth of a woman with her eligibility, even to the extent of dismissing children as a burden if they hinder this endeavor. Through a seemingly unremarkable family conversation, Koreeda, like Ozu, is able to draw out complexities in the

relationship between Yukari and her in-laws and to expound on issues at the core of Japanese traditions.

Beyond the issue of remarriage, *Still Walking* implicitly criticizes the Japanese conception of family as a whole, referred to as "家" or *ie*. For the Japanese family, "Blood ties are not as important as the belonging to the household itself, this is the '*ie*'" (Caro-Oca and López-Rodrígu). By remarrying into another household, Yukie-San had her membership in the Yakoyama family revoked. Her absence from the scene suggests that she could no longer be invited back to the Yakoyama home for an event as private as the commemoration of the family's eldest born, even though she is the widow of Junpei. The characters' silent acceptance of Yukie-San's expulsion is perhaps reflective of a wider, more endemic problem of adhering too much to traditions at the expense of empathy. There is no consideration for how Yukie-San may feel about not being invited to a family gathering commemorating her own deceased husband.

Throughout the remainder of the film, the customs of the *ie* continue to yoke the characters to the past, preventing them from moving on. According to the film critics Caro-Oca and López-Rodrígu,

> the *ie* consists in a patriarchal conception of the family based on principles such as the hierarchy of the older, the continuity, the maintenance of the property, and the division of labor in terms of gender. The patriarch is the head of the *ie* and his role would be inherited by the firstborn male child. Within this system, the situation of the children was marked by their status as successor or not.

Ryota is thrust by an approximately 500-year-old Japanese tradition into the hot seat of "the successor" upon the death of his older brother (Sakata). His decision to pursue art instead of medicine becomes a major source of conflict with his father, Kyohei, who struggles in vain to find a suitable successor. Here, Koreeda is criticizing the rigidity of customary systems for their overemphasis on the collective family unit at the cost of valuing individual worth. In a society where family roles are strictly predefined by tradition, there is no space to accommodate deviations from the established norms.

Given the cultural specificity of many of Koreeda's claims in his film, it is no surprise that its universal appeal came as a surprise for the director (Schilling). Yet, it is precisely the "accidental" universal appeal of the film that has propelled its status beyond the genre of Shōshimin.

In the Style of Koreeda

One of the most poignant scenes begins with a conversation between Toshiko and Ryota, mother and son, as they reminisce over a famous, now-retired Sumo wrestler known in his prime for grimacing in an exaggeratedly comical manner during a fight. What begins as nostalgic musing quickly turns into a passive-aggressive confrontation.

Ryota, following a short moment of pause, suggests to his mother that she should stop inviting Yoshio to join the Yokoyama family yearly in mourning because he "feels bad" for him. Yoshio is the boy who was saved by Ryota's elder brother, Junpei, before he drowned. Now obese and out of a job, Yoshio is mocked behind his back by the majority of the Yokoyama family for not living a life worthy of Junpei. Toshiko reveals, almost candidly, that she invites Yoshio to pay tribute to Junpei year-on-year precisely because it is painful for him to be constantly confronted with his guilt over being the survivor of a tragedy. Even though she acknowledges that Yoshio did not intend for Junpei to die saving him, "it makes no difference to a parent" and "not having someone to hate makes it all the worse" for her. The heightened juxtaposition between Ryota's expression of sympathy and disgust, as well as Toshiko's pained look of guilt and hatred, raises the moral dilemma at the heart of *Still Walking*. To what extent can we blame a grieving mother for harboring a deep-seated, almost vitriolic hatred towards an innocent victim?

Every twitch, gaze, and silent pause accentuates the tension in the scene, provoking immense discomfort in the audience. Certainly, we can sympathize with Toshiko's plight. No mother should have to mourn the death of her child. There is also something frighteningly true about her claim that hate somehow aids the grieving process. Perhaps having somebody to blame alleviates, to some degree, the guilt that all survivors of tragedy harbor. Still, we also recognize that Toshiko's cruelty in projecting her pain on the innocent Yoshio is deplorable. *Still Walking*'s worldwide appeal is a function of the relatability of these characters. Koreeda's characters are an unadulterated reflection of us viewers when stripped to a vulnerable core. They reveal that we are more complex than the binary categories of good or evil, selfless or selfish. Like these characters, and the Sumo wrestler of Ryota's childhood, we too are perpetually wrestling against our human nature, almost to a fault.

What is it about *Still Walking* that makes it so poignant, so accessible, so universal? Koreeda seems to have applied the same Ozu-inspired formula: "to "transform everyday things into eternal truths" (Schilling, "Re-examining Yasujiro Ozu on Film"). Yet, unlike Ozu's films, which had more of a culturally specific payoff, Koreeda's film resonates with an international crowd. The American critic Carson Lund insists that Koreeda's film "speaks volumes about human existence while being, with its generous doses of wry, modern humor, universally relatable" (Lund). Even the title of Lund's film review, "Kendall Square's Finest Hour Was Still Walking," credits this Japanese film for being a triumph for Bostonian cinema. The reason for its appeal lies in both Koreeda's distinctive technique and his motivation for making the film.

Although both Ozu and Koreeda apply a similarly contemplative style to their films, they have achieved it through different means. Ozu was well known for using pillow shots to provoke quiet reflection. Koreeda's style is encapsulated by the oxymoronic title of the film. It eschews stasis, opting for a more organic style of

filming that allows his characters to freely interact with the landscape. They are the bridge through which we access the rural village in Yokohama.

The places featured in the film are laden with sentimentality and provoke a powerful nostalgia in both the characters and the audience. Professor Mitsuyo Wada-Marciano, an academic at Carleton University in Canada, uses the term "memory props" to refer to objects, places, and conversations that evoke nostalgia and create a "memory architecture." Toshiko and Ryota affectionately reminisce about a now-retired sumo wrestler. Images of childhood food—corn tempura, radishes, sushi—all trigger a longing for the past. A non-Japanese viewer who may never have encountered corn tempura would undoubtably still appreciate being reminded of the comfort of consuming childhood snacks. Even for an international audience, these memory props resonate with a universal yearning for the proverbial "good ol' days."

Even so, Koreeda's purpose was not simply to capture a snapshot of family life in Japan. Koreeda revealed in an interview with *Time Out* that he made *Still Walking* to pay homage to his late mother (Jenkins). The characters in *Still Walking*, particularly Tokshiko, were modeled after Koreeda's own kin. His characters are not archetypes of existing stereotypical personalities in a Japanese family. Rather, they represent an intimately realistic portrayal of Koreeda's own family life. In a subsequent interview with Schilling, Koreeda reflected that there was perhaps no way of distinguishing between a "domestic film" and a film for an "international audience." His model of "mother" "was everywhere." Ironically, in choosing to narrow the focus of the film to the psychological dimension through his characters, Koreeda has allowed for his film to appeal to a broader crowd. What began as a personal tribute became an international sensation because all mothers, regardless of the sociocultural context, share certain commonalities. We are still able to relate to Toshiko's romanticization of her son's memory, her painful grief over his death, and her inability to let go of a deeply entrenched hate, even if we cannot understand the implications of Junpei's death for the *ie*. There is something powerful about how, despite cultural-historical differences, all humans share certain primal, instinctive, and emotional needs. These we can identify in the characters on screen, who are partly Japanese, but wholly human.

More Than Just Tofu

> *I don't like films that have a social message, either fictional films or documentaries. It's all right if a film reflects something the maker has thought about and agonized about. But a message film doesn't come from that sort of place. The filmmaker thinks he has the answer. But the world doesn't work that way.*
>
> —*Hirokazu Koreeda*

The broader question evoked by Koreeda's *Still Walking* is best encapsulated by the man himself. Who decides if a film resonates: the director or the audience? It is clear

that Koreeda never intended for his films to have, broadly speaking, a universal message. Yet, in creating such an intimate portrait of family life, he has constructed a vision of a family that reflects our own. *Still Walking* reveals a relationship between the director and his audience, one that is both slightly antagonistic and mutually dependent. The director can delimit his film's scope, making it as personal, or sociological, or universal as he wants to, but it is the audience's intuitive response to the film that completes it.

While Ozu's films do, to some extent, touch on themes that can appeal to an audience outside Japan, the essential difference is that Ozu was primarily interested in telling stories from a Japanese perspective. Any universal relatability is at best incidental, given that Ozu intentionally retained layers that explicitly excluded an audience not privy to all the eccentricities and peculiarities of Japanese culture. Koreeda certainly operates on a similar paradigm, alluding, at times, to culturally specific claims. His film is probably a variation of the Shōshimin, but is better classified on its own terms, as a "message film," one that at its core is about the quintessential human experience. When Lim refers to Koreeda's characters as "pricklier and less reconciled" (Lim) than Ozu's, he highlights Ozu's primary fascination with capturing the emotional struggle of people in face of tragedy (Schilling). Koreeda evokes culturally specific ideas only as a means to express his message authentically and compellingly. His version of Shōshimin, as a result, resonates with a global audience in an intimate manner despite its cultural specificity.

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THE VIEW FROM THE CHEAP SEATS

JULIAN YANO

At 10 a.m. on the Sunday after Thanksgiving, I attended service at Canaan Baptist Church of Christ in Harlem. Arriving half an hour before the service began, I was jarred find a line stretching down the block. I stood next to a French woman and my white boyfriend, who repeatedly muttered that we were being segregated—many felt the same way. The mostly white queue in sneakers and jeans glowered at the formally dressed black congregants who entered the church without waiting in line, being waved in and personally greeted by the guard. The French woman complained loudly, with one phrase crossing the language barrier cleanly: *attraction touristique.*

Visiting the church for the first time, donning Guess, Gucci, and accents, the white line was in fact composed of tourists. They had come to see a Congregationalist sermon in Harlem, a neighborhood suffused with history and culture, including the Apollo Theater and a strong tradition of gospel music. For Canaan Baptist and dozens of other churches in Harlem, the tourists are vital to their continuance—they fulfill a necessity (Stahl).

Harlem churches find themselves in financial crisis as they face dwindling bases of tithers: those who donate ten percent of their income to the church (Gregory). Some churches report losses of fifty percent of their tithing base (Gregory). In response, many churches have taken loans from local banks and more than sixty participate in the tourist trade (Gregory). Why the churches are facing such radical changes in membership can be explained in part by looking at Harlem's gentrification.

As property values soar and money pours into the area in the form of new developments, the community finds itself reeling with change. In an active effort to raise rents, landlords have begun offering buildings with upscale cafes with low-rent spaces in their ground floor so as to make the units above seem more attractive (Amato). Regardless of whether or not gentrification has caused this new reality for Harlem churches, the fact remains: their role in the community, as the community changes in composition, is attenuating.

Canaan Baptist's former pastor, the Rev. Wyatt Walker, stood outside the church in 1970 and preached a sermon about drug dealing in the neighborhood. "We've been living dangerously for a long time, and we're not afraid to name names," he said (Gregory). Compare this to prayers delivered to a crowd of wide-eyed tourists by Canaan's current pastor, the Rev. Thomas Johnson—however lyrical, his words seem hollowed.

One questions the ethics of a spectacle intended to preserve a culture. Harlem Spirituals capitalizes on the community's surging attention as a tourist destination: Routard, a prominent French travel guide, gave Canaan Baptist two stars out of three

(Stahl). Harlem Spirituals offers weekly tours for people to witness "live gospel music" for just $59 per adult. On Canaan Baptist's website, the question "Does Canaan accept Euros?" is answered under the donations section. "No, Canaan only accepts U.S. dollars."

As it turns out, the French woman had done her research: if you spoke to the security guard and promised to stay the entirety of the service, you too could sit with the congregation. The guard then asked how many people were in her group. "Eighteen," she responded. Perhaps she was leading a youth group. The tourists who hadn't done their homework were seated in the balcony.

During the service, the audience was transfixed. Four hymns were sung, three people were baptized, and two newborn children were welcomed into the church. As the congregants applauded the events, audience members lurched forward in their chairs. Some leaned perilously over the balustrade, Nikons dangling. Others asked to sit with the congregation and sulked after being rebuked, muttering that we were being segregated. I can't help but appreciate their complaint: they are right to be angered by the situation.

When a people must commoditize themselves to preserve their unity, when a church that once gave a voice to a struggling community must sing through a crackling microphone to be heard by all, something unjust has absolutely occurred. The tourists had no place in this church—they didn't deserve the balcony or the line. Their seclusion from a church they did not attend was quite obviously not segregation. I only wonder if it was a transaction.

Yet if not for the tourists, Reverend Johnson would have delivered his sermon to an empty balcony. Watching tourists watch the congregants, I found that the entire spectacle seemed like but a proxy to a larger struggle. Church tourism, a reaction to a community being squeezed out and apart, occurs as Harlem is being commoditized and gentrified. What I witnessed was only the aftermath. When the collection basket came around, the offerings felt like the price of admission."

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