Asian American Voices

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AAARI, the City University of New York

Asian American Voices

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Acknowledgements

Asian American Voices Committee

Editors

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Note from the Editors
Asian American Voices
No.7, 2025

Asian American Voices has, in a way, graduated from a two-year college, after a six-year-long journey. While the journal did not officially earn a degree, having never been enrolled in a formal program, the editors certainly gained a wealth of experience along the way.

This is a truly exciting moment for all past and present editors, as we witness the continued growth and evolution of the journal. After thoughtful reflection, we made the decision in Fall 2024 to open submissions to all CUNY students and to expand our editorial board to include members from CUNY institutions beyond LaGuardia Community College. While we could not predict all the implications of this change, our shared intuition guided us toward this new chapter of expansion.

With that spirit, we warmly welcome submissions from students across CUNY, and we are delighted to work alongside new editors from CUNY colleges as we continue to grow together. This year Qin Li, Andy Szeto and Xiaoyi Wei joined us. Here we present their brief bios:

- **Qin Li** is an Assistant Professor of Psychology at CUNY Queensborough. She currently teaches several foundational psychology courses, including a Positive Psychology course she designed. Her scholarship focuses on understanding and enhancing creativity, with an emphasis on art and expertise, and is expanding to include topics on well-being. A 1.5 generation Chinese American who grew up in Manhattan's Chinatown, Dr. Li brings a unique perspective to the Asian American experience. She sees her role on the editorial board as both a continuation of personal connection and a step toward broader community engagement. She is committed to uplifting Asian American voices across CUNY.

- **Andy Szeto**, EdD, currently serves as an Education Administrator for the New York City Public Schools, where he focuses on academic policy for overage and under-credited students. He is also the current President of the Asian American Association (A3) of the Council of Supervisors and Administrators (CSA). Andy holds an EdD in Educational Leadership from Russell Sage College and an MA in Reading from SUNY Albany. In addition to his administrative role, he teaches courses in educational leadership, teacher education, TESOL, and adult education. Andy is a strong advocate for the integration of artificial intelligence in education and has written articles for *Teaching for Social Studies*. He is a former principal and assistant principal within NYC Public Schools.

- **Xiaoyi Wei** is an educator and researcher originally from China, now based in the United States. She holds an Ed.D. in Early Childhood Education from Teachers College, Columbia University. With a rich transnational and bilingual background, she brings a deep appreciation for cultural and linguistic diversity to her work in early childhood education. Her teaching and research focus on multilingualism, multiculturalism, and antiracist pedagogy, with particular emphasis on translanguaging and multimodal approaches that honor children's varied ways of learning and expressing themselves. Xiaoyi is committed to uplifting the voices of Asian and Asian American communities in education. She leads community-based heritage language workshops that support second-generation Chinese American children in connecting with their linguistic and cultural roots. Through her work, she seeks to affirm cultural identities, foster belonging, and cultivate inclusive, equity-centered learning environments that recognize and celebrate the full humanity

of all children and families.

The journal continues to recognize the work of amazing AAPI leaders. This year the decision was particularly challenging and at the end we decided to highlight **Dr. Yung-Yi Diana Pan** who currently is the Director of the American Studies Program and an Associate Professor of Sociology at CUNY Brooklyn College. She is also affiliated with the Sociology Department at the CUNY Graduate Center. Dr. Pan's research broadly explores the intersections of race, ethnicity, immigration, professions, and culture. Her work focuses on how institutions not only reflect but also reinforce race-based assumptions, often in subtle and structural ways. The heartwarming testimonies from Dr. Pan's colleagues speak to her excellent leadership, dedication to Asian American Studies, and commitment to CUNY students.

The reflective essays in this volume revolve around the central themes of identity and belonging. They span the breadth of human experiences, from vivid childhood memories of beachside exploration to the challenges of navigating language barriers, family expectations, and academic decisions during adolescence. The writers examine the influence of both internal and external stereotypes and express a deep yearning for complex representation in media and society. These pieces grapple with the complexities of cultural preservation and identity formation, particularly for children of immigrants who often find themselves suspended between two cultures. Recurring motifs of loss of childhood, language, or cultural connection, underscore the ongoing, and sometimes turbulent, journey of adaptation and self-discovery in unfamiliar environments.

Collectively, these essays offer nuanced, personal insights into Asian and Asian-American experiences, spotlighting both the challenges and the resilience involved in straddling multiple cultural planes. Themes such as generational differences, language disconnection, and cultural identity are woven throughout, illustrating the layered realities of multicultural lives.

The poetry and artwork section opens with an evocative vision of a poet sitting alone on the sand, mirroring emotions of loss and longing through oceanic imagery and the setting sun. This sentiment is echoed in a marine-themed ceramic vessel whose intricate, organic surface resembling coral, seashells, snails, and sea plants pays homage to the beauty and complexity of underwater ecosystems.

Other visual works reflect themes of displacement and memory. Dramatic collages depict the suffering of Myanmar civilians, especially children, offering a powerful tribute to the artist's homeland. In another piece, a young woman dressed in traditional Hanfu performs a ritual of burning incense while a delighted ancestral spirit eats dumplings behind her, a symbolic fusion of past, present, and future. Similarly, the next section, themed around food, begins with an essay that explores how cuisine binds generations together. Dishes like coconut noodle soup and grilled green peppers become metaphors for cultural continuity, friendship, and familial love.

The final section of the volume presents a series of critical essays. It opens with a descriptive piece on a visit to a Sherpa monastery, underscoring the enduring influence of Buddhism on Sherpa culture and its continued resonance among younger generations. Monastic life, marked by ritual, discipline, and compassion, fosters a way of being that contrasts sharply with the identities shaped in the world of sports. The following essay shifts focus to hockey, exploring how the sport constructs

a particular form of masculinity, one rooted in ritual and discipline but oriented toward hegemonic ideals, producing identities often devoid of compassion.

Two essays then engage in a literary dialogue about prose and poetry. One defends an Indian-American author criticized for stereotypical portrayals, arguing that her intent was to explore classical literary influences and personal experiences rooted in New England. The second analyzes a poem that captures the alienation of urban life through vivid metaphors inspired by subway trains, symbols of transience and marginalization.

Throughout the volume, a recurring theme emerges: the tension between preserving cultural identity and navigating to dominant societal norms. The closing essay draws connections between post-colonial experiences in India and Latin America, where native languages and traditions have been systematically marginalized. The volume ends on a powerful note, echoing Gloria Anzaldúa's assertion from *"How to Tame a Wild Tongue"*: "I am my language", a reminder of the profound connection between language and identity.

The Editors

New York, New York
May, 2025

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Part I

Recognizing the AAPI Leader

1.

Recognizing the AAPI Leader: Yung-Yi Diana Pan

Yung-Yi Diana Pan

Dr. Yung-Yi Diana Pan is the current director of the American Studies Program and an Associate Professor of Sociology at CUNY, Brooklyn College. She is also affiliated with the Sociology Department at the Graduate Center. Dr. Pan's research broadly intersects race, ethnicity, immigration, professions, and culture. Mostly, she is interested in examining how institutions not only maintain but reify race-based assumptions. Her first book, *Incidental Racialization: Performative Assimilation in Law School* (Temple University, 2017) examines how Asian American and Latinx law students are racialized as a part of their professional socialization. She finds that law students learn to perform and embody their race as a part of their professional schooling. Her research has appeared in peer-reviewed sociology journals and interdisciplinary journals, including *Sociological Forum*, *Journal for Asian American Studies*, and *International Journal of Clinical Legal Education,* among others. She regularly teaches theory, research methods, and race and ethnicity courses, and advises students on an array of independent research topics.

Dr. Pan was the Interim Executive Director of the CUNY-wide Asian American/Asian Research Institute (AAARI) during the 2023-2024 academic year where she began managing the Localized History Project, a youth-led research and advocacy initiative to include Asian American Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander (AANHPI) curriculum in K-12 classrooms. Along with youth researchers, the team recently published "Localized Histories and Pedagogical Revolutions: Youth-Driven Asian American, Native Hawaiian, and Pacific Islander History Curriculum in New York State" in the journal, *Educational Studies*. This project has gained broader recognition with presentations at professional meetings this spring, including the *Association for Asian American Studies*, and the *American Educational Research Association.* The study is entering year 3 with a focus on teacher professional development opportunities, advocacy, and student surveys. While at AAARI, Dr. Pan helped secure annual funding from New York State to support the research institute's important work elevating

AAPI communities. Aside from AAARI, Dr. Pan has also served in other leadership capacities at Brooklyn College as Faculty Dean Associate of the *School of Humanities and Social Sciences*; Undergraduate Deputy Advisor for the Department of Sociology; and co-chair of the Asian American Faculty and Staff Association. Dr. Pan serves as co-PI to a five-year $1.97 million federal AANAISI grant, and led the development of the first Asian American and Diasporic Studies (AADS) minor at Brooklyn College, which was just approved in Spring 2025.

Born in Taiwan, and immigrated to the U.S. at age seven, Dr. Pan identifies as a 1.5 generation American. She is a proud first-generation college student; she was the second person in her entire extended family to attend college, and the only woman, so far. Growing up in Oregon shaped her perspectives on race, gender, and class, and she has been firmly rooted in that background as she moved to California and then settled in New York. She believes that it is important to understand multiple standpoints and the sociological imagination that guides our life course. Dr. Pan earned her PhD in Sociology from *University of California, Irvine;* MA in Ethnic Studies from *San Francisco State University,* and BAs in Ethnic Studies and Political Science from *Oregon State University.*

Testimonies

Dr. Yung-Yi Diana Pan has been a wonderful colleague and supporter of AAARI. She served as AAARI's Interim Executive Director in 2023-24, and in that short time played a pivotal role in getting New York State to provide direct funding to AAARI through CUNY for the first time ever. It's likely that this funding will continue in the years to come, providing a strong foundation for AAARI's growth and development. After her term as Interim Executive Director ended, Dr. Pan generously offered her time to answer questions and provide advice as I stepped into the role of AAARI's Interim Dean. She continues to help guide AAARI's Localized History Project, which investigates to what extent AANHPI history is being taught in New York State and produces youth-led curricular solutions. Dr. Pan's policy-relevant research and commitment to public scholarship is a model for what AAARI aspires to be.

John J. Chin
Interim Dean
Asian American / Asian Research Institute
City University of New York

I am deeply honored to have worked alongside Dr. Pan for so many years. I met Dr. Pan when I became a board member for the Asian American/Asian Research Institute of CUNY (AAARI). She was one of the more senior board members, and her passion in supporting the AAPI community was palpable. Her numerous accolades in academia are evidence of her drive to support racial equity, which is at the forefront of these troubling geopolitical times. As a cofounder of AAMPOWER (Asian American Mentorship Providing Opportunities to Women for Empowerment and Resilience), I am also indebted to her constant support as my cofounders, Dr. Trang Le-Chan, Dean Sandie Han, and Dr. Payal Doctor, launched the first Asian female mentoring organization for CUNY. It was also during her leadership as the interim executive director of AAARI that New York State funding was acquired with the help of Assemblywoman Grace Lee to provide Asian American studies for our K-12 curriculum. Dr. Pan's commitment to her colleagues, academia, and community is what makes her

such an inspiring leader and ally for Asians and Asian Americans. She epitomizes what a true leader is and is most worthy of this recognition from Asian American Voices.

Catherine Ma, M.A., M.Phil, Ph.D.
Cofounder of AAMPOWER (Asian American Mentorship Providing Opportunities to Women for Empowerment and Resilience)
Professor of Psychology, Department of Behavioral Sciences
Kingsborough Community College, CUNY

Dr. Diana Yung-Yi Pan is a leader who is dedicated to and passionate about working to help individuals and institutions become better. I first came to know Prof. Pan when I joined the Asian American Studies Working Group at Brooklyn College. With almost no resources or support, she worked alongside students and other faculty for years arguing for the creation of more classes and events addressing the many experiences of Asian Americans.

I was so impressed by her hard work and integrity that she was an obvious choice to be one of two Dean's Associates when I served as Interim Dean of the School of Humanities and Social Sciences at Brooklyn College. During that time I got to know her well, and to see her work up close. Prof. Pan gives her all to any task she pursues. Her portfolio within my office included overseeing both department assessment processes and decolonization initiatives. Whether the undertaking was bureaucratic or more dynamic, she was able to get it done and maintain a disarming sense of humor. When she attended the American Association of Colleges and Universities conference on behalf of Brooklyn College, she returned not with a handful of notes, but with a vision of faculty at CUNY and the California State University –the two largest public universities in the USA –working together to jointly solve problems we share.

Alongside Dr. Sau-Fong Au, Director of BC's Women's Center, Dr. Pan successfully applied for a grant of almost two million dollars from the U.S. Department of Education as part of its Asian American and Native American Pacific Islander-Serving Institutions Program. Because of this hard work, BC now has its first office dedicated to supporting students of Asian American, Native American, and Pacific Islander descent, an intervention that will forever be part of Brooklyn College's history.

I was pleased but not at all surprised when Prof. Pan moved on from Dean Associate to the dean-level position of Interim Executive Director of AARI. She brought insight and excitement to that role. We have now welcomed her back to BC's campus to pursue her important teaching and research, alongside her ongoing work on the AANAPISI project's curricular initiatives and her position as Director of the American Studies Program.

Professor Diana Yung-Yi Pan is a leader whose star will not stop rising because of her ideas and her ideals –and the tireless visible and invisible work she puts in to achieve them. Brooklyn College and the City University of New York are fortunate to have this visionary on our side. I cannot wait to see what she does next!

Rosamond S. King, Ph.D.
Carol L. Zicklin Endowed Chair to the Honors Academy
& Professor of English, Brooklyn College
www.rosamondSking.black

I greatly admire and thank Diana Pan for her exemplary leadership and steadfast commitment to advancing Asian and Asian American issues. As a Board Member of the Asian American/Asian Research Institute (AAARI) at CUNY, I witnessed her leadership firsthand. As the Interim Executive Director of AAARI, Diana's leadership has been truly transformative. She guided the organization with a clear vision and secured critical funding that expanded AAARI's impact, demonstrating her strategic acumen and deep-rooted dedication to the AAPI community.

Dr. Payal Doctor, Dr. Catherine Ma, Dr. Sandie Han, and I, as the co-founders of the Asian American Mentorship Providing Opportunities to Women for Empowerment 202 and Resilience at CUNY (AAMPOWER), we are deeply grateful for the opportunity to work with Diana. Her support during the early formation of AAAMPOWER was crucial to our success. From the beginning, she believed in our mission, and her unwavering encouragement and provision of necessary resources were instrumental in turning our vision into a thriving reality. Her commitment to uplifting AAPI voices, especially those of women and emerging leaders, is a testament to her broader dedication to equity and empowerment within our communities.

What sets Diana apart is her unique, proactive, and people-centered approach to leadership. She invests time in understanding the individuals she works with—their goals, passions, and potential—and uses that insight to create opportunities. A striking example was when Diana identified an opportunity for me to serve on the New York State AAPI Commission. She saw how it aligned with my interests and experience and generously offered to nominate me, demonstrating her tireless advocacy for those around her. Diana is a visionary leader and a tireless advocate. Her work continues to have a profound and lasting impact on the AAPI community across CUNY and beyond.

Trang M. Le-Chan, EdD
Director of Alumni Relations
CUNY School of Law

I met Dr. Diana Pan as a board member of AAARI when she took the role of the interim president of AAARI in 2023. Through the year while she served in that position, I worked alongside her on numerous occasions like organizing the annual AAARI research symposium and attending various AAPI organizations' galas across New York City in the fall of 2023. In my eyes, Diana is equipped with the sensitivity, vigor, humility, and hard work of an Asian Americanist in the leadership position. She is particularly mindful in pushing to build AAARI's connections across New York's social and political spaces from research, politics, and the arts. I especially bonded with her as an Asian American mother-educator with young children. With this shared core identity of ours, I applaud Diana's work pushing AAPI curriculum in K-12 schools, networking with many multi-ethnic youth organizations, advocating for CUNY students, and actuating such leadership vision on different levels from inviting high-school students to AAARI to attending meetings in Albany. I'm also grateful for her mentorship I received directly and indirectly while working along beside her during that year of her interim presidency. I'm thrilled that she's recognized by Asian American Voices this way as an exemplary leader.

Lili Shi, PhD
Professor, Department of Communications and Performing Arts
Kingsborough Community College, CUNY

An exemplary teacher, mentor, administrator, and advocate, Yung-Yi Diana Pan truly puts her research on access and equity in education into practice at CUNY and beyond. In addition to being a prolific scholar, highly effective teacher, and committed mentor in Sociology and American Studies at Brooklyn College, Diana advocates fiercely and successfully for AAARI, BCAP, and countless other efforts to serve Asian/Asian American students and causes within and outside of CUNY. I have had the privilege of sharing an office with Diana for 14 years, during which I have witnessed the innumerable hours she has spent directly supporting students, harnessing resources for them, and advocating for them within administration. The CUNY community is lucky to benefit from Diana's expertise and passions for equity and student success.

Emily Tumpson Molina, PhD
Associate Professor, Sociology
Brooklyn College, CUNY

I first met Dr. Diana Pan in a sociology library session, when she brought in her Classical Theory and Intro classes for library instruction in 2012. Through our conversations and shared service on various committees—including Faculty Council, college-wide committees, and later the very Steering Committee for Asian American Studies that she convened—I've always known her to be an articulate leader, a thoughtful listener, and a sharp intellect, especially when it comes to our Asian American experiences at Brooklyn College and across CUNY.

Since her arrival at Brooklyn College, Diana has brought all of us along with her vision: first through the formation of the Asian American Program Steering Committee, then the establishment of the Asian American Faculty and Staff Association (AAFSA), and eventually securing an AANAPISI grant. She has been a visible and tireless presence in the CUNY AAPI community, working persistently to advance the institutionalization of Asian American Studies at Brooklyn College.

One memory that stands out most vividly for me is a pre-COVID conference she convened, where she brought together Asian American Studies faculty and program directors from across CUNY. They all gathered in the Brooklyn College Library, and I had the privilege of listening to an incredible wealth of historical knowledge about AAPI communities, students, and academic programs. We should have recorded it!

Frans Albarillo
Social Science Librarian and OER Coordinator
Associate Professor, Library
Brooklyn College, CUNY

It is an honor to highlight the accomplishments of Professor Diana Pan as she is being recognized by the *Asian American Voices Journal.* Dr. Pan is a rising leader in the City University of New York System. At Brooklyn College, she has directed the interdisciplinary program in American Studies and played a key role in shaping the School of Humanities and Social Sciences as the Dean's Faculty Associate. Her leadership extends to the CUNY-wide level, where she recently served as the Interim Executive Director for the Asian-American/Asian Research Institute (AAARI). She has been entrusted to leadership roles because of her commitment to Asian American and Pacific Islander studies, and her advocacy around AAPI experiences and issues. She has engaged the national media to challenge anti-Asian hate and to dispel the myth of the model minority. Dr. Pan exemplifies academic

leadership and courageous public engagement. I am proud to work alongside her and to witness her impact on our community.

Tammy L. Lewis, Ph.D.
Professor of Sociology and Urban Sustainability
at Brooklyn College, CUNY
Professor of Sociology and Earth & Environmental Sciences
CUNY Graduate Center

Part II

Reflective Essays

2.

Five Golden Years

Christa Huang (Hunter College)

The orange metal seats of the boat were cool against my legs, their paint chipped and worn from years of use. I swung my feet back and forth, watching the waves churn below as we made our way to the island. It was a small fishing island off the coast of Southeast China, where the days were long, the air was thick with salt, and the sea carried the scent of home. To me, it was the entire world, and home was waiting. The wooden staircase, painted green, creaked under my small feet as I raced up, the scent of the sea still clinging to my clothes.

Behind my parents' house stretched a beach. Though to call it a beach might paint the wrong picture. There were no golden dunes or gentle waves lapping at soft, white sand. Instead, the shore was wet and dark, pilled with tiny holes. My feet would sink just slightly under the weight of my body, a satisfying give, as if the earth itself was welcoming me home.

I would crouch low, eyes scanning the sand, hands poised like a hunter's. The small, perfect circles were a map leading me to hidden treasures. I dug with tiny, determined fingers, scooping handfuls of cool, damp sand until I felt the smooth curve of a clam or the skittering legs of a crab. My blue bucket filled slowly, the clams clinking softly against one another, the crabs scuttling frantically along the bottom. Then, breathless with excitement, I would run home, my prize sloshing with each step, ready to show my mom and dad the fruits of my labor.

Life was simple. Life was full. My Gege (older brother) of twelve years, took his role as an older brother both seriously and mischievously. Every afternoon, after returning from school, he would peel off his worn white socks, sweaty and stiff from the humid air, and hold them up to my face, grinning wickedly. "Smell it," he'd command, as if daring me. I shrieked, swatting at him, laughing through my protests.

At night, after dinner, I had only one request. "Mom," I would plead, tugging at her sleeve, "can I have milk?" It was my ritual, my small, stubborn indulgence. She always gave in, shaking her head, but with a smile tugging at the corner of her lips.

My mother was proud of me. She paraded me through the neighborhood, my little hand in hers, announcing me like a prized possession. "This is my daughter," she would say, her voice thick with pride. "She is from America." I never quite understood what that meant, not then. I only knew that I was hers, that in her eyes, I was something to be cherished.

Then, one day, I was not.

I was put on a plane, sent across the ocean to a country I did not know, to parents I did not recognize. When I met my biological mother for the first time, this woman with familiar eyes but an unfamiliar presence. I tilted my head politely and said, “Ayi.” Auntie. I told her, earnestly, that my mom was waiting for me back in China. She had to put me back on the plane and send me home.

But I didn’t understand then that I would never return. That the life I had known was already slipping away. For five golden years, my aunt, uncle, and cousin gave me the best childhood I could have ever asked for. Even now, years later and an ocean away, I sometimes wake with the taste of salt on my lips, the image of that beach flickering behind my eyes. In dreams, I crouch low once more, fingers sifting through sand, searching not just for clams or crabs, but for the shape of a life I once lived. And though the city I live in now is paved in concrete and lit by neon, somewhere deep within me, China remains a tide that never truly went out.

3.

Do I Seem Asian Enough?

Sylvia Lee (Queens College)

I am an English major at Queens College.

What else do you wanna know?

You probably don't know this, or you do, or you assumed or something. But, I am Asian. Specifically, Chinese. When you think of me as a Chinese person, what do you think of? Am I taking all these English classes only because they are requirements at Queens College? Or, am I rebelling against my family, who wanted me to go into mathematics? Is English not my first language, but Chinese is, regardless if it is Mandarin or Cantonese? No, no, and no. The thing is, I am taking these English classes because I love writing. My parents are extremely supportive of me going into English. Plus, English is my first language and I am not actually fluent in any Chinese language. All of this to say, I am not burdened by the stereotypical rules that come with being Chinese.

But, I am not the only Chinese-American young adult that is currently walking around New York City, and I certainly was not the only Chinese girl in town when I was younger. What about the other Asian Americans that are currently going through the things that I had the privilege of not facing? In fact, according to Wikipedia, there are over 500,000 Chinese Americans in New York City. However, I'm not here to talk about the numbers. What I want to talk about is this: Why do stereotypes exist if all they cause is harm?

Here's some context: Recently in the news, I heard people all over the country say that the immigrants in Springfield, Ohio are eating dogs, cats, and practically any other pet in the state. While I laughed at the absurdity and my friend looked on in confusion, I slowly began to realize the deeply rooted racism that some people have, even if they got that idea from someone else. There are people in other states and possibly other parts of the world that believe that immigrants, no matter what nationality, are eating dogs. And based on what those people said and the number of people that listened, the spread of that idea is not slowing down. Actually, the stereotypes against Chinese people have been raging ever since coronavirus ran rampant in 2020. So much hate, like all Chinese people are from Wuhan and they came to America and are now spreading the disease.

Now, since the coronavirus has died down, I can't really complain about how I have been treated because I have never been faced with those stereotypes. Actually, I can't complain about how I have been treated in my life, because it really was not that bad. Sure, I had my hardships, like institutionalizations and fights. However, I have never, not *once*, experienced the typical Chinese

stereotypes that plague other Chinese Americans. I was not ostracized for potentially eating dogs; I was told that I am intelligent by my peers because I speak and write in fluent English; I was not blamed for coronavirus, and I certainly was never told to go back to where I came from. All of this to say, I am lucky that I was never ostracized because of a well-known stereotype, like only being good at math or not being fluent in English.

Well-known stereotype, huh...

That's right. I was faced with stereotypes. Just...not the ones you are thinking of, and definitely not by the people you are thinking of either. The first one was in sixth grade. I was in an art class and my fellow classmate, who was also Asian, made the comment that I did not look Asian because my eyes were too big. That has always stuck with me, especially while writing this essay. Now I have a question for him. How big should my eyes be? Should they be small? Or should they be like those eyes from the cartoons: Nonexistent? Or should they just be lines? Whatever, it's not like I care.

sniff

The second one was subtle, but actually worse than the last one. It was the summer between ninth and tenth grade, and I had been institutionalized. I befriended other patients, and for the duration of my stay, they called me a racist name that was somewhat like the c-word. To be honest, I not only didn't care, but I didn't know that the name was racist. I was just happy to have friends. I really thought they were my friends, but I guess there were some people that I was not meant to befriend.

Now, of course someone would ask, "Why do you care about that stuff anymore? I mean, it's not like it has ever affected you." My answer is that I care about this right now because it just shows how uneducated kids and adults are these days about stereotypes and the fact that they are harmful. Even though no one has used them against me, those stereotypes made me feel awful about myself because I felt like there was something wrong with me when my math skills weren't at the same level as other Chinese people. Although stuff like that happened several years ago, that doesn't mean the ignorance has died down. In fact, after seeing how the education system has slipped and is currently falling down, I think it's only going to be a matter of time before America fully reverts back to its old ways: Using stereotypes to ostracize and control people. The stereotypes that plague America are the building blocks for this country, and if we try to break them down, the building is going to fall. Not just because the stereotypes are holding up the building, but because no one will find any interest in the building, leading to ruin and disrepair. Without Chinese stereotypes and prejudice, there would be no need to protest for the rights of Asian people. Without stereotypes in general, politicians would not need to run campaigns based on their tolerance for a certain human race, and there would be fewer nonprofit campaigns that have to instill hope into humanity, all because this prejudice is gone for good.

Actually, this sounds pretty good. Our tax dollars can be put in other places, right?

But stereotypes are more than just capitalism. Stereotypes are the demoralization of people that probably had no choice but to come to America. Think about it: With no immigrants and everyone dying where they stood, America would become a deserted nation. Immigrants are important to the survival of America as a nation, let alone the richest nation in the world. But with every stereotype, we distance ourselves from our history as a land of immigrants. Why do I say this? Well, many people

in America are either the children of immigrants or immigrants themselves. Now that I said it, why don't you tell me again why immigration is detrimental to our American society?

If every single immigrant in America went back to where they came from and took their children with them, America would probably have enough people to fill one or two states, at most. Is that what people want?

This demoralization affects everyone. Stereotypes are the most basic form of prejudice, but they are also the most subtle and particularly offensive especially if one does not know the implications of the stereotype. Without stereotypes, would life be better or worse? Without stereotypes, I feel like life for everyone would be better. Because without stereotypes, there would not be prejudice.

Wait, let's take a step back. Why the hell does prejudice exist in the first place? Is it out of ignorance? Jealousy? Personal rage? I could guess but I could never fully encompass the mindset of an entire race, which is what people who create stereotypes try to do. While I don't know what the majority of white people think about Chinese people, I know what the loud ones think: They despise them, oftentimes for no real reason. That is what makes me confused and frustrated. People hate people for no real reason, and that notion is further established when two people don't know each other. The thing is, stereotypes are not supposed to be true. But that is hard to believe when people keep proving stereotypes right, like when tons of Asian parents pressure their children into excelling at math and not much else.

Thing is, we don't need stereotypes. There's no reason for them. It doesn't matter how true they are; these stereotypes inflict unnecessary and stupid standards on groups of people such as Asians that cause a lot of damage. But why haven't we remedied this over these past years? Why are we still fighting each other over stereotypical issues that should have been resolved years ago? I'm tired of fighting. I'm tired of being told to fight and being patronized for not fighting. Why can't the world accept that people are different and there is nothing wrong with that? I guess this is a final attempt at getting people to listen.

I hope you were listening...

4.

Close Enough, I'll Take it

Regina Gultom (Queens College)

While doom-scrolling on the Internet one day (as Gen Z is prone to do), I came across a YouTube Short of someone reading a Tumblr post about Disney's *Moana*. The post goes on to describe the original poster going to watch the movie with their mother who, at some point during the movie, turns to them and exclaims:

"They made a movie about us!"

I let the YouTube Short repeat itself while I wrapped my head around the notion. Someone was able to watch a movie (a Disney film no less), point at the screen, and say, "That's me!" It made me think about how many times I've been able to say so for myself. How many times have I claimed a character as "someone like me?"

I quickly realized that the answer was little to none. My mind kept returning to Disney, so much so that I began to fantasize writing up an Indonesian story to present to the Mouse himself. I grew up with the franchise after all.

And I *loved* the princesses. My favorites were Cinderella and Sleeping Beauty who were so clearly unlike me that my kindergarten lunchroom debates, aside from fighting to claim one or the other as "my favorite" ("No, she's *my* favorite!"), were always about picking a princess that looked more like me.

"You should like Snow White! She has black hair like you!"

Never mind the fact that all of us at the table had black hair, of course. I didn't like her dress, so she wasn't one of my favorites. None of us were mermaids, but I didn't see anyone picking apart why some of us liked Ariel.

But subconsciously, I began to look at characters differently. Suddenly, any girl with dark hair and eyes that suggested a slant were characters I could say were "just like me." Those were *Tinker Bell's* Silvermist, *Little Einsteins'* June, and Ginger Snap from the 2003 version of *Strawberry Shortcake*, just to name a few.

Once I got around to watching *Mulan*, I had already begun to settle for any Asian representation I could get my hands on. "She's Asian, it's close enough." By then, I figured I could just lump myself under the greater umbrella of Asia and call it a day, despite not being East Asian like so many Asian characters usually were.

I am Southeast Asian. But to be more specific, I am Indonesian American. I was born in America, so my understanding of my Indonesian heritage is limited to what my parents tell me (and even then, it's only when I ask). Having been born and raised in the States, I've felt at times that my American side has won over my Indonesian side.

Case in point, I have no stories from the country. I have never been to Indonesia to visit my grandparents because of one reason or another keeping my sister and I in New York. We've lost our ability to speak Indonesian (however childlike our skill level) in order to speak the more dominant English for school. Sometimes, I wonder how my father feels hearing us forget the language, hearing how "Bapak" became "Dad" the older we got. But let's get back to the stories.

If I wanted to write a story about an Indonesian princess, I needed to know what I was working with. What made a story Indonesian? What would an "authentic" story sound like? I decided to ask my mother and cousin about some of the stories they were told as girls growing up in the country.

It is truly something to behold whenever I ask the adults about their history. You can tell they share love and pride for their home country from the way they immediately slip into speaking Indonesian, enthusiastically bouncing conversation back and forth between each other to answer a question as simple as "What were your bedtime stories like?"

Had I retained the language, I would have gladly jumped in, but I could only sit and understand them. I'm still lucky enough to understand, I say. And I liked to play translator sometimes anyway.

Finally, they told me the names of a few stories they remembered. *Bawang Putih, Bawang Merah* was a popular one; a Cinderella-esque story about two onion sisters, Red and White Onion, which ends happily (as most Cinderella stories usually do). There was also *Timun Mas* which took them a bit longer to translate for me. The exchange went something like:

"Ah, *Timun Mas!* Nanguda tau?" (Nanguda/Inang uda: a Batak honorific, for we are Batak people. According to how our tribal relations work, she is my cousin through her marriage to my father's nephew. Her children are therefore my niece and nephew.)

"Apa bahasa Inggrisnya? Kok gua lupah sih..."

And after a pause for thinking, they told me it was called "The Golden Cucumber." They had burst into laughter at how absurd the English translation sounded, and I laughed because they were laughing. It is still something we laugh about today, a little inside joke that we like to make randomly.

But I didn't want those generic fairytales. I wanted something that felt uniquely Indonesian. I wanted to be able to call a story culturally my own. I began to search the Internet for Indonesian folklore, preferably ones with princesses. In doing so, I found the Legend of Centipede Lake.

The Legend of Centipede Lake follows Princess Putri Aji who is set to marry a Chinese king. Upon meeting him and bearing witness to his lack of manners, she becomes disgusted with him and refuses their marriage. The Chinese king leaves to assemble his army in order to take over her kingdom out of vengeance. To save her kingdom, Putri Aji chews on a betel nut, chants a mantra, and spits it out before her. The pieces transform into centipedes and attack the Chinese fleet, sinking the ship. The sinkage location is called *Danau Lipan,* Centipede Lake.

This was the story I was looking for. This is what I wanted! Here was a story with a headstrong princess straight from the islands that my parents called home. Putri Aji was the princess I wanted to represent Indonesia, someone who I could point to and say, "That is us!"

I thought I had found gold and went to ask my mother if she recognized this tale. I'll let you imagine my disappointed surprise when she flat out tells me, "No, I've never even heard of it before." My mother is from Jakarta and the folktale of Putri Aji comes from East Kalimantan, thousands of kilometers away. Just like that, I was back to square one.

I couldn't have this story. It wasn't one of my mother's, so it certainly couldn't be one of my own. Sure, I'm Indonesian, but even more than that, I'm American. I'm an American who worries about the "smell" of my lunches, who gets insecure about indulging in my culture in public for fear of being called "primitive," who sometimes feels so far removed from my Asian side that, instead of asking my parents (who are as primary a source as I could have), I take to the Internet like some modern-day historian trying to piece together a part of myself that I know nothing about. Putri Aji herself had to come to me from a Wikipedia link. No one I knew told me her story; she was never "mine" to begin with.

So, instead of trying to find a story, I want to make my own. There are only a few people who can say they are truly "like me," and I know I won't be able to reach for the hands of every Indonesian American kid with what I want to say, but at least I want them to know that someone out there knows they exist. I want to make the Batak people back home proud—because I hope they will be—once they get the chance to say, "She's Batak. She made this. *We* made this."

My community web is full of *abangs* and *kakaks* and *opungs* who keep asking us to go visit home with them. One day, I'll be able to say that I have gone to Indo. That I have seen Centipede Lake. That I have finally created something to represent me, to represent Indonesia in the West, to represent America in the *kampungs.*

Perhaps one day, I won't have to settle for close enough. Maybe one day, I'll be able to confidently say, "My favorite princess is Southeast Asian."

"She is Indonesian."

Just like me.

5.

Bleeding

Alif Kazi (Hunter College)

My mother never bleeds.

With every fall, turn, or slip of her body, my mother ascends, brushing dirt off the blouses, salwar kameezes, saris, or dresses she chooses to wear. During this particular event, I observed her frizzy hair, once curly, as they obediently followed her to the kitchen. I observed her eyes as they peered toward me when she noticed her supposedly "discrete" onlooker. Her fingers directed me towards her, her eyes filled with stress.

"Aahil, baba, *khi hoise,* what's wrong? She asked me as I watched her begin cutting up an onion. The onion she was cutting was going to go into the simmering pot of chicken curry that was on the stove. It was the second to last night of Ramadan, thirty days of fasting that Muslims undergo. This year, Ramadan was near the beginning of summer, so Muslims broke their fasts later in the day, compared to years when Ramadan was during the winter when the sun set earlier.

"*Kiso naa* Maa, nothing. *Khi jonno ranna kortaso,* what are you cooking for?" I asked as I watched her hands hold the knife, and so swiftly cut the onions into small pieces.

It was too early to be cooking for iftar, I thought.

"I need to start cooking for dinner, no one else is doing it baba" Maa replied to me with an exasperated [1] look on her face, the heat from the chicken reaching her face, making it gleam with sweat. Her brows were furrowed and her eyes shifted repeatedly between me and the pot in front of her, wondering where to focus her attention–to me or the chicken.

"Can I help?" I asked

"*Naa, shona*, I can do it," she said as she looked at me tenderly[2].

I retreated from the kitchen, noticing my mother sprinkle a handful of salt to the pot of simmering chicken, to which I exclaimed "Maa, that's too much! I don't like it. It's ruined now."

I noticed my mother adding salt to the chicken, but what I didn't notice was what she did afterwards.

For five minutes, Maa stood in front of the hot pot, inquiring as to how to separate the salt from the rest of the ingredients.

***

My mother never bleeds.

As my mother set the table, my father and I began the prayer designated during sunset, *Mahgrib.* While we were praying, the intoxicating smell of my mother's food being set at the table distracted me from my father's booming voice reciting the surahs aloud. The smell of the *daal*, the *beguni* (fried eggplant), *aloo chop* (potato cutlet), fried spices, and even the ruined chicken curry made my mouth water. I could hardly choose to focus on the prayer at hand, as all I could imagine was the food entering my starved body.

Once my father and I got up to go back to the table, Maa went to pray, wearing a black hijab as she sat on a metal chair to pray. Her knees were bionic now, steel rods implanted to support her deteriorating body. However, that didn't prevent her from praying–even if it was from a metal chair.

We waited for Maa to join the table and began to pile food onto our plates. The food landing on each of our plates didn't represent our hunger. Instead, it represented how much we *thought* we could eat. At the end of every meal during Ramadan, my brothers and I usually had heaps of food leftover on our plates, untouched. I piled everything on my plate except for the chicken. Ahad, my older brother stretched his arm towards the pot of chicken.

"Be careful Ahad. Maa put a lot of *lobon,* salt, in the food," I warned.

"Maa, *keno,* why? I hate salt, I hate tasting it on chicken Maa," Ahad said angrily as he dropped the large spoon back into the pot.

"If you don't like my cooking, you can cook it yourself," Maa said, her eyes watching me as she spoke to Ahad.

We all ate quietly through the rest of the meal.

***

My mother never bleeds.

"How is Ramadan going? Are you keeping up with your fasts?" my Sunday school teacher, Hassan, asked me. He was only a few years older than me, a nineteen-year-old working as a Sunday school teacher while he went to a local college to learn how to become a doctor.

"*Inshallah* yes. I am about to complete all of them. Tonight is the last one" I replied smiling.

"*Alhamdulillah.* I am going to ask your brothers how their fasts are going as well when I see them. How are your parents doing?" Hassan asked.

"They're doing well. They did all their fasting too!" I exclaimed happily.

Hassan gave me an inquisitive look.

"What's wrong?" I asked.

"Your dad, sure. But your mom definitely didn't complete all her fasting" Hassan answered confidently.

"What do you mean?" I asked, a hint of disbelief apparent in my voice.

How could Hassan accuse my mother of not keeping all of her fasts?

Hassan turned around to make sure no one was listening before he poked his head closer to mine and whispered, "Don't you know about periods?"

"As in the dot? Yeah, but what does that have to do with my mom missing a fast?" I stared at him, dumbfounded and angry, my cheeks beginning to turn a bright hue of red.

"I meant the other period," Hassan said.

For the next half hour, Hassan explained to me how women went through a week of bleeding through their uterus, and it prevented them from fully completing a month of fasting. As Hassan discussed concepts hidden from me that I had not learned in school yet, my mouth was agape.

***

My mother bleeds.

We all sat for the last night of Ramadan.

"Aahil, I made a new batch of chicken. *Khao,* eat." she said.

I piled some chicken on my plate and savored the seasoned, but not strongly salted chicken.

"I'm so happy we finished Ramadan. Finally," my younger brother Bazir said

"*Alhamdulillah.* And how many fasts were you able to keep Bazir?" Baba asked.

Bazir was only eight. It is not mandatory for a Muslim to fast until they hit puberty. Still, he was very proud of himself when he exclaimed that he was able to successfully hold ten days of fasting. Ahad was fifteen, and I was thirteen, so it was required of both of us to fast every day.

My eyes shifted towards Maa as Bazir and Baba were talking. I watched as she ate the *beguni* on her plate. Never once did I notice Maa eating anything outside of Iftar— the time to break our fast.

What other secrets was she hiding?

The conversation changed towards Eid and what would be happening tomorrow morning by the time I decided to actively listen in again.

Eid was my favorite holiday and everyone in the family knew it. Every Eid morning was the same. We woke up at the crack of dawn, my mother and father yelling all over the house to wake me and my brothers. We would all groan and begrudgingly awake, against our own bodies' wishes. As my brothers wore matching red panjabis, I wore a green panjabi, our colors intertwining to reference the Bangladeshi flag.

***

My mother is always bleeding.

We made our way to the large field, where boys and girls, were separated by gender. A large area of the field was reserved for the large population of men, and a smaller section set aside to the right of the field was for the much fewer women. As Baba and I got out our *jainah maajes,* prayer mats, we set them to connect to a line filled with a flurry of other Bangla, Pakistani, Arab, and Indian Muslims as we all sat, listening to the *Imam,* the priest, on American soil.

"Dear brothers and sisters–" as the imam began to speak, his voice was drowned out by my own wandering mind. I could see Maa wearing a red shawl on her head as she and the other women listened to the *Imam.*

Although it was customary for men and women to be separated, I felt bad for my mother—having to begin the prayer and the beginning of Eid without her family. It was not her fault she only bore sons—a blessing for my father, but a burden for her.

A burden for her, like how it was a burden for her to come to America and leave everything behind for a life she barely knew. A burden for her, having to care for her dying mother instead of going to school. A burden for her, to marry a man whom she barely knew, but one day would grow to love. A burden for her, to learn how to use the MTA—which train led which way? For a woman who didn't know English, the signs and messages blaring all over the trains meant nothing. These are just the burdens my mother would vocalize, but what about the ones she chooses to keep private?

The prayer concluded, and both parties of men and women came together to hug one another. I hugged my father and brothers—three hugs, alternating the shoulder each time while repeating *Eid Mubarak.*

I approached my mother and embraced her. For a second, time stopped. I could feel every pulsing beat of her heart as it emanated from her chest.

For every drop of blood that pulses throughout her body, there will always be drops that secrete, whether she wants them to or not. The job she chooses to take on, no matter how unnecessary, is to hide it–to hide every drop. The drops she is unable to hide resemble the breaking of a foundation that was expected of her to undertake—yet never vocalized to be desired by her. It's a job she, along with every mother feels the need to do; to hide their pain, sorrow, and struggle—to be the *unbreakable* foundation. She knows the world will only see what happens when her foundation breaks, but not what it took *to* break. Each drop of blood is both destroying and rebuilding, mirroring a cyclical humane experience. Let the burdens of child, partner, home, and world make the outward foundation of undaunting strength crack, crumble, and collapse. Let it collapse to show the world *her* scars, *her* wounds, and *her* vulnerability to repair them, slowly, carefully, and intimately. What good is a foundation if it isn't broken, to be rebuilt into something stronger?

[3] Maa let go of my embrace, as she looked at me.

"Eid Mubarak *shona,* dear," I never noticed how tired her eyes were.

"Eid Mubarak Maa."

What does the "exasperated look" look like? Her eyes, the muscle on her face ... adding some small physical details could make this moment more vivid and emotionally resonant for the reader

I really appreciate the way you weave in several conversations throughout the piece to reveal both your own growth and your mother's often invisible yet central role in the family. These dialogues—whether it's your curious questioning in the kitchen, the tense exchange at the dinner table, or your conversation with Hassan—do more than just move the narrative forward. They offer intimate glimpses into everyday moments that highlight your mother's resilience, labor, and care, often unnoticed by others.

Your progression from "My mother never bleeds" to "My mother bleeds" to "My mother is always bleeding" is powerful—both in its literal and metaphorical resonance. When the narrator learns about menstruation, "bleeding" shifts from something mysterious and invisible to something both bodily and symbolic. It becomes not only about the physical process but also a metaphor for hidden pain, labor, sacrifice, and emotional endurance.

The two paragraphs near the end—beginning with "A burden for her..." and "I approached my mother and embraced her..."—are particularly rich. They reveal the unspoken, accumulated weight the mother carries as an immigrant woman, a wife, and a mother. The metaphor of blood here expands beyond biology to suggest emotional bleeding, invisible wounds, and silenced struggles.

That said, I wonder if there's an opportunity to unpack the metaphor even more explicitly. For example:

How does the narrator's understanding of "bleeding" evolve—not just in terms of menstruation, but in recognizing emotional and psychological bleedings that the mother conceals?

Could you draw a clearer line between the societal expectation for women to remain "unbreakable" and the natural process of bleeding—something that is cyclical, human, and necessary for renewal?

Might you expand on the final rhetorical question—"What good is a foundation if it isn't broken, to be rebuilt into something stronger?"—to connect it back to the idea that mothers are expected to silently bear the weight of everyone else's lives without ever showing signs of their own cracking

6.

Criticisms of Chinese Beauty Standards from a Chinese Teen

Min Zeng (Borough of Manhattan Community College)

I. To Be Pale

"Mom? What is this?" I glanced down at the bottle my mother shoved in my hands. It was a thin, white tube with a few Chinese characters etched on the front. I couldn't make out what these characters said, but in miniscule text underneath the bolded Chinese, it read *tone-up cream*.

My mom clicked her tongue in frustration before hastily pulling the tone-up cream out of my hands, twisting off the top, and squeezing a sizable amount onto her finger. Without any hesitation, she dabbed the cream all over my face, leaving white dollops in various areas. She began rubbing it into my skin.

An intense burning sensation spread across the surface of my skin. "W-wait! It hurts!"

"*Ang yit ha. Hao fai mang tyak lo.* (Wait. It won't hurt soon)." The rhythmic words of my mother echoed in my head, spoken in *Taishanese*, a dialect hailing from a small region in Southern China.

She continued aggressively massaging the cream into my delicate, sensitive skin. As the seconds slowly ticked by, my skin only became increasingly aggravated. The burning grew stronger, and I could feel my cheeks heating up.

Swallowing the mucus building up in my throat and forcing back the tears welling up in my eyes, I looked up towards my mom. "Are you ever gonna tell me what this is for?"

Her sharp gaze met mine, nearly causing me to turn my head away. Broken English escaped from her lips. "Because you too dark."

"Oh." All the words resting on the tip of my tongue seemed to disappear at that moment. I raised my hands up, wondering if my skin tone was truly that dark. Shamefully, I set my palms back down on my lap, not uttering another word as more cream was smothered across my face. The burning sensation didn't hurt anymore.

There's a Chinese saying: "一白遮三丑" (yī bÁi zhē sān chǒu), meaning "a white skin complexion is powerful enough to hide several other flaws. In Ancient China, dark skin was a reflection of a lower economic status, showing that your skin has been darkened from many hours of hard labor out in the rice fields. Only the nobility and those of high economic status were allowed to remain indoors, resulting in pale skin, and an association between status and skin color. Both of my parents grew up as rice farmers, before eventually seeking out education and creating better lives for themselves. Judging from old photos, my mom has always maintained a pale complexion, despite working in the fields, but my dad was not so 'fortunate.' Even to this day, his skin tone remains extremely dark, indicative of his poor upbringing.

Growing up, I frequently received comments from relatives and family friends about how much I resemble my dad. With his dark complexion being one of his first noticeable features, remarks on our resemblance almost came as an insult, at least within traditional Chinese beauty standards. My skin tone used to be that of a golden-brown tan when I was still in grade school, which is also when I received the most comparisons to my dad.

Over the past few years, my skin has lightened significantly, which can be potentially attributed to the whitening cream my mom forcibly applied to my face, and occasionally my body. After becoming paler, the mentions of dad-daughter resemblance lessened, and I began receiving more compliments towards my appearance. It probably would've been strange to comment on the attractiveness of a child, and it was only normal for these types of compliments to increase as I grew older. However, that still doesn't mean my paler skin didn't potentially influence others' perception of me.

Modern China has come a long way from what it was a mere century ago, and can't even be compared to its ancient state — except for one thing. Beauty standards. Ghostly white skin was the ideal centuries ago, and, somehow, it still remains the ideal today. The modern societal system in China isn't as hierarchical as it was in ancient times, or even a few decades ago, when my parents were around my age. There's no overarching reason why pale skin should still be highly coveted, yet, it remains the idealized standard, and has even followed me all the way to America through my traditionalist parents.

II. To Be Thin

"My grandma said you look fat."

"What?" The sound of the train rattling on the tracks muffled my dismay. I glanced over at my boyfriend, who seemed unfazed by what he just uttered to me. He was focused on an uninteresting phone game.

"Yeah. She said you have big thighs."

Annoyed, I placed a hand over my boyfriend's phone. The screen dulled, indicating that his in-game character had died. "Did you show her a picture of me?"

"Couldn't you have waited for me to finish?" He nodded his head towards his phone screen, which was still covered by my hand.

"No. Now tell me."

He sighed. "I showed her this picture of us."

He swiped out of the game, opening up his photo gallery instead. He opened up the most recent photo — a picture of us sitting on a picnic blanket in Central Park. His legs were outstretched, in contrast to my cross-legged sitting position. With my legs in this position, my calves were completely hidden from view, making my thighs seem much larger than they actually were.

Without asking, I snatched the phone from his hand. I held his phone in my trembling hand, silently gazing down at the photo. The longer I looked, the worse I felt. I *did* look fat.

I stand at 5'3" (160 cm), and my BMI falls within a healthy range for my height, but in the world of Chinese beauty standards, I would easily be considered overweight. Brandy Melville is a brand that has recently gone viral in China, and one feature that makes them rather distinctive from other luxury brands is that all their clothing is one-size only — and this one size is extremely small. In order to fit into Brandy Melville clothing, a woman at my height shouldn't weigh over 43 kg, which is approximately 95 lbs (Medium). BMI isn't necessarily the most accurate scale when it comes to weight, especially when you factor in muscle mass, but when it says 95 lbs is severely underweight for a 5'3" woman, I can believe that.

In my experience, backhanded compliments seem to be a given at any Chinese family reunion, and I've been the subject of many — the most common one being how I'm already very pretty, but I would be even prettier if I lost more weight. If not a backhanded compliment, it would be an extremely blunt statement, similar to what my boyfriend's grandma said. In response to these comments, I would feel compelled to diet, halving all my meal portions and erasing snacks from my consumption entirely. My disappointment was immeasurable when I struggled to lose anything more than ten pounds, and upon returning to my previous eating habits, all the lost weight would come flying back on far faster than I had lost it.

My parents were no exception to fat-shaming — they also piled on with backhanded compliments, with my mom even going as far as (jokingly?) saying my face looked similar to a *mantou*, a Chinese steamed bun. However, despite often bringing up my weight, my parents never allowed me to skip meals, no matter how much I insisted on it. With this, I thankfully never fully manifested an eating disorder, but regardless, intense body-shaming commonly leads to an eating disorder, and I've tip-toed on that line multiple times in my life.

Fat-shaming has never been discouraged amongst Chinese communities, and, instead, is oftentimes encouraged, especially towards women, in order to promote femininity and desirability. The concept of being thin is overly idealized, and highlights a dangerous and unrealistic beauty standard.

III. To Be Pale and Thin

Throughout my life, I've never been particularly pale *or* thin, and admittedly, to this day, occasionally, I still struggle with fully embracing those parts of myself. The beauty standards ingrained in my head

tell me that anything outside of pale skin and a thin frame are things to be fixed, which, fundamentally, is such a toxic mindset to uphold.

Chinese society is one that upholds 'shame culture' — it's considered important to correct the actions of others through shaming them, and with this mindset, things like fat-shaming and mocking darker skin tones are seen as socially acceptable.

I only resided in China for approximately two and a half years, so I can't speak on what the shaming culture is truly like there, but I think it's quite telling how deep-rooted it is when I've been shamed so much on my appearance as a Chinese-American who has lived in the United States for most of my life. A lot of this shaming has come from a much older Chinese population, but a good chunk has also come from peers the same age as myself. It would never be as direct as the older generation, who wouldn't hesitate to call anyone dark-skinned, with a negative connotation, or fat, at their own discretion. Instead, it would be subtle remarks, such as mentioning the amount of food I consumed at outings, expressing 'concern' that it would cause unnecessary weight gain.

In my experience, the younger generation hasn't been nearly as snide as the older generation about skin tone, and made generally less hurtful remarks about weight, but these remarks cut much deeper — probably due to me valuing my close peers' words much more than distant relatives I couldn't even name if asked. From this, I ended up as an extremely insecure pre-teen and teenager, and the added pressure from numerous adults in my life to be paler and thinner didn't help either.

Sometimes, I still gaze down at my bloated stomach after eating a filling meal with a slight sense of shame, and occasionally, when shopping for makeup, I'll feel compelled to buy a foundation shade three-shades-too-light. A few years ago, I would've mentally battered myself for overeating, and I would've gone through with purchasing an incorrect foundation shade without thinking twice about how it didn't match my skin tone. A lingering sense of self-consciousness still resonates within me every once in a while, but it's nowhere near the level it was in my earlier teenage years. I primarily attribute this to having a supportive community of friends who I can comfortably eat with, and won't criticize my appearance, along with telling myself that the shaming words thrown at me by relatives and family friends are nothing more than empty words that don't deserve my time of day. It's akin to that of a mental mirror mantra, and doesn't always ring true when I recite it to myself, but has played a part in allowing me to overcome the shaming and be a little kinder to myself.

I wouldn't have ever had to tell myself this mantra if these deeply-rooted body shaming 'traditions' didn't exist in the first place, though. Fortunately, I've been able to let go of these unrealistic beauty standards to an extent — one that allows me to be comfortable in my own skin, but these standards have not only affected me; they've affected plenty of other young Chinese-Americans around my age.

I no longer associate with some of my older friend groups, due to them negatively affecting my own body image. I still vividly remember my friends who would force themselves on strict diets despite already being underweight, and those who would utilize extreme makeup to transform themselves into 'porcelain dolls,' with large, exaggerated eyes and pale, ghostly skin. These same actions would slowly manifest within myself with a little pressure from these friends, although not to the same extent. The nature of peer-pressuring was definitely quite toxic, but looking back on it now, I can see that it likely wasn't out of malice, but rather, just a result of a deeply-ingrained mindset that it was fundamentally correct to appear a certain way.

The distaste for darker skin tones and fat-shaming stemming from the older generations has caused a vicious cycle that breeds more insecure pre-teens and teenagers, just like I once was, that will continue pushing these beauty standards onto their peers and perhaps even to the next generation. I can't control what others within the Chinese-American community do or say, but as a Chinese-American teenager, I can say that life was far more miserable when I hyper-fixated on beauty standards than it is now, after being able to let go.

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Part III

Poetry and Artwork

7.

Why did We have to Say Goodbye?

Anandita Shaji (Queens College)

I wait seated on the sand

for the love that has slipped away from my hand. The waves hug the shore,

and flow back in a roar;

cloud my mind- the memories of him, the ways
I used to embrace him.
The way the ocean carries the sand with it... He took a
part of me and I am left split.
As the evening casts its shadow, beauty spreads
on the canvas, I see.
The moon besides the sun not
completely visible
Portrays me, quite invisible in his eyes, those that do
not anymore hold mine.

The softness in his touch, will I miss the most?

for the unchangeable part will haunt me like a ghost for quite some time...
The stairs of hope to find true love again, Will I climb?

As the sun sets,

I question myself

Is it loving him that I regret or

our moments together, I cannot forget?

Light of dusk covers the cloud shining it
up, in its crowd spread vast in the sky

Tears in my eyes,

Why did we have to say goodbye?

8.

Slip and Tumble, 10x11 Stoneware and Glaze

Noah Skinner (Bronx Community College)

Figure 1. Slip and Tumble

Figure 2. Slip and Tumble

Description

The ceramic vessel, titled *Slip and Tumble,* is a 10"x11" wheel thrown pot made from a mid-fire white stoneware, slip, and clear glaze. The surface decoration, salvaged from parts of unsuccessful attempts to throw this vessel, is decorated with red clay slip. It was inspired by my grandmother's descriptions of her rural family home in Visayas in the Philippines. Her home had what they call a banga, or tapayan, and provided the household with cool drinking water. These wide-mouthed jars informed the shape of the wheel thrown vessel and now brings an aspect of her past into the home we live in today.

My interest in arts has always been besides me, although I chose not to pursue it until I enrolled into college. Memories of my mother taking me to a family friend's pottery studio as a child housed my first interests in ceramics. The space recorded an entire person's journey in their craft

solely in the pots lining all available surfaces. Now, a record of them exists in my home as well, a hand painted mug whose function for tea has long become a beloved plant pot. Teaching studios in the Bronx where I could have learned as a child were missing from our schools and communities. Worries over being able to provide for myself and the regrets of having not pursued any education in ceramics prior to college created a sense that it was too late for me to attempt it. My drive to go back to school was in part because I felt I was still lacking something core to myself, and exposing myself to different subjects of study became my new prerogative. Shortly after enrolling at Bronx Community College I had taken a handbuilding and wheel throwing class, and started work as an assistant for the ceramics classes. With the support of Professor Michiyo Tanaka-Kuwashima, I found myself in the studio five days a week with my only concerns being how much I could push myself to create what I envision. My drive to learn and my focus when working, led me to land a position as a studio technician and pottery instructor in Hell's Kitchen, where I continue to learn from working with many successful professional potters from diverse backgrounds and practices.

9.

Myanmar is Pleading...

Emily Suu Myatnoe (Queens College)

This project is a multimedia series that combines digital collage and illustration to shed light on the humanitarian and political crises devastating Myanmar. Each of the four distinct yet connected pieces were created using a combination of hand-drawn pen and marker elements, cut-outs of images from newspapers and magazines, digital manipulation in Adobe Photoshop, and final layout composition in Adobe InDesign.

This series confronts the overlapping traumas of natural disaster, civil war, and military oppression devastating my homeland. Myanmar is home to one of the world's oldest civil wars, decades of military rule including the February 2021 coup *d'état*, and most recently, a 7.7 magnitude earthquake in March 2025. Each composition is a visual outcry, urging viewers to bear witness to the pain endured by civilians, children, and political prisoners. This work is not only a call for awareness, but a demand for justice, compassion, and international solidarity.

As an artist, my mission is to spread awareness and drive action through visual media—especially in support of causes that are overlooked or underrepresented. This project is inspired by childhood memories spent making protest posters with my father for pro-democracy marches. Although my visual style has since evolved, the purpose remains the same: to create work that speaks truth and sparks thought. These posters are not just art, they are acts of resistance.

Help our People

This piece captures the aftermath of the March 2025 earthquake in Myanmar, where homes and sacred spaces now stand in ruins. It honors those whose lives were lost and highlights the ongoing urgent need for international humanitarian aid.

Save our Children

This piece is a stark portrayal of Myanmar's child soldiers, urging for global attention to the exploitation of children by armed groups. This is a plea to protect the innocent from a war they should be shielded from, not involved in.

Free our Leader

This piece demands the release of Myanmar's ousted democratic leader, Aung San Suu Kyi. Although her leadership is not without critique, her arrest by the military junta is a devastating blow to the country's democratic progress.

Figure 3. Myanmar is Pleading... (Suu Myatnoe) Image 1

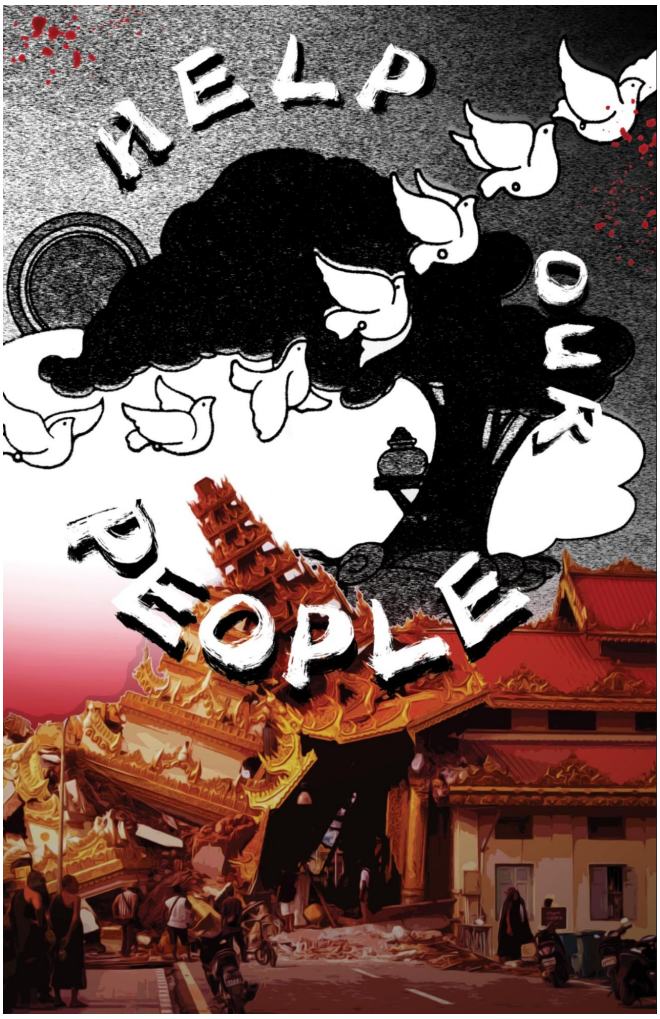

Figure 4. Myanmar is Pleading... (Suu Myatnoe) Image 2

10.

Prayer

Aemon Khin (Queens College)

Figure 5. Prayer

Introduction

Aemon Khin is Chinese born in Myanmar, having moved to New York to pursue university. Her hobbies include indulging in fiction and drawing, and a penchant for fandom participation.

Meaning

The theme of this painting comes from an old tradition I used to/still follow with my family, ZhongYuan Jie translated to Ghost Festival in English (中元節). It takes place during fall in which wandering spirits of the dead will come to the world of the living for a day, and deceased family members visit their families.

It's a relatively simple tradition, with simple acts such as burning joss paper, incense and paper-mache symbolizing material items, and offering food for the visiting spirits. Since it differs from region to region, household to household, I can't speak for others, but in my household, there was a rule of having 13-15 dishes served, avoiding 14 dishes as 14 is an unlucky number; these dishes could either be home-cooked or bought, but we usually only bought 3-4 of the dishes with the rest being made by my mother and housekeeper, with myself helping out in preparation. We'd also have someone toss a coin every now and then–with heads signaling that the spirits have feasted, and tails signaling not–to see when we could take the dishes back to eat, but this might not exist for other households.

Inspiration:

If I were to be honest, I just wanted to play around with the contrast of red and teal, so I made an illustration in which I could display it, but also have an eye-catching composition. After settling on that, it came naturally to pick out a character from my original stories and apply a theme to it. Said character is a girl-god based off of XīWÁngMǔ (西王母), the Queen Mother of the West and a guardian of mount. Kunlun, thus the panther tail and tiger spirit in the background. Not only that, the piece is my reminiscence of a tradition that I won't be able to partake in for a long while, at least while I'm separated from my family.

Part IV

Recipes and Food

11.

Identity through Food

Kaitlyn Noyan (Queens College)

My grandmother immigrated to America with nothing but the clothes on her back, a suitcase full of precious mementos and a dream that her children's lives would count for something more than what she thought hers did. She moved to New York in the late 90s for the opportunity to call herself an American with very little knowledge of the people around her and no job to keep her feet stable.

In early 2000, she landed a job at a small shop that specializes in food from the country she was born in. It made me think the life she left back in her country, slaving over the stove, wasn't far off from the life America provided her –the only difference was getting paid to do it. It wasn't until I asked her why she willingly worked 12 hour days with very little pay, in a hot, cramped kitchen that I finally understood that this job taught her how to stay connected to her roots. The smell of the food, the people who surrounded her, and the music all reminded her of the country she grew up in.

In December of 2001, her eldest daughter gave birth to me. I was the first grandchild of three and her love for me was inconceivable. Growing up as an Indian-American, I had a difficult time connecting to either side of my identity. I was "too American" to be considered Indian and " too Indian" to be considered fully American. At home, I was expected to enjoy the food my grandmother made. At school, I was expected to enjoy dry pizza in the cafeteria. Every night I would come complaining about how much I didn't want stewed vegetables for dinner. The next day, I wouldn't be caught dead opening a bowl of dhal and rice at the lunch table. I wasn't eating cold fries or flavorless burgers because I loved the taste or because it was easier to access –I was eating it to seek approval from my classmates through what I chose to eat.

During the pandemic in 2020, for the first time in a decade, my grandmother was given the chance to spend some time with her family as the shop closed. With schools closed and desperate to fill the time, we chose to explore our talents in the kitchen. I loved to bake and she loved to cook. With nothing open and nowhere to go I rediscovered my love for her food. A few months into lockdown, I asked her to teach me how to make some of her signature meals.

In January of 2023, my grandmother was diagnosed with Non-Hodgkin lymphoma. A month later, I tried making one of the dishes she taught me. 5 months after that, she succumbed to her illness and passed away on a rainy afternoon.

For the past year and a half, I have been trying to chase the flavors of my grandmother's food. For the first time in my life I realized that our identities are rooted in food. I craved validation from

my peers at schools through food because I thought it would connect me to the American culture that surrounded me. Our love for food connected my grandmother and I, forming unforgettable memories. Food continues to connect me to my grandmother even after her passing.

Food is something that reminds me of who I am, where I come from, and the memories meals hold. When I get sick I think of the soup she'd make and when holidays roll around I remember the traditional food she'd make for us. My identity has been so deeply embedded in the conversations I've had over food, the connection to community through food, and the nostalgia of flavor. I thank my grandmother for teaching me that.

12.

Barbecued Green Peppers: My Food Memory

Yubin Lin (LaGuardia Community College)

One of my favorite foods is barbecued green peppers. It smells fragrant and appetizing. Additionally, it tastes a little spicy, juicy, and soft. This food reminds me of my friend in China, who took me to a barbecue restaurant near my apartment and recommended her favorite dish to me.

Located in Gulou District, Fuzhou City, Fujian Province of China, this restaurant, which was called Bonnie Bears, was not a famous place but specialized in barbecuing various vegetables, meat and seafood. This restaurant was inconspicuous as it was situated in a quiet place. Therefore, few people passed or went into it. There was a convenience store on its left and a fast-food restaurant on its right. I found this restaurant was small, but chairs and tables were set neatly when I entered it. The decorations were simple. A fortune cat, which symbolized prosperity, was seated on the front desk as most stores did. The photos of people who smiled and chatted with family, a clock with cartoon patterns and best wishes for happiness and health hung on the wall, creating a warm atmosphere for customers to enjoy food like at home. Additionally, the restaurant owner was genuinely kind and barbecued food well.

My friend and I usually go there to fill our bellies and relax ourselves after overtime work and sometimes go there to spend time together during holidays or weekends. Please see two pictures that I took when my friend and I ate in that restaurant as below for reference. Apart from barbecued green peppers, we also ordered barbecued needle mushrooms with meat, chicken fillet, tofu, kidney beans, cauliflower, squid (followed by the sequence of left picture) and eggplant (right picture) together. We ate them with sodas instead of rice or other staple food, and we could add condiments on the table if we preferred stronger tastes. Like us, most people usually go there with their friends and colleagues to have a night snack and kill time.

The barbecued green peppers make me recall all the moments that we sat together to talk about things that happened to us and share interesting experiences. For example, we complained about overtime due to sudden and urgent assignments, exchanged experiences and comments on how to solve problems we faced, shared some items such as food, clothes and shoes we bought from Taobao, and discussed holidays arrangement, etc. Additionally, my friend, who was fond of and good at cooking, shared her recipes and pictures of what she cooked with me. It was a relaxing moment that relieved us of our stress.

There are some steps to get barbecued peppers ready. First, brush the skins with oil and then put them on the barbecue for around 4 minutes. Second, turn the peppers when they look a

little burnt and barbecue them again for around 3 minutes. Be careful not to make them become completely black. Third, sprinkle with seasonings such as cumin, black peppers, salt and so on, which is based on your own preferences. Also, you can remove the seeds if you do not like the spicy taste. After being barbecued, their skins become burnt and wrinkled, which look like the pattern of tigers' skin. This is also the reason why this dish is called tiger-skin peppers in China.

I have not eaten this food for around two years. But my friend and I have promised each other that we will share it or even barbecue it together when I go back to China to meet her next time. I sincerely hope that this day will arrive soon.

Figure 6. Barbecued Green Peppers. Photo Credit: Yubin Lin

13.

Ohn No Khauk Swe

Lillian Maung (Queens College)

A dish called *Ohn No Khauk Swe*, which translates to "coconut noodle soup," has been a central part of my family's traditions. It's more than just a meal, it's a symbol of togetherness, especially when we gather with our extended family. Whenever my mom prepares this dish, people frequently ask for the recipe or if she can teach them how to make it, but she always gently declines, saying it will be passed down only to my brother and me.

Making this dish is a collective effort. Everyone in my family plays a role, and it's that shared process that makes it taste even more special. It is not just the delicious flavors that make it meaningful to me, it is the memories we create and the time we spend together that give it depth. We have been cooking this dish as a family for as long as I can remember, and it has become a cherished tradition.

The significance this dish holds for my family mirrors what it means to me: quality time, shared laughter, and enjoying each other's presence. Life can get busy, but whenever it is time to make *Ohn No Khauk Swe*, everyone contributes in whatever way they can. I am deeply grateful to my family for maintaining this tradition, not only for the meal itself but for the chance to reconnect and strengthen our bond.

This dish also ties me to my cultural roots. Since I was born in the United States and haven't had many opportunities to visit Burma, where my parents are from, cooking this dish helps me feel closer to my heritage. As we prepare it, my parents often share stories from their lives in Burma, how they used to cook with their families, and how important those moments were. Through these stories, my brother and I have learned more about where we come from, and we've grown closer because of it.

When I visited Burma for the first time in 2012, I finally saw the places my parents had talked about and met their friends from childhood. We even had authentic *Ohn No Khauk Swe* while we were there. It was delicious, but it didn't carry the same emotional warmth as when we make it together at home. That experience made me realize that the dish's true flavor comes not just from its ingredients, but from the love and effort we pour into making it together.

Ohn No Khauk Swe plays a vital role in shaping and sustaining our family culture. Preparing it gives us a chance to slow down and talk about our days, our feelings, or whatever's on our minds. It represents the kind of family life that values teamwork and emotional connection over individual achievement. When we cook this dish, we set aside distractions and focus on each other.

To outsiders, it might just look like noodles, coconut, and meat. But to me, it means family, connection, and being present with the people who matter most.

Part V

Critical Essays

14.

Beyond Prayer: How Monasteries Preserve Sherpa Culture at Home and Abroad

Pemba Sherpa (Queens College)

Growing up in a family deeply connected to Buddhism, I have always felt the presence of monasteries as more than just religious sites—they are living, breathing sanctuaries that nurture the Sherpa way of life. Whether nestled in the remote Himalayan landscapes of Nepal or serving as community centers abroad, monasteries are the spiritual, cultural, and social heart of Sherpa communities. Their significance extends far beyond worship, shaping identity, preserving traditions, and offering education and support to those in need. Reflecting on my experiences, I have come to see that monasteries are not just buildings of prayer but the very essence of what it means to be Sherpa.

In my own family, my grandfather dedicated much of his life to preserving and supporting Buddhism. He helped build monasteries, commissioned sacred statues, and funded religious activities that enriched our community. Several of my uncles also devoted themselves to the Dharma, pursuing Buddhist studies and eventually becoming teachers. After completing rigorous retreats and advanced education, they now travel widely—across East Asia and remote regions of Nepal—offering spiritual guidance and sharing teachings with many.

Perhaps most remarkably, my aunt's son has been recognized as the reincarnation of Trulshik Rinpoche, one of the most highly respected Tibetan Buddhist masters and a major lineage holder of the Nyingma tradition. As a direct disciple of great teachers such as Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche and a principal teacher to the 14th Dalai Lama, Trulshik Rinpoche's legacy continues to inspire not only our family but Buddhists around the world.

A Spiritual Foundation Rooted in Monasteries

For centuries, monasteries have stood at the spiritual core of Sherpa life, instilling values of compassion, mindfulness, and karma. I vividly remember visiting monasteries as a child, where the rhythmic chanting of monks and the gentle scent of burning incense created an atmosphere of profound peace. Monasteries serve as places of guidance through all of life's stages—births, marriages, funerals—marking both joyous and sorrowful moments. They reinforce the belief that life is deeply interconnected with Buddhist teachings.

These sacred institutions ensure that Buddhism is not just a philosophy, but a way of life. Monks and lamas teach the importance of inner peace and selflessness, offering wisdom passed down for generations. Even in today's fast-paced world, monasteries remain places of refuge—where people can pause, reflect, and reconnect with their faith and purpose.

Who are the Sherpa?

My upbringing in the Sherpa homeland shaped my understanding of life and community. The Sherpa people originate from the Solukhumbu and neighboring Himalayan regions of Nepal. I come from a small village called Cherem, nestled amidst towering mountains, rivers, and forests. From our village, we could see the snow-capped Himalayas every day. Cherem is a close-knit community with only 14 to 15 households, centered around a modest but essential monastery. In our village, Buddhist customs were deeply woven into everyday life. We practiced non-violence so fully that even the killing of animals was forbidden. Buddhism was not just a religion—it was the foundation of how we lived.

The word *Sherpa* itself means "people from the East," referencing our ancestors who migrated from eastern Tibet. While the world often knows Sherpas as legendary climbers, today, we are much more. Many Sherpas are doctors, pilots, lawyers, scientists, artists, and community leaders in Nepal and around the world. Yet no matter where we go, our roots remain anchored in Tibetan Buddhism, particularly the Nyingma school, one of the oldest and most respected Buddhist traditions.

Today, Sherpas number between 150,000 to 200,000 globally. The largest populations remain in Nepal—especially in the Solukhumbu, Sankhuwasabha, and Taplejung districts—but vibrant Sherpa communities have also emerged in the United States, the United Kingdom, Australia, Canada, and India. In the United States alone, it is estimated that 3,000 to 5,000 Sherpas live in the New York and Boston areas, forming one of the largest Sherpa communities outside Nepal. Similarly, significant populations thrive in London and Sydney, where active Sherpa organizations and monasteries help preserve cultural ties.

Monasteries as Centers of Education and Social Support

One of the most remarkable roles of monasteries is their contribution to education and humanitarian work. In Nepal, where many children lack access to formal schooling, monasteries welcome students regardless of ethnicity, background, or social status. They provide free education, food, and shelter, offering hope to those who might otherwise have none. I have met children who were taken in by monasteries and who, through Buddhist philosophy and practical life skills, were empowered to build a better future.

Monasteries also serve as sanctuaries for the elderly, orphans, and those facing hardship. In times of crisis—whether from natural disasters or economic challenges—monasteries become centers of relief, providing food, shelter, and emotional support. Their generosity and compassion extend far beyond the monastic community, touching countless lives across Nepal.

Keeping Sherpa Traditions Alive Abroad

The role of monasteries does not end in the Himalayas. As many Sherpas migrate around the world, monasteries have become vital spaces where traditions are upheld, languages are preserved, and cultural practices are passed down to younger generations.

It is estimated that around 15,000 to 20,000 Sherpas live outside Nepal, with thriving communities in the U.S., U.K., Australia, Canada, and India. In cities like New York, Boston, London, and Sydney, monasteries serve as cultural and spiritual homes for the diaspora. They host religious ceremonies, organize festivals, and provide a sense of belonging for those far from their ancestral

homeland. For many Sherpas abroad, monasteries are not just places of worship but cultural lifelines, ensuring that our traditions continue despite distance and time.

In addition to monasteries, organizations like the Network of Sherpa Students and Professionals (NSSP) and the United Sherpa Association (USA) play vital roles in sustaining Sherpa identity abroad. The NSSP, a volunteer-led youth committee, promotes social, educational, professional, and cultural initiatives, working closely with students and professionals within the Sherpa community. Likewise, the United Sherpa Association (USA) in America aims to strengthen the Sherpa community by promoting cultural programs, sports, education, and fostering harmony among Sherpas and friends of Sherpa culture.

Inspired by these initiatives and my upbringing, I am also in the process of starting an NGO called Bodhi Light Nepal, whose mission is to support low-income and underserved individuals in Nepal by providing essential educational and medical supplies—delivered through trusted community partners and supported by donations raised in the United States.

Finding Belonging Abroad

Moving abroad made me realize that monasteries are much more than religious spaces—they are bridges to identity. Here in the United States, I have found that the monastery continues to be where the Sherpa community gathers—not just for rituals, but for emotional and cultural support. I still remember attending my first Losar celebration here. Despite being far from home, I found myself surrounded by familiar sights, sounds, and practices. Monks chanted prayers, offered blessings, and Sherpa families gathered—just like in Nepal.

Another powerful moment was when the Sherpa community abroad held a traditional funeral ceremony. Even thousands of miles from the Himalayas, the gathering resembled those I had known back home. Monks chanted for days, butter lamps were offered, and community members came together to cook, support the grieving family, and carry out every ritual as our ancestors had done for generations. For me, monasteries have helped redefine what it means to be Sherpa in a new cultural context. I am no longer just a Sherpa from Nepal, but a Sherpa-American—living between two cultures yet fully part of both.

Sherpa Buddhism in the Wider Buddhist World

Buddhism worldwide is practiced through four major branches. Theravâda Buddhism, common in Southeast Asia, focuses on personal liberation and meditation. Mahâyâna Buddhism, practiced in East Asia, emphasizes compassion and the liberation of all beings. Vajrayâna Buddhism, often referred to as Tibetan Buddhism, is known for its specialized practices—mantras, visualizations, and rituals—and is primarily practiced in Tibet, Nepal, Bhutan, and Mongolia. Zen Buddhism, common in Japan, China, Korea, and Vietnam, is distinguished by its simplicity and emphasis on meditation.

Sherpas primarily practice Vajrayâna Buddhism, especially through the Nyingma tradition. Sherpa Buddhism is also shaped by local customs and beliefs unique to our Himalayan environment, focusing on practical teachings that directly relate to the daily lives of Sherpa people.

Conclusion: A Lasting Legacy

Reflecting on the role of monasteries in Sherpa communities, I see that they are much more than physical structures—they are the embodiment of our faith, history, and identity. They provide spiritual guidance, preserve our rich heritage, educate the young, and support those in need. Whether in the Himalayas or overseas, their presence ensures that Sherpa culture and Buddhist teachings continue to thrive.

For me, monasteries represent continuity—a bridge between the past, present, and future. They remind us of where we come from, keep us grounded in our values, and offer a sense of belonging no matter where we are in the world. Even as the modern world changes, monasteries remain timeless sanctuaries, ensuring that Sherpa traditions and the spirit of our culture endure for generations to come.

These are some of the photos I captured during my most recent trip to Nepal.

Figure 7. A distant view of Halesi Maratika Monastery, gracefully nestled among vibrant and lush greenery. The monastery's striking architecture stands out beautifully against the natural surroundings

Figure 8. A closer look at the colorful architecture of Halesi Maratika Monastery. The intricate details, traditional Tibetan designs, and vibrant colors reflect the monastery's spiritual and cultural significance.

Figure 9. This is a retreat home and a row of stupas built by my grandfather. Each door on the ground floor leads to a room that preserves natural and sacred Buddhist objects. For example, one room holds remnants believed to be ancient stone-carved Buddhist scriptures, while others contain statues and other relics. To the side of the house is the famous and sacred Nya Cave, known for its spiritual significance.

Figure 10. Colorful prayer flags flutter across the hills of Halesi, where it is a common practice for visitors to hang them. According to Buddhist belief, each flag carries prayers, mantras, and blessings written on them. As the wind blows, it is said that these prayers are spread into the air, benefiting all living beings, bringing peace, compassion, and harmony to the world. The act of hanging prayer flags is a symbolic offering and a wish for the well-being of all.

Figure 11. Under the soft glow of the evening, young monks enthusiastically set up tables for a small gathering.Their excitement and playful energy made the preparation itself a joyful memory.

Figure 12. The ongoing expansion of Halesi Monastery is being built to create more space for young monks. Monasteries like this often welcome children from poor backgrounds, especially those whose families cannot afford to provide them with education or proper care, they entrust their children to the monastery, hoping they will find not only shelter but a chance at a better life.Once completed, this new space will serve as both a residence and a learning center, nurturing their spiritual development while offering them an education and a place to call home.These children can grow, learn, and find peace, surrounded by spiritual guidance and a caring community.

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15.

Postmodernizing Men's Hockey: Deconstructing Identity, Physicality, and Queerness

Eunice Yeung (Kingsborough CC)

Ice hockey has cemented its status as an international sport with leagues across the globe. Specifically, men's hockey in North America is considered one of the most aggressive and fast-paced contact sports, often related to its smaller rinks compared to international and European sizes (*Size of Hockey Rinks: Why the US Rink Is Smaller Than the EU Rink*, 2022). The North American playstyle focuses on speed and toughness, unlike the European style which emphasizes strategy and control (Wueest, 2023). Rooted in a rigid structure, it creates a unique identity based on deeply ingrained norms and beliefs. Through a postmodern lens, this paper will examine the sport's distinctive perceptions of masculinity, the body, and queerness, while analyzing observations on hockey culture. This essay will explore why men's hockey is an outlier compared with other sports.

Dissecting Hockey Culture

Hockey, originally named *Duwarken,* began with the *Mi'kmaq*—the First Nations people known in the maritime region (Bennett, 2019). Despite its Indigenous history, hockey has been whitewashed and commodified to a degree where it has the reputation of being a "privileged white man's sport" (Moore & Shah, 2023). An internal demographic study of the National Hockey League (NHL)'s staff and all 32 teams showed that 83.6% of its workforce is white, and nearly 62% of the 4,200 participants (about 67% of all employees) of the survey were men (Whyno, 2022). The lack of diversity in North American hockey is even more evident when considering that only one player under an NHL contract has ever come out as gay, and there are currently no openly gender non-conforming or transgender players in the league (Benjamin, 2021). Hockey has become a more inclusive sport in recent years, as seen with the founding of the Professional Women's Hockey League (PWHL), and the rise in representation of BIPOC and LGBTQ+ players in the women's game (Blackottawa, 2024; James, 2024; Rodriguez, 2023). Women's hockey is a marginalized and underfunded sport that has its problems of bigotry and discrimination, but it is largely more inclusive than men's hockey (Moore & Shah, 2023). The structure of the men's game has long been upheld with stagnant progress. The following deconstructs the elements that build culture in men's hockey and its resistance to change, providing the background for discussion.

Before Joining the System

Every degree of men's hockey is a precisely manufactured universe of its own. Youth leagues present as a community where young boys can have fun and make friends. On a semi-professional or professional level, it is a fraternity where players work together to succeed as a team. Generally, hockey requires full dedication to the team mentality. Players are no longer just themselves. It is nearly impossible to continue playing if dedication weakens because one would not survive professional hockey without first enduring exhausting drills, injuries, or punishments as a youth hockey player. In North American leagues, hockey players are held in high regard, where "the heroic status of the players contributes to the illusion of power. And as long as they continue to be masters of their trade, they will receive the acclaim that perpetuates the illusion" (Robidoux, 2001, p. 179). Branch (2015) describes the expectations of aspiring hockey players when writing about the life of Derek Boogaard. He was a former Canadian professional hockey player, known for being an enforcer, who died at 28 due to an accidental drug and alcohol overdose while recovering from a concussion:

> But nobody dreams of playing hockey so that they can hurt other people. It just goes that way. Players are shaped into puzzle pieces that fit with all the others. A boy is stripped to a set of skills at the whim of coaches and scouts. To keep playing hockey, do more of this and less of that. The untalented and undedicated are discarded, swept away at the end of each season. Survivors plug away, baited by hope. (p. 6)

Every young boy who wants to succeed like their idols on TV knows what it means to be a hockey player. It is hard work, and they must accommodate this new identity by intentionally molding their lives around it going forward. Many young players do not realize how a cycle of indoctrination is perpetuated in the North American youth hockey system until they are in it. They may not know how a locker room becomes an echo chamber that can dismantle their self-perception as athletes or as people entirely. Minor leagues are farms that train boys into players, feeding the larger, more unyielding institution of higher-level professional hockey. The machine does not stop until you, the player and the audience, do.

Passing the Threshold: The Making of a Hockey Player

Joining a hockey team often constitutes a rite of passage that is often done without considering its meaning (Robidoux, 2001). Once a boy enters the locker room, a transitional phase that adds "hockey player" to their identity begins. These rituals can be viewed through symbolic interactionism, as defined by American sociologist George Herbert Mead. Interpersonal interactions form society, and they can shape individual behaviors in return ("Symbolic Interactionism of George Herbert Mead," 2012). These interactions give tangible items or concepts meaning. Hockey players do not need to know the reasons behind rituals, they already believe that it signifies an initiation into the group (Robidoux, 2001). Rituals can range from tasks that rookies may not feel necessarily *bad* doing, like paying for an expensive team dinner with their first check, to hazing incidents that are traumatic and violent like physical assault (Moore & Shah, 2023; Robidoux, 2001). Rookies may justify or even defend these rituals because "it is what it is".

Closely related, we can see how these beliefs legitimize when applying Erving Goffman's Performance Theory. It suggests that a person is like an actor on stage when presenting themselves to

others, every situation is a new scene, and "props" that represent meaning define a setting (Goffman, 1959, as cited in *Roles and the Presentation of Self*, n.d.). In professional hockey, there is no more "backstage" when players are always *frontstage*. Everything is seen by everyone. Both literally and figuratively, a hockey player is given roles to play, none easily broken out of. On the ice, they take up the role of a defensive forward, offensive defenseman, special teams linebacker, or any one of these combinations. Off the ice, they perform by involving themselves in media scrums. They may experience role fatigue as everything done in the arena is tied to the performance of hockey, including their interpersonal relationships. Players practice for games and actors rehearse to act in plays. Spectators applaud both at the end. The front a player puts up for hockey becomes a mainstay in their perception of self, instead of a temporary character that breaks when a theater performance is complete.

Foucault's (1995) usage of the panopticon to describe the disciplinary functions of society can also be applied in addition to Goffman's performance theory. Once entering collegiate or professional hockey, players are subject to constant observation. Reporters not only interact with players in the public areas of an arena, but they enter the locker room and continue their work in that private space. Players need to behave accordingly or they would be accused of being a "locker-room cancer" or having "personality issues" by the media. Strict regulations direct them toward the ideal image of a motivated and obedient athlete. Intense scrutiny from authority figures reinforces these methods of discipline to create a productive force that keeps systems running. It shapes the perfect hockey player—a man willing to sacrifice himself for the greater good.

After passing through the liminal space between *boy* and *player*, all a hockey team has is each other. Strong bonds form over the meanings ascribed to routines and rituals since only *they* believe and go through them. Players no longer have the experiences of a regular boy. In a symbolic-interactionist sense, hockey players do not perform like the rest of society once they enter the pipeline. This atmosphere of heightened conformity isolates itself from the social groups or communities players have outside the rink, making up the basis of hockey culture.

Behind Closed Doors

Much like organized religion, hockey upholds a hierarchical structure with a designated physical location for activity, establishing structural-functionalist ideals. Robidoux (2001) describes that a "climate-controlled stadium with its painted, artificial ice surface glowing brightly exemplifies the artificiality of the sport domain; it immediately tells those inside the building that they have entered a space outside everyday experience" (p. 99). The hockey arena itself is a representation of a self-sustaining terrarium. In this contained ecosystem, slogans, phrases, and ideals are promoted to maintain order. The most championed aphorisms in a locker room are statements affirming team spirit and perseverance, such as "you're as good as you want to be" or "there's no I in team" (Wenner, 1998, p. 314). It encompasses a belief that dominance, be it mental or physical, wins games. Most importantly, it facilitates a homogenized identity where "as a result, what it means to be a hockey player is generally indistinguishable from being a man" (Robidoux, 2001, p. 189).

Described as a "refuge from women", and a "sexually segregated place", the locker room is "where boys receive inspirational talks about how they must show they are 'real men' in the game" (Wenner, 1998, pp. 311–314). In this space, there are only two options for identity, "male" or "everything else" —a catchall for deviance, being gay or female. The language used in a locker room is particular, intentional, and hostile (Messner, 1992; Pronger, 1990, 1998; Robidoux, 2001). Derogatory slurs become a part of regular vocabulary. Speaking about competition in a degrading manner reduces

them to the inferior level in which women and queerness are often placed, perpetuating rape culture by extension. On the ice, there is also a culture of "chirping" —taunting opponents—where this language is used. It separates hockey players from what they are not.

Diversity and the Hockey Identity

Before examining the current state of the NHL, we must first recognize the history of BIPOC players in men's hockey. While there are more non-white players now, breaking the color barrier in the early stages of the sport's development was far from painless.

On March 13, 1948, Larry Kwong became the first non-white player of Asian descent to touch NHL ice, and his singular shift in the dying minutes of the game was enough to pave the way for other Asian players to enter the sport (Sachdeva, n.d.). Kwong was born in British Columbia during the emergence of the Exclusion Act in 1923, which banned most forms of immigration to Canada from China. Anti-Asian sentiment was on the rise. As he worked towards playing professional hockey, he had to deal with many obstacles due to his identity, such as being denied jobs for being Chinese. On multiple occasions, he was unable to travel across the border with his hockey team because the United States did not allow Chinese people to enter the country (para. 29). It was a groundbreaking moment in NHL history when he finally had that faithful minute of ice time, even though he spent the bulk of his career in various senior leagues in Canada and Europe. Kwong's legacy of breaking the NHL's color barrier for Asian hockey players as a Chinese-Canadian reflects what many Asians are expected of in Western society—to not complain, work hard, and assimilate.

Kwong's upbringing is a familiar story to many Asian immigrants in North America, where the main focus is to "be seen, not heard," all the while facing inevitable racism and discrimination (Sachdeva, n.d.). The "model minority" myth largely contributed to why his legacy has long been overlooked. Most often applied to Asian minorities in North America, the stereotype perceives them as successful, well-educated, and the ideal "role model" for other minority groups (*Pioneers on Ice: Celebrating Asian Heritage Month in Hockey*, 2024). It reduces the diverse experiences and cultural backgrounds of Asian communities into a homogenous narrative, overlooking the struggles faced by different Asian subgroups and downplaying the effects of systemic racism on other communities of color.

Under the lens of the model minority myth, Asian parents in Western countries may feel pressured to uphold this myth, believing it is the only way for their children to gain social mobility and become successful. They may not view sports as an ideal career choice for their children and instead as a hobby due to the limited employment options it offers. This can discourage kids from playing sports and developing their skills, and some may give up on sports entirely in favor of academic pursuits. It creates a paradox where the barriers to accessing hockey limit the number of successful Asian players moving on to play in professional leagues, which can also become exactly why kids are discouraged from trying the sport in the first place.

The lack of Asian players in men's hockey—or hockey in general—stems not only from a lack of accessible, affordable resources and programs but also from the culture of conformity in hockey as an institution. As previously discussed, hockey culture is a pressure chamber constantly defining (or redefining) deviance. It challenges the primary goal of an aspiring hockey player, which is to conform. Inside this system, the ideal hockey identity is "definitively North American, Caucasian," and

"prejudicially English-speaking" (Robidoux, 2001, p.145). This fundamentally hostile space heightens racism and targeted violence since BIPOC players cannot fully conform to the hockey ideal, which makes them deviant by default. While there have been many instances of outright racism against players of color across different levels of hockey, including players being called racial slurs or seeing others make racist gestures at them among other examples (Aliu, 2022; CBC News, 2022; Higgins, 2022; "Junior Hockey Player Suspended for Alleged Racist Gesture - ESPN," 2022; Little & Garrett, 2022), Robidoux (2001) understands the discriminatory environment of hockey as something deeply rooted in the player development process, and that bigotry has embodied a less overt form in recent years. He notes:

> "What must be understood, however, is that the barriers faced by would-be professional hockey players are not limited to the fact that they belong to an ethnic minority, or that they are women or homosexuals. Rather, it is that any experience that does not fit within the specific hegemonic paradigm is discriminated against. In fact, discrimination in the hockey community exceeds ethnicity, gender, or class. (p. 148)

Robidoux (2001) states that players seem to be "truly accepting of both African-Canadian and African-American players, as well as of the increasing number of European players arriving in North America to play professionally" (p. 146). As more BIPOC players have risen to prominence—albeit gradually—it can be understood that as long as a player assimilates into the existing framework of hegemonic masculinity and can effectively produce as part of a team, ethnicity does not matter. This acceptance of diversity is conditional. It is dependent on a player's production as part of a team, including the ability to conform and "just be a guy" (p. 148). Some players may feel uncomfortable fully assimilating to the norms of their locker room but would choose to remain silent and follow through in fear of jeopardizing their careers or reputation among peers. Players who cannot fit in with this group identity would be made deviant, which is especially difficult for BIPOC players since they simply do not fit the mold, yet they have to try their best to do so.

Although hockey players generally accept the diversity of their peers, there are still many instances of unveiled racism in hockey fan spaces online. In the same way that chanting "basketball" at Black hockey players is racist (Moore & Shah, 2023), some people insult the performance of players by making racist jokes that imply them getting traded to Chinese teams. It is worth noting that these jokes do not seem to be only targeted towards Asian players specifically. These insults can be statements such as saying a player's "new home will be in China", a player should "get ready to learn Chinese," or things like "welcome to Guangzhou" (tjh3212, 2025). They imply that it would be a "punishment" if the supposedly bad players in question had to play on a Chinese hockey team. Additionally, in recent days, there has been an increase in jokes about deporting players (Russo, 2025) made in response to the players' on-ice performance. These online posts are reflective of how casual racism and xenophobia are normalized in hockey spaces, which reaffirms the idea that the acceptance of diversity is conditional within the institution of hockey. Nothing matters as long as a player is productive, skilled, and "one of us".

While there is room for improvement in diversifying men's hockey, efforts towards increasing BIPOC representation and acceptance in the sport should not be discounted. Figures like Akim Aliu, who is a Nigerian-born Ukrainian-Canadian NHL player, have been outspoken about their experiences growing up playing hockey as a person of color, detailing how the ingrained racism, misogyny, and homophobia that permeate hockey culture still require ongoing effort to be changed (Aliu, 2022). Active NHL players like Jason and Nicholas Robertson, who are Filipino-American brothers playing for the Dallas Stars and Toronto Maple Leafs respectively, Mathew Dumba (Filipino-Canadian) of the

Dallas Stars; and Nick Suzuki (Japanese-Canadian) of the Montreal Canadiens have not only been significant contributors on the ice for their respective teams, they have also been vocal about what it means for them to play in the NHL and represent their heritage, hoping to inspire future generations of Asian hockey players (Blennerhassett & Blennerhassett, 2020; Cudzinowski, 2023; (*Filipino-Canadian NHL Player Speaks Out Against Racism in Hockey*, 2020; Murphy, 2023; Rosen, 2021).

Reconstructing Gender Roles in a Homogenous Space

Sports exist as a microcosm of society where real-life issues like violence against women, queerness, and racism are exemplified, often through the use of derogatory language (Robidoux, 2001). Combining this idea with the team-centric nature of hockey, a smaller ranking system is created within the larger pecking order of a team. Robidoux (2001) examines how the hockey player's view of self-worth and identity is validated through interactions in the sport as follows:

> Every day the players engage in a highly demanding physical competition; thousands of screaming fans celebrate that competition, reinforcing the players' successes and failures and, hence, publicly validating their performances as men. By simply fulfilling their occupational demands, the players are embodying specific qualities of one form of masculinity and establishing, at least esoterically, their male worth. (p. 129)

It can be interpreted that men familiar with hockey culture view the conquest of dominating a game (scoring) as a symbol of the "ideal man". In a given franchise, there are usually known pairings of their best players—a top goal scorer and a linemate who most frequently assists their goals, or the team captain and his alternate captain. They are the faces of their team's identity. The general population of hockey fans, a majority being privileged, cisgender, and heterosexual men, are often biased towards the "better" player (the captain or the leading goal-scorer) and not the associated teammate. They are either disliked or overshadowed. It is not unusual to see feminine- or queer-implying insults directed towards the lower-ranked player in these duos, like calling them "soft" or "snowflakes" (Messner, 1992). It is no different from how men insult women or queer people. Meanwhile, the higher-ranked player may be called masculine as a compliment.

Additionally, hockey seems to precipitate a unique subtype of misogyny and sexism that can only exist in a strictly male-dominated bubble. Hockey, as a local (contained) variant of hegemonic masculinity, creates an artificial identity of the "designated woman". It applies to those who take up roles of support and assistance in the group. Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) explain that "hegemonic masculinities are ... constituted in men's interaction with women; therefore, the commonalities in women's gender practices also produce convergence. Accordingly, local constructions of hegemonic masculinity have a certain 'family resemblance"' (p. 850). Within this context, the pairing of a goal-scorer and their assisting teammate replicates the image of a traditionally cisgender, heteronormative couple. Their dynamic may be spoken of like a marriage where the scoring player assumes the role of "husband", and the other player "wife". This can also extend to the association between defensemen and their goaltenders. A defenseman specializing in shutdown defense (prioritizing puck movement rather than scoring) is often called a "stay-at-home defenseman" (Mitchell, 2020). It is a clear variant of the "stay-at-home housewife" role, the goaltender being the "man of the house". In a leadership group, atop the hierarchy is the captain, the "father", and the alternate captain the "mother". These roles emulate the heteronormative and binary structures of gender in a nuclear family. The existence

of the "designated feminine" role in hockey implies that "ritually speaking, females are equivalent to subordinate males" (Goffman, 2017, p. 73). The dynamic of hegemonic masculinity reflects its association with gendered power (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005).

Juxtaposed Symbols of Masculinity and Queerness

Hockey has a coding of homoeroticism, intentional or not. The pleasure found in winning a hockey game is similar to the pleasure found in the eroticized play of power between the equal gender status of men (Messner, 1992; Pronger, 1990). Hegemonic masculinity rejects male closeness, eroticism, and homosexuality, but as long as it is contained within the athletic setting, it is acceptable. It becomes a means of production to help the team succeed (Foucault, 1980, 1985, as cited in Pronger, 1998). Disciplinary structures that maintain the boundary between that and "having sex" keep the homosexuality of sports a well-kept secret, offering homoerotic opportunities while simultaneously denying them (Pronger, 1990, 1998).

Applying this idea, retired players no longer have an "excuse" to comfortably be emotionally or physically intimate—platonic, romantic, or not—with their peers "safely" because they now exist outside the boundaries of hockey. For the most part, the relationships formed in hockey are the only ones players have, and they often last a lifetime (Allain, 2023; Robidoux, 2001). Alumni games become opportunities for retired players to re-experience the tenderness they had previously been "allowed". The hockey arena as a third space gives the players in these relationships "permission" to "open up" (Messner, 1992; Wenner, 1998). It becomes acceptable to be naked, play with others' bodies, kiss teammates, or establish "bromances" within the context of hockey. It is not gay if it's "ferda" —a slang term meaning "for the boys" originating from the Canadian comedy sitcom *Letterkenny* (Lealos et al., 2024, para. 15). Combined with the idea of the "assigned feminine" role (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; Goffman, 2017), it illustrates how hockey is inherently homoerotic under the pretense of reproducing heteronormative and binary structures.

Hockey as a conflicting symbol of both homoeroticism and denial is best depicted in the film *Close* (Dhont, 2022). In the film, two 13-year-old boys named Léo and Rémi are best friends with a deeply intimate connection. In fear of being outed and alienated by his peers, Léo turns to hockey to intentionally avoid Rémi. Léo is the focal point of most scenes, but in the sequences of him playing hockey, he blends in with his teammates. It visually represents hockey's culture of homogenization where an individual body is reduced to its function in a system, internalizing homophobia and the desire to belong (Film at Lincoln Center, 2023; Foucault, 1995; Pronger, 1998; Robidoux, 2001). In an interview, Dhont states that he felt the imagery of "the hockey costume" was "an armor put on [a] very fragile child", and hockey was a visualization of grief (Film at Lincoln Center, 2023). Protective gear shields a player from harm, much like grief shielding a person from facing reality. Hockey is aptly used in the film to symbolize Léo's intentions of erasing his identity. He is "no longer gay" because his queerness now exists within the boundaries of the sporting arena (Pronger, 1998).

The Body In Hockey

The body is employed in many ways in hockey. Integral to the men's game, checking is frequently used as a defensive technique (Eskenazi et al., 2024). It is legal for a player to drive their torso,

hip, or shoulder into an opponent as long as they have possession of the puck. Checking is illegal when involving knee-on-knee, elbow, or head contact. Below will examine the operation of the hockey body through Foucault's understanding of "docile bodies" (1995, p. 135) and real-world examples of athletes. The following will also analyze how hockey legitimizes a physical identity by way of rituals, violence, and destruction, differentiating itself from other sports.

Disciplined Violence and Bodily Destruction

No other non-combat sport glamorizes violence like hockey does. "The masculine aesthetic of hockey becomes almost sacramental through its violence and bloodshed.... 'There is an undeniable *frisson* to the sight of blood on the ice—the spilling of the very warm onto the very cold, perhaps—that not even football can match."' (Pronger, 1990, p. 22). Self-policing and intensifying the game by way of fighting is intrinsic to its culture (Business Insider, 2017). In theory, it allows players to express their frustrations and prevent worse consequences—like impulsively hitting opposing players out of anger in ways that could result in detrimental injuries. Though phased out over time, the *enforcer* is a role in hockey given to players whose only job is to fight. *Boy On Ice: The Life and Death of Derek Boogaard* (Branch, 2015) details enforcers' experiences strikingly. As an archetype with more physical attributes than skill, they do not score or eat up ice time like regular players. Enforcers gain respect by responding to dirty plays and defending teammates at the expense of another player's reputation, health, and livelihood. Pressure weighs heavy as they never know if a game needed a fight to boost momentum, or if a brawl would spark from a hit to their star player. They regularly break bones and suffer concussions. The image of an unapologetic "tough guy" conceals many enforcers' broken lives, leading to serious mental health problems with alcoholism or painkiller addictions to cope (Branch, 2015; Messner, 1992) From this, it can be seen that enforcers are "exploited for their 'animal aggression', fine-tuned and chemically manipulated by techno-science" (Pronger, 1998, p. 284). The subordination of the body becomes a sign of the self (Messner, 1992; Rail, 1998a).

Foucault (1995) suggests that power is introduced by "the contact between the body and the object it handles", constituting "a body-weapon, body-tool, body-machine complex" (p. 153). In hockey, the body itself becomes the object—the weapon used and sacrificed not unlike a rifle in combat (Messner, 1992; Robidoux, 2001). Historically, hockey has had an obsession with size. Teams looked for the next "freak" when drafting ("Confessions of a Junior Hockey Coach - When Scouting for Size Fails," 2015). The phrase "you can't teach size" had long been customary, believing that size guaranteed skill. Players who could fight, skate, and maneuver their bodies despite their heft are a scout's dream. Puck-handling skills and "hockey sense" (Doyle, 2024) become a bonus. You can teach someone how to use a gun (the body) at any time, as long as they have one. Enforcers' bodies are disciplined to discipline others. A means of production that creates positive power regardless of personal values or discomfort (Branch, 2015). Without their fists, they are nothing.

Likewise, hockey glorifies pain and endurance, reflecting the internalization of hegemonic masculinity (Robidoux, 2001; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). The Bill Masterton Trophy epitomizes this fact (*HHOF - Bill Masterton Memorial Trophy*, n.d.). It is named after Bill Masterton, a forward who made his NHL debut at 29, scored the first goal in Minnesota North Stars' franchise history, and was the first and only player in NHL history to die as a direct result of in-game injuries. The Masterton Trophy is awarded to players to commemorate sportsmanship, perseverance, and dedication. More accurately, it is awarded to players who successfully return to hockey after career- or life-threatening setbacks. Winners and nominees include players overcoming cancer, chronic illness, severe injuries, mental health struggles, addiction, or traumatic incidents like deaths in their fami-

lies. Nothing symbolizes hockey's fixation on playing through unimaginable agony like the Masterton Trophy does.

The principle of non-idleness and subjection of the body (Foucault, 1995) is also evident. Take Tyler Seguin, a Canadian forward for the Dallas Stars of the NHL, for example. At 32, soon turning 33 on January 31, he has endured many ailments like other players. Most significantly, he played 26 games through a knee and quad injury—aided by painkiller injections—that resulted in a completely torn hip labrum by the end of the 2020-2021 Stanley Cup Playoffs (Yousuf, 2021a, 2021b). Following the post-season, he underwent a right hip arthroscopy and labral repair, and a procedure that removed substantial tissue at his knee thereafter. It required him 6 months to heal from the surgeries, regain muscle, and relearn how to walk. At the time, Seguin took pride in not missing many games in the seasons prior (Yousuf, 2021b). He also stated that he, like other athletes, was driven and competitive, making slow injury timelines frustrating. He felt "behind schedule" since his rehabilitation process was so extensive. Four years later, Seguin has returned to form again, albeit playing more cautiously now than during his prime (Shapiro, 2024). Undeniably, the toll taken on his body will linger for the rest of his career. On December 4, 2024, it was announced that Seguin was undergoing another surgery to repair a left-side impingement and torn hip labrum, a timeline nearly identical to his last major surgery (Assimakopoulos, 2024). It was a matter of time before load management and "toughing it out" were no longer viable. One can only hope the pain is worth it someday.

The cyclical nature of injuries in hockey mirrors Foucault's (1995) idea that *exhaustive use* extracted more useful forces from time, and that "one must seek to intensify the use of the slightest moment" (p. 154). "The athletic body needs to be repaired quickly to return to its production function" (Rail, 1998a, p.149). The disappearance and subjection of a hockey player's natural body—the new object—to requirements like artificial replacement (surgery) shows the constraints needed for them to stay in the sport (Foucault, 1995; Pronger, 1998; Rail, 1998a). It reflects a functional reduction that constitutes the body as part of a multi-segmentary machine, turning the body of a hockey player into a rhetorical existence. As Pronger (1998) described, modern sports are a project of boundary maintenance. However, hockey dissolves the boundaries between animal, human, and machine (Haraway, 1985, as cited in Pronger, 1998). Modern athletes, in this case, hockey players, are experimented on much like rats in laboratories. They are constantly worked on to repair the destruction of their bodies—a prime example of "the cyborg" (Pronger, 1998, p. 284). Without this, "the natural body becomes a failure, ... a useless object" (Rail, 1998a, p. 148). The longevity and success of a career are dictated by a player's performance when healthy, and how they subvert the damage inflicted on their bodies as they age and continue playing (Messner, 1992). Father time is unforgiving. Time is always running out.

This parallels the Stalinist masculinity embodied in Soviet hockey that influenced North American hockey over time. "Mutilation, discipline, and heterosexual panic together articulate the paradox of Stalinist masculinity" (Kaganovsky, 2008, p. 4). The obsession with virility juxtaposes the damage to the male body, expressing the "mediation between reality and desire, of what it means to be so close and yet so removed from power" (Kaganovsky, 2008, p. 7). The 80s-90s Soviet hockey system prioritized structure, physical ability, and off-ice training, which only gained popularity in North America after the arrival of Soviet hockey players (Gave, 2018). Sergei Fedorov, a member of the Detroit Red Wings' Russian Five, believed that playing injured limited his effectiveness, deviating from his peers who thought otherwise. During the 1995 Stanley Cup run, Fedorov's teammate Slava Fetisov persuaded him to play through a shoulder injury by taking painkillers and wearing more protective gear. From this, Fedorov demonstrated the paradox of Stalinist masculinity (Gave, 2018; Kaganovsky, 2008). A skilled, young, physically robust hockey player, damaged and limited by circumstance despite his devotion to the sport.

Drawing a comparison to Tyler Seguin's recent injury update, the lack of surprise at this announcement from the media and fans is a stark reminder that sacrificing the body for the team is the default. His efforts at returning to form can only go so far when restricted by nothing else but his body, almost a betrayal (Assimakopoulos, 2024; Messner, 1992). It reaffirms that weaponizing the body is "among the chief artifacts of masculinity, indicating the masculine desire and capability for power over others" (Pronger, 1990, p. 159). By extension, injury-prone players and the fans who do not subscribe to hockey's norms of bodily destruction are made deviant—"soft", "gay", "feminine", or "woke" —according to the majority audience who upholds this status quo.

"At risk for injury or death, the body-machine is often pushed to the limit: it must produce exploits, medals, records, and thrilling sensations for the spectators" (Rail, 1998a, p. 149). It is worth it to the players because they "do so out of an attachment to the meaning of orthodox masculinity" (Pronger, 1990, p. 23). Even so, a player's love for the game cannot save them from the disciplinary powers and destruction their bodies are subject to.

Old Rituals Die Hard: The Body Never Retires

"Hockey player" is a physical identity legitimized by rituals created in the sport. "To retire is to die because a part of your identity does die" (Petkovic, 2024). As discussed above, the hockey system fundamentally changes the perceptions of the self and physical body (Pronger, 1998; Robidoux, 2001). Rail (1998) states that in the postmodern condition, athletic bodies act in defiance against the power of nature, "a refusal of human finitude" (p. 150). For many athletes, surgery symbolizes the beginning of the end ("Federer: Twelve Final Days," 2024). In hockey, it is a rebirth. A continuation rather than finality. These setbacks allow players space to reflect on the ephemeral nature of their playing careers, forcing them to figure out who they are away from it (Benjamin, 2024; Messner, 1992; Zeisberger, 2024). When players successfully rebound from an injury or procedure, they avoid confronting the reality of retirement—the loss of identity (Messner, 1992). Professional hockey players with the privilege to join the system at a young age never had to grow up (Branch, 2015; Messner, 1992). Told what to do and where to be, they have never done anything else besides being a hockey player. Former players may feel lost without hockey since the sport is all they have known. Their bodies serve as reminders of what they used to be. For the love of the game (or what is left of it), they would do anything to play again.

Hockey is known for its plethora of superstitions intended to boost confidence, believing they help players win (Close, 2021). Many players have pre-game and post-game rituals. Examples include being the last skater leaving the ice after warmups, slamming teammates against the boards or slashing their pads, having distinct handshake routines with every teammate and staff member, thanking goaltenders at the end of every game by lining up for a head bump and a hug, kissing helmets, and so on. These acts only mean something when performed in the hockey arena. Once retired, these intricate rituals have nowhere to go but stay with the player. A notable post-game celebration ritual is the "Triple Low-Five" shared between Montreal Canadiens' defenseman P. K. Subban and goaltender Carey Price throughout the 2010s (Hughes, 2013; Leahy, 2013; Sciola, 2023). It was banned by then-coach Michel Therrien, stating that only team celebrations that "pay respect to the game, the other team, and the fans" were tolerated. This reflects the lengths discipline could go to put the collective before everything else (Robidoux, 2001). It was not banned just because "they hate fun", rather it redefined deviance. Despite the ban, these post-game rituals are never forgotten easily. A decade after its disappearance, the former teammates gave the last rendition of the "Triple Low-Five" during a pre-game "Homecoming" ceremony honoring Subban's NHL retirement (Sciola, 2023). They may

have "left it all on the ice", but it was like they never did. "What was a ritual becomes itself ritualized, a transformation of what is already a transformation, a "hyper-ritualization" (Goffman, 2017, p. 71). These intimate rituals are more than a sign of gratitude or respect. They are the embodiment—an incarnation—of the desire to make mental experiences physically tangible (Pronger, 1990). Hockey violence develops a special interpersonal closeness between players that rejects the intimacy forbidden by hegemonic masculinity (Messner, 1992). The body becomes the instrument that allows them to express their individuality and emotions through the physical act of rituals.

Returning to the idea of alumni games, they display the eternal "hockey player" identity. They evoke an overwhelming sense of bittersweetness since the audience and participants themselves know they are past their prime, many left with the long-term fallout from injuries. By revisiting the ice "for old time's sake", they embody the young, sprightly players they once were. Their sense of self and place in the world take physical form again. Hockey players, retired or not, will forever have the proverbial "it" in them. The body is proof that it existed.

Conclusion

Analyzing the formation of hockey culture, the manifestation of hegemonic masculinity, the perceptions of the body, and the sport's approach to queerness, it can be seen that hockey exists as a distinct outlier among many sports. Hockey upholds structure and a deeply rooted sense of exclusivity. A culture obsessed with toughness, violence, and hostility that sharply contrasts the homoerotic nature of contact sports that it tries to reject. Legitimized by physical destruction and intricate rituals, the identity of "hockey player" becomes inseparable from an individual. The postmodern perspective helps to deconstruct the reasons why the progression of hockey has remained relatively dormant and conservative. Overall, observations and research on hockey as an institution further provide a basis for understanding gender and sexuality in sports.

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16.

In Defense of Jhumpa Lahiri

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Over the course of her career, Indian American writer Jhumpa Lahiri has received much praise for her fictional work, which is mostly centered on Indian American characters. However, she has also received negative criticism from various angles. In the United States, many of Lahiri's critics are Indian Americans of the generation following her. Generally, the main accusation coming from these critics is that Lahiri writes Indian American characters who follow the trope of the model minority, tokenizing them with an extreme emphasis on ethnic and cultural identity for a perpetually ignorant American audience (Vara). Although these critics raise a few valid points, they are largely guilty of ignoring the context and nuances of Lahiri's beloved writing. Contrary to what her critics claim, Jhumpa Lahiri's fiction does not tokenize Indian Americans as model minorities; rather, her work emphasizes characterizations other than ethnic identity, which she elegantly incorporates into fictional narratives about Indian Americans.

Nilanjana Sudeshna "Jhumpa" Lahiri is a notable writer of Indian American fiction, born in London, England, in 1967 to Bengali immigrants from Calcutta, India. Three years later, the family immigrated to the United States, settling in the New England region. Lahiri's father worked as an academic librarian at MIT in Cambridge, Massachusetts, before relocating to another university in suburban Rhode Island (Rose). Her upbringing was largely defined by her being the only Indian, and often the only non-white person, among her peers. However, her aberrant ethnic identity was not the only uniqueness she possessed. Lahiri began writing as a child (Rose) and was attracted to reading and writing during high school, showing an interest in literature from her early beginnings. In her undergraduate years at Barnard College of Columbia University, she focused mostly on classical writers from ancient Greece and Rome while studying for a Bachelor of Arts in English (Leyda 68). In 1999, as a graduate student in Boston University, Lahiri published her debut book *Interpreter of Maladies*, a collection of short stories about Indian immigrants in New English American towns. The book quickly gained worldwide popularity and won the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction in 2000. Her subsequent novels, including titles like *The Namesake* and *The Lowland*, closely followed the themes written about in *Interpreter of Maladies* (Leyda 66). In 2012, she initiated a seemingly dramatic change when she moved to Rome and began writing and translating in Italian. She considers Bengali to be her mother tongue since it is the first language to which she was exposed, but she never learned to read or write in it like English and Italian ("Teach Yourself Italian"). Despite the diverse writing published by Lahiri since the beginning of her 25-year-long career, she has been criticized by academics and literary critics for allegedly writing Indian American token characters who behave as model minorities for other Americans to exoticize (Vara).

The criticism of Lahiri's "model minority" Indian American emerged at the very beginning of her literary career, when she was still in graduate school. Since Lahiri's undergraduate background focused mostly on classical literature from ancient Greece and Rome, she only later studied contemporary literature, which gave her time to develop her classical-influenced writing prior to publishing (Leyda 68). The analyzing lenses of feminism and multiculturalism started to become dominant when she entered graduate school, which she perceived as an ideology seeking to tear down the classical literature she adored due to the bigoted themes presented in it. Lahiri was repulsed by the academic relegation of classical writers to the dead white man camp, unable to satisfy the expectation to despise them as a young woman of color. While these ideological lenses can be helpful for identifying the differences in classical literature from contemporary attitudes, this pushed Lahiri away from academia, as she could not base aesthetic relationships off politics (Leyda 69). Her retained interest in the classics continued to influence her work, and since classics are often read in high school and college classrooms, the literary style could have contributed to the immediate success and popularity of *Interpreter of Maladies*, which was crowned the most read book on American college campuses in 2001 (Caesar 89). Lahiri's critics claim that she had abandoned her "problematic" portrayal of Indian Americans when she began writing in Italian, turning over a fully new leaf (Vara). However, her fascination with Italian is linked to her previous era through her prior study of Latin and inspiration from classical Greek and Roman literature ("Teach Yourself Italian"). In fact, the subtle classical influences in Lahiri's English-language literature surrounding Indian Americans became blatant with the shift to Italian, where Rome is a centralized feature admired for its classical roots.

More importantly, the claim of intentional exoticization has always been explicitly denied by Lahiri. In 2003, at the beginning of her literary career, she expressed that her fiction is centered around the experience of Indian immigrants and first-generation Indian Americans "to a certain degree" but also contains themes regarding family and displacement, which are not necessarily specific to any group (Rose 03:03-03:50). Similarly, in a 2011 interview, she stated that she does not write her fiction with the intention of teaching Americans about Indian culture or history. Her work really focuses on characters and universal themes regardless of ethnicity or migration background, and Indian American characters are simply the means by which they are conveyed. Here, Lahiri admits that many of her readers ignorantly see her as solely Indian, believing her novels to be traditional Indian literature undiscovered by mainstream American media (Leyda 75). Critics and interviewers are also guilty of seeing her ethnicity before her personhood, often assuming her fiction is totally defined by its influence of post-1965 immigration to the United States (Leyda 74). However, Lahiri has no control over what readers or critics interpret from her fiction, and the same phenomenon can possibly occur with any writer or artist who incorporates foreign cultural items into their work. As Lahiri elegantly put it, "Some people will look at a Picasso painting and think only about the Spanish Civil War, and others will think only about the colors and the form. People read things in millions of different ways" (Leyda 76). Therefore, it is unfair to blame Lahiri for the unintentional exoticization from her readers, as the same accusation can then be used on any writer of minority fiction.

Furthermore, Lahiri's Indian American characters are written in a historically accurate way, which makes her a competent author of historical fiction. Lahiri's chosen setting of 1970s suburban New England is representative of her personal upbringing, in which attitudes, demographics, and behaviors wildly differed from those of 21st-century urban Americans. In the especially criticized scene where a white American woman is quickly forgiven by her Indian boyfriend when mistaking Bengali for a religion instead of an ethnicity (Vara), the interaction only reflects the attitudes of the times. Another criticized aspect of Lahiri's characters are their professional occupations, as she rarely ever writes about impoverished Indian Americans. But similarly, a story about poor Indian immigrants would not be congruent with the demographic reality of the post-1965 wave of immigration, which was mostly made up of non-European skilled professionals, not uneducated sweatshop laborers (Leyda 77). While it would be comfortable for modern readers to expect today's levels of cultural sensitivity

from everyone, it would be improper for Lahiri to write a story set in the past without including attitudes from the past. Such characterizations would actually constitute exoticization, as it would be fetishizing the past as an exotic backdrop for the story to take place instead of respecting the historic social environment with its positives and negatives.

While Lahiri was criticized in the United States for writing Indian American characters in *Interpreter of Maladies* that behave as "model minorities" living comfortable suburban lives, her worst criticism came from India. There, her characters were criticized for the opposite reasons, claiming that she gave Indian immigrants a bad name by portraying them as miserable and sexually immoral (Rose). For example, in the titular short story "Interpreter of Maladies," Mrs. Das repeatedly commits adultery, secretly sleeping with a man who impregnated her with one of her sons and later attempting to initiate a sexual relationship with Mr. Kapasi on the family's trip to India (Lahiri 62). Thus, it is evident that Lahiri is always trapped by critics to be considered controversial. In the US, critics perceive Lahiri's Indian American characters as "too Indian," illustrating a stereotypical image of a docile, naive immigrant. However, if she were to instead write her characters as criminals and adulterers, they would be perceived in India as "too American," criticized for betraying the ideal Indian characteristics of industriousness and matrimonial loyalty. However, both judgments are based on presumptions of what personal qualities Indian Americans are "supposed" to possess. Indian critics believe they should be depicted as angels to show the Indian nation's greatness to the world, while Indian American critics believe they should be depicted as demons in order to counter the model minority trope. It is impossible for Lahiri to satisfy both groups which desire extreme opposite representations, but she is able to write characters that appeal to the majority of the population—characters that are meaningful to herself without regard for labels and stereotypes.

Unlike the caustic critics accusing Lahiri of exploiting the media obsession over her ethnic origin (Vara), Professor Judith Caesar has outlined how Lahiri has rejected labels of division since her earliest work, *Interpreter of Maladies*. Caesar defines Lahiri's fiction as a combination of postcolonial, Asian American, and traditional American literature, uniquely incorporating themes, motifs, and ideas from all three genres without fully subscribing to any label (Caesar 82). This is most prominently illustrated in one highlighted short story, "When Mr. Pirzada Came to Dine," which follows Lilia, a ten-year-old American girl living with her Indian-born parents in New England, and Mr. Pirzada, the East Pakistani guest welcomed in their home during the 1971 Bangladesh War of Liberation (Caesar 83). Through Lilia's perspective, Lahiri sheds light on the complex blessing of navigating life with more than one culture. As an Indian American, she is labeled by some as American and by others as Indian, required to mediate between the two worlds for the sake of the monocultural characters around her (Caesar 91). Her difficulties involving cultural alienation, whether at her Indian household or in her American surroundings, mold her into a more sensitive, mature, and kind person, toppling traditionally divisive labels such as nationality, religion, and culture. The limits of monoculture is seen in Lilia's friend Dora, who is unable to imagine a situation where Mr. Pirzada's daughters are missing outside of them being kidnapped (Caesar 87). Lilia's bicultural upbringing greatly improves her personality compared to her peers, allowing her to relate to realities of both worlds and see past artificial divisions. The religion of Lilia's family is also deliberately left out of the story, evident from the fact that Lilia was never taught any prayers, which is strange for an Indian family. This could be Lahiri's way to signify that Lilia sees past nominal divisions and labels, gaining the universal empathy championed by all religions (Caesar 86). The story epitomizes Lahiri's dedication to individualism, demonstrating that her fictional literature has always centralized characterization and universal themes over ethnic identity.

Moreover, Lahiri has outright stated that labels of nationality and culture mean little to her. She feels like a combination of nationalities, holding British and American citizenship and being of full

Bengali Indian ancestry. But nationalism and national belonging are not feelings that appeal to her as an individual (Rose), expanding her capacity to think rationally without being blinded by the interests of a collective nation. Even after learning Italian, she still resonated with that sentiment, saying that she does not prefer to ascribe her belonging solely to America, India, Italy, or elsewhere, instead describing her existence as "linguistic exile" in a profound expression of individuality ("Teach Yourself Italian"). Lahiri's individuality is notably the most ignored aspect in the conversation surrounding her fiction. In both India and the United States, she is unfairly judged as an emissary of India to the American people, scrutinized by critics for her representation of Indian American characters and admittedly exoticized by some readers. But both the critics and the exoticizing followers fail to realize that Lahiri is an individual capable of separating herself from the groupthink and biases that come with identity labels.

Contrary to what her critics claim, Jhumpa Lahiri's fiction does not tokenize Indian Americans as model minorities; rather, her work emphasizes characterizations other than ethnic identity, which she elegantly incorporates into fictional narratives about Indian Americans. Solely by virtue of being labeled an Indian American, Lahiri is expected by different groups to write a certain way. By Indian American literary critics, she is expected to write the most exaggeratedly rebellious Indian American characters to defy the model minority stereotype. By Indians, she is expected to write traditionally moral and upright characters who give Indian immigrants a good name. Neither characterizations are accurate representations of real-life human beings, which Lahiri recognizes are more complex than wholly good or wholly evil caricatures and stereotypes. Nonetheless, both sides of the criticism come from a well-intentioned desire to be represented and have their stories told. The true problem lies in the historic scarcity of Indians in the United States, who numbered merely 51,000 in 1970. That population had grown twenty-fold by 2000, when Lahiri began her publishing career (Vara). With so little Indian American literature published, Lahiri's stories and characters were unreasonably expected to represent the entirety of a diverse and quickly growing demographic. Other American populations already had their own literature by that point, with diverse stories and characters. Comparatively, Indian Americans only had Lahiri's narratives to represent them, sowing seeds of resentment in the next generation. However, criticizing Lahiri's representation as "archaic" or "exoticized" does not change the arena of literature. The only viable solution to the gap of Indian American fictional representation is for more of the population to write new and different stories, without relegating Lahiri to the past like she was told to do with the classic writers she loved.

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17.

Subway Soliloquy: Navigating Identity, Survival, and Alienation in Sokuntary Svay's poem "Evasion"

Aiman Sheikh (LaGuardia Community College)

Sokuntheary Svay's poem "Evasion" explores the layered experiences of an immigrant navigating the complexities of race, gender, class, and cultural identity in New York City. Svay, a Cambodian American poet and author of the poetry collection, *Apsara in New York,* addresses themes of survival, displacement, and resilience in her work. "Evasion" is set in the city's subway system and connects neighborhoods like Harlem and the Grand Concourse. The subway serves as both a literal and symbolic space, emphasizing the speaker's transient existence in a multicultural urban landscape. In this poem, Svay examines how systems of race, gender, and class interact to shape the speaker's lived experience. The poem's vivid imagery and personal voice reveal the speaker's alienation, the economic struggles of immigrant life, and the longing for cultural connection. By focusing on these intersections, "Evasion" highlights the broader implications of structural inequities on marginalized communities.

The person in the poem "Evasion" experiences cultural disconnection because of their identity as an Asian immigrant navigating life in New York City. Their ethnicity, working class status, and linguistic challenges create a sense of isolation from both their surroundings and others who might share parts of their identity. The speaker describes their "yellow skin" as a marker that invites judgment from "dark magnetic beads" which represents the scrutinizing eyes of subway passengers. This racial visibility alienates them in a predominantly non-Asian environment, emphasizing how ethnicity shapes their experience of public spaces.

Svay's poem opens with a sensory rich description of the subway, where the "uptown number two train syncopates / in limping metallic clasp." This auditory imagery situates the reader in the rhythm of the speaker's daily grind, selling toys and batteries to survive. Their call of "One dollar! One dollar!" to get customers' attention and entice them to buy cheap products signals the economic precarity faced by immigrants in informal labor. This scene reflects the intersection of class, race, and language: the speaker's working-class background and "yellow skin" mark them as an outsider subjected to both economic and racialized scrutiny. Their immigrant status further exacerbates this disconnect, as seen in their selling toys and batteries on the subway—a reflection of the economic precarity faced by many immigrants in informal, low-paying jobs. The refrain, 'One dollar! One dollar!' not only signifies their struggle to make a living but also highlights their outsider status. This limited linguistic interaction underscores the barriers they face, with language acting as yet another marker of their exclusion from the dominant social and cultural norms in public spaces. They are identified by potential customers on the train not by name but by impersonal labels like "hey" or "you," phrases that dehumanize and further separate them from those they interact with.

In addition to economic struggles, the poem addresses the cultural disconnection experienced by the speaker. On the subway, they observe other Asian individuals but are met with avoidance; "when she sees a young Asian woman reading at the corner of the train," the speaker states: "I smile; she pretends not to see me. My cheeks turn pomegranate red." This moment reflects how societal pressures and internalized stereotypes can inhibit solidarity, even among those who share cultural or racial identities. The speaker's longing for connection is further underscored by their reflection that, "In another world we would have been friends or neighbors, in continent or street."

Through its exploration of the intersections of race, gender, class, and geographic location, Sokuntheary Svay's "Evasion" provides a compelling critique of structural inequities. The poem reveals how systemic forces manifest in daily struggles, shaping not only the speaker's labor but also their sense of identity and belonging in New York City and America. By grounding these themes in the tangible challenges of immigrant life, Svay bridges personal experience with broader sociological concepts, urging readers to confront the humanity behind marginalized narratives.

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Excavating the Mother Tongue to Retain Cultures

Anandita Shaji (Queens College)

Language plays a key role in the formation of cultures and traditions. Cultural values and heritage are passed on to the next generation through language as a means of communication at home. This linguistic communication leads to the formation of culture after generations through the inheritance of ancestral history. I have experienced that widespread acceptance of standard English as the universal language has led to the disappearance of mother languages of countries like India, which is a land of diverse languages. The spread of English during the British era influenced the educational system of the time, which is being followed to date. Being brought up in an Indian household, I have learned the importance of language in the transfer of cultural knowledge through generations. In this essay, I will use Chicana writer Gloria Anzaldúa's "How To Tame A Wild Tongue" to argue that linguistic supremacy in India has led to the demolition of Indian culture. In her work on Mexican-American communities in Texas, she argues for the acceptance and celebration of linguistic diversity, particularly in the context of Chicano culture. In India, the imposition of languages like English over mother languages of India can be seen as a form of linguistic imperialism, similar to the way Anzaldúa describes the suppression of Chicano Spanish. Gloria Anzaldúa's "How To Tame a Wild Tongue" and linguistic imperialism in India share a common thread- the suppression of marginalized languages and cultures by the dominant ones. The suppression of mother languages leads to cultural erasure and loss of linguistic diversity. The English language supremacy in India promotes cultural erasure, which causes youth to detach from their language as they adopt Western culture. Parents therefore communicate with their children in their native language to resist linguistic dominance in the domestic sphere.

In the text, "How To Tame A Wild Tongue," Anzaldúa reflects on linguistic terrorism. She exposes the discrimination faced by people of different linguistic backgrounds. Through her text, Anzaldúa puts forward her firsthand experience that she faced in her school. She talks about the treatment towards people who speak different languages in the educational setting in America.

She exposes the way she was forced to learn English and get rid of her accent. Although she was born in South Texas by the Mexico- U.S. border, which was originally part of Mexico, her ancestral language Spanish was devalued. She had to speak 'American' to be identified and valued in American society. She writes that this harsh enforcement of a foreign language on people like her also led them to face discrimination in their community. If they spoke in an American accent in her community, people would look down upon them as foreigners. Since people of her community spoke purely in their mother language, they would judge people like her for speaking in the American accent and therefore not connect with them merely because of linguistic barriers. If people like Anzaldúa did not retain the American accent, American-born folks would not respect them. She writes about

how people of different ethnicities but similar races are afraid of speaking in their languages because their language was undermined in the educational system in which they studied. She argues how her language had become distorted under the influence of standard English. She says that those who study in America struggle to form their identities because they are caught between following their culture or the American culture. She is also American but her Mexican American culture and language isn't valued and not seen to be part of American traditions and culture. She concludes her article by stating that the conflict between following one's native culture and the dominant American culture has made it difficult for people to belong to one place.

I want to connect the argument in Anzaldúa's work with linguistic discrimination that is still prevalent in India. Because English is the primary mode of instruction in India, students are forced to learn about their culture and history in the language of the colonizers, the British. This has resulted in a distortion between ancestral Indian culture in post-colonial India. We have accepted the language of the colonizers and subdued our native languages under it. Our Indian culture, which once never reflected any Western influence, is now overwhelmed by the "Standard English."

Anzaldúa reminds us that, "And because we internalize how our language has been used against us by the dominant culture, we use our language differences against each other." (58). English is positioned as 'better' than our own language, which leads to the marginalization of our mother tongue. In the case of India, many of those who learned the English language in the post-colonial era looked down upon those who spoke our native languages. This resulted in many people idolizing the Western culture. I have experienced this firsthand. I went to an Indian school where English was mandated as the medium to converse with our peers in our class. We were required to speak in English; otherwise we would be reprimanded if caught speaking in our mother tongue. Instead of connecting us to our own culture, we were taught our Indian history in English, the language of the colonizers. The choice of this linguistic medium centers the colonizer's perspective in the retelling of Indian history, reinforcing British supremacy in a post-colonial India. Traditionally speaking, history should be recorded and taught in Sanskrit, which was the most common language from the Vedic period in ancient India. Yet, by privileging English over native Indian languages as the medium of instruction, we distort our understanding of our histories, which leads younger generations to internalize Western supremacy. The stereotypical thought process of the youth that English is superior to their native language to retain their status in society has led them to detach from their culture and follow the Western culture.

Parents resist English prioritization in the domestic sphere to preserve the existence of our native languages. Our parents use our mother tongue for communication to keep us attached to our language and culture at home. Parents encourage their children to take pride in their native languages so that they honor their family's cultural history. This sentiment is echoed by Anzaldúa: "Ethnic identity is twin skin to linguistic identity – I am my language. Until I can take pride in my language, I cannot take pride in myself" (59). Here, she underscores that our identity is formed based on language. It is the primary means by which we communicate and reflect our cultural background. I am always told by my parents to speak in my native language and not be ashamed of it. My parents always persuade me to take pride in speaking my family's languages, Hindi and Malayalam, because they make me who I am – unique. Thus, parents resist linguistic supremacy in our education systems by centering native language in the home.

Linguistic supremacy in the education system has led to the deterioration of Indian culture. This is evident in the way people reflect their thinking by considering English as a superior language as compared to their native languages. In her work on Mexican-American communities in Texas, Anzaldúa considers how English has led to internal conflict among folks, pulling them between their

native traditions and languages and those of their colonizers. This issue is important today because contemporary youth are detached from their own cultural and ancient history. The flow of the historical values won't have the same power and connection if imparted to future generations in English. Hence, it is very important to preserve and give importance to native languages, as it is a way to pass on ancestral knowledge to future generations.

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Part VI

Authors

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Authors' Bios

Aemon Khin is a Chinese student born in Myanmar who moved to New York for college education. In her free time, she enjoys reading fiction and drawing, preferring creative pursuits over conventionally productive activities.

Aiman Sheikh is a Pakistani computer science major passionate about technology and innovation. He is interested in artificial intelligence, software development, and data analysis, and aspires to impact communities through cutting-edge advancements. He also enjoys coding personal projects, gaming, and reading science fiction.

Alif Kazi is a junior at Hunter College double-majoring in English literature and sociology while minoring in Asian American studies and history. He is a Mellon Mays Undergraduate Fellow, Thomas Hunter Honors scholar, and Athena Honors scholar who also serves on the Athena Honors Advisory Council. Additionally, he works part-time as a tutor for K-12 students in NYC.

Anandita Shaji is a Queens College freshman born in India who has also lived in Saudi Arabia. She plans to major in Neuroscience with a minor in health science and participates in the Freshman Honors Program. Anandita is also passionate about creative writing.

Christa Huang is a first-generation Chinese American born in Queens and raised in Southeast China. Now a biology major at Hunter College, she aspires to become a primary care physician. In her free time, she enjoys cooking, singing, and volunteering at her local food pantry.

Daniel Katash studies Economics and History at Brooklyn College. Raised in the Syrian-Jewish community of southern Brooklyn, his perspective is shaped by first-generation American experiences. He is also fluent in four languages.

Emily Suu Myatnoe is a Burmese American and is pursuing an interdisciplinary major at Queens College with a dual major and a concentration. She is passionate about academics, activism, and art, using her creative work to speak against injustice.

Eunice Yeung is a Chemistry major at Kingsborough Community College. Born and raised in Hong Kong, they moved to New York City in 2023. Their writing blends sociology, sports, queerness, journalism, and prose poetry, and they enjoy painting, film photography, and creating zines.

Kaitlyn Noyan is an Indo-Caribbean pre-med student, born and raised in New York. As a first-generation college student, she enjoys baking, painting, and reading. She plans to obtain her medical license, conduct cancer research, and advocate for more accessible health insurance in low-income communities.

Lillian Maung is an Accounting major at Queens College set to graduate in Spring 2025. Born in Queens to Burmese immigrants, she enjoys creative activities such as painting and sewing.

Min Zeng is a first-year Writing and Literature major at Borough of Manhattan Community College with a focus on Journalism. Born in Taishan, China and raised in Brooklyn, she is a proud member of Phi Theta Kappa and the BMCC Student Government Association.

Noah Skinner is a Studio Art major at Bronx Community College. Raised in a Filipino-American household, his art is inspired by cultural artifacts such as the wide-mouthed Philippine tapayan, and he incorporates hand-built textures into his creative work.

Pemba Sherpa is a psychology major with a minor in health science, aspiring to become a DO. Coming from a deeply Buddhist family, they are passionate about culture, community service, and medical education. Pemba shares Sherpa culture, Buddhist teachings, and inspiring success stories online while also working as an EMT.

Regina Gultom is an English major at Queens College who has written for leisure for a decade. As the eldest daughter of immigrant parents, she constantly explores and redefines her Indonesian-American identity through her writing.

Sylvia Lee is an English major at Queens College, born in New York to Hong Kong and Taiwanese immigrants. She enjoys reading and writing a variety of texts—from recipes to creative fiction. Sylvia dreams of earning a Master's in English Literature and eventually becoming a college professor.

Yubin Lin is a Social Science and Humanities major at LaGuardia Community College, originally from China. Arriving in the U.S. two years ago, she enjoys playing badminton, practicing yoga, and exploring language and translation. English is her second language, and she looks forward to learning another.