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## You know how I know you're gay? : masculinity and homophobia in mainstream comedy

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YOU KNOW HOW I KNOW YOU'RE GAY?  
MASCULINITY AND HOMOPHOBIA IN MAINSTREAM COMEDY

by

Lijah Johanna Barasz

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements of the  
Senior Scholars Program

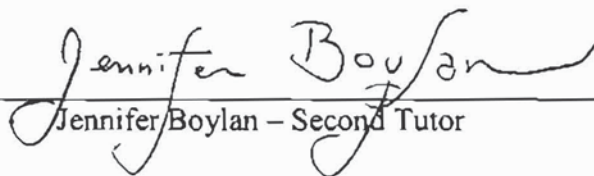
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2006

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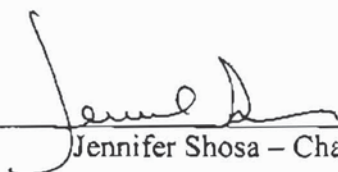
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## Abstract

*You Know How I Know You're Gay?: Masculinity and Homophobia in Contemporary Mainstream Comedy* is a three-part senior scholars project that consists of a critical analysis of homophobic humor in contemporary mainstream comedy, an original feature-length comedy script entitled *Don't Be that Freshman*, and a DVD of selected scenes from *Don't Be that Freshman*.

The critical analysis first establishes the existence of homophobic humor in mainstream comedy and then links this homophobia to masculine anxiety, applying the ideas set forth in Michael Kimmel's essay, "Masculinity as Homophobia," to contemporary, mainstream, homosocial comedies. The paper goes on to examine audience reactions to this homophobic humor, focusing on audience members who enjoy these movies, yet consider themselves to be accepting of homosexuality and against homophobia. I discuss ways of resistance and the importance of opposing homophobic humor, and finally, I look at comedy as a potentially transgressive medium that could be used to fight homophobia and social inequality. The critical analysis, therefore, leads into *Don't Be that Freshman*, a film that uses progressive humor to oppose homophobia and expose the potential dangers and pitfalls of conforming to social constructions of gender.

*Don't Be that Freshman* is a film about three pairs of college roommates in their first semester at college who become each other's first friends on campus. It is a character-driven comedy that attempts to normalize non-heterosexual sexual orientation and gender non-conformity, to advocate a type of living that does not conform to



problematic social constructions and cultural ideologies, and at the same time to appeal to a mainstream audience. The film version is twenty-five minutes long and consists of ten scenes from the script.

I would like to thank everyone who contributed to this project in one way or another, including my tutors and readers, actors, crew, and editing help. Without you, this project would not, and could not, be what it is today.

Thank you especially to Margaret McFadden, who has inspired and motivated me for four years and whose weekly meetings I will truly miss, but never forget.

This project is dedicated to Colby, my friends, JEL, Sirens, and my family. I am so blessed to have so many amazing people in my life. Thank you for being you.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

I. Introduction	1
II. "Masculinity as Homophobia"	11
III. The Mainstream Audience of Mainstream Comedy	22
IV. Combatting Homophobia through Comedy	37
V. Conclusion	53
Works Cited	55

## I. INTRODUCTION

In the summer of 2005, *Wedding Crashers*,<sup>1</sup> a comedy featuring Owen Wilson and Vince Vaughn, opened in wide release in the United States, becoming a huge summer hit and the highest grossing comedy of the year.<sup>2</sup> While critics gave mixed reviews, few took issue with the representation of homosexuality in the film; in fact, most ignored the presence of homosexual content entirely. True, the homophobia was tangential to the main plot and insignificant structurally, yet its all too gratuitous nature should, conceivably, have made the homophobia all the more conspicuous. Whether or not audiences and critics took note, however, the movie was indeed homophobic, particularly the character of Todd Cleary. Son and self-described “political liability” of Senator Cleary, Todd is un-athletic, overly emotional, artsy, vegetarian, socially awkward, and in the words of Grandma Mary Cleary, “a homo.” Despite the use of so many negative gay stereotypes, a scene that puts a “comic” spin on rape (“I felt like Jody Foster in *The Accused* last night”), and several highly offensive anti-gay speeches from Grandma Cleary, whom, I will argue, we laugh *with*, not *at*, *Wedding Crashers* went on to win People’s Choice Awards for Favorite Movie Comedy and Favorite On-Screen Match-Up and the Teen Choice Award for Choice Summer Movie.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *Wedding Crashers*. Dir. David Dobkin. Perf. Vince Vaughn, Owen Wilson, New Line Cinema, 2005.

<sup>2</sup> “2005 Box Office,” *Box Office Report*. 7 Feb. 2006, 12 Feb. 2006.

<<http://www.boxofficereport.com/ybon/2005gross.shtml>>.

<sup>3</sup> “Awards for *Wedding Crashers*,” *International Movie Database, Inc.* 11 Feb. 2006.

<<http://imdb.com/title/tt0396269/awards>>.

Popular comedy films aimed at a teenage and young adult demographic, including *Harold and Kumar Go to White Castle*, *American Pie*, *The 40 Year Old Virgin*, *Old School*, and a number of others rely on homophobic jokes as a main source of their humor. Compared to mainstream dramatic films, which recently have included *Boys Don't Cry*, *Brokeback Mountain*, and *Transamerica*, comedy seems to be lagging behind rather significantly in terms of the substance, originality, and constructiveness of its queer content.<sup>4</sup>

*Wedding Crashers*, for example, is in many ways an endearing movie in which two thirty-something party-hoppers exploit single women's vulnerability at weddings until they learn the power of love and committed relationships. Although critics were not as enthused as audiences, no one can contest that the film had tremendous commercial success. Indeed, *Wedding Crashers* has much to recommend it: smart, witty dialogue; funny, quirky characters; an interesting comedic concept; romance; and even attempts to find a moral high ground during the whole second half of the film. Yet, for a film that reconciles the misogyny of its main characters, who begin as womanizers and end as lovesick monogamists, the film never even attempts to resolve its blatant homophobia.

The character of Todd Cleary, our only representation of homosexuality in the entire film, is characterized sexually, physically, and socially as an outcast. Sexually, of course, Todd is gay. He is also portrayed as a frightening mix of gay male stereotypes from unathletic and vegetarian to artistic and sexually predatory, characteristics that are

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<sup>4</sup> *Harold and Kumar Go to White Castle*, Dir. Danny Leiner, Perf. John Cho, Kal Penn, New Line Cinema, 2004.; *American Pie*, Dir. Paul Weitz, Perf. Jason Biggs, Universal, 1999.; *The 40 Year Old Virgin*, Dir. Judd Apatow, Perf. Steve Carell, Universal Pictures, 2005.; *Old School*, Dir. Todd Phillips, Perf. Luke Wilson, Vince Vaughn, Will Ferrell, Dreamworks, 2003.; *Boys Don't Cry*, Dir. Kimberly Pierce, Perf. Hilary Swank, 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox, 1999.; *Brokeback Mountain*, Dir. Ang Lee, Perf. Heath Ledger, Jake Gyllenhaal, Focus Features, 2005.; *Transamerica*, Dir. Duncan Tucker, Perf. Felicity Huffman, Belladonna Productions, 2005.



always linked back to Todd's homosexuality, as demonstrated in the following exchange between Todd, his grandmother, and Owen Wilson's character, Jeremy Grey:

Jeremy Grey: Todd, I notice you haven't even touched your food.

Todd Cleary: I don't eat fish or meat.

Grandma Mary Cleary: He's a homo.

As Todd's vegetarianism is explained away by his gayness, it follows his sexuality is also the source for his dislike of sports, strange choice of clothing, creepy posture, and the like. Todd dresses in all black; his hair is disheveled as if he has a permanent case of bed-head, suggestive perhaps of uncleanness; and he is constantly hunched over, causing him to look as though he is actually deformed. Socially, he is reclusive, antisocial, and angry. During his sister's wedding Todd ignores the guests and the party, choosing to sit alone on a pier instead, and shouts out to the ocean, "Death, you are my bitch lover!" This is the first time we hear Todd speak, though we have already observed him looking peculiarly Goth-like, intense, and morose, and with this line we instantly recognize that he is not only strange, but sexually perverse; in fact, the two are made to seem inextricably linked.

Todd's line, "Death, you are my bitch lover!" is simultaneously nonsensical and highly meaningful. Not only is Todd yelling out to the ocean, ostensibly talking to himself, talking to no one, talking to death, and talking to the ocean all at once, his language is also telling of his morbidness, strangeness, and sexual perversity. Death is not only Todd's "lover," but his "bitch lover," which likely brings to mind all sorts of imagery related to male-to-male sexual relations, sadomasochism, and sexual predation previously instilled into our subconscious by our media culture. Thus, whether we infer these meanings of the text consciously or subconsciously, Todd's characterization

corresponds to our culture's prevailing representation of gay men. Furthermore, Todd's character reinforces and indeed compounds our already negative (mis)understandings about homosexuality: next time we see a freakish gay character onscreen or meet a gay person in the street, we will remember Todd, the Goth, the freak, the vegetarian, unathletic, "homo" artiste who talks perversely to the ocean.

As an audience we accept immediately (or are supposed to accept immediately) that Todd is the target of jokes and is, in fact, deserving of our ridicule. Unlike the two lead characters Jeremy Grey and John Beckwith, whom we laugh *with* and root *for* despite their flaws, Todd is characterized as essentially and inherently weird, perverse, and creepy, as evidenced by his appearance, behaviors, and sexual orientation, and his faults are neither redeemable nor loveable. Steve Neale and Frank Krutnick write in *Popular Film and Television Comedy* that "where in humour the butt is often merely and affectionately ludicrous, in the comic the butt is always rendered, exactly, ridiculous – worthy of ridicule. Laughter marks a disavowal of what one once was, a refusal of identification, a differentiation of ego and other."<sup>5</sup> Thus, in *Wedding Crashers*, Todd Cleary serves as the comic figure, a character deserving of our ridicule, with whom we are *not* supposed to identify, while Jeremy and John are wily and flawed, but altogether "affectionately ludicrous." We love them for their faults and are encouraged to both forgive and identify with their characters.

Further, although Todd's family members demonstrate obvious ignorance, insensitivity, and narrow-mindedness, their interactions with Todd establish that his outcast status is entirely deserved. Grandma Cleary is especially interesting since she is characterized by her blatantly homophobic comments. Time and again Grandma Cleary

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<sup>5</sup> Steve Neale and Frank Krutnick, *Popular Film and Television Comedy* (New York: Routledge, 1990) 77.

refers to Todd as a “homo” in an obviously derogatory way. In a discussion of Franklin Roosevelt, Grandma Cleary adds, “But that wife of his, Eleanor... big dyke! A real rug muncher. Big lesbian mule.” Part of the humor is derived from seeing a very small, frail-looking elderly woman whom we would expect to be matronly, demure, and loving be so unabashedly foul-mouthed. Yet, the humor is not only that Grandma Cleary is so unexpectedly crude, and the question becomes whether, in addition to the humor that comes from our surprise at the grandmother’s language, we are laughing at her very narrow-minded and antiquated views of homosexuality (in other words, laughing *at* the stereotypes and those who are foolish/unenlightened enough to believe them), *or* we are laughing *with* Grandma Cleary, relieved that while we as an audience can’t express our homophobia in the silence of the theater or, as some feel, the enforced silence of a politically correct society (this is of course arguable), at least we can derive pleasure through watching the politically incorrect grandmother.

Ultimately, *Wedding Crashers* does instruct the audience to appreciate and rejoice in Grandma Cleary’s homophobia. As we watch the film, somewhere, either in the deep recesses of the mind or only slightly hidden beneath the surface, those who harbor any discomfort, fear, or loathing of homosexuality must be observing Todd Cleary with an element of disgust. Not only is he not likeable, he represents an assortment of qualities that Americans are taught to look down upon. As a man, Todd does not perform his gender appropriately; he is emasculated by his homosexuality, but also by his lack of athleticism and a competitive nature as well as his clothing, food choice, painting, and emotional outbursts. In other words, he is a sissy, a ninny, a freak. In a word: homo. Todd Cleary even looks and acts diseased, feeding on irrational fears that his homosexual



disease might spread to others. Grandma Cleary's line, "He's a homo," with all the negativity that word implies, is the perfect phrase to sum up all the audience's well-cultivated animus feelings. Finally, in the grandmother, of all characters, that tension is released; we can join in on the pleasure of her homophobia without ever truly sanctioning it.

A scene in *The 40 Year Old Virgin* is similarly ambiguous, though not nearly as cruel. At one point characters Cal and David have an interchange in which each "accuses" the other of being gay and names various gay stereotypes as proof:

David: You know how I know you're gay?  
 Cal: How? How do you know I'm gay?  
 David: Because you macraméd yourself a pair of jean shorts.  
 Cal: You know how I know you're gay? You just told me you're not sleeping with women any more.  
 David: You know how I know that you're gay?  
 Cal: How? Cause you're gay? And you can tell who other gay people are?  
 David: You know how I know you're gay?  
 Cal: How?  
 David: You like Coldplay.... You know how I know that you're gay?  
 Cal: How?  
 David: You like the movie *Maid in Manhattan*.  
 Cal: You know how I know you're gay?  
 David: How?  
 Cal: I saw you make a spinach dip in a loaf of sour dough bread once.  
 David: You know how I know that you're gay?  
 Cal: How?  
 David: You have a rainbow bumper sticker on your car that says "I love it when balls are in my face."  
 Cal: That's gay?

The last line is the clincher. Of course having a rainbow bumper sticker that so directly communicates a man's attraction to other men is the only thing in Cal and David's exchange that is actually "gay," and everything else merely relates to gender nonconformist behavior, not sexuality.

Thus, Cal and David call this distinction to mind: gender nonconformity does not automatically indicate a person's sexuality, and as a result, it becomes more acceptable for a man to exhibit certain "effeminate" traits. Furthermore, we realize that Cal and David's statements are all stereotypes and not true indicators of sexuality, and this realization should make us aware of how ridiculous and arbitrary gay stereotypes are. At the same time, however, the characters share one fundamental understanding throughout that being gay is undesirable. Thus, Cal and David may advocate for the acceptance of men who are not entirely "masculine," but they still do not advocate for the acceptance of gay men. Homosexuality remains taboo, and although Cal and David assert that you can be a man and enjoy Coldplay, they maintain you can't be a man and enjoy having sex with other men. Like Grandma Cleary, the joke ultimately comes down on the side of homophobia, whether we are accepting cathartic pleasure through homophobic name-calling or personal affirmation because we too, like Cal and David, are not gay.

At times *Wedding Crashers* seems self-conscious about its unfailingly cruel portrayal of Todd, who is, again, our only representation of homosexuality in the entire film, but *Wedding Crashers* never follows through on this momentary break from the conventional masculine mindset. For example, at one point in the film, Todd's father, Senator Cleary, trying to get Todd to join in on a family game of touch football, tells Todd, "It wouldn't kill you to play some competitive sports, once in a while." Todd shouts back, "Would that make you love me?" On one level we see Todd trying to stand up for himself, asserting that his un-athleticism is not the real issue between him and his father, but on another level, we see Todd having yet another irrational and overly-emotional outburst. The context therefore overwhelms the content of his words.



Also in this scene, we see Senator Cleary once again cast in the role of the poor father with the all-too-difficult son. Simply stated, our sympathies cannot be with Todd because they are already aligned with the father, against the son. Indeed, though he refers to Todd's homosexuality as "our situation," Senator Cleary is shown attempting to understand and include his son on several occasions. For example, after Todd shouts out at the ocean, "Death, you are my bitch lover!" Senator Cleary calls out, "Todd, that's good! Tell that mean ocean!" The line hints simultaneously at Senator Cleary's willingness to encourage his son and the visible strain in their relationship. The audience knows, in fact, that Senator Cleary is a good father by watching his interactions with his two younger daughters. Thus, as Senator Cleary makes his attempts to include or encourage his son and Todd resists them, it seems as though Todd's social outcast status is, basically, deserved. The message seems to be that homosexuals are excluded from the mainstream because they exclude themselves and also that Todd is so weird even well-meaning people cannot understand him.

A second example makes *Wedding Crashers'* failed attempt to redeem or sympathize with Todd even more apparent. Throughout the film, Todd's strangeness is constantly related back to his homosexuality. Self-conscious perhaps of the fact that Todd is solely defined by his sexual orientation, the film gives Todd a chance to call his family's, and the audience's, one-dimensional view of him to our attention. Incensed after an overwhelmingly homophobic interchange during dinner, Todd leaves the table quipping, "I'll be in my room... painting homo things!" The line is uttered sarcastically and is intended to mean that there is more to Todd than his sexuality, which is of course the only way Todd's family and the audience sees him. However, Todd does in fact go to

his room to paint “homo things.” We see this later when Todd reveals a naked and very homoerotic painting of Vince Vaughn’s character Jeremy Grey to Jeremy in the middle of the night, when he sneaks into Jeremy’s room (and almost rapes him), thus proving that Todd’s sexuality is, in fact, part and parcel of his painting. With nothing else to define him, Todd becomes the embodiment of “gay,” nothing more, nothing less.

*Wedding Crashers* is not unique in its homophobia, but is instead indicative of a trend in contemporary comedy, specifically in buddy film comedy, in which the homophobia is so ingrained in the genre one could call it a central characteristic. Notably, however, the presence of homophobia is almost never structurally significant to plot of the film. In other words, the boy would still meet the girl, lose the girl, and ultimately get the girl, with or without the gay freakish brother in *Wedding Crashers*, or the random appearance of Andy Dick as a gay fellatio instructor who gave his dog herpes in *Old School*, or the twenty second appearance of a creepy-looking old man who fingers his belly button while watching a younger man bend over to wash his car in *Dodgeball*.<sup>6</sup> Arguably, comedies are filled with random moments that are inconsequential to the plot, and as such, these moments, or gags, exist explicitly for the purpose of delivering a quick laugh. But the fact that contemporary mainstream comedies have collectively chosen to include specifically homophobic humor in these gags overwhelmingly indicates that the constant stab at homosexuality is not accidental. It is the real purpose of this homophobic humor on which the first part of my paper will be focused. The second part of my paper will deal with audience reactions to homophobic comedy, or lack thereof, and the responsibilities of socially-conscious audiences and filmmakers. The final section will

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<sup>6</sup> *Dodgeball*, Dir. Rawson Marshall Thurber, Perf. Vince Vaughn, Christine Taylor, Ben Stiller, 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox, 2004.

discuss how comedy can be used as a progressive medium to make a positive statement about homosexuality and the queer community and will include an analysis of my original comedic screenplay, *Don't Be that Freshman*, which attempts to diversify the representation of sexuality and gender and appeal to a young adult mainstream audience.



## II. "MASCULINITY AS HOMOPHOBIA"<sup>7</sup>

The majority of contemporary mainstream comedy is made and performed by men for a male audience. This is certainly true of *American Pie*, *Old School*, *Harold and Kumar Go to White Castle*, *Dodgeball*, and other such films – in other words, several teen flicks, as well as comedies starring one or more of the following actors: Vince Vaughn, Ben Stiller, Owen Wilson, Luke Wilson, Will Ferrell, Steve Carell, and their other Frat Pack<sup>8</sup> associates. While many audience members are, in fact, women, these films still adhere to a strictly male perspective and target a strictly male type of anxiety – the construction of masculinity.

Laura Mulvey writes in "Afterthoughts on 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema'" that female spectators, in order to enjoy patriarchal cinema, learn to identify with the male perspective provided by the camera. Indeed, Mulvey posits that from childhood, women's "trans-sex identification is a *habit* that very easily becomes *second nature*."<sup>9</sup> Mulvey uses Freud's theory of femininity, which states that the human libido is composed of both masculine (active) and feminine (passive) tendencies, to explain how film allows women to identify with the repressed masculine/active part of their sexual identity. Thus we can say, even though mainstream comedy has a cross-gendered audience, it is appealing to a distinctly male aesthetic. Accordingly, we should not

<sup>7</sup> Michael Kimmel, "Masculinity as Homophobia," *Theorizing Masculinities*, ed. Harry Brod and Michael Kaufman (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc., 1994).

<sup>8</sup> The nickname "Frat Pack" was first coined by a *USA Today* article published June 2004 by Susan Wloszczyna entitled "Wilson and Vaughn: Leaders of the 'Frat Pack.'" The principle members of the Frat Pack include Ben Stiller, Jack Black, Luke Wilson, Owen Wilson, Vince Vaughn, and Will Ferrell.

<sup>9</sup> Laura Mulvey, "Afterthoughts on 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema,'" *Feminist Film Theory*, ed. Sue Thornham (New York: New York University Press, 1999), 125.

assume that co-ed audiences change the degree to which a given film may be about masculinity or masculine anxiety, since the female spectator learns to adapt to a masculine perspective in order to enjoy the film, temporarily accepting masculinisation in memory of her active/phallic phase.<sup>10</sup>

Many of the comedies under discussion are explicitly about the construction of masculinity, such as *American Pie*, while others are about manhood in the way that Frederic Jameson explains *The Godfather* is about family and *Jaws* is about anxiety over steadily advancing technology.<sup>11</sup> The films feed off male anxiety about proving one's masculinity in a world in which men are their own harshest judges. The importance of manhood may be most obvious in films like *American Pie*, in which the main characters are moving from boyhood to manhood over the course of the film, and in films like *Old School*, in which the threat of emasculation through domestication drives the thirty-something-year-old characters to relive their college days and literally start a fraternity in which the only rule seems to be "no girls allowed." However, anxiety about masculinity is equally relevant in a film like *Harold and Kumar Go to White Castle*, which strives to prove guys are guys no matter their race and relies on constructions of masculinity to do so.

In fact, while *Harold and Kumar* may claim to be about race, in the logic of the film, in order to make its point about the constructedness of racial difference, *Harold and Kumar* must first prove that its title characters, who are Korean and Indian, respectively, are still "real men," just like every other white "real man." The film is, therefore, actually about manhood and Harold and Kumar's need to defend and assert their

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 124.

<sup>11</sup> Frederic Jameson, "Reification and Utopia in Mass Culture," *Social Text* (Winter 1970: 130-149).

masculinity to other “real men.” Michael Kimmel writes in “Masculinity as Homophobia” that “we come to know what it means to be a man in our culture by setting our definitions in opposition to a set of ‘others’ – racial minorities, sexual minorities, and, above all, women.”<sup>12</sup> Since the “other” can no longer be defined by race in *Harold and Kumar*, it becomes solely defined by gender and sexual orientation. Indeed, “whatever the variations by race, class, age, ethnicity, or sexual orientation, being a man means ‘not being like women.’”<sup>13</sup> *Harold and Kumar* becomes, in the process, the most homophobic film under discussion in this paper.

Kimmel uses Freud’s model of gender formation to explain how “masculine identity is born in the renunciation of the feminine, not in the direct affirmation of the masculine, which leaves masculine gender identity tenuous and fragile.”<sup>14</sup> In Freud’s model of gender construction, the young boy learns to identify with his father and, simultaneously, to force a disassociation with his mother. In this basic stage, masculinity hinges on the boy’s ability to separate himself from his mother and renounce the characteristics of his mother in her and in himself. Thus, the young male learns to reject and devalue all signs of femininity:

The drive to repudiate the mother as the indication of the acquisition of masculine gender identity has three consequences for the young boy. First, he pushes away his real mother, and with her the traits of nurturance, compassion, and tenderness she may have embodied. Second, he suppresses those traits in himself, because they will reveal his incomplete separation from mother. His life becomes a lifelong project to demonstrate that he possesses none of his mother’s traits.

Third, as if to demonstrate the accomplishment of these first two tasks, the boy also learns to devalue all women in his society, as the living embodiments of those traits in himself he has learned to despise.... We

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<sup>12</sup> Kimmel, 120.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 126.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 127.



may *want* 'a girl just like the girl that married dear old Dad,' as the popular song had it, but we certainly don't want to be *like* her.<sup>15</sup>

It is perhaps some proof of success of the women's movement that blatantly sexist humor is no longer socially acceptable among "enlightened" audiences, thus the butt of the joke of homosocial comedy has moved from women to gay men. Homophobia, like sexism, still derides all things feminine; it is now femininity in men, however, not women, that is under attack. As Kimmel explains, "Homoerotic desire is cast as feminine desire, desire for other men."<sup>16</sup> Gay men are therefore immediately likened to women, and while women, and society as a whole, may not stand by as women are called evil or inferior, we do stand by when gay men receive such condemnation for their assumed "female" traits.

Indirectly, Cal and David hit upon this fact in the previously discussed "you know how I know you're gay?" conversation. Each of the gay stereotypes brought up deals with gender nonconformity relating to a man acting "feminine" or doing something "feminine." Cal and David point out what we already know, but what all of these films repeatedly show, that if you are un-masculine you will be perceived as gay. It is a circuitous relationship: being gay is bad because it is un-masculine, and being un-masculine comes to mean you are gay. Or, at least, you will be perceived as being gay. The key here is gender nonconformity, or un-masculine behavior, epitomized by the gay male whose attraction to other men automatically likens him to women. And, as previously argued, a man who is likened to women is everything a man is not supposed to be. Thus, the threat of emasculation through association with women or gay men drives men to denounce homosexual men, even in a thirty second gag that is otherwise irrelevant to the film. By repudiating the gay male, other men are able to reinstate their

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 127-8.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 130.

own gender-conforming masculinity. Thus, what unites men, ostensibly, is the mere fact that they are not women, they are not like women, and they are better than women.

Male masculine identity is “tenuous and fragile”<sup>17</sup> precisely because it is defined in opposition to this “other.”<sup>18</sup> In fact, there is little that actually defines men as men in non-oppositional terms, and these criteria are equally problematic. First and foremost, men must be biologically male, and of course there is great emphasis put on the size of the penis. Second, men must be heterosexual and dominant to women: “Masculinity, in [Freud’s] model, is irrevocably tied to sexuality. The boy’s sexuality will now come to resemble the sexuality of his father (or at least the way he imagines his father) – menacing, predatory, possessive, and possibly punitive. The boy has come to identify with his oppressor; now he can become the oppressor himself.”<sup>19</sup> Indeed, phrases like “you need to get your balls reattached” from *American Pie 2*, spoken by notoriously misogynist Steve Stifler to Chris “Oz” Ostreicher when he refuses to look up a girl’s skirt, relate male genitalia, what literally makes a man a man, with the pursuit and sexualization of women, what symbolically makes a man a man. Thus, men who are not heterosexual, who do not pursue women, are missing this vital criterion for manhood.

Indeed, heterosexuality is not only one of the ways men assert their manhood in mainstream comedy, and in our material world, it is a prerequisite. A girl becomes a woman when she first menstruates, a physical experience no one can deny or take away from her, but movies and society at large tell us that a boy becomes a man the first time he “scores” with a girl. This is especially apparent in the first *American Pie* film, a movie about high school boys trying to enter manhood, “the next step,” by losing their

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 127.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 127.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 127.



virginity. Finch, one of the principal characters, is arguably the least masculine of his group of guy friends, but he successfully asserts his manhood through heterosexual desire and, ultimately, sex itself. Thus, even though Finch may drink cappuccino, refuse to use the school lavatories for hygienic reasons, and play golf on the academic quad, he, in effect, asserts his masculinity by losing his virginity to "Stifler's mom," the most impressive "score" of all his friends. In fact, for Finch, his sexuality is all that defines him as masculine, but it is enough. Finch demonstrates a keen understanding of this concept when, in order to attract women and prove his masculinity when he is still a virgin, Finch pays a female student to spread rumors around about his sexual prowess and large penis. Thus, through heterosexual lust, the sexualization of women, and ultimately, heterosexual sex itself, Finch's manhood is positively affirmed.

Mainstream comedy films often feature the seemingly paradoxical juxtaposition of intense male bonding and homophobia, indicating that, at all costs, male bonding should not be read as homoeroticism. Indeed, films like *Old School* that emphasize male bonding in a man-made, boys-only world where the male characters purposefully exclude women seem especially anxious about being (mis)read as homoerotic texts. Such films feel the need to firmly establish the heterosexuality of all the characters and themes in order to prevent any suspicion of homoeroticism or homosexual behavior. To ward off such misreadings, these films all include either random moments of homophobic humor or an underlying homophobia throughout. In *Old School*, for example, the most notable homophobic moment comes when Andy Dick as "Garry," the overly flamboyant gay fellatio instructor, arrives at a women's party to give a class on blowjobs. Garry, who carries a small dog under his arm, makes the following egregious statement: "[My ex-

boyfriend] left me with a little something called herpes. Which I then gave to the dog. But that's neither here nor there." *Old School* thus links homosexuality with bestiality, disease, and absolute idiocy. Garry's scene has nothing to do with the rest of the film, of course, except that it allows *Old School* to assert its repudiation of male homosexuality and thereby make it absolutely obvious that the film is not a gay text. Kimmel suggests that "homophobic flight from intimacy with other men is the repudiation of the homosexual within – never completely successful and hence constantly reenacted in every homosocial relationship."<sup>20</sup> Thus, in every homosocial mainstream comedy, we see the same joke played again and again on the gay or effeminate man who is ridiculed and ostracized for the characteristics he supposedly shares with women.

In *American Pie 2*, even though there are no gay characters portrayed, the film still reenacts this heterosexual insecurity, especially after a scene in which Stifler and Jim effectively, yet un-erotically, "make-out" with each other. Later that day, Stifler, concerned there might be some question over his sexuality, returns to the house bearing gifts of pornography for the rest of his roommates saying, "Ho Ho Ho! Stifler Claus is here. Now, just so there's no confusion, Santa Porn has brought us some heterosexual entertainment." Thus the threat of being seen as gay is thwarted by Stifler and his friends' continued objectification of women, as well as Stifler's open distaste for male homosexuality. Indeed, homophobia and sexism, which are both the repudiation of the feminine, occur simultaneously, for "homophobia, the fear of being perceived as gay, as not a real man, keeps men exaggerating all the traditional rules of masculinity, including sexual predation with women. Homophobia and sexism go hand in hand."<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 130.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 133.

In addition, there are never any gay men included in these films' self-made homosocial worlds: not in the dodgeball team in *Dodgeball*, the fraternity in *Old School*, the summer house in *American Pie 2*, nor the electronics store in *The 40 Year Old Virgin*. Almost all of these homosocial comedies sympathize with the dorky, misfit man who, no matter what, does not measure up to mainstream standards of masculinity. As such, the films are all on some level about men embracing and accepting other men who are simply not very cool, and in this way we see these films doing positive social work by allowing male audience members to accept their own faults, even laugh at themselves, without becoming actual figures of ridicule. For instance, in *Dodgeball* we are encouraged to identify and/or sympathize with the dorky high schooler, the middle-aged obscure-sports enthusiast, and even a man who thinks he is a pirate. Yet, these groups of men, which include people from various racial backgrounds who are fat, ugly, very old, very young, skinny, and just plain weird, *never* include any men who are homosexual. We laugh at the misfits, but our laughter is benign until the random appearance of a man who exhibits homosexual tendencies.

The ubiquity of mainstream comedy's homophobic humor should make us question why it is so important that male characters not be perceived as gay or effeminate, and why such perceptions automatically lead to emasculation. Using the Freudian model of gender formation, Kimmel explains the relationship between feminization, emasculation, and male humiliation: "After pulling away from his mother, the boy comes to see her not as a source of nurturance and love, but as an insatiably infantilizing creature, capable of humiliating him in front of his peers.... Mothers



represent the humiliation of infancy, helplessness, dependency."<sup>22</sup> It may be women who are seen as the cause of humiliation, but it is men, not women, who are actually responsible for emasculating other men. Writes Kimmel:

This, then, is the great secret of American manhood: *We are afraid of other men*. Homophobia is a central organizing principle of our cultural definition of manhood. Homophobia is more than the irrational fear of gay men, more than the fear that we might be perceived as gay. "The word 'faggot' has nothing to do with homosexual experience or even with fears of homosexuals," writes David Leverenz (1986). "It comes out of the depths of manhood: a label of ultimate contempt for anyone who seems sissy, untough, uncool" (p. 455). Homophobia is the fear that other men will unmask us, emasculate us, reveal to us and the world that we do not measure up, that we are not real men. We are afraid to let other men see that fear. Fear makes us ashamed, because the recognition of fear in ourselves is proof to ourselves that we are not as manly as we pretend, that we are, like the young man in a poem by Yeats, "one that ruffles in a manly pose for all his timid heart." Our fear is the fear of humiliation. We are ashamed to be afraid.<sup>23</sup>

Even more alarming, Kimmel writes how "the stakes perceived in sissydrom are enormous – sometimes matters of life or death" and that while women report they are most afraid of being raped and murdered, men report they are most afraid of being laughed at.<sup>24</sup> Thus we see how, according to contemporary social thought, a man's emasculation, brought upon by the derision of other men, may in fact be his worst fear come to life.

As Kimmel contends, "Being seen as unmanly is a fear that propels American men to deny manhood to others, as a way of proving the unprovable – that one is fully manly."<sup>25</sup> Thus, men are constantly on the defensive to prove their masculinity, often in outwardly hostile terms. Indeed, men's fear masks itself in anger and aggression and

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 127.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 131.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 133.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 135.

reappears on the big screen in random spurts of homophobic humor. Kimmel asserts that "the reigning definition of masculinity is a defensive effort to prevent being emasculated. In our efforts to suppress or overcome those fears, the dominant culture exacts a tremendous price from those deemed less than fully manly: women, gay men, nonnative-born men, men of color."<sup>26</sup> It is important, therefore, to recognize that homophobia has to do with men's fear of self, a fear of being unmasked, and *not* fear of the "other."

In all of these cases we have been dealing strictly with homophobia targeted at male homosexuality, whereas lesbianism, though sometimes portrayed as strange and uncomfortable gender bending, is even more often portrayed as erotic in mainstream comedy. The disparity between the representation of lesbianism and male homosexuality shows us the issue is not homosexuality itself, but men who are homosexual or exhibit the effeminate traits we now associate with male homosexuality. *American Pie 2* demonstrates this distinction in a scene in which three of the main characters, Stifler, Finch, and Jim, have an interaction with two women they presume are lesbians. What follows is a game of dare in which the women agree to perform sexual acts on each other in front of their male audience, which includes the entire town via walkie-talkie, as long as Stifler, Finch, and Jim also perform sexual acts on one another. The lesbian sexual behavior is depicted as erotic, sensual, and enjoyable (to both the male spectators and the women themselves) while the male homosexual behavior is depicted as unquestionably un-erotic, humiliating, and disgusting. The male audience, who cheer when one "hot lesbian" touches the other hot lesbian's breast, almost turn off their walkie-talkies at the mere thought of one of the men kissing another. This is just one example that works to confirm that the homophobia in mainstream comedy is not about fear or hatred of same-

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 135.

sex behavior per se, or about conservative politics or religious arguments against homosexuality. The issue is not homosexuality at all, but heterosexual insecurity and fear.

If these popular teen comedies and Frat Pack films are actually about heterosexual, masculine insecurity, as I have argued, we can reasonably conclude that the filmmakers and audiences of this type of homophobic entertainment do not necessarily harbor malicious attitudes towards homosexuality. Further, we can use this relatively encouraging information to challenge the homophobic wave of pop culture with more progressive comedy and characters that defy our cultural definitions of manhood and homosexuality. Some men's need to affirm their heterosexuality, masculinity, and thereby manhood is not an adequate excuse for their homophobia, especially considering that such homophobia is mass-produced and eventually seen by millions of people worldwide, many of whom base their views on homosexuality on its media representation. Men, and women, and especially the media-makers among us, must therefore take responsibility for the way their own insecurities and anxieties transform into homophobia on the big screen and, ultimately, social and political inequality in our material reality.



### III. THE MAINSTREAM AUDIENCE OF MAINSTREAM COMEDY

The Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation (GLAAD) Center for the Study of Media and Society recently sponsored a study entitled "How Youth Media Can Help Combat Homophobia Among American Teenagers" by Rodger Streitmatter, Ph.D. Streitmatter found that socially responsible gay and lesbian-themed content in youth media has a concrete positive effect on youth attitudes towards homosexuality. In particular, Streitmatter credited shows like *The Real World*, *Dawson's Creek*, and *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, all of which featured gay characters who were both likeable and important to the narrative, with familiarizing young audiences with homosexual issues, people, and intimacy.

For the purposes of this paper, Streitmatter's study offers two particular points of interest. First, as Streitmatter points out, the media has a strong socializing and educational effect on its young audience. The 1997 Commonwealth Fund Survey of the Health of Adolescents found that "of the more than 6,000 students surveyed, 52.5 percent identified their parents as a source of information about sex, while 52.0 percent named magazines and 50.9 percent named television."<sup>27</sup> The findings are significant and applicable to adolescent education regarding non-heterosexual sexual orientation, a subject even more taboo in many households than discussions of heterosexual sex. Accordingly, Streitmatter argues:

That youth media can educate the nation's young people about gay men and lesbians, as well as the issues they often face, is indisputable.

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<sup>27</sup> Rodger Streitmatter, Ph.D., "How Youth Media Can Help Combat Homophobia Among American Teenagers" (New York, NY: GLAAD Center for the Study of Media and Society, 2003) 9.

The current study builds on that reality to suggest that the power wielded by teen-oriented magazines and television programs can be harnessed to reduce the damage inflicted by an insidious evil that is rampant in this country in the early years of the twenty-first century: homophobia.<sup>28</sup>

Indeed, Streitmatter's interviews, group discussions, and survey responses demonstrate that positive representation of gay and lesbian characters can and has led to positive attitudes towards homosexuality.

The second point of interest is the extent to which the two hundred eighteen-year-old subjects had already been familiarized with gay and lesbian-themed content in their entertainment media. Almost all respondents reported a high level of acceptance, had positive attitudes towards gay and lesbian characters, and were comfortable watching homosexual intimacy:

A majority of the respondents were comfortable with *all* of the levels of gay content depicted in the four clips. Although the level of comfort dropped when the physical contact reached a point that could be described as "intimate," more than half of the respondents were comfortable with each of the scenes depicted in the clips.<sup>29</sup> Specifically, more than 90 percent of the respondents indicated they were comfortable with the first three levels of gay content—people talking about homosexuality, lesbians holding hands and hugging, and gay men hugging on a public street—and 58 percent of the respondents were comfortable with the two men kissing while lying on a bed together and cuddling or "spooning" while lying shirtless on a bed together.<sup>30</sup>

Streitmatter concludes that, over time, homosexuality is normalized through exposure and positive representation and that youth media has proven to be the most important arena in which this change occurs.

Writes Streitmatter, "Experts and laypersons alike agree that the best way to reduce homophobia is to expose more people to sexual minorities—when heterosexuals

<sup>28</sup> Ibid. 8.

<sup>29</sup> Clips included homoerotic scenes from *Dawson's Creek*, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, and *The Real World*.

<sup>30</sup> Streitmatter, 58.



are exposed to gay people, the comfort level mounts and the hatred dissipates.”<sup>31</sup> Using Lisa Wolf’s example of *The Real World*<sup>32</sup> 1992 season, Streitmatter explains how watching Julie, a straight southerner who had never met an openly gay person before, learn to accept and befriend Norm, the first gay person featured on the show, had a tremendous, positive impact on young viewers all over the country. Indeed, “to watch Julie evolve in her thinking, Wolf said, gave millions of young viewers permission to change their thinking as well.”<sup>33</sup> *The Real World* has, in fact, been called the show that “woke up a generation to gay realities” by *Out* magazine.<sup>34</sup>

In a study conducted by the Gallup Institute, researchers asked whether or not some heterosexuals are “more likely to be prejudiced than others.”<sup>35</sup> The study investigated correlations between homophobia in the United States and various demographic divisions and found that in comparison to heterosexuals with favorable attitudes towards gay people, those with negative attitudes were more likely to be men, older, less well-educated, residents of areas in which negative attitudes towards gay people are the norm (such as rural areas or the Midwestern or Southern US), more religious, conservative, republican, less sexually permissive, and supportive of traditional gender roles. We can assume the reciprocal of the Gallup study to be true: heterosexuals with favorable attitudes towards gay people are more likely to be women, younger, more well-educated, residents of areas where homosexuality is generally accepted (like urban areas, the East or West coast, colleges and universities), less religious, more liberal,

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<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

<sup>32</sup> In *The Real World*, seven eighteen to twenty-five-year olds are selected to live in a house and work together while being taped. This was the first major reality show.

<sup>33</sup> Streitmatter, 10.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

<sup>35</sup> Gregory M. Herek, “Are Some Heterosexuals More Likely to Be Prejudiced than Others?” *The Gallup Institute*, 13 Feb. 2006. <[http://psychology.ucdavis.edu/rainbow/html/prej\\_corr.html](http://psychology.ucdavis.edu/rainbow/html/prej_corr.html)>.

independent or democratic, more sexually permissive, and unsupportive of traditional gender roles.

The Gallup Institute also found that, as of May 2003, 54% of the general US population believed "homosexuality should be considered an acceptable alternative lifestyle"<sup>36</sup> (admittedly, this is a poorly phrased survey question). However, if homophobia is unevenly distributed among divisions of age, class, education, and religion as previously described, we can reasonably assume that much more than 54% of the population of young men and women in the US are accepting of homosexuality. The Ontario Consultants on Religious Tolerance write:

A massive gap in beliefs exists between America's youth and elderly. Older teens and young adults, who are not religious conservatives, have generally accepted homosexuality as a normal and natural sexual minority. They are far more likely to have one or more gays or lesbians among their circle of friends. They are much more liberal in their beliefs about homosexuality than are their parents.<sup>37</sup>

Furthermore, college-aged audiences are also likely to reside on college campuses, which, generally speaking, promote accepting attitudes towards homosexuality. A young adult, less religious, less conservative, more sexually permissive, and more liberal audience is, in fact, necessary for films like *American Pie*, *Wedding Crashers*, and *Harold and Kumar*, since these films collectively seem to advocate sexual promiscuity and drug and alcohol use and have a fairly progressive stance on race and a relatively liberal stance on politics.<sup>38</sup> Such an audience *should*, therefore, be much more accepting of homosexuality than any other.

<sup>36</sup> Ontario Consultants on Religious Tolerance, "Public Opinion Polls on Homosexuality," [ReligiousTolerance.org](http://www.religioustolerance.org/hom_poll2.htm), 13 Feb. 2006 <[http://www.religioustolerance.org/hom\\_poll2.htm](http://www.religioustolerance.org/hom_poll2.htm)>.

<sup>37</sup> "Trends," [Religioustolerance.org](http://www.religioustolerance.org/homosexu.htm), 13 Feb. 2006 <<http://www.religioustolerance.org/homosexu.htm>>.

<sup>38</sup> In *Anchorman: The Legend of Ron Burgundy* (Dir. Adam McKay, Perf. Will Ferrell, Dreamworks, 2004), the narrator at the end of the film states that the character Brick Tamland, a weatherman with an IQ



The previous studies, however, are not meant to suggest that *The Real World* has cured generations X and Y of all homophobic thought. We cannot forget that the most popular mainstream comedies and other socializing forces have done major work to the opposite effect, counteracting the few positive portrayals of homosexuality out there. Indeed, adolescents and young adults, specifically males, also belong to a generation that uses words like “gay,” “pussy,” and even “faggot” on a daily basis. Streitmatter notes, “Homophobia among American teenagers is so widespread, in fact, that researchers estimate that gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender youths attempt suicide two to six times as often as straight youths.”<sup>39</sup> While this may be the case, we cannot forget about the previous studies entirely. The gap between America’s younger and older generations and the work that some popular entertainment media has already done to increase positive representation and acceptance of homosexuality are real and significant.

What I mean to suggest is that, first and foremost, adolescents and young adults have been raised with more positive representations of the queer community and more fair and accurate information about gay and lesbian issues than ever before, and research shows that these positive representations have increased audiences’ comfort level with and acceptance of homosexuality. As such, America’s younger audiences are primed for more progressive gay and lesbian-themed content; indeed, millions of young viewers have already proven their willingness to support television shows and other media that focus on gay and lesbian issues.

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of 48, later becomes “one of the top political advisors to the Bush White House.” Because this film is written and performed by members of the Frat Pack, and because it is reasonable to say that the political views of one Frat Pack film are similar to those of any other, we can safely assume that the political polarity of these comedy films, at the very least, shifts away from conservative and right wing politics.

<sup>39</sup> Streitmatter, 9.

Why then does homophobia remain a central characteristic of mainstream comedy? It seems this more accepting audience would recognize and disapprove of the homophobia in films like *Old School* and *Wedding Crashers*, for example. After all, these films are heavily patronized by the same audiences that watch *Dawson's Creek* and *The Real World*. Thus, there seems to be a cognitive dissonance between the open-mindedness young adults report in studies, surveys, and interviews and their actual enjoyment of and participation in homophobic comedy.

The dissonance suggests three things about the audiences of contemporary mainstream comedy. First, there must be an underlying homophobia, or heterosexism, within many audience members that is exacerbated by mainstream comedy's constant use of the proverbial gay joke. Second, some audience members must simply not recognize homophobic humor as homophobic. Third, some audience members must not be fully committed to their social ideals, especially when the pursuit of such ideals inconveniences them or requires taking some sort of personal risk.

To clarify, in this paper I am not concerned with people who are proud to call themselves homophobes and consciously enjoy homophobic humor. Rather, I am concerned with socially-conscious individuals who demonstrate this cognitive dissonance between what they think they believe about homosexuality and what their actions suggest they believe. Such people can be divided into three general categories: people who love and support their openly gay friends and family members and consider themselves allies, yet laugh at homophobic humor; people who do not consider themselves to be homophobic, but still laugh at homophobic humor; and people who enjoy homophobic



humor *and* recognize that they are homophobic or heterosexist, but believe in gay rights and/or are trying to overcome their homophobia.

Our individual homophobia is revealed when we laugh at homophobic comedy, whether or not we notice it is homophobic. Mary Douglas argues, "A joke unleashes the energy of the unconscious against the control of the conscious";<sup>40</sup> thus, jokes must exploit something already in our consciousness, even if that "something" is well-hidden in our subconscious. For example, if a joke works by pointing out some absurdity in our daily lives, the audience must recognize this absurdity in order for the joke to work. Accordingly, if we do not find men who show their emotions, enjoy domestic activities, or are attracted to other men absurd, we will not find humor in jokes that deride these characteristics in men. Additionally, if we do not believe in gay stereotypes we will not find anything funny about jokes that derive their humor from gay stereotypes.

Likewise, Douglas contends that "a joke cannot be perceived unless it corresponds to the form of the social experience."<sup>41</sup> Years ago, our social experience was such that Irish immigrants, Jews, women, African-Americans, and other minority groups were figures of the absurd, worthy of ridicule; such ideas now offend our modern social consciousness. Women, African-Americans, and Jews, for example, are no longer socially-accepted comic figures, and blatantly sexist, racist, or anti-Semitic jokes are now socially unacceptable.

Yet, men who are attracted to other men – and are therefore like women and not "real men" – still seem "absurd." Jokes attacking gay men do not offend our mainstream social consciousness the way racist jokes about African-Americans do, and not only

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<sup>40</sup> Mary Douglas, "Jokes," *Implicit Meanings* (New York: Routledge, 1999) 154.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 153.

homophobic humor, but blatantly homophobic humor, is ever-present in mainstream media without mainstream opposition. Writes Douglas:

As to the permitting of a joke, there are jokes which can be perceived clearly enough by all present but which are rejected at once. Here again the social dimension is at work. Social requirements may judge a joke to be in bad taste, risky, too near the bone, improper, or irrelevant. Such controls are exerted either on behalf of hierarchy as such, or on behalf of values which are so judged too precious and too precarious to be exposed to challenge.<sup>42</sup>

Such social "controls" censure jokes deriding race, religion, and sex as they pose a challenge to our "precious" and "precarious" social values. Gay rights, however, do not yet qualify as these protected values and therefore are not censured by our social conventions. As one internet blogger wrote:

Substitute African American or Jewish or any ethnicity for "gay" in these premises and see if the culture would deem the humor acceptable. NO, the networks would be picketed by media watch groups and Jesse Jackson.

Yet, "gay" is still okay to use as a derogatory insult or put-down. "Gay" is still okay to be laughable.<sup>43</sup>

Indeed, Andy Dick's portrayal of a gay man in *Old School* is not much different than a black face portrayal of a "coon" in a minstrel show, one of the most popular forms of live entertainment well into the twentieth century, now considered exemplary of racism. I would argue, however, that the minstrel show and Andy Dick's performance are equally malicious caricatures of their respective undeserving targets of ridicule.

Therefore, when homophobic humor makes us laugh, the humor is accessing some measure of homophobia within us that, even hidden or suppressed, is no less a real part of our consciousness. Thus, our laughter, the pleasure we take in homophobic

<sup>42</sup> Douglas, 152.

<sup>43</sup> Mike Player, "The 'New' Homophobic Comedy," [MySpace.com](http://blog.myspace.com/index.cfm?fuseaction=blog.view&friendID=4808865&blogID=79740742), 21 Jan. 2006, 14 Feb. 2006  
<<http://blog.myspace.com/index.cfm?fuseaction=blog.view&friendID=4808865&blogID=79740742>>.



humor, should be consciously resisted. This is, of course, easier said than done: it means bringing a social consciousness into the movie theater; it means resisting the desire to laugh and other pleasures that comedy affords us; it means allying ourselves with the object of ridicule; and of course it mandates knowing how to read media texts so that we can recognize homophobia as homophobia.

The very nature of movie-watching and the comedy genre in particular makes bringing a social consciousness into the movie theater seem almost antithetical to the purpose of watching a comedy. Especially in the case of mainstream comedy, we go to the theater in order to laugh, to be entertained, and to relax. We generally do not sit down to watch *American Pie*, *Dodgeball*, or *Harold and Kumar* intending to think hard about social injustice or the problems of the world at large for the next ninety minutes. In fact, unlike thrillers with their complex plotlines or melodramas that are emotionally exhausting, comedy, more than any other genre, invites a total relaxation of our bodies and our minds.

Comedy also enables us to say things we otherwise wouldn't. It is an "anything goes" territory: we can talk about sex and excrement without censure, and we can mock anybody and everybody from politicians, men, the wealthy, the elite, and the powerful to the homeless, women, queer people, the poor, and, of course, the powerless. Theodor Adorno notes in *The Culture Industry* that "a number of repressed gratifications which play a large role on the hidden level are somehow allowed to manifest themselves on the surface in jests, off-colour remarks, suggestive situations, and similar devices."<sup>44</sup> At the same time, however, audiences have grown up knowing that a joke is "just a joke" and

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<sup>44</sup> Theodor Adorno, "How to Look at Television," *The Culture Industry*, ed. J. M. Bernstein (New York: Routledge Classics, 2002. 158-177) 165.

“doesn’t mean anything” so we “shouldn’t get offended,” logic meant to efface the meaning behind the joke. Taken together, we find that comedy films invite a total relaxation of critical thought, just as homophobic images are most likely to appear before us, now unrecognized, unanalyzed, and unopposed.

In addition, comedy has the dangerous potential of alluring viewers to its point of view. By *not* resisting its manifold pleasures and “repressed gratifications” we accept the comedy and, consequently, the message behind the humor. For, contrary to popular opinion, a joke is not just a joke. Meanings do matter. Freud argues that the joke can actually “bribe the hearer with its yield of pleasure into taking sides with us without any very close investigation, just as on other occasions we ourselves have often been bribed by an innocent joke into overestimating the substance of a statement expressed jokingly.”<sup>45</sup> Thus, comedy can have a “nefarious effect”<sup>46</sup> which exploits our subconscious weaknesses and fears (fear of gay men, fear of emasculation) in order to make us laugh. Furthermore, because “our enjoyment of a joke is based on a combined impression of its substance and of its effectiveness as a joke... we let ourselves be deceived by the one factor over the amount of the other. Only after the joke has been reduced do we become aware of this false judgment.”<sup>47</sup> As Freud contends, jokes sell themselves by offering the audience the pleasure of laughter, and if the joke is clever enough or we are simply in the mood to laugh, we will willingly accept the joke without actually considering its underlying meaning. Only if and when we do finally un-package the joke will we find that we may have “[overestimated] the substance” or accepted a

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<sup>45</sup> Sigmund Freud, Jokes and Their Relation to the Subconscious, ed. James Strachey (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1960) 123.

<sup>46</sup> Adorno, 158.

<sup>47</sup> Freud, 109.

"false judgment."<sup>48</sup> Furthermore, Adorno warns audiences that "the hidden message may be more important than the overt, since this hidden message will escape the controls of consciousness, will not be 'looked through', will not be warded off by sales resistance, but is likely to sink into the spectator's mind."<sup>49</sup> Thus, what we imagine to be most meaningless may actually be most meaningful.

Besides the pleasure of laughter, however, comedies also offer us the pleasure of positive identification. In *Wedding Crashers*, for example, we are supposed to identify with Jeremy Gray and John Beckwith. Such identification is self-affirming as we ally ourselves to the lovable heroes of the film. At the same time, we repudiate Todd and disassociate ourselves completely from him. Thus, we elevate ourselves to a position of power, superiority, and social acceptance by identifying with the heroes alone, and such self-affirmation and social approval is hard to resist. Indeed, resistance creates the opposite effect: by rejecting the homophobia, we ally ourselves with *Wedding Crashers'* lone figure of ridicule and are looked down upon by the film, other audience members, and society at large. Thus, comedy, with its myriad of pleasures and particular potential to persuade viewers into sharing its logic, weakens our ability and desire to resist temptation and openly oppose homophobic content.

Resistance is further complicated by our frequent inability to recognize homophobic humor as homophobic. As we have already discussed, such humor can be missed or not recognized as homophobic because of our un-analytical frame of mind when we watch movies. Additionally, homophobia is difficult to recognize because homophobic jokes are so commonplace in comedies aimed at teens and young adults they

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<sup>48</sup> Freud, 123.

<sup>49</sup> Adorno, 164-5.



have become naturalized and normalized into their respective texts. Just as we might enjoy a rap song for its beat or impressive vocals while ignoring the pathologically misogynist lyrics, some audience members seem to appreciate homophobic humor without taking notice of the homophobia and laugh without recognizing the significant social content of the joke. Other well-meaning audience members may not recognize homophobic jokes as homophobic because they simply don't realize that the stereotypes are stereotypes. A person may believe in gay rights, for example, but also believe that all gay men are effeminate and love shopping. This image is not inherently negative, but it does misrepresent huge numbers of gay men and render them invisible. If we are ignorant, naïve, or easily convinced by media culture, it will take a personal dedication to self-education in order to first understand homosexuality and homophobia before knowing exactly how and what to resist.

Our inability to recognize homophobic humor as homophobic, our willingness to let the homophobia pass without objection, and our overall enjoyment of homophobic humor all suggest a lack of dedication to our own social ideals. Commitment to the belief that homophobia is wrong requires personal sacrifice and, especially for men, bravery and confidence. Heterosexuals must be prepared to stop taking self-affirming pleasure in homophobic humor. We must resist the pleasure of such jokes until our resistance to homophobia becomes effortless and involuntary, at which time we will not have to try to notice homophobic moments, they will jump out at us and surprise us in their randomness and gratuitousness. At this point, the jokes will likely bore, disappoint, and offend us, but they will not be able to offer any sort of pleasure. This moment of

personal progression means that the ideals we intellectually support have been internalized.

Male heterosexual insecurity is a major obstacle in accomplishing this feat. Men who worry about their masculinity laugh to dissociate themselves from the gay male and to show their disapproval of homosexual behavior, therefore affirming that they do not participate in homosexuality. Homophobia is, then, used to affirm the heterosexuality and masculinity of male audiences just as it is used to affirm the heterosexuality and masculinity of the films' principal characters. Indeed, Kimmel contends that men laugh at homophobic humor even if they don't find it funny, especially in the company of other men, because they are afraid to emasculate themselves by sticking up for gay men and thereby allying themselves to the queer community. According to Kimmel, men's laughter in the theater translates into silence in society:

Shame leads to silence – the silences that keep other people believing that we [men] actually approve of the things that are done to women, to minorities, to gays and lesbians in our culture. The frightened silence as we scurry past a woman being hassled by men on the street. That furtive silence when men make sexist or racist jokes in a bar. That clammy-handed silence when guys in the office make gay-bashing jokes. Our fears are the sources of our silences, and men's silence is what keeps the system running.<sup>50</sup>

Kimmel's diagnosis is unfortunately dead on. For men, there are plenty of reasons *not* to take a stand against homophobia, all of which boil down to a desire to avoid social humiliation and stigmatization and the need to be seen as "real men" to other "real men." But until men, and women, gay and straight and otherwise, do take a stand and join the victims of homophobia, we will never effect any sort of change, in the media or the social and political realm. Men and women who support the system and its problematic

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<sup>50</sup> Kimmel, 131.



ideologies, including filmmakers and media moguls, must take a risk on themselves and others in order to overcome heterosexual anxiety and break the taboo against homosexuality and gender nonconformity.

I have several heterosexual male friends who are liberal-minded, support gay rights, and have a few gay friends, yet they count *Harold and Kumar* and almost every Frat Pack film as one of their favorites and call each other “pussies” on a regular basis. The disconnect between my friends’ beliefs and their actions shows that while they respect women, queer people, and queer issues on a superficial level, they are not dedicated to their stated ideals to the extent that they are willing to actually change themselves or their daily activities in order to combat homophobia. They still watch movies that would offend their gay friends, and they still laugh at homophobic humor in a derisive manner, meaning they either do not care that it is homophobic, or they do not recognize the humor as homophobic. My friends may vote in favor of gay rights when the opportunity arises, but when it comes to taking a public stand in front of their male friends and peers, or inconveniencing themselves by turning off homophobic comedy and resisting its pleasures, we see the system perpetuate itself in their silence and inaction.

Indeed, what many men, including my friends, have yet to realize is that they can only be emasculated or humiliated by taking a stand against homophobia if they are, as “heterosexual insecurity” suggests, insecure. In this way, Paul Finch in *American Pie 2* (though not the first *American Pie*) may actually be a model for other men. “Comfortable with [his] sexuality,” Finch is the only heterosexual male character who doesn’t talk about how much he scores with other women or make sexist or homophobic remarks. He accepts himself for who he is and because he is self-assured, cannot be humiliated by the

men around him. Confidence, therefore, is the key. If being revealed for not being “real men” is what men fear most, the only cure for this insecurity is confidence and self-acceptance, not homophobia. Homophobia only feeds the system. We must therefore strive to deprive the system of its constituents until it can no longer function.

Until that time, however, if Kimmel is right that only men can grant or take away another man’s manhood, then it only really matters to a number of men what other *men* think of them, and thus heterosexual males in our society have a much greater effect when they take a stand against homophobia than, for example, straight women and the queer community. Indeed, famous female singers may refrain from using homophobic slurs in their music all the time, but not being homophobic was never a newsworthy event until rapper Kanye West called a press conference to declare his decision to stop discriminating against homosexuals in his music. Men, as the more influential sex, must therefore take greater responsibility for the way they contribute to the system, as willing participants or silent bystanders.

#### IV. COMBATTING HOMOPHOBIA THROUGH COMEDY

Comedy films are too often like a mediocre amusement park. You go to the park with the stated purpose of amusing yourself with rides, you pay an exorbitant entrance fee, and once inside, you ride as many rides as you can, irrespective of whether or not you actually *like* all of the rollercoasters, swing rides, and Ferris wheels. Going on rides is what you do at an amusement park; and laughing, enjoying the joke, is what you do at a comedy. We might not agree with the sentiment behind the joke, but we don't worry about that, we just laugh and move on. Audiences know that if they don't laugh at the jokes, because they've taken them "too seriously," they won't enjoy their time in the cinema and may instead be left angry, even offended. What I am suggesting, however, is that we should not settle for bad "rides" or bad jokes. The industry will rise to our higher standards, and the sooner the more accepting members of our society recognize this, the sooner these unfunny and frankly harmful filmic moments will be replaced by jokes that do not further offend the most ostracized and stigmatized members of our communities. Indeed, we should demand progressive humor that encourages acceptance, challenges stereotypes, and mocks homophobes, not homosexuals.

In this final section, I'd like to move away from looking at homophobic humor in mainstream comedy and look toward using comedy to send a progressive message about homosexuality and gender nonconformity. Comedy is a powerful medium, and while its power can be used negatively, it can also be used in a decidedly subversive and progressive manner. In fact, comedy is more often than not assumed to be transgressive.



Anthropologist Mary Douglas, for example, defines jokes as being inherently subversive such that, by her definition, jokes that are not subversive are not actually jokes.<sup>51</sup>

Kathleen Rowe, author of *The Unruly Woman*, writes, “Almost all comedic forms – from jokes to gags to slapstick routines to the most complex narrative structures – move toward a liberation from authority,”<sup>52</sup> and Freud notes that “a joke will allow us to exploit something ridiculous in our enemy which we could not, on account of obstacles in the way, bring forward openly or consciously; once again, then, the joke *will evade restrictions and open sources of pleasure that have become inaccessible*.”<sup>53</sup> Thus, with comedy, we can make fun of those we wouldn’t or couldn’t normally: our bosses, our parents, the government, the media, the President of the United States, white people, straight people, rich people, and others. Douglas contends, “All jokes have this subversive effect on the dominant structure of ideas. Those which bring forward the physiological exigencies of which moral beings are subject, are using one universal, never-failing technique of subversion.”<sup>54</sup> As such, we see that comedy should have a transgressive purpose, even if mainstream comedy has failed to capitalize on this “universal, never-failing technique of subversion.”

Indeed, while comedy can be used for hostile purposes, such as justification for the social domination of minority groups, it can more appropriately be used to challenge stereotypes, to affirm the rightness of the weak, and to oppose an unfair hierarchal social order. Furthermore, if the pleasure of a joke can bribe its hearer to accept a logic that promotes homophobia, a joke may also bribe its hearer to accept progressive ideas as his

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<sup>51</sup> Douglas, 150.

<sup>52</sup> Kathleen Rowe, *The Unruly Woman: Gender and the Genres of Laughter* (Austin, TX: The University of Texas Press, 1995) 103.

<sup>53</sup> Freud, 123.

<sup>54</sup> Douglas, 150.

or her own. Again, by laughing, we accept the underlying meaning of a joke, and therefore, if a joke is transgressive and the audience laughs, the underlying logic being accepted is transgressive. Thus, comedy has a special potential to persuade us to the side of the queer community and its allies, just as it has, for years, persuaded us to accept homophobic ideas.

Rowe explains how, depending on the way in which jokes are constructed and where their target lies, jokes may either be antiauthoritarian or status quo-affirming. In *The Unruly Woman* she describes two paradoxical theories about narrative comedy:

The first, which is often a prelude to the second, emphasizes comedy's attack on the Law of the Father – its *antiauthoritarianism*, its drive to level, disrupt, and destroy hierarchy, to comment on and contest the values tragedy affirms. Comedy breaks taboos and expresses those impulses which are always outside the social.... Comedy, in contrast to tragedy, inflects the Oedipal story that underlies most narratives by shifting the son's guilt to his father. Youth (the small, the petty, and the powerless) triumphs over old age (authority, repression, and the law), and the "happy ending" fulfills the son's transgressive desires to murder the father and marry the mother/bride.

In this regard, comedy contests patriarchal power and so is available to women and all oppressed people as a weapon with which to express their aggression and rage at the forces of the father. But comedy can also be turned against those people in a movement of displaced abjection, when it shifts its destructive impulses from what might be considered its "proper" target – those with greater social power – toward even weaker groups. Then comedy may express the hostility to women Freud described in his analysis of the joke or the fears of what would happen if social justice were achieved and oppressed groups liberated.<sup>55</sup>

As Rowe suggests, jokes aimed at the weaker groups in society are hostile in nature and unite the audience in feelings of superiority and domination as they work to justify the oppression and powerlessness of subordinated groups. Derisive and self-congratulatory, such jokes maintain the current social structure instead of taking the opportunity to point out and thus potentially improve upon society's failings and injustices. However, Rowe,

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<sup>55</sup> Rowe, 101-2.



like the other theorists, affirms comedy's "proper" purpose is subversive and that comedy can break taboos, fulfill transgressive desires, and act as a "weapon" for "all oppressed people."

There are, of course, a few mainstream examples of successful, relatively progressive comedies. *Mean Girls*, *Anchorman: The Legend of Ron Burgundy*, and *Harold and Kumar*<sup>56</sup> attack high school politics and popularity, sexism, and racism respectively, and altogether demonstrate that having a positive message does not lessen the comedic effect of the film (especially when you consider that homophobic humor isn't or shouldn't be funny in the first place). Rather, progressive comedy offers two additional pleasures: the pleasure of identification with the morally correct underdog (which is always cooler than being the self-affirming top dog), and the pleasure of being a part of a moral movement, of "fighting the good fight," so to speak, as we challenge huge social ills like sexism, homophobia, and racism.

In addition, comedy films don't have to change significantly in order to become subversive texts. For example, if Cal and David from *The 40 Year Old Virgin* can argue that gender nonconformity is not so bad after all, they can argue the same for homosexuality without making significant changes to the film. Likewise, Grandma Cleary's character in *Wedding Crashers* could be slightly rewritten so that we are laughing at her outmoded homophobia instead of indulging in it. In addition, adding positively portrayed gay characters to the group of loveable misfits in *Dodgeball* and *Old School* would mean that the films actually are all-inclusive, instead of merely pretending to be, while ostracizing gay men based on their sexual orientation alone. Generally

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<sup>56</sup>*Harold and Kumar* is progressive in the area of race only, but as already argued, is an incredibly homophobic text.



speaking, because most of the homophobic moments in mainstream comedy are entirely tangential to the plot of the film and could be removed without disturbing the storyline, they could, hypothetically speaking, also be replaced by equally tangential moments of antiauthoritarian humor, humor that advocates social progression, not oppression.

The most obvious way to fight the stigmatization of the queer community in mainstream film is to increase the number of positively portrayed gay characters and themes. Indeed, studies like Streitmatter's demonstrate that shows such as *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, *Dawson's Creek*, and *The Real World*, all of which feature gay characters who are multidimensional and likeable, have already made a significant positive impact on audiences. Thus, gay characters must not serve as comic figures, but characters whom we laugh with instead of at, people whom we identify with instead of repudiate. Better and more frequent representation will negate stereotypes and stigmas about homosexuality.

At the same time, we must also reassess our media representation of heterosexual men and masculinity in general. Manhood can no longer be defined in oppositional terms like *not* feminine and *not* gay. Such definitions work to deny manhood to other men and at the same time make men feel internally insecure about their own masculinity and self-worth. While I hesitate to suggest what our new cultural definition of manhood should be, I will say that its current oppositional and therefore destructive nature should be challenged as much and as often as possible. One way to counter the idea that masculinity, as it is currently defined, reigns supreme is to portray the negative repercussions of masculinity, such as repressed emotions, hatred of women, recklessness,

violence, and the like, on film. In other words, transform the man who must always “sack up” and “be a man” into the comic figure.

In addition, films should portray characters who resist the strict cultural definitions of gender and sexuality and therefore challenge our troubling notions of manhood and womanhood. Such characters could project both “masculine” and “feminine” characteristics and demonstrate that by not repressing one for the sake of other or overcompensating for a perceived lack of manliness or femininity, these characters are happier, healthier, more confident, and invulnerable to social reproof. Like Paul Finch in *American Pie 2*, such self-confident, yet entertaining characters could serve as positive models to other men and women, because their complete acceptance of themselves makes them invulnerable to taunts about their sexuality and self-worth. This type of self-confidence should, in fact, be reproduced since it encourages positive feelings about ourselves without denying those feelings to others. Indeed, while masculinity encourages negative feelings towards an “other” and relies on sexism and homophobia to exist, self-confidence and self-acceptance enable us to recognize our own strengths and look more kindly and openly at others in noncompetitive, non-defensive terms. Thus, more characters who are “comfortable with their sexuality,” or simply comfortable with themselves, will provide models for living that evade conventional gender constructions and will promote new ways of measuring self-worth that don’t rely on factors like masculinity and sexual orientation.

An example of progressive-minded humor can be found in a review of *Harold and Kumar* by Amazon.com critic Mark Englehart. Although the film review is not generally considered a comedic form, Englehart’s critique does contain some noteworthy



wit and wisdom. Englehart writes, “The only thing that may give you pause are the innumerable – and I mean, innumerable – gay panic jokes that pop up every five minutes or so. It’s so excessive at times that you want to tell *Harold and Kumar* to just make out and get it over with.”<sup>57</sup> Englehart thus critiques *Harold and Kumar*’s homophobia and points out that the “gay panic jokes” are actually caused by heterosexual insecurity, or the reverse, by the insecurity of two men who are attracted to each other, but are afraid to admit it. The flippancy with which Englehart suggests that Harold and Kumar “just make out and get it over with” shows us that homosexuality is not only not wrong, it is not a big deal, and that the fear of being seen as gay in our culture, epitomized by *Harold and Kumar*’s relentless homophobia, is just ridiculous. Englehart tells us, if you’re gay, you’re gay, and if you’re not, you’re not. Who cares? Of course, society does care, but Englehart’s joke helps us recognize this absurdity, and as a result, initiate a move away from it. Thus, in this one line of wit, Englehart criticizes the film’s homophobia (and was one of the few mainstream critics to do so), mocks heterosexual insecurity, challenges the idea that homosexuality should be taboo, normalizes homosexuality, and renders all of Harold and Kumar’s “gay panic” just plain foolishness.

In writing my own comedy script, *Don’t Be that Freshman*, my most fundamental aim was to include true and positive representations of people who are gender nonconformists and/or identify as queer. I had three basic goals while writing this film: one, that no character should be a “type”; two, that the people and situations portrayed should feel real and therefore be relatable; and three, that the film be funny and appealing to a young adult mainstream audience. As a whole, the film uses its characters to

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<sup>57</sup> Mark Englehart, Review of *Harold and Kumar Go to White Castle*, Internet Movie Base, Inc. 14 Apr. 2006 <<http://imdb.com/reviews/0366551>>.



advocate for a type of living that does not subscribe to problematic social ideologies and to normalize homosexuality and gender nonconformity.

The film revolves around three sets of roommates – Meredith and Joline, Parker and Chastity, and Matt and Teddy – all freshmen in their first semester of college who become each other's first friends on campus. There are three gay men in the film: Teddy, Cavin, and Keith. They are all very different and deal with their sexuality in different ways, from healthy and out, to hiding, to hiding and self-destructive. Meredith (Mere) is the only woman represented who may, but may not, identify as queer. Mere chooses not to reveal her sexual orientation to her roommate (possibly because she is still figuring it out), and in doing so introduces a sort of sexual ambiguity as she refuses to be categorized. Mere, therefore, advocates for the absence of labels and the absence of judgment.

Teddy is open and kind and enters college admirably confident of himself and his sexual orientation. However, throughout the film we see his relationship with his roommate, his roommate's friends, and his boyfriend wear on him as he is sexually harassed by his roommate's friend Keith, ignored by his closeted boyfriend Cavin when the two are in public, and forced to wait patiently for his friends to come around and accept him. Eventually, Teddy's closest friends do learn to see him for who he is, a person whose sexuality is a part of his identity, but not all that defines him. Importantly, the audience, like Teddy's friends, must also learn to see his sexuality as an important part of who he is but not *the* defining characteristic.

Cavin, Teddy's boyfriend, who is also a freshman, has a less visible role in the film, reflecting the fact that he is closeted and thus in hiding, so to speak. Because of

Cavin's secrecy, Teddy is made to feel like he too has to hide. Teddy cannot be open about their relationship, for example, because Cavin is not ready to be out. This forced sense of shame is deeply troubling to Teddy, though he never talks about it. In fact, we barely see or hear of Teddy and Cavin's relationship at all. Their secrecy parallels the forced secrecy and shame put upon many gay relationships, as if the "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" policy has moved from the military to the campus. Everything seems hushed, hidden, underground, and shameful. In the privacy of Cavin's room, however, we see that Cavin and Teddy actually have a deep bond, one that surprises us, since we have not seen or known them as a couple before that very moment.

The surprising closeness between Teddy and Cavin should emphasize the subtle, daily pressures on Teddy. Though he is himself openly gay, he cannot simply look to Cavin for support any time of the day, but instead must enter Cavin's room when no one is watching and endure being ignored by Cavin in public. At the end of the first term (when the film ends) Teddy leaves campus headed for Cavin's house, where he will have to pretend to be straight for the week. He tells Meredith and Gary that the future of his relationship is unknown; thus, Teddy lets us know he will choose himself over a relationship that forces him back into hiding.

Keith, a senior hockey player, quickly befriends Matt, Teddy's roommate, and is therefore drawn into the lives of our main characters. Filled with judgment for those around him and with self-loathing, Keith is physically dominating, threatening, and a heavy drinker. He has a heterosexual sexual relationship with Joline but their relationship seems to be based on unsatisfactory, unprotected sex and little else, as Keith attempts to prove to himself that he is straight. Keith's interactions with Teddy are



extremely guarded when others are present, but in two incidences Keith seems to both come on to Teddy and sexually harass him, assuming that because Teddy is gay he must be sexually available and willing. We are led to believe that Keith is gay, but his internalized homophobia and fear of being judged by other men prevent him from acknowledging his sexuality. Overcompensating for his "unmanly" sexual orientation, Keith is hyper-masculine, which leads him to be angry, sexually aggressive, self-destructive, and hateful towards others and, most viciously, towards himself.

Meredith is a first among equals in the film. An innate feminist, soccer player, and gender nonconformist, Mere hates make-up, dresses, and the color pink, is oblivious when someone likes her, has a dry sense of humor, and does not seem to care what people think about her. Nevertheless, pressures from her mother to be more feminine coupled with the pain caused by the loss of her father, with whom she had a much closer relationship, drive Mere to loathe all things "girly" and "feminine." This in turn makes Mere deny any part of herself that she would consider too feminine. Although Mere ultimately begins to date a junior named Gary, her sexuality remains somewhat ambiguous throughout the film.

Joline, Mere's roommate, at first glance seems like "that freshman girl." She parties, drinks, spends a significant amount of time in front of the mirror, and cares about partying and drinking and looks. In other words, she is very concerned about what other people think about her. Joline immediately identifies the people who are "cool" and could therefore help her climb a social ladder, starting with fellow freshman Matt and then moving on to his upper classmen friends, such as Keith, with whom she begins a sexual relationship. Joline is, therefore, less concerned with investing in friendships with



a goody-two-shoes like Chastity, a queer guy like Teddy, or a “not feminine” girl like her roommate Meredith. At the same time, Joline resents the fact that Mere spends all her time with her teammates instead of Joline and their original group of friends. She is also always first to point out that Matt has left the group for the hockey guys.

Joline and Mere are in many ways stark opposites. While Mere doesn't care what other people think about her, Joline tries to be the person others want her to be. She seems like “that freshman girl” because she is trying to be that freshman girl. Like Keith and Matt, she struggles to fit into various socially constructed molds in order to be cool, popular, and attractive. However, Joline slowly realizes over the course of the film that she is actually the one being left out by the people who really matter. As a result, Joline starts to reassess the superficial things she has been taught to value, which are not what her roommate and other friends seem to value, ultimately choosing, for example, to be better friends with Mere rather than gossip about her.

Interestingly, Joline and Mere each become more accepting of themselves as they learn to accept and value each other. In order for Mere to get along with Joline, respect her, and truly like her, for example, she must learn to value, to a certain extent, many of the “feminine” characteristics she has devalued for so long. Additionally, in order for Joline to befriend Mere, she has to put her judgments aside and stop caring that Mere is “not feminine,” and might even be a lesbian. From Mere, Joline learns that there is an alternate way to live your life, one that ignores social conventions about femininity and the importance of popularity, and that this alternate way of living has its benefits.

Joline's relationship with Keith is important in that it represents the pinnacle of emotional emptiness in Joline's life and reveals that Joline's need to have the senior

boyfriend and live the party lifestyle causes her to be reckless with her heart and her body as she engages in loveless, unprotected sex. In the beginning of the montage/climax of the film Joline walks into a bathroom stall where she discovers a positive pregnancy test indicator belonging to another student. Joline reacts almost as if the test were her own, realizing, finally, that there are serious repercussions to her actions. Hearing the student the pregnancy test belongs to crying in the shower stall, Joline sits down next to her and tries to comfort her, an act of compassion for a stranger from whom Joline has nothing to gain.

Matt, Teddy's roommate, enters college prepared for the party aspect and little else. Like Joline, he is impressed by Keith, his tough, cool, masculine exterior and his senior status. Keith is also a member of the hockey team Matt hopes to join, and Matt is quickly swept up in the team's heavy partying. His grades subsequently suffer the consequences, and Matt receives a harsh awakening when he begins failing his classes. Although he attempts to improve his grades, Matt eventually adopts an almost apathetic attitude towards his education, as if he is purposefully fostering a "dumb jock" persona. Both Keith and Matt, therefore, make us question what being "masculine" actually means given their indifference towards education, reckless partying, homophobia, insensitivity to others, and consequent unhappiness. Near the end of the film Matt ends up getting alcohol poisoning and going to the hospital. At the end of the semester, while the rest of the main characters pack one or two suitcases for winter break, Matt packs up his entire room and leaves school, having failed out.

In his interactions with Teddy, Matt is always somewhat distant. Although he never makes any outright homophobic comments, he doesn't like to be seen with Teddy



around campus and shows hostility towards him when the hockey guys are around and Teddy's back is turned. Matt clearly sees his roommate as a gay kid, and not much more. Matt's discomfort with Teddy's sexual orientation works on Teddy in subtle ways, but Teddy still finds it in his heart to keep Matt company in the hospital the night Matt gets alcohol poisoning. If Matt had gotten over his own homophobia, or heterosexual insecurity, he might have realized the value of Teddy's friendship and allowed Teddy to have a positive influence on him. Matt may not realize this in the end, but we, the audience, do.

Parker and Chastity are the third pair of roommates. Both are offbeat characters, in very different ways. Chastity has been raised by her father, Doctor Downing, since the death of her mother when she was six. Father and daughter are incredibly close, and Doctor Downing, who lives nearby, visits the college quite often. Chastity comes from a religious Christian background and has always been very sheltered, as well as home-schooled, for much of her life. As a result, Chastity has never been exposed to different types of people or different opinions and has never thought to question her (her father's) beliefs. In an early scene, Chastity tells the group, "I've never met a gay before," and she is shocked to discover that Parker does not believe in God. Although she is quite intelligent, Chastity is also naïve and on the whole seems much younger than the other characters. Throughout the film, we see her horizons opened up by her friendships, especially with Teddy, as well as her experiences at college in general. As she grows and matures, learning to think for herself for the first time, a rift grows between Chastity and her father, the most important person in her life. Chastity goes through a process in



which she must question all of her beliefs, her identity, even her father. Struggling to decide who she really is is Chastity's biggest challenge.

Parker, on the other hand, is a free spirit who seems both worldly and aloof. Although she herself is quite the oddball, Parker more than anyone else picks on Chastity for being naïve. At the same time, Parker fears being judged by Chastity and her father for her lack of religious beliefs, unique personal style, and sexual activeness. A paradoxical mix of mature and immature, Parker lacks social skills, but is sexually empowered, free thinking, and has no problem with homosexuality. Annoyed by Chastity's naïveté, Parker tries to transform her roommate into "Chas," a hipper, more Parker-esque version of Chastity. While these attempts are benign in nature, they cause Chastity immense stress and only fuel her identity crisis and problems with her father, which Parker sincerely regrets. Indeed, although she is often off in her own world, little moments cue us into the fact that Parker is quite tuned in to her friends' lives and cares for them.

Finally, Gary is a dorky but lovable junior who is immediately taken with Meredith's wit and confidence. In attempts to both get to see Mere and impress her, Gary begins going to the gym at the same time that Meredith works out with her soccer team. Gary calls Meredith's attention to her own attractive qualities, but also her resistance to romance. Though Mere's feelings for Gary are always a bit ambiguous, like her sexuality, Gary is very open and straightforward about his feelings for her. What is or should be refreshing about Gary and Mere as the romantic couple of the film, so to speak, is the fact that the attraction is based on character and not solely on physical appearance. Furthermore, there are no unrealistic demands put upon their relationship. The characters

do not fall in love in two days in some sensationalized, fantastical romantic adventure; they like each other and eventually something develops between them that is honest, if understated, and endearing.

At the end of the film, not everything is or feels resolved. Though all the characters have grown, independently and in their relationships with each other, there are still lingering questions in the air. We wonder whether Gary and Mere will stay together and what their relationship means about Mere's sexuality. We wonder if Doctor Downing will learn to accept Chastity, who is still figuring out what she thinks and who she is. Other questions include: will Cavin come out so that Teddy won't have to hide their relationship, or will Cavin's shame or fear ruin their relationship? will Matt be able to pick himself up? and will Joline actually commit herself to a more meaningful way of life?

Comedy is a powerful medium, one that is capable of making tremendous progressive social critiques, but equally capable of tempting us back into the self-affirming comforts of homophobia. Indeed, all too often we see mainstream comedy recycling the same derisive and hostile humor and using it to justify inequality, reinforce stereotypes, and encourage well-meaning individuals to find personal pleasure and reassurance in homophobia, even if the principal purpose of this humor is to stave off masculine anxiety. Freud writes:

If we bear in mind the fact that tendentious jokes are so highly suitable for attacks on the great, the dignified and the mighty, who are protected by internal inhibitions and external circumstances from direct disparagement, we shall be obliged to take a special view of certain groups of jokes which seem to be concerned with inferior and powerless people.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Freud, 125.

Thus, Freud advises us to look especially carefully at jokes whose targets are already less powerful and less "protected" than the joke-makers. We must resist the pleasures afforded by homophobic humor, which take us further away from realizing our egalitarian ideals, and instead, we must support and promote the jokes that further them, such as jokes that mock homophobia and the homophobic, reveal the falsity and absurdity of gay stereotypes, de-legitimize constructions of masculinity and heterosexual anxiety, and give the queer community a voice, empowering them through fair and accurate representation in the media.



## V. CONCLUSION

Throughout this paper, I have been concerned with readers whose social views mirror my own: people who find the inequality in our society egregious and want to put an end to homophobia. But to do so requires more than good intentions. It requires more than going to the polls to support gay rights. Personal change, risk, and unwavering commitment are all required for any type of movement to succeed.

It is my belief and hope that one day Andy Dick's performance in *Old School* will be viewed as a relic of our shamefully homophobic past, like the minstrel show is to racism. We must acknowledge, however, that changing attitudes towards African-Americans did not happen in the voting booths or because white people were hopeful or emotionally supportive of their Black friends (or simply because they *had* a Black friend). Change happened because people took a stand and demanded it happen. They marched, they fought, they created a movement. Where once there was a stigma against non-white race, now there is a stigma against racism. In many ways, the path is easier now: think of how offended people get when someone calls them a homophobe or a racist. Think of how badly you feel when you've accidentally said something that would offend someone else on the basis of his or her race, religion, or culture. We don't want to be accused of prejudice or to discover that we actually are prejudiced, but we must not close our mouths or our minds to that possibility. If we aren't willing to take a stand and change our own attitudes and actions, how can we expect anyone else to?

Negative media representation of the queer community has serious social and political consequences, and therefore, if our social ideals include equal rights and equal treatment for all, we must consciously oppose homophobic media. Considering the subversive power of comedy, we should use mainstream comedy to offer new types of pleasure, new definitions of masculinity, and new ways to combat homophobia. If we actually want to not be homophobic, to see gay rights become a reality, and to truly support our gay friends and loved ones and the queer community at large, we must pursue our stated ideals, especially when doing so necessitates risk, taking a stand, using our voice, and ending the silence that stifles us all.

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# DON'T BE THAT FRESHMAN

by  
Lijah Johanna Barasz

EXT. CAMPUS - MORNING

Moving in day. We see the college library tower, glorious, pristine. Pull back to reveal the entire campus swarmed by Suburbans. SUVs crowd the sidewalks, accompanied by the hustle and bustle of new students and their parents. We hear excited voices, car horns, car doors opening and closing.

We follow a blue sedan and a black SUV (with Uhaul trailer attached) as they make their way around campus and pull into a parking lot outside of a large residence hall.

EXT. MERE AND JOLINE'S DORM - CONTINUOUS

The SUV parks next to a smaller white sedan belonging to Meredith's MOTHER. Meredith's mother takes one final box from the open trunk of the sedan and closes it. Now we follow the box in her bejeweled hand, notice the manicured red nails and tennis bracelet. Meredith's mother goes inside the dorm,

INT. MERE AND JOLINE'S DORM, STAIRWAY - CONTINUOUS

And up the steps, down the hallway, and into

INT. MERE AND JOLINE'S DORM ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Meredith's room. MEREDITH (18) stands in the middle of her room trying to put things away. She gestures to a spot on her already covered bed, her mother puts the box down. Meredith's stuff - gym bags, books, sports clothing, T-shirts, sneakers - is spread out everywhere though there isn't a huge amount of it. Meredith and her mother continue to move things towards her wardrobe, bed, desk, etc.

Out the window we see the SUV and Uhaul. Five popped collars move around the car (JOLINE, 18, JOLINE'S MOTHER, FATHER, OLDER and YOUNGER SISTERS). Joline's father opens trunk.

INT. MERE AND JOLINE'S DORM ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Joline and family enter Meredith and Joline's dorm room carrying large armchair, tv/dvd, stereo system, giant trunk, large mirror, computer, etc.

(CONTINUED)



CONTINUED:

Mere pushes her stuff out of the way. Shakes Joline's hand. Joline's family turns to get another load.

INT. MATT AND TEDDY'S ROOM - DAY

Close up on top desk DRAWER as TEDDY organizes the index cards, pens, tape dispenser, stapler, paper clips, etc. Pull back to see one side of the room is completely in order, things put away, bed made, clothes hung. The other half of the room is empty. TEDDY sits on his bed, satisfied.

INT. CHASTITY AND PARKER'S ROOM - DAY

CHASTITY and her father (DR. DOWNING) are hanging up a picture of two kittens at play. Religious trinkets and all things pink abound. Father and daughter keep stealing glances at the other, then quickly looking away. We see they both have tears in their eyes.

INT. MERE AND JOLINE'S ROOM - DAY

Mere's mother is already gone. Out the window, we see her white sedan has been replaced by another SUV and a new family of movers. Joline's parents and sisters keep coming in with more and more loads of Joline's stuff. Mere's belongings are all now in a tiny little pile in the corner of the room. Mere looks at the sheer volume of stuff coming in and is more amazed than anything else.

INT. MATT AND TEDDY'S ROOM - DAY

Teddy sits on his bed, overwhelmed. The room is now a pigsty. Matt's stuff is everywhere. Two barely clothed women decorate the walls, a third poster is on its way up. Matt whistles while he works.

EXT. CHASTITY AND PARKER'S DORM - DAY

A Volkswagon bus pulls up, PARKER (18) and PARENTS step out.

INT. CHASTITY AND PARKER'S DORM - DAY

The door is open, Chastity and Dr. Downing are mid-embrace, crying. Parker and Parents walk in. Parker and Parents look and pause as if watching television.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Parents continue to watch the hugging and start to tear themselves while Parker walks right into the room and starts putting down her stuff. Dr. Downing breaks the hug, watches Parents watching him. Awkwardness pervades.

INT. BOOKSTORE - LATER/AFTERNOON

Gary is working at the counter, Mere and Joline walk in. Gary watches Mere. Mere and Joline walk to the book area.

INT. BOOKSTORE, SHELVES - AFTERNOON

Teddy and Parker are already there in the P section. Teddy finds a physics text book and Parker looks through various psychology books. Mere and Joline walk past the P aisle to the E aisle.

MERE

So you're actually from the  
Philippines, that's really cool.

JOLINE

I've lived here most of my life  
though.

The head into the E aisle

JOLINE (CONT'D)

You taking econ too?

MERE

No. English something. The  
literary experience I think it's  
called.

They each search shelves for their class title. In the other aisle, Parker is looking at psychology books with Teddy who's perusing the physics books.

TEDDY

(answering her)

I'm from outside Philly.

PARKER

Oh cool. I'm from Missoura.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

TEDDY

Oh wow. Nice.

PARKER

Just kidding. I'm from outside  
L.A.

TEDDY

Oh. Okay.

PARKER

I need geology.

TEDDY

(looking at slip of paper  
in hand)

I'm headed that way too.

They walk towards the G aisle. Mere and Joline are there by  
now.

JOLINE

(holding up a government  
text book)

This book weighs sixty pounds.

MERE

(looking at gender studies  
texts)

This book costs sixty dollars.

Teddy walks over to Mere.

TEDDY

Are you taking Gender and  
Sociology?

MERE

Yeah, are you?

(CONTINUED)



CONTINUED: (2)

TEDDY

No, but I really wanted that class.  
I'm in the Sociology of Gender,  
which I guess is close enough. I'm  
Teddy.

MERE

Meredith. This is my roommate

JOLINE

Joline.

TEDDY

(shaking hands)

Hi. You're both first years,  
right?

MERE

Yep.

TEDDY

Me too.

PARKER

I'm Parker.

(nonchalant)

Let's be friends.

INT. BOOKSTORE - CASH REGISTER - AFTERNOON

Mere, Parker, and Teddy are in line. Joline hands Gary her  
credit card.

JOLINE

So, Gary, you're a junior.

GARY

Yeah.

JOLINE

That's so cool. Do you party a  
lot?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

GARY

You know, now and then.

JOLINE

That's so cool.

GARY

(hands receipt)

Can you sign here?

JOLINE

Oh yeah.

(she signs, notices his  
shirt)

Do you play football here?

GARY

(What? Remembers shirt)

No. It's a joke, from my friends.  
Cause I'm not... athletic. Here are  
your books.

He moves them to the side. Joline moves away from the  
counter, Mere approaches counter.

MERE

Question.

GARY

Yes?

MERE

Do these books ever go on sale?

GARY

Textbooks?

MERE

Yes.

GARY

No.

(CONTINUED)

MERE

No?

GARY

No.

MERE

So they are always a katrillion  
dollars?

GARY

Give or take.

MERE

Dammit.

(Hands over debit card)

Okay, here's my life's savings.

Gary smiles, takes card.

INT. FOSS DINING HALL - NEXT DAY

Mere, Joline, Parker, Teddy, Chastity, and Matt are sitting  
down eating. Mere wears gym clothes.

PARKER

Seriously? You've never walked in  
on your parents?

JOLINE

Ugh. No!

PARKER

Never?

MATT

No.

PARKER

(shrugs)

It's happened to me like four  
times.

(pauses)

Okay, humor me.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)



CONTINUED:

PARKER (CONT'D)

What's the most awkward parent-child interaction you've ever had? Someone share. Chas?

CHASTITY

Me? Gosh. Not really anything.

(thinks)

I guess when I learned to drive. My dad was really nervous, and I was really, really nervous. And he just kept making me really even more nervous. But I wouldn't say it was awkward... We were just both really nervous.

PARKER

Teddy?

TEDDY

Awkward parent interaction? Oh, you know, lots of stuff.

PARKER

Like what?

TEDDY

I don't know. Someone else go. I'll try to think of something.

PARKER

You people are no fun. Parents and I have awkward interactions almost daily.

JOLINE

Hmm. Do you mean parents plural as in you and anybody's parents, or parents as in your parents, and you just call them "Parents"?

PARKER

Parents are my parents. I just call them Parents.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

TEDDY

Interesting. But when you talk to them you don't just say Hey Parents, right?

She nods.

JOLINE

What's wrong with "Mom and Dad?"  
It's like one more syllable.

NOTE: for Parker's long monologue, need to figure out how to make it work for visual medium.

PARKER

Well, first off, I don't call them "Mom" and "Dad", I call them "Dava" [Dah-va] and "Nolo," cuz what if we're in a crowded area or something and I need my mom? This way I just say Dava, and she knows what's up. So syllabically, it's actually a lot easier to just say "parents". But the real reason is like when I was four, this one night I was totally thirsty and so I'm lying on my Sealy Poster Pedic, and I'm like "Nolo! Nolo! Dava!" So Parents show up and Nolo gets me water. No problem, right? So then like a few nights later, I have this really terrible dream, I mean it's like I don't even know, you know? Like bears and flying vampire muffins and this like sixteen-legged caterpillar, and at the time I couldn't even count to sixteen, right? Crazy shit. So anyway, I'm totally freaked. So I'm just shouting in my sleep, "Dava! Dava!"

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

## PARKER (CONT'D)

Nolo!" So, you know, Parents show up, and they calm me down, and again, it's like all kittens and rainbows. But like something's wrong, you know. Like you know how you can just sense something is wrong? So I ask Parents about it, but I'm like four, so I think I'm all like, "Nolo, Dava, I'm getting weird vibes, what's going on? Did I upset you? Are there money issues, whatever, whatever." But really it comes out like, I don't know, like really garbled. But then finally I leave, and I'm headed off to my room to go play with my black Barbie - I know, totally lame, right? - but she was in the middle of this haircut, decapitation, really hot soiree thing with totally in the closet Ken and, whatever the other one's name was, um, Skippee, so I was like parent intervention off, Mattel orgy on. But on the way there, just when they think I'm out of earshot, Dava's like, "She did it again." And Nolo's like, "I'm sure it didn't mean anything." But like apparently what it came down to is when I called for Nolo first, Dava got all upset, and when I called for Dava first, Nolo got all upset. So from then on, whenever I wanted both of them, I just said "Parents," cause then no one's feelings get hurt. Well, anyway, that's like the gist of it.

## CHASTITY

Wow. I have so many more questions for you.

(CONTINUED)



CONTINUED: (4)

MATT

Damn. Dude, you're kinda messed up. You know that right?

Parker gives a little shrug.

MERE

Okay. Time for practice.

(to Joline)

I'll see you back in the room I guess.

JOLINE

Yep.

MERE

Nice to meet you, Chastity and...  
Matt.

MATT

(same time)

Matt.

MERE

Sorry. I knew it would come to me.  
Okay, I'll see you.

Mere exits.

EXT. CAMPUS - MOMENTS LATER

Chastity, Matt, Joline, Parker, and Teddy walking. Matt and Joline are a little ahead of the others.

CHASTITY

So Teddy, what was your awkward parent moment, for real?

TEDDY

Okay. I guess, I mean not I guess, it was when I came out to my parents.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

CHASTITY

Of the womb?

TEDDY

No, the closet.

CHASTITY

Oh.

(beat)

You're a homosexual?

TEDDY

Uh, yeah.

Matt and Joline join the conversation.

PARKER

Dude, that's cool. My boyfriend from home is like totally gay. He just doesn't know it yet.

CHASTITY

I've never met a gay before!

MATT

(to Chastity)

You don't have a filter do you?

CHASTITY

A filter?

MATT

Yeah, a filter that tells you what not to say out loud.

CHASTITY

Oh. No. Dude, I was home-schooled. I'm probably missing all sorts of social skills.

MATT

And you never used the word "dude" before two days ago, did you?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

CHASTITY

I used to practice saying it in my  
bedroom... But not in public, no.

(pause)

So basically, college is great. No  
homework,

JOLINE

Classes haven't started yet.

CHASTITY

Boys everywhere,

TEDDY

Isn't it sixty-forty girls?

CHASTITY

My town has more cows than people.  
So I think the male population has  
significantly improved.

TEDDY

You have a point there.

CHASTITY

And my dad is 40 miles away.

JOLINE

Forty?

CHASTITY

He wouldn't let me go out of  
county.

They enter the student union.

INT. STUDENT UNION - CONTINUOUS

Gary is leaving the post office area. Seeing him,

JOLINE

Gary! Hey.

They walk up to him.

(CONTINUED)



CONTINUED:

GARY

Hi.

JOLINE

Oh, this is Chastity, and Matt.

GARY

Hey.

CHASTITY

(shaking his hand)

Hi, pleased to meet you.

PARKER

(Reminding him.)

Parker.

(points to Teddy)

Teddy.

GARY

I remember. Joline and, where's  
the one who thought the bookstore  
was trying to rip her off?  
Meredith?

JOLINE

Soccer practice.

Pause.

GARY

Ah. Well, I gotta...

(starts to leave, turns  
back)

Actually, I'm having a little get-  
together up on the Hill tonight if  
you guys all want to come.

JOLINE

Indeed.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

GARY

Cool. Yeah, it's Hillside dorm,  
220, and, you know, invite whoever.  
Meredith, or whoever. I gotta get  
to work, but I'll see you all  
later.

JOLINE

Yeah, definitely.

MATT

(overlapping)

Thanks man.

Gary turns to go.

CHASTITY

Oh, Gary! What time should we stop  
by? And should we come casual,  
formal, business casual?

GARY

(Whuuut?)

No theme tonight. Just come as you  
are. And anytime after 9 is fine.

(mostly to Chastity)

It's just, you know a little  
welcome back to campus party for me  
and my roommates.

(to everyone)

Ok, so I'll see you tonight then.  
Nice to meet you all.

CHASTITY

Likewise.

Gary leaves the table.

MATT

(making fun)

Business casual?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

CHASTITY

What?

MATT

No nothing. It's a good question.

Done checking mail

PARKER

(indicating herself and  
Chastity)

We're going this way.

MATT

Oh, before you go, you know that  
senior I told you about?

JOLINE

Keith the hockey guy?

MATT

Keith the hockey guy. He's doing  
some "shopping" for me later if  
anyone wants anything. Just get me  
some cash before four.

CHASTITY

Oh really? I could go for some  
tampons actually. Like a mix pack.

MATT

(disgusted)  
Oh, Chas!

JOLINE

Not that kind of shopping.

MATT

Seriously, filter.

CHASTITY

What? So Parents fornicating is  
dining hall conversation, but I  
can't mention menstruation, ever?

(CONTINUED)



CONTINUED: (4)

MATT

Pretty much.

They separate with waves, head off in opposite directions.  
Matt, Teddy and Joline leave Cotter.

EXT. STUDENT UNION - CONTINUOUS

TEDDY

Pigtails has a point.

INT. JOLINE AND MERE'S DORM ROOM - EVENING

Joline is dressed and brushing her hair. Mere enters from the hallway wearing only a towel. She's just gotten out of the shower. There's an open box on Joline's desk.

MERE

What's that?

JOLINE

First care package from the  
parents.

MERE

(peering into the box)  
Cookies and a necklace, not bad.

Joline offers Mere a bin of homemade cookies.

JOLINE

Want one?

MERE

(taking a cookie)  
Thanks.

Mere takes a bite, and then puts the rest of the cookie on her dresser. She throws a pair of jeans and a T-shirt on her bed. Joline takes out her makeup kit. Definite pause in conversation.

JOLINE

Teddy's gay.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MERE

Oh, huh.

Mere starts to dress. She first drops her towel, completely at ease being naked in front of her roommate. Joline quickly turns away.

JOLINE

Yeah, he came out of the closet after you left.

MERE

He wasn't out before?

JOLINE

Oh, well, not to us. I mean we all thought he was straight. Didn't you?

MERE

Um, I don't know. I wouldn't say I gave it much thought.

(finishes dressing.)

You ready?

Mere takes another bite of the cookie.

JOLINE

No.

(sort of accusatory)

You don't primp do you?

MERE

I showered.

JOLINE

I don't mean this like I think you're gay, but like do people think you're gay sometimes because you're so, you know, not feminine?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

MERE

I don't know.

(smiles)

So, you don't think I'm gay?

JOLINE

I don't know. No. Are you? No.

MERE

Okay.

Mere grabs her toothbrush and starts to leave.

JOLINE

Wait though. Really, are you?

MERE

This really bothers you.

JOLINE

No it doesn't. Maybe. I just  
wanna know.

MERE

Look, would it make any difference  
to you if I was gay or straight? I  
mean, if I was gay, would that make  
you uncomfortable?

JOLINE

(yes)

No.

MERE

Ok then. So it doesn't really  
matter.

Mere grabs her toothbrush and opens the door. She starts to  
leave. While the door is closing,

JOLINE

(yelling)

Are you bi?



INT. "HILLSIDE HALLWAY" - LATER

(Note: will probably use Heights and Heights balcony for rooftop scenes)

Joline, Mere, Chastity, Parker, Teddy, and Matt are gathered in the hallway. Loud music plays from inside. Joline knocks. Waits. Nothing. Parker and Matt motion for her to just go in. She knocks again.

PARKER

(to Teddy)

It sounds like a total dance party  
in there!

Joline opens the door slowly. It's dark inside, but the light creeps in as they enter. There's a beer die table set up in the common room. Despite the loud music, the room is pretty empty. Gary and his three roommates are playing at the table. A boy and a girl (Post office employee) sit close together on a futon. Another boy (NELSON) sips some beer. The clock on the wall says 9:00. Gary sees the six freshman enter.

GARY

Hey Nelson, take my spot.

Nelson heads over to the table. Gary walks toward the door. They shout over the music.

GARY (CONT'D)

Hey guys. Glad you could make it.

MATT

Is this the party?

GARY

Yeah, well, it's small for now, but  
there should be more people later.  
Okay, let's see  
(remembering)  
Matt, Joline, Teddy, Parker,  
Chastity--

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

PARKER

(interrupting)

"Chas."

(to Chastity)

Cool nickname, right? Besides, you don't want to be known as resident "virgin girl".

CHASTITY

Oh, right.

Gary half nods to Mere.

GARY

And Meredith.

MERE

Mere is fine. The "dith" really holds me back socially, I feel.

Gary gets it. The others don't.

MERE (CONT'D)

So this is the Hill?

GARY

Uh, yeah. It's sorta, well we call it "the Hill," cause we live in Hillside, and "the Hill" makes it sound like a real hot spot, right?

JOLINE

You fooled us.

GARY

Yeah, well, we like it. And we have roof access, which is sweet. So, yeah, help yourself to the beer in the fridge.

MATT

I'm on it.

Matt, Joline, and Teddy head for the fridge.

EXT. ROOFTOP - LATER

Outside, the party music sounds far off. It is a clear night, and the stars are out. Teddy, Matt, and Joline have beers, Mere only drinks from her nalgene. Gary pops open another beer.

GARY

(to Mere)

Nothing for you?

MERE

I packed my own.

(gestures to her nalgene)

Water. I have early morning practice tomorrow.

PARKER

Wow. It's really cool up here.

(smiling, as if giving a  
compliment.)

This reminds me of the time my dog died.

GARY

How so?

PARKER

You really want to hear it? It's sort of depressing.

GARY

You were smiling. I thought this was a happy story.

PARKER

I said, "This reminds me of the time my dog died." How is that happy?

GARY

Well I-

(CONTINUED)



CONTINUED:

MERE

How did he die, Parker?

PARKER

He fell off the roof. I'll never forget it. Verne was four at the time. No five. Or four. I can't believe I don't remember. Four. He was four. And he and I and Gorpa -

(off their looks)

My nanna, Grandma, whatever - were out on the roof watching fire works. And poor Verne got scared and ran straight off the roof.

(pause)

Oh my G-d, I was so devastated. I cried for like-- FIVE! Verne was five. Thank G-d. - ok, I feel like I have my sanity back, you know?

Parker stares off into space, they don't know if she's done or not.

GARY

So I--

PARKER

You know what the crazy thing is though? We never heard him hit the ground. Never saw his little terrier body again. But, look up. See those three stars that look like a tail and those ones that look like a body. That's him. And he's watching over us. That night, that very night, those stars came out for the first time.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

CHASTITY

(whispers to Joline)

Which stars does she mean?

JOLINE

The big dipper.

EXT. ROOFTOP - LATER

Parker sits cross-legged, watching stars alone.

INT. GARY'S ROOM - SAME TIME

Mere walks up to Gary.

MERE

Hey, thanks for having us over. I  
have to head out now.

GARY

Already?

MERE

Yeah well, practice tomorrow.

GARY

Can I walk you to your dorm?

MERE

If you want to.

EXT. CAMPUS - MOMENTS LATER

Mere and Gary are walking towards Mere and Joline's dorm  
(Frat Row).

GARY

So, where are you from again?

MERE

Connecticut. Not too exciting.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

GARY

I've been to Connecticut before,  
it's pretty cool.

MERE

Well then you probably haven't been  
to my town.

GARY

Which town is your town?

MERE

Guilford.

GARY

Does I-95 go through there?

MERE

Yeah.

GARY

I've been there. And I stand by my  
original assertion. It's hang ten  
really cool.

MERE

Hang ten really cool?

GARY

I know what you're thinking. "What  
kind of dork actually says 'hang  
ten.'" But that's where you're  
wrong. At college, you'll learn,  
once you've reached a certain level  
of ridiculous coolness factor you  
achieve the ability to reclaim what  
appears to be the lamest vocabulary  
and make it totally rock out. See,  
I did it again. You smile, but  
seriously, one day I'll be cool  
enough to break out the cowabunga.  
And then I'll know.

(CONTINUED)



CONTINUED: (2)

MERE

What?

GARY

That I'm really cool.

MERE

Right.

GARY

Seriously. Hang with me, Mere, and you're hanging with the finest. I can get you into all the cool clubs, introduce you to some choice people, get you invited to the coolest parties -

MERE

Like the one we were just at.

GARY

(pretends to be insulted)  
Whatever. You might not think it sounds cool, but you'll learn--

MERE

(interrupting)  
Hey, what's your favorite part of campus?

GARY

New topic, okay. Um, probably the pond. But not now. In winter, when it's frozen. It's absolutely still. I mean it's freakin' freezing, but I don't know it just looks like a living black and white photograph. Beautiful.

MERE

What does it look like now?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

She veers Gary over towards where they can see the pond. It is still at a distance from them. The moon is reflected on the water. Everything is still and beautiful.

MERE (CONT'D)

Not bad.

GARY

So, what's your favorite part of campus?

MERE

I'd say, right now, that bench.

She points to the bench closest to the water. Meredith turns and heads back up the hill. Gary stands looking at the bench, the water, the moon. He looks back at Mere, waits a beat, and then finally follows her up the hill.

INT. FOSS DINING HALL - ONE WEEK LATER - DAY

Chastity, Joline, Parker and Teddy sit in a booth. Chastity is now dressed much more like a hip, cool, Indy-esque Chas than a Chastity. Meredith sits with her teammates a few tables away. Matt, lunch tray in hand, walks past their table with Keith, nodding as he passes.

MATT

What's up, Guys.

JOLINE

(to Teddy)

So, how is your hotshot roommate, by the way?

TEDDY

Why, he's a social butterfly.

(quietly)

And mayhaps an alcoholic in training. Actually this is the first time I've seen him awake and sober in a few days.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

CHASTITY

Seriously?

TEDDY

(nods)

Unfortunately. He's gotten home really late and really wasted every night this week. I shouldn't complain, it's like having a single. Which is sort of nice, in an "I'm a lonely, pathetic freshman" sort of way.

CHASTITY

Aww.

PARKER

I know. Let's have a sleep over there tonight. Lot's of roomies all at once for you.

CHASTITY

Guys, on a Wednesday? It's a school night.

PARKER

Are you serious?

CHASTITY

No. I've just always wanted to say that.

(excited)

I've never gone to a sleep over before.

PARKER

Why am I not surprised.

CHASTITY

I'll bring the nail polish.

JOLINE

I'll bring the booze.

(CONTINUED)



CONTINUED: (2)

TEDDY  
(to Joline)  
Tell your roommate.

JOLINE  
She won't come.

TEDDY  
I know. But that doesn't mean I  
shouldn't invite her.

INT. GYM - AFTERNOON

Gary is lifting ten-pound free weights and is wearing a muscle tee. Mere and her teammates enter. Mere walks over to the free weights and picks up the fifteen pounders. She stands next to Gary.

GARY  
Hey.

MERE  
Hey. Oh, Gary. I didn't even see  
you there.

GARY  
Yeah well. What's up?

MERE  
Just working out with the team.  
You work out?

GARY  
Oh, you know, getting back into it.

MERE  
Oh ok. Well, have fun.

Mere steps to the side slightly to give herself more room and returns to looking at herself in the mirror as she lifts. Gary is now really tired.

GARY  
So.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MERE

Yeah?

GARY

If you need a spotter, just let me know. I'll be over there doing shin splints.

He starts walking away.

GARY (CONT'D)

(muttering to himself)

Shin splints?

(camera shot: for previous view Gary walking away in same frame as Mere's mirror reflection. We see Gary embarrassed at having said "shin splints" and Mere giving him a stifled laugh sort of expression)

INT. JOLINE AND MERE'S DORM ROOM - 9 PM

Mere is getting ready for bed. Joline is getting ready to go out. There's a new care package, open on her desk. A sweater spills out of it. Joline is looking in the fridge.

JOLINE

Do you mind if I take the rest of this Natty over?

MERE

That's still in there? Yeah, go for it.

Joline puts the beer in her backpack.

JOLINE

I'll resupply us later.

MERE

Yeah. No worries. I can't drink until the season's over anyway.

JOLINE

That's like months.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MERE  
(shrugs)  
Yeah.

Mere climbs into bed. She's stretched out under the covers with her head propped up.

MERE (CONT'D)  
So who's going to be there?

JOLINE  
Oh, you know, the usual. Teddy,  
Parker, Chas, maybe Matt if he ever  
shows up.

Joline moves towards the door.

JOLINE (CONT'D)  
You were invited, by the way. But  
I told Teddy you wouldn't be able  
to make it.

MERE  
Yeah I have six am practice again.

JOLINE  
Yeah I know. Ok, well.

Pause. And she exits. Mere stays frozen with her head propped up. She stares at the door. Finally she turns off her desk light and goes to sleep.

INT. TEDDY AND MATT'S ROOM - LATER

Teddy, Joline, Parker, and Chas are sitting on the floor. Teddy and Joline are tipsy. Chas is painting her toenails.

TEDDY  
Don't you think it's a problem  
though? I mean I really do think  
Matt's afraid to be seen with me.

(CONTINUED)



CONTINUED:

JOLINE

Don't you think we're all slightly  
homophobic though?

TEDDY

Uh no. I'd have to say I'm  
completely homo-friendly.

JOLINE

Well then, you have something in  
common with my roommie.

CHASTITY

You really think Meredith's a  
lesbian?

JOLINE

Look, I found this in her dresser.

Joline pulls a neon green dildo out of her backpack. She  
holds it in a napkin, away from her face.

CHASTITY

Whoa, is that what they look like?

Chastity grabs the dildo and holds it, unabashedly, in her  
hand.

TEDDY

Except not neon green. And some of  
us are more well-endowed of course.

Parker takes it from her.

PARKER

(to Joline)

So what are you trying to say?  
That Mere straps this on herself  
and then uses it to have sex with  
other girls? Really, I don't see  
the big deal. It's just a dildo.

Parker finds the hidden switch, and turns it on like a pro.  
The head starts to rotate around.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

PARKER (CONT'D)

How else are women supposed to get off?

(to Joline)

What were you doing in her dresser?

JOLINE

I needed to borrow socks.

Chastity looks really disgusted and is wiping her hands on the carpet.

PARKER

What's wrong with you? Dare I ask.

CHASTITY

She sticks that in her? That's so disgusting. I thought it was just artwork. Like a statue or something.

PARKER

No, it's not artwork. It's a sex toy. Fuck, every second with you is like remedial sex ed.

CHASTITY

Sorry! Apparently I missed more growing up than organized sports, Ok?

PARKER

Chas, I didn't mean to snap at you.

(Parker stands to get  
another beer.)

I'm just, I'm still reeling from my break up with Brandon.

JOLINE

The boyfriend?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

PARKER

Ex. He came out, and now he thinks we shouldn't be dating anymore.

TEDDY

And you disagree with him?

PARKER

No. I just haven't been single for a while. And I'm gonna miss all the hypothetical sex we could be having if we were still together and he changed his mind about not sleeping together and we weren't six thousand miles apart.

TEDDY

True. That is sad.

Chastity gets up to get another chocolate milk.

CHASTITY

What about that guy you like?  
Clint?

PARKER

No. Eew.

CHASTITY

He wasn't "eew" three nights ago when you two were flirting with each other like crazy.

PARKER

First of all, a girl and a guy are allowed to talk to each other without it being called "flirting." In some circles, they actually refer to it as "conversation." Crazy, huh?

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)



CONTINUED: (4)

PARKER (CONT'D)

And secondly, the guy I was not flirting with is named Cliff, not to be confused with Clint, which is the name of this spazzoid with Backne in my geo class. Cliff, is hot and nice, and has a cute Boston accent. Clint is a fugly, suck up and is having a love affair with his igneous rock collection, if you ask me.

CHASTITY

Sorry, it's hard to keep track.

PARKER

Whatever. I have to pee.

Parker sticks the dildo in the middle of the semi circle, stands, and exits.

CHASTITY

Yeah, she really doesn't like me anymore.

Teddy and Joline give sympathetic looks.

CHASTITY (CONT'D)

It's not her fault. I'm annoying. I don't know anything. Every second with me is like remedial sex ed. I have to go to sleep by ten, and my dad calls like three times a day, and he leaves long messages in Russian and French if I'm not in, so I won't forget my languages. And if Parker checks the messages, she's stuck there for like forty minutes. I've told her she could just press 7-6, and skip the message, but she never does; and then I get yelled at.

(confessing:)

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (5)

## CHASTITY (CONTD)

And the other day, I washed her sheets, and I shouldn't have done that. I shouldn't have. It was a total invasion of her private space - for the sake of cleanliness, which may I remind you is next to godliness, but Ok, she doesn't believe in G-d!

JOLINE

You really did her laundry?

CHASTITY

(apologetically)

Yeah.

(explaining)

It was just that some guy slept over the night before and those sheets just had to be washed. I mean she hasn't washed them since she's been here...

JOLINE

(slowly)

Maybe Parker is just a little afraid you might be judging her.

CHASTITY

I'm not judging her. I like her. Which is why I don't want her to drown in her own filth or go to hell. Or worse! Get herpes! Or worse!! Fall pregnant!!

EXT. HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Parker's ear is pressed against the door, listening. She sees Matt coming down the hall. She backs away from the door

PARKER

(nonchalant)

Hey Matt.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MATT  
(tipsy)  
Hey.

Parker walks past him down the hall to the bathroom. Matt watches her, opens the door to his room, enters.

INT. TEDDY AND MATT'S ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Matt enters, sees the semi circle around the dildo.

MATT  
What's this? Sex party?

Joline quickly grabs the dildo in the napkin, and stuffs it in her bag.

JOLINE  
Hey Matt. We were hoping you'd show up.

CHASTITY  
We're having a sleep over.

MATT  
Oh, well, I'm headed out. Just had to grab my reserves.

He opens the fridge.

TEDDY  
Dude, stay awhile.

JOLINE  
Yeah. Stay.

Matt gives Joline a look. Thinks. Beat.

MATT  
Really? Yeah, Ok.

Matt grabs a beer from the fridge, pops it open and sits down next to Joline.

(CONTINUED)



CONTINUED:

JOLINE  
(leans into Matt  
playfully)  
So where have you been?

MATT  
With the hockey guys.

JOLINE  
Oh yes. The hockey guys.

Parker enters.

PARKER  
I peed.

TEDDY  
Congratulations.

MATT  
So, what have you all been up to?

JOLINE  
Classes.

CHASTITY  
Homework.

TEDDY  
Nothin'

JOLINE  
(sarcastic)  
It's totally exciting.

CHASTITY  
(genuine.)  
Are you kidding? It's the best  
thing ever.

Pan out on the scene. Five friends. Chastity is sitting and sort of cuddling with Teddy, Joline and Matt talking to each other, and Parker in her own world, but very happy.

INT. FOSS DINING HALL - DAY (SEPT. 11, 2002)

Joline, Chastity, Parker, and Teddy at their table.

JOLINE

Guys, be nice to Mere today.

TEDDY

Are we usually mean to her?

JOLINE

No, it's just, her dad died a year ago today.

CHASTITY

Oh my gosh. Of what?

JOLINE

Terrorism actually. He worked in the World Trade Center.

PARKER

(beat)

At least that's not hereditary.

Meredith comes up to the table. Everyone is uber friendly.

CHASTITY

Hey Mere.

TEDDY

Hi Mere.

PARKER

Ho Mere!

MERE

Weird. Mind if I join you guys?

TEDDY

Where's the team?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MERE

I don't know. Probably still at practice. I took the day off.

TEDDY

Any reason in particular?

Joline elbows him in the side.

MERE

No. Just needed a day off. You know.

Mere sits down. Picks up a french fry. Is about to bite it,

CHASTITY

My mom died when I was little. She almost died in childbirth actually, but she survived. Until I was five, and I gave her the chicken pox. That killed her.

(pause)

Sort of awful when you think about it.

Mere shoots Joline a look, like "you told!?!". Everyone looks extremely uncomfortable. Then, they all crack up, led by Mere and Parker, Teddy, Joline, and Chastity. Mere finally starts eating.

TEDDY

Wow. Chas, I'm sorry.

JOLINE

Yeah, that's really awful.

CHASTITY

(to Mere)

I didn't mean to steal your thunder. It's your dad's day. I was just trying to-

(CONTINUED)



CONTINUED: (2)

MERE  
(laughing)  
No, no. Totally fine.

INT. GYM - SAME TIME

Gary is standing in the gym. By his feet are two twenty pound weights. The door to the gym opens and the soccer team enters, minus Meredith. Gary picks up the weights and starts lifting, with much difficulty, as he searches for her. Finally, after he doesn't see Mere, he approaches one of her teammates.

GARY  
Hey, um, do you know where Meredith is?

TEAMMATE  
Mere? No, she didn't come to practice today.

Gary looks totally bummed. He puts his weights back and leaves.

INT. TEDDY AND MATT'S ROOM - LATER

Teddy enters. Matt and friends, including KEITH, are gathered around the TV, drinking beer.

MATT  
Hey Man.

TEDDY  
Hey.

We see Matt's friends react to "the gay kid."

MATT  
You remember Keith, Tony, James.

Only Keith looks up when Matt says his name. He looks at Teddy, and then quickly looks away.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

TEDDY

Hey.

(to Matt)

You gonna be here awhile?

MATT

Yeah.

(looks up)

That Ok?

KEITH

(reacting to the game,  
shouting)

Oh come on!

TEDDY

Yeah, I'll just go work in the  
'brary.

Teddy grabs his stuff.

TEDDY

Bye.

MATT

(doesn't look up)

Bye.

The door closes. Matt chucks an empty at the door. The guys laugh.

EXT. CAMPUS - EVENING

Gary heads out towards Mere's dorm (Pierce). He looks really nervous.

EXT. JOLINE AND MERE'S DORM - CONTINUOUS

Gary stands outside the dorm and then let's himself in.

INT. JOLINE AND MERE'S DORM - CONTINUOUS

Gary heads up the stairs. He knocks on Mere's door. There's no answer. He knocks again. No answer.

INT. JOLINE AND MERE'S DORM ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Mere is in her bed, wrapped up in sheets. She turns over and looks at the door. Ignores two sets of knocks. The doorknob turns. (note: remember new care package on Joline's desk)

The door opens. Mere watches as Gary's head appears. He sees her in bed, distraught.

GARY

Sorry. I, I didn't mean to do that.

Mere, who's been crying, is embarrassed. He starts to close the door then opens it again.

GARY (CONT'D)

Um, are you ok?

(turns)

I can come back later.

MERE

Yeah, that'd be good.

Turns to leave, turns back, turns to the door, and back again.

GARY

Seriously, are you ok though?

(pause)

One of the girls said you weren't at practice. I just got worried. You're always at practice.

(pause)

Are you sick?

MERE

No. Sad.

GARY

Do you want to talk about it?

(CONTINUED)



CONTINUED:

MERE

No.

(Pause, watches him)

Do you?

GARY

(pulling up a seat next to  
her bed.)

Yeah. Kinda.

Mere sits up, wipes her eyes.

MERE

Oh. Um, ok.

They start talking as we zoom out.

INT. HALLWAY OUTSIDE TEDDY AND MATT'S DORM - 1 AM

Teddy walks down the hallway to his door. Yawns. The door is covered with notes for Matt including a penis or two. There is one note for him from Chastity, and a fresh message from Matt which reads, "Out. -M Dawg."

Teddy walks into his room. Turns on his light and takes off his shoes.

INT. FOSS DINING HALL - BREAKFAST NEXT DAY

Mere and Teddy each carry a tray to a table.

MERE

You see Joline at all yesterday?

TEDDY

Not since lunch, no. She didn't come home?

MERE

No. Home, that's funny. I guess it is now, isn't it?

TEDDY

Is for me.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MERE

So you living in a single or a  
double these days?

TEDDY

Single by night, fucking commune  
anytime I need peace and quiet.

MERE

Awesome.

They start to eat. Mere notices a freshman boy (CAVIN)  
looking over at their table.

MERE

You're getting checked out.

TEDDY

No I'm not. Where?

Mere nods in Cavin's direction. Teddy looks over. Cavin  
smiles at him, and Teddy smiles back.

MERE

Ooh, smooth.

TEDDY

Yeah, I'm used to it.

Mere hits him jokingly.

TEDDY

What? I'm totally hot.

INT. CHASTITY AND PARKER'S DORM ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Chastity and Parker's room has been split down the middle,  
decor-wise, with obvious differences between the religious,  
pink pony side and the Being-an-individual-means-owning-  
nothing-that-matches side. The beds are bunked, with  
Chastity on the top bunk. Parker is in the room with Clint,  
on her bed, making out. Her shirt is unbuttoned. Clint is  
wearing only his underwear (tighty whiteys). The lights are  
dim. There's a knock at the door.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

PARKER

Come back later. We're screwing!

Parker giggles and resumes kissing.

EXT. CHASTITY AND PARKER'S DORMROOM - CONTINUOUS

We see Dr. Downing from the neck down, in a business suit, knocking on the door.

DR. DOWNING

(very gruff adult voice)

Is Chastity there?

INT. CHASTITY AND PARKER'S DORMROOM - CONTINUOUS

PARKER

Dr. Downing?

MR. DOWNING

Parker?

He turns the knob, which is locked.

PARKER

(buttoning her top)

One second.

She pushes Clint off of her. He continues to try to kiss her.

PARKER

Stop it! Get off.

He continues

PARKER (CONT'D)

Clinton I-Don't-Know-Your-Middle-  
Name Whitney

CLINT

(cringes, pulls away)

What?

(CONTINUED)



CONTINUED:

PARKER

That's Chas's father. Move it or lose it.

(yelling)

One second, Dr. Downing.

Parker gets up. Clint, who's wearing only tighty whiteys, finds his shirt on Parker's desk chair and throws it on (back-ne). He searches for his pants.

PARKER (CONT'D)

Where are your pants?

CLINT

I don't know!

They both look, quickly, but don't see them. Parker points to the floor.

PARKER

Sit.

Parker throws a notebook from her desk to the floor. Flips on the room light and tosses Clint a blanket from her bed.

PARKER

Put it over you!

He puts the blanket over himself. Parker takes a deep breath and opens the door.

PARKER (CONT'D)

Hi Dr. Downing. What a nice surprise.

DR. DOWNING

Good evening. I sincerely hope I wasn't intruding on anything here.

PARKER

Oh no. My friend Clint and I were just studying. Clint, Dr. Downing, Chastity's father. Dr. Downing, Clint.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

DR. DOWNING  
(extends a hand)  
Pleased to meet you.

Clint holds the blanket over himself as he half stands up to shake hands. Dr. Downing looks at him strangely.

DR. DOWNING (CONT'D)  
Are you cold, Son?

CLINT  
I just, this is my favorite blanket.

DR. DOWNING  
(clears his throat)  
So is Chastity around?

PARKER  
She's, hmm, she might be at cheer practice.

DR. DOWNING  
But it's Friday. If I remember correctly, and I think I do, cheer practice is Monday and Wednesday.

PARKER  
Prayer group?

DR. DOWNING  
Thursday evening.

PARKER  
Piano lesson?

DR. DOWNING  
Tuesday.

PARKER  
(nervous laughter)  
Wait! No, it is a piano lesson, her teacher had to reschedule this week.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

DR. DOWNING  
She didn't tell me that.

PARKER  
You have to know everything?

DR. DOWNING  
I am her father.

PARKER  
Right.

Dr. Downing sits down in Chastity's desk chair. Parker and Clint watch him. Uncomfortable silence.

PARKER  
So, geology.

CLINT  
Right. Yes, geology.

He opens the notebook.

CLINT  
Interesting, mmhmm. We were just,  
we're just, studying.

DR. DOWNING  
Well, don't let me bother you.

Parker and Clint look at the notebook in silence. Dr. Downing watches them and then surveys Parker's side of the room disapprovingly (handmade poster of, hm, Bill Clinton's head on an Abercrombie model's body? "support our soldiers.... right to fornicate with other men"?). Dr. Downing's eye catches on Clint's pants, hanging over the edge of Chastity's bed.

PARKER  
Would you like something to read  
while you wait?  
(standing)  
I'm gonna get you a paper from the  
hallway.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)



CONTINUED: (4)

Parker and Clint look at the notebook in silence.

Don't move, just uh, look at this poster.

(one of Chastity's  
religious posters)

Cool, huh? I'll be right back.

She walks out the door.

INT. CHASTITY AND PARKER'S DORM - HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Parker shakes her head as if to say, "What am I doing?" She walks towards a stack of newspapers in the hallway.

INT. CHASTITY AND PARKER'S DORM ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Clint and Dr. Downing stare at each other. Clint meekly smiles.

CLINT

It's good to have a study buddy...  
With midterms coming up and  
everything.

(pause)

I'm actually Parker's tutor. I  
mean, really, I am. I know you  
think... but...

Dr. Downing just glares. The glaring continues.

CLINT (CONT'D)

So I hear Chastity is a lovely  
girl. I don't really know her.  
But I'd like to. I met her once.  
She seems... really nice.  
Charming. And smart. Smart as a,  
uh, button. Or, you know, a thumb  
tack. You can just, you can just,  
you can just stick her in a wall  
and she holds stuff. You know  
really smart.

INT. CHASTITY AND PARKER'S DORM - HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Parker, newspaper in hand, is walking back towards her room.

INT. CHASTITY AND PARKER'S DORM ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Dr. Downing just glares at Clint for a beat. Then Clint bolts up, blanket falling off him, grabs his pants, and runs from the room.

INT. CHASTITY AND PARKER'S DORM - CONTINUOUS

We see Parker walking towards her room as Clint comes running out in his underwear trying to get on his pants and run at the same time. Once they are on, he flies off in the opposite direction.

PARKER

(calling)

Clint!

CLINT

Sorry!

(whispers loudly)

He's just so scary!

Parker stands in the hallway, stunned, until Clint is gone from view. Finally she walks towards her door.

INT. CHASTITY AND PARKER'S DORMROOM - CONTINUOUS

The doorknob turns. Parker walks in slowly. Dr. Downing watches her.

DR. DOWNING

Your friend left.

PARKER

I saw.

DR. DOWNING

No pants.

PARKER

Nope.

They're both quiet and embarrassed.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

DR. DOWNING

Just be careful what you do and say  
around my daughter. That's all I  
ask.

PARKER

Of course.

She puts the paper on Chastity's desk, and then sits back  
down on the floor looking at her notebook.

INT. CHASTITY AND PARKER'S DORM ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Parker sits studying, Dr. Downing is reading the paper. Both  
shoot each other glances, are clearly uncomfortable.  
Chastity enters.

DR. DOWNING

Hey Baby Girl.

CHASTITY

Daddy!

DR. DOWNING

Give me a hug.

They hug.

CHASTITY

When did you get here?

DR. DOWNING

Oh, bout fifteen minutes ago.

PARKER

I didn't know your dad was coming  
today, Chas.

Dr. Downing should obviously be monopolizing his daughter's  
attention.

DR. DOWNING

Chas?

(CONTINUED)



CONTINUED:

CHASTITY

Oh yeah. My nickname. Isn't it cute?

DR. DOWNING

Where's your cross, Honey?

CHASTITY

Oh, my friend Teddy gave me this one. It's a diversity cross.

DR. DOWNING

Oh. That's nice.

CHASTITY

Isn't it? So yeah, how do you like what we've done with the place?

PARKER

If I'd known you were coming I would have cleaned up more.

Dr. Downing gestures to a picture of the Virgin Mary above her desk.

DR. DOWNING

I'm so glad there are some people in this world who still know the value of purity and faith.

CHASTITY

Thanks Daddy.

DR. DOWNING

So, can I take my little girl out to dinner?

CHASTITY

Of course. Parker, do you want to come?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

DR. DOWNING

- (privately to Chastity)

I thought, you know, I haven't seen  
you in awhile. Why don't we go  
just the two of us. Nothing  
personal, Parker.

Parker smiles weakly.

CHASTITY

Oh, ok. Daddy.

EXT. TEDDY AND MATT'S DORM - WEEKS LATER

We see the passage of time, as evidenced by the fall leaves.  
(May instead have Chastity taking notes to show passage of  
time, her dating the top page of her notes)

INT. CLASSROOM - DAY

The class is filing out the door, Matt and another student  
(ED) hang behind. It is just the two of them and the female  
professor. Ed is incredibly nervous.

ED

I didn't get my paper back.

MATT

Me neither.

ED

(looking around)

Is it... is it just the two of us?

The professor gets two papers out of her briefcase.

PROFESSOR

Yes.

ED

What does this mean? Did we fail  
or do we--

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

PROFESSOR

This means you have by the end of this week to submit a rewrite. If you don't, or if the rewrite is of the same caliber as this edition, which I'm sorry to say is absolute rubbish,

Ed starts crying.

PROFESSOR

then you're forcing me to give you an F and put you on academic probation.

MATT

How do we know what changes we're supposed to make?

PROFESSOR

You make time to meet with me, this afternoon or tomorrow, and we'll discuss them.

(beat)

Look, I'm giving you both a second chance. You don't take this seriously, there are no more second chances. Understand?

ED

Yes.

MATT

Yeah.

INT. TEDDY AND MATT'S ROOM - SAME TIME

Teddy enters. Matt's studying at his desk, which has been recently cleared of papers and the usual random crap. Random crap now resides on his unmade bed.

(CONTINUED)



CONTINUED:

TEDDY  
(surprised)  
Hey.

MATT  
(doesn't look up)  
Hey. (CONT'D)

TEDDY  
You still live here?

MATT  
Funny.

TEDDY  
Where are your cronies?

MATT  
(irritated)  
I'm studying.

TEDDY  
Oh, ok. Sorry, sorry.

Teddy grabs a book from his desk.

TEDDY  
Hey, I'm off to the library. You  
wanna come?

MATT  
Uh, yeah. Yeah. That'd be good.  
This paper is kicking my ass.

He grabs his books.

TEDDY  
Try having three midterms all next  
week.

MATT  
Do I need my coat?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

TEDDY

Naw, it's like two feet away.

(realizing)

You do know where the library is,  
right?

They head towards the door.

MATT

(not really)

Yeah.

As the door closes.

MATT

It's like two feet away.

INT. GARY'S DORMROOM - SAME TIME.

Gary and two of his roommates are in his room looking at his muscles. His roommates watch him, amused, as he flexes.

GARY

I really think I'm coming along,  
Guys.

ROOMMATE 1

No.

ROOMMATE 2

No Dude.

GARY

Seriously, look at these guns.

He flexes. Roommate 3 pokes his head into the room.

ROOMMATE 3

What are we doing?

ROOMMATE 2

Looking at Gary's muscles.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ROOMMATE 3

Oh.

Roommate 3 ducks his head back out of the room.

GARY

(flexing)

I couldn't do that before. Ok,  
come on, that's totally a new  
muscle.

Roommate 1 just leaves. Roommate 2 watches him go, then  
follows. Gary continues to flex in the mirror.

There's a knock at the door. Mere enters. Reacts to his  
flexing.

MERE

Bad time?

GARY

Oh, no, I was just, stretching.  
What's up?

He pulls up a chair.

GARY

Have a seat.

MERE

No thanks, I've got to run.

GARY

Oh, ok.

Silence.

GARY

Do you want some peanuts?

He hands her a bag.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

MERE

No thanks. Do you-

(smiles, embarrassed)

The soccer team has this, stupid,  
dance thing at the end of the  
season.

GARY

(interrupting)

The soccer ball.

MERE

Yeah, the soccer ball. And so I  
was just wondering if you'd like to  
go with me. As friends. Just you  
know. A friend thing.

GARY

Yeah. Yes. Definitely.

MERE

Oh good.

GARY

It's formal, right?

MERE

Yeah? Yeah yes. I just, ugh. I  
hate dressing up.

GARY

How bout this, I'll wear a dress,  
and you wear a suit.

MERE

I like it.

GARY

I was kidding.

(CONTINUED)



CONTINUED: (3)

MERE

(smiles)

I know. Ok, I gotta run. More details later.

She exits. He flexes. He's so cool. She pokes her head back in, catching him at the mirror again.

MERE

Hey, thanks.

Gary reacts, really embarrassed. Tries to cover for his flexing. Smiles.

GARY

Any time.

Mere exits.

INT. OUTSIDE GARY'S ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Mere walks out of Gary's room, smiling.

INT. GARY'S DORMROOM - CONTINUOUS

Gary sits down on his bed, he's so uncool.

EXT. TEDDY AND MATT'S DORM - TWO WEEKS LATER - AFTERNOON

Establishing shot. --And maybe have Chastity write date in her notes.

INT. TEDDY AND MATT'S ROOM - SAME

(post-midterms)

Teddy is at his desk reading a biology text. Near his desk, there is a graded paper posted to the fridge with a big F on it. Matt and his friend Keith are on the futon drinking, watching football, and yelling at the TV. Teddy tries to work, but can't. Matt stands up.

MATT

I gotta piss, Dude.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

KEITH

(pointing to exam on  
fridge)

Yo Matt, that yours?

MATT

(smiling)

Yeah.

KEITH

(laughing)

That's fuckin' funny dude.

Matt leaves, smiling. Teddy is at his desk reading. Once Matt leaves, the moment is immediately awkward. Keith stands up and stretches.

KEITH

So I hear you're gay. That's cool.  
That's cool. I'm not. But you  
know.

Keith walks closer to Teddy, pretending to be interested in photos/posters around the room. Keith teeters back and forth from confident, to harassing, to embarrassed/vulnerable.

KEITH (CONT'D)

So like, if I wanted you to suck me  
off someday, you think you'd be up  
for it? I'm not gay or anything,  
I've just always, you know,  
wondered what'd it be like. We  
wouldn't have to tell anyone.

He comes really close to Teddy, almost on top of him.

KEITH (CONT'D)

But you'd be up for it, right?

TEDDY

Sorry, I don't give sexual favors.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

KEITH

You're the one getting the favor  
dude.

(grabs his shoulder)

Now don't get confused about what's  
going on here.

Teddy pushes his chair from his desk deliberately, grabs his bag, and his book and leaves the room. Keith sits back down on the futon. Matt enters, looking into the hallway as if watching Teddy.

KEITH

Your roommate man. Weeeird.

Matt shrugs at Keith. Joins him on the futon.

INT. RESTAURANT - EVENING

Chastity and Dr. Downing are out to dinner.

CHASTITY

No, I'm not saying I don't  
appreciate your visits. I just  
wish you'd give me some notice  
first.

DR. DOWNING

I checked your schedule Honey. I  
knew you didn't have any  
extracurriculars this afternoon,  
and your midterms are over.

CHASTITY

I know. It's just

(note: It'd be really cool if they could start conversing in Russian or French here, with subtitles beneath...)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

CHASTITY

It's just, it's like, I might be hanging out with friends, or like, I don't know, doing something with Parker.

DR. DOWNING

I'm sorry, "or like doing something with Parker." Did you just say "or like doing something with Parker"? What are you, a valley girl now?

CHASTITY

No. It means "for example," Daddy. Or, for example, I could be doing something with Parker.

They take a few bites in silence.

CHASTITY

How's your lab work coming?

DR. DOWNING

Good. I'm presenting next week.

CHASTITY

You told me.

DR. DOWNING

Yeah. Well.

Chastity eats a carrot from her salad.

DR. DOWNING

You like carrots now?

CHASTITY

Yeah. My friend Teddy made me try them the other day, and I realized I hadn't had one since I was like--  
(looks down)  
since I was seven. And I like them now.

(CONTINUED)



CONTINUED: (2)

DR. DOWNING

I always asked you to give them  
another chance.

CHASTITY

I know, Daddy.

DR. DOWNING

But I wouldn't force you. I never  
forced you to eat carrots.  
Remember that.

CHASTITY

I know Daddy. I appreciate it.

DR. DOWNING

Teddy's the, uh, the one who likes  
other boys?

CHASTITY

Yes, Daddy. He's a good friend.

Dr. Downing shifts in his seat. Takes another bite.

DR. DOWNING

(While chewing, softly,  
and getting emotional)

All these years, you could have  
been eating carrots, and I never  
knew.

CHASTITY

What's wrong, Daddy?

DR. DOWNING

I just, I don't know who you are  
anymore.

CHASTITY

I'm the same person. It wouldn't  
be college if I weren't learning  
new stuff.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

DR. DOWNING

This is not exactly the education I  
sent you off for.

(slight pause)

Are you still going to be premed?

Chastity looks down.

DR. DOWNING

(that's it)

Check please.

INT. TEDDY AND MATT'S ROOM - 2 AM

Teddy is lying in bed, awake. Looking at the clock. It's  
just past two in the morning. Matt comes in. Teddy turns on  
his desk light. Matt yells.

MATT

Fuck. You scared me.

TEDDY

We need to talk.

MATT

Now? I'm really hammered.

TEDDY

Yeah, well, when then?

MATT

I don't know. Tomorrow.

TEDDY

Tomorrow?

MATT

Yeah. Tomorrow.

TEDDY

Tomorrow at three then. I'll meet  
you here after your class.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MATT

I was gonna go to the gym.

TEDDY

Fucking cry about it.

(he rolls over)

Goodnight.

INT. FOSS DINING HALL - LUNCH

Teddy, Chastity, Parker, and Joline are sitting down together. Mere approaches the table. Everyone except Mere and Chastity is in a bad mood.

CHASTITY

Hey Mere.

MERE

Hey.

CHASTITY

Pull up a chair.

JOLINE

She can't. She's with the team.

Mere shoots Joline a look.

JOLINE

Well you are, aren't you?

MERE

I can sit for a minute.

JOLINE

Blessed be. A whole minute.

MERE

So what's with all the long faces?

TEDDY

It hasn't hit you yet? Midterm exam grades are rolling in.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

PARKER

Stop smiling, Chas.

CHASTITY

I'm not.

JOLINE

So have you asked you-know-who to  
the ball yet?

CHASTITY

What ball?

JOLINE

The soccer ball.

MERE

It's this stupid little thing.

CHASTITY

I've never gone to a ball before.  
Can I go?

MERE

Oh no, sorry. It's players and  
dates only.

CHASTITY

So who'd you ask?

PARKER

God, give the woman air.

MERE

Gary? Do you remember him, he's  
like tall, lanky-

CHASTITY

Yeah, Gary.

PARKER

Gary. Yeah, we all know Gary.

(CONTINUED)



CONTINUED: (2)

MERE

Yeah, well, we're going as friends.

JOLINE

Sure.

MERE

We are.

JOLINE

Oh come on, Mere. Gary's in love with you.

MERE

Could you lower your voice?!

JOLINE

And we've all seen the way he looks at you. Can't keep his eyes off you.

MERE

Oh that. I think he has a lazy eye or something.

JOLINE

Sure he does.

MERE

You know, I think I liked you better when you thought I was gay.

TEDDY

I hate to admit it, but she's right, Mere. The boy likes you more than Matt likes to get tanked. And let's face it. That's a lot of love.

MERE

Yeah well. Anyway, I just wanted to remind you about the game this Saturday. 12:00, at the field.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

MERE (CONTD)

It's our last home game so it'd really mean a lot if you came. And if any of you see Matt, please let him know. I don't know, he's usually here around this time with his meathead buddies, but I don't see him. He's alive, right?

TEDDY

Yeah. Just avoiding me.

MERE

Hmm.

(standing)

Well, minute's up.

JOLINE

Told you.

MERE

Bye guys. I'll see you tomorrow.  
Don't forget.

Mere leaves. Everyone stares at Joline, uncomfortable silence.

JOLINE

What?

PARKER

I'm bummed about exams too, but, Dude, you're having like the bitchy version of the Chastity-no-filter syndrome.

CHASTITY

That's not very nice.

PARKER

(to Joline)

Sorry.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (4)

CHASTITY  
(indignant)  
To me!

PARKER  
Oh, well I don't mean now. I mean  
like you were. Before. Old  
Chastity. Now you're Chas.

CHASTITY  
Right. A totally different person.

PARKER  
Right.

INT. TEDDY AND MATT'S ROOM - 3 PM

Teddy is in his room reading. He looks up at the clock; it's  
3 on the dot.

INT. GYM - SAME TIME

Matt is working out.

INT. TEDDY AND MATT'S ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Teddy looks at the clock. It's 3:10.

INT. GYM - MOMENTS LATER

Clock behind Matt says 3:30. Matt walks out of the gym

INT. HALLWAY OUTSIDE LOCKER ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Matt walks from the men's locker room towards the door. Mere  
is close behind.

MERE  
(yelling)  
Matt! Matt wait up.

MATT  
(harsh)  
What?!

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MERE

Whoa. Hello to you too.

MATT

I'm kinda in a hurry.

MERE

Oh ok, I just had a quick question for you. Do you have any plans tomorrow morning? Not morning, like 12 o'clock.

MATT

Sleeping.

MERE

Sleeping? Oh, cause it's our last home game. And it's sort of a big one. So I was wondering if you could maybe just this one time wake up at like 11:55 and come.

MATT

Tomorrow you said?

Mere nods.

MATT

Yeah ok.

Mere hugs him.

MERE

Thanks so much.

Matt loosens up. They walk towards the door.

MERE

So have you met Teddy's man-crush? He's totally hot.

MATT

(tensing again)  
Teddy has a boyfriend?

(CONTINUED)



CONTINUED: (2)

As they exit.

MERE

Well, not yet. But he's working on it. Geez when was the last time you talked to that boy?

INT. JOLINE AND MERE'S DORM ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Joline is in the room, plucking her eyebrows. Mere returns from with a large bag of clean laundry. Joline quickly finishes plucking and puts her tweezers away. Mere empties her laundry onto her bed and begins folding. Joline starts typing on her computer.

MERE

Could you not tell everyone every detail of my private life?

JOLINE

What are you talking about?

MERE

Never mind.

JOLINE

What?

MERE

I don't even want to have this conversation with you. Forget I said anything okay?

JOLINE

Okay. I don't even know what you're mumbling about anyway.

MERE

Hm. Ok. Well, for instance, next time my mom calls, please just try to refrain from telling her I have a boyfriend. Cause, for starters, that's not true.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MERE (CONTD)

And secondly, I really don't care if she shares your fear that I'm a lesbo, Ok? And next time you're with our friends and you run out of things to talk about, don't bring my personal possessions along for show and tell.

JOLINE

You mean your dildo?

MERE

Yes, I mean my dildo.

Pause.

JOLINE

Whatever you think, I actually don't care about what you do in your private life. Hell, I don't even know you have a private life. All I know is you play soccer, and you occasionally grace your unathletic friends with a few moments of your time.

MERE

Well, wonderful. Then I'm sure you'll be able to avoid talking about me from now on. I mean you must have a life of your own to discuss, right? You think everyone has to have a crush, so who do you like? Where do you go when you're not around every other night?

JOLINE

You'd like to know wouldn't you?

MERE

(very composed)

Yeah, I would.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

MERE (CONTD)

Although I have to say it's more concern than curiosity that makes me wonder where you are two am on a Wednesday night.

Mere stares at Joline who looks away and starts opening her care package. Mere sighs, turns to her laundry.

MERE (CONT'D)

Plus, then maybe I could stop lying to your parents when they call. Volunteering? Your mom and dad are actually supposed to believe me when I say you're out volunteering at 10 o'clock on a Saturday night?

JOLINE

They'll buy anything.

Joline pulls an Ipod out of her care package.

MERE

Literally, yes they will. That's not the point.

JOLINE

What is the point?

MERE

Either we're friends or we're just going to have to agree not to get in each other's business.

JOLINE

(yelling)

Well, I'd rather be friends.

MERE

Well, good then. Start acting like one.

INT. STUDENT POST OFFICE - SAME TIME

Teddy is at the post office window. Being waited on by the student employee.

TEDDY

Hi. I have a package for Theodore Hamilton.

EMPLOYEE

Name?

TEDDY

Uh. Theodore Hamilton.

EMPLOYEE

(extending her hand)

You made it just in time, we're about to close.

TEDDY

(distracted)

Oh, right.

Employee extends her hand farther. Teddy looks at it, confused.

EMPLOYEE (CONT'D)

Your student ID please?

TEDDY

(hands it over)

Oh, sorry. I guess I'm sorta out of it today.

EMPLOYEE

(goes to shelves)

Sign your name on the sheet.

Teddy signs the sheet. A group of students, including Cavin, walk past the post office. Teddy looks up as they come. Cavin sees him, makes eye contact for half a second, and then looks away and continues talking with the girl and guy next to him. Teddy watches them pass.

(CONTINUED)



CONTINUED:

EMPLOYEE

Here you go.

Teddy continues watching Cavin.

EMPLOYEE (CONT'D)

Hey. Uh, Theodore. Here's your package.

TEDDY

Oh. Thanks.

Teddy takes his package and leaves.

INT. JOLINE AND MERE'S DORM ROOM - NIGHT

Both Joline and Mere are lying in their beds. Mere's desk light is on.

JOLINE

I have a boyfriend.

MERE

You do?

JOLINE

Yeah I do. He's a senior. You probably don't know him.

MERE

When'd you start dating?

JOLINE

Just a few weeks ago month. We met at this party. Matt introduced us. But no one knows, Ok? Not even Matt. And I want to keep it that way. Well, we, he wants to keep it that way. You're the only one who can know.

MERE

What's his name?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JOLINE

Keith.

MERE

Don't know him.

JOLINE

Yeah.

(beat)

You?

MERE

I'm not dating anyone... And you  
guys totally freaked me out about  
Gary liking me. We're just  
friends.

JOLINE

(sarcastic)

Sure.

MERE

We're friends.

JOLINE

(genuine)

Yeah Ok. You're friends.

EXT. SOCCER FIELD - NOON

In the stands, Joline (wearing a short skirt), Chastity,  
Parker, and Teddy sit next to each other. Matt's nowhere to  
be seen. A mildly awkward, yet adorable freshman boy (TOM)  
walks by. He notices Chastity.

TOM

Chastity, right?

CHASTITY

Yeah.

TOM

(extends a hand)

I'm Tom.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

They shake.

CHASTITY

I know. You sit behind me in  
Russian Lit.

TOM

Yeah. I heard you broke the curve.

CHASTITY

You mad at me too?

TOM

No, that's cool. I'd be bragging  
to everyone if that were me. Not  
that that would ever happen. But  
anyway, I was wondering if maybe I  
could copy your notes from the  
fifth sometime? I was out with  
the, Ok, I went to a Roots concert,  
but according to my doctor's note I  
had a wicked bad stomach flu.

CHASTITY

Yeah, no problem. We're on the  
third floor in Pee Wee. Stop by  
anytime.

TOM

Awesome, ok. See you around.

CHASTITY

Yeah, see ya.

Tom leaves. Parker, Joline, and Teddy explode into laughter.

JOLINE

Someone has a boyfriend.

CHASTITY

(smiling ear to ear)  
Shut up.

Gary joins them with two of his friends.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

GARY

Hey guys.

TEDDY

Hey.

Gary and his friends sit down. Ad lib greetings.

GARY

Did I miss anything?

PARKER

Nope. You're right on time.

Mere drives up to the goal. She passes to another player who shoots and scores.

EXT. SOCCER FIELD - LATER

The game is over. The crowd's dispersed. Gary, Teddy, Parker, Chas, and Joline meet up with Mere on the field.

GARY

(yelling to Mere as he  
approaches)

Great game!

Mere is noticeably awkward around Gary now.

MERE

Wow, thanks everyone for coming.  
Matt's a no show?

TEDDY

At least he's consistent.

MERE

True true.

GARY

You were amazing out there.

(CONTINUED)



CONTINUED:

MERE

Thanks.

(turning to her regular  
group)

So what are you guys up to now?

TEDDY

Hangin'

PARKER

Hangin' (CONT'D)

CHASTITY

Hangin' (CONT'D)

JOLINE

Apparently, we're hangin'

GARY

We're having a little thing up on  
the Hill tonight if you guys want  
to come.

CHASTITY

(coooooool)

Oh yeah?!

MERE

Yeah, well, we'll see. I gotta go  
shower and change.

(to her select few)

Catch up with you later?

She runs off. Gary tries to recover from the snub.

TEDDY

(to Joline)

So what are you up to really?

JOLINE

(hiding)

I have a thing.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

TEDDY

You have a thing?

JOLINE

Yeah a thing. I have a thing.

TEDDY

(to everyone)

Does anyone else have a thing?

PARKER

No thing.

CHASTITY

No thing. (CONT'D)

TEDDY

Well then. Let's get ice cream.

Teddy, Chastity, and Parker walk off together. Joline stands still and then walks off in another direction. Gary, alone, looks lost and lonely.

INT. KEITH'S ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Joline enters the room. It's a pigsty. Keith is standing by his stereo, which is playing really loud rock music. He's trying to glue a knob back in place. There's an open beer by his elbow.

JOLINE

Hey.

He doesn't hear her.

JOLINE

(shouting)

Keith! Hey!

Keith notices her and half smiles. He turns down the music.

KEITH

Hey.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JOLINE

What happened?

KEITH

Nothing. Drunk-cident.

Joline goes to sit down on his couch, but first has to move his stuff around. She grabs a jacket and a sweater and throws them onto the floor, onto another mound of clothes.

KEITH

Whoa, watch it with that stuff.

Joline raises her eyebrows, and then continues to move one pile to another, but now more carefully. She sits down on the couch. Keith, sick of the stereo, turns around. He sees her sitting there and smiles. He sits down next to her, puts one hand on her inner thigh and begins kissing her hard. She reciprocates, although is clearly not as into it as Keith. As he climbs on top of her, Joline leans back against a large pile of clothes. Keith stops kissing her for a second and looks at her.

KEITH (CONT'D)

You're beautiful, you know that?

Joline smiles. That's why she's here. She pulls him towards her. They kiss. We pull away, hear jeans unzipping. On Keith's desk is an unopened condom.

(note for previous scene: the rock music should accentuate the lack of romance between them.)

EXT. CAMPUS - 2 WEEKS LATER - DAY

Establishing shot shows passage of time. The ground is covered in snow. People walking around wear heavy jackets, hats and gloves.

INT. CLASSROOM - DAY

Matt stands in front of a large classroom next to a poorly constructed poster. He looks at the poster. He looks out at the class confused.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MATT

I'm sorry, can you repeat that?

PROFESSOR

(slowly, over-  
annunciating)

Did you. Understand. The  
assignment?

MATT

Yeah. I think so.

PROFESSOR

Because you've just presented the  
class with a poster listing the  
differences between realism and  
liberalism, and that's it. This  
shows us you know how to use the  
glossary at the back of your  
textbook.

Class laughs.

PROFESSOR (CONT'D)

You've yet to connect any of these  
theories to current events, which  
was the assignment...

CUT TO:

INT. CLASSROOM - LATER

Class is empty except for Matt and the professor.

PROFESSOR

...So let me ask you a third time.  
Did you understand the assignment?

MATT

Well, it looks like I didn't.

(CONTINUED)



CONTINUED:

PROFESSOR

No, it looks like you didn't care.  
It looks like you made this last  
night. It looks like you spilled  
your breakfast on the top right  
corner.

Matt looks back blankly.

PROFESSOR (CONT'D)

In case you're confused, Mr.  
Seabrook, this is your opportunity  
to try to convince me why I  
shouldn't fail you. Why I should  
give you another second chance.

(Beat)

Look. You can turn in a rewrite on  
the day of the final. Or you can  
not turn in a rewrite. The choice  
is yours.

(stares hard at him,  
pause)

What I'm looking for at this point  
is a heartbeat. Just give me some  
sign of life, can you do that?

MATT

(nods)

Yeah.

INT. JOLINE AND MERE'S DORM ROOM - AFTERNOON

It's the weekend before final exams begin.

Mere is preparing for the soccer ball. She's wearing a dress  
and is not happy. Joline is trying to help her get ready.  
There's a new unopened care package on Joline's desk and a  
small package peeking out from under Mere's bed.

JOLINE

Stop fidgeting.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MERE

I can't help it.

JOLINE

Yes, you actually can.

MERE

Fine. What are you doing to me?

JOLINE

It's called eyeliner. Ever heard of it?

MERE

You really think this is necessary?

Joline finishes, and hands Mere her makeup mirror.

MERE

I look like a moose in drag.

JOLINE

You do not. I know you don't believe me. I know you think you look weird, but trust me you look hot. You look like a girl!

MERE

Ugh, my worst nightmare.

Joline pulls out a camera.

MERE

No no no no no. No pictures. I want no reminders of this night.

JOLINE

Come on. You know full well seeing you in lipstick and a gown will get your mom off your back for like a whole month.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

MERE

(thinking)

Ok, get it over with quickly.

Joline snaps a picture.

JOLINE

P.S. What's in the box?

MERE

My first care package.

JOLINE

It's about time.

MERE

It's actually my birthday gift.

JOLINE

When's your birthday?

MERE

Yesterday.

JOLINE

Oh my G-d! I feel so awful. I had no idea.

MERE

No, don't. It's my fault for not bringing it up. Just bad slash weird memories of birthdays past.

JOLINE

That's why you need to make new memories, Silly.

Joline gets out Mere's package. She starts to open it. Stops.

JOLINE

I'm sorry. Do you mind?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

Mere gestures for her to go ahead and open it. Joline pulls out a pink and white striped scarf and pink ear muffs.

JOLINE (CONT'D)

Are you serious? This is for you?

MERE

Thank you! Thank you! Ok, thank you. So I'm not being selfish and bratty by hating it right?

JOLINE

What is this, Gap kids?

MERE

I don't know. It's just the most not-me thing I think I've ever seen.

JOLINE

It's cute.

MERE

Oh it's totally cute.

JOLINE

And pink's really in this year.

MERE

Yeah. Go pink. But would you ever get me anything pink, ever?

JOLINE

No.

MERE

No. Of course no. And you've known me only two and half months. My mom should know better right? Yeah, I don't get it. Is she doing this on purpose?

JOLINE

What are you gonna do with it?

(CONTINUED)



CONTINUED: (4)

MERE

I don't know. Chas would like it,  
right?

JOLINE

(so would I... Get over  
it)  
Yeah. Definitely.

MERE

My dad used to take me to a soccer  
game on my birthday.

JOLINE

Mere, are you crying?

MERE

Tearing. I'm tearing.  
(beat)  
Is my mascara running?

JOLINE

(proudly, holds up bottle)  
No, it's waterproof.

MERE

Oh my G-d, I feel like such a girl!

JOLINE

And you look like one too.

Joline snaps a picture.

EXT. CAMPUS - LATER

Mere and Gary are walking across campus.

GARY

I'm not gonna say you look  
beautiful, cause I think you might  
whap me.

Mere gives him a look like she wouldn't, but then realizes  
she would, and then looks away.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

GARY

(under his breath)

But you do.

MERE

(turns to him)

It's just- this isn't me.

GARY

I know. And I prefer the real you.

(to himself almost)

But you do look pretty.

They walk a bit in silence.

GARY (CONT'D)

Any reason in particular you've  
been avoiding me lately?

MERE

Yes. I thought you liked me.

GARY

I do like you... More than a  
friend. God, I feel like I'm in  
fourth grade when I say that. But  
you're allowed to not feel the same  
way. It doesn't mean we can't, you  
know, converse anymore.

MERE

Very mature response.

GARY

Yes, well, I've been very honest  
with you from day one about how  
cool and mature I am.

MERE

(smiling.)

Honest?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

GARY

See? That. I miss that. I miss those looks. I miss you making fun of me.

MERE

Ok, sorry. I'll stop being weird around you.

GARY

Thank you. That's all I ask.

They walk a bit more in silence.

MERE

Can I ask why? I mean this is all very out of the blue. Boy meets girl, girl is nutty, boy... also nutty. Boy likes girl for no apparent reason.

GARY

Or how bout: Girl, is totally sure of herself,

(off her look)

Or at least acts that way. Issues big 'Fuck you' to anyone who challenges who she is or why. Girl, totally brilliant and could kick anyone's ass, yet somehow doesn't have an ego. Girl, seems to appreciate boy's dorkiness and even inspires him to go to the gym, all of four times.

(breaks speech pattern)

That's a lot, by the way.

Mere laughs.

GARY

(resumes speech pattern)

Girl, refuses to be tied down.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

GARY (CONT'D)

Boy, can't wrestle. See we're perfect for each other.

Mere stops smiling.

GARY (CONT'D)

Sorry, I wasn't supposed to say that, right?

MERE

Right.

GARY

Ok, just, here's the thing. You're all about just being who you are. Just let people be, right? Don't define 'em. Don't label 'em. Well, you gotta just let life be too. If this is all it is, fine. But I think it's more. I won't push the dating label if you agree not to push the just friends label.

MERE

Hmm.

(pauses. Mere points up ahead)

I think we're almost there.

They continue walking in silence.

INT. JOLINE AND MERE'S DORM ROOM - NEXT DAY

Joline and Mere at their desks.

JOLINE

What are you doing tonight?

MERE

I don't know. I think I might start studying.

(CONTINUED)



CONTINUED:

JOLINE

Exams aren't for another week. You  
will not start studying. Look,  
soccer's over

MERE

Yep.

JOLINE

And it's the end of our first  
semester at college.

MERE

Yep.

JOLINE

And it's a Saturday.

(pause)

Come out with me.

MERE

No.

JOLINE

Come out with me.

Beat.

MERE

Fine.

JOLINE

You can bring Gary.

MERE

No. If we go out, let's just have  
it be you and me.

JOLINE

Ok.

(pause)

But Keith's probably gonna be there  
too.

INT. PARTY ROOM - NIGHT

Mere and Joline are standing together in the middle of a busy party in a dorm room, each wear a lei. The party has a Hawaiian theme.

MERE

Which one is he?

JOLINE

In the blue. Talking to that girl.

Keith is standing by the keg flirting with a scantily clad female student. RHET sneaks up behind Mere.

RHET

(to Mere)

Hey. I've seen you in the dining hall.

MERE

Yeah. I eat there.

RHET

Have you been laid tonight?

MERE

What?

RHET

(holds up a lei)

Have you been laid tonight?

Mere holds up her lei.

MERE

I'm all set, thanks.

RHET

You're hot. I'm Rhet.

MERE

I'm sorry. I'm not interested.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

RHET

Nice to meet you not interested.  
Can I call you "N.I." for short? So  
where you from?

JOLINE

She has a boyfriend, ok?

RHET

Oh, sorry. I didn't know.

Rhet leaves. Joline smiles at Mere.

JOLINE

It's the only thing that works.

MERE

That's disgusting. The only way I  
can get him to leave is to pretend  
some other guy has already claimed  
me. I can't simply be not  
interested. He can't simply be too  
fucking boring and unoriginal.

Joline is watching Keith. The other girl leaves.

JOLINE

I'm gonna go say hi to Keith.

MERE

I'm gonna leave.

JOLINE

No.

MERE

Yeah.

EXT. CAMPUS - MOMENTS LATER

Mere walking to Gary's room.

INT. GARY'S ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Gary is staring at the ceiling, lying on his back, tossing a ball to himself. Mere enters. Gary, surprised.

GARY

Hi--

MERE

If I told you I wasn't interested,  
what would you say?

GARY

(confused/devastated)

Ouch. Um. Ok. Sorry.

MERE

No, I'm not saying I'm not  
interested. I'm just saying "if".  
What would you say?

GARY

I'm sorry, what?

MERE

No, nothing. I'm just trying to  
figure you out.

GARY

Me?!?!

Mere exits and shuts the door. Gary waits a beat then jumps  
up to follow her. She opens the door, he slams into it,  
bashing his head.

MERE

Oh my God! I'm so sorry.

GARY

It's ok. I'm ok.

(beat)

Were you coming back?

(CONTINUED)



CONTINUED:

MERE

Yeah. I am... interested.

She watches him, holding his head.

MERE (CONT'D)

I think.

INT. TEDDY AND MATT'S ROOM - SUNDAY MORNING

Matt is sprawled on the futon, asleep, mouth open. Teddy wakes up, hungover. The room is a mess, empty pizza boxes, beer cans, etc. He chucks a few cans, grabs his books and heads out.

INT. CHASTITY AND PARKER'S DORM ROOM - AFTERNOON.

Parker is reading an anthropology text. Chastity comes into the room.

CHASTITY

Hi.

PARKER

(doesn't look up)

Hi.

Chastity puts her bookbag down at her desk. She sees a notebook there.

CHASTITY

(re: the notebook)

Oh good.

PARKER

What?

CHASTITY

Tom didn't stop by to get my notes yet. I thought I might have missed him.

PARKER

Who? Oh right.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Chastity picks up the phone.

CHASTITY

Did you check the messages?

PARKER

No. Sorry, I'm reading.

CHASTITY

Sorry.

Chastity checks the voicemail.

CHASTITY

Nolo called.

(hits 7-6 pause)

And Dava.

(hits 7-6 again)

PARKER

What'd they say?

CHASTITY

I don't know. I skipped them.

PARKER

Gosh, Chas! I don't skip your messages.

CHASTITY

Well you should. They're not even in English.

(listening intently)

It's Tom. He came by before, but he didn't see the room. He didn't see the room? And then he went online to check the room number and realized he thought Chas and Parker were two boys.

PARKER

What is this, the play by play?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

CHASTITY

Shhh! And he got his notes from someone else he ran into in the library.

(she hangs up)

Thanks anyway.

PARKER

That sucks.

CHASTITY

(getting worked up)

Yeah. Yeah it actually does. Do you realize that's the first boy to actually show interest in me since I've gotten here?

PARKER

He wanted to copy your notes, not marry you, Chas.

CHASTITY

Oh really? Then why do you guys always ooh and ahh whenever he's around?

PARKER

Cause that's what friends do. They make fun of you. Get with the program already.

CHASTITY

No, you get with the program! Ok, he liked me, or whatever, he noticed me. And not because I have a cool nickname, and not because I stopped wearing pigtails, but because I broke the curve. And then, he comes by to have flirting conversations, and what? He thinks I'm a boy?! Because you insist on calling me Chas? I don't even know who I am anymore because of you!

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

## CHASTITY (CONT'D)

Not you, per se, not just you. All of you guys. You think it's so funny that I don't know this and that about sex and boys, and, and, and, and drinking, and about stuff that doesn't even matter. And I defended you! I defended you to my dad. The one person who means more to me than anyone else in this world. Because he thought you were a bad influence, go figure, and he wanted me to change rooms.

Chastity takes a big breath and looks around her room.

## CHASTITY (CONT'D)

I used to know who I was. I used to have it all figured out. "Sugar and spice and everything nice. Plus smart as can be, and a future M.D." That was our little rhyme. And my daddy used to be so proud. Do you know what he's gonna say next time I see him? "Chastity, are you even a Downing anymore?"  
(totally losing it)  
And now someone thinks I'm a boy?  
Do you know what boys are made of?

Parker gets up, furious.

## PARKER

You are the most ridiculous freak I have ever met in my life!

Parker grabs her bag and her coat and runs out of the room.

INT. LIBRARY STACKS (2ND FLOOR) - SAME TIME

Teddy is alone in the library stacks, looking for a book. He wanders down one aisle and is visible from the outside of the stack area (through glass walls). Keith, walking down from the third floor sees him. He shifts his bag to his opposite shoulder and walks into the second floor area.

(CONTINUED)



CONTINUED:

He stands in the same aisle as Teddy but down a few feet.  
Teddy notices him and starts to walk away.

KEITH

Hey.

TEDDY

Hey.

KEITH

What are you following me now?

Teddy smiles weakly and then turns to the door. Keith is closer to the exit, as we watch the aisles go by, Teddy passes them first, but Keith is close behind. Teddy turns into the final aisle, walks down it, seconds later so does Keith. Teddy almost collides with him.

TEDDY

Let me pass.

KEITH

What are you running from me?

TEDDY

Look, I don't want any trouble.  
Just let me through.

Keith walks closer to him.

KEITH

Come with me to the third floor.

TEDDY

No.

KEITH

I said come with me to the third floor.

TEDDY

And I said fuck you.

KEITH

Is that a come on?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

Teddy turns and starts to run. Keith is at his side in two seconds. He grabs him with one hand on his shoulder and places one hand on his butt. A female student walks into the door and sees them. She gives them an embarrassed smile as if she thinks she is interrupting the reunion of two long lost friends. Keith suddenly separates from Teddy and pushes him harshly away.

KEITH

Get off of me, Faggot.

The girl just walks off. Teddy uses the opportunity to run like hell out of the library.

INT. CAVIN'S DORM - MOMENTS LATER

Teddy is really shaken up. He walks down the hallway to Cavin's door. He looks around to see if anyone is watching/following him, then he knocks. The door opens. Teddy reaches out a hand to someone inside and is pulled into the room.

INT. CAVIN'S DORM ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Cavin pulls Teddy into the room. He looks at him with intense compassion and concern. Love?

INT. JOLINE AND MERE'S DORM - SAME TIME.

Joline locks their door, pocket book in hand, and then starts walking down the hall towards the women's bathroom.

INT. WOMEN'S BATHROOM - CONTINUOUS

Joline enters the bathroom. She looks in the mirror for a second, dabs at her eyeliner, and then opens up a stall door and walks in, and closes it behind. She looks down into the toilet bowl at a home pregnancy test. It is positive. Joline looks absolutely startled, as if it is hers. She leans against the stall door with all her weight.

Montage: (music cue: "Forever" by Ben Harper) First beats of music start right as Joline leans against bathroom door.

INT. CHASTITY AND PARKER'S DORM ROOM - SAME TIME

In silence at the beginning of the song, pan down from Chastity's head to feet - she's wearing a very feminine summer dress, with her hair in bows. The next beat of the song begins as Chastity buckles up her high heeled shoes, then

INT. MERE AND JOLINE'S DORM ROOM - SAME TIME

Mere snapping her jacket closed, and putting on a hat.

INT. WOMEN'S BATHROOM - SAME TIME

Joline hears someone crying in one of the shower stalls and looks up,

INT. TEDDY AND MATT'S DORM ROOM - SAME TIME

Matt is working on his poster. On his desk is a letter from the Dean of Students announcing that he is on academic probation.

INT. CHASTITY AND PARKER'S DORM HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Then Chastity, dressed in a skirt, high heels, winter coat and pigtails, opens the door to outside,

INT. MERE AND JOLINE'S DORM ROOM HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Mere opens the door to outside,

INT. WOMEN'S BATHROOM - CONTINUOUS

Joline opening up the bathroom stall door,

INT. TEDDY AND MATT'S DORM ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Keith opens the door, Matt looks up.

INT. CAVIN'S DORM ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Cavin shuts his room door, keeping his eyes on Teddy.



EXT. CAMPUS - CONTINUOUS

We see Chastity walking. She is wearing high heels and a winter coat over her dress with bows in her hair. Cold, alone.

EXT. CAMPUS - CONTINUOUS

Mere walks towards the pond.

INT. TEDDY AND MATT'S DORM ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Keith walks in, opens beer in front of Matt. Keith offers Matt some beer, but Matt declines.

KEITH

What are you, a pussy?

Matt takes a beer from him. Opens it and starts drinking. Keith pats him on the back.

EXT. PARKING LOT - SAME TIME

Parker is walking through the parking lot. She drags her finger along a frosted window, then stops walking.

EXT. CAMPUS - CONTINUOUS

Chastity keeps walking, but now a few other students (all very bundled up) pass by and give her strange looks. She wipes away a few tears.

INT. CAVIN'S DORM ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Cavin looks at Teddy. Then they embrace as Cavin tries to comfort Teddy. This should show that they actually have a relationship.

EXT. JOHNSON POND - SAME TIME.

The pond is frozen and beautiful. Like a black and white photograph. Mere walks towards a bench (her "favorite part of campus") and then sits down.

INT. BATHROOM - SAME TIME

(CONTINUED)



CONTINUED:

Joline walks into the shower stall. Another female student (the post office employee) is there curled up and crying. Joline sits down next to her and tries to comfort her.

EXT. PARKING LOT - CONTINUOUS

Parker stands by a car, etching out flowers in the frosted car windows.

EXT. JOHNSON POND - CONTINUOUS

Far off shot. We see Mere sitting and Gary come to the crest of the hill overlooking the Pond. Shot of him from the top of the pond. He sees Mere. Waits a beat and then starts walking towards her.

EXT. CAMPUS - CONTINUOUS

Chastity keeps walking. She shivers. Close on her high heels walking through the snow. Then close on her tear-streamed face.

INT. CAVIN'S DORM ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Cavin kisses Teddy on the forehead. Holds him closely again.

Ext. Parking lot - CONTINUOUS

Parker is still etching out flowers in the frost. Now all the cars around her have flower designs on their windows.

EXT. JOHNSON POND - CONTINUOUS

Gary joins Mere on the bench.

EXT. CAMPUS - CONTINUOUS

Chastity keeps walking, but now we watch her from behind. She is walking away from us.

EXT. JOHNSON POND - CONTINUOUS

Gary and Mere kissing.

INT. CAVIN'S DORM - CONTINUOUS

View from the hallway. Cavin's door opens. Teddy peers out. Look both ways. The hallway is empty. He walks out. We see him walk down the hallway. End of montage.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - 1 AM

Matt is in the hospital bed, sleeping. Teddy is in a chair near the bed, awake but exhausted. He stares blankly at a notebook in front of him (Bio notes). Mere, Parker, and Joline enter. Joline looks like she's been crying.

TEDDY

(sleepy)

Hey.

MERE

Hi. How you doing?

TEDDY

Wow, he's gonna wake up to a party.  
He'll love it.

(to Joline)

D'you remember the booze? Sorry,  
that was pretty tasteless.

JOLINE

If you can't laugh at life...

(looks at Matt)

So it's alcohol poisoning, right?  
He didn't like get a traumatic  
urinary infection or something?

TEDDY

Naw. No surprises here. The  
doctors said he was lucky though,  
considering the amount he drank.

(pause)

You know, you all didn't have to  
come. He probably won't remember a  
thing, if he even wakes up tonight.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

PARKER

Then why are you here, Loser?

TEDDY

Who else was gonna go with him?  
That asshole Keith he hangs out  
with?

Mere goes to Teddy's side.

MERE

We're not exactly here for him.

TEDDY

Well in that case I probably won't  
remember a thing either.

MERE

Why's that?

TEDDY

After this, I was gonna go online  
and look up ways to give myself a  
mild case of amnesia so I could  
forget this day ever happened.

(to Joline)

Jesus Jo, how are you doing?

JOLINE

I'm actually good. Believe it or  
not. It's been an oddly decent  
night. Minus current  
circumstances, of course.

They find chairs and sit down, or sit on the ground.

PARKER

So this is what a hospital is like.  
So weird.

MERE

You're lucky you've never had to be  
in one.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

PARKER

Yeah, I guess. When my Gorpa was in the hospital I never went to see her. It's something I've always regretted.

JOLINE

When my grandfather had his heart attack - I was really young, so I shouldn't even remember, but I do, it's weird - But we were gonna fly to Atlanta, to the hospital where he was, and I just remember sitting in the airport and we got the call that'd he'd already gone. It was just like, "That's it." We got back in the car and headed home.

PARKER

Wow, that's awful. He died?

JOLINE

Yeah. But you just said--

PARKER

No, Gorpa's still kickin' it. She was just getting her eyes done. God, don't jinx her.

They laugh, sort of.

TEDDY

Where's Chas? I feel like she's missing a moment.

Joline and Mere get quiet and look at Parker.

PARKER

She went home, I think. I don't know, a bunch of her stuff is gone. And the room smells like her dad's aftershave.



INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Mere, Joline, and Parker are standing up.

MERE

(to Teddy)

So, you staying or leaving?

TEDDY

Staying... I don't want him to  
have to wake up alone.

MERE

You want any company?

TEDDY

Naw.

MERE

(pulls a toothbrush and  
toothpaste from her bag)

Toothbrush?

Teddy takes the toothbrush and smiles. Mere kisses him on the top of the head and heads towards the door. Joline squeezes his shoulder as she passes. Parker walks over to Matt and kisses him on the head.

PARKER

(off their looks)

Just mixing it up. Goodnight.

She's out the door and closes it behind her. Teddy curls up in his chair.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - EARLY MORNING.

Matt and Teddy are sleeping. Chastity opens the hospital door and steps inside. She's wearing pants and bows in her hair. Teddy opens his eyes.

TEDDY

Hey Lady.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

CHASTITY

Hey you. You been here all night?

TEDDY

Yeah. Where've you been?

CHASTITY

Home. Old home. Now I'm back to new home.

TEDDY

Good to hear. You scared us for a second.

CHASTITY

(gestures to Matt)

Me?

She walks over to Matt.

CHASTITY

My gosh. He's stable though?

TEDDY

Yeah.

CHASTITY

They have to pump his stomach?

(Teddy nods)

Do his parents know?

TEDDY

Yeah. They might come up next weekend.

CHASTITY

Next weekend. Wow, they're really concerned.

TEDDY

Yeah, well, that way they can combine it with a trip to Bar Harbor.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

CHASTITY

Why not just wait until Christmas  
break?

Chastity sits in a chair next to Teddy (the one that Mere was  
sitting in before)

CHASTITY

You ok?

TEDDY

It's just kind of a down moment in  
my life right now.

CHASTITY

(looks around)  
You really wanted to be alone here?

TEDDY

It's sorta like walking in the  
rain, you know? I'm just soaking  
up my bad mood until it's time to  
feel up again.

Chastity looks at Teddy for a beat.

CHASTITY

I love you.  
(smiling)  
You're the first person who's not  
my daddy I've ever said that to.

He smiles.

INT. EXAM ROOM - ONE WEEK LATER - DAY

Chastity dates her exam paper. Pull back, we see her taking  
an exam.

INT. JOLINE AND MERE'S DORM ROOM - DAYS LATER - DAY

Joline and Mere are packing - Joline in a big suitcase, Mere  
in a small one.

INT. CHASTITY AND PARKER'S DORM ROOM - SAME TIME

Room semi-decorated for Christmas. Parker is packing. Chastity and her father stand at the door about to leave. Dr. Downing holds Chastity's suitcase. He and Chastity both say goodbye to Parker. Beat. Chastity walks over to Parker and gives her a hug.

INT. TEDDY AND MATT'S ROOM - SAME TIME

Room is half empty. Teddy and Matt each pick up a box (the last two), Matt's bed is stripped. They walk out the door...

INT. TEDDY AND MATT'S DORM HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

And bring the boxes down the hallway to the stairs.

EXT. TEDDY AND MATT'S DORM - CONTINUOUS

Teddy and Matt walk out, boxes in hand. Matt's mother is in the driver's seat, frowning. Matt's father loads Teddy and Matt's boxes into his car, shakes Teddy's hand, and gets in the passenger seat. Matt's mom turns on the engine. Teddy and Matt embrace awkwardly. Matt gets in the backseat of the vehicle. It leaves almost immediately.

EXT. PARKING LOT - LATER

Cavin, Teddy, Mere, and Gary are standing around. Joline and Parker are in Joline's car. Mere waves goodbye.

MERE

Have safe flights home, you guys.

PARKER

See you in a month.

JOLINE

(sticking head out the  
window)

Miss you!

MERE

I'll miss you too.

(CONTINUED)



CONTINUED:

They drive off.

CAVIN

(to Teddy)

Ok, I'm gonna get the car.

He moves O.C.

MERE

You going to Cavin's?

TEDDY

Yeah. We'll see how it goes. I'll be playing the part of "Ted" Cavin's new straight college buddy for the next week.

MERE

Yikes. Back in the closet with you.

TEDDY

I know, I know, I know.

(unhappily)

Not my decision.

(pause)

Anyway, that'll just be through Christmas and then I'll be home for New Years. Hopefully still in a relationship, but I'm not sure.

Cavin's car pulls up.

TEDDY

Bye, Love.

They hug.

TEDDY (CONT'D)

Bye, Gary.

GARY

Bye. Good luck.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

Teddy gets in the car. They drive off. Mere stares at the disappearing vehicle.

MERE

Muscles? -- That's your new  
nickname by the way.

GARY

Obviously.

MERE

Obviously. -- How many of your  
friends from your first semester at  
college are you still friends with?

GARY

All of them.

MERE

(disbelieving)  
Really?

GARY

No. Like close friends? One? But  
I still see everyone. Well, you  
know, almost everyone.

Mere nods.

EXT. PARKING LOT - MOMENTS LATER

Gary and Mere start walking to Gary's car.

MERE

So?

GARY

So what?

MERE

So what is your family expecting?  
Some burly girl with shin pads? Or  
Susie Homemaker, whose favorite  
hobby is ironing?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

GARY

Susie. Definitely.

MERE

That's it, we're breaking up.

(beat)

Why are you smiling?

GARY

To break up, we actually need to  
first be dating.

MERE

Stop defining!

GARY

I didn't do it, you did.

They reach the car, a shit-mobile.

MERE

Gary, is this going to last the  
whole way to New York?

GARY

Don't insult Leroy. This car is  
righteous.

They get in.

MERE

No.

GARY

What.

Gary turns the keys in the ignition.

EXT. STREET - CONTINUOUS

We see the car driving. Pull back to see all of Campus.  
Beautiful, white snow.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MERE (O.C.)

You cannot say "righteous". I'm  
sorry. Not allowed.

GARY (O.C.)

You're such a hypocrite.

MERE

Me?

GARY

Yes, Susie, you.

Banter continues as voices fade. Credits roll over them  
driving.

MERE

By the way, when I said your  
nickname was "Muscles" I meant "no  
muscles"

GARY

You can't change my nickname.

MERE

Oops, I just did.

GARY

Well you can't.

MERE

Yes I can.

GARY

No, you can't.

MERE

Dammit. It's the "no you can't"  
argument.

GARY

Gets you every time.

(CONTINUED)



CONTINUED: (2)

After voices fade, play "Tree Tops" by Eisley (Laughing City  
EP)

FADE TO BLACK.