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Why We Don't "Just Smile"

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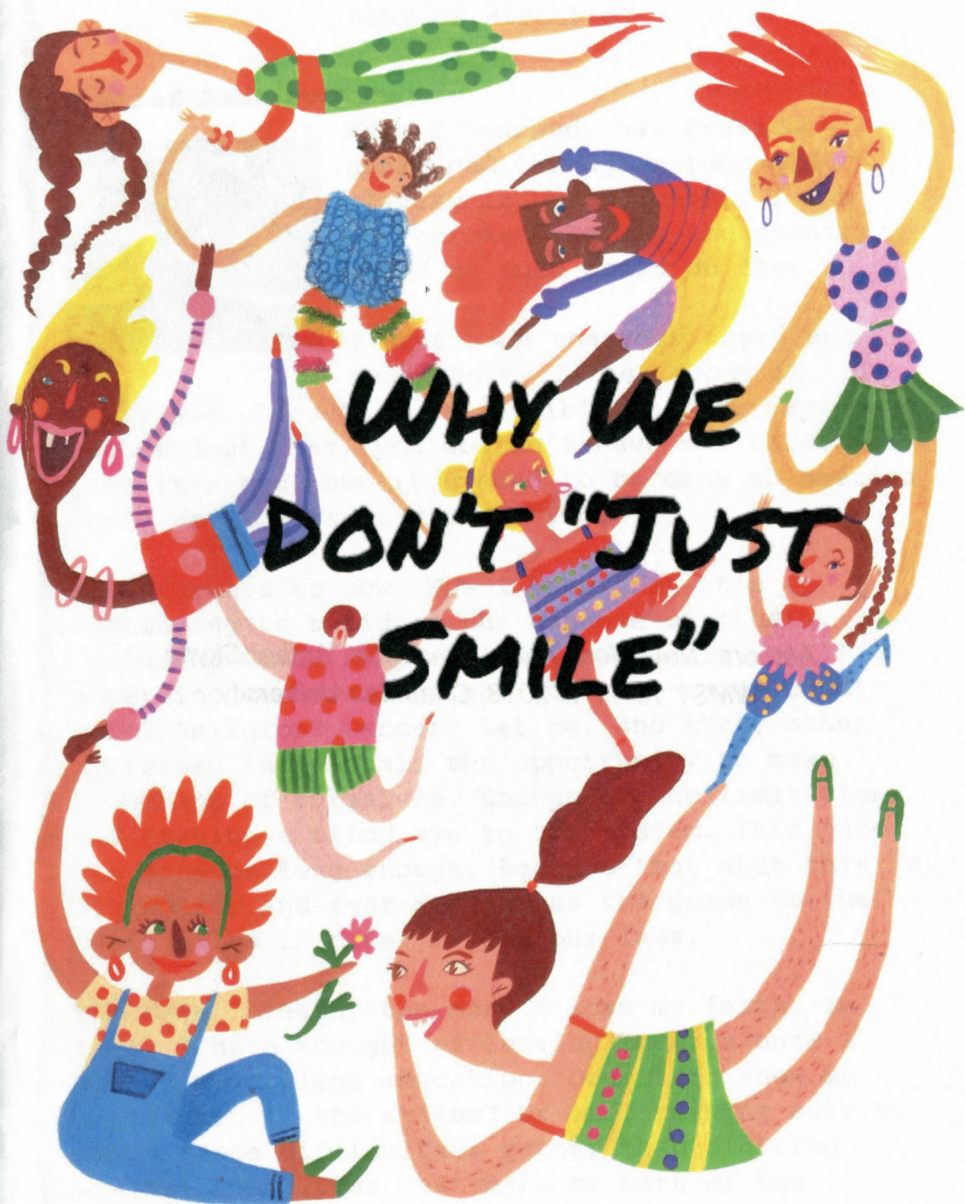


IMAGE BY CAROLINA HARAKI

THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA:

HOME OF HYPOCRISY.

A Brief Rant by Amber:



When I learned that America developed through murder and slavery in grade school, I was heartbroken. No way the country I loved so much could do that.

I went home that day angry and spoke to my father about it. His reply was, "Yes that is terrible that it happened. But without them, you wouldn't have all this. So yeah it's sad, but it needed to be done so America could develop as it did." WTF dad.

Fast forward to now. Now I know that it's continuing to build at the expense of others, including women. Why in 2018 is equality still something we have to fight for? Who cares about race? Religion? Gender? Let me, and every other oppressed individual, the opportunity to make something of ourselves. Enough of the limitations and turning a blind eye to the system. This hate has gone on long enough. Because that what this is. Its hatred and fear serving as the guide to the white males in power making our laws.

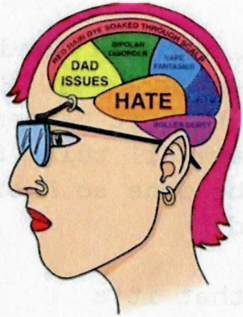
The more I learn, the more I lose my faith. In fact, I have thought of leaving America once I finish my college education. Does this show my opposition to the system? Or am I running away to avoid these difficulties rather than fighting against them? Does that make me part of the problem?

I'm confused and feel betrayed. And this is why I force my smile.

*Authors: Troy Allen, Taylor Mavroudis, Amber Skytte
WMST 101, Fall 2018, Chapman University*

Why I Don't Smile:

- ★ Roe v Wade is being reversed and will put over thousands of women in danger.
- ★ I am guilty and judged for not being a "lady", aka feminine, dainty, soft-spoken, submissive.
- ★ My father calls me a "feminazi" because I



choose to point out his misogynistic ways.

Side note, the definition of "feminazi" on Google is "a radical feminist", along with this image. As though demanding change within a system designed at the expense of women should just be accepted.

Understanding the Feminazi

- ★ The god damn pay gap.
 - White women make \$0.77 to the man's dollar, and my Latina mother and I will make \$0.65.
- ★ In a time period where women have the most opportunity to create change, some still don't consider themselves "that type of girl."
- ★ 1/5 girls and 1/10 boys will be sexually victimized.
 - Sexual assault is not a woman's problem, its a man's problem done to those who are perceived as vulnerable.
- ★ The household environment I grew up in, my father dominated. Even after the divorce. And he did not, and does not, deserve the head of the table. Yet, there he will stay.

Don't Forget:

Why do so many people, girls right around my age in particular, carry this "decade envy" where they long to have been a teenager in the 1950's? They see movies like *The Notebook* or see an image of a couple sharing a milkshake at a diner and suddenly the feminist conquests become obsolete.



I didn't know the waves of feminism could be washed away with two scoops of ice cream and twin straws.

[Source: Paget S. (2013, Sept 17) *Dating Tips From the 1950's (That Still Work)*, We Love Dates <https://goo.gl/aWGEQH>]

I myself have read books like this and longed for the feeling of love and desire. But that can happen in any era or decade. I feel that many women forget the pain and sacrifice women have gone through in order for us to have the rights now have, like the ability to vote or have a job. To long for a time where women had minimal right, is said from a privileged perspective. Knowing that if they were to have grown in that time, their white middle-upper class self would only need to worry about finding a man to provide for them.

Appreciate the faces and names we have yet to learn and remember those who we do have the honor. of learning from. That's a reason to smile.

what terrifies
me most is
how we foam
at the mouth
with envy
when others
succeed
but
sigh in relief
when they
are failing
our struggle
to celebrate
each other
is what's proven
most difficult in
being human

- rupi kaur



The Final Reason:

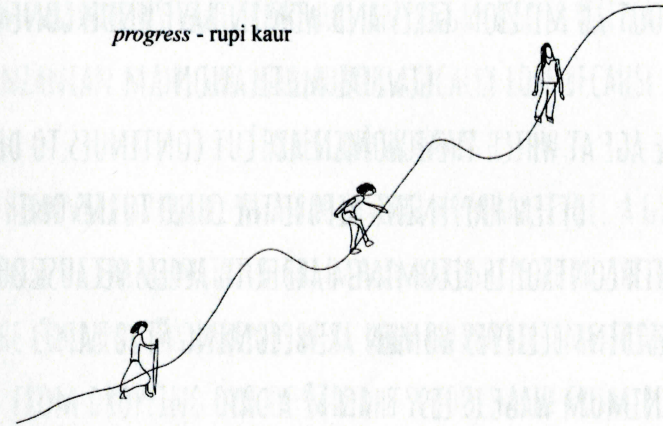
Competition is good. It helps push others to try their hardest and find their limits. What's not okay is relishing in the failure of others. Or raising yourself on the back of others. And this is seen time and time again in America. Capitalism you terrible economic bastard. Individual vs person, daughter vs friend. We have been taught that it is all a distraction from the men above. So stop, look up, celebrate one another and move forward together.

TANZANIA

HOME OF THE GREATEST WILDLIFE AND MOST ANCIENT TRIBES ON EARTH, BUT WHAT DON'T WE KNOW?

our work should equip
the next generation of women
to outdo us in every field
this is the legacy we'll leave behind

progress - rupi kaur



WHAT GOOD IS THE PROGRESS WE MAKE IN THE *LAND OF THE FREE* WHEN THERE ARE WOMEN AROUND THE WORLD WHO ARE NOT ENCOURAGED TO REACH THEIR POTENTIAL EVERY DAY OR ANY DAY?

PROGRESS IS WHAT WE STRIVE FOR, BUT WE ALL MUST START SOMEWHERE.

TANZANIA: MY HOME & MY HEART, YET THERE ARE SO MANY FUNDAMENTAL ISSUES THAT KEEP ME FROM SMILING, FROM DEEMING IT THE BEST PLACE TO BE.

I DON'T SMILE BECAUSE:

- EDUCATION IS ONLY COMPULSORY FOR CHILDREN AGES 7-13
- ONLY 23.7% OF ADOLESCENTS ENROLL IN SECONDARY EDUCATION
- ABOUT 7.9 MILLION GIRLS AND WOMEN HAVE UNDERGONE FEMALE GENITAL MUTILATION
- THE AGE AT WHICH THESE WOMEN ARE CUT CONTINUES TO DECREASE, OFTEN HAPPENING BEFORE THE CHILD TURNS ONE
- BIRTH CONTROL IS BECOMING HARDER TO ACCESS BECAUSE OUR PRESIDENT BELIEVES WOMEN ARE BECOMING "TOO LAZY"
- MINIMUM WAGE IS LESS THAN \$2 A DAY
- THE AVERAGE WOMAN HAS 5 CHILDREN IN HER LIFETIME



(RAHMA, SHAMINA, AND AISHA ON THEIR WAY HOME FROM SCHOOL IN ARUSHA, TANZANIA)

MY EXPERIENCE IN THE PLACE I LOVE TO CALL MINE.

IT'S BEEN INTERESTING. BEAUTIFUL, YES. REFRESHING, YES. GROUNDING, YES. BUT, ALSO, INTENSE, DIFFICULT, AND UNFAIR.

- MY MOTHER AND OTHER WOMEN ARE TOLD THEY CAN'T ENTER GOVERNMENT BUILDINGS BECAUSE THEY'RE WEARING PANTS AND NOT DRESSES
- SHE KNOWS THAT IF SHE HAS ANY LEGAL ISSUES WITH ANY TANZANIAN MAN, SHE WILL AUTOMATICALLY LOSE BECAUSE SHE IS A [FOREIGN] WOMAN
- HOWEVER, OVERALL, AS A CAUCASIAN WOMAN, I FEEL A GUILTY SENSE OF IMMUNITY TO THE MANY HARDSHIPS THAT ARE TIED TO THE COUNTRY. MY PARENTS WERE ABLE TO PROTECT ME FROM FGM, FROM DROPPING OUT OF MIDDLE SCHOOL, AND FROM BEING PUSHED INTO UNEMPLOYMENT WITH NO OPPORTUNITY EXCEPT TO SERVE OTHERS.

WHY ME? WHY NOT THEM?



HOWEVER, THERE ARE REASONS I AM MOTIVATED TO MAKE A CHANGE.
THERE ARE REASONS TO HAVE HOPE. THERE ARE REASONS I SMILE.

THESE TANZANIAN LADIES CAN GIVE YOU SOME LIFE LESSONS:



THE SELF-SUPPORTING FISH VENDOR:
"BUSINESS ISN'T BAD. I'M HERE, I'M WORKING. MY CHILDREN ARE EATING, MY CHILDREN ARE GOING TO SCHOOL. GOD IS HELPING US. I HAVE A LOT OF FRIENDS WORKING AROUND ME. WE ALL HAVE OUR OWN WORK TO DO, THERE ARE NO PROBLEMS."

THE FAMILY-FIRST BEAN MERCHANT:

"MY JOB IS TO CAREFULLY CHOOSE THE GOOD, SPECIAL BEANS SO THAT MY CUSTOMERS DON'T HAVE TO. I PICK THEM, I CLEAN THEM, AND I PUT THEM IN THE BASKET. HAVE A BIG FAMILY, MANY SISTERS, AND NO BROTHERS. WE ARE ALL VERY CLOSE, SO I MUST SUPPORT THEM."



EVEN THOUGH THERE IS MUCH LEFT TO DO IN THE PROGRESS OF THIS COUNTRY, THESE WOMEN REMIND US OF THE IMPORTANT SIMPLICITIES OF LIFE, AND WHAT WE HAVE TO BE GRATEFUL FOR.

(ALL STATISTIC TAKEN FROM UNESCO & THE WORLD BANK. PHOTOS BY TAYLOR MAVROUDIS)

A Birth of Stains: as Told from the Mouth of a Brown Woman

When Innocence died, she did so
Slowly, screaming, within me,
Up and down the hall, at the junction
Between English and Lunch.

The once empty
Void between my legs
Served as her last mouthpiece,
A channel that now breathed and lived to be
Filled with her lamentations that were
Always destined to fall on cottoned ears
Until the canals were
Red, Red, Red before
Brown, Brown, Brown.

It was in my nature to assume that I
Was dying with her,
With my legs parted and a wad
Of toilet paper in my underwear
With an "O" of desperation rather than one of
Hope upon my lips
As clots were coughed out of the other.
And more cotton was given to
Shut her up by my mother
Who laughed and laughed
At Strife who had sensed the vacancy and
Made a home out of my face.

But 10 years later, she
Screams again and I realize that
My body is no hallowed earth but a
A waiting battlefield to be desecrated
By men who beheaded and disemboweled
Chivalry with his own sword.
Men who sense a false emptiness
Within me that they feel entitled to.

Uncharted territory that they wish to conquer,
To fill and make a home out of it
For their soldiers. I will not do it.
Because I know that they will not love my soldiers
Red, Red, Red because
They will come out
Brown, Brown, Brown.

Split

There are times, in the early morning, where I look into the mirror and fail to find remnants of my own soul staring back at me. There are times, in the early morning, when my skin is still supple and swollen, injected with the residue of dreams too rich, too cryptic, and too hazy to know what to do with, that I find a war manifesting in the darkness of my pupils and realize: my body has become a battleground for warring ideals fighting over the same territory to colonize.

My body belongs not to me but not to anyone else either. My identity was split and fragmented in the shipping, handled with little

care, and arrived with little fanfare, warning, or instruction. At times, I wonder if the pieces even belong to the same set. W.E.B Du Bois termed this feeling as one of “double-consciousness”: a sense of self that has been so incredibly divided, so wholly irreconcilable, that you may hold little hope of ever forming a unified identity ever in this life or in anyone else’s. The former half of Du Bois’s philosophy should be taken loosely though he meant it literally, for when terming the sensation he was referring to matters between blackness and Americanness and, perhaps, had little foresight that his terminology would one day be adopted by someone like me.

Black, yes, but also Asian. Asian, yes, but also Japanese. Japanese, yes, but also American four generations in the making. American, yes, but also a woman. What is that supposed to mean? Am I expected to be independent and self-assured while maintaining an image that is docile and invisible? Am I meant to keep my hair natural and big while assuring that there is always a streak of electric blue, or red, or pink in it? While on the street am I supposed to yell from the rooftops that I need no man to define me before I rush home to have dinner on the table by 6 o’clock sharp? Am I a part of the least romantically wanted group of women within America, or a part of the most? Am I supposed to allow myself to be ever hyper-sexualized and fetishized, first at a young age because I look older than I was, and now because I look older than I am? When am I allowed to say no?

Now? Now.

I do not smile because...

- for years I was made to believe that I was not good enough
- for years I was made to believe that “exotic” was a compliment
 - see also: “you’re pretty for black girl”
- my body does not immediately have value just because someone wants to fuck it
- I refuse to be anyone’s token
- I will not allow my failures to be the rule and my successes to be the exception or vice versa. They both belong to me.
 - I should not have to follow Disney’s ideal of becoming someone else before becoming myself (see: *Mulan* and the *Princess and the Frog*)
- I refuse to allow my smiles to denote my presence, or be taken as a sign of submission

