UWriting op-ed event covered in Columbia Magazine

Ben Appel published in The Huffington Post

Hana Joy published in The Idaho Statesman

Santiago Tobar Potes published in Fox News

Neel Puri published in Delaware Online

Akansha Ravishanker published in The Huffington Post

Vanessa Seungjin Rhee published in Korea Times
What are the consequences if I write something on race at Columbia?” a student asked the panel at a recent discussion titled “Going Public: Writing and Publishing the Op-Ed.” The overflow crowd of two hundred undergrads in Schermerhorn 501 was all ears. So was Glenn Michael Gordon ’10SOA, the assistant director of the Undergraduate Writing Program at Columbia and the event’s creator and host.

The afternoon had been an attention grabber from the get-go. You might have thought that students raised on the Internet would either a) view the traditional op-ed as passé, its power diluted in a sea of opinionated tweets and blog posts, or b) retreat from public discourse altogether, for fear of nasty comments and forum trolls. Yet the turnout said otherwise, as did Gordon’s introductory remark that, since 2011, when the first-year composition class University Writing began assigning op-eds, students have published more than a hundred of these essays, in places like the New York Daily News, the Baltimore Sun, USA Today, the Huffington Post, Army Times, the Atlantic, Salon, the South China Morning Post, and a bundle of hometown papers.
The panel was made up of five sophomores who had taken University Writing the previous semester and subsequently published their op-eds: Madison Cox linked the scarcity of female engineers to childhood gender socialization in her piece for the Washington Post; Adam Croxton, a US Air Force veteran who was raised in a Mississippi trailer park, published an op-ed in the Columbia Spectator on student debt and being the first in his family to attend college; songwriter Tinatin Japaridze, in the Moscow Times, told of how entering the Eurovision Song Contest after the 2008 Russo-Georgian War laid bare her divided loyalties between Russia, where she grew up, and her native Georgia; Kira LeBron, opining in the Peoria Journal Star, urged that paper’s readership to consider the underlying causes of unrest in Ferguson and Baltimore; and Josef Starc, a product of the oft-criticized Oakland public school system, where teachers were negotiating a new contract, wrote in praise of his high-school education in the Oakland Tribune.

“In University Writing, students write four essays, the last of which is the op-ed,” says Gordon. “For the first three, you’re working on building an argument. By the time you write your op-ed, you’ve learned to develop your argument and present it within a highly crafted essay.”

Gordon had the panelists read parts of their op-eds aloud, and demonstrated the ways in which all the pieces answered the four questions that editors ask when considering an op-ed: Why you? Why us? Why this? Why now?

You might have thought that students raised on the Internet would view the op-ed as passé.

Gordon, who is the former editor in chief of Readersdigest.com, strongly encourages students to submit their op-eds for publication, noting that “the word ‘published’ still has a lot of cachet.” He told the audience: “It never hurts a CV to have publications on it — it shows a level of excellence and striving.”

This comment was in response to the student who asked about the risks of writing an op-ed about race. The student, who was white, posed a hypothetical in which, two years after publishing his op-ed, “I apply for a job at Goldman Sachs and they Google my name and say, ‘This guy’s a racist: we can’t hire him.’”

There was a three-second pause before a wave of nervous laughter welled up from the audience and rolled lightly over the room. Gordon jumped in. “You know what? I think partially there’s laughter because it’s the laughter of recognition,” he said. “A lot of people have anxiety about putting themselves out there — putting a strong opinion out there. And there is some truth to the idea that often your biggest critics are people who haven’t even read your op-ed and just react to what they think it’s about. So I understand the nature of your question.”

Thus Gordon rescued both the audience (from its assumption that the student had just implied he was racist) and the student (from further snickers). He then asked the panelists if they’d like to address the student’s concern.

“The onus is on you to have a well thought out, clearly communicated piece, so that it can’t be misinterpreted,” said Croxton, the Air Force veteran. “If you hold a controversial view, stick to it. But make sure that it’s smart. I think if you shy away from something that’s controversial, you’re not doing yourself or journalism justice.”

http://magazine.columbia.edu/college-walk/spring-2016/strong-opinions
Notorious Anti-Gay Preacher Scott Lively And The Language That Kills

Lively believes that the Russian gay propaganda bill was his “greatest success.”

06/12/2017 01:31 pm ET Updated Jun 13, 2017

The case against anti-gay extremist and evangelical Scott Lively for “crimes against humanity” was dismissed last week on a jurisdictional issue, and yet Lively has sought the aid of the Liberty Council to repeal the language that Judge Ponsor used in his ruling. According to the Daily Beast, Ponsor stated that Lively facilitated efforts to “restrict freedom of expression” by Ugandan members of the LGBTI community, “to suppress their civil rights, and . . . to make the very existence of LGBTI people in Uganda a crime.” Apparently these observations by the judge were offensive to Lively, a Christian who once played a key role in the drafting of Uganda’s 2009 Anti-Homosexuality Bill which called for the execution of homosexuals.

I can understand Lively’s hurt feelings about Ponsor’s remarks. When allegations are made about a public figure by a powerful wielder of the law, the reputation of the accused can be irreversibly damaged, regardless of the outcome of a case. And Ponsor really laid into Lively, calling his evangelical work both “pathetic” and “crackpot bigotry.”

Ouch.

However, despite Lively’s boohooing, there was nothing overstated or inaccurate about Ponsor’s remarks; Lively, along with many other Christian activists—including the president of the National Organization for the Family, Brian Brown—have been a part of a global campaign to criminalize homosexuality for years, and some might even say that they’re just getting started.

But how did we get here?
When the LGBTQ rights movement gained solid footing in the U.S. in the late nineties, conservatives foretold a losing battle against the “gay agenda” in the States; they knew it would only take one ultra-liberal administration to reverse the discriminatory legislation they had worked so tirelessly to enact into law. Before Barack Obama was even elected, evangelicals—whose unparalleled ability to organize against sexual minorities can be traced back to Anita Bryant’s 1977 “Save Our Children” campaign—set their sights on the developing world, where they could simultaneously evangelize Christianity and disseminate extremist anti-LGBTQ propaganda.

When Lively visited Uganda in 2009, he helped to organize the “Seminar on Exposing the Homosexual’s Agenda.” Borrowing the rhetoric of Bryant that has proved so successful for the Christian Right since the seventies, Lively warned the audience of parliamentarians, parents, and police officers that “legalizing homosexuality” was akin to accepting the “molestation of children and having sex with animals,” and that homosexuals only wish to abuse and recruit children, promote divorce, and spread the AIDS virus.

Lively’s objection to the “language” of Ponsor’s ruling is ironic, only because it was the language of Lively’s speech at the anti-gay seminar in Uganda that ultimately dictated the wording of the “Kill the Gays” legislation a month later. The bill declared homosexuals must be executed because the “promotion of homosexual behavior” would undermine their “traditional family values,” and that “homosexuality has a variety of negative consequences including higher incidences of violence, sexually transmitted diseases, and use of drugs . . .”

Sound familiar?

In 2013, Scott Lively and Brian Brown played a major role in Russia’s international anti-gay adoption legislation and infamous “gay propaganda” bill, the latter of which created a dramatic uptick in anti-LGBTQ hate crimes in the country, and led to investigations of gay-friendly children’s book authors and the firing of gay teachers. With the help and encouragement of American evangelicals, Russia hoped to thwart the “spread” of homosexuality and forever silence the LGBTQ community so that one day, if all goes according to plan, gays can be wiped off the map for good.
Lively believes that the gay propaganda bill was his “greatest success,” and Brian Brown hopes that their work will “enable the development of the movement around the world.”

So now we have Chechnya, where gay men are being arrested, taken to detention centers, tortured, and even murdered. Here’s where Lively might say, “Now wait a minute, those are Muslims that are killing the gays, and not us Christians,” and Lively would be right; after all, President Kadyrov—proud denier of the mere existence of gay Chechens—is Muslim, and Islam is the predominant religion of the southwest region of Russia.

But what Lively wouldn’t soon admit is the fact that evangelicals are taking pages out of the Chechen’s gay-hating playbook to inspire the international Christian masses in their global assault on homosexuals. In other words, they’re warning Christians that if they don’t start upping their game against gays, they’re going to lose converts to Islam. After all, nobody wants to be part of a team that isn’t as homophobic as the other guy’s. That would just be embarrassing.

Even more embarrassing than being told off by a District Court judge in a Massachusetts courtroom.

Yes, the United States has seen epic legislative gains for LGBTQ rights in recent years—and so has the world, for that matter. But it’s vital for us to understand that while we proudly check the “married” box on our tax forms and our adoption applications, gay men and women abroad are regularly being publicly humiliated, jailed, tortured, and murdered, all because of the relentless work of evangelical Americans.

And all in the name of God.

https://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/notorious-anti-gay-preacher-scott-lively-and-the-language_us_593ec487e4b014ae8c69e2ac
Prince Harry acknowledgment he sought therapy a good example for other young men

BY HANA JOY
MAY 19, 2017 06:56 PM

Recently I was awakened by a notification from my phone. Prince Harry admitted to seeking treatment for his mental health to better cope with the death of his mother, Princess Diana. That week, Facebook was filled with reports of Prince Harry “admitting” and “revealing” this fact. I was happy to hear the news, especially in regard to a male public figure. But I couldn’t help but feel like I was reading a scandalous tabloid report, with headlines like that of the Daily Mail: “Prince Harry admits he was close to a breakdown over the death of Diana as he reveals he saw a therapist.”

Harry pointed out how difficult it is for young men to feel comfortable seeking treatment for mental illness, telling The Telegraph, “You suddenly realize that actually you’re part of quite a big club, and everybody’s gagging to talk about it.”

We have made great strides toward recognizing and providing treatment. Yet the stigma of mental illness remains, especially among men. Seeking counseling still requires that a person “admit” that they have a problem. The media isn’t known for reporting on mental illness responsibly, from caricatured versions of Britney Spears to Lindsay Lohan. Young men need role models, examples within the media that show there is no shame in getting treated for psychological issues. However, potential role models are unlikely to make their treatment public if they feel that they will be reported on as a scandal.

Over 40 million people are suffering with a mental illness in the U.S., and 53 percent did not receive treatment – and these numbers are from those who actually reported it. Many do not. According to the American Psychiatric Association, men are less likely to seek treatment, but they have equal or sometimes higher rates of mental illnesses, with suicide being the second-highest cause of death for men younger than 34.
It is so important that members of the military and other “hyper-masculine” environments have role models willing to talk openly about seeking help. Prince Harry, an army captain, speaking about his experience is a start. However, in our everyday lives mental health issues are still not discussed.

Saying that you came from counseling should be as simple as saying you came back from a trip to the store. “My brother and other people [said], ‘You really need to deal with this,’ ” Harry said, and talking with members of the military was what pushed him to finally seek the counseling he needed. This is what the headlines should have focused on. As someone with five brothers, the thought that they might suffer in silence because of the way society might view them is heartbreaking. I hope the media can take stories like that of Prince Harry and focus on the positive aspects.

We as a community should be as mindful and supportive as Harry’s brother, and one of the ways we can encourage this within our communities is by the media helping to normalize the treatment of a very common issue.

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_http://www.idahostatesman.com/opinion/readers-opinion/article151663807.html_
Hurricane Harvey forced thousands of people from their homes in Texas and Louisiana – and now President Trump is threatening to force me and 800,000 other undocumented immigrants brought to America as children out of our homes throughout the United States.

My heart goes out to those made homeless by Harvey. That tragedy, unfortunately, was unavoidable. But President’s Trump’s decision announced Tuesday to end a program called Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) in six months is a man-made disaster.

In making the announcement, Attorney General Jeff Sessions said the delay in ending DACA will give Congress time to pass legislation, if it chooses, to provide the protection DACA now gives to me and the other immigrants known as Dreamers. If enacted, such legislation would enable us to stay in the U.S., where we have lived since childhood.

But with Congress gridlocked on so many issues, no one can say for sure if efforts to reform America’s immigration laws will succeed in six months, after years of failure. So those of us protected by DACA have no idea if we will be able to stay here or if we will be deported to countries where we have few if any memories.

This is torture for all 800,000 of us – a giant question mark hanging over our heads.

Almost all of us have jobs or are in school. We have friends, relatives, partners and many ties to our communities. And we love America. We desperately want to stay.

But it’s not just we Dreamers who would be hurt by the end of DACA. America would suffer.
The Center for American Progress estimates that ending DACA would remove about 685,000 workers from the U.S. economy over the next 10 years – creating hardships for employers who would have to replace them. And the center estimates ending DACA would reduce the U.S. gross domestic product – the total value of all goods produced and services provided – by about $460 billion over a decade.

Businesses would lose 800,000 customers. Government at all levels would lose billions of dollars in tax revenue. Colleges and universities would lose tuition and fees from students. The armed forces would lose brave immigrants willing risk their lives to defend America.

So why are we Dreamers being threatened with deportation? The anti-immigrant hysteria that motivates those who want to send us packing makes no sense.

I ask everyone born in the U.S. to look at us as you looked at your parents, grandparents or earlier ancestors who came to this land of immigrants, making your lives possible. Do you think the Native Americans, who were here first, should have deported members of your families?

I have been a beneficiary of DACA since 2012. It changed my life, as it changed the lives of other Dreamers. Before DACA, I felt like a criminal on the run. I was terrified of being deported. I thought it would be impossible to ever go to college due to my undocumented status.

Yet I feel as American as anyone born here. My parents took me from Cali, Colombia to Miami in 2002, when I was 4-years-old. We fled after rebel forces of the FARC (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia) killed my grandparents. My parents feared we’d be in danger if we stayed.

Like other Dreamers, I didn’t ask to come here. Contrary to the dire warnings President Trump has voiced about undocumented immigrants, I was not a rapist, drug dealer or any other sort of criminal at age 4. Nor have I become one.

My parents started a business and created jobs for Americans. They worked every day of the week and paid their taxes. They taught me an unwavering sense of respect and gratitude for everything that living in the United States made possible.

In school I dedicated myself entirely to my studies and was a straight-A student, scoring at the highest levels on state and national academic tests.
I am currently a sophomore at Columbia University in New York City and if I am allowed to stay in the United States I hope to go to law school.

I could never afford an Ivy League education on my own. But my education is funded and supported by scholarships from the Jack Kent Cooke Foundation, Alexander Hamilton Scholars, Golden Door Scholars and Questbridge.

I speak six languages. I held internships with Sen. Marco Rubio, R-Fla. I became an accomplished violinist and gave free violin lessons to impoverished Miami youth.

I visited the White House and met first lady Michelle Obama when I was appointed to the student advisory board for her Better Make Room initiative, which encourages college attendance. I was one of 22 students worldwide to win the Future Global Leaders Fellowship.

For the rest of my life, I will be grateful to all the organizations that have supported me and given me new opportunities on the basis of my abilities and hard work, not my birthplace. And I will be grateful to President Obama for signing the DACA executive order.

President Trump is the grandson of German immigrants, son of a Scottish mother, husband of an immigrant and former husband of another. I’m sure he’s glad members of his family were allowed to stay in America. We 800,000 Dreamers ask that we be allowed to do the same.

http://www.foxnews.com/opinion/2017/09/05/daca-student-deporting-me-and-800000-dreamers-is-man-made-disaster-that-will-be-terrible-for-us.amp.html
Neel Puri is a rising sophomore at Columbia University studying Economics. He is originally from Camden-Wyoming, Delaware and went to St. Andrew’s School. He will be spending this summer in New York City as an intern for the U.S. Department of the Treasury.

Those outside of the Mid-Atlantic may know of the Delaware River as the one that George Washington crossed on Christmas night in 1776. In the centuries after that night, our state’s eponymous local river has served an essential supporting role to the countless major towns and cities it passes by, including Dover, Wilmington, Camden, Trenton and Philadelphia.

Its watershed, spanning 15,000 square miles across five states, is homes to millions of people, provides vital habitats for a rich variety of wildlife and is critical to the economic well-being of the mid-Atlantic region. Beyond these more quantifiable benefits, the Delaware Watershed is an essential recreational asset to the urban communities that surround it. Home to the Delaware Water Gap Recreation Area, six National Wildlife Refuges and the complex Delaware Estuary, the watershed’s wilderness can provide an invaluable escape from life in the nearby cities.

Yet, with this convenient proximity to urban centers has come grave costs. According to a recent report by the non-profit group Environment New Jersey, our local river is now the fifth-most polluted in the country. Government agencies continue to issue permits to our state’s burgeoning chemical and manufacturing industries that allow them to bypass the Clean Water Act and pollute freely in the Delaware River.

Research has shown that some of New Castle’s top industries also rank as some of the worst water polluters in the watershed: Amtrak’s heavy locomotive shops in Wilmington and the Standard Chlorine Metachem plant near Delaware City rank as the largest dischargers of PCB-laced wastewater in the nation. Our very own DuPont Company’s Chambers Works factory is legally permitted to emit over 5 million pounds of effluent into the watershed every year. The river water has become subject to dangerous toxins, unsanitary runoff and destructive chemical deposits that creep in unseen but gradually dirty the water and destroy the surrounding land. While many of us grew up swimming in
the Delaware, most children in New Castle County today know to avoid touching the river altogether.

It would seem that the Delaware Watershed’s proximity to urban centers has caused it to fall victim to not being considered as separate from them. In his essay "The Trouble with Wilderness," noted environmental historian William Cronon defines this consideration of a separate “wilderness” as “an island in the polluted sea of urban-industrial modernity, the one place we can turn for escape from our own too-muchness.” Cronon sees wilderness as an idea created by humans, constructed throughout time as a means for us to escape society and immerse ourselves in something completely separate from it. Wilderness is where we withhold our power to dominate, and let nature live as nature does. Yet over time, the cities and industries that surround the Delaware River have come to see it less as a pristine escape from society than as a conveniently-located waste dump.

Although William Cronon uses “wilderness” as a conceptual lens through which to criticize certain contemporary environmental protection movements, his definition of wilderness can actually be a productive means of reframing our cities’ relationship with the Delaware River. Making the short trip from our cities to the Delaware Watershed’s wilderness can give us an invaluable mental respite from our daily lives. Hiking, fishing, rowing and other sustainable activities in and around the river are, and must continue to be, an essential part of growing up on the shores of the Delaware. We should capitalize on the Delaware Watershed’s singular proximity to so many major urban areas, and preserve its pristine wilderness as a convenient escape from them. Yet when people and corporations fail to see the Delaware as an area of distinct "wilderness,” they allow themselves to contribute to its gradual destruction as both a home to wildlife and a recreational asset to the tens of millions of people who live nearby.

In the sea of cities that surround it, the Delaware Watershed has the potential to be an island of untouched and not wholly unadulterated nature. Yet it must first become a sanctuary protected by the nearby urban centers rather than victimized by them. As residents of these areas, we have the obligation to push our towns and cities to expand their efforts to curtail waste runoff and clean up the Delaware. We must protest, lobby and persuade our local environmental regulation offices to more strictly enforce the Clean Water Act and join protection groups like the Coalition for the Delaware River Watershed.

In addition to enforcement, we must write and pass petitions in order to secure a fair share of federal investment to clean up the damage already done. Last, and possibly most important, is that we educate Delawareans on their connection to the river. We must teach our children and our peers the value of wilderness and the priceless natural escape it gives us from the pressures of our daily lives, and encourage them to go out and responsibly appreciate it themselves.

Love Can Be Found In Arranged Marriages

Sometimes I wonder if American society has glorified romantic love at the detriment of celebrating all the other kinds of love out there.

05/26/2017 02:20 pm ET Updated May 30, 2017

Summer is upon us, which means that brown aunties all over the world are breaking out astrological charts and biodata is being exchanged left and right, all in hopes of scoring coveted rishtas (marriage proposals) and week-long wedding extravaganzas for their tragically unmarried children. Desi weddings have always remained close to my heart, and some of my most memorable nights involve wearing a lehenga choli and participating in traditional festivities like the mehndi or sangeet. But whenever the topic of weddings is broached with Americans, I’m reminded of the cultural chasm that often separates us, of my precarious balancing act of straddling two countries while never quite belonging to either one.

When I tell my American friends about the two weddings that I’ll be attending in India this August, their faces immediately light up. I get bombarded with a lot of questions: How did they meet? How long did they date? How was the proposal? My friends are inevitably looking for answers reminiscent of a Nicholas Sparks novel, but I know that I’m about to disappoint them.

“They’re getting an arranged marriage.”

Oh, they breathe out. I can’t quite put my finger on it, but the tone of their voices is different. The air in the room has shifted, the nature of the conversation has changed, and I feel strangely defensive.
“The omnipresence of arranged marriages in my life has caused the idea to become the accepted norm.”

Arranged marriages have always presented a unique problem for me. My parents had an arranged marriage, and nearly all of the adults that I’ve grown up around also had arranged marriages. The omnipresence of arranged marriages in my life has caused the idea to become the accepted norm. However, being raised in the United States, the emphasis on values such as individualism and freedom have also led me to believe that marriage should be based on love and personal choice. Indeed, the opinions of my American friends have shaped mine, and their ideas of dating, romance, and marriage have caused me to think of arranged marriages as somehow “less than” other marriages.

But when I look at my parents, all I see is a loving, fulfilling, successful marriage. After nearly three decades together, my parents share an indescribable comfort with each other, the kind of relationship that only comes after building a life together. They know each other’s weaknesses, idiosyncrasies, dreams, fears, and each and every little characteristic in between. It always excites me when my parents tell me stories of their early years together. Whenever I complain about the subzi (curry) that my mom has prepared for dinner, my dad always reminds me that he had to eat lemon rice for their entire first year of marriage because it was the only dish my mom knew how to make. He didn’t want to pressure her or demand anything else since he himself was “useless” and had mediocre culinary abilities, so he resolved to eat lemon rice every day until my mom cooked something else.

“The opinions of my American friends have shaped mine, and their ideas of dating, romance, and marriage have caused me to think of arranged marriages as somehow ‘less than’ other marriages.”

I love watching home videos of old converted tapes, in which my dad secretly records my mom singing loudly and wonderfully off-key to songs like Lag Jaa Gale (which roughly translates to Hug Me), smiling and yelling at the camera when she realizes she’s been caught. Their marriage has been filled with memories of my dad pulling pranks on my mom, of them traveling the world together, of my mom indulging my dad’s fondness for classic films and listening to him enthusiastically explain the plot of some awful Bollywood movie from the 70s. Their marriage has been filled with thrilling
adventures and deep laughter, with genuine friendship and joy, and I don’t think anyone would be able to guess that they chose to get married after the very first time that they met.

To be fair, arranged marriages do have their flaws. There are young girls, barely over the age of 12, who are forced into marriages, and there are women who are attacked with acid or burned to death because their dowries aren’t impressive enough. There are survivors of domestic violence who cannot leave their homes because marital rape is legal and divorce is a social stigma. To me, these problems have more to do with misogyny and marriage as an imperfect social institution than the nature of arranged marriage itself, which is simply a practice of involving parents and families in the process of looking for a significant other. We like to think of arranged marriages as lacking in choice, but my parents willingly chose to marry each other, despite knowing that they could walk away and choose someone else. “Falling in love is a choice,” my dad always says. And perhaps he’s right. Maybe we should start thinking of love as a verb rather than a noun, as something we do actively and intentionally rather than some mysterious phenomenon that we sit around and wait for to happen to us.

“My parents may or may not be in love, but they certainly love each other.”

My parents may or may not be in love, but they certainly love each other. Sometimes I wonder if American society has glorified romantic love at the detriment of celebrating all the other kinds of love out there. I don’t know how to define what my parents share, but I can definitively say that it adds something incomparably special to their lives. And maybe that’s all that we need to know. Maybe my dad’s superhuman ability to stomach lemon rice for an entire year and my mom’s newfound hobby of singing Lag Jaa Gale at odd intervals tell us more about real, genuine love than conventional acts of “romance” ever could. The relationship that my parents share isn’t one that can be found between the pages of a Nora Roberts novel or onscreen in a Hallmark Channel film, but it is beautiful and meaningful. It is love.

https://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/on-lemon-rice-lag-jaa-gale-and-looking-for-love-in_us_59286e4be4b0a7b7b469ca27
In late April, Hong Joon-pyo, a presidential candidate of the Liberty Korea Party (LKP), became the center of a controversy because of his possible involvement in an attempted rape. In his memoir published in 2005, “Na DoragagoShipda” (I Want to Go Back), he states that he helped his friend obtain yohimbine, a stimulant used on animals such as pigs, to make them mate by stimulating the peripheral nerves. Hong’s friend used yohimbine on a girl to try to make her more sexually receptive. Fortunately, the “aphrodisiac” did not work on the victim as expected and his friend ended up with scratches on his face from the girl’s fingernails. Hong said this rape attempt was all in good fun.

This episode triggered a heated debate about his eligibility for public office since Hong has worked as a prosecutor for over 30 years before running for the presidency. Hong emphasized this episode happened a long time ago and he admitted in his memoir what he did was wrong. However, the following reactions from him and his supporters show his apology was meaningless.

Jung Gab-yoon, a lawmaker of the LKP, defended Hong by comparing his case to President Obama. In Obama’s memoir, “Dreams from My Father,” the former president mentioned his usage of marijuana. Jung argued Korean citizens would vote for a person who shares his guilt frankly as American citizens did. First, a rape attempt is not comparable to marijuana use when we consider the victim. Second, to share his shameful past is not enough to be accepted. Hong’s spokesman also said this episode happened during his college years, which is in the heat of youth. Hong and his supporters pretend this is not a big deal, and their attitudes exemplify the pervasiveness of rape culture in Korea.

“Rape culture” means that society normalizes rapes. The term was created to criticize the culture encouraging violence against women in America. However, Koreans also are not free from rape culture. According to a survey by the Korean Women’s Development Institute last year, the sex crime rate in Korea has more than doubled in 10 years. One
reason for our rape culture is probably the Confucian background that emphasizes the gender roles; women should be submissive and supportive of men, while men are thought to be active and stronger. Moreover, according to Confucianism, men are much more sexual than women.

Our traditional culture assigned sexually submissive roles to women, which resulted in the distorted understanding about women’s sexuality. According to Yeong-Ae Yamashita, the author of “Nationalism in Korean Women’s Studies,” Confucianism demands “sexual purity” for women. Therefore, women who are sexually receptive are often stigmatized. This faulty assignment limits not only women’s understanding of their sexual behavior but also that of males. The incorrect perceptions of female sexuality might be the reason why some people like Hong and his friend thought they had to drug someone to have sex.

Hong is often compared to U.S. President Donald Trump in Korea because of his straightforward attitude and stereotyping of males and females. I was surprised when Trump was elected, considering his sexist statements. Hong is more extreme than Trump. In an interview, he stated women and men are supposed to do different kinds of work, and for women the work should be household chores. Even though this offensive statement was criticized and he apologized officially, he and his supporters give the excuse he was trying to seem “strong.”

Despite their excuse, it is not strong to stereotype females. They are misusing the word “strong.” In rape culture, to control and discriminate against females solidifies a man’s status as a strong and “real” man. To define males as masculine and dominant and females as feminine and subordinate is one facet of rape culture. Therefore, Hong’s effort to define himself as a man who never goes into the kitchen, is strong only from a sexist view. We should not dismiss his behavior as a cute little boy showing off his arm muscles. That “boys will be boys” attitude will feed rape culture.

If we stay complacent, Korean society will never have equality for both sexes. It is true that Korea has Confucian traditions and traditions that deserve to be respected. However, if traditional views drag society from more essential values, such as sexual equality, we need to turn up our voices against them.

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/http://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/opinion/2017/05/162_229470.html