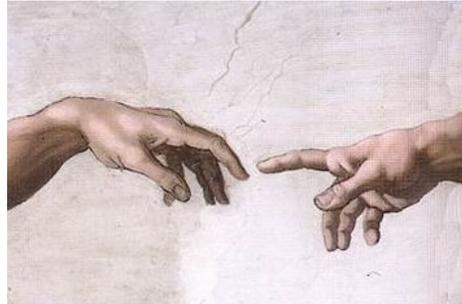The Best of Brave New
Word
July - August 2016

About Us

Brave New Word is a blog where our diverse groups of creators - all current undergraduate college students - come together and gives our take on the world today. We call ourselves the Kill Joys because as our generation comes of age our causes to end racism, violence, sexism and bias in general are constantly being dismissed by not only most of the older generations but some of our contemporaries. Brave New Word is focused on giving our generation a voice and a space to let the world know that being 'politically correct' or a 'kill joy' is hardly an insult but a compliment and an acknowledgement of unconscious bias

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What people get wrong about psychologists

This is an issue that has been simmering under the surface of my skin for many years now. I am currently a psychology student, as well as a clinical worker for a nonprofit group home for teens with histories of trauma and behavioral challenges. I know certain systems of therapy and treatment inside and out, having been both a patient and a professional. I study and work with amazingly kindhearted, passionate people who want nothing more than to help others and serve their community.

That's why it gets me so riled up when I am met with such ignorant comments to my disclosure of studying psychology. Often times, people get wary or awkward around me, as if I will start judging them. I am told frequently that I must love watching people on the street and picking out what is wrong with them. Or that I would have a field day psychoanalyzing their families. I have even had people ask me to read their minds.

I know some of these comments are well meaning or said in a joking manner, but they all are a reflection of how little people know about psychology as a field and the actual role of psychologists. I have no desire to just categorize people or label them as diseased. The profession was not built around judging people and telling them that there is something wrong with them. Psychologists, like any other people in the medical field, first and foremost want to help others.

The job of a psychologist is to help their clients with any concerns they have that are interfering with their ability to function or diminishing their quality of life. The labels psychologists/psychiatrists use (such as schizophrenia or OCD) are just there to help catalogue and accesses tested ways that have assisted people with similar difficulties in the past. They also are necessary when dealing with insurance companies to approve certain medications or levels of treatment and when communicating between different health providers or centers of care.

People do not go into the field of psychology to make fun of others behind their backs or judge what it means to be "normal" or not. People become psychologists, social workers, and psychiatrists to help people and teach them the tools that would help them live the quality of life they want to live. This may sound like a small or petty complaint for me to have, but it is just a reflection of how skewed perceptions often are of the field of psychology and its purpose. There is so much stigma behind seeking help for mental illness or everyday challenges of life. If we can help change the misconceptions behind what psychologists do and what different forms of therapy look like, maybe we can empower more people to seek the help that they need and further protect those people who already receive treatment from being ridiculed or unfair judgment. The mental health field is so necessary, and I wish that is was given all of the credit and validation that it deserves as a legitimate and beneficial field of medicine.

Blood Donation Discrimination

I think it is way passed time to talk about the restrictions on donating blood based off of sexuality and sexual activity. Back in 1985, stemming from panic over the AIDS epidemic, a federal law was passed stating that any man who had sex with another man since the year 1977 cannot donate blood. I hope that this law reads as hypocritical and unproductive because quite frankly it is. The outbreak and rapid spread of HIV/AIDS was and still is popularly blamed on the homosexual community (gay men in particular). HIV and AIDS are spread through blood, vaginal fluid, semen, and breast milk. All people are therefore equally susceptible of contracting and spreading HIV. While it is true that men who have sex with other men make up a larger amount of people statistically who have HIV, that should never be interpreted as all or even most men who have sex with other men have HIV.

In 2015, in response to growing pressure to let go of the ban, the law was changed to state that men who have not had sexual relations with another men for at least a year can donate blood. While this law may be an improvement in terms of widening who can donate blood, it is almost more insulting than helpful. It does not address at all why this law was so wrong in the first place. All blood that is donated is screened for HIV and other diseases before it is used. It is true that HIV may not be discovered in a blood test for up to a month, that is the case for all people, not just men who have sex with other men. The year time frame is completely arbitrary and is just a reflection of societal fear and mistrust of gay men of those who engage in homosexual activity. The fact that the rule is not all people must be abstinent for the last month speaks for itself on the intentions and reasoning of this clause.

Not only does this law exist, but when you donate blood, you are required to specifically detail your recent (and not so recent) sexual encounters, particularly if they were with men who identify as homosexual. These questions are completely irrelevant and offensive quite frankly. Viruses do not discriminate their hosts in such a way, so why should we?

I urge everyone to think twice about the next time they donate blood and fight for the complete lifting of the ban. Passing on the knowledge that the lifting of the ban will in no way endanger anyone is vital to spreading awareness and understanding. It is distressing to think that sexual orientation or consensual sexual engagement is the reason that more people are not able to donate blood and potentially save lives. We, as a people, can do better than that.

Is The Big Bang Theory actually discriminating against nerds?

As the show wraps up after 10 seasons I think it's important to look at how it evolved and all the hate/love it got throughout the time it's been on the air. To be honest, I'm not the biggest fan of the show and I'll go into greater detail with that later but I think something should be said at how audiences responded to the show. People either loved or hated it and I'm still somewhere in-between. I used to really dislike it but now I can see both sides looking back at the entire series. The fact that The Big Bang Theory did get so many responses and emotional ones at that, does say how thought provoking of a show it was. Full House, for example was a show that stayed on the air for a long time, had mostly good reviews and a faithful audience but that doesn't make it a 'good' show. A good show in my opinion, is one that creates dialogues and an impact on peoples' lives, whether they want it or not, and I can say that The Big Bang Theory does that really well, but not always for the right reasons. But then again, is there ever such thing as bad press?

At first, like I said, I really liked The Big Bang Theory I watched it readily until the first half of the 7th season until I kind of just grew out of it. I couldn't bother to follow it anymore but that doesn't mean other people abandoned the show, in fact it got three more seasons after that. I liked it because of the 'smart' humor but the more I looked into it and thought, where was the humor coming from (stereotypes, caricatures of religion and people from other countries, 'women jokes'), I started to dislike it. Not only that, but the show turned into *Friends*, if *Friends* were nerds and had a single person of color in the main cast. And me personally, I'm not into those sorts of sitcoms. But this article isn't going to be me summarizing my opinions, but rather an article showcasing both sides of the binary toward The Big Bang Theory and trying to make sense of it for myself.

The main criticism that The Big Bang Theory gets is that it's actually anti-Nerd. We're supposed to be laughing at the main group of men rather than with them. We're supposed to be on Penny's side because like Penny the audience is an outsider. The opposite argument is that we as the audience are supposed to be siding with the 'nerds' because the audience are nerds. This goes on to the counter argument that the show isn't 'nerdy' enough but rather is just a pop culture referencing machine and makes jokes that any average audience member with the internet could get. However, I would argue that the main audience of The Big Bang Theory is average audience viewers with some knowledge of Buffy the Vampire Slayer, Firefly, Dr. Who, etc. So does that mean average people are just nerds and that the humor is actually nerdy? Eh, it's a mixed bag. There are science jokes and there are pop culture jokes that rather than being nerdy are just pop culture jokes that most audiences would get. And that's the point, most audiences, so the show can continue making its millions. Not only making themselves millions but spurring on this whole generation of 'cool nerds' or Hollywood Nerds; people who think they're nerds because they watch The Big Bang Theory but are just average viewers with access to the internet.

So this brings us to, who are we laughing at? To understand this we need to bring in the laugh track and where it's placed and the foundations of most of the jokes. The laugh track is placed in the show even though it's filmed in front of a live audience in order to induce the TV audience at home to laugh with the live audience. I wouldn't say that the laugh track plays exclusively with Penny's side or with the guys'

side. It's pretty even. When Penny makes a 'dumb' joke that she doesn't understand nerdy stuff we're not supposed to side with her not only because she's blonde but because she's a woman without a college degree. When Sheldon makes a sexist or racist joke because he's socially inept we're supposed to laugh with him at the expense of whatever marginalized group he's mocking. Which seems kind of counterproductive because aren't nerds a marginalized group? Why have them mock others who are in the same or worse situation? There are scenes and episodes dedicated to the nerds' former bullies which is kind of a fantasy witnessing of what a nerdy audience member might feel towards their own bullies. But when it's about ridiculing a group under the 'nerd' group in the social hierarchy then I think that's a problem. Why would anybody want to bash a group that's considered lesser when they themselves should know what it feels like to be in that same position? So I think that though most characters get a laugh we have to think about where the laugh is coming from and at whose expense. Sure, it's easy to make jokes about racial and sexist stereotypes we as an audience don't believe in, but bringing them up and giving attention and not having Sheldon learn from them is extremely problematic. MAYBE these jokes could work in a post sexist and post racist era but we're living in a world where discrimination exists and Sheldon is just adding to it. I guess you could make an argument that the show is living in a 'post' era where everyone is equal but then why have these jokes anyway?

The next thing to look at is the characters and what they represent. Mainly all the characters in The Big Bang Theory are stereotypes and caricatures of people with stigmas attached to them. But they play it up at different degrees which creates this seemingly broad spectrum of nerdom when in reality it just makes them all one dimensional figures save, Bernadette and Leonard as the in-between characters of the nerd spectrum. One of the reasons why I stopped watching the show isn't about the jokes but about the characters, they're all caricatures and the ones who aren't are just bland and forgettable. Amy however has grown into a progressive character and this brings me to how the show doesn't exist in a vacuum. There are real actors playing these stereotypes of characters. They have real thoughts and feelings and whether they're doing it for the money or not they have a chance to voice an opinion after an episode or during the creation of an episode to have an input. Mayim Biyalik (Amy) has said things about the show that she herself has put into her character to make her more of a feminist rather than how she was portrayed when she was first introduced. But Sheldon still is as unbearable as ever and Raj, ugh, don't get me started.

Writing this essay made me realize that the show is mostly anti-nerd. Not because of the characters or the jokes or the fact that the audience is made up of average people who think they're nerds but that it's because it's a show about marginalization that contains marginalization. It's a show that says 'smart is the new sexy,' but Stuart and Kripke, both with degrees are not smart or sexy but rather a loser and a villain, respectively. Though there is marginalization in the nerd vs. loser universe (i.e. every nerd is a loser but not all losers are nerds) why make the slogan of the show 'smart is the new sexy' when it clearly isn't. This isn't high school anymore, this is adulthood and though I do enjoy the occasional bully reference nerds and losers should ban together not put others down. They're adults not children, not even teenagers, why is it still okay to make fun of a guy with a lisp? Or a guy who works at a comic book store? Why is it funny to make fun of men who may not have sex like 'real men'? They can put deep things in The Big Bang Theory, I personally cried when I watched the letter from Howard's dad episode.

Why not put that emotional stuff in for Raj's character or Penny's character rather than have them just get the cheap laughs? Why not say, hey there are losers and there are nerds and yknow what, they can be friends? Set a positive example for audiences rather than a seemingly positive show with actual negative undertones.

Competitive Women

As women we're already in a lower minority position in a gendered hierarchy and therefore feel the need to compete with men for job positions, life skills, and other aspects of our lives. However, if men uphold their masculinity through homosocial bonding – getting 'accepted' by other men for fulfilling a heteronormative masculinity – then women uphold their femininity through the opposite, competition.

Women not only have to compete against other men for equality but with other women. Women are pitted against one another in order to distract them from bonding and joining forces to gain equality for all women to be equal to men. Not only is race an intersection when competing but sexuality, the way you perform gender, and age are key factors. Women are constantly competing due to the age marks we give them. The age they get their period or when they become a 'real' woman, the age they start having kids and getting married (because if they don't then they're an old maid by 40), and the age when they become infertile and no longer 'of use' to men. Age makes being a woman extremely competitive with other women because it feels as though their time in life is running out. Time is running out to find a man, to settle down and become secure because the patriarchy makes women feel as though obtaining a man will lead to happiness and security. Not only does this need to find 'the one' a heteronormative aspect of patriarchy but it's not a guarantee that any relationship will fulfill any individual. Because of the patriarchy women are forced to compete with each other not only for men but are told to be distracted with things like who can do makeup better, who can be the thinnest, who can be the smartest all to woo a man and gain financial and emotional benefit. Women are told to compete rather than to mingle and focus on things other than finding a man. The patriarchy does this to women in order to keep them from rising up against them thus, keeping them a pacified minority. It also introduces harmful stereotypes against women such as that they're superficial, not to be taken seriously and materialistic. The age stereotypes defy women by saying that after certain ages they are of no use and can either only be a sexual object to be used and then retire to their maternal position or go on to be a 'super woman' and not only be fit, have her own business, and raise a multitude of children. A woman doesn't dare to be 'sexy' after giving birth and becoming a mother because 'what if her kids see it?' These patriarchal stereotypes confine women to either being sexual objects or mom.

If a woman doesn't want to become a 'super woman,' a mom, or a 'slut,' then they can take on the persona of a man and be a masculine woman because it's one step closer to being 'not like those other girls.'

Not all women want the same things and these patriarchal induced boxes that women must be caged in and then compete in order to gain a man's attention just prove that. Why can't a woman be sexy after giving birth? Why can't a woman stay at home and take care of her kids after giving birth? Why are these choices so binary and why is one better than the other? Feminism and masculinity should lie in people being able to choose what they want to do without being scrutinized for it. Only then will we be able to respect one another and reach equal footing.

<u>To all of the nice people out there</u>

> **"I'm not a racist**/sexist/homophobe, but..."
> "My best friend is gay/black/Asian/etc, and he doesn't care when I use that word."
> "It's just a joke. You know I don't mean it like that."
> "Oh I'm not one of those people. You know I don't mean anything by it."
> "You know I don't mean you when I say that. You're not like the rest of them."

I could go on and on with more phrases like these, but I am sure we can all conjure up similar expressions that we have heard before or even said ourselves. Nice people say careless things all the time, make jokes that offend some people, use words laden in histories of hate and subjugation, condone systems of inequality. Does this make them bad people? No. Does not being a "bad" person make it okay to speak or act in such a way? No.

I am so sick of people brushing off micro-aggressions because they were just joking or they "didn't mean it like that." There is no way for someone to use offensive language, play off of stereotypes, or put down a group of people without endorsing existing systems of inequality. There is no way to claim absolution from a system that a person partakes in just because they know better or they only do it in certain social settings.

If someone claims to be a nice person out there, if someone claims to not be a racist/misogynist, if someone is not one of "those people," then prove it. Thoughts and intentions don't matter at all in the face of actions. Moving outside of systems that are societal norms and bred over lifetimes takes constant effort and vigilance. It is no easy feat. And mistakes/ slip ups will be made. But it is through the acts of rectifying those slip-ups, being open to growth, seeking out different perspectives, and accepting criticism with compassion and an open mind that we can slowly work beyond systems of hate and inequality. And earn that "nice guy" badge that is so easy to just verbally claim.

The Transformation of Cigarette Ad

It's not so much of a stretch to say that cigarettes were a huge thing only a few years ago. And in some parts of the world and even in parts of the US it's still really 'normal' to have a smoke. Hence all the public money that goes into anti-smoking PSAs on MTV. But if you think a lot people smoke nowadays, you can't even imagine how many people used to smoke up until the late 70s and even through the 90s. People smoked cigarettes because it was cool. Cool people smoked. My mom, a person who I never thought would be following the main stream just to be cool, once told me that she started to smoke just because her friends started, so she also wanted to be part of the social group. Advertisements of any kind – TV, Billboards, and Magazines - were the main reason for the great popularity of cigarettes. Commercials on TV used to show a lot of beautiful, happy and cool people smoking. It really hooked people into smoking, until the government prohibited ads on TV, censored the cigarette's packing and obligated the companies to warn about the risks of smoking.

I didn't live in the 60's or 70's – the era that my mom grew up, so I looked up cigarettes ads on YouTube and I really got surprised. Many of the ads are really similar to ads for alcohol used today (beer, whisky, 'girly' forms of Vodka etc). So, the cigarette ads that the government prohibited because they supposedly incentivized the use of cigarettes are now used for advertising alcohol. And to be honest, our 'generation' really is based on alcohol. For young people in most parts of the world having fun and being labeled as 'cool' is all based on alcohol. How much you drink and how much you *can* drink. Forget about trying to be the 'party pooper' by saying you don't drink. Peer pressure forces you to drink the same ways as cigarettes once and maybe still do. You can't be 'cool' unless you have a great 'drunk story' to tell at parties where you just drink more. It's ridiculous. People die from binge drinking, drinking and driving and not to mention how alcohol plays into the rape culture we have on US campuses. The "fun" that people like now often involves getting drunk so drunk in fact that it's 'cool' to black out.

It's not only advertisements that incentivize young people to drink, it's the movies like American Pie and Superbad that tell us if we don't we're automatically not cool and our existence is meaningless. TV shows with cigarettes used to be the same way with TV characters – even the Flintstones – endorsing certain brands and on air or off air.

Just like smoking, alcohol also has problems associated with its consumption. Alcohol causes many diseases, mainly liver related, drunk driving is a real problem. The number of smokers really dropped after the government intervention and the health risks were revealed. It is still legal, but the whole social power or peer pressure related to cigarettes is not as strong as it used to be. **It makes me wonder if alcohol used the same ways that the cigarette industry used to get into people's lives and young culture.** It make me **wonder if restringing alcohol and putting on major warning labels on the bottles and the health effects of drinking would help our generation to break this alcohol based young culture.**

<u>"He only does that because he likes you" – Normalizing violence against women</u>

When I was in grade school K-12 I got picked on a lot for various reasons. My friends as well got harassed by boys who either taunted us with slurs or try to take things from us or poke us. We as girls didn't do anything about it. Rather we took the abuse because we knew as 'losers' no one would care anyway. When I watched TV at home of fake schools for some solace and escapism from real school I saw this mantra being played out, 'he's only doing those things because he likes you.' 'He doesn't know how to express his emotions,' 'he's just a guy,' 'guys mature emotionally slower than girls.' So, being the impressionable girl that I was I believed these lies.

I reminisced with my friend of 14 years and we talked about those 'stupid boys' that used to pull our hair and tease us on the play ground and through high school gym class. Her mom chimed in that 'they only did that because they had a crush on you.' I don't say anything but I know now that wasn't the case at all.

TV and our parents and friends defend the boys' actions because we've given into the illusion of gender for so long. We attribute characteristics and physical traits to gender which don't exist. Men aren't less emotional than women we've just conditioned them to be that way and thus now it is taken as the truth.

A prime example of this is the chimpanzee and the banana experiment. There are bananas at the top of a stair case and the chimps of course go for the reward but they all get sprayed with water repeatedly so they all learn that going for the bananas at the top of the stairs is wrong. They bring in new chimps that don't know the rule and go for the bananas but this time the water isn't needed. The chimps that were there before remembered what happened last time and teach the new chimps not to go for the bananas. This is repeated until after bringing in newer and newer chimps none of them go for the bananas anymore. They just ignore them not knowing why they don't go for them in the first place. This animal allegory can also be seen in George Orwell's novella *Animal Farm* where no one learns to read and thus are mercy to the rules written on the side of the barn. And those who do remember what it says are either too afraid to speak up or silenced.

The same goes for 'gender norms' and normalization of violence against women. Women are so often told that boys mature slower than girls and can't show how they feel so they harass you instead. And we as women are told to take it with the assurance that 'they like us' and thus we should be happy about the abuse. "I can't believe he likes me!" This is just what the media machine wants us to believe. Women are brought up to be so insecure and competitive with one another that a boy liking us is worth the daily abuse. And sure it's starts in play grounds but that will lead to women being submissive just because to them it's natural to be treated like an object to be hit rather than to be loved. We need to stop making excuses for men to be violent and tell women to just deal with it. That's why breaking down the gender walls of what 'men' can be and what 'women' can be is so important because it has life and death implications.

<u>Normalizing the Sexualization of Women</u>

I was scrolling through my news feeds on social media and found a similar pattern recently, mind you when I'm writing this its May 26, 2016. I saw a common thread of how women were being branded to the masses. The first one is the Fabletics advertisement by Kate Hudson. She's doing the 'impossible' pose of showing off her 'assets' in just one picture. This pose has been criticized before by many women who were angry with Scarlett Johansan's Black Widow Pose in Iron Man 2 as well as the Avenger posters. While her male and even female counterparts were displayed as people Johansan was regulated to a butt and boobs. Yes, it does show her flexibility but why is she the only one in that pose? I also know the argument that men take on that pose too but why is it expected of women to do it while men only do it either once in a while or still can be taken seriously while in the pose. The fact that Kate Hudson who's the owner and endorser of Fabletics is doing this pose she's endorsing the idea that women are only their superficial looks. Yes, maybe to her it's 'empowering' but to many others who are scrolling through their instagram feed she's adding to the fact that women are taught to be sexual objects and internalize what they see in social media. Rather than respecting our bodies and doing poses that we think are empowering she's using a pose that has been created by the male gaze.

Not only that one but I was really angry at the one with the racial swapping of the James Bond characters as Asian actors. I'm a big fan of that but the fact that they kept the bond girl in the position of sex object is really mind blowing to me. If we're trying to break racial stigma why not break gender stigma as well and try to raise women up along with men and racism. I just don't get it. We need to raise each other up together in order to be both taken seriously.

I'm not advocating that men start sexualizing themselves but it is a fine line to what's empowering and what's adding to the stigma of women. Why are Kim Kardashian's nude selfies and girls gone wild not empowering while slut walks are? It's a really hard and fine line and I guess it just goes with your definition of feminism. I think that the women in these posters are subject to the male gaze. Even Kate Hudson who yes is the endorser of Fabletics is a **patriarchal woman, a woman who's internalized the patriarchy so she can't see that what she's doing may not be empowering for everyone or for the feminist cause.** In fact, it's further stigmatizing the feminist movement and clouding what is 'sexual empowerment.' **For me, sexual empowerment is doing something that defamiliarzes others with the idea that women are sex objects…. Not acts that normalizes women as sexual objects.** These images are normalized by men and have been male approved for centuries because of the normalization of women as sex objects. This isn't empowerment. Women shouldn't need men's validation. The fact that slut walks makes men uncomfortable and face the realities of slut shaming and rape, that's empowerment.

Adoption as the 'Ultimate' Charity – in response to HONY commenter who said adoption is 'cool'

As I've written about before, charity ultimately and paradoxically comes from selfishness. You need the hours to graduate, put on your resume or just to feel good about yourself and sleep better at night. That's why most people do charitable work. However, even though the act is motivated by narcissism the act is still the act. It's still valid. Whether they want to be there or not they're doing more than someone who did nothing. That should still be commended. If selfishness wasn't a drive in the human condition I'm sure that charitable acts wouldn't be as prevalent. Helping others is really helping you but there isn't anything wrong with that because helping others is important.

So I was scrolling through the Humans of New York page which I really admire. However, there are some problems that I have brought up about the page before such as it's easy to empathize with the people in the photos and the captions because we don't really know them from one phrase they might have said. That doesn't sum up someone's life. I'm sure I wouldn't admire the people posted on the page if I truly knew them in reality. But it's still a page that fosters positivity and charity (ironically enough) so I stand by it.

Recently or not (depending on when this goes up) a Chinese adoptee – a story I was really looking forward to since HONY started – came up on the page. The comments were mainly from parents posting pictures of their own adopted children and how much the children changed their lives and how it takes children to learn how much they mean to their parents. The most popular comment said something to the effect of 'adoption is so cool, it's so amazing to think that someone chose you.'

What are we Pokémon?

Chosen to be adopted, really? Thinking about charity, more than donating money and opening up spaces to help others, adopting a child and bringing them into your everyday life is something really big. It is seen as charity because you're 'rescuing' a human life potentially and I guess actually too. I think adoption is great but the comment really missed the point. Adoption isn't 'cool' and adopted kids don't get chosen to be adopted. They're forced to be adopted because their original family didn't want them or were able to care for them, and that's fine. But I don't think many adoptees would describe their experience as 'cool.' It's hard to forge a family out of I guess strangers that weren't connected to you in any way before. I guess it can be seen as beautiful too because it really shows how family itself is a social construct. But to be honest I don't think I would choose if I had the choice, to be adopted again. It's the parent's choice to adopt not the child's. I was chosen by the orphanage to be adopted but I didn't choose this life. I guess no one really does either way.

Again, thinking of adoption as charity and having parents speak for their children adopted or not really irks me because in my experience my parent has never truly known what I was going through. Maybe it's my fault for not sharing but I never felt comfortable sharing and it shouldn't be my fault. It's my life and

my choice. People who choose to adopt should be heralded as 'good people' but are they doing it as a charitable act? It depends on the parent but if it's charitable or not having children inherently is selfish. Raising another life other than your own is seen as the most selfless act anyone could do but in reality it's done for selfish reasons and most times parents aren't happy about it. They usually don't want to sacrifice their own life but do so anyway because either society demands or they just didn't' know the realities of child rearing. Having children and the relationship of family, parents and children is really complicated and something I really detest. But that's just my opinion. I'm not a family person and maybe it is because I'm adopted, maybe it's not but please don't say adoption is 'cool' and don't show off your adopted children for self validation.
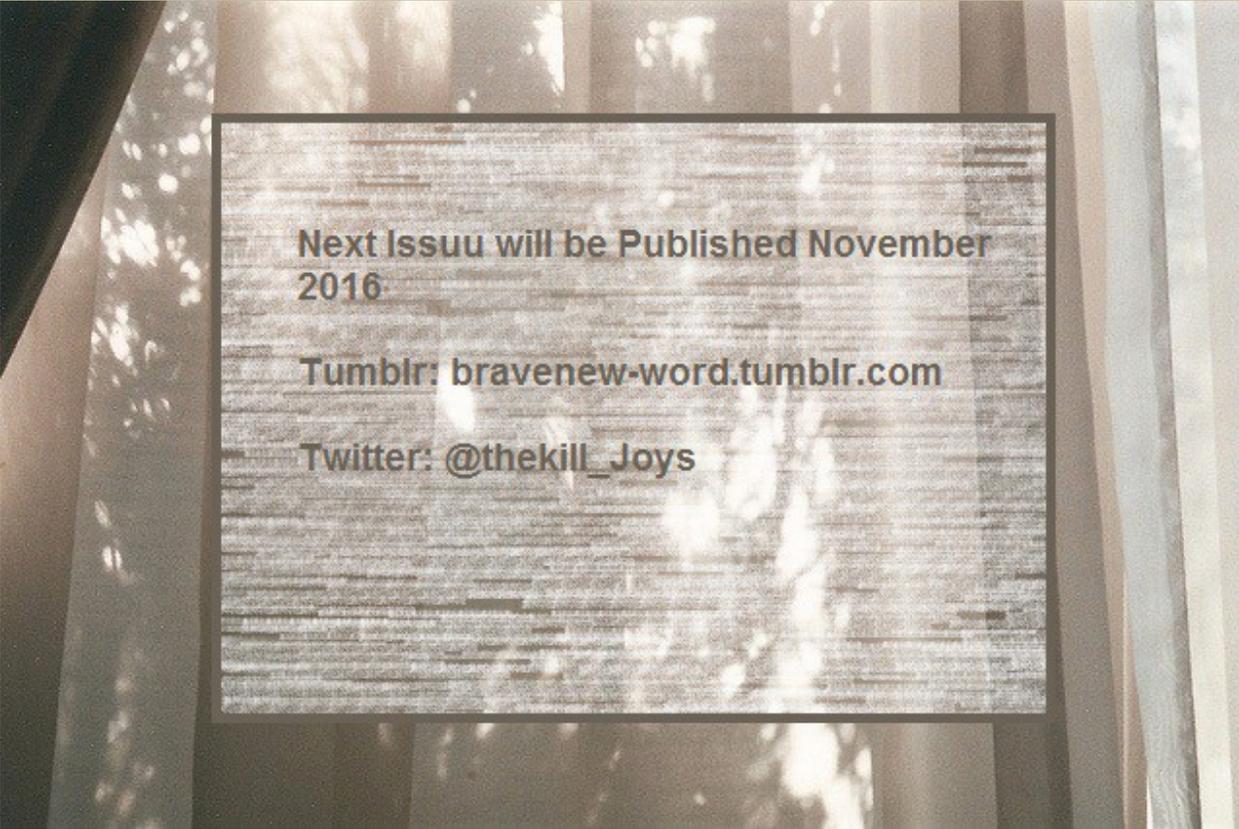
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