

Cameron Whiting

Section: S

“Modern Educayshun” is a short film posted to YouTube in 2015 by Neel Kolhatkar who also stars as the main character. The piece begins as a student named Neel walks into a classroom with a large box in the middle and three other students at their desks with the teacher at the front. The mood is very ominous, and he soon realizes that this is not a normal classroom. When the teacher asks a few simple math questions and Neel answers the supposedly correct answer, she tells him he is wrong, and the other students answer correctly with terms like “multiculturalism” and “gender equality”. When it is time to submit their math papers, he gets extremely frustrated with the illogical grading system and the students start verbally attacking him, ironically complaining that he is attacking them. The film then takes an extremely dark turn in the last few seconds as they all stand up, surround him and kill him. After a few seconds, the short ends as another student enters the same classroom and everyone looks completely calm again but the box shudders in the center of the room, implying that the previous boy is now in there and this is an endless loop. “Modern Educayshun” is an effective Juvenalian satire in which the director incorporates numerous rhetorical devices into the establishment of two primary arguments critiquing the education system’s cultural oversensitivity to labels and equality.

The first heavily satirized theme throughout the short film is the modern education system’s fixation on equality using the concept of average scoring and privilege points. After the initial confusion surrounding the answer to simple math question like “ $2+2$ ” and “ $3*3$ ” not being what they should be in true math terms, it is time to hand in their math write ups. Penelope, a quickly disliked girl that embodies the character of the oversensitive teacher’s pet, is the first to be graded. The teacher simply glances over her paper and announces that she receives a 6/10. The next to be graded is Simon, another student that the viewer discovers is

extremely sensitive to his self-image and cares very much about trying not to offend anyone. He receives the same 6/10 after the same quick glance from the teacher who doesn't even read the paper. The third student in the classroom besides the main character, Sunshine, who is clearly meant to represent almost every significant minority in the school system, sits in front of a messy drawing with the word "educayshun" scribbled across the center. He only gets a 1/10 as he obviously did not have a good paper but Neel, who then explains his extremely complicated and groundbreaking discovery, gets a 7/10. This scene begins the directors satirical attack on our education system by emphasizing the idea that the work we produce in school does not actually matter very much and ends up summed into a single number. This is a larger problem in the system, but this film takes a step further to narrow down the problem back to equality. The next step of the grading process begins with adding up everyone's scores and dividing them evenly among the students, angering our main character. The teacher stands before the students and simply states "Well done students ... we're all average" (Modern Educayshun), an exaggeration of how our schools prioritize equality of its students over their unique abilities and strengths. The final step to this process is the most absurd as it involves a concept called privilege points. These extra points are added to the average score of the class that you received and are determined by how many traits you possess that might define you as a minority. For example, Penelope is bisexual and female which gives her two privilege points, but one is subtracted because she is white. Simon is a straight, white male which subtracts three from his score and provokes a calm reaction saying, "It's only fair" (Modern Educayshun). Sunshine is where this concept is the most heavily exaggerated as he begins to list traits like Asian and transgender which are obviously important minority groups but then goes on to list the fact that "I've got hairs on my nipples" and "I can't really run properly or tie my shoelaces by myself" (Modern Educayshun). This is a strong example of caricature and exaggeration because he is using

these traits to accumulate 13 privilege points and score the highest of the class, sending him to the math summit with only a scribbled drawing and beating the impressive paper the Neel produced. This extreme grading system satirizes how our education system prioritizes equality and ensuring everyone is represented over the actual quality of work coming from each student. The largest system in the world that embodies these principals is the college application process. The process and the colleges that created this problem heavily rely on your background and are constantly worried about their image. This often leads to many institutions accepting certain groups of students just to show the world they have diversity and use that as a marketing tool for the school. Not even just accepting students into college but throughout the entire education system there has been a huge movement towards trying to maintain equality that in some cases can overshadow the actual work of each unique mind and this concept is effectively portrayed in this exaggerated example that anyone can understand.

Another concept that is satirized in this work is our system's obsession with labels and being overly sensitive to what could offend someone as each student takes great offense to every small thing Neel says. The strongest example of this theme being satirized is a rant Simon gives to the class after accidentally saying the word "straight" because he does not want to offend anyone with such language. This begins with his yelling at Neel to stop staring at Penelope because it is offensive to do so for more than 15 seconds straight. Appalled, he then feels the overpowering need to nervously clarify that when he uses that term he didn't want to "offend any persons of a non-traditional sexual preference" and that by non-traditional he didn't mean to "offend any persons who oppose..." (Modern Educayshun) but is cut off by Neel. The horrified look on his face and his flustered corrections is a great personification of the culture developed recently in much of our education system. So many people identify as so many different things that it can be difficult to correctly identify

everything, and you are often heavily criticized if you don't understand these terms or use them incorrectly. This idea of trying your best to correctly identify people's pronouns or other traits has created in some places a hostile culture where one can be attacked for doing so improperly and instead of trying to educate them. This leads to this perpetual worry instilled in everyone about offending others. Here, Simon doesn't even use the word "straight" in the context of someone's sexual preference but instead simply the direction, but he still needs to explain himself for fear of being called out for offending someone. Penelope also provides a great caricature of a persona who is constantly worried about this exact thing to an extreme. When Neel asks a seemingly relevant question in the beginning of the short, she snaps back "We don't ask questions, questions are offensive" (Modern Educayshun), an obvious exaggeration. This quote is important to the satiric nature of the piece because it is using caricature to represent our education system's tendency to, instead of teaching people who ask questions, ridicule them so they aren't able to learn. The final minute of the film takes a very dark turn where they end up killing Neel but the events leading up to that perfectly satirize this concept of offense. The beginning of the end starts with Neel standing up, grabbing Sunshine's scribbles and yelling at everyone in an attempt to make them see how crazy this is. Simon and Penelope take great offense to this and Sunshine even starts crying. One quote that perfectly sums up this entire satire comes from Penelope as she retorts, "You think you're so great with your maths and your facts? What about feelings" (Modern Educayshun). To which Simon responds with "Yeah, feelings are more important than facts" (Modern Educayshun). This is the whole concept put into two lines that we put feelings first and make sure not to offend anyone instead of focusing on the physical work or accomplishments of a student in our modern education system. When these retorts do not convince Neel, he continues yelling and amidst this screaming match, Penelope yells "Stop violating me with your different opinions!" (Modern Educayshun). The irony present in this

dialogue greatly supports the satirical purpose of the short because it shows that even though Penelope is extremely concerned about offending anyone with her opinions, she still refuses to accept a difference from her opinion at all. The three students and the teacher then proceed to gang up on Neel, tie his mouth shut and presumably kill him producing the sound that the next girl hears similar to the one that attracted Neel to the room at the very beginning. When this next girl walks into the room and all the students are eerily calm, they watch as she walks past the sealed box in the center of the room. As it shatters and startles her, the teacher speaks ominously, “It will end” (*Modern Educayshun*) referencing the endless and hopeless cycle that refuses any change to our system and continues to harm the social comfortably of it’s students.

Although this short film by director, Neel Kolhatkar, directly targets the modern education system’s problems with it’s internal culture, this is just a microcosm of the entire world and our modern society. Many of the themes present here are easily scaled to global societal trends of the same nature. One modern trend especially relevant with the rise of social media is the concept of “cancel culture”. This tendency of people online to argue and accuse instead of educating is the same concept present in our education system and is what is critiqued throughout this effectively satiric short film.

Works Cited

Modern Educayshun, Neel Kolhatkar, 9 Nov. 2015,

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iKcWu0tsiZM&t=1s&ab_channel=NeelKolhatkar.