TOO SMART FOR THEIR OWN GOOD: POPULAR CULTURE AND HOLLYWOOD FILM DEPICTIONS OF INTELLECTUALS

by

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(Under the Direction of Bonnie J. Dow)

ABSTRACT

Mainstream films, TV shows, and magazines abound with representations of intelligence and intellectuals that question the political roles of academic professionals and the social capabilities of brilliant scholars. This project delves into these depictions of intellectuals as elitist and absent-minded by specifically investigating the overlapping discourses surrounding intellectualism involved in two recent mainstream films, *Good Will Hunting* and *Finding Forrester*. If we take the intellectual within media representations as a model for public and political engagement, these films not only offer attractive incentives for apathy by normalizing intellectual aspirations in order to suit the fancy of media audiences, but they also cement popular insecurities toward any claim to specialized knowledge. Within media texts, the looming issue that this project highlights is the inability of our political atmosphere to stomach any notion of elite appeals to universal considerations. The normalization of the images of the highest forms of intellectualism in these films is a sign of a drastic dysfunction in popular culture when it comes to depictions of viable forms of intellectual occupations.

INDEX WORDS: Intellectualism, Genius, Mass Media, *Finding Forrester*, *Good Will Hunting*, Authenticity, Class, Therapeutic Discourse, Post-Colonial Theory, Bodily Representations, Magical Negro

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DEDICATION

To Kate, Mom, Dad, Katy, Stephen, Andrew, Patrick, and Margie. Everything I do is for and because of you.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

In Woody Allen's popular 1977 film *Annie Hall,* Allen's character Alvy Singer responds to then girlfriend Robin's inquiry into his appreciation of basketball by saying, "What's fascinating is that it's physical. You know, it's one thing about intellectuals, they prove that you can be absolutely brilliant and have no idea what's going on." This brief jab at intellectuals, especially given Allen's reputation as a filmmaker concerned (although humorously) with traditionally intellectual topics such as philosophy, psychology, and literature, goes to show the contested relationship that intellectuals have with popular U.S. media institutions. Mainstream films, TV shows, and magazines abound with representations of intelligence and intellectuals that question the political roles of academic professionals, the social capabilities of brilliant scholars, and the relationships between intellectualism and class, race, gender, ability, and sexuality.

This project delves into these depictions of intellectuals as elitist and absent-minded by specifically investigating the overlapping discourses surrounding intellectualism involved in two recent mainstream films, *Good Will Hunting* (1997) and *Finding Forrester* (2000). The specific overlapping discourses within these two media artifacts are the depiction of aptitude itself (as a result of contrasts with characters of more average proficiency in literature, mathematics, art, creative writing, and history), representations of intellectuals' bodies (as opposed to their acts of thinking and writing), and the co-intersections of race and class. These films are typical of U.S. media's treatment of intellectualism in that they generally support the following characterizations. First, they implicitly argue that scholastic obsessions deny human capabilities

more suited for social acceptance, emotional stability, physical ability, and cultural competence. The mental abilities of the film's main characters thrive only insofar as they come into conflict with seemingly healthy relationships, emotional intelligence (especially as it concerns the values of humility and maturity), and bodily capabilities such as athletic skill. Second, they depict intellectuals as devoting themselves to insular, irrelevant subjects and issues. The films suggest that matters of the intellectual sphere are isolated from communities capable of influencing cultural and political change. This detachment relies on understanding intellectualism as not only a self-motivated activity that seeks higher forms of knowledge for their own sake but also a theoretical practice, much like the U.S. Supreme Court's traditional responsibility to set itself apart from political pressure (and thus deprive itself of political salience).

The ambivalence in media/intelligentsia relations described above manifests itself in two interactive phenomena. First, media professionals use the relationship of intellectuals to the public in maintaining their own populist yet expert image because, as Nicholas Garnham (1995) states, "[the media's] relative autonomy and the source of their intellectual 'distinction' rests upon the twin legs of a claimed transparent and objective presentation of the 'real'…on the one hand, and a claim to represent the public rather than the truth" (p. 381). Second, actual media representations of experts often participate in the "dethroning of the expert" by "unmasking their pretensions and holding them to account" (Garnham, 1995, p. 381). In attempting to optimize their effect on the U.S. public and popular discourse, media organizations utilize the guise of expertise in their products just as they simultaneously denigrate intellectuals and expertise by opposing them to the public interest. A recent article from the humor magazine *The Onion* (2005) entitled "Actual Expert Too Boring For TV" comments on this phenomenon well. The article brings to light intellectuals' inability to relate to the public in a mediated society

increasingly reliant on Dr. Phil and infomercials. Intellectualism is discounted as a "nerd" style not flashy or friendly enough to fit within the strategic category of "media-friendly," and this exclusion of scholarship from positions of expertise in media makes intellectual pursuits questionable as social commitments and epistemological approaches. Being a "brainiac" undoubtedly means that you have no access to that realm of public knowledge that Woody Allen refers to as "what's going on."

Andrew Ross (1989) claims that "the heart of the story about intellectuals and popular culture is a structural interrelatedness between knowledge and power" (p. 5). I would argue, however, that the focal point of this structural clash lies not just in the methods that the two groups use to acquire power through knowledge but also how consistently that power can be maintained through institutional and public support in the face of oppositional dethroning. For traditional intellectuals, scholarly pursuits through higher educational institutions have ensured distinction and shaped expectations of power; however, the popular discourse of anti-intellectualism threatens to shake these academic foundations as elitist, secular, or impersonal. For emerging media institutions, control over the means of representation and guarantees of popular reception can be best ensured through appeals to social, experiential learning as media products stimulate it. This stability, however, faces criticism from intellectual critiques of media power and corporate culture that highlight the limits of media education and the need for cautious media consumption. As the quote above and the recent popularity of accusations about "liberal media" illustrate, this interaction certainly has political implications, in the leverage that intellectuals, however located on the political spectrum, have on popular opinion and in the ability for U.S. media to seem to genuinely represent the public.

Purpose for the Study

Given this often unrecognized but often heated social clash, this study examines fictional portrayals of intellectuals and the particularly disparaging characteristics, however subtle, that these narratives portray. While the public can absorb comments on intelligence and intellectualism from obvious non-fictional sources such as political debates over Leftist politics in the U.S., I argue that these disputes center more on questions of political doctrine than intellectuality. More important to the media/intellectual relationship are the actual renderings of intelligence itself in media because these speak to the larger social context of education, culture, and authenticity. To put it simply, the driving question that informs this project is this: *what does it mean to be smart and what is smart-ness able to do?* From popular books that are self-described "Idiot's guides" to a children's cartoon focusing on a boy genius (*Jimmy Neutron: Boy Genius)*, the rhetoric of intelligence is a fluid body of descriptions and behaviors that inform the American public's relationship to its own political, social, and cultural curiosities. A popular dichotomy that also interplays with the smart/stupid dichotomy evident within the examples above involves the opposition of intellectualism to the popular will, as whatever is brainy can assumedly involve questions too difficult for the majority to grasp. Given this distinction, stupidity has become a signifier for nobility, innocence, and honesty, especially through such popular films as *Forrest Gump* and the sentimental treatment of mental disability in popular media (Adler, 1994). As Avital Ronell (2002) contends, "the character associated with stupidity – in contemporary picaresque rendition, an offspring of For[r]est Gump – can serially move forward (losing the braces) only to the extent that he is spared knowledge of positions taken or deeds accomplished. Moral purity, American style, can be ensured only by radical ignorance" (p. 55). These influences pin popular opinion between pressures maintained by media to nurture, on

the one hand, a Quixotic ignorance of the political implications of dominant socio-economic values, and, on the other hand, a cautionary skepticism of the pre-eminence of media sources for information exchange. Media-age intellectuals challenge the authority given to print, film, radio, and TV sources because they represent a social orientation based on the belief that "what you don't know" *will* hurt you. The intellectual figure, then, is a central participant in the national and international negotiation of particular forms of knowledge and their cultural, political, and moral valuation.

Literature Review

A motivation for this study was an honest belief that representations of intellectual identity were a relatively novel focus for a media analysis. However, although media's role in shaping intellectual identities may be relatively unexamined, writing on intellectualism as a political and social phenomenon constitutes an expansive body of commentary. Most of the literature maintains a generic approach to the sociological question of intellectualism based on its relationship to social movements, capitalism, political authority, and the University. The history of public intellectualism has a very specific introduction into American culture from France, and most authors locate the significance of the term to the Dreyfus Affair in France in the 19th century and the intellectual role of Émile Zola in exposing the truth of Dreyfus's wrongful conviction. In a multitude of works since then, the topic of intellectualism has become a popular means for studying the role of artists, writers, and academics outside of their respective institutions and in the popular realm. An important distinction in the intellectualism literature lies in the discussions of the strict political significance of intellectuals versus the more recent treatment of the cultural components of intellectualism. While the traditional political literature

is informed by such influential theorists as Antonio Gramsci (his concept of organic intellectuals) and Karl Marx (the relationship of intellectualism to the proletariat), the analysis of the role of intellectuals in a more specific micro-political context has been influenced by theorists such as Michel Foucault (the concept of power), Pierre Bourdieu (the intellectual field and academic discourse), Edward Said (affiliation and the "liminal intellectual"), and Noam Chomsky (the effects of the intellectual elite and the "intelligentsia"). While many works fall under the more Marxian notion of the political role of intellectualism (Brint, 1994; Eyerman, 1994; Fink, 1997; Gagnon, 1987; Lock, 1990; Polsgrove, 2001), there are also myriad works engaging in second wave, "Cultural studies" scholarship as well (Bender, 1993; Bourdieu, 1990; Brym, 1987; Chomsky, 1969; Disco, 1987; Flacks, 1991; Fridjonsdottir, 1987; Furaker, 1987; Goldfarb, 1998; Joffe, 2003; Lukacs, 1960; Radakrishnan, 1990; Ross, 1989; Ross, 1990; Said, 1990; Said, 2002; Swartz, 1997).

Several other sub-categories exist in the literature that relate to this topic. First, rather than considering the relationships of self-identified intellectuals to society, several works center on the definition of intellectualism as a varying concept, arguably since antiquity (Aronowitz, 1990; Eyerman, 1994; Melzer, 2003; Robbins, 1990). A second branch of the literature treats the question of intelligence as an element strictly applicable to education, the University, and the role of academia (Biel, 1992; Bourdieu, 1994; Brint, 1994; Goldfarb, 1998; Jacoby, 1987). To describe this sub-category more clearly, it concerns the role of intellectuals within their own disciplines as private figures rather than as politically active figures. A third part of the literature base concerns the role of intellectualism as it relates to racial identities and their history in the U.S. (Farred, 2003; Goldfarb, 1998; Graff, 2001; Holloway, 2001; King, 2004; Michael, 2000; Polsgrove, 2001) and gender identities and their history in the U.S. (Biel, 1992; Goldfarb, 1998;

Spivak, 1990). At concern in these works are the possibility for the exclusion of racial and gender-based concerns from discussions of intellectualism and the structure of academia. While class and economic concerns also are prevalent in the discussion of intellectualism, this topic is most specifically referenced in the political literature, pondering such major concepts as educational capital and intellectuals as a new class in society. Fourth and finally, several works treat the question of intelligence at a theoretical/philosophical level, working through such issues as the Cartesian mind/body dualism and general questions about the acquisition of knowledge (Adler, 1990; Ronell, 2002).

The theoretical discussions of anti-intellectualism and the literature on the media/intellectual relationship are of most concern to analysis of these films and their depictions. The legacy of influential discussions on anti-intellectualism in American life dates back to Richard Hofstadter's (1963) award-winning assessment of the phenomenon and Allan Bloom's (1987) subsequent emphasis on its continued prevalence in the U.S. While other works take up this topic (Duncombe, 2003; Graff, 2001; Podhoretz, 1979; Ronell, 2002), these two books represent the legacy of the academic treatment of this concept. Consistently, however, their discussions of the occurrences of anti-intellectualism exclude considerations of media portrayals of intellectualism. While Bloom is more responsible for taking into account the effects of media, his coverage of the "closing of the American mind" briefly touches on the role of music in youth culture's aversions to intellectuality simply as a formal distraction to kids who should be studying.

A recent author who takes the role of media seriously is Dane Claussen (2004), who uncovered media's dethroning tendencies in popular magazines' treatment of higher education. Two of his general findings inform the choice and direction of this analysis. First, he found that

the “U.S. mass media’s role in U.S. anti-intellectualism has received almost no scholarly attention” (Claussen, 2004, p. 50). Second, he contended that “the term *intellectual* is strikingly absent from the discourse of both U.S. intellectuals and the general public’s vocabulary” (Claussen, 2004, p. 29). This claim not only contributes to the sense that intellectualism deserves attention as a marker of identity but also gives media representations of intellectualism further significance because they exist within a society that is relatively incapable of coming to terms with them. His coverage of anti-intellectualism, however, is arguably limited by the medium chosen and the media content that he chooses to consider. Given the rise of the concept of organic intellectuals in the U.S. since Gramsci originated it, the public has become aware of the educational opportunities outside of formal educational institutions. Eyerman (1994) comments that “Gramsci’s main point concerning intellectuals is that they are historically, that is generationally, formed. From the view of human potential, everyone is an intellectual, only social conditions determine who actually becomes one” (p. 82). Thus, actual depictions of intellectuals may have more salience to a public that has intellectual curiosities but a disregard for or disinterest in opportunities in traditional educational institutions since many of the portrayals question whether or not to pursue intellectualism in any context.

This discussion of Gramsci forces a pertinent question concerning what exactly constitutes an intellectual or intellectualism. If Gramsci is correct in attaching the potential for intellectual status to anyone, then how does that contribute to the understanding of the essence of intellectualism? One limitation is that defining what intellectualism is requires accounting for patterns of speech, dress, body movement, occupational identifications, divisions of professional status, and standards for expertise. The surfeit of applications of the term “intellectual,” many examples of which are considered above, more easily justifies this critical approach than it offers

an easy path to construct a modern definition of intellectualism. Nevertheless, this project utilizes the following operational notions of intellectualism as grounds for the media criticism of the two films. First, based on Eyerman's (1994) discussion of intellectualism, this paper considers the concept as describing not just a fixed identity (whether individual or collective) but also a "social practice" whereby intellectualism can be attained via institutional certification (p. 34).

Second, while every social role from biochemist to business strategist carries with it traces of intellectualism, one specific marker for intellectualism involves the societal translation of a form of knowledge into a particular distinctive social status. An intellectual is a self-ascribed or socially determined elite who maintains a grasp over a specialized area of information that requires expert discourses. This relationship between knowledge and privilege is a central aspect of prior treatments of intellectualism, evident in Garnham's comment above as it suggests a dichotomy between expertise and democratic ideals. The notions of intellectualism in the films under consideration are evident in their clear demonstration of traditionally defined "genius" in the main characters, an experience of status in its most pure and given form. This paper, however, does not consider all geniuses to be intellectuals or all intellectuals to be geniuses. The working notion of intellectualism is a broad attempt to describe how particular knowledges of the external world are given social credence within a rhetorical process that negotiates authority and autonomy in order to determine the social conditions of living in a world made up of both "smart" and "stupid" people.

Just as the anti-intellectualism literature provides a foundation for the concerns offered in this study but falls short of encompassing current media representations, the literature on the relationship between intellectuals and popular culture also gives strong support for the direction

of the paper but treads only briefly along the path proposed. Some works only briefly cite media's role without considering it in depth or in theory (Michael, 2000; Pells, 1985; Polan, 1990; Parry-Giles & Parry-Giles, 2002). Kauffman (2002) closely investigates the relationships between intellectuals and media, but she does so by studying intellectual artists and their tribulations in producing critical/cultural messages in mainstream media. The two works that come closest to treating this interaction seriously are Garnham (1995) and Ross (1989), who relate this relationship to questions of knowledge/power and the role of capitalism in shaping popular understandings of intelligence.

Both authors emphasize a key aspect of the media-intellectual relationship in Western culture: the dialectical interplay between expertise and elitism (or ignorance). While the quotation from Garnham (1995) earlier in this essay illustrates his consideration of this phenomenon, Ross (1989) also notes that many narratives "splice together what appears to be in contradiction: distrust and hostility, on the one hand, and deference and respect on the other" (p. 3). While Garnham's (1995) investigation of the shifting political and cultural roles for intellectuals attempts a more theoretical analysis of the threat that intellectual practice poses for media capital based on such cultural theorists as Gramsci and Said, Ross's (1989) book provides a more extensive demonstration of the complex relationship between intellectualism and popular culture in numerous American media representations. Ross's chapters are devoted to popular uses of "categories of intellectual taste" such as hip, camp, bad, sick, and fun (p. 5). One of Garnham's (1995) main examples involves the depiction by the Thatcher government in Britain of academic intellectuals, assumed to be particularly key players in liberal arts education, as responsible for the downfall of the British state in their propagation of anti-business ideals. Both authors come the closest to fulfilling what Claussen (2004) has called for in a serious effort to

question popular media treatment of intellectualism because they recognize the stakes of the contemporary struggle for authority in our mediated society. This contradiction, while prevalent in TV and film depictions, has a deep history in the emergence of print and its close linkage to the emergence of intellectuals as a distinct sociological category or class (Garnham, 1995, p. 376). This paper examines this long-existing clash in order to measure intellectual status at its current position within mediated society and to determine the varied social methods for relating to, pursuing, and understanding academia and intellectual pursuits. As Ross (1989) notes, "only then can we expect to make proper sense of the linked material power, in our culture, of elitism and anti-intellectualism, vanguardism and populism, paternalism and delinquency" (p. 5).

Summary of Texts and Critical Perspective

The two media artifacts that I've chosen to consider for this project are two mainstream Hollywood films, *Good Will Hunting* (1997) and *Finding Forrester* (2000), both directed by Gus Van Sant and released on a wide national and international scale. The films are appropriate artifacts for treatment of the scope of the project for several reasons. First, they not only share release dates within a reasonably close timeframe as to be considered similar cultural samples but also maintain a relevance to current media texts and discussions to a necessary extent as to be considered worthy contemporary texts. Second, both artifacts concern stories that figure as their main characters a self-taught intellectual whose conflicts center on their integration into mainstream society and the academic sphere. *Good Will Hunting* portrays its protagonist, Will Hunting, as a white, working-class twenty-something from South Boston whose janitorial duties at MIT allow him to reveal his genius-level mathematical skills to an esteemed scholar who takes interest in his potential and tutors him. *Finding Forrester* depicts an African American high

school student from New York City whose test scores, a surprise to his teachers and his classmates, give him the opportunity to excel athletically and academically, particularly in English composition, at a prestigious private school. In both cases, the character's intellectual brilliance in traditional academic subjects is on display and unquestionable. The conflicts for the two young prodigies in the stories, however, pertain to their social, cultural, and emotional growth as it relates to their racial, class-based, and age-based status. Third, both stories pair the promising students with an experienced mentor figure who offers substantive aid in their respective areas of interest, and, more reliably, life lessons in how to cope as an intellectual within and outside of academia. For Will Hunting, his father figure is Sean Maguire, counselor/teacher with similar South Boston roots who agrees to give Will weekly therapy sessions. For Jamal Wallace, his social educator is William Forrester, a reclusive novelist who gives him daily writing lessons after reading some sample stories. These two artifacts were chosen based on these similarities, particularly as they relate to popular culture's representations of intellectualism, and for their many differences, evident in the contrasting handling of race, bodily activity/work, class, and emotional normalcy within the two narratives.

Intellectuals in the films operate in the context of the activity and interactivity of four sets of relations: class-based, race-based, therapeutic, and corporeal (based on the mind/body dualism), each of which is explained in more depth in the individual chapters. Each of these representative modes informs the overall handling of intellectualism and independently contributes to the visual, verbal, and aural framing of the stories with the potential to shape popular opinion concerning particular identities. One underlying assumption of this project in its choice of media and its emphasis on media content over form is that criticism of media artifacts themselves can reveal and question significant elements of the mediated experience and its

relationship to a dynamic body of popular understanding. While conclusions from the textual analysis do situate the films within the divisions and associations between intellectualism and capitalism, these theoretical perspectives and their relationship to the films also shed light on how those modes, as independent cultural concepts, relate to media's role in society.

Despite the overlap between the two narratives in many examples of these four theoretical concepts, this paper utilizes the class-based and therapeutic perspectives to comprehend *Good Will Hunting* and race-based perspectives and analyses of corporeality to understand *Finding Forrester*. Even though both films share relationships to these concepts, this organization is not arbitrary but based on fundamental differences in the ways that the two narratives depict their particular intellectuals. Based on the critical concepts of capital, habitus, and field conceived by Pierre Bourdieu, the class relations within the films shed light on the anti-intellectual tendencies in the films. Ross (1989) notes that "Pierre Bourdieu's description of the social and symbolic use of cultural capital provides an important, if far from systematic, explanation for the 'powerless power' of intellectuals over 'ordinary people'" (p. 11). While Ross's call for an analytical system may be simultaneously naïve and overly skeptical, he recognizes the utility of the notion of capital, a framework used on other media texts as well (Gibson, 2004; Reynaud, 2001; Shefrin, 2004; Sweeney, 2001). The concepts of field and capital are particularly useful as theoretical underpinnings for analysis of mediated messages that oppose genius to common sense because these concepts provide a vocabulary for understanding the structure of specialized and mass opinions and behavior. In *Good Will Hunting*, Will's encounters with the traditional University clash with his class identity because his organic intellectualism represents an intellectual status realized outside of traditional academic institutions. For Jamal in *Finding Forrester*, no such conflict occurs because, instead of using his

social location to defy the social influence of his school, he strives simply to achieve certification from his high school as an intellectual.

The therapeutic lens is also situated upon Will in such a prominent way as to deny the possibility of any alternative to his plight other than emotional salvation. In Jamal's case, however, emotional stability is not questioned but used to place him in a supporting role of emotional aide to a recluse writer. While in both cases, therapeutic discourse maintains the authority over, to quote Woody Allen again, "what's going on," this discourse is utilized within the narratives to downgrade intellectual knowledge in opposing ways. Furedi (2004) notes that "today, an anti-intellectual emotional ethos appears to influence therapeutic culture" (p. 159). Given the prevalence of popular forms of confession and consolation within Western society, analyzing the impact of this regime of discourse within the two films is significant to account for the manifestations of this anti-intellectualism as it begins to cast a shadow over portraits of intellectuals in society.

Preview of Chapters

This thesis proceeds in three remaining chapters. First, I consider *Good Will Hunting* and the viability of the intellectual persona in that narrative. Of particular concern in that analysis are the therapeutic discourses and the representations of class within the film and their interplay with the main character's intellectualism. Second, I analyze *Finding Forrester*, specifically in regard to therapeutic relationships, mind/body distinctions, and notions of colonialism and racism. These chapters are followed by a conclusion that summarizes and discusses the implications of this analysis.

Chapter 2

The Closet Southie Genius: Intellectualism, Class, and Therapy in *Good Will Hunting*

Critical reviews of the 1997 film *Good Will Hunting*, whether they praise the movie as a viable Oscar contender of that year or lambaste it as Hollywood mush, contain three prominent themes that comment on the basic elements of the plot and general reception of the narrative. The first common subject involves the main character's intelligence and its role as the torque that influences the main conflicts in the story. Desson Howe of the *Washington Post* noted this major theme in his introductory remarks, arguing that "when people tumble into love – in Hollywood movies, that is – intelligence is rarely the motivating force that brings them together. Being adorable or eccentric, or having an amazing head of hair – these are the usual qualities that make one flavor of the month hot for another. But in the wonderfully original 'Good Will Hunting,'…What counts is his thinking organ. When [Will] meets [Skyler], a highly intelligent Harvard student, they waltz on a mental plateau that Julia Roberts and Brad Pitt couldn't reach by cable car" (1997).

The second common angle that these filmgoers use to understand the story is based on the class politics within the story. Maitland McDonagh of *TV Guide* contends that "the battle for Hunting's soul is ultimately a tug of war between caricatures: pathetic ivory-tower intellectuals on the one hand (Lambeau is quite literally reduced to groveling on bended knee before Hunting's raw genius), salt-of-the-earth working-class heroes on the other. All that's missing is a speech about the heart having to mediate between the head and the hands" (1997). This summary also begins to establish the clash between the intellectual pursuits of the main character and his class status. The final theme prevalent in the reviews involves the role of therapy in resolving the

major conflicts in the story. Jonathan Rosenbaum of the *Chicago Reader* called the movie a "therapeutic fairy tale" (1997) while Roger Ebert, incorporating the class theme again, found that "[Will's] reluctance to embrace the opportunity at MIT is based partly on class pride (it would be betraying his buddies and the old neighborhood) and partly on old psychic wounds. And it is only through breaking through to those scars and sharing some of his own that [Maguire], the counselor, is able to help him" (1997). These three interactive elements of the film's story form the analytical basis for understanding it as a cultural artifact whose scenes carry with them notions of class relations, therapy, and genius. In the analysis that follows, I approach these foci using concepts from Bourdieu and Foucault to argue that, in *Good Will Hunting*, intelligence and its role in fueling class awareness get downplayed and muted through a therapeutic lens that regards intellectualism as an obstacle to human personal development.

The film is a coming-of-age story involving a 20-year old janitor/construction worker from South Boston, Will Hunting, who spends most of his time at the batting cage or exchanging blows with neighborhood foes. Will's intellectual capacity and his drive for learning, however, eventually become obvious to an MIT mathematician, Gerald Lambeau, who recognizes his brilliance and begins to mentor him. A condition of his parole after one particularly violent altercation with the police on a basketball court involves the requirement of bi-weekly counseling sessions. Through an incident at a Harvard bar where he humiliates a history graduate student in defense of his best friend, Will begins a relationship with a Harvard senior, Skyler. While he resists the counseling at first, his time with a tough psychologist, Sean Maguire, also from South Boston, slowly gives Will the opportunity to confront his distancing and lying behaviors that have emerged as a result of his orphanhood and a history of physical abuse from foster parents. Maguire begins to treat Will as his own son, and their friendship and his advice

inform Will's decision to desist feigning his loyalty to working class lifestyle and pursue jobs more suited for his intellectual ability. While Lambeau lines him up with several prestigious job offers in mathematics, he ultimately refuses them in search of Skyler, who has since moved to California for medical school.

The film's conclusion offers a resolution of the conflicts that Will embodies between intellectualism, working class lifestyle, and emotional instability by establishing his authentic self as the product of therapeutic redemption. Will confronts his class status and the trauma from his foster father's abuse, but instead of embracing his academic opportunities, he chooses to forego an intellectually rewarding, well-paying job and instead start on a cross-country pursuit of a Harvard student he met at a bar. Will's journey throughout the film begins with the spectacle of his genius but slowly becomes a personal struggle to overcome his criminal tendencies and his traumatic emotional upbringing. While he retains full control over the public emergence of his brilliance towards the beginning of the story, influential figures in his life, notably his best friend Chuckie, his academic mentor (Lambeau), his psychologist (Maguire), and his girlfriend (Skyler), assume more authority over the settings in which he chooses to portray his intellect along with his Southie-ness and his emotional vulnerability. This overall tendency works to structure Will's intelligence within a confessional ritual, one in which he comes out as a working-class whiz kid, managed by the interpretation and advice of his friends (members of his own class), professional academics (those already situated within the field of intellectuals), a romantic partner (an upper-class student with the expectations of a typical love interest), and his therapist (a "failed" intellectual from Will's neighborhood who offers the expertise of emotional experience).

Using Foucault's repressive hypothesis and Bourdieu's concepts of habitus and capital, I argue that this confessional framework opposes his intellectualism with two other aspects of his identity, his class status and his emotional development, in order to de-emphasize and even devalue his scholastic aptitude. As Will's visibility as a capable intellectual increases in the film, his inability to manage these other aspects of his personal life also increases, justifying his therapeutic treatment and contributing to the sense that his IQ alone won't guarantee his overall success given other personal barriers. The film's message, however subtle or implicit, contributes to anti-intellectualism within popular media depictions because of its emphasis on the failures expert status faces within the social realm.

The Intellectual Habitus, Economic Capital, and the American Dream

The therapy frame/lens plays a significant role in the management of intelligence in the film by presenting psychological health in opposition to the social applicability of brainpower, but I will first consider how class politics works as a conditioning factor for Will's intellectuality. Pierre Bourdieu offers two analytical concepts, habitus and the different types of capital (within cultural fields), that contribute to the class/intellectual dynamic in the film. Bourdieu regards cultural fields as series of institutions and rules that interact between each other to sanction certain cultural practices within a hierarchical structure (Webb, Schirato, & Danaher, 2002). Within these fields, whether economic, legal, political, economic, or academic, cultural capital (the cultural valuation of different dispositions and modes of consumption) determines the power dynamics because positioning is established and negated by the acquisition of capital. When we traditionally speak of class status, this term refers most accurately to Bourdieu's economic capital in which occupational and social mobility is determined by economic wealth or

the ability to easily attain it. Webb et. al. (2002) note that “one of the advantages of being in a position of power is that it enables groups or agents to designate what is ‘authentic’ capital” (p. 23). Within cultural fields, the appraisal of different forms of and claims to capital may not be a product of pure collective determination, but pre-existing power relations serve to maintain economies of capital that favor the powerful. Bourdieu (2000) asserts that “the social order itself largely produces its own sociodicy. It follows that one only has to let the objective mechanisms do their work, which may be work[ing] upon oneself, in order, unwittingly, to grant the social order its ratification” (p. 181).

This tendency for the reproduction of social conditions also relates to Bourdieu’s explanation of symbolic capital as “a form of capital or value that is not recognized as such” (Webb et al, 2002, p. xv). Symbolic capital, evident in the assignment of expert status or celebrity, rather than functioning to create power through its acquisition, relies on popular support for its cultural force. His concept of habitus applies directly to this phenomenon, as it begins to theorize the cultural behavior of individuals between particular fields. To Bourdieu, habitus, defined in his early work as “the durably installed generative principle of regulated improvisations…[which produces] practices” (1977, p. 78), combines aspects of subjective compromise with the conditions of social living and objective determination of people’s realities. By navigating different societal fields, a certain habitus can be shaped by the power structures within those fields.

Habitus and the acquisition of capital within different cultural fields enlighten the consideration of intellectualism in the film for several reasons. First, Bourdieu himself openly recognized and attempted to cast off his intellectualism and to free himself from the academic habitus as a marker of status (Webb et. al., 2002). By treating the application of intelligence in

the form of intellectualism as an operative habitus, he acknowledged the potential role it played within different fields. Second, the social logic created through the interactions between the habitus and different fields with different types and levels of cultural capital allow the class/intellectual dynamic in the film to be subject to not just a convenient vocabulary but a systematic understanding of social operation that makes possible the conclusions concerning the role of intellectuals in the U.S. now and in the future. What Bourdieu offers is a frame for assessing the connections between economic status, social location, academic experience, and power that explain the active relationship between these forces.

As intellectualism is tied up in the educational field, it is produced in different individuals through educational institutions that assign them degrees of cultural capital through the amount of retained knowledge they receive, their approach toward learning, and even their ways of speaking (Webb et. al., 2002). In the case of *Good Will Hunting*, however, Will's intelligence and behavior as an intellectual is unique in that his economic status is one that isn't suited for the cultural capital that he obtains and it is a book smarts gained outside of traditional educational institutions. Instead of recognizing the viability of this working-class, outlaw intellectualism, the film's other main characters challenge Will's authenticity as a gifted academic by questioning his emotional stability and positioning his traditional social location as mutually exclusive with his capabilities as a well-read genius.

A Working-Class Brainiac: *Good Will Hunting* and Class

One brief note before the specific analysis involves how Will's genius is represented in the film. While all claims to intelligence may not be seen by their claimants as constitutions of their personal identity, this film clearly constructs Will's intelligence as an identity characteristic

rather than a habit or an area of interests. First, his skills at mathematics and chemistry are consistently depicted as innate rather than earned through long hours of study. In a conversation with Skyler at a coffeshop, Will justifies his talent by comparing it to how Bach envisioned the piano in that "he could just play." Second, one area of focus on his intelligence is the natural expanse of his memory, a topic in the same conversation with Skyler and a depiction evident in scenes when he reads stacks of books by quickly flipping through pages but retaining everything (something Sean, the psychologist, specifically mentions to Prof. Lambeau at one point). This representation of Will as a born genius does contribute to the sense that Will's intellectuality "designate[s] an objective sociological category" (Garnham, 1995, p. 373). While this incidence does justify Will's characterization as an intellectual, it does not restrict his intelligence to an aspect of identity alone. As will be discussed below, intellectualism also "carried with it from its origins a sense of distinction…that can be mobilized, both negatively and positively, within cultural and political struggles" (Garnham, 1995, p. 373). For the purposes of this analysis, I emphasize how this distinctiveness is challenged or maintained by Will and the other characters within the film in order to celebrate or downgrade something that constitutes a natural characteristic.

The five main components of the relationship between intellectualism and class in the film are the depiction of Will's intellect and Southie lifestyle as objects for spectacular consumption, the depiction of Will's intellect as a weapon of class warfare, the use of gaming metaphors in the dialogue to obscure structures of social inequality, the opposition of intellectualism as an individual myth of the American dream to collective participation in societal affairs, and the role that Will's "passing" downward plays in the film to position his intellectualism as incompatible with his class status. Will's genius is continually offered up to

viewers of the film as a characteristic that makes him capable of amazing feats that audiences simultaneously recognize as incredible and foreign to them. When the film shows him assigning proton spectra to obscure particles, completing high-level mathematical proofs, or reciting sections of history books from memory, the film's concern is not the availability of that specific knowledge to the audience but rather the general depiction of evidence of his brilliance. Howe's review of the film even argues that it "asks us to nod our heads in reverence at the mysteries of higher intelligence" (1997, p. online). In their study of a well known Budweiser commercial, Watts and Orbe (2002) found that "a key rhetorical resource in the economy of spectacular consumption, then, is the paradoxical tension between the 'different' and the widely available" (p. 4). While their study concerns the consumption by a largely white audience of African American male social behavior as both funny/available and unknowable/different (Watts, 1997; Watts & Orbe, 2002), the same tendency could be applied to the consumption of Will's intelligence and the Southie lifestyle in the film.

The consumption of this rare brilliance places Will's intelligence on a pedestal to be imitated not based on its contributions to cultural capital or social well-being but rather simply based on the aesthetic magnetism of supreme genius. The equations Will solves and the quotations he recites serve to construct an intellectual style that makes academic advancement less a tool for the world's social and intellectual development and more a lifestyle useful in personal interactions to wow friends and create relationships. This proximity and distance of intellectual displays also become prominent early, just as depictions of Will's class status are also screened for consumption. The film continually contrasts demonstrations of Will's genius with the language and everyday habits of his friends born in South Boston, and this association not only restricts intellectualism to being a subculture of technical experts but also melds Southie

vernacular with his technical vocabulary and intellectual habitus in a way that de-emphasizes the political efficacies of scholarly knowledge. The first fifteen minutes of the film depict scenes that alternate between Prof. Lambeau's MIT teaching and Will and his friends' experiences in Chuckie's car, at local baseball games, at batting cages, and in bars. While some romantic depictions of the working class lifestyle do exist later in the film, particularly in Will and Chuckie's enjoyment of their construction jobs, these glimpses into Southie lifestyle involve patterns of speech and behavior presumably native to these friends and the neighborhoods in which they have grown up. They fight based on childhood rivalries and they chatter at local bars with their distinctive accents that mark them to audiences as members of a distinctive subculture whose everyday codes are foreign to the general viewership. As these scenes depicting Southie life continue, in their confrontation with Harvard students at a Harvard bar and Skyler's presence at one of their local bars, the pure spectacle of Will's brilliance fades and is replaced by a Southie/expert hybrid that shows up in two particular scenes.

The first scene involves Chuckie impersonating Will at a job interview for a prestigious mathematics firm. Chuckie convinces them to give him their cash on hand using a faux-sophisticated vocabulary that is an exception to his language throughout the film. While he still retains the Southie accent, the vocabulary change and his syntax mock the expert language that Will previously engaged in (at the Harvard bar and with Lambeau), thus privileging the efficacy of Southie identity in garnering economic capital over traditional intellectualism. The second scene involves a job interview Will actually attends with the NSA where he's questioned about his reservations in potentially taking the job. In a confident manner, he offers a scenario in which his possible codebreaking for the agency could threaten a friend from his neighborhood who is injured because of the work that Will does. In this diatribe, Will uses technical language that

illustrates his desire to give proof of his intelligence and that contextualizes his intellectuality in the context of political protest of a dominant governmental organization. The story, however, also utilizes an ample amount of slang and focuses on his desire to protect a fellow Southie, thus locating the motivations for his resistance in his class identification. Aside from the general preference for the politics of Southie-ism, these two scenes make the consumption of both intellectualism and a Boston class identity something that allows audience identification and differentiation, thus reinforcing the media's ambivalence toward both Will's intellectual identity and his class in their management of him as a questionably "authentic" genius and Southie.

This relationship between the spectacles of genius and South Boston identity also play a role in the construction of Will's intelligence as a class consciousness capable of representing the social and political issues surrounding his working class lifestyle and challenging the ability for upper class elites to use their intellects to achieve class distinction. Lisa Holderman (2003) argues that the role of class in understanding media portrayals of intellectuals is particularly significant because "despite apparent support for education in general, it may be argued that the social order is least challenged if citizens (*particularly* members of the lower classes most likely to be dissatisfied) are removed from and perhaps even hostile to erudition" (p. 46). Will's autodidactic genius doesn't just represent the equalizing force that education has in class relations but it also demonstrates how lower class intellectuals threaten the social dominance of higher class institutions and values. Will has been "born into" his genius, as Sean illustrates to him later in the film, just as many wealthy elites garner their upper class qualifications simply through their family. Intelligence, then, serves as a potential chink in the armor of the dominant social order because it allows class mobility without having to *put in the work* of acquiring the necessary cultural capital. Will is an anomaly, and his exceptional status plays a role in

unnerving other academics in the film based on who he is and what he does. The film continually illustrates how the political capabilities of Will's "gifts" are translated into an ability to expose inauthentic intellectuals and to defy the consequences of their presumed status. Will's politics is one of "punking" M.I.T. professors, renowned psychologists, and Harvard graduate students in ways that reflect his participation in a collective identity based in class.

One example occurs when Will has a confrontation in a "Harvard bar" with a Harvard student who seeks to humiliate and expose Chuckie after he pretends to be a Harvard student to impress Skyler and her friend. Will intervenes mid-conflict and catches the student plagiarizing a historian. This memorable display of Will's brilliance is significant because he's not only protecting a fellow Southie, his best friend Chuckie, but also he's devaluing the economic capital that the Harvard student brings to the intellectual challenge. The scene clearly prioritizes "being original" (Will's concern with the student) to "being able to go on ski trips with your children and have some upstart serve you fries" (what the student imagines his future will be compared to Will's). It also illustrates Webb et. al.'s point that what is at stake is the ability to designate "authentic capital." Here Will is defending Chuckie by replacing his pretend Harvard status with a real intellectual status that overwhelms the graduate student and also exposes him as unoriginal. After Will talks to Skyler, who's impressed by his intellectual display, he and his friends are walking back to South Boston and spot the same graduate student in the window of a restaurant. Will again humiliates the student in a gesture that emphasizes the class anxieties within their confrontation. While these scenes certainly underscore the relationship between intellectualism and these characters' efforts to display their masculinity and impress women, they are also saturated with class concerns. One particular feature of the latter scene that illustrates the class dynamics is the location of Will versus the student. While Will and his

Southie friends walk home in the cold, the student and his Harvard peers sit in a heated restaurant having a discussion over drinks. Will approaches the window where the student sits, a gesture that pits his exterior-setting, lower-class background against the student's interior-setting, upper-class lifestyle. This scene juxtaposes Will's location on the street to the student's location in the institution, establishing the primary class divide that motivates the narrative and informs Will's intellectual class awareness. Will and his friends are constantly on the move and outside, whether in Chuckie's car or on foot in their neighborhood, while the academics in the film and higher-class characters are immobile, resting comfortably in the confines of their positions.

The third aspect of the intersections of class and intellectualism involves the prevalence of gaming metaphors in the film to describe social mobility, Will's intellectual talent, and Will's confrontative behavior. When Lambeau prepares Sean for Will's possible resistance to his therapy, he warns that "it's a poker game with this young man. Don't let him see what you've got." When Will confronts Sean about his unwillingness to date again after the death of his wife, Will claims that "some people would have the sack to lose a big hand like that and still come back and ante up again." There are also two references to the lottery. When Chuckie derides Will for not accepting the opportunities he's been given through his intellectual ability, he tells him that "you're sitting on a winning lottery ticket." Sean also brings up the lottery twice, the final time serving as a clear reference to Chuckie's comment and the probability of Will's genius in society, something Lambeau quantifies to Sean as "thirty million to one." Bourdieu specifically considers the role of gaming metaphors in obscuring the inequalities within the acquisition of capital and societal interaction. He states that "those who talk of equality of opportunity forget that social games… are not 'fair games.' Without being, strictly speaking, rigged, the competition resembles a handicap race that has lasted for generations or games in which each

player has the positive or negative score of all those who have preceded him [or her], that is, the cumulated scores of all his ancestors" (Bourdieu, 2000, pp. 214-215).

The film's constant reliance on games as fair representation of Will's intellectualism and the possibilities for social mobility in Boston ignores the structural inequalities in society that limit the application of the metaphor and confuses Will's intellectualism with the American dream, rags-to-riches myth. Scenes throughout the film focus on Will's luck in a fashion that reconciles his given intellectual talents with his given class status. This reconciliation, however, is only possible in the context of a devalution of the enterprise required to achieve such masterful scholarly ability. Will is shown engaged in profuse reading and proof-writing throughout the film, especially at the beginning, but this work is discounted within the narrative as a one-time receipt of good fortune, much like Carlton Fisk's game-winning home run. Tom, Lambeau's assistant, comforts another professor who's frustrated over the ease at which Will produces groundbreaking mathematical proofs by telling him that "some people just get lucky." While intellectual conflict in the film often works doubly as class conflict, these references to the lottery establish a continuous comparison of class and intellect based on the relative success of acquiring cultural capital within these social realms. The odds of a genius like Will emerging in the academic scene serve as an analog for the odds of Southie kids to exceed their expected class position. This association also relates to Will's role as one "born into" his intelligence. While children of wealthy families can legitimately assume the class status of their families without question, Will's own rise in stature can only be legitimated within the context of luck. While the film's anti-intellectualism can be explained by Will's status as a threat to the Horatio Alger myth, its attempts to portray his intelligence as bestowed through luck downgrade his intellectual identity and his genius. Intellectual pursuits in society can be more common than the probability

of winning the lottery, but the film presents Will's case as so rare through the lottery metaphor as to deny viewers' aspirations toward emulating his pursuits.

When the film does coopt the representational potential of Will's intellectualism as a valuable trait, it does so in order to emphasize Will's need to be more individualistic as opposed to the political implications his identity could have on remedying the material causes of his orphanhood, his abuse, and his economic status (Rockler, 2003). In an analysis of labor films in the U.S., Sefcovic (2002) found a conflict between individualism and collectivism within the themes of the films as they were influenced by the class politics in the U.S. at the time of production. Bodnar (2003) also recognized the clash between liberal-democratic ideals represented by the American dream myth, and the images of the working class and collectivism in films regarding class dynamics. This dynamic operates in this film in several ways. First, Will's intellectual ability is immediately assumed to involve a quality of heroism often associated in the media with the mastery of scholarly knowledge (Parry-Giles & Parry-Giles, 2002). While he does show interest in maintaining the bonds with his Southie friends, his interest in maintaining his Southie identity is pitted as exclusive with academic success. At the end of the movie, Chuckie encourages Will to abandon them as hapless owners of too little economic capital. As Will drives off to find Skyler in California, he has chosen to abandon them and to pursue an interest related only vaguely to a collective identity. The lottery metaphor again illustrates the film's relation of Will's intelligence to an individual success story rather than a product of his intellectual development. Second, Sean's advice to Will in their sessions throughout the film offers up potential counter-examples of this dynamic in the film, as Sean is often encouraging Will to stop thinking only of himself or to admit to himself that he's not personally responsible for his abuse as a child. While this trend presents evidence of Will being

encouraged to be more collectively focused, his choice in the conclusion to abandon his job and his friends who want to see him succeed can only be interpreted as a self-interested decision.

The final element of class and intellectualism in the film involves the simple portrayal of low economic capital as incompatible with the cultural capital Will obtains through his intellectual identity and the symbolic capital of his genius status. This conflict works in two major ways, through the opposition of academic and experiential learning and through Will's inability to pass downward into his Southie background because his intellectual capabilities demand a higher social status. In a conversation Sean has with Will after their first confrontation, Sean offers a rejoinder to Will's previous behavior by denigrating his mastery of art, literature, and love as book knowledge rather than as a product of social learning that seemingly produces true knowledge. By criticizing Will's attempt to challenge Sean as an embodied expert based on his previous reading, Sean demeans Will's scholarly pursuits as inapplicable to the everyday lessons of real life that can only be acquired through experience. By celebrating experiential knowledge, the film limits the efficacy of Will's innate talent and lowers him back onto the level playing field of social interaction. The film's emphasis on Will's transformation through the acquisition of experiential knowledge with Sean, Skyler, and his friends serves as a pointed example of Bourdieu's description of the powerful within certain cultural fields determining the conditions for the acquisition of capital based on claims about authenticity. When Sean calls Will out as an emotional infant who has never left Boston, he is denying Will's claim to superior social status as a result of his academic gifts. The educational path Will has taken to acquire his general knowledge also defies the traditional relationship between class and education, further explaining the increased regulation in the film of the standards by which real intellectuals can thrive. After Will criticizes the haughty Harvard student for overspending on his education,

Skyler and Will have two separate conversations about her own investment in her education and its price compared to Will's library-based self-instruction. Will's own cheap academic advancement through voracious reading is a capital-acquiring practice that threatens the class-influenced institutional structures of education in Western society. Will's case is so rare and his emergence so startling for the people he encounters because his intellectual status positions him as not just an academic equal to many individuals who represent and are products of traditional academic education but even as intellectually superior to most of them, from Harvard pre-meds to medal-winning mathematicians.

Sean and the other figures in Will's life also dominate Will's efforts to continue to pass as a lower class buffoon despite the potential for his intelligence to garner him substantial economic capital. After Will solves the two complex mathematical problems on the board at MIT and is discovered by Lambeau, his identity as a genius has been uncovered, a process of outing that limits his ability to keep his talents secret to whomever he wishes. This unveiling of Will as what one of his Southie pals calls "wicked smart" begins a shifting conflict between his concealment of his genius and other characters' continuous pressure on him to cast off his lower class roots and permanently remain an academic intellectual. Gwendolyn Foster (2005) investigates the role of class-passing in popular culture, finding that "we find socially inscribed desires for icons of social mobility in everything from film to 'reality' television'" (p. 6). While many of her case examples involve characters in film and TV who pass upward into higher classes, her interest in class-based passing treats it as an issue of mobility no matter the direction. One form of class-passing that she and Hitchcock (2001) both discuss is "slumming," where characters often experience economic conditions more impoverished than those to which they were previously accustomed. Will's case is particularly unique because his passing as a member

of the South Boston working class is not predicated on his previous experience living above his class. Rather, his slumming is based on the assumption that he should have access to the professional class of academics due to his intellectual capital.

Performance and passing are prominent motifs throughout the film. When Chuckie seeks to pose as a Harvard student to flirt with Skyler and her friend, the arrogant Harvard student calls him out as a phony before Will returns the action by exposing the student's plagiarism. When Lambeau begins to encourage Will to seek job opportunities based on his analytical skills, Will first sends Chuckie to pose as him in defiance of the company's and Lambeau's pressure. In a telling conversation between Will and Sean after Will attempts to defend the honor of brick-laying as a profession, Sean remarks that "I just want to know why you decided to sneak around at night, writing on chalkboards and lying about it," exposing Will's intentions in taking the janitorial job so that he could make his brilliance known to a relevant academic field. By uncovering the motivations for Will's lies, Sean succeeds in disarming Will's ability to pass downward in certain situations as a normal working man from Southie. After this conversation, Will also faces resistance from Chuckie to his efforts to pass downward and work in construction for the rest of his life. Chuckie tells Will that he "doesn't know much" but that he wants to see Will choose to live a life consistent with his intellectual prowess. This scene depicts another barrier to Will's class passing, this time from a Southie friend who's impersonated him in a job interview and watched him tell lies to Skyler about his family. Chuckie's defiance of Will severs Will's intellectualism from its ties to his class upbringing by fashioning his passing downward as "insulting" to those who cannot use their intellects to do the same. This scene also exemplifies another instance of a character using more advanced social know-how to influence Will's development. Chuckie may not be as academically brilliant as Will but he maintains an authority

to give him a lesson in friendship based on his emotional acumen. With these two influences on his passing, his ability to co-exist as an intellectual and a member of his social class is disabled and replaced by a social barrier to those two identities. In the end, he leaves his friends and his neighborhood on the advice of his best friend, but he has no choice given that the film posits the simultaneity of intellectualism and low economic capital as impossible.

Class/Therapy Interactions in *Good Will Hunting*

The overlaps between class issues and psychology deserve a brief mention. Given the conditions for access to formal therapeutic means, economic capital potentially determines the possibility for and the extent of therapeutic redress. On the other hand, given the popularity of TV talk shows that have disseminated the therapeutic form throughout U.S. culture, informal therapeutic means could be coded as most available to those unable to afford or make time for traditional counseling. The film navigates these issues by presenting formal therapy sessions that serve a similar function to TV talk shows of provoking emotional confrontation and tearful resolution. Will is only (reluctantly) able to visit the therapists in the film through a rehabilitation deal that the MIT professor strikes with his judge who previously had confined Will to jail, a rare instance of a working class individual receiving therapy traditionally available to those with more economic capital. The one common emphasis between these two factors lies in their similar reliance on individualism. The prevalence of therapeutic solutions to political problems in U.S. popular culture serves to reinforce the individual as capable of and responsible for political redress through confession and consolation. As for class dynamics in the U.S., the Horatio Alger myth of the American dream has triumphed through modern media representation as a powerful narrative of the possibility for individual social improvement. This rags-to-riches myth also

relies heavily on the potential for individual self-actualization and acquisition of capital independent of structural forces.

While specific studies of class in modern media and cinema have been limited (James, 1996), perhaps influencing or influenced by the general lack of a vocabulary of class in the U.S. (Holtzman, 2000), the study of the class implications of the American dream story within cinema has recently been given extensive consideration. In their study of the intricacies of the myth in business films in the U.S., Pileggi, Grabe, Holderman, & de Montigny (2000) found a fluctuating presence of variations of this story in mainstream films. Operating from the perspective that class in American film is understudied, they found that the American dream myth allowed structural barriers to social mobility to be ignored (Pileggi et. al., 2000). One conflicting variation on this myth is the "money-can't-buy-happiness" narrative (Pileggi et. al., 2000, pp. 210-211) that works in contrast to the traditional class dynamic of the story. In Will's case, the romantic rags-to-riches-through-books theme is generally muted in the film in favor of an intelligence-doesn't-guarantee-happiness message that downplays the capability of his natural ability for social improvement and emphasizes the inadequacies of his talents for giving him lessons on self-esteem. While class is one conditioning force for Will's intellectuality in the film, his therapeutic influences throughout the film serve to authorize "matters of the heart" as a more authentic form of knowledge.

Confession and Therapy

In *History of Sexuality*, Foucault introduced the increasing role confession plays in Western society (1990). Describing the effect that this ritual has had on the preference toward individual self-authentification, he states that "for a long time, the individual was vouched for by the reference of others and the demonstration of his [or her] ties to the commonweal (family,

allegiance, protection); then he [or she] was authenticated by the discourse of truth he [or she] was able or obliged to pronounce concerning himself [or herself]. The truthful confession was inscribed at the heart of the procedures of individualization by power" (Foucault, 1990, pp.58-59). As Corey Anton (2001) notes, "self-centered modes of authenticity tend to direct the idea of fulfillment toward the individual" (p. 6). In privileging personal recourse in order to uncover new forms of selfhood, collective methods for achieving autonomy and upholding political duty within social settings get downplayed as means for empowerment. Our confessional society, in preferring self-justification and disclosure as modes of truth-production, while shirking communal ties and solutions, does not, however, empower confessing individuals to determine the circumstances in which their admissions can acquire empowering autonomy. As Foucault (1990) states further, "the discourse of truth finally takes effect, not in the one who receives it, but in the one from whom it is wrested" (p. 62). The illusory freedom produced by confessional politics ignores the role it plays in opening up the confessor and the disclosed information to new forms of scientific regulation based on external stimuli to confess, command over interpretation, and the role that latent tendencies play in requiring therapeutic revelation (Foucault, 1990, pp. 65-67).

While Foucault focuses specifically on confession of sexuality and its medicalization, two phenomena show how the tendencies of confessional norms carry over to other forms of disclosure related to other aspects of collective or individual identity. First, the prevalence of therapy talk within the film and within mainstream media representations illustrate the ritualization of other practices of empowerment. Numerous studies have regarded the widespread role of popular therapy and confession in U.S. culture, especially within TV talk shows (Acosta-Alzuru, 2003; Brunvatne & Tolson, 2001; Thornborrow, 2001; Shattuc, 1997; White, 1992),

many of which concern the revelation of non-sexual information. Second, the methods of regulation in confessional form that Foucault outlines apply to the case of intellectuals generally and in the film. Claussen (2004) describes the latency of the vocabulary of intellectualism in the U.S., an absence that makes possible the disclosure of genius in a similar manner to sexuality. In Will Hunting's case, as will be explicated in more detail below, the empowering secrecy of his intellectual ability gets outed through the therapeutic setting of a counselor who determines the terms of his emotional recovery. Cloud (1998) and Dow (2001) offer two compelling examples of the applicability of Foucault's hypothesis in mainstream media. Cloud considers the rhetoric of therapy across a range of media discourses, including family solutions in 'Hood films, therapy themes in the representations of the feminist movement, and the role of this rhetoric in the New Age movement, and she concludes that "therapeutic discourses discourage both systematic understanding of capitalist society and collective struggle against it" (Cloud, 1998, p. 166). In the ways that healthy representations of intellectualism contribute to this systematic understanding and even the possibility of struggle against capitalism, therapeutic discourses muffle the capability of intellectuals in society. Ross (1989) analyzes the media's use of appeals to common understanding and its hefty political stakes as it has been traditionally opposed to intellectual knowledge in popular culture:

> [The language of common sense] works to incorporate and rearticulate the most uncommonly critical ideas and perceptions as part of its explanatory presentation of the values that survive…in a world whose volatility is depicted as potentially hostile to the stability of all values. This is how the "folklore of capitalism" comes to preside over the popular memory, by way of a constantly changing repertoire of perceptions and maxims of value - American values – that are presented as unchanging…nothing is more crucial

> to the maintenance of ideological stability, even as capitalism's voracious need for change and innovation insists…on continually changing the rules. (p. 9)

Even if only a few, small examples of Will's intelligence as threat to this system of ideological folklore exist within the film, his very existence as an intellectual is threatening to the value structure of U.S. society.

Specifically addressing the role of confession in the media to study Ellen DeGeneres' coming-out on the TV sitcom *Ellen,* Dow determines that the confessional politics involved privileged evidence of experience and the construction of an authentic self in order to situate political liberation within the realm of the autonomy of the psychological (Dow, 2001). She concludes that "*Ellen*'s interpretation of lesbian identity as an exclusively *personal* issue makes it easier for everyone- especially those viewers in middle America that DeGeneres so desperately wants to reach- to ignore that there is much more at stake here than making TV safe for gays and lesbians" (Dow, 2001, pp. 136-137). The popular conception of intellectuals in the U.S., however limited, has ignored the implicit political ramifications of how intellectuals are represented in the mainstream media. By personalizing Will's intellectuality instead of recognizing the consequences it could have outside of the film itself for the recognition of safe spaces for unfettered intellectuality, *Good Will Hunting* uses the confessional ritual, much like *Ellen*'s lesbian revelation, to downplay intellectual identity as it simultaneously names it.

Another perspective on the relationship between intellectualism and therapeutic culture is offered by sociologist Frank Furedi (2004a). His analysis of therapeutic tendencies in the West opposes those cultural vocabularies to other political and moral perspectives that have historically influenced everyday life. Detailing the demise of a cultural politics reliant on considerations of knowledge forms external to the self, Furedi (2004a) notes that "the idea that

politics is about fulfilling yourself relegates wider public attachments to a secondary role. Feeling good becomes an end in itself – and the individual relationship to a wider moral or political framework threatens to become an insignificant side issue" (p. 73). One specific characteristic of this phenomenon involves the elevation of emotional literacy and self-knowledge over traditional forms of knowledge. As Furedi (2004a) describes, "the promotion of emotional intelligence is symptomatic of a climate of intellectual pessimism. Suspicion towards reasoning and conventional learning has helped create a climate where so-called emotional skills can expect cultural support. …Emotional intelligence is presented as the answer to the problem of the contemporary individual" (p. 161). This relationship posits intellectualism as not simply another discourse to be exposed through confessional influences but also a social practice placed at odds with the modes of learning celebrated by dominant therapeutic forces in society. As this cultural trend de-emphasizes social living based upon knowledge of external people and events, not only do conventional modes of learning become downgraded as incapable of contributing to self-esteem but the concurrent overemphasis on therapeutic vocabularies risks, according to Furedi (2004a), "call[ing] into question the quality and meaning of individual autonomy" (p. 107) and perpetuates a notion of disempowerment that "dooms people to the role of helpless victims of circumstance" (p. 127). At question among these competing discourses are cultural norms of authenticity, achievement, and autonomy that determine tendencies toward passivity and social engagement central to the influence of particular political and economic ways of life.

These competing vocabularies interact within the film in ways representative of the tendencies in popular culture described by Cloud, Dow, and Furedi. The central theme of *Good Will Hunting*, similar to many coming-of-age stories, involves the issue of Will coming to terms with who he really is. As opposed to the typical tale of becoming adult, however, at stake in this

narrative is Will's birth-given genius and its viability within his diagnosis as a vulnerable individual.

Confession and the Real Will

In the first set-up shot to the MIT campus at the beginning of the film, a crew rower paddles his scull along a river from the left side of the screen to the right. At the end of the movie, after Will decides to use his new car to drive to California and live with Skyler, the river is shown again, this time with a rower returning from the right side of the screen to the left. This symmetry in the establishing shots for the campus may serve as visual book-ends for the organization of the film, but it also plays a key role in relationship to Sean and Will's first meeting together. As Will walks around Sean's office, looking at his books and trying to discover information about him that will allow Will to sabotage the session, Will sees a painting of a sailor in a small boat on the sea. As the two men from Southie stare at the hand-painted work, Will struggles to interpret it in some way that will offer him clues to Sean's past and his vulnerabilities. Will suggests that the color scheme may offer some insight into Sean's mental state then makes a passing remark about Sean's wife, which causes Sean to eventually physically confront Will about his rude mention of his deceased wife. This scene and this painting, especially as they are referenced by the rowers at the beginning and ending of the film, serve as narrative devices that reflect the larger therapeutic approach toward decoding Will's intellectual capabilities, his class status, his mental state, his family past, and his current relationships. As Will's own personal history and identity become exposed through the therapeutic discourse that pervades his counseling sessions and the resolution of the story, the audience gets to stand in to diagnose Will and discover his orphanhood, his experience with child abuse, and his subsequent detachment tendencies. The film offers Will up for interpretation much like the man at sea, and

this uncovering of the real Will as a "cocky, scared kid" according to Sean positions him within the context of personal revelations and mentor advice.

The narrative angle on Will as a maladjusted and secretive genius incites him to not only speak the details of his personal struggles since his childhood but also convinces him of the inefficacy of intellectual capabilities for self-discovery and emotional well-being. The narrative ritualizes Will's own personal growth in four primary ways. First, Will's orphanhood and abusive childhood in foster care support the introduction of family relations into his life through his allegiance to his Southie brothers and his need for a father figure in Sean. Will is often described as a child or child-like. Sean continuously refers to him as "just a kid," reinforcing his paternal role as a Southie model for Will's personality and career aspirations. This depiction of Will as a misdirected youth makes possible the simultaneous fatherly and therapeutic influence of Sean because it presents Will as a life novice to be cared for and taught social lessons. Will turns twenty-one during the story, and this coming-of-age sets up the clear association of adulthood with mastery of your own emotional state and acceptance of your identity (as determined by what your "heart" tells you is your "true calling"). Will's errant, often politically incisive intellectualism becomes a remnant of his rebellious youth, and his maturation sets the stage for his development not only into a new social being but also a person who can de-prioritize his intellect in a way that disables it as a source for learning responsibility and moral orientation.

Tom, Lambeau's assistant, comments to Will before one of their math meetings that "most people don't believe how brilliant they can be, they don't find teachers that believe in them, they get convinced they're stupid." This description of learning posits therapy as a pedagogical tool. Education becomes not just about imparting information to the uneducated but

about *convincing them that they can be smart*. This comment introduces a therapeutic notion of intelligence whereby brilliance can only occur and be maintained if individuals believe that they are brilliant. This shift in traditional notions of intelligence makes it less a question of actual knowledge and more an issue of self-esteem. While Will never demonstrates this anxiety over his intelligence, this description does place questions of intelligence under the guise of therapeutic control. Will's case is the other extreme of this concern because, rather than being unsure about his intelligence, he is too cocky about it. He uses it to humiliate people and embarrass them. Given these two extremes, an unsure brilliance and a too-sure brilliance, the construction of intelligence in the film is one that necessitates external certification based on the determination of emotional stability.

Second, the film identifies genius as a potential symptom of mental instability, thus constructing Will as a vulnerable object in need of therapeutic management. When Lambeau confronts Sean about Will's potential to do breakthrough work in mathematics, Sean responds by reminding Lambeau of the story of the Unabomber, presented by Sean as a brilliant mathematician who seemingly pushed himself too hard and went crazy. This established relationship between technical brilliance and insanity positions Will as a vulnerable personality reaching the brink of violent madness as he furthers his intellectual pursuits. This relationship has an ample history in media depictions of intellectuals, manifested in such mainstream films as *Rain Man* (1988) and *A Beautiful Mind* (2001) where main characters are presented as geniuses with clear mental drawbacks such as autism and schizophrenia. This comparison to the Unabomber also references Will's criminal past and his violent tendencies, and this suggestion, perhaps based on the traditional character type of the evil genius in Hollywood film, also reinforces the need for a therapeutic approach to Will's condition. Sean and the film's solution to

this potential to be “pushed too hard” is the prioritization of a social authenticity represented by Sean as honesty with oneself and others and an emphasis on personal expression as a paramount opportunity for psychological health. Will’s potential for mental illness shapes other people’s influence on the choices that he makes throughout the film in order to encourage a gradual abandonment of his intellectual habits. His valiant decision to pursue Skyler at the film’s end serves as the final culmination of this prioritization of personal happiness over concerns with social status, economic well-being, or even employment.

Third, while Will’s relationship with Sean is the most explicit opportunity to examine the consolatory themes in the film, his interactions with Skyler also expose Will to a life-shaping influence based on emotional growth. When Skyler first talks to Will after he defends Chuckie in a bar, she tells him, “you’re an idiot,” referring to the fact that he didn’t talk to her after the incident. This accusation begins their romantic relationship on a note of Skyler criticizing Will’s social know-how. Whereas he begins to gain clear supremacy over her intellectually, even though she’s a Harvard pre-med student who plans to attend medical school at Stanford, she represents from the outset a socializing influence that will test his emotional vulnerabilities and expose his personal flaws. She consistently inquires about his family, and he avoids disclosing his traumatic family past by lying to her and telling her that he belongs to a family of 13 brothers. She also presses him to visit his house and meet his family. These requests for information into Will’s past and his current life not only emphasize the class passing that he engages in but also illustrates how Skyler serves as a confessional instigator. She seeks personal information from him because of her interests in achieving trust and emotional intimacy in their relationship. While Sean also serves as an emotional outlet for him when they discuss his abuse as a child, Skyler confronts Will about his feelings for her in a scene that also involves his

disclosure of his true family situation. Skyler's emotionality throughout this scene and Will's distancing tendencies in pushing her away may illustrate the failure of Skyler's emotional impact on Will, but his final decision to quit his job and to seek her in California shapes their relationship as one that has motivated Will to such an extent that he would trust his feelings and abandon a reliable intellectual lifestyle. In this sense, then, Skyler represents not just a consolatory influence on Will but also the ideal goal of his emotional health, as reinforced by Sean's stories about his own wife and her role in his life.

Fourth, the film's therapeutic treatment of Will reveals him as an abused orphan as it simultaneously denies his class passing and pushes his intellectual prowess to the periphery. This outing of Will's troubled past serves as a breakthrough into discovering the emotional motivations for his behavior. Throughout the film, the audience becomes aware at different moments of his violent past, but the film depicts Will revealing this private information to certain people under many circumstances that establish the story as a talking cure for him. Sean sits with Will for an hour-long session trying to get Will to talk honestly about himself. Will defies him for that meeting, and Sean tells Lambeau after the session that Will is "[proving] to me that he doesn't have to talk to me if he doesn't want to." This resistance to the confessional forum, however, wears down over time and upon Sean's insistence, as Will begins to open up to Sean's approach to imparting a psychological understanding to Will (in the guise of life lessons). These moments of revelation are celebrated within the film narrative as steps of progress toward his eventual transformation and self-discovery, but they position Will as a confessional respondent whose authenticity can only be established through consistent transparency with others who can accept him and approve him as troubled and recovering.

One such moment occurs right after Will's opposition to the NSA. During his rant, the scene switches to Sean's office, where Will is retelling the story verbatim. After he finishes, Sean avoids discussing the story, instead asking Will, "do you believe that you have a soulmate?" Their conversation turns to whether Will truly knows his career goals, and Sean scolds Will for planning to live in South Boston and waste his given talents. This scene is one of the final meetings between Sean and Will before Will opens up about his past abuse, and it represents a turning point in his orientation toward Skyler, his intelligence, and his future. Sean's influence on his choice can be found in his opposition of Will's knowledge about "questions relating to high-level academic subjects" to "what Will must decide using his heart" such as his career plans. While Lambeau is on his knees in a previous scene begging Will for a math solution, Will is finally humbled by an expert, as this scene clearly establishes Sean's confidence and Will's admission that he's uncertain about his future. The product of Will's honesty to Sean is the revelation of his emotional vulnerability, which paves the way for his final decision to choose personal happiness over a promising private sector job.

This eventual uncovering of the "true Will" through Sean's counseling also contrasts with the other psychologists that Lambeau tries to use to help Will. He pretends to be hypnotized only to frustrate one counselor, and he accuses another one of being gay by interpreting his body language. These forms of resistance are attributed in the narrative to Will's unbounded intelligence because his capability to deceive a hypnotist into thinking he's hypnotized and confound another therapist over stated suspicions of homosexuality are skills inseparable from Will's innate acumen. Just as he can break open complex mathematical problems in moments, Will's instincts and knowledge base give him the tools to defy the talking cures in these instances. This association positions Will's intelligence as a barrier to his eventual therapeutic

recovery. The conflict over confession and interpretation in the form of the counselors' attempts to cure Will and Will's attempts to defy it eventually become a surrender to Will's exposure as a traumatized kid genius whose potential value to society pales in comparison to his need for redemption and arrival as an adult. Sean is the former brilliant mathematician who refuses Will's games and offers an ideal identity formed more centrally around personal discovery and fulfillment. This discursive construction of Will to exclude his blinding intellect further illustrates the therapeutic denigration of any politically efficacious notion of genius in the narrative.

Conclusion

As Will drives off into the Boston sunset, fully recovered from the imposed trauma of his past and seemingly rid of the social burdens of his intelligence, the applause of a hundred TV talk show guests could substitute just as well for the ponderous lyrics of Elliot Smith. In the ways that the film uses class dynamics and therapeutic discourse to challenge Will's authentic intellectualism, it has succeeded in making his intelligence a subplot to his larger emotional conversion. This coming-of-age tale has conveniently devalued his pre-existing academic maturity in favor of the trials of an orphan Southie, and it has denied the collective potential for intelligentsia as a sociological category to receive more favorable representation that refuses to pander to individualist narratives or to shirk the political potential of intellectuals in society. The two antagonisms at work in the film work to send the message that a little knowledge can be a dangerous thing.

First, the film contributes to media's promotion of therapeutic culture by valorizing Will's self-understanding over his intellectual knowledge and marking his intellectually-driven class consciousness as a fleeting stage of adolescence. Only when he opens up to his peers and

counselor and confronts his emotional wounds is his personal deliverance accomplished. At issue in this film text is the tendency for populism to be contingent on therapeutic discourse rather than other modes of discourse such as a politically-aware intellectualism. Norms of confession and therapy are profuse in public discourse, from the Girl Scout merit badge for stress relief to expectations that politicians shelve their policy knowledge in order to establish their personalities through self-disclosure. Furedi (2004a) observes that "gradually, the debate and exploration of important public issues has given way to an almost pornographic fascination with the private problems of public figures" (p. 74). Our society obsesses over celebrity gossip and the sexual indiscretions of politicians because of the fascination with discovering people's authentic selves that both influences and is produced by media coverage. Within this therapeutic climate, the continuous contrast between book smarts and self-knowledge also plays a significant role in political and cultural developments. Al Gore and John Kerry's boring intellectual demeanors stand in sharp contrast to the compassionate presence of President Bush, who has been able to thrive off of the emotional vulnerabilities of a nation since September 11th, 2001.

Within the context of educational institutions, the emotional intelligence movement and the growth of public interest in emotional literacy has begun to shape the degree to which strictly academic notions are emphasized in school. Daniel Goleman (1995), in the beginning of his best-selling book *Emotional Intelligence*, writes emphatically that "the brightest among us can founder on the shoals of unbridled passions and unruly impulses; people with high IQs can be stunningly poor pilots of their private lives" (p. 34). Taking a cue from his cover, this analysis of a popular film is concerned centrally with these competing discourses concerning "what it means to be smart" and the recent prevalence of self-obsessed thinking over other-oriented rhetoric. Media representations such as *Good Will Hunting* contribute to societal conceptions that "matters

of the mind" are inadequate for interacting and succeeding in the world compared to the gratifying possibilities of what Dr. Phil in one of his books calls "creating your life from the inside out" (McGraw, 2001). The disappointing conclusion of the film establishes that, as long as Will relies on his intelligence, he will never be happy. This dominant interpretation of happiness produces a politics based on gratification, recognition, and consolation that risks not only developing an individual passivity whereby external events are viewed as uncontrollable but making the issue of personal choice therapeutically sanctioned. With the type of social orientation that this mainstream media text endorses comes the erosion of previous collective-based forms of politics and modes of development.

This particularly American narrative of self-determination makes understanding the consistency between intellectual pursuits and democratic ideals difficult because of the idea of intellectuals as isolated elites. As long as depictions of intellectuals in popular culture continue to figure them as lonely, mad, and ruthless, the viability of a populace able to embrace both specialized and collective interests will remain in question. Peter Rainer, a film critic for the *Dallas Observer*, aptly notes in his review that “most Hollywood movies about prodigies exist on this same dumbed-down plane…What you rarely get in these movies is any sense of the specialness that comes with genius. In popular culture, it's impolite to elevate genius; it smacks of elitism. But why should we be asked to identify with geniuses only insofar as they resemble ourselves?” (1997). These narcissistic representations of intellectual distinction normalize the gifts and work of modern-day intellectual figures, whether fictional or non-fictional, and they replace their contributions to society with stories of emotional vulnerability in order to achieve the media gratification necessary to satisfy audiences.

Second, while media-portrayed intellectualism stimulates cultural anxieties over general notions of specialization, they also make intellectual privilege dependent on institutional certification of special-ness. For Will, the only way to understand his intellectual role is through the metaphor of the lottery, a reward so rare as to make it insignificant to the structural operation of the intellectual field that he temporarily inhabits. These depictions suggest that genuine cultural capital can only be acquired through the economic capital that an Ivy League education requires. Even when elitism in shunned in favor of a mass therapeutic thinking that is democratic only in its most fragile form, intellectuals still face challenges to their legitimacy based on the class politics of educational institutions. Many people can be "gifted" with intelligence, but only by passing through institutions established to certify appropriate status can these brilliant minds gain the recognition they deserve. With this resistance to the notion that anyone can be an intellectual comes a dependence of political participation on class relations whereby intellectual status is an award given out only at institutional graduation ceremonies. While Will's resistance to the elites he encounters is an organic representation of his working class roots, the film downplays these outbursts by introducing the therapeutic perspective. This vocabulary of vulnerability and immaturity casts his class politics as a fleeting phenomenon. Therapeutic discourse within the narrative works as a politically-silencing tool, excusing all forms of political protest as temporary manifestations of an undiscovered self. In this sense, these two dominant notions in American society, the elitism of educational institutions and the anti-elitism of therapeutic rhetoric, although contradictory, do cooperate in the downfall of a healthy image of genius. These two oppositions, between class and education, and between emotion and intelligence, drive the narrative to its ultimate conclusion, where they remain unchallenged, as active as they are at the opening credits.

Chapter 3

Vindicating the Black Writer in the Ivory Tower: *Finding Forrester* and Black Intellectual Authenticity

The similarities between *Good Will Hunting* (1997) and *Finding Forrester* (2000) aren't limited to the fact that the two films are helmed by the same director, Gus Van Sant. They also share some common narrative features that were a recurring talking point among critics and other viewers of the two movies. As Milford Reid of the *Minneapolis Star Tribune* notes in his review of *Finding Forrester*, "Director Gus Van Sant liked directing the surprise 1997 hit *Good Will Hunting* so much that he decided to direct it again. Only this time he called it *Finding Forrester*. In 'Hunting,' a brilliant but troubled math student learns to focus his talent and embrace life from an eccentric and also troubled therapist. In 'Forrester,' a brilliant but troubled writing student learns to focus his talent and embrace life from an eccentric and troubled author" (Reid, p. 3E). Reid's substitutions are certainly on-point to some of the main similarities, particularly how the mentor/therapy frame continues to be established in the newer film, but there are some striking differences as well, differences that point to the important role that race plays in *Finding Forrester*. The film employs the race of the writing student, a 16-year old teen from the Bronx named Jamal Wallace, in order to depict the trials and tribulations of a black student, also a skilled basketball player, in receiving academic respect once he transfers to a prestigious private school across town.

The uphill battle that Jamal fights to gain recognition as a gifted wordsmith contrasts sharply with the unquestioned genius of Will Hunting's historical knowledge and mathematical proofs. While Will challenges Harvard students in bars over their originality, Jamal gets accused

of plagiarism by his English professor. While Will's deal to study with an M.I.T. professor requires that he attend therapy sessions, Jamal's invitation to the private school is informally conditioned on his willingness to play basketball. Whether or not *Finding Forrester*'s portrayal of Jamal's plight could be said to be more realistic to the racial politics of New York City education, the film's narrative course ultimately downsizes his image as a gifted writer by pitting his academic pursuits against his athletic skill and by using Forrester as an authority to legitimize Jamal's coming-of-age as a capable intellectual. Based on theories of post-colonialism, whiteness, and the mind/body dualism, this chapter argues that Jamal's legitimacy as an intellectual is contingent upon his eventual authentication by Forrester and his continued attendance at his private school. This dependence colonizes his intellectual gifts within the walls of Forrester's apartment as an emotional aide to the hermit Forrester and within the institutional gates of the private school, where his whitewashed literary gifts and Forrester's help give him legitimacy as a student. I conclude that, although its specific strategies are different, *Finding Forrester* also participates in the dualisms established by *Good Will Hunting*, including the incommensurability of genius with emotional health as well as the incompatability of intellectualism with qualities linked to the body rather than the mind. In contrast to *Good Will Hunting*, the dynamics of the first dualism are reversed in Jamal and Forrester's case because Jamal consoles and advises Forrester about Forrester's own emotional difficulties. The latter dualism is represented by in Will Hunting's case by his working class identity as a manual laborer; in *Finding Forrester*, it is represented by Jamal's athletic ability as a skilled basketball player.

Intellect and Class, Intellect and Race

In *Finding Forrester*, Jamal Wallace lives with his Mom in the Bronx and is a C-student at a local high school. The stack of books in his room and the occasional notes he clandestinely jots down, however, show signs that he maintains a covert interest in literature and writing. After he scores unexpectedly well on a standardized test, a private preparatory school in Manhattan becomes interested in giving him a scholarship in order to study and play basketball. During this transfer, Jamal, on a dare, sneaks into an apartment perched above an inner-city playground, where he and his friends usually play basketball, to find out about a man they call "the Window" who can be seen peering down at them with binoculars. As he walks around the dark apartment, Jamal suddenly realizes the man is sitting in a chair right across from him, so he races out of the apartment, leaving his backpack behind. After his backpack is thrown down from the window one day, Jamal finds editorial comments in all of his creative journals, and his growing interest in this recluse motivates him to enter the apartment again, this time with the mysterious editor's permission and an informal promise to continue to teach him about writing. At the new prep school, Jamal's haughty English teacher, Professor Crawford, assigns them a novel, *Avalon Landing*, from a writer named William Forrester who disappeared from the public after its publication and failed to write any more books. After several meetings with his recluse mentor, Jamal realizes that "the Window" is Forrester, who has retreated from all social interaction for 30 years. The elderly novelist promises to continue giving Wallace guidance as long as he promises to remain tight-lipped about Forrester's identity and whereabouts.

Their friendship grows, and Jamal also befriends a white female student from the new school named Claire Spence. As Jamal begins to learn creative lessons from Forrester that illustrate both Jamal's potential and Forrester's acumen, Forrester begins to open up to his

student, slowly disclosing information about his traumatic past and motivations for going underground after *Avalon Landing*. Professor Crawford also approaches Jamal after one creative assignment that Jamal writes, questioning whether his submitted writing was original. After one writing lesson where Jamal uses some of Forrester's writing to help him begin a practice composition, Jamal decides to submit the composition to the school's annual writing competition. The hot-headed Crawford, however, motivated by Jamal's attempts to protect another student from humiliation in class, finds the borrowed text, published decades earlier by Forrester, and uses it to try to expel Jamal from the school. In a meeting with members of the school board and Crawford, Jamal refuses to disclose whether or not he received Forrester's permission to draw from the piece but also decides in frustration not to cooperate with Crawford's suggestion that he write a letter of apology to the class. The school board decides to wait to rule on Jamal's case until he finishes contributing to the basketball team's state championship run, a decision which Jamal soon finds out is influenced by the board's desire to expunge the instance of plagiarism from his record if he produces a championship for the school.

At the game, Jamal is given a chance to make two foul shots to win the game, but he misses both of them, eliminating his team and his chances to avoid expulsion. At the writing competition the next day, Forrester makes a surprise trip outside of his apartment to read some writing to the school and reveal not only his friendship with Jamal but also Jamal's authorship of the piece he has just read. Having demonstrated Jamal's writing skills as well as rescuing him from the plagiarism charges, Forrester informs Jamal of his plans to travel to Scotland to visit his family. After a year has passed, Jamal receives word of Forrester's death resulting from a cancer Forrester had known about for years but never disclosed. Along with the surprising news, he

receives several items from Forrester's will, including a personal note, the keys to the apartment, and an unpublished second novel with the foreword to be written by Jamal.

Jamal manifests his brilliance, previously disguised from his family, school, and friends, in similar ways to Will Hunting. His mastery of literature becomes obvious when he and Forrester are watching *Jeopardy* in Forrester's apartment. One clue on the game show reminds Forrester of an author whom he assumes Jamal doesn't know. Jamal responds to this assumption by mouthing the author's words while Forrester recites them and then quickly supplying the author's name. Will demonstrates an ability to recollect long passages of text from memory as well during his fight in the Harvard bar. Jamal also helps Claire with an assignment about the minor characters in the Sherlock Holmes books, a deed similar to Will's aid to Skyler in chemistry. Finally, the most fitting parallel to Will's confrontation with the Harvard graduate student is Jamal's literary scuffle with Professor Crawford. After Crawford humiliates a student in class, someone who had previously been friendly to Jamal, Jamal decides to challenge Crawford by correcting the grammar in his last statement. Crawford passionately responds to the provocation by challenging Jamal's knowledge of famous literary quotations. As Crawford recites the beginning of several quotations, however, Jamal confidently fills in the rest, providing the quotes and the authors in a manner that suggests that the information is common knowledge. Even though Crawford makes Jamal leave the class, the confrontation highlights Jamal's intellectual prowess (especially with regard to dead, white, canonical writers) and Crawford's vulnerability.

The spectacular draw of these narratives, as discussed in Chapter 1 using Orbe and Watts' notion of "spectacular consumption," stems from a combination of the hidden quality of the main characters' intellects and the unveiling of their mental prowess. Audiences are able to

have insider knowledge of Will and Jamal's capabilities in scenes where other characters are oblivious to their intelligence. When they finally reveal the depths of their knowledge, the complexity of the information that they provide and the often acerbic way they provide it function to position their intelligence as, on the one hand, an elite and unobtainable quality, and, on the other hand, a skill capable of producing intellectual feats so amazing as to demand mimicry. When Jamal confronts Crawford, his grammatical criticism of Crawford's use of "farther" to denote degree serves as an example of intellectual discourse much like "Whassup" offers a peek into authentic African American discourse. This characteristic is particularly critical to understanding portrayals of intellectualism in the media because of the constant negotiation within public discourse concerning intellectuals' ability to represent the public yet also inhabit specialized spheres of knowledge.

Within the examples of Will and Jamal's genius, their intelligence is often used to expose racial and class-based stereotypes both within and outside traditional educational institutions. Before Jamal meets Forrester, he confronts Forrester's courier, a sharply dressed white man who drives a polished BMW sports car. As Jamal is approaching the car, the courier turns and activates the car's alarm. When Jamal responds by assuring the man that he doesn't intend to steal his car and that it's "just a car," the man replies that he didn't intend to suggest that and also adds that "anybody who knows anything about that company knows that [a BMW] is more than just a car." Jamal then jumps at this opportunity to disprove this assumption of his ignorance and details for the courier the history of the production of BMWs. Will also calls out intelligence stereotypes maintained by more privileged groups when he embarrasses the Harvard student who attempts to humiliate his friend. That discussion is filled with personal attacks based on class relations, with Will criticizing the student for plagiarizing and paying too much for his education,

and the student jabbing that Will is going to end up serving his kid's fries one day on their way to a ski trip. While Jamal's encounters in the Bronx and at the school mostly center on race, the film and this analysis certainly do not consider his character to be devoid of class. Jamal comes from a poor neighborhood and a single-parent household, factors which come into play, for example, in a confrontation with a rich black basketball player on the Maillor practice court. While the basketball court may offer a site for class conflict, the barriers to Jamal's academic success in the classroom are decidedly race-based, especially after he begins to don the school uniform. For both Will and Jamal, their "gifts" are not only equalizing forces to counter the privileges of white, upper-class employment and education, they are also tools to expose the façade of thinking that particular identities are naturally productive of certain intellectual capabilities. While Jamal's writing skills trouble the assumptions made by teachers and students at the prep school that his race, class, and athletic ability make him academically subordinate, Will's South Boston upbringing and mathematical gifts challenge societal expectations of someone of his age, class, and family status.

Despite these similarities in the two main characters' academic skills as received in the films, significant differences between Will and Jamal's cases speak to how different the stakes of success are in each character's case. While both characters are presented as autodidacts, with concurrent ties to the public library system, Will's genius is regarded as a more superior and a more natural ability by comparison. Jamal does use his talents in astounding ways, but Will's brilliance is upheld as brighter and more mature. For example, even Lambeau, a Fields Medal winner in mathematics, cowers at the ease at which Will completes difficult proofs. Jamal, on the other hand, receives no such respect from Forrester, whose comments on Jamal's early journals demonstrate that he shows talent but needs some work. Jamal's promise of confidentiality creates

a system of exchange that allows him a capable teacher. Will, in contrast, *needs no teacher*, at least not in the forms of knowledge on display in the film. While Jamal is able to join the institution and silence doubts of his qualifications, Will exceeds any institutional requirements, obtaining top-scale job interviews without any formal participation in academia. When Will chooses to pursue Skyler at the film's end, he is free of his previous academic obligations but still capable of resurrecting them in the future. Jamal, however, has no choice, his legitimacy is tied to Forrester's power play at the school, and he continues to attend the school, reliant on that academic institution for future material gains. The great accomplishment he earns at the film's end is bound by his continued use of the school for educational capital, with the implicit suggestion that the achievement is particularly incredible *for an inner-city black student from the Bronx.*

Jamal's attainment of intellectual recognition differs from Will's because his primarily relies on resolving racial stereotypes within the academic institution he joins while Will confronts class stereotypes that create barriers to his legitimate entrance into the University. In juxtaposing the two narratives, another striking contrast involves the particular characters in each story who are depicted as emotionally unhealthy. Will eventually gives in to social expectations that he pursue emotional well-being, succumbing to therapeutic interpretations of his condition that explain his failures by looking to his family status, his maturity, and his past experiences with physical abuse. The mentally unstable figure in *Finding Forrester*, however, is not the young intellectual but rather Forrester, the elderly, obsessive compulsive recluse who never goes outside of his apartment and wears a brand new pair of socks every day. Jamal's emotional stability is rarely ever questioned by his peers and his mentor, and his role within the therapeutic framing of Forrester's case makes him to be the socially experienced therapist, similar to Sean's

effect on Will. Jamal takes Forrester to a basketball game and an empty Yankee stadium, moments in which he is able to teach the hermit author how to interact in the world. This contrast, however, isn't a trite coincidence but, rather, it speaks to the overarching dynamics at play in Jamal's search for recognition and success. Forrester is able to legitimate Jamal's writing at the end of the narrative because of Jamal's therapeutic effect on him, a phenomenon that makes clear Jamal's central struggle to achieve authenticity. While therapeutic discourse contains Will Hunting's intellectual goals by constructing his battle as one for emotional stability, several normative discourses of authenticity regulate Jamal's distinction as a credible intellectual. The following analysis considers three particular modes of intellectual constraint by assessing the representation of Jamal's athletic ability (as exclusive with his intellectual aspirations), the use of colonial imagery and language (to whitewash Jamal's potential as an authentic black intellectual), and Jamal's role as an emotional aide to Forrester (to emphasize Jamal's emotional superiority in order to ultimately justify his normalcy).

Jamal's Athletic Performance and Bodily Presence

The mind/body split plays a major role in popular thinking about intellectualism because it represents the underlying philosophical drive that distinguishes mental reasoning from physical embodiment inherent in Descartes' original humanist assertion "Cogito Ergo Sum." As Susan Bordo (1987) notes, "the creation of a 'pure' realm, untouched by uncertainty and risk, always necessitates, as Dewey points out, the designation of a contrastingly 'impure' realm to absorb or take responsibility for the messy aspects of experience. In the history of philosophy, the role of the unclean and the impure has been played, variously, by material reality, practical activity, change, the emotions, 'subjectivity,' and most often — as for Descartes — by the *body*" (p. 76).

Media's portrayal of intellectualism, however, questions Bordo's description of the body as impure because denigration of expertise or expert figures in media often involves an increased value placed on bodily activity and performance. In mainstream Hollywood narrative, the white male hero usually overcomes an intellectually superior villain through physical determination and corporeal ability. The marked difference between sports film/television representations and the depiction of trivia whizzes on game shows also illustrates contemporary media's demarcation of the two realms.

While Bordo applies her analysis of Cartesianism to the role of feminism (1993) and the medium of film (1999), her consideration of the mind/body dualism solely regards films where bodily representations are more prominent than intellectual ones and are often constructed to continue the treatment of the bodily realm as shameful or impure. Other works also regard the significance of corporeality in film (Albilla, 2005; Asman, 2001), but they also illustrate how bodily knowledge in certain mainstream films challenges the traditional split and the superiority of inward reasoning. *Finding Forrester*, however, maintains the split in its separate depictions of mental work and physical activity, especially athletics. Each type of knowledge or activity, as maintained by the works themselves, interacts with the other to contribute to the anti-intellectual tones of the films. Also necessary within this treatment of the Cartesian dualism is an acknowledgement that this dualism works strategically to portray intellectualism in a certain light but also historically to limit the social opportunities for non-white groups in Western society. As much as all of these theoretical categories interrelate, this interaction particularly comments on the tendency, for example, for media to treat "normal" African American work as involving either athletics or entertainment (two prominently body-related occupations) as opposed to academics, business, medicine, or law (Dyson, 1996, p. 54). Capitalist society

changes what Bordo and others have found to be the traditional rules by strategically valuing bodily activity in order to socially, intellectually, and politically subordinate a particular race (or class, age-group, nationality, gender) to the mainstream identity. Boyd (1997) notes how, much like jazz did previously, basketball currently works as a site for struggle over issues of race, class, and masculinity. This perspective, then, is particularly helpful in tracking this rule-change and highlighting how media structures also rely on intellectual competence to reinforce their social authority over groups whose social locations threaten media's ideological stability.

Athleticism and depictions of highly active bodies play a significant role in denigrating intellectualism in the film because Jamal is forced to choose between emerging at the school as a polished writer and continuing to fit within the stereotype of the black athlete attending the white private school primarily for sports. After his test scores attract the interest of the Maillor-Callow school, the school recruiter who visits his Bronx high school makes it clear that they also maintain a major interest in seeing him play basketball. As a result of this draw for the school and the small minority of black students at Maillor, Jamal is constantly fighting the impression that his primary interest and value, not only for the school but as a college-bound student, lie in athletics rather than his literary pursuits. This constant reinforcement of the different roles that Jamal plays at his new school diminish his significance as a student capable of attending the school on academic merits alone by referencing the mind/body dualism so active in traditional education's demarcation of thinking/writing and bodily activity. Professor Crawford comments to other teachers and to Jamal on one occasion that he is surprised by Jamal's writing because he is a basketball player at the school. This expectation directly translates into a racial stereotype as well, as Jamal's position within the school as a basketball star is intricately bound up in his race.

By assuming athletes will produce inferior work in his classroom, Professor Crawford in this case is also presuming a mediocre effort from one of the only black students in the school.

Jamal's bodily presence as a tall, black athlete reinforces his role at the school as a bodily engine, driven to work on the basketball court but not to think in the classroom. Although his classroom demeanors and everyday behaviors utilize many physical cues that mark him as primarily an athlete, such as his expressionless face, his silence, and his constant possession of a basketball, these behaviors may be components of his performance as "black athlete unconcerned with school." The concept of passing requires understanding representations of the body such as these because passing *for* inevitably requires performing or constructing an artificial physical appearance and behavior. Passing, based on this ability to masquerade, is also a method for testing the limits of authenticity by questioning the essential qualities that inform certain cultural notions. While passing potentially allows individuals to acquire cultural capital not historically allotted to them, both Will and Jamal use their passing downward to maintain traditional stereotypes about their race and class while they seek to assimilate into dominant educational institutions. While at his Bronx high school Jamal passes for a similarly un-intellectual student, his role at Maillor requires a more complex form of passing because it is played simultaneously with his emergence to viewers, Forrester, and the school's teachers as an astute, well-read scholar. This passing could be interpreted as a resistance to the stereotype of his role at the school by over-identifying with the type he seems to be molded into at Maillor. Jamal's assimilation as a credible academic at Maillor, however, whether through formal accreditation or informal performance, will never be completely possible because his race marks him as a foreigner to the school.

This significance of Jamal's passing is similar to how Will Hunting's companions out him as an intellectual in a way that denigrates his bodily activity. In *Good Will Hunting*, Will's janitorial masquerade and his desires to resist his genius and live a noble life in South Boston get exposed by Maguire and Chuckie as aspirations incompatible with his true intellectual calling. Prior to exposing himself as a genius, Will's everyday activities, at least as his friends are aware, consist of going to batting cages, getting in fights on playgrounds, working at construction sites, and buffing M.I.T. floors. Van Sant's use of slow-motion shots during the fight on the playground and a pitch at the batting cage also work to accentuate bodily motion and situate these practices within that realm. When Chuckie tells Will that seeing him stay in construction would be an insult to him, he forces Will to choose between his Southie lifestyle, one that privileges the domain of the body, over his scholarly potential, one that relies on the mind. The mind/body split also manifests itself by making Will's intellectual activities exclusive to his criminal lifestyle. The deal Will makes with Lambeau after his court hearing makes Will's mathematical work with Lambeau (and, interestingly, Will's psychological reform) a condition of his release.

Jamal's ability to control his performance as a basketball star is ultimately challenged, much like Chuckie and Sean challenge Will, after he is accused of plagiarism by Crawford. Jamal is put to the test when a member of the school board, who also happens to be Claire's father, promises him that the plagiarism issue can be resolved if he plays well in the State Championship and helps his team win. For Jamal to buy into Dr. Spence's deal, he must simultaneously reinforce his athletic image in the school and use it to secure a clean academic record. Jamal is forced to either refuse the deal and face expulsion based on plagiarism charges

or downgrade his own ascent to superior academic status by answering the rich white board member's call for him to perform on cue.

The outcome of the game is left in Jamal's hands, and the scene where he misses the foul shots and loses the game provides clues to the intentionality of his misses. While he may not be any better off academically for having lost the game, a reality that may cast doubt on his motivation to throw it, several indicators point to evidence that his misses were intentional. First, his glances toward Crawford, Claire, and Dr. Spence while he is at the foul line place his shots in the context of Dr. Spence's deal. Jamal is not just shooting to win but choosing whether or not to opt into an image of himself that he is attempting to shed. Second, his presence at the foul line references the foul shots he takes during one practice where he and another teammate both make fifty shots in a row. The film has clearly established his control and experience at the foul line, a detail that would suggest his ability to make or miss at will. Third, Forrester inquires about the shots in a curious manner that suggests he knows that Jamal missed them on purpose. While Jamal responds by refusing to reveal the truth, the hint suggests that he had a purpose on the line. This interpretation has also been shared by several critics. Roger Ebert comments in his review of *Finding Forrester* that "In [*Finding Forrester*], a disadvantaged young man simply refuses to perform like a trained seal, because he knows that will be a lethal blow against his adult tormentors. In a movie where sports supplies an important theme, Jamal's crucial decision supplies the best insight in the story about his journey between two worlds" (Ebert, 2000). This refusal, then, represents Jamal's choice to abandon his athletic role and attempt a purely academic one at the school, and even Ebert's reference to the "two worlds" illustrates how the film so clearly divides the two realms based on mental and physical pursuits. Jamal's attempt the next day to defy Crawford at the writing competition, however, only complements the force of

Forrester's arrival and reading. While his basketball skills are very advanced and the movie shows the coach offering little advice beyond some disciplinary regulation, Jamal cannot thrive on his own at the scholarly game he plays after his athletic role at the school comes under scrutiny at the State Championship.

Forrester's (Ivory) Tower, Colonialism, and African American Vernacular

Jamal's symbolic ascension to Forrester's apartment, his adoption of strict grammatical constricts under Forrester's tutelage, and the historically Western literary influences of his reading and writing all contribute to Jamal's emergence as a capable intellectual, but one tethered to the history of colonial power relations and the strategic power of whiteness. Whiteness is a concept within the cultural study of race that has lately been applied to media representations of white and non-white identities (Dyer, 1988; Dyer, 1997). While traditional studies of racial representations in films have concerned the relative treatment of minority racial groups, Dyer (1988) encouraged critical attention toward the methods by which whiteness perpetuates its dominance within media narratives and news coverage. Nakayama and Krizek (1995) describe whiteness as a central point from which power is created and applied that utilizes numerous strategies to keep itself invisible. Dyer's (1988) call for the application of this analytical tool in media representations, then, justifies an attention toward depictions of the dominant power relations of whiteness, and scholars have subsequently taken up this task in the context of popular imagery (e.g., Liera-Schwichtenberg, 2000; Shome, 2000).

Post-colonialism offers a similar avenue for understanding the interplays between race and nationality in Western culture. Shome & Hegde (2002) describe the scholarship as "provid[ing] historical and international depth to the understanding of cultural power" (p. 252).

Through major theorists such as Edward Said and Gayatri Spivak, this body of knowledge has developed around the central investigation of the history of Western colonialism in Africa, India, Asia, and the Americas and the subsequent critique of Western concepts of enlightenment, progress, humanism, and modernity based on their extension into slavery and oppression. While this critique has been applied to filmic ideas and characters, this theoretical concept is more significant to this project's subject because of the historical linkage between intellectualism and Western colonialism. Shome & Hegde (2002), citing Schwarz, argue that "Western intellectual enterprise itself is fundamentally dependent on Europe's conquest and exploitation of the colonial world" (p. 251). The historical baggage of white, Western intellectualism shapes not only individual intellectual identities but also strategies by which intellectuals assume authority and gain popular attention, and this interconnection constitutes an underlying basis for media discourses describing the elitism of intelligentsia. "Ivory Tower" academics have traditionally retained a privileged epistemological position relative to colonial knowledge bases and subordinate intellectual figures. Additionally, the aforementioned dialectic between hostile and respectful depictions of intellectualism may also illustrate a relationship between media professionals and colonial bodies in that media institutions play the role of the colonizer relative to intellectuals' position as the colonized in popular TV and film. Given the complicated power relations involved in the media-intellectual disputes over authenticity and expertise in the public's imagination, the two perspectives on the dynamics of race and colonialism offered by whiteness and post-colonialism offer useful lenses through which Hollywood images and stories can be viewed in order to account for their racial meanings and historical motivations.

Finding Forrester does little to challenge the implicit ties of intellectualism to whiteness and colonialism, as Jamal accomplishes his intellectual coming-out and successful arrival in

academia only through the white, colonial presence of Forrester. The colonial influence of Forrester constructs the colonized in his own image by functionally bracketing Jamal's blackness and splitting his identity, thereby making Jamal not only the dark object of Forrester's influence but also the mythological white subject whose literary interests are simply a gateway to saving Forrester and restoring purity to Forrester's damaged whiteness. Johnson (2003) describes this effect as such:

> Such examples are chronicled in countless autobiographical narratives where particularly upwardly mobile blacks find themselves in the company of whites who see them as 'exceptional' or as a 'credit' to their race. These instances usually occur at exclusive 'invitation only' white gatherings. The black who has been accepted into the elite circle of whiteness is expected to bracket the blackness that proffered his or her (temporary) invitation to the welcome table of whiteness in the face of the dissonance he or she feels in relation to the black hands extending the hors d'oeuvre tray. In these instances, Williams suggests, 'You need two chairs at the table, one for you one for your blackness.'" (p. 8-9)

One scene that illustrates Jamal's bracketing of his race is the second interpersonal encounter between him and Forrester. When Forrester voices his surprise that Jamal's writing was written by a young black man, Jamal's questioning of this comment causes the issue of racism to be foregrounded. Rather than forcing Forrester to come to grips with his apparent racism, Jamal adheres to Forrester's summary of the situation, shelving his concerns because he wants to avoid jeopardizing the potential for a literary mentor. Given the results of this confrontation, described in further detail below, Jamal's race is eliminated from their relationship in order for him to gain entrance to the "elite circle of whiteness."

Jamal's inner-city friends first become interested in "the Window" or "the Ghost" because they peer up at him during their pick-up games while he seems to glare down at them using binoculars. When Jamal ventures up to the tallest apartment to gain more knowledge about "the Window," he promises to bring an item from the apartment back. This native fascination with the gazing fortress that overlooks the playground reinforces the colonial encounter that awaits Jamal once he pursues "the Ghost" further. While we learn of Forrester's psychological weaknesses during his friendship with Jamal, the reclusive author also demonstrates some omnipotence and power dynamics that reinforce his role as the experienced foreigner capable of imparting knowledge on the colonized, and, in this instance, African American, other. While Jamal and the courier seem to have their conversation about BMW's out of hearing range of anyone else, Forrester makes a passing remark during a later visit by the courier that reveals his knowledge of the conversation. While the film passes off Forrester's gazing as a harmless birdwatching hobby, this clue offers some evidence that his perch is capable of more than just videotaping birds. After Jamal finishes challenging the courier, his backpack drops from the window of Forrester's apartment, a falling-from-the-sky in the shot that gives Forrester's corrections to Jamal's writing an expertise steeped in superior power relations, even suggesting a heavenly gift.

This tower in which Forrester resides is most significant because it allows Forrester the opportunity to survey the surrounding neighborhood without being surveyed himself. The boys playing basketball on the court are an object of Forrester's gaze, a spectacle for him to observe, classify, and master just like the Canadian warbler he spots in the park. Forrester also owns multiple televisions, a further sign of his power through looking, and his apartment is covered in old World War II-era pictures and memorabilia. Forrester's apartment is a relic of the era that

these pictures illustrate not just in reference to his refusal to emotionally move beyond his brother's death after the war but also in reference to the power relations that Forrester brings to his encounters with Jamal and others. This initial role for Forrester contrasts with Jamal's presence walking along the streets of his neighborhood and with Forrester's later decision to bike around the neighborhood at night, both instances of interacting in the city space horizontally rather than attempting to visualize it and manage it through vertical ascendance. While we last see Forrester riding down a busy Manhattan street on his bike, the conclusion shows Jamal leading his mother and brother up to Forrester's apartment to explore the place and eventually live there. Jamal and his family profit from Jamal's close adherence to Forrester's colonial strictures so much that they are able to inhabit this colonial space. As Jamal and Fly shoot hoops on the same playground, the camera comes to a still position behind the window inside Forrester's apartment once again. Just as Jamal was originally the object of "the Window" so is he in the end as well, an image of physical interaction that colonizes the basketball game, the rest of his friends, and his final role in the narrative.

Forrester's positioning in the tall apartment building offers a spatial metaphor for his substantive interactions with Jamal about writing. During one of his first opportunities to enter into Forrester's apartment, Jamal reacts aggressively to Forrester's suggestion that his writing is particularly exemplary because of his race. As a result, Forrester pulls an old knife on him and walks slowly toward him, saying "you don't know what to do right now, do you? If you tell me what you really want to tell me, I might not read any more of this. But if you let me run you down with this racist bullshit, what does that make you?" After these remarks, Forrester jerks his arm to strike, but stops quickly and hands Jamal back his paper. This power-play is a display of dominance by Forrester to not only intimidate Jamal but also to deter his criticisms of Forrester's

racially motivated comments. Jamal leaves quickly with his paper, and, although their meetings become warmer over time, this encounter positions their relationship as one initially and perhaps continually influenced by these unequal power relations. The knife plays a role at the end of the film as well, when Jamal uses it to open Forrester's final letter to him. As he puts the letter down and decides to shoot hoops with his friend, Jamal stares at the knife for a moment as he sheaths it. This passing of the tool that Forrester originally used to intimidate Jamal not only reinforces the transference of power to him after Forrester's death but also represents the writing skills with which Forrester empowered Jamal in order to thrive at Maillor.

Jamal's encounters with Forrester also demonstrate how reliant Jamal becomes on Forrester's tutelage about Western rules of grammar and the legacy of classical European and American literature. E. Patrick Johnson (2003) argues that language is a central factor in establishing authenticity, claiming that "one of the most palpable examples of the arbitrariness and politics of authenticity is in language use. Particularly among young black American and white American youth, whose cultures overlap in multiple and complicated ways, there exists a crisis of blackness involving language use that remains a permanent schism in identity politics" (p. 5). Not only do speaking and writing styles serve as racial markers (which interact with Jamal's passing in the film) but they also influence the political viability of forms of intellectualism. Grant Farred (2003) highlights how central the notion of the vernacular is to black intellectualism, arguing that "vernacularity marks that sociopolitical occasion when the conventional intellectual speaks less as a product of a hegemonic cultural-economic system than as a thinker capable of translating the disenfranchised experience of subjugation as oppositional, ideologically recognizable, vernacularized discourse" (p. 11). Although he interacts with his Bronx friends using a vernacular likely in violation of many traditional rules of English

grammar, Jamal also demonstrates a mastery of this style in his interactions with Forrester and his challenges to Crawford. In one instance, Jamal and Forrester quibble over the proper usage of conjunctions at the beginning of a sentence. When Jamal humiliates Crawford during their class, he corrects the Professor for using “farther” to denote degree when he should have used “further.”

This reliance on proper grammar, while inconsistent with much of Jamal’s conversational style with his brother and Claire, does coincide with the writers pictured on the walls of the English classroom and the pile of books in Jamal’s room displayed at the beginning of the movie. Some of the collection includes James Joyce, Ray Bradbury, Anton Chekhov, and Kierkegaard, but, as many viewer comments and reviews have touched upon, none of these books nor any other works that Jamal reads or references fall outside of the traditional English canon of classical American and European masterpieces. While no critic should expect a character such as Jamal to harbor literary interests outside of the canon simply because he represents a racial minority, several elements of the film deny a neutral reading of Jamal’s literary style and interests. First, vernacular discourse is clearly downplayed in the film, not only in Forrester’s suggestions to Jamal to maintain proper grammar but also in references to Jamal’s brother’s failed hip-hop aspirations. Second, Jamal’s reliance on conventional literature allows Forrester’s final vindication of him. Without this proper style, an accepted academic position would be much more difficult to earn because the Maillor teachers would discourage it. When Forrester reads Jamal’s writing at the competition, the ruse is most effective because the writing sounds like it could be Forrester’s, demonstrating that Jamal’s writing is only commendable if it mimics Forrester’s and closely follows his guidelines.

The confrontation with Crawford at the competition does little to subvert the power of whiteness or racial supremacy; rather it uses Crawford's cardboard racism to position Forrester as the anti-racist white hero (Madison, 1999), whose legitimation of Jamal allows him a continued role in the school. Jamal's journey to gain authority within Maillor is a footnote to the mythic journey of Forrester, who overcomes the dark confines of his apartment in the Bronx, gains the mobility to disappear to a colonial center (Scotland) after he saves Jamal, and eventually publish a second book. The fruits of Jamal's assistance, on the other hand, consist of continued access to the private school, Forrester's apartment, and the chance to write the foreword to Forrester's book. Watts' (2005) analysis of the film *8 Mile* offers a similar understanding of the heroic journey of a central white character. Just as Rabbit (Eminem's character) crosses back over the tracks after his victory at the rap battle in order to maintain the color line, Forrester's departure to Scotland reinforces the sense that the Bronx is not his true place. Jamal, however, by receiving Forrester's apartment, is further reminded that he does belong there. His final location in the film is on the basketball court where he first saw Forrester, suggesting that "black folk risk becoming inauthentic once they leave the inner city" (Watts, 2005, p. 190). Jamal's role in the film situates "real" blackness in the Bronx and outside traditional educational institutions. Thus, even though Jamal aids Forrester and renounces his athletic identity, his intellectual aspirations are confined to Maillor and severed from his now immobilized blackness by the narrative's reliance on colonial and white notions of authenticity.

Jamal's Deified Emotional Intelligence

While the mentoring relationship that Jamal and Forrester begin also highlights parallels in plot and theme between *Good Will Hunting* and *Finding Forrester*, differences in the initiation, direction, and outcome of these moments of guidance comment on how the latter film strays from the conflicts of the former. Will reluctantly warms to Sean after Sean exposes Will's chameleonism, but Jamal actively seeks out Forrester as a potential resource to improve his writing. While Sean confronts Will with the challenge that his book knowledge cannot translate into practical life skills, the reverse occurs between Jamal and Forrester. The hermit-like author has stayed inside his apartment for decades, and when he ventures out with Jamal to a professional basketball game and to an empty Yankee stadium, it is clear that his social competency has been dulled, even if it was acute enough once to inform his masterpiece novel. Within this instance of counseling, Jamal's unquestioned emotional stability and street smarts are what challenge Forrester to escape his quarters, rethink his seclusion, and come to grips with his traumatic involvement in his brother's death. Sean motivates Will to stop passing for a working class Southie while Jamal influences Forrester to reveal his identity to society and to face his skeletons. The titles to the two films especially illustrate this difference. Will and Forrester are the personalities seeking to achieve redemption and personal fulfillment. While both Sean and Forrester leave their homes to travel at the conclusion of the films, it is less clear that Sean's trip has been motivated by his experiences with Will than it is that Forrester's new extroversion is a product of his friendship with Jamal. It is also clearer throughout each movie that Will's wounds needing to be healed are psychological while Jamal's barriers to selfhood are based on structural barriers to his academic success (that only Forrester can finally raze).

This role-switching and the differences in personal obstacles to contentment and success may be attributable to the heavy racial burden placed on Jamal by the film's narrative. In *Finding Forrester*, the young mastermind is only able to fulfill his dreams, a goal made clear by Forrester's final letter to Jamal, through the mentor's vindication of his talents. *Good Will Hunting*, however, depicts Will's talents as unquestioned and introduces the main conflict not as one that produces material gains for him but as one that already assumes his capability to succeed and rather produces emotional gains for him. One explanation that can and should be acknowledged to approach this comparison involves the added component of Jamal's isolation among his mostly white academic peers based on his race. While Jamal does admit to Forrester that he began writing after his father, struggling with alcohol abuse, left home, Will is presented as more scarred by the violence he experienced from his foster father as a child and as demonstrating a more widely manifesting fear of social attachment. Jamal's home life, while sparsely represented, offers signs of a healthy upbringing by his mother and his older brother, Terrell. His mother encourages him to go to Maillor after she and the school discover his talents from his test scores. She also inquires about his backpack after he leaves it in Forrester's apartment, a sign that she actively monitors his educational participation. While Jamal does mention the absence of his father, his mother's presence at home offers signs that his father's departure has not damaged Jamal's upbringing. Jamal's brother, Terrell, also plays an influential role in maintaining Jamal's emotional stability by serving as a paternal influence on his emotional health and a deterrent to any temptations Jamal has to abandon formal schooling. Terrell gives Jamal basketball tickets, which he uses to treat Forrester on his birthday, and arranges his entrance into Yankee stadium. He also comes to Jamal's basketball games with their mother, a sign that he is actively involved in his brother's life and interested in seeing him

succeed. After Jamal throws the game, Terrell and their mother try to comfort Jamal about the loss. One final influential role that Terrell plays is in representing the career options Jamal has if he chooses not to pursue an academic future. When Jamal approaches Terrell at his work where he is manager of a parking lot, Terrell jokes about his own lack of success, promising that his aspirations to become a successful hip-hop star will pay off. While this comment may be an inside joke on the actor playing Terrell, Busta Rhymes (who is a successful rapper in real life), it also distinguishes Jamal's institutional interests from Terrell's seemingly less legitimate, less promising goals.

Jamal, as opposed to Will, is not an orphan and does not avoid emotional commitment to relationships because of past instances of physical abuse, and this stability makes possible the dynamic established by the service Jamal offers to Forrester in the form of emotional guidance. Jamal's scholarly intelligence gets muted in favor of an emotional expertise that he applies to deal with Forrester's agoraphobia and his obsessive-compulsive behavior. The deal that Forrester and Jamal establish creates a situation where intellectual knowledge gets exchanged for emotional experience, a set-up that implicitly values psychological knowledge as equivalent with traditional intelligence. Many scenes in Forrester's apartment involve not Forrester's advice to Jamal about writing but simply informal conversations about Jamal's experiences at school or Forrester's past. As Jamal begins to inquire more about Forrester's past and his decision to avoid publishing any more books, he outs Forrester as a timid recluse whose emotional baggage explains his isolation. During one scene where Forrester naps in a chair, Jamal looks around the apartment at old photographs of Forrester's family. Soon after, Forrester opens up to Jamal about his brother's death and his own feelings of culpability surrounding the incident. With these moments as well as their trip to the basketball and baseball stadiums, Forrester is able to

overcome his agoraphobia and confront his fears about publishing, social interaction, and his past. On several occasions after meeting Jamal, Forrester rides his bike around the neighborhood, and this mobility is a sign that he has been liberated and become comfortable with leaving his apartment. Ultimately, Jamal is successful in helping Forrester learn to interact in the world in a healthy way. Forrester's decisions to travel back to Scotland and revisit his home country and family offer conclusive evidence of his emotional awakening and social integration.

The film makes clear Jamal's effect on Forrester. However, while Jamal's influence may be read as a sign of a positive representation of a minority character, especially an intellectual one, the dependence of Jamal's success on Forrester's emotional well-being and the relationship of this role to the history of "magical negro" characters in popular film diminish Jamal's authentic intellectualism. Forrester's reintegration into society is not a minor subplot to the central story of Jamal's experiences at Maillor. Rather, the film establishes the reverse as true. Because Forrester ultimately vindicates Jamal in the confrontation with Crawford at the writing competition, Jamal's legitimacy at the school as a scholar is dependent on Forrester's emotional ability to risk public appearance. Forrester surprises the teachers and students at the competition when he points to his picture on the wall among the great writers in history, but this moment is also significant in Forrester's psychological growth because he is finally able to confront his celebrity status which has plagued him since his first novel. This moment is meaningful for the former recluse because, through Jamal's consolation and advice, he has learned how to deal with his anxieties. It is also, however, the crucial moment, as established above, for Jamal's continued credibility at the school. Since he has abandoned his performance as "only a basketball player," his appearance at the writing competition and defiance of Crawford (and the administration) signal his willingness to reshape his own image into a skilled writer and thinker. Given the

results of Forrester's appearance, however, Jamal's defiance of Crawford and emergence as a respected student at the school are only possible through Forrester's health. Jamal's academic acceptance, then, is conditioned within the narrative on his emotional stability.

This relationship also informs the second implication of Jamal's emotional assistance. Consistent with the film stereotype of the "magical negro" character whose emotional support of the main white protagonist allows the main character to triumph in the end (Kempley, 2003), Jamal's therapeutic contributions to Forrester's reawakening make his other attributes, especially his intellectualism, only an aspect of his magical presence. Jamal challenges Forrester to overcome his emotional barriers to fulfillment, but Jamal only achieves limited success in the film himself, thus depicting him as merely a means to Forrester's triumphant recovery. This relegation of Jamal's role in the film to emotional servitude cannot be read outside of the context of the recent proliferation of this character type within mainstream films. From *Ghost* and *The Matrix* to *The Green Mile* and *The Legend of Baggar Vance*, Hollywood narratives have recently contained supporting African American characters whose mystical capabilities give them a unique ability to assist the main white protagonist. As Kempley (2003) notes, "they materialize only to rescue the better-drawn white characters." These attempts at positive representations of African Americans, while they do assign gifts to these characters which influence the plot's resolution, ultimately make their magical abilities an instrument for helping the main white characters resolve their own conflicts. Brookey & Westerfelhaus (2001) expand on this specific stereotype by arguing that the discourse of deification is a popular tool for normalizing minority characters within mainstream media representations. Looking at depictions of gay characters in popular film, they find two concurrent qualities that downplay these deified characters' social significance. First, they argue that the mystical traits often "pose no threat to the established

order or serve to reaffirm that order" (Brookey & Westerfelhaus, 2001, p. 144). Second, they found that these magical roles also often coincide with a limiting isolation, explaining that "because they are defined as being above the mainstream, the deified can easily be removed from it" (p. 144).

While the film examples above may offer more literal examples of "magical negro" characters because the story specifically assigns them a spiritual value, *Finding Forrester* constructs Jamal's emotional stability as a magical route to curing Forrester. When Jamal first sneaks into Forrester's apartment, he appears and disappears from Forrester's life much like an apparition, only to then consistently intervene in Forrester's emotional troubles. While Forrester educates Jamal about subjects pertinent to the mind, Jamal confronts him in return with emotional knowledge, a relationship that has the same effect as typical "magical negro" characters. Jamal's emotional experience works within the context of standard advice about social interaction that reaffirms the traditional order of academic institutions. It also limits his social significance to that of a conduit for Forrester's reawakening. While Jamal's intellectual authenticity comes at the expense of his emotional assistance to Forrester, his emotional authenticity is unquestioned and deployed in the narrative in a way that devalues his academic intelligence. Even though Jamal's character is magical because of his access to the non-substantive emotional realm, the isolating effect that this primary role has on his intellectual aspirations serves to muddle the distinction between his emotional and intellectual intelligence. Jamal also begins to be seen as magical not only because he's able to finally get the one-time writer to leave of his apartment but also because of his intellectual prowess. This association even further denigrates Jamal's authentic genius by defanging its social influence and making its legitimacy contingent on its reaffirmation of traditional academic subjects and language.

Conclusion

Jamal is not only incapable of finally achieving legitimacy on his own but he also utilizes a colonial style to gain access to the academic community he so desperately seeks to join. The completion of Jamal's goals is only possible through his sabotaging of any athletic interests and the final transformation of Forrester into a socially capable individual. Only then has Jamal demonstrated the intellectual credentials, reliance on traditional literary forms, abandonment of physical activity, and emotional stability to survive amongst his privileged white, upper-class peers. In the end, *Finding Forrester* ends up positing the same dichotomy between genius and emotional stability as does *Good Will Hunting*, it just does it with a different set of characters. The gradual unclosing of Jamal's real talents occurs not only through his forcing the school to define him severed from his basketball skills but also through his external authorization as a capable thinker and writer based on Forrester's confirmation of his originality and his adoption of colonially-constructed speaking, grammar, and subject matter based on traditional Western literature. These different components of Jamal's struggle to gain fair access to the educational opportunities of white, upper-class New York students as well as respect as a gifted writer and academic all reorient the question of access to the privileges and benefits of certain institutions not around concerns over mental instability or social expertise but rather around authenticity as an intellectual. Not only does this priority of the authentic diminish intellectuals' general claims to social influence but it is particularly perilous for non-white claims to intellectual authority. Either the representative modes of racial minorities are legitimated within the confines of white, colonial institutions, thus reinforcing pre-existing power structures and immobilizing these individuals into stereotypical or token roles, or claims to knowledge are deemed inauthentic, thus

denying their cultural capital and continuing their disempowerment. Stephen Holden, in his *New York Times* review of the film, questions:

> What is one to make of Jamal? This hybrid of the young Michael Jordan and Arthur Rimbaud, with the temperament of Gandhi, is the new, teenage version of an insidious Hollywood fantasy that might be called the Perfect Negro. In his latest incarnation he looks and sounds like a direct descendant of the sort of righteous but gentle black saint embodied by Sidney Poitier in the late 1960's and early 70's. Invoked at a moment when some are alarmed by the language and attitude of contemporary rappers, Jamal is a blatant palliative, a fantasy figure invented to assuage anxiety. (Holden, p. E3)

Jamal's intellectualism is made safer and muted by the whitewashing forces of Forrester's guidance, and his final authentication as a literary genius, limited in scope compared to Will Hunting's, can be attributed to the miracles of the material benefits provided for him from his gracious private school and the heroism of a once-reclusive Pulitzer Prize winner.

Chapter 4

Conclusion: The Cultural Value of Intellectualism in Everyday Life

The messages of these film texts under investigation speak to the heart of the current cultural climate surrounding intellectualism as an identity and a practice because they primarily influence popular understanding of the *authority* of the intellectual. What has been at stake throughout this analysis is the relative acceptance of intellectuals within Western society as autonomous experts capable of specializing in their fields of study yet also of taking on public roles informed by their academic pursuits. Furedi (2004b) notes that "intellectuals often exist in a state of creative tension with the rules and restrictions imposed by the prevailing institutions on everyday life" (p. 32). This tension rests on intellectual claims to authority, for as much as the very nature of modern intellectuals involves the pursuit of knowledge outside of the realm of common experience, it also relies on the idea that intellectuals have a commitment to a critical engagement with ideas in order to benefit the public.

The devaluation of intellectual work has emerged in our cultural scene amid a fervent backlash against expert claims to knowledge due to an increase in the institutionalization of modes of authority, the popularity of alternative knowledge-forms such as therapeutic understanding, and a general rise in public suspicion towards technocratic governance. For example, public and media expectations for the qualifications of political candidates have generally shifted from their technical abilities in administration, their political knowledge, and their decision-making abilities to such personal values as integrity, sensitivity, and honesty. This movement has occurred not only because of an increasing concern for personal values but also because of a general fear of excessive authority within positions of governance. As figures

capable of political influence, intellectuals have received a similar treatment. Their autonomy has evaporated and their institutional obligations have increased. The general public sufficiently tolerates the continued pursuit by intellectuals of specialized areas of knowledge, but this acceptance has also met with increased scrutiny of intellectual expertise once that knowledge begins to be applied to everyday issues and events. Academic figures have been relegated to the roles of pure technocrats, absent-minded and incapable of understanding or commenting on common experience. Media representations particularly contribute to this public suspicion because of the need, as Garnham (1995) and Ross (1989) attest to, for media professionals to also make legitimate claims to representing the public and the truth.

In *Good Will Hunting*, Will Hunting's experiments with using his mental prowess to assume a position of authority not only within academia but also within the larger society that he inhabits are ultimate failures. In the end Will passes on the potential of his genius as a means for academic success and Einstein-like contributions to society, instead pursuing normalcy as a more heart-felt and honest path toward the goal, modified through the influence of Sean, Chuckie, and Skyler, of personal contentment. The message sent to the millions of viewers who discovered and have yet to discover the film is that intellectual enrichment and emotional enrichment cannot go hand in hand, and that the more thoroughly rewarding option of the two is a search for the self. This displacement is a convenient rhetorical device that allows the audience to identify with Will as a vulnerable genius. While audience members are not deceived by the ruse of these depictions of intellectuals, their identification with these intellectual personae is conditioned upon the establishment of these characters' normalcy. Instead of denigrating what he knows, for everyone in the narrative seems to accept his brilliance, the film cuts away at his image as a viable social figure by conjuring up challenges to his relevance. Will fervently pursues his class

politics, embarrassing and confronting institutional and higher class authorities whenever he gets the chance, but this politics is ultimately captured within the story as a spectacle for the audience to enjoy and imitate. And instead of this social engagement being given any legitimacy beyond its function as a big-screen form of entertainment, it is ultimately cast off by Will and the film as a politics unable to be translated to the general public as a political target or to the audience as a commercial target. The film devalues Will's intellectual status as elitist using popular therapeutic notions. This attractive film vocabulary not only uses a populist message to reach an optimal number of viewers but also renders a long-lasting emotional effect that gives Will's anti-intellectual triumph a cathartic value that justifies popular derision of intellectual status. Furedi (2004a) comments that "individuals are not so much cured as placed in a state of recovery. They are far more likely to be instructed to acknowledge their problems than to transcend them. Therapy, like the wider culture of which it is a part, teaches people to know their place. In return it offers the dubious blessings of affirmation and recognition" (p. 204). This narrative preference for recognition risks downgrading all representations of societal roles that require some form of elite discourse or activity.

In *Finding Forrester,* similar questions of intellectual authority linger throughout the film. Jamal's choice to abandon his athletic pursuits at Maillor serve to justify his interest in literature by resolving the traditional conflict between intellectual forms of thinking and physical activity. While traditional films use physical and mental disabilities within narratives to support this dichotomy between individual thinking and action, Jamal chooses to disable himself by throwing the State championship game and forcing his peers and his school to accept him without the racial stereotypes of athleticism. Jamal's barriers to an authentic intellectual life lie at the institutional level in the acceptance of his racial status (and therefore his physical ability) as

his proper future. With institutional certification of his creative genius and literary skills in question, Jamal's great hope for legitimation rests in the literary authority of Forrester as a redeemed recluse. Jamal's colonial dependence on Forrester's teachings, not only about literary ideas but also about managing his identity in his new institutional setting, make Jamal's intellectualism conditional on his emotional support for Forrester and his continued performance at school. Forrester's vindication of Jamal at the film's conclusion works only because the author has personally overseen Jamal's colonial indoctrination, by way of influencing his ways of speaking, his creative subjects, and the classical literary texts after which he models his work. As Forrester is liberated from the psychological barriers to fulfillment that his Bronx apartment represents, Jamal is rewarded for his intellectual assimilation through his ability to operate within the academic institution of Maillor and to occupy the actual space of Forrester's apartment. The colonial relationship is reinforced by these privileges for Jamal because his compensation is still based on the underlying drive for the colonized to mirror the behavior and lifestyle of the colonizer, as Jamal's role as a proxy is fulfilled when he literally takes Forrester's place. In the end, the authority that Jamal's intellectualism should be able to assume becomes reduced to his colonial subjectivity established through Forrester and his decreasing autonomy within Maillor. Jamal's emotional relationship to Forrester paints him in a similar light as many "magical negro" characters in mainstream Hollywood narratives, equating his intellectual status with the fantastic quality of his emotional care for Forrester.

While for Will his intellectualism is at odds with his class aspirations and his emotional literacy, Jamal's intellectual legitimacy gets downplayed via his blackness through the opposition of his intelligence and his physical ability. Both of these films present intersecting discourses that ultimately cast doubt on intellectualism as a viable identity. Both are centrally

devoted to determining the authenticities of their main characters as viable intellectuals devoted to their particular canons of knowledge, for Will primarily in math and Jamal primarily in literature. While Will's outlaw genius habits become a symptom under the therapeutic gaze, Jamal's intellectual aims become limited not through another form of anti-elitism but through a pseudo-elitist reliance on traditional educational institutions for granting cultural capital. These contradictory influences serve similar ends as far as the ultimate treatment of intellectualism, and this juxtaposition highlights the tensions that intellectualism negotiates within society.

This analysis offers a framework for questioning other popular media texts that utilize the same rhetorical strategies, whether they depict historical figures, scientists, politicians, or even musicians. The films at hand and the theoretical perspectives outlined are not the only potential examples of this media content nor of the formal frames for understanding these representations. To begin, these films borrow common historical figures such as Einstein, Mozart, J.D. Salinger, and the Unabomber to relate key ideas about intellectualism. These references speak to the need to account for the role that these figures play within the cultural negotiation of intellectualism. In addition, aside from a more specific analysis of the development of the "multiple intelligence" movement, the association of intellectualism with mental instability also deserves further attention within other popular film and TV representations. For example, biopics such as *A Beautiful Mind* and *The Aviator* utilize this juxtaposition as well. The expansion of Asberger's Syndrome as a category of mental ability and a popular notion linking autism to forms of genius may contribute significantly to the coincidence of genius and mental instability (or social incompetence). Films such as *Rain Man* and the upcoming *Mozart and the Whale* may be important for this consideration. Another important area for future research might be IQ tests and their rhetorical function as tests of intelligence and as popular determinants of a hierarchy of

intellectual capability. Finally, in the interaction between intellectuals and educational institutions, the imagery of child geniuses also may contribute to these understandings of media messages. Child prodigy characters are profuse in films and TV shows, but they are often, in the examples of *Malcolm in the Middle* and *Jimmy Neutron: Boy Genius*, downplayed in favor of screening these character's experiences in overcoming their social ineptness and seeking personal redemption.

If we take the intellectual within media representations as a model for public and political engagement, *Good Will Hunting* and *Finding Forrester* offer attractive incentives for apathy by normalizing intellectual aspirations in order to suit the fancy of media audiences. They also cement popular insecurities toward any claim to specialized knowledge. Within media texts and other cultural forms, the looming issue that this project highlights is the inability of our political atmosphere to stomach any notion of elite appeals to universal considerations. The normalization of the images of some of the highest forms of intellectualism in these films is a sign of a drastic dysfunction in popular culture when it comes to depictions of viable forms of intellectual occupations. John Michael (2000) describes this situation with an acknowledgement that many of these conflicts are inevitable, claiming that "intellectuals cannot effectively hide the unpopular nature of the work the do; nor can they cover themselves in the robe of the philosopher king. There is no way out of this dilemma. Some contradictions must be held and lived with. Transcendence without universals, universals without transcendence: these are the paradoxes of contemporary intellectual work and modern politics in the West, and I suspect, elsewhere as well" (p. 42-43). While this analysis neither seeks to refute Michael's pessimistic (or, perhaps, realistic) claims nor offer a radical political project designed to circumvent the foundation of these paradoxes, it does seek to discourage apathy surrounding this modern political dilemma

and encourage an informed skepticism, especially concerning current, socially-inscribed insecurities surrounding intellectual freaks and geeks.

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