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PRESENTING THE SELF, THE SOCIAL BODY, AND THE OLFACTORY: MANAGING SMELLS IN EVERYDAY LIFE EXPERIENCES

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ABSTRACT: *This article considers smell as a social intermediary with regard to the body, presentation of self, and social/moral order. Employing the trajectory of a sociology of everyday life, the data presented here are collected from narrative interviews conducted with twelve respondents. The study looks at how respondents react to bodily odors and how they go about maintaining acceptable bodily scents to facilitate social interaction. The discussion is framed within Goffmanian sociology on the interaction order and corporeal scholarship. The findings show that respondents equate foul odors with social and moral defilement, and this affects how they view social others, adopting attitudes and behaviors of social inclusion and exclusion. Managing bodily odors also points to the idea that instead of approaching the body as an object of analysis, the body should also be analyzed as an active and acting subject, located and influenced by sociocultural conditions. This article thus contributes to discussions on a sociology of the body by linking them with olfactory analyses and also aims to supplement the dearth of olfactory research in the Southeast Asian region by using Singapore as an empirical case study. Keywords: smell; social intermediary; body; presentation of self; everyday life.*

Corporeal sociology has increasingly taken a “hot spot” in social science theorizing (Rodaway 1994; Shilling 1993), running the gamut of issues from anorexia (Garrett 1998; MacSween 1993), gendered bodies, and sexuality (Adams 1997; Gilmore 1994; Seymour 1998) to disease (Harrington 1997; Wall 1997) and health and illness (Nettleton 1995; Toombs 1992; Weiner 1993). Yet it seems as if these “entry points” do not take into full account the role of the senses in relation to the body. Here, I contend that by using smell and the presentation of self as an example of how a foundational ontology of the body (as a presocial, material entity) can potentially be synchronized with a social constructionist epistemology (Williams and Bendelow 1998:7), the notions of how the “physical” body transforms into the “social” body can be apprehended through Goffmanian concepts concerning the

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presentation of self. Within these, I highlight the links between smell and morality, demonstrating that smell as a social medium is intertwined with issues of olfactory acceptance and hence social and moral approval. The article thus looks at the ways in which social actors regard smells in relation to the body and therefore demonstrates how such perceptions and actions indicate a need for reconsidering sociological approaches in studying the body by including olfactive dimensions for analysis. By locating how people conduct their bodies and perceive other bodies in social interaction, the article also aims to offer an analysis of how different readings of the body contribute toward reproductions of social groups vis-à-vis race, class, and nationality.

Instead of approaching the body as an object of analysis, there appears a need to redirect sociological foci instead, toward the body as an active and acting subject yet still located within and influenced by sociohistorical conditions (Howson and Inglis 2004). This requires "embodied practice," where a shift from sociostructural accounts of the body toward the body as the "ground" of experience (Howson and Inglis 2004) is necessary. It follows that a phenomenological perspective (Merleau-Ponty 1962; Schutz 1970) that addresses lived experiences of social actors is required. The body as "social" will also be explicated through concepts drawn from Mauss ([1935]1979) and Goffman (1956, 1963a, 1963b, 1971) (see also Berthelot 1995; Turner 1984, 1996, 1997; Williams and Bendelow 1998), where the central argument stems from analyzing the body as a repository of social meanings that are at once presented by the individual and perceived by social others. Also, issues concerning the need to smell "nice" before and during social interactions are expounded on to illustrate the roles of smell in respondents' everyday life experiences, where concerns involve perfuming and cleansing as well as how one approaches the "tricky" task of managing, tolerating, and "exposing" bodily odors to one's friends, showing thus the sensitivity surrounding smells, personhood, and social acceptance. In short, reading the body as embodying social meanings and association is exemplified by the following two variants: (a) presentation of social body through self-regulation and (b) issues of morality.

By locating bodily techniques within olfactory practices, I thereby draw attention to "issues of *lived experience* and the problems of human embodiment, [as] there is little regard for issues of social *praxis*, including the 'use' to which bodies are put in society and the learnt 'techniques' they draw upon in the conduct and negotiation of everyday life" (Williams and Bendelow 1998:28, emphases in original). In other words, adopting a phenomenological stance on the body brings us beyond abstract, theoretical accounts from the body as a symbol (Douglas 1970) toward the body as an experience, action, and intention (Merleau-Ponty 1962; Schutz 1970). Linking the olfactory with the body thus offers new dimensions of corporeality for empirical investigations and analyses.

The article also attempts to supplement the dearth of olfactory research, particularly in the Southeast Asian region, where research on smell remains in an inchoate stage, with only a few contributions, such as those by Cohen (1988), Law (2001), and Roseman (1990). Literature on the sociohistory of smell and its social meanings has hitherto focused on Western societies (see, e.g., Corbin 1986; Howes and Lalonde 1991), and anthropological olfactory studies have brought us to

places such as Brazil, Ethiopia, Nigeria, the Andaman Islands, and elsewhere (see Classen et al., 1994). Hence, through the empirical case study of Singapore, I add to the existing literature by exploring the roles and meanings of smell beyond Western societies and anthropological studies. I argue that smell is equally, if not more, germane in the context of Singapore, a modern, industrialized, multiracial society in Southeast Asia.

The article is divided into six parts. First, I provide a brief overview of the existing literature on smells and show how these studies (which generally adopt a structuralist perspective) remain insufficient in analyzing olfaction in everyday life experiences. Second, I discuss the methods employed in this study. Third, I provide a section on a theoretical overview of Goffmanian sociology on social interaction so as to offer an analytical background for the subsequent section on empirical data and analyses. Fourth, I include a cursory background of Singapore's racial model, comprising the four "official" races of Chinese, Malay, Indian, and Others, largely a product of colonial governance, which remains in existence today. I expand this section by mentioning briefly general attitudes adopted toward foreigners in Singapore to contextualize the data herein within racial dynamics and issues concerning nationality in relation to respondents' olfactory appraisals. Fifth, I present primary data procured in Singapore, where I analyze the findings in three parts: (1) presenting oneself as olfactorily acceptable for social interactions, (2) olfactory impropriety as social stigma, and (3) techniques for correcting olfactory impropriety. Last, I conclude by reiterating how olfaction is intertwined with issues concerning personhood and morality.

OLFACTION LITERATURE OVERVIEW

Extant studies on olfaction often operate on structuralist examinations, spanning such domains as gender, religion, and sociospatial analysis. Bifurcatory constructs of odors, for instance, can be found in the domain of gender relations. Synnott (1991) observes that "men are supposed to smell of sweat, whisky and tobacco... [while] women, presumably, are supposed to smell 'good': clean, pure, and attractive" (p. 449). Gender scent polemics can also be observed in the names and typography of colognes and perfumes (Bigelow 1992; Synnott 1991). In general, scent names seem to express not merely different but also virtually opposite poles of self-concepts for men and women. For instance, fragrances and perfumes for women include such names as "Beautiful," "White Linen," and "White Shoulders," whereas men's scents are marketed as "Boss," "Brut," and "Polo" (Synnott 1991:449). These polemic divisions could very well socialize the two sexes into opposite roles, thereby transforming biological/physiological distinctions into a gender hierarchy of different sociocultural representations, such as "pink" or "blue" (Synnott 1991:449). Seeger (1981), in tandem with Synnott (1991), demonstrates how smell has been used to articulate and perpetuate gender divisions and hierarchies. He points out that the *Suya* of the Mato Grosso region of Brazil classify women negatively as "strong-smelling," in opposition to men as "bland-smelling." This division is due to the association of men with the valued domain

of "culture," whereas women are often associated with the domain of "nature" (see Classen 1997).

Olfactory polemic constructions are also evident in supernatural and religious discourse. In general, evil spirits are believed to emit "evil" smells across many cultures, whereas good spirits emit "good" smells (Classen 1993). Classen (1993:94) notes that the Bororo of Brazil use odor as a classificatory medium for two basic types of spirits. The *bope*, a spirit perceived negatively, is believed to give off a strong stench. Conversely, the *aroe*, a spirit regarded positively, is said to possess a sweet smell. In religious discourse, there exists a concept of the "odour of sanctity" (Classen et al., 1994:52) in Christianity. This concept is linked to the idea that deities frequently made their presence known through fragrance, and Christians believed that the presence of the Holy Spirit was made known via a mystical fragrance as well. In tandem, the "odour of sanctity" stood antithetical to the stench of moral corruption (Classen et al., 1994; Le Gu erer 1992).

The employment of bipolarities in analyzing olfaction is also present in sociospatial analysis, spanning the fields of urban sociology and anthropology. Studies include Cohen's (1988) work on Thailand, Illich's (2000) observation on the olfactory properties of cities, and Porteous's (1985) piece on smells in landscapes. The urban anthropological study of a Bangkok *soi* (lane) by Cohen (1988), for example, places emphasis on the role of smell in Thai culture. Cohen coins the term *olfactory dualism* to throw light on how smell is intertwined with personal hygiene and neatness (*riab roi*) as well as the environment. He explains that the *soi* he observed was inhabited by a group of singles, mainly women who worked in tourism-oriented sex work. Cohen remarks that the *soi* is polluted with "heaped-up refuse" and "stagnant swampy water" (p. 42). He adds also that the Thai girls living there are very much preoccupied with their personal cleanliness, spending substantial amounts of their time on taking care of their body and appearance. Cohen's olfactory dualism is thus predicated on his observation of how residents of the *soi* remain oblivious to the stench surrounding them and yet possess "keen sensitivities to human body-odours." Such dualism therefore is seen in the separation of the self/body in relation to the general surroundings one inhabits. Cohen explains that the absence of a civic spirit in Thailand is probably the reason why people are not so much bothered with public sanitation as compared to their own appearance and (olfactive) conduct.

Ostensibly, structuralist examinations seem to undergird sociocultural analyses of smell, as discussed above. In the case of gender scents, polemic constructions were discussed where meanings and interpretations of fragrance items, as well as the separation of male versus female scents, show that on one level men and women are supposed to smell differently and on another level, this difference results in gender hierarchy where more often than not, it is the women who are "othered" in relation to male dominance in social life. We also saw how the "odour of sanctity" distinguished between "good" and "evil" and how evil and good spirits were also classified in accordance with putrid and pleasant smells, respectively.

Such a mode of conceptualization, however, remains insufficient in analyzing olfaction. Polemic constructions fail to address a range of smells that perhaps

cannot be easily categorized into direct opposites. Also, it is imperative to take a step back and reflect on seemingly clear-cut scent dichotomies. We should, according to Miller (1997), be cognizant of the possibility that “good smells can be a cause for suspicion, mistrusted as a mask or a veneering covering something that needs to be hidden” (p. 247). Miller argues further that many foul smells become more acceptable if knowledge of their origin is made known. He cites the example of how the smell of strong cheese would be much more tolerable “than if thought to emanate from feces or rank feet” (p. 247). When the origin of the smell is known, then perhaps the bipolarities of “good” versus “bad” may not be accurate in how smells are perceived. This viewpoint is also adopted by Almagor (1990), who argues that although structuralist approaches provide an element of polemics, such approaches fail to “account for the nuances of odours that are neither extremely ‘bad’ or ‘good’” (p. 254), thereby assuming that such polemics are necessarily self-contained, with no range in between.

Essentially, structuralism implies that all meaning is established and produced by the principles of binaries and that based on this polemic contrast, nothing carries any meaning in itself. Additionally, Howes (2003) points out that although in *Mythologiques* Lévi-Strauss extended the model of structural linguistics to the study of the sensorial codes of myths, his preoccupation with discovering binary oppositions is problematic, as “sensory values may interact with each other in much more complex forms than that of simple binarisms” (p. xx). Hence, both Almagor and Howes have it right when they point out that by operating on the tenet of antithetical polarities, such an approach cannot “explain the range and significance of odours in daily life” (Almagor 1990:254). In other words, “the life of the senses is not simply a matter of logic [as is Lévi-Strauss’s penchant for cognitive codes would suggest], but of experience” (Howes 2003:xxi). To remedy the shortcomings of structuralist evaluations on smell and everyday life experiences, one possibility is to adopt a phenomenological approach (Rindisbacher 1995:ix). By doing so, we would then “take some distance from the existing theoretical ballast and focus instead on the level of concrete examples” (Rindisbacher 1995:ix). I elaborate further in the succeeding section on employing narrative interviews in relation to the phenomenological trajectory.

A NOTE ON METHODOLOGY: “BORROWING NOSES”

The data presented here are taken from my dissertation research spanning twenty-six months, where I include for present purposes respondents’ experiences culled from narrative interviews (Pollio et al., 1997; PuruShotam 2000). Research and data collection began with the researcher approaching people who have complained about smells (e.g., body odors) or were interested in the present topic. The researcher began by speaking to friends and acquaintances keen on the subject matter, and through the method of snowballing, more respondents were contacted. Through preliminary rounds of interviews, the issue of race emerged as a recurrent one, where more often than not respondents tended to use race as a starting point in narrating their olfactive experiences. Because of this, subsequent selection of respondents boiled down to making a conscious attempt to include

respondents of different races so as to procure a multiplicity of meanings and allow respondents to self-ascribe their racial identity. In all, seventeen respondents were interviewed, out of which data from twelve of them will be incorporated here. The sample comprised three Malays, three Indians, and six Chinese (see the appendix for respondents' profiles). The remaining five are non-Singaporeans and hence will not be included in the article, as the discussion is based on the Singapore context.

In sum, it is not of immediate interest here to select respondents using variables such as class, age, or occupation. Neither does this study present findings that are predicated on statistical similarities and/or differences in olfactive perception and behavior among participants; these have been sufficiently undertaken by various other scholars (see, e.g., Bensafi et al., 2002; Filsinger and Fabes 1985; Gilbert and Wysocki 1987; Hannigan 1995; Herz and Cahill 1997; Lord and Kasprzak 1989; Schleidt 1980). Instead, the present project aims to illuminate the plethora of ways in which smell acts and is acted on by various social actors. Throughout the course of research, interaction with respondents was not merely reduced to a one-off interview, but rather, it comprised continual meetings, including both formal and informal chats and interviews. Pseudonyms are employed here for purposes of confidentiality.

As mentioned, the data presented here are drawn from narrative interviews, so as to provide rich discursive data for analysis. The method of narrative interviewing operates on the assumption that "human beings have a fundamentally narrative relation towards themselves, perceiving and accounting for their social experiences by a continuous narrational stream vis-à-vis a shared stock of knowledge" (PuruShotam 2000:24–25). This stock of knowledge, PuruShotam (2000) contends, "both gives to experience its social dimensionality, while [drawing its] source from the narrational relationship human beings have" (pp. 24–25). The starting point of narrative interviews for present purposes was as follows: "Tell me about your experiences with smell." Generally, this opened up a flow of narration that respondents chose to share with me. I was careful not to interrupt them, except for clarifications or follow-up questions based on what each respondent shared. In following phenomenological trajectory, the researcher did not conduct the interview with a list of prepared questions, otherwise known in methodological terms as a "structured" interview. Furthermore, questions were thought of *in situ*, dependent wholly on where the respondent was leading the researcher. Such questions include the following: "What do you mean by smelling nice?" or "What do you mean by a Malay or Indian smell?" In this manner, taking my cues from the respondent would lead us to talking about experiences and stories about smell that concerned him or her the most and, in the process, uncover varied patterns of practice with smell as a social intermediary in relation to the body.

After each interview was completed, reorganization of the data obtained was accomplished based on conceptual categories (Glaser and Strauss 1967). These include, *inter alia*, individual and group dynamics of smell in the presentation of self and social interaction; links between olfaction, personhood, and morality; and techniques for accomplishing an "ideal olfactory image" through Goffmanian approaches. Such categories were identified through respondents' accounts of particular episodes in their olfactory experiences, including being acquainted with

people whom they think have body odors, talking about their cleaning and odorizing routines before stepping out of the house, and revealing how they would handle a situation whereby they were confronted with people who smell or if they themselves were told that they emitted unpleasant smells, among others.

THEORETICAL AND CONCEPTUAL UNDERPINNINGS

I adopt a Goffmanian framework in analyzing the ways respondents present themselves olfactorily as well as how they “correct” olfactory derelictions for purposes of social and moral acceptability. Hence, through an integration of the perspective of phenomenological sociology and Goffmanian approaches, I problematize smells as a domain for sociological inquiry. By doing so, we will come to understand the ways in which smells are ordered by and influence social behavior, thereby gaining awareness of the extent to which sensory modalities affect and organize our everyday life experiences. Goffman’s (1956) approach looks at how social life can be alluded to the world as a stage, where individuals “perform” on a daily basis. He argues that having a body would involve “body-work,” comprising primarily expressive and symbolic significance. Instead of speaking about “doing” our bodies, Goffman contends that we should also, at a deeper level, talk about being a body. Any loss of control over our bodies not only becomes socially embarrassing but also indicates a loss of control over ourselves (Goffman 1956). It is therefore justified to make a claim for how bodily odors can represent a loss of control over ourselves, and hence rectification is required to undo the stigmatic equation of olfactory breach with social and moral defilement.

To begin, it would be regarded as olfactory impropriety (cf., Goffman’s, 1963a, “situational impropriety”) for one not to cleanse oneself of discernible bodily odors that are deemed unpleasant. With cleansing, social interaction will prolong and proceed more smoothly than when one is caught with an odoriferous interlocutor, for example. To understand how olfactory impropriety can be perceived as an emblem of social violation, I cull from Goffman’s (1963b) notions of stigma and concepts from *Relations in Public* (Goffman, 1971) to act as a corollary of why and how individuals with body odors are socially (and morally) rejected, as well as how these “stigmatized” actors can undo the stigma via cleaning and perfuming body techniques. Bodily odors, for Goffman (1971), form one of many “modalities of violation” (p. 44), subsumed under the modality of “bodily excreta” (p. 46). Violation, he claims, stems from processes of “incursion, intrusion, encroachment, presumption, transgression, defilement, besmearing . . . and contamination” (p. 44), where the source of such boundary offense is actually individuals themselves.

Where Goffman (1963b) refers to stigma in more concrete terms, such as “physical deformities,” “blemishes of individual character,” and “stigma of race, nation, and religion” (p. 4), I allude to the role of body odors as forming a part of physical or otherwise sensorial shortcoming as the source of defilement and thereby stigma. Also, in spite of the fact that Goffman’s take on bodily decorum arises from Western models, I seek a reinterpretation of his approach to demonstrate how his concepts concerning the body can be made germane in the context of Singapore,

where I highlight processes of olfactory stigmatization and hierarchy formation in relation to racial, class, and citizenship dynamics.

I now discuss how rectification and maintenance of the body is accomplished and what they mean for the individual social actor within the larger society. I begin by looking at Mauss's ([1935]1979) "body techniques." Then, I demonstrate how one attempts to avoid the olfactory stigma by referring to Goffmanian sociology of the body. Mauss refers to "body techniques" as "the ways in which from society to society men know how to use their bodies" (p. 97), which include standing, walking, sitting, varying sleeping positions, and making love. Hence, even the most quotidian and banal of our everyday life experiences are predicated on corporeal-cultural techniques (Mauss [1935]1979). Crossley (1995a), however, critiques Mauss's body techniques. He contends that Mauss seems to treat body techniques as "historical and biographical acquisitions (which they are) but not as on-going practices" (p. 135). In doing so, this brings about a failure to take into consideration the extent to which these body techniques are predicated on social interaction. Crossley (1995a) submits that although Merleau-Ponty might have partially tempered Mauss's shortcomings by looking at how perception and action are articulated and "therefore how action is always oriented to a present situation which it will both accommodate and transform" (p. 135),¹ this idea has yet to be developed to its full potential.

We should, following Crossley, turn to Goffman to materialize this idea. Crossley (1995a:136) contends that social encounters involving our senses, such as sight and hearing, are predicated on particular routines and negotiations from our repertoire of actions. This, Crossley (1995b:43) proposes, constitutes "carnal sociology," which addresses the body as having an active role, as opposed to a sociology of the body, mainly concerned with what is done to the body. Thus, the negotiation and accommodation intertwined with the employment of body techniques can be exemplified using Goffmanian (1956, 1963a) concepts.

Goffman's (1956) preventive practices (defensive and protective practices) comprise the techniques used by social actors to safeguard the impression provided by an individual as he or she encounters social others. I employ the term *preventive practices* in relation to how social actors prepare themselves in the olfactory dimension before going on stage, so to speak. Such practices are understood as taking place in the "back region" (Goffman 1956:69) so as to "perform" in the "front region" (Goffman 1956:66). These forms of olfactory scrupulosity are to be understood as attempts not merely to remove socially discreditable odors but also to prevent body odors from being present, thereby presenting a social self that is olfactorily acceptable for social interaction. I thereby demonstrate later how social actors attempt to undo the olfactory stigma (in preventing or controlling body odors), which thus leads to a re-presentation of self.

THE CONTEXT OF SINGAPORE

I include here a brief background on the racial dynamics of Singapore as the contextual framework within which I situate my analyses. This is necessary as I found that when respondents associate foul scents with particular individuals/groups, issues

of race and nationality tend to surface in their assessment of “those” who smell. Hence, it is important to provide a comprehensive background of Singapore’s official racial model, as well as the general sentiment concerning the presence of foreign nationals, to better understand racial and smell dynamics raised by respondents. Respondents’ olfactive experiences are often narrated in racial terms, and olfactive racial boundaries seem to emerge in tandem with the CMIO (Chinese, Malay, Indian, and Others) racial model of Singapore, as adopted by the local government. This model is largely a product of colonial administration (Ang and Stratton 1995; Leong 1997), where people were grouped according to different nation-state origins. In the beginning, there were forty-seven ethnic groups listed for the 1881 census; these increased to fifty-six by 1921 (PuruShotam 1995). By 1965, when Singapore achieved independence, the racial categories were reduced to just four, comprising the CMIO quadrotomy that is in existence today.

The CMIO model pervades many aspects of life in Singapore (Benjamin 1976), for instance, in government reports and national censuses (Ang and Stratton 1995), touristic consumption (Leong 1997), compulsory study of one’s mother tongue as a second language (Chua 2003; PuruShotam 2000; Siddique 1990), racial allocation of public housing programs under the Housing and Development Board (Chua 1991), and the assortment of food available in Singapore (Chua and Rajah 1996). Hence, race is highly visible in the public sphere (Chua 2003), where every Singaporean is inscribed with a “hyphenated identity” (Hill and Lian 1995)—Singaporean Chinese and Singaporean Malay, for example. These culminate in what Chua (2003: 74) terms “multiculturalism in practice.” Therefore, it is not surprising that respondents tend to (unproblematically) categorize social others vis-à-vis the CMIO configuration, which constitutes their everyday stock of knowledge (Schutz 1970), regarded as commonsensical and hence “natural.” As will be shown, respondents often assign smells to “others” based on race, as well as nationality, as a defining characteristic. In the case of differences in nationality (locals vs. foreigners), the general attitude toward foreign others working in Singapore is that of disdain, given their sheer numbers populating certain parts of Singapore (Saini 1995), such as residential estates. Residents are particularly uncomfortable with the perceived overwhelming presence of these foreigners; as one of them opines, “residents feel their security threatened” (Saini 1995:6). Oftentimes, such discriminatory attitudes² adopted against foreigners stem mainly from class consciousness, as such attitudes surface when Singaporeans talk about foreigners who are hired as low-skilled workers, such as domestic help or construction workers. Guest workers remain temporary and marginal and hence are treated as “outsiders,” as “others” who are different and presumably “inferior” because of their economic underdevelopment (Chua 2003). Issues concerning olfactory stigma, intertwined with race, nationality, and class, will be discussed below to account for how olfactive conceptions of social others intertwine with these characteristics. Suffice it to say for now that olfactory appraisals are not merely resulting from reactions toward one’s bodily emissions or physical appearance. Instead, these judgments are also a consequence of informants associating social others’ socioeconomic and nationality backgrounds with ascertaining who “smells” and who does not.

DATA AND ANALYSES

(1) Presenting the Self, the Social Body, and the Olfactory

Where social interactions occur on a day-to-day basis, respondents typically highlight that there is always a need to smell “neutral if not nice” so as to facilitate social encounters. In the presence of bodily odors that are deemed offensive, negative reactions comprise truncating interaction, adopting covert methods of talking about the body odor, or simply avoiding the social actor who smells. More important, such physical reactions bring forth issues concerning personhood and morality, as there appears to be a constant link between smelling “presentable” and thus being compliant with social expectations by maintaining moral orders/odors. Either to smell foul or to tell someone that he or she smells is to be insulting:

We know that in our society one can't have bad breath, sweaty underarms, or noticeable genital odour. You can tell people they need a haircut or to wash their face, but if you tell them they smell, you are really insulting. The height of crudeness is the passing of gas in public. Sociologists call it the 'fart taboo.' (Winter 1976:15)

As one respondent shared, “people would tell other people that you are smelly and not tell you directly because...it's a matter of social etiquette...it's a matter of face also.... You won't tell a person outright [that he or she is smelly] because it's actually regarded as rude to tell a person that.” Ostensibly, the ways in which our bodies smell are very much tied up with who we are and, more pertinently, how others smell and perceive us, based on whether we are “clean” or “dirty.” Simmel points out quite rightly: “Impinging on the human subject, the sensory impression of a person provokes feelings of like and dislike in us, of our own exaltation or degradation, of excitement or composure, from his or her look or the tone of his or her voice, or from his or her mere physical presence in the same room” (as quoted in Frisby and Featherstone 1997:110–11).

Respondents generally found body odors to be a “social violation” and expressed disdain when talking about them:

I don't think people would want to really stand next to a very sweaty person who is giving out very bad odor. This immediately turn the person off, because given the fact that we have five senses, and smell is the main of it, so unless this person has totally no sense of smell, this body odor will put everybody off. So this is what we call *basic courtesy*, the fresh smell...especially when we are meeting people, we...smell at least, not fantastic, but at least we don't smell bad. (Joshua, emphases mine)

I should say that they should know how to get rid of that smell, or use some body deodorant? Something that would cover that smell...you know...*in social situations, if you smell bad, it's very embarrassing*. You are not a person who take care of yourself, your body...how you present yourself to other people.... Sometimes when I smell body odor, I find that I don't like this person. It takes an effort to try to communicate, try to make...sometimes it's bad to be so er...*kind of judgmental of them because of their body odor*. But it's not easy lah, you just have to overcome certain things, to try to be nice to these people. (Gail, emphases mine)

Such responses therefore illustrate constructions of “oneness” and “otherness” (Classen 1992), where people who are smelly become “othered” and thereby excluded; as Gail puts it, “you just have to . . . try to be nice to *these people*” (emphasizes mine). The presentation of self thus involves not only what can be seen but also that which can be discerned olfactorily. The body then comes to symbolize personhood, either representing one as able to take care of oneself or as failing to do so. This is also suggested by one of my respondents, Ian:

I think . . . a lot of people mark a person’s identity, a person’s sense of self and sense of being based on smell . . . I think people react to a particular person because of the way he smells or the way he looks, and I think, the one thing . . . the one indicator I think is that, would . . . mark or differentiate the person from another person, especially today is smell.

In this sense, smell becomes a social tool others employ in locating themselves and others in social life. More pertinently, social actors who emit bodily odors are perceived as committing both odoriferous and social defilement and therefore induce rejection:

I think it’s actually part of them, how they smell, like how they look, how they talk . . . these are all part of you. So when people show that they don’t like how you smell, you think that it’s a sign of rejection by them. So they think that they are not accepted by you. I think that’s a . . . it’s in a certain sense, it’s true lah, that you can’t accept the smell, but you may be able to accept the person if they do something about the smell. (Gail)

It is interesting to note that in Guangzhou, China, one of the selection criteria for civil service jobs is an absence of body odor, for the presence of body odor represents “carelessness in personal hygiene” (Streats 2002). And in Japan, it was once believed that body odor signified poor genes and bad character, and hence, one would immediately be disqualified from military service (Glaser 2002). Recently, a new law has been proposed in Johannesburg, South Africa, where commuters and passengers with body odor would be expelled from public transport (*The New Paper* 2003). Such reports seem to indicate that the maintenance of one’s body is paramount in situations of social interactions, be it for job applications, commuting, or informal meetings with friends and acquaintances. It demonstrates both formally and informally the need to present an olfactorily pleasing if not fragrant self before one can be “accepted.”

The ways in which foul smells are related to moral defilement are simple. Odors are not merely physical phenomena; they are also moral phenomena (Synnott 1993). When scents are evaluated either in positive or negative ways, such moral appraisals therefore place olfaction as a paramount component within our “moral construction of reality and our construction of moral reality” (Synnott 1993: 190). Similarly, other scholars, such as Corbin (1986), Le Gu erer (1992), and Turner (1984, 1996), relate the moral dimensions of scents with how society perceives foul odors. Consequently, smell and morality, or the lack of rectitude, often go hand in hand when one perceives and judges the social “other” as either olfactorily acceptable or not. Hence, olfactory boundaries, or the transgression of them, are in part moral boundaries, where moral values of positive versus negative associations are

often imputed onto an individual's emanated bodily smell or an expected smell coming from particular individuals (Synnott 1993).

Additionally, Le Gu er (1992) brings us back to the placement of smells in history and expresses the idea that repulsive odors, apart from reinforcing social class divisions also carried with them moral stigma, for sin was often associated with stench. She refers to an Egyptian hieroglyphic inscription that states the following: "He whose odour is unpleasant shall be punished and ostracised" (p. 30). Furthermore, olfactory intolerance extended to "marginal" groups³ such as Jews, prostitutes, and groups of the working class, as the "supposed fetidness of such groups, a sign of their moral inferiority, serves to justify the exclusionary practices of bigotry" (Le Gu er 1992:30). Adopting olfactory disgust at the socially marginalized is perhaps better understood vis- -vis Darwin's (1965:255) discussion of disgust and fetid smells. He points out that expressing contempt via facial expressions, such as turning up the nose slightly, followed by wrinkling the nose, is evidence of one's reaction toward the socially despised, indicating that he or she "smells offensively." Darwin defines *disgust* as "something offensive to the taste" (p. 256) and explains how smell is tied up with taste. He contends that because "smell is so intimately connected with that of taste, it is not surprising that an excessively bad odour should excite retching or vomiting in some persons" (p. 259). Consequently, the "tendency to retch from a fetid odour is immediately strengthened in a curious manner by some degree of habit" (Darwin 1965:259).

Similarly, Miller (1997) suggests that disgust "must be accompanied by ideas of a particular kind of danger, the danger inherent in pollution and contamination, the danger of defilement, which ideas in turn will be associated with rather predictable cultural and social scenarios" (p. 8). Miller contends that disgust can be regarded as a form of emotion that works to "hierarchise our political order" (p. 8). At times, it also serves to maintain hierarchy. This is evident from the discussion above, where I point out that the "socially marginal" (e.g., Jews, Pakistanis) are being despised, and with that, olfactive judgments are more often than not produced in negative terms. Through smell, disgust "evaluates (negatively) what it touches, [and] proclaims the meanness and inferiority of its object" (Miller 1997:9). In essence, both Darwin's and Miller's arguments demonstrate how olfactory intolerance and social and moral disgust manifest simultaneously. More pertinently, recipients of such intolerance come from the lower classes, and this demonstrates how smell can be a medium of division between groups in social life—in this case, the differentiation of class statuses.

Apart from linking the presence of bodily foul smells with moral defilement, respondents also relate how difficult it can be to tell someone that he or she has body odor. Joshua, who runs an aromatherapy school, had this to say when asked if he would tell someone directly that he or she has body odor:

How receptive, it really depends on them. But if you are being too blunt, to go in straight at them, I believe it's not my case—everybody has the same problem. If you were to go straight, blunt on them, unless you are willing to lose a friend, a colleague or... whatsoever. If they are not so open enough, you might easily lose them. They might not talk to you, because... to them we are looking down on them, based on their body odor, so a lot take this very personal. But a lot, after they can see that a lot of friends [are] going off, then they... will open up.

Similarly, Caitlin reasons that talking about one's bodily odors is a sensitive issue:

Because it's rude, number one it's rude, and number two, you don't know how they are going to take it. They might get offended, can't take the truth. You know what I mean? It's like...because it's a sensitive topic. If someone says you got bad breath, wouldn't you get offended? Ya. So I think it's rude. It means that that person [did] something wrong, never clean properly. How to meet people like that?

When probed further as to the links between the need for familiarity and talking about one's bodily odors, Felix mentions that he needs to be in a "comfort zone" to tell his friends about their bodily odors:

It's very private. It's very personal, I think, and...I would feel bad having to tell someone, you know, you got body odor (laughs). Why? Because I would think it's sometimes not really the person's fault. But at the same time, ya it is. It's like trying to tell a person, you know, you're not clean enough. So you need to be close to that person before you can tell him or her that he or she is smelly.

Also, in a recent newspaper article in Singapore, Yeo (2004) offers a few tips as to how one can handle colleagues with body odors, including:

Show respect: Know that it will be difficult for the person to hear [about his/her body odour problem], so handle the awkward situation with sensitivity. Sit down with the person in a quiet private place. Be specific but caring. Make it clear that this is not an attempt to embarrass the person. (p. 1)

By emphasizing the presence of a "comfort zone" as an imperative before one's body odors can be discussed, or rectification can be asked for, this demonstrates two things: First, we can better grasp how smell comes to be a social conduit reflecting on one's lack of personal hygiene/cleanliness, thereby resonating both social and moral transgression. Second, smell is also linked to one's sense of personhood and integrity, for bad smells such as bodily odors evince a lack of order and proper maintenance, thereby inviting social and moral disapprobation. Hence, by employing smell as an intermediary with which we flesh out how the olfactory goes beyond the physiological to the social and moral, I have shown that smell can be either an "integrative" medium between social actors (via neutral or fragrant scents) or a divisive element (foul smells such as body odors), depending on reactions to (bodily) smells that are either emitted or picked up by social actors.

(2) Olfactory Impropiety as Social Stigma

Reactions against stigmatized, odoriferous others coincide with Goffman's take on how we believe that a person with a stigma is "not quite human," and based on this assumption, a whole host of discriminatory actions is exercised, including social/moral condemnation, avoidance, rejection, or truncation of social interactions:

I [used to] take the bus to school, so in the morning, office workers [or whoever] goes into the bus. Some of them don't bathe in the morning! I'm like, oh my God! What? If I sit next to someone who's got body odor, the whole time I think I'm gonna faint. I come up with a headache. The first thing once I get off the bus is really, run to the toilet and puke. (Charmaine)

Anything that puts off anyone to go towards the person, this is considered something like a body odor . . . you can't take a more than five minutes talk, you want to finish quick and then you go off, ah this is something like that. So a nice aroma, nice smell is something like you feeling very comfortable with the person. Be it talking, because talking you know that speech is also a sense of human; the next one is from the smell. If you don't mind talking . . . the same time ah, you can be with a person for more than fifteen minutes . . . even without talking . . . compared to body odor, to foul smell that you can't be with the person for more than five minutes. (Trey)

By thinking and acting in these ways, we tend to construct a "stigma theory" (Goffman 1963b:5), an ideology of sorts to explain a person's shortcoming. This theory concretizes when we employ such terms as "cripple, bastard, moron in our daily discourse as a source of metaphor and imagery, typically without giving thought to the original meaning" (Goffman 1963b:5). Caitlin, for instance, claimed that the hostel where she was staying was "infected" by students from China, as they do not bathe or brush their teeth in the morning and therefore "stink like crazy." She adds that these students were "unhygienic people," surmising that "maybe people in China don't bathe." Trey, on the other hand, labeled Indian students as "carriers of poisonous green gases" when they entered the hostel lift with him. Thereafter, he arrived at a premature decision that his (yet to be born) daughter would not be allowed to marry an Indian. Joshua vividly describes "beggars" from temples:

I believe [in] some of the temples. . . you know *those beggars*, not really pinpoint at them, but need to . . . they don't really get to wash up. At least once a day, you have to do that. . . But those who fail to do that, even from quite a distance, can also detect their body odor, very strong. So *these are the group of people* that you can't take the same train or bus with them. If they are in the front, you are the last row, you can still detect them. These are the people that [other] people usually avoid. . . You have to stand a few meters away from them. Things like you can't share the same bus ride, you can't share a train ride with them, definitely cannot endure all these. (emphases mine)

Social stigma arising from the olfactory begins to further arrest social actors' attention and action when "normals" (people who see themselves as members of a more desirable olfactory group) and stigmatized "others" "enter one another's immediate presence, especially when they there attempt to sustain a joint conversational encounter [—] there occurs one of the primal scenes of sociology; for, in many cases, these moments will be the ones when the causes and effects of stigma must be directly confronted by both sides" (Goffman 1963b:13). Besides, Goffman (1963b:4) also suggests that race and nation form examples of stigma. These are raised in Caitlin's and Trey's comments on students from China and India, whom they regard as culpable of olfactory defilement. Caitlin shared that when she was a child, her grandmother taught her to believe that "Chinese [are] smelly because their parents are dirty, so they will teach their children to be dirty also." Caitlin offered that she has since understood such a judgment as a stereotype, as most of her Chinese friends do not smell. What is interesting here, however, is that Caitlin

now distinguishes between Singaporean Chinese and Chinese nationals, where she regards the latter as a source of foul smells, perhaps tied in with their unkempt appearance based on her undergraduate hostel experience. Caitlin also offered that she ranks Singaporean Malays as smelling the best, followed by Chinese, then Indians. When probed about the low ranking of Indians, she explained that for one, she does not have many Indian friends. And second, her impression of Indians is more often than not associated with occupations such as laborers or domestic help. This brings us back to my earlier discussion on how discriminatory attitudes are often projected against foreigners who are involved in low-skilled occupations. There is thus a conflation of race and socioeconomic status here, which accounts for Caitlin's smell "hierarchy."

Labeling others as having committed olfactory defilement involves making distinctions between a "we" group and a "they" group. In this case, the dichotomy of locals versus foreigners is brought up, revealing that smell perceptions concerning foreign others are perhaps more derogatory than how locals are appraised. As I have discussed elsewhere (Low 2004, 2005), malodorous foreigners are treated with more disdain and suspicion than the locals are; one local respondent labels Thai workers congregating at Golden Mile Complex as "crooks, thieves and drunks." In tandem, Stallybrass and White (1986:3) claim that the "other" requires constant regulation and surveying, demonstrating the various ways in which binaries of high and low (e.g., cleanliness and dirt and "us" versus "them") may be employed, forming the basis from which ordering and scents making take place.

Additionally, Joshua's remarks on beggars corroborate with my earlier discussion on smells and class status (Le Gu er 1992), where feelings of olfactory disgust are adopted against the socially despised and disadvantaged. Differences in class therefore bring about a social hierarchy of smells (see Classen 1992; Corbin 1986), where odors function as a divisive medium for social avoidance, as illustrated through Joshua's comments. Corbin (1986) suggests that foul smells in France were typically linked to the lower classes or certain groups associated with specific occupations, including prostitutes and domestic servants. His concept of class olfactory consciousness is also applicable in the case of Singapore, as suggested by Ian:

Erm... the whiff of a rubbish truck passing by? And I must say that people do make judgments onto people who are in these lines, in these occupations. As to how they actually manage the kind of smell in their line. And they probably would define them as being uneducated because they cannot get another job elsewhere, where they don't mind working in such a line of clearing trash or clearing rubbish. Because trash is always associated with...er...lowly status, with class er...of having a lower class situation. I think people always think and associate people in those lines. And people will think that if you do not have sufficient money to actually sanitize your body or to clean yourself, that means you are a person of...lower social class.

In this sense, olfactory defilement is not only about smells. Olfactory stigma arising from judgments on smell is also intertwined with other social categories, such as race, class, and nationality.⁴ When these categories intertwine, this is where respondents adopt attitudes of inclusion and exclusion. The notion of "normals,"

therefore, is not just about people who do not smell but also includes, according to Caitlin and Trey, people who are at least of the same nationality, if not race. Hence, I add on to Goffman's stigma theory by highlighting the intersections of smell, racial, and national differences, for it is due to the amalgamation of these differences that attitudes of (olfactory) stigmatization are brought about. The perception of olfactorily inferior others, based on these two respondents' experiences, also exemplifies Schwalbe et al.'s (2000) discussion on how processes of othering bring about a reproduction of inequality on marginal groups. They suggest that othering is a "form of collective identity work" (p. 422). Such work, according to them, adds to the creation and/or reproduction of inequality. When Caitlin and Trey pointed out that foreigners or racial others are olfactorily inferior, such exclusionary attitudes projected onto these racial/national others elucidated strata differentiation between the "we" group and "they" group. And although distinctions between "we" group smells and "they" group smells stand as bipolars, what is more pertinent in this dichotomy or difference is a social hierarchy of smells (as mentioned above) resultant from differences in race, class, and/or nationality. Within this hierarchy thus lies an establishment of social boundaries (Classen 1992)—boundaries that feed back into the reproduction of segregation based on olfactory and identity dissimilarities. Classen (1992) puts it aptly: "To characterise a certain group as foul-smelling... is to render it repellent at a very basic physical and emotional level, not simply at a cognitive level" (p. 158). In other words, familiar "we" smells tend to be more acceptable, and unfamiliar "they" smells arouse "feelings of disgust, fear... and a plethora of other emotions" (Hannigan 1995:499), for the smell of the "other" has unknown and uncontrollable elements, and fears and anxieties therefore translate into stereotypes (Sibley 1995).

Having accounted for how stigma arises, I now discuss the methods respondents employ in dealing with olfactory defilement. I refer to Goffman's (1963a) concept of "civil inattention," which he defines as how "one gives to another enough visual notice to demonstrate that one appreciates that the other is present... while at the next moment withdrawing one's attention from him so as to express that he does not constitute a target of special curiosity or design" (p. 84). He goes on to explain that civil inattention can be interpreted as tactfulness in the face of (olfactory) offensiveness to maintain a social situation (Goffman 1963a:87).

Though Goffman employs civil inattention with regard to the visual, I borrow this term to apply to the olfactory sense, where the performative meanings of such inattention remain similar. In other words, though (olfactory) "offensiveness" may be picked up by social actors, such recognition is played down where the issue of body odor as a problem is not brought up to the one emanating it. Such "polite" olfactory "oblivion" is probably exercised with measured nonchalance by social actors as they choose not to "confront" an olfactorily stigmatized individual, for, as highlighted earlier, the presence of body odors on a person typically garners negative reactions. Olfactory civil inattention is practiced as follows:

At my former workplace, one male colleague had really bad breath. No one wanted to talk much with him, and avoided him as much as they could. But nobody told him . . . or dared to tell him what the problem was . . . instead, most of us avoided talking with him unless really necessary! (Lydia)

Although all respondents indicate repugnance concerning individuals with bodily odors, not all however would exercise civil inattention in dealing with this olfactive problem. For instance, Vince adopts a rather forthright stand: "I would tell them [if they smelled bad]...I don't hold back...er...some of my closer friends...some of my closer female friends, they know that I would tell them.... They just feel a bit conscious, stay away a bit lor." Caitlin reveals that as she was brought up to believe that all Chinese⁵ smell bad, she would instantly cover her nose on encountering any Chinese (previously), albeit acknowledging that such a gesture was "very rude." Civil inattention or the absence of it in relation to these individual lived experiences thus demonstrates that smell is regarded differently by various individuals as they go about understanding and reproducing their social realities with olfaction as a social intermediary, dealing with issues such as body odors and how social interactions may be affected as a result.

(3) Undoing the Stigma, Correcting Olfactory Impropriety: A Re-Presentation of Self

Having located how stigmatized individuals are regarded, as well as how civil inattention may or may not take place, I now discuss the various "corrective" techniques to see how body odors are dealt with, arguing in tandem with Goffman (1956), who terms these techniques (concerning maintenance and management of the body) "preventive practices." The use of cleansing and fragrance items, such as soap, deodorant, and perfume, will be presented to show that these items used in cleaning and perfuming routines indicate how the body has to be constantly regulated, maintained, and corrected for the presentation of self. This is also articulated by Shilling (1993:5), who argues that self-care regimes do not stand merely as forms of prophylaxis. Instead, these regimes are also linked to how we present our bodies to ourselves and others.

To begin, I present the techniques employed by an anosmic individual, Tristan, who can only depend on those around him to "check" if he smells "acceptable" before presenting himself at the "front region." This is to demonstrate that anosmic respondents are equally engaged (if not more) in olfactory scrupulosity for purposes of social interaction, very much like their nonanosmic counterparts. Tristan makes sure that he changes his clothes regularly so as to avoid being smelly:

Because I can't smell, I tend to be paranoid about smells, in a lot of ways, like I might smell or stink of sweat. But most people told me I don't at all, but it's more of a kind of paranoia that . . . so I tend to correct that by using perfume. Not excessively lah, but I will make a conscious effort to change my clothes often. It's a kind of *jié pī* (obsessive habit)—not so serious until I change my clothes every two hours, I would usually not wear the same shirt for more than a day.

And to ascertain that the clothes he wears are clean and free of odors, this is what Tristan does:

It's like not knowing lor, because if you smell that you stink, you can correct it yourself. But for me, I can't. So what I always do is I dangle my clothes in front of my brother. . . . If smelly, then wash. If he say "can can," then I wear another day.

Where perfuming is concerned, Charmaine (nonanosmic) shares that she carries perfume with her wherever she goes:

There was once I went out and I forgot to wear perfume. Do you know what I did? I actually went to a shop...sprayed myself there you know (laughs)... I cannot live without perfume. I actually bring perfume with me wherever I go... because it's just a matter of self-presentation. Because I know how I feel when I sit next to somebody who stinks, so I wouldn't want to put anyone in that position.

Annette, on the other hand, talks about her cleaning regime and fragrance products:

I bathe, obviously. I...put baby powder [on] all the time. And I make sure my shower foam is nice.... My shower foam is pink in color as well. You know the *Shokubutsu* one? But anyway, so I bathe, I ...I ...make sure I have my perfume on whenever I go out, regardless of where I go. It can be like [to] the *Northpoint* (a shopping center), it's like five minutes from my house. I...I have to wear perfume. My perfumes are not those cheap perfumes you know. I got "*J. Lo Glow*", I got *Clinique One* I got *Calvin Klein Contradiction* ... all nice perfumes. But even if I don't wear it, for example like if I go to the beach, you don't have perfume on, I'll make it a point to bring deodorant. Always! I always make it a point. Never fail to bring it. If I actually forget, I'll actually go out and buy you know. Ya. Because I cannot be stinking up a bus, or people around me.

It is interesting to note that the selection and use of scents—perfumes, soap, shower gel, and so forth—revolve around an imperative of smelling nice and luxurious, where the need for hygiene and proper cleaning seem relegated to a level of secondary importance. The fragrances of such products are often deemed the most important criterion instead of the products' efficacy in cleaning. As Winter (1976) asserts, "how a product smells is more important than how well it does its task" (p. 106). Correspondingly, Classen et al., (1994:8) propose that where deodorants function to subdue undesirable odors, perfumes and colognes contribute toward the achievement of an "ideal olfactory image." Extending this proposition to even detergents, antiseptic, and house paints, they posit that "odour is an important means by which consumers judge the value and effectiveness of a product" (p. 193).

Such an argument may be supported by how respondents choose their fragrance products, for instance:

I think I would use a soap just because it smells nice. Or shampoo, or conditioner...I'm using *Dove*. That one has a very nice smell. Shampoo and conditioner I would choose it based on the smell. (Charmaine)

Additionally, it is usually the women (such as Charmaine and Annette) who are more concerned with how they smell and the selection of fragrances, as compared to men. Isaac, for instance, shares that he does not usually use perfume unless a bottle is lying around the house: "Once in a while, if I see it lying around the table, in the main hall, I'll just take it and spray it.... There are days when I don't apply at all. I'm talking about a rarity when I take a bottle and spray it [on me]. It's er...because it's there.... But I don't give [perfuming] much importance." Similarly, Ian comments:

I guess you use perfume to smell good. And I think...I don't think it's very important and I haven't used perfume.... I really don't think...whenever it goes into the realm, the parameters of vanity, it normally doesn't mean it's necessary. Most of the time, these things are not necessary.... It's more an appendage... so it's not really important.

It seems as if interests concerning careful selection and use of perfumes represent female vanity in comparison to the olfactory "nonchalance" of men. Generally, smells and fragrances are more often than not associated with females than with males, as indicated by Classen (1992). And as I have discussed earlier, Classen contends that women are usually the "othered" ones, and hence, "different attitudes toward different 'types' of womanhood may be expressed through a more complex system of olfactory symbolism" (p. 142).⁶ It may be suggested that perhaps women are more hard pressed to "render themselves inoffensive through the use of deodorants" as compared to men (Classen 1992:145).

In sum, undoing the (olfactory) stigma means removing social and moral violations (thus gaining moral accreditation), for to rid oneself of olfactory excreta such as bodily odors reflects positively on the bearer, thereby allowing him or her to move from the back region (of rectification, cleansing, and maintenance) to the front region (by presenting an ideal olfactory image). The achievement of olfactory/social propriety consequently allows for a re-presentation of self in social situations.

CONCLUSION

To explicate how the body is both at once "physical" and "social," this article deliberated on the various ways in which smell is tied up with different dimensions of personhood, concomitantly intertwined with issues concerning the various domains of disgust and social and moral violations. Through the discussion of bodily odors—emanations, reactions, and rectification procedures—(olfactory) re-presentations of social actors therefore reveal myriad dimensions of personhood with regard to the body. These are (1) bodily odors coming to stand not just merely as olfactory defilement but also as social and moral breaches; (2) civil inattention substantiating the proposition that smells are tied up with one's social "performance," integrity, and acceptability in society; and (3) management and prevention of body odors through cleansing, perfuming, and "preventive practices" so as to perform and present in the "front region."

These three complexes of personhood depict the multifaceted ways in which smells act and are acted on for social actors in relation to how the body is to be understood as both active and passive (Howson and Inglis 2004). On one hand, it acts on the basis of culturally generated schemata (that of body odors linked with morality and social acceptance, personhood, and maintenance), and on the other, these schemata are created by "body-subjects" (Crossley 1995b:60). The imposition of the social on the physical body is effected by social actors, who constantly move within social expectations, thereby informing them of the need to manage their bodies, and this represents the realm of the social as a "concrete intersubjective structure, reproduced through embodied action; it consists in sites of shared meaning and mutual (if conflictual) interaction, where bodies act and are acted upon" (Crossley 1995b:61).

A further significance of these sociological dimensions is that "the body, rather than being a naturally given datum, is a socially constructed artifact [similar to] other cultural products" (Turner 1997:19). The body thus emerges as a "culturally recognisable feature of social relations" (Turner 1997:19). And with smell as an entry point, I also provide new dimensions in discussions on corporeality, where olfaction in everyday life experiences is equally germane in understanding the link between the body and personhood, concomitant with issues concerning social and moral approval or disapproval. Social judgments also reflect on how "othering" comes about through olfactive appraisals. "Othering" is not merely about attributing the odor to social others but is also intertwined with differences in race, class, and nationality, located within the context of Singapore. Hence, I have shown that odors attributed to social others are to be comprehended with how that attribution comes about (because of differences in identity) and are thus employed for purposes of differentiation and social stratification.

Analyses predicated on Goffmanian interaction order also illuminate the process whereby "bodily 'interiority' becomes 'externalised' and social 'exteriority' becomes 'interiorised'" (Williams and Bendelow 1998:8). By presenting respondents' olfactive management techniques (e.g., perfuming and cleaning) through the concepts of "front region" and "back region," these techniques reveal how the body undergoes different stages and regions of preparation on a continual basis, which therefore reveals the body not as a passive object for analysis but rather as an active and acting subject situated within social/olfactory dynamics of appraisal, acceptance, and rejection.

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APPENDIX

Data collected from twelve respondents were included in this article. I list here their individual socioeconomic and racial background. Please note that these respondents self-ascribed their racial identities.

1. Annette, a twenty-five-year-old Indian, is currently working for a human resource company after graduating with an honor's degree in the social sciences.
2. Caitlin, a Malay secondary school teacher, is twenty-five years old. She holds a Bachelor of Arts degree.
3. Charmaine, Indian, is a thirty-one-year-old graduate who works in a travel agency as an administrative executive.
4. Felix is a Malay accountant who is twenty-nine years old. He is a degree holder.
5. Gail is a Chinese private tuition teacher in her late forties and holds a preuniversity General Certificate of Education "A" Level.
6. Ian, a Malay postgraduate student, is twenty-seven years old.
7. Isaac, an Indian, is currently working as a civil servant and graduated from university with an honor's degree. He is twenty-seven years old.

8. Joshua is a thirty-year-old Chinese who runs an aromatherapy school. He is a polytechnic diploma holder.
9. Lydia is a Chinese property agent who is in her late twenties. She is a degree holder.
10. Trey, a thirty-two-year-old Chinese, has been working as a researcher since graduating with a master's degree in social sciences.
11. Tristan, a twenty-seven-year-old postgraduate student, is Chinese and was born without the sense of smell.
12. Vince is a forty-five-year-old Chinese doctor who runs his own clinic. He is married with two children. He earned his degree in medicine from England.

NOTES

1. See Merleau-Ponty (1965:168–69) for examples.
2. It should be pointed out that there are some Singaporeans who are perhaps more compassionate toward foreign workers, as reflected in other newspaper reports. For instance, as one of them opines: "The Indians and Bangladeshis are here to do an honest spot of work for honest pay. They labour at jobs no Singaporean will take. They have families to support, promises to keep, dreams to work at" (Chua 1997:6).
3. In a similar vein, Largey and Watson (1972) point out that many alleged odors of groups are related to stereotyped notions about their moral laxity. The authors give examples of how Pakistanis in Britain are described by a London dockworker as "passive and weak" therefore they "smell."
4. I discuss at length the demarcation of the "we" group versus the "they" group in my dissertation (Low 2004) based on racial, olfactive, class, gender, and spatial boundaries in Singapore. For instance, I argue that racial constructs of social others are predicated not only on visible racial markers such as clothes, skin color, or other tangible traits. Rather, racial categorization transpires via the olfactory, and this takes place through processes of stereotyping, arising from an individual social actor's expectations of a person's smell, thereby arriving at a perception of the racial "other." In this sense, social bodies are not merely racial bodies; they are also, in effect, odorous bodies that signify racial constructs.
5. Here, Caitlin is referring to both Singaporean Chinese and Chinese nationals. Throughout the interview, however, she indicates that Chinese nationals (due in part to her hostel experience as mentioned earlier) are more foul smelling than Singaporean Chinese. She says, "I think China's Chinese the worst!"
6. Classen (1992) offers a threefold categorization of women, which includes "(1) sluts or prostitutes, (2) maidens, wives, or mothers, and (3) seductresses" (p. 142). She explains that sluts or prostitutes are often associated with foul smells because of their "polluting status." Conversely, maidens, wives, and mothers are usually identified with pleasant and innocuous smells, as they are regarded as "exemplars of cultural norms" (Classen 1992:142). Finally, seductresses are associated with "heavily sweet and spicy odours," as the "sweetness of the scent [signifies] their beauty and attraction" (Classen 1992:142).

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