

Suppressed Emotions of Asian Americans in *Beef*: A Pragmatic Analysis

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ABSTRACT

The series *Beef* (Lee, 2023) offers a unique perspective on Asian American emotions by featuring two vengeful characters who challenge traditional notions of emotional restraint. This study investigates their anger, linking it to suppressed emotions arising from their experiences in a racially hierarchical society. Utilizing discourse and pragmatic analysis, the paper examines how these repressed emotions reflect broader societal identities. Key scenes demonstrate that the characters frequently violate conversational norms to align with social expectations, hide less desirable traits, and project a competent image. This behaviour not only masks their true feelings but also heightens their frustration. The study also highlights that those around them use similar strategies to steer conversations towards specific goals. Ultimately, the paper argues that the characters' departure from conversational norms is a strategic attempt to assimilate into American society while managing their repressed emotions.

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INTRODUCTION

Director Lee Sung Jin's (Lee, 2023) film *Beef* subverts prevailing Asian American stereotypes by depicting two vengeful characters entangled in road rage and engaging with complex themes of depression and trauma. This representation stands in stark contrast to the predominant narratives in mainstream media that emphasize Asian American success stories, frequently neglecting the vulnerabilities and socioeconomic diversity of this demographic (Chou & Feagin, 2015). Amy, portrayed as a successful businesswoman, cultivates a public persona of self-made achievement, despite her strained familial relationships. Conversely, Danny grapples with a faltering business and seeks parental validation, illuminating the internalized pressures that both characters experience. The film interrogates societal expectations of Asian Americans and intricately explores themes of anger and accomplishment.

This study explores how the characters in the series defy stereotypes associated with Asian Americans by examining their relationships with their surroundings. It aims to uncover the underlying meanings behind their behaviours, focusing on language patterns and the social construction of emotions. The study seeks to understand why the characters suppress their emotions in the presence of others yet express intense emotions to each other. By analyzing the series' portrayal of these dynamics, it aims to elucidate the deliberate choices in character presentation. This research investigates the relationships between emotions, racism, and Asian American identity through the linguistic and contextual analysis of the characters' interactions.

Pragmatics is employed to analyze the emotions, words, and behaviours of the characters in *Beef*. Pragmatics offers tools for analyzing meanings within the contexts of speech acts (Laura, 2016). By using pragmatics, the study aims to uncover the motives behind the characters' actions and interactions. Specifically, it seeks to answer the following questions:

How do the characters represent themselves to society and their family through language analysis? What do these representations suggest about suppressed emotions and their identity as Asian Americans?

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Language, Emotions, and Identity

This study utilizes language analysis to investigate the social construction of identity and emotions in *Beef* (Lee, 2023), revealing themes associated with emotional suppression. It examines how individual interactions mirror broader societal influences and, in turn, affect society. Emotions, as articulated by Ahmed (2004), are simultaneously personally and socially constructed, deeply interconnected with communal living and interpersonal interactions. Furthermore, the research explores how the concept of the linguistic social contract, as proposed by Murtaza et al. (2020), shapes and reflects patterns and purposes in social exchanges, emphasizing language as an essential instrument for understanding these complex dynamics.

Previous studies highlight the relationship between language and social construction. Van De Mierop (2008) shows that identity is co-constructed in institutional interactions, shaped by how others influence an individual's identity presentation. Bamberg et al. (2011) discuss how language in discourse actively shapes individual identity in relation to societal norms. Mahmoud (2023) demonstrates that language patterns in literature can redefine female protagonists' identities contrary to stereotypes. These studies underscore how everyday interactions and language practices contribute to identity formation and redefinition.

Bonilla-Silva (2019) examines the reciprocal influence of language, emotions, and identity through the interactions between the "self" and "others." He analyzes how individuals navigate racialized emotions, shaped by societal relationships and historical contexts, encompassing a wide range of emotional experiences across diverse racial landscapes. He specifically mentions racialized emotions to follow Ahmed's (2004) perspective on emotions as existing in the middle of individuals and society. Both negative and positive emotions significantly inform individuals' connections to and experiences within racialized societies, thereby playing a critical role in shaping societal dynamics. Therefore, the discussion of language and emotions cannot be separated from the discussion of identity and, ultimately, of race.

Pragmatics as a Framework of Analysis

Paltridge (2021) notes that speakers adapt their language to fit different social settings, whether familial, professional, or social. This process shapes their overall perception of life. In studying language expressions, he mentions that understanding speech's communicative function is important to discover larger meaning within people as a part of a culture and society. In this regard, Austin (1962, as cited in Paltridge, 2021) and Searle (1969, as cited in Paltridge, 2021) both explain that language has a purpose or is "used to do things" rather than functioning solely as a literal means. Speech in conversations often conveys more than the literal meaning of the words being said.

To study speech and behavior patterns within the characters in *Beef* (Lee, 2023), pragmatics is used as a tool of analysis. Austin (1962, as cited in Paltridge, 2021) introduces three kinds of speech acts in conversations:

- Locutionary act – The literal meaning of speech.

- Illocutionary act – The intention of the speaker in speech.
- Perlocutionary act – The interpretation and response to the speech from the hearer. This represents the hearer's thoughts and reactions to the speech.

Subsequently, this study focuses extensively on illocutionary and perlocutionary acts within conversations, as they elucidate characters' intentions and interpretations of speech. Furthermore, it is essential for both the speaker and the hearer to share the same presuppositions during their interactions to facilitate effective communication. Paltridge (2021, p. 43) defines presupposition as “the common ground that is assumed to exist between language users, such as assumed knowledge of a situation and/or of the world.” This indicates that establishing a shared contextual understanding of the subject matter is critical for productive dialogue.

Grice (1975) explains there must be a cooperative principle in a conversation. This principle facilitates smooth conversational flow. There are four categories under this principle, referred to as maxims, which ideally should be observed in conversations:

- of quality – What is being said should be true.
- of quantity – What is being said suffices no more or no less than required.
- of relation – What is being said should be relevant to the conversation.
- of manner – What is being said should be clearly stated and not ambiguous.

However, it is recognized that speakers sometimes do not literally mean what they say in conversations. Therefore, some flouting of maxims occurs in such interactions. This implies that a speaker may not say something truthful, but no misleading intention is involved as they wish the listener to seek the truth behind their utterances (Paltridge, 2021) When what is being said is purposefully misleading, this is referred to as violating maxims (Paltridge, 2021). There are also infringing maxims when a speaker is not aware of the need to fulfill the maxims (Paltridge, 2021).

The cooperative principle, as outlined above, is therefore useful in understanding an individual's efforts to fulfill the appropriateness of language expressions in certain situations, along with the causes and effects of such acts.

Asian American Representations

Despite some advancements in media representation, Asian Americans frequently continue to be depicted through the model minority stereotype (Besana et al., 2019; Dong et al., 2022; Nguyen, 2022), which implies exceptional success while neglecting the racial barriers they face (Chou & Feagin, 2015; Kim, 1999). Such media representations reflect societal perspectives and biases (Dong et al., 2022), thereby impacting the portrayal of Asian American emotions in films like *Beef* (Lee, 2023). This representation not only reflects contemporary societal attitudes but also invites a critical reassessment of prevailing perceptions. Nonetheless, representations of Asian Americans in films began to be oriented towards realistic perceptions (Ibarra, 2024). This study therefore seeks to explore Asian American dynamics represented in *Beef* (Lee, 2023) as a rendition of today's portrayals of the minority group.

Research on Asian American emotions and social constructs, such as that by Ma (2009), examines rare portrayals of angry Asians in literature, often linked to domestic and racial tensions. *Beef* (Lee, 2023) features Asian American characters openly expressing vengeful emotions publicly while appearing passive in private interactions, challenging stereotypes (Pham-Ada, 2023). This series prompts further analysis combining language, emotions, and identity, exploring unique character interactions. Discourse and pragmatics studies (Berdjane, 2012; Murtaza et al., 2020) suggest language patterns shape identity, making them valuable for understanding the characters' interactions in *Beef* (Lee, 2023).

While the Western world has moved beyond blatant racial segregation created by white people in the past, racism still continues through institutionalized and subtle discrimination referred to as new racism (Bonilla-Silva, 2015). Bonilla-Silva (2015) argues that this is an even more powerful tool to preserve the domination of white people, because it is more difficult to detect and fight against in daily life. Bonilla-Silva's (2015) discussion is supported by Grinage (2024), who argues racial equity in the United States is present only at the surface level, hiding structural and violent racism beneath. Grinage (2024), following Bonilla-Silva (2019), explains how racialized emotions illustrate how the individual, society, and power affect one another through the very exchange of emotions.

Ultimately, this study aims to illustrate how broader social constructs permeate individuals' interactions with themselves and their society. Within these interactions, emotions play a pivotal role, serving as both motivators and connectors for individuals within a social context (Ahmed, 2004). Therefore, as Bonilla-Silva (2019) suggests, there is a need for greater openness to diverse representations of racial subjects, which necessarily encompass a range of emotional experiences. Such inclusivity represents a crucial step towards dismantling racism and redefining the trajectories that are pursued.

METHOD

This study specifically focuses on the lens of marginalization, which sees that inequality is experienced by individuals or groups in their daily lives in relation to a larger political issue. The study uses qualitative research to uncover the broader meaning of issues presented in the series. Creswell & Creswell (2018) state that the qualitative approach interprets meaning within a social or human problem.

The data gathered for this study is in the form of texts representing unusual language patterns in Amy and Danny's conversations with others, connected to the framework of Asian American and racialized emotions. There are 14 scenes presented in 14 tables to narrow down the analysis specifically to the topic. These include minutes 00:05:42-00:06:41, 00:08:30-00:08:51, 00:09:35-00:10:30, 00:12:00-00:12:07, 00:12:31-00:13:48, 00:15:00-00:15:26, and 00:22:55-00:23:18 from episode 1; 00:22:44-00:23:06 from episode 2; 00:14:48-00:14:59, 00:25:04-00:26:14, and 00:27:20-00:28:18 from episode 3; 00:29:16-00:12:06 from episode 4, 00:06:54-00:07:28 and 00:18:13-00:18:47 from episode 8.

This study utilizes pragmatic analysis, involving speech acts and cooperative principles introduced by Austin (1962) and Grice (1975). Pragmatic analysis is used to identify the language patterns present in the excerpts. In *Beef* (Lee, 2023), characters frequently flout and violate communication norms to avoid truth-telling, which is analyzed here through their interactions within their communities and families. Speech acts and cooperative principles are used to analyze the reason for the characters' flouting and violation.

This study explores the emotional dynamics between Amy and Danny in *Beef* (Lee, 2023), contrasting their behavior towards each other with their interactions with family and community. The Results section outlines two steps of analysis. First, the analysis is divided into two main themes: Amy's and Danny's self-representations. Second, under the main theme, the analysis is divided into each character's experience in their society and family. The findings are interpreted into two main themes in the Discussion section.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The study finds a significant number of speech violations from Amy and Danny to conceal their true feelings for the sake of building specific identities. This habit is shown by language expressions when interacting with society and their family. At the same time, speech violations used by the people of their surroundings suggest

strategies to avoid conflicts and take advantage of situations, resulting in built-up tensions and pressures for Amy and Danny.

Amy's Self-Representation with Politeness and Conformity

Throughout the series, Amy uses a politeness strategy to conform to societal standards, utilized to maintain her successful image. Politeness can be inferred through deviations from Grice's (1975) cooperative principle as social status and individuals' needs are considered (Brown, 2015). In Amy's case, she violates and flouts Grice's maxims to adhere to the public's image of her and maintain her family's relationship.

Amy's Conformity in Society

Table 1. Episode 1, 00:12:00-00:12:07

No.	Character	Utterance
1	White Woman Customer	I read your interview in Calabasas Style and I just wanna say I really look up to you and how you live your life.
2	Amy	Thank you.

This scene occurs when Amy visits her shop and meets an enthusiastic customer. The white woman's declarative statement about Amy presupposes her as an inspiration, featured in a magazine celebrating successful individuals "Calabasas Style". Amy responds with a performative "thank you", fulfilling the maxim of relation but violating the maxims of quality and quantity. In fact, the customer can be construed as a representative of people who are blind to Amy's road accident with Danny because Amy manages to conceal it. This demonstrates how Amy chooses to present two faces of her public life: accepting praise for her business while concealing her involvement in a road rage incident with Danny, which underlines her rather emotional self. This pattern of violation aligns with the white woman's perception. Overall, this interaction portrays Amy crafting a positive identity, maintaining a facade of success in her workplace despite underlying complexities.

Table 2. Episode 1, 00:22:55-00:23:18

No.	Character	Utterance
3	Amy	You know what? Um... you should come to this gallery opening tomorrow night. George is loaning one of his father's pieces.
4	Jordan	Really? I would love that. Nobody else in my family understands culture, that's why Forsters has been stuck in the past.
5	Amy	That's why you're here. To change that.
6	Jordan	See? I like you. You have this... serene Zen Buddhist thing going on.
7	Amy	Well... you know, just doing me.

Another scene highlights the way Amy uses a politeness strategy in the face of discomfort. Amy wishes to sell out her business to Jordan, an art collector and a businesswoman. In the scene above, Amy strategically acknowledges Jordan's interest in George's father, to persuade Jordan to engage with her. Although interested, Jordan is shown in utterance 4 to merely seek someone to boost her company, instead of facilitating Amy's divestment from her business. With such a motive, she also implies a serene Zen Buddhist personality that she thinks exists within Amy, to convince Amy that she is suitable for the role (utterance 6). With her recent incident, Amy certainly does not embody a serene person inward, highlighting violation of maxim of quality.

Table 3. Episode 3, 00:27:20-00:28:18

No.	Character	Utterance
8	Amy	Jordan, this isn't what we discussed. Okay? I- I had no intention of staying on.
9	Jordan	I know, I know, I know. But, honey, you are the face of the brand. And the board feels that's an important deal point.
10	Amy	Well, I was planning on spending time with my family's the thing.
11	Jordan	Sweetie, I know. But it's not up to me. It's the board. You know what, tomorrow is our annual Las Vegas conference. Come, talk to some of them. Take my jet, bring your family. Amy, listen to me. I know this is not what you want... you want more. So just, trust me. You're gonna thank me later.

In this scene, Jordan's assertive agency enables her to manipulate Amy by contravening the maxims of quality, quantity, and relation. Amy's declarative statement in line 8 expresses her needs directly, marking a departure from her prior politeness. Jordan employs affirmations such as "I know" to project an understanding demeanor while simultaneously reinforcing her own agenda. Additionally, she utilizes endearing terms like "honey" and "sweetie" to simulate intimacy, while simultaneously dismissing Amy's opinions and needs. By invoking the board's authority in the negotiation, Jordan asserts control while preserving her decision-making power. She redirects Amy's aspirations to align with her own business interests, thereby violating the maxim of relation by misrepresenting Amy's familial priorities. This scene illustrates Amy's struggle for agency, which is undermined by Jordan's manipulative strategies and her superior position in terms of wealth and status. The scene below demonstrates the way Amy goes back to maintaining her successful image as she is told by Jordan to promote her brand further.

Table 4. Episode 4, 00:29:19-00:30:12

No.	Character	Utterance
12	Amy	You know, um, the first year we went direct to consumer.... God, I was up at... 6 a.m., every single morning, making deliveries, all by myself. Like, all over Los Angeles. I had just given birth to my daughter. Um... I'd pump in the car, and we've all... been there, right? But, um... I still made sure to have dinner with my husband, every single night, because it was important to me. I bought a house that I redesigned myself and... I mean, why am I telling you this? Because I want you to know that, despite what everybody tells you, you can have it all. You can.
13	Panel Host	Wow. I mean, just... the perfect answer. Yeah.

The scene portrays an unfortunate ending to Amy's struggle. She hopes for a better life in which she can get life balance but instead needs to continue the demanding role of a successful and high-functioning woman. In her utterance, Amy is violating the maxim of quality as her life does not align with what she says. For example, the conversation between Amy and her husband George in Table 8 illustrates that her relationship with her husband is not a happy and equal one. Her conclusion, at the end, conforms with what the audiences (as perlocutors) want her to say rather than originating from her own perspective. The panel host's response further suggests a perlocutionary act that influences Amy to present as the perfect person who gives perfect motivation for other people. However, instead of being able to have it all, it is highlighted how she has been sacrificing so much of her time and energy to work hard for her family. After all those efforts, she could not even afford the basic necessity of time for her family and herself. Therefore, even after trying to be assertive about herself

in the previous scene, she is once again adapting a violation of the maxim of quality to yet hide her real conditions and build a successful image of herself.

Amy's Conformity in Family

While Amy assumes the role of provider, George takes on the responsibilities of a househusband, caring for their child, June. In episode 2, Danny describes Amy by stating, "She got a house, she has kids," which illocutionarily suggests that she appears to live comfortably with her family in the eyes of others. However, if her personal life is indeed so ideal, it raises questions regarding her involvement in the road rage incident. The subsequent scene introduces Amy's small family as she returns home following the altercation.

Table 5. Episode 1, 00:05:42-00:06:41

No.	Character	Utterance
14	George	Well, then what's going on? You seem all riled up. Babe... Come on. Talk to me.
15	Amy	Okay... well, um... you know, after the meeting, I was sitting in the parking lot, thinking about how many meetings and calls I've had to do for the last two years. Still somehow there's no offer coming, and it just really got to me, you know? So... Then, I started driving and there was this guy—.
16	George	Amy... before you spiral, I'm gonna have you stop right there. Take a deep breath. Pause... You've got to start focusing on the positive, okay? You know, maybe we should start doing gratitude journals again.
17	June	Daddy! I need more markers!
18	George	Our little artist.
19	Amy	Uh... Gratitude journals. Yeah, you're right. Let's do it. Thanks, babe.

Table 6. Episode 1, 00:15:00-00:15:26

No.	Character	Utterance
20	Fumi	Joji... Your whole house needs a remodel.
21	Amy	Right, and, uh... you know, you're the one who wanted Junie in all those... mindfulness classes and organic gardening playgroups, so...
22	George	All that matters is that June thrives as her truest self.
23	Amy	Yeah well, no one thrives for free—.
24	Fumi	My sister was a loud eater. And, you know, three years ago... her husband was struck by a train.

George presupposes that emotions should be internally regulated, thereby infringing the maxim of relation based on his belief system. Conversely, Amy violates the maxim of quality in line 19, as she questions the efficacy of George's advice. This dialogue serves as a significant introduction to the fundamental differences

between them, despite external perceptions of their compatibility. This scene can be contrasted with the subsequent interaction in which Amy confronts both her husband and her mother-in-law.

In this scene (Table 6), Fumi persistently provides unsolicited advice, reinforcing her status as an elder. George's comments about their financial situation overlook Amy's concerns, while Fumi redirects the conversation to evade potential conflict, resulting in diminished agency for Amy. Consequently, Amy struggles to articulate her perspective amid George and Fumi's contrasting perceptions. Their actions effectively suppress Amy's expressions, underscoring her limited agency within the interaction. This scene sets a departure from Amy's previous conformity to her family's views, only to subsequently be suppressed.

Table 7. Episode 2, 00:22:44-00:23:0

No.	Character	Utterance
25	George	If money is gonna drive us apart, then I renounce.
26	Amy	We can't renounce because all your dad left us was tables and chairs.
27	George	This is a celebration of chairs.
28	June	Hi, Mommy!
29	George	<i>[George and Amy realize their daughter sees them fighting.]</i> I just wish you would unload the dishwasher sometimes.
30	Amy	I barely have time to eat off of those dishes.
31	George	Babe, it takes five minutes.

Table 8. Episode 8, 00:06:54-00:07:28

No.	Character	Utterance
32	Amy	Um... I- I don't mean to upset you, but I saw something my senior year, and I should have told you--
33	Amy's Mom	Oh, my God. Just stop. Okay? You're not gonna tell me anything I don't already know. Okay?
34	Amy	What do you mean? You and Dad already talked about it?
35	Amy's Mom	No. We don't have to. And you and I don't have to either.
36	Amy	See, this is the problem with our family. We never talked about anything openly. And now--
37	Amy's Mom	Amy, that's enough. That's enough. Just stop, please?
38	Amy	Okay, okay. I wish you'd talked to me, growing up.
39	Amy's Mom	Why are you bringing this up now, huh? Are you and George having problem?

This scene (Table 7) further demonstrates how Amy and George fail to understand each other, due to their differing presuppositions regarding "money." Amy wants George to sell his father's chair to Jordan to secure

her agreement on the deal. In utterance 79, however, George presupposes it as something unimportant compared to individual pursuit and art. In utterance 82, George flouts the maxim of relation to express his concerns, while shifting the conversation from Amy's concerns.

Overall, Amy's small family does not serve as a refuge where she feels safe and valued. The subsequent scene examines Amy's interactions with her original family to determine whether similar avoidance language patterns persist or if they offer different responses to her.

In this scene (Table 8), Amy's mother consistently avoids confronting the problems in her life. Her statements from 33 onward contradict each other, particularly by ignoring the fact that Amy's father has cheated, violating the maxim of quality. Despite this, she chooses to overlook it. Amy's confession reveals her mother's failure to be open and nurturing during her childhood, maintaining the same behavior now. In utterance 39, her mother diverts the conversation from her own issues to Amy's, disregarding the maxim of relation. Ultimately, Amy's attempts to address her problems with her parents and current family result in suppression and achieve little progress.

Danny's Self-Representation to Assert Capabilities

While Amy needs to hide the less desirable aspects of herself, Danny tries to demonstrate his positive qualities. According to Coulmas (2019), some features of language could enhance someone's social role. In navigating his environment, Danny tries to negotiate his place within it despite lacking credibility. This is seen throughout the series, where he tries to become casual and convincing, and to assert his importance through speeches.

Danny's Performativity in Society

In the scene (Table 9), Danny's indirect inquiry at the outset is an illocutionary act aimed at exploring job opportunities while concealing his underlying desperation. The white man recognizes Danny's implication and contravenes the maxim of manner to maintain a facade of politeness. Danny's repeated repairs underscore the significance of his work, unsettling the white man, who is unprepared for such persistence. Although the white man acknowledges Danny's efforts, he violates the maxim of relation to mitigate the resulting awkwardness. Danny further breaches the maxim of quality by embellishing his qualifications in an attempt to persuade the white man to hire him, despite the absence of formal certifications. The ellipses employed by the white man signal skepticism regarding Danny's assertions. Furthermore, Danny's casual demeanor contrasts sharply with the white man's formality, highlighting Danny's determination despite apparent client dissatisfaction.

Utterance 55 implies that Danny is respected even after he cries. Unlike his former clients, the Korean-Americans welcome Danny and trust him. They refer to Danny's job as "business", presupposing a sense of agency in Danny's daily survival efforts. They are willing to understand Danny's background, in contrast to how his white clients perceive him. Despite this, Danny violates the maxim of quality again as he tells a lie about himself. In contrast to the scene from Table 5, it is evident that he could not even have a stable income to afford such a humble act. This is another instance of how Danny tries to build an image of a reliable man. However, compared to Amy, he did not achieve sufficient success to be regarded as reliable. There is an illocutionary act behind this utterance that he wants to reassure the community to accept him as part of them. It can therefore be recognized that his insecurity persisted even after he found a safe space.

Table 9. Episode 1, 00:12:31-00:13:48

No.	Character	Utterance
40	Danny	Hey, bud, do you... happen to have those referrals... I was asking about? Remember I texted you about those?
41	White Man Client	Yeah. Um... you know, I asked around... and uh, all my friends... have a handyman... so—.
42	Danny	Contractor. I'm a contractor.
43	White Man Client	Yeah, yeah. Of cou—, yeah, totally. Totally. Um... by the way, if you know of a good tree trimmer, let me know, 'cause of uh... I've been meaning to cut these bad boys.
44	Danny	I could do it.
45	White Man Client	Hmm? Oh. I- I mean... don't you need like a certification, or something?
46	Danny	What, are you gonna get a guy with, like, five stars on Yelp? Those reviews are fake, man. They're... totally fake. Look, I'll come back tomorrow with some dudes, 600 bucks.
47	White Man Client	It would be nice to get it done. Um... five-fifty?
48	Danny	Uh... my guy. Only 'cause it's you.
49	White Man Client	All right. See you tomorrow.
50	Danny	Great. Okay, great. Yep.
51	White Woman Client	[Over the unmuted intercom.] Did you fire him yet?
52	Man Client	No... he's trimming the trees.
53	White Woman Client	Okay, you have to fire him after that. He's so annoying.
54	White Man Client	I know. I know, he really is.

Table 10. Episode 3, 00:14:48-00:14:59

No.	Character	Utterance
55	Veronica	We could have you do some repairs around here. We'd pay, of course. We'd love to support a Korean-owned small business.
56	Danny	Don't even worry about it. You know, I love to support nonprofits. I do a lot of charity work.

In this scene (Table 11), Danny ascends a hill in his truck, envisioning his future home despite his lack of financial resources to construct it as a contractor. Utterance 57 indicates Danny's effort to elicit sympathy from the Realtor by emphasizing his financial difficulties, thereby flouting the maxim of relation, as his remarks are not directly relevant to the transaction. The Realtor, in turn, responds by steering the conversation back to business matters, also contravening the maxim of relation. This scene highlights how Danny tries to use speeches to compensate for his lack of money and status in his desperation to get a property.

Table 11. Episode 3, 00:25:04-00:26:14

No.	Character	Utterance
57	Danny	Yeah. No, I mean I know it's a lot of money, but I plan on doing the renovations myself to the property, so it's really a sound investment. And it's not for me, it's for my parents. I'm moving them back from Korea.
58	Realtor	Well, keep in mind, Mr. Cho, you don't have the best credit.
59	Danny	Right, yeah. Um... when I was 18, I went to BR for cargo pants, and next thing I knew, I was signed up for a credit card.
60	Realtor	BR?
61	Danny	Banana Repub-. H-how long would it take for me to be approved for a mortgage? Isn't, don't I need, like, 20%?
62	Realtor	The down payment would be 100,000, but you'd also need to demonstrate a consistent income and a healthy checking balance. Now, on the track you're on, we could maybe consider you in... I don't know, seven years.
63	Danny	Okay, I-I don't think you understand. My parents are getting old, okay? And like, this land is not gonna be available much longer. I-I don't understand why everyone else gets approved for a loan but me.

Danny's Performativity in Family

The subsequent scene depicts Danny's interactions with his parents immediately after he returns home following the road rage incident, during which he experiences embarrassment in front of others.

Table 12. Episode 1, 00:08:30-00:08:51

No.	Character	Utterance
64	Danny's Mom	<i>[In Korean]</i> I don't think he wants to work anymore.
65	Danny's Dad	<i>[In Korean]</i> Why would I want to work at my age? I don't even have time to eat breakfast!
66	Danny	<i>[In Korean]</i> Mom, Dad, don't worry. <i>[In English]</i> Business is good. <i>[In Korean]</i> I'll buy that land you always wanted. <i>[In English]</i> I'll build a big house.
67	Danny's Dad	Sure.
68	Danny	<i>[In Korean]</i> No, really!

In this scene, Danny's interactions with his parents reveal notable contrasts. Danny's Mom and Dad perform passive-aggressive speeches, conveying the illocutionary meaning that they want Danny to settle as soon as possible. In utterance 66, Danny portrays his business as successful and commits to providing financial support despite encountering job-related challenges, thus violating the maxim of quality. In utterance 67, his father dismisses Danny's assertions, disregarding both the maxims of quantity and quality, indicating a lack of engagement. Danny continues to reassure his parents in utterance 68, again flouting the maxim of quality.

Table 13. Episode 8, 00:18:13-00:18:47

No.	Character	Utterance
69	Danny	<i>[In Korean]</i> Don't worry. <i>[In English]</i> Okay? It'll be okay. I'm gonna call the insurance. They'll cover everything, and we'll rebuild the house.
70	Danny's Mom	<i>[In Korean]</i> How? We shouldn't have thought everything would work out.
71	Danny	<i>[In Korean]</i> Mom, don't say things like that. <i>[In English]</i> Okay, it's just a hiccup. I'll table it out.
72	Danny's Dad	<i>[In Korean]</i> We should change our flight. Let's hurry back to Korea. I need to work.

Following Danny's prolonged struggle to purchase a house, his parents exhibit indifference in response to yet another setback. His mother's utterance in 69 conveys her disappointment, accompanied by a subtle undertone of sarcasm implying they never truly believed in Danny's potential for success. Despite Danny's attempts to seek their assistance and his patience in resolving his challenges, they, weary and unresponsive, decline to offer support. Consequently, Danny acquiesces to their wishes, albeit reluctantly.

Given his role as the oldest son, Danny's relationship with his younger brother can also be examined as depicted below.

Table 14. Episode 1, 00:09:35-00:10:30

No.	Character	Utterance
73	Paul	That's why I made more than you this week. I don't have to fix toilets.
74	Danny	I've been busting my ass since Mom and Dad lost the motel. And you're gonna stay here and gamble, while they're going to work for <i>samchon</i> ?

Danny and Paul's childhood closeness has faded with age. In this scene, Danny discovers Paul's involvement in cryptocurrency, prompting him to assert his role as the responsible older brother by cautioning Paul against it. Paul, however, belittles Danny's job in utterance 73, considering it inferior to his own. Danny, surprised by Paul's response, defends himself, asserting his efforts to support the family despite the challenges. This scene highlights how Danny makes up for his lack of stability by employing discourse that underline his struggles. However, they do not meet the standard for a reliable family provider.

Discussions

Suppressed Social Identity of Asian Americans

Amy's Social Identity

In the case of Amy, there are several instances where subtle segregation happens in her interactions with her customers and, seemingly, her business partner, Jordan. The scene in Table 1 from Episode 1 briefly introduces the white customer's blindness towards Amy's hardships. While the comment "I look up to you..." seems to be a positive appreciation, it can also be viewed as a naive comment coming from a white person towards an Asian American in which the white person focuses on the perceived importance of an Asian American

achieving certain socioeconomic indicators (Chou & Feagin, 2015). In connection to a later episode in Table 4, this briefly represents the dominant's ignorance of Asian American's struggles to succeed in American society.

The analysis first reveals more unpleasant treatment from Jordan, who began to notice Amy since she knew her husband's background--highlighting how she only appreciates wealth, not culture (as shown in Table 2). The next utterances hint at Jordan's belief in superficial equity or that the dominant always take advantage, supporting Matias's (2016) statement about whites being the bearers of knowledge and their need to assert this. Jordan's treatment towards Amy subtly reduces her into a cultural object to be owned for financial gain. While sounding like praise, when Jordan says that Amy has "serene Zen Buddhist thing", it subtly highlights her disregard for Asian heritage. By referring it as a "thing", she undermines the very concept of Zen as well as Buddhist.

Despite Jordan's love for culture, it lacks a foundational identity. Ahmed (2004) describes this "love of 'White'" as stemming from fear of imagined others, fostering a unity through exclusion rather than equality. Jordan's acceptance of Amy as shown in Tables 2 and 3 is conditional and incomplete, reflecting a systemic racism benefiting dominant white individuals like herself, as noted by Bonilla-Silva (2019). She masks it well with praise for Amy's capability while knowing that Amy really needs her to purchase the business, highlighting underlying purposes behind the violation of the maxim of relation.

Amy's need of selling her business contributes to her negative emotion stemming from not being treated as an equal business partner and plays a critical role in shaping the social dynamics given her disadvantaged status due to her racial background (Bonilla-Silva, 2019). Amy's personal revelations about her family receive minimal attention from Jordan, who prioritizes expanding her business, flouting conversational norms. Chou and Feagin (2015) note that people of color in America often sacrifice personal and collective needs to conform to white societal expectations for success. Amy's choice to violate the maxim of quality (lying) reflects her desire to maintain a positive societal image and secure success for her family. This underscores how societal dynamics influence her decisions. Amy's experience illustrates how Asian Americans face discrimination, which is often treated as personal issues, often suppressing emotions and memories while enduring ongoing struggles. Ultimately, the situation leaves Amy feeling helpless, torn between pursuing the deal and confronting her reality.

In Amy's life, love is conceptualized through the lens of the dominant white culture's ownership mentality, compelling her to "deliver" following childbirth in order to secure familial stability (as shown in Table 4). In Table 4, the broader audience does not perceive Amy's struggles as a result of hardships experienced by Asian Americans striving to succeed. Instead, they only become inspiring stories for entertainment, further highlighting the superficiality of diversity in America (Grinage, 2024). Her decisions are primarily influenced by the apprehension of losing the scant acceptance afforded to her by the prevailing culture, exemplifying the persistent outsider status experienced by Asian Americans (Chou & Feagin, 2015). These conflicting emotions challenge the comfort of the dominant white narrative, yet they remain largely underrepresented in mainstream media. Amy's experiences illuminate how society reduces her struggles to a simplistic ideal of attaining the American Dream, predominantly inaccessible to non-dominant groups. Within this framework, adherence to an incomplete representation of herself is valorized, while deviation is pathologized, thereby entrenching her in a state of internal conflict.

Danny's Social Identity

In the case of Danny, the identity gap becomes more apparent as he struggles financially as an immigrant. Asian Americans are especially placed on a pedestal against other people of color, as an example made by the

post-colonial Western world that everyone can succeed as long as they work hard (Chou & Feagin, 2015; Kim, 1999). For Danny, “branded” as a struggling Asian-American seems to put him among less-competent professionals in the perception of white people (as shown in Table 9). However, Table 9 indicates that Danny’s white clients do not overtly exhibit racism. Their discomfort with Danny seems to be very subtle, manifesting in the white man’s reluctance towards Danny, expressed through politeness and violation of the maxim of relation, as well as the way the white woman refers to Danny as “annoying”. This invites a discussion on how small language expressions could hide damaging propositions, especially when talking about race.

Although subtle, the white people’s discomfort with Danny’s upbringing actually stems from white domination, the remnants of which provide continuous power to white people as the superior ones (Bonilla-Silva, 2019). Coulmas (2019) suggests that identity politics involves “exclusionism”, which sets a boundary between those included in a group and those excluded. In this case, the white clients assert their identity as the landowners in America, while Danny is only positioned to enhance their identity as he fails to own his own land. In regards to American society, White domination fosters a belief that no one is permitted to force them to do things that they do not favor, which extends into school, residential, and other forms of segregation. Under the name of “choice”, they leave other groups in society with few remaining choices (Bonilla-Silva, 2015). This sets a boundary that Danny is not allowed to cross, that the white clients are not friends he could casually talk to when seeking job opportunities.

The white clients, in this case, casually ignore Danny and are uncomfortable facing the fact that their comfort stands on the same ground as his hardship (Bonilla-Silva, 2015; Coulmas, 2019). Their politeness in refusing Danny, coupled with the belief that he is really annoying, indicates they have internalized certain beliefs about themselves. Identity construction often involves the dominant belief that they have positive traits while perceiving imagined others as having negative ones (Bonilla-Silva, 2015). In this case, the white clients believe themselves not to be annoying, as they deem Danny to be annoying. In their exclusivity, people are not allowed to have traits like Danny while undermining the causes of Danny’s behaviours. In this case, the vulnerability of people of color is considered taboo, while the vulnerability of white people is considered innocent (Bonilla-Silva, 2015).

Meanwhile, in contrast to the negative emotion experienced by Danny in the scene detailed in Table 5, in Table 6, Danny is shown to experience positive support from members of a Korean church. This offers another redefinition of Danny’s vulnerability of not having a job, which is understood by people of the same background. However, he wants to appear reliable, as other successful Asian Americans who fit into American society do (Chou & Feagin, 2015). This finding suggests how Danny is affected by rules established by the white dominant group, even in a space where white people do not directly rule (Bonilla-Silva, 2019). The model minority stereotype has permeated Danny’s mind and behavior, making performative utterances to compensate for his lack of credibility.

Overall, Danny shows a pattern of anxiety to feel belonging in a social group. In relation to the model minority stereotype attributed to Asian Americans (Chou & Feagin, 2015), Danny tries to seek membership in his career and religious group. Similar to the exchange of racialized emotions (Bonilla-Silva, 2019), identity is sought “from individuals to group” (Coulmas, 2019). Individuals seek “psychological security” by seeking membership in a group of people with similar racial, religious, and national backgrounds (Coulmas, 2019). In this case, Danny’s strategy in violating maxims contains a subtle implication of seeking memberships both to the national (white clients) and the racial (members of the Korean church) groups.

Suppressed Collective Identity of Asian Americans

In the end, as both Amy and Danny seek to belong in their own family, they also discover the same bitter reality of structural inequality that has extended its roots into domestic relationships.

Amy's Familial Identity

Amy's relationships with both her parents and her immediate family illustrate how the suppression of emotions, stemming from unfair treatment and racism directed at Asian Americans, permeates their interactions.

Amy and George are members of the same racial group (Asian American). However, there is still a difference in class. As someone who has (superficially) embodied the successful Asian American through his father, George believes that perpetual positivity is equivalent to acceptability. His belief comes not only from psychological reasons, but also from the societal expectation that Asian Americans need to show acceptable emotions to demonstrate their capacity for success in line with the model minority stereotype (Besana et al., 2019; Dong et al., 2022; Nguyen, 2022).

In Amy's small family, strained conversations hinder understanding between her and George, shaped by her societal struggles contrasting with George's sheltered perspective. Fumi reinforces George's insulated worldview, contributing to his disregard for social issues in their relationship, echoing broader dismissals of emotional vulnerabilities in their predominantly white environment. Despite Amy's financial success, their Asian American backgrounds perpetuate economic disparities that influence their experiences in a challenging society. George and Amy come together despite their vastly different family backgrounds. Amy, seeking to escape her family identity, is drawn to George, who exudes positivity and tranquility. As shown in Table 6, George grew up with a mother who avoided problems instead of facing them every time they arose, shown by several violations of the maxim of relation. This highlights how Amy tries to compromise with George (Table 5) and strives to embody peace thoroughly in her work and family life, masking childhood trauma and a sense of displacement. However, these only serve to conceal her inner turmoil, leading to unresolved contradictions and self-directed resentment.

In contrast to George, who hails from a wealthy family (as noted in Table 2 of the previous section, wherein his father is acknowledged as a renowned artist by Jordan), Amy comes from a family that must struggle to make ends meet. To navigate life in America, they felt compelled to conceal their struggles and project an image of a family capable of resilience in the face of adversity. Chou and Feagin (2015) specifically highlight that Asian American families seldom discuss issues of racism and inequality openly, often internalizing these challenges to appear capable of surviving in American society. Patterns of silencing pain and suffering extend to external events and dynamics within their homes. According to Balaev (2008), "loss and suffering," or intergenerational trauma, resides in language, experience, and memory, which are then transferred to the next generation. When Amy, as an individual, seeks to uncover a heritage that helps define her identity, she finds pain hidden by years of silence within her family.

Danny's Familial Identity

Danny takes the role of a provider, while receiving little emotional support from his family. Meanwhile, he encounters numerous hardships externally. This situation clearly demonstrates what has been stated by Chou and Feagin (2015) that subsequent generations of Asian Americans continue to experience intense feelings of racial marginalization, exclusion, and isolation. At the same time, they face the complex challenge of navigating their identities between the sociocultural traditions of their parents and the pressures of assimilation within U.S. society. They are racially distinct from white individuals and other non-Asian groups in a predominantly white society. Yet, they are also integrated into American culture, often possessing limited knowledge of the ancestral cultures of the communities in which they were raised or currently live.

Similar to Amy's parents, Danny's family could not openly discuss their emotions because of financial struggles. They focused on surviving instead, appearing capable of succeeding in American society. Danny's struggles to achieve socioeconomic success do not necessarily prevent racial treatment from the whites. Evidently, the stereotype of the successful minority does not shield them from the discrimination faced at the hands of white individuals (Chou & Feagin, 2015).

The difference between Danny's family and Amy's lies in language capability and economic situation. Ahmad et al. (2022, p. 2) summarize, "The victims of trauma do not mourn their pain in front of anyone and need language to recuperate their wounds". Danny's parents' linguistic identity is characterized by their limited English capability and limited freedom of expression. As reviewed, Asian American's history of immigration is deeply connected to the interests of white individuals as the dominant group. Asian laborers are deemed useful by white people as they are able to construct narratives against other minority groups (Chou & Feagin, 2015; Okihiro, 2014). In contrast to the situation of the immigrants, white people have the freedom, or language, to control as the dominant group (Ahmad et al., 2022). Exposing vulnerability is deemed a taboo for Danny's parents in light of the model minority stereotype (Bonilla-Silva, 2015).

However, the process of silencing pain and suffering can only extend to a certain point. Ahmad et al. (2022) summarize the delayed effects of trauma caused by racism and injustice against Asian Americans. They are not always outwardly apparent but are then inherited through beliefs and behaviours towards the next generation (Ahmad et al., 2022). Danny's parents' failure to succeed in America leads them to indirectly pressure Danny to achieve success for their family. However, as depicted by Danny's experience, escaping financial struggles is not easy when faced with prior prejudices about him as an underprivileged minority. When seeking support from his family, Danny could only find particles of societal pressures existing within.

Suppressed Emotions of the Asian Americans

Amy and Danny's story in *Beef* (Lee, 2023) is a stark representation of how minorities' aspirations and vulnerability are suppressed and masked in the name of assimilation. Their struggles also depict how modern generations of Asian Americans try to navigate their place within the extreme boundary of becoming either inherently Asian or inherently American, which was created by remnants of white domination for the sake of power. While Asian Americans are perceived as having a strong collective identity by preserving their culture and traditions (Vargas & Kemmelmeier, 2013), they struggle with intergenerational traumas, which are silenced by the societal pressures to become the model minority by American society (Ahmad et al., 2022; Chou & Feagin, 2015).

Amy and Danny's struggles invite a discussion on "identity politics", which sets an exclusive boundary between people deemed acceptable for belonging and those who are not. While remaining an abstract concept, identity is constructed and adaptable (Coulmas, 2019). The Asian American stereotype that damages Amy and Danny's relationships with their surroundings stems from the postcolonial construction of identity to segregate people based on Western interests (Coulmas, 2019). The perspective of identity has revolved around the notion "we are different" and "you are different" (Coulmas, 2019). For minority individuals confronting power, the statement involves a stronger boundary than what an individual thinks of themselves, but rather the eyes of those who can make prejudices and categorize them apart (Ahmad et al., 2022). For Amy, it is the perception of her broader consumer base and her business partner. Meanwhile, for Danny, it is the perception of people with whom he seeks professional relationships.

CONCLUSION

This study aims to contribute to ongoing debates on the suppression of emotions by analyzing language, with the ultimate goal of deepening the understanding of Asian American representations and the social forces that

construct them. In conclusion, Amy and Danny show patterns of suppression of emotions in their interactions with society and their families. This is evident in how they try to build a positive image through words and action in their workplace, while hiding the fact that they have anger issues as they seek revenge against each other. With such pressure of building a positive societal image, they also need to maintain their family relationships. However, instead of finding peace and sense of belonging within their family, they are seeking for unhealthy approvals and answers for mistreatments received since childhood. On the other hand, their families show patterns of avoiding problems and difficult conversations as a result of repression imposed upon them by society.

In examining how the characters Amy and Danny represent themselves to society and their families through language, it becomes clear that they frequently violate the maxim of quality by accepting affirmations, making untrue remarks about themselves, and concealing negative aspects of their lives. This pattern of behavior, influenced by societal and familial pressures, suggests a deep struggle with suppressed emotions and highlights the complexities of their identities as Asian Americans. By masking their true thoughts and feelings, they not only prevent authentic self-expression but also exacerbate their stress, ultimately leading to emotional breakdowns.

Analyzing *Beef* underscores the importance of diverse representations within minority groups, prompting a reconsideration of how societal perceptions shape individuals' experiences and futures. The characters' actions against communication norms are heavily influenced by societal dynamics—fear of not fitting in, financial insecurity, and societal expectations placed on Asian Americans. These dynamics, in turn, shape and are shaped by individuals within American society, highlighting the intersection of racial and socioeconomic backgrounds. The call for greater discourse around uncomfortable topics, such as the complexities of Asian American experiences, is essential, as Asian Americans often refrain from discussing racism due to a desire to maintain the image of success. As highlighted by Chou and Feagin (2015) and Grinage (2024), subtle forms of racism remain pervasive and require collective awareness and solutions. Addressing these issues demands a societal effort to recognize and confront the nuances of racial discrimination that continue to affect marginalized communities.

The study advocates for empathy to foster a more equitable and understanding society, recognizing the complexities of these dynamics. Limitations include the selective data collection and focus on individual interactions, overlooking broader elements within the series that could enhance understanding of language and social dynamics among Asian Americans. Future research could examine the multimodal elements of the series that were not addressed in the current study, expanding the scope of analysis to include additional layers of visual and verbal communication. Further investigation could focus on the characters of George and Fumi as well as the relationships and dynamics between them. Such studies could provide a more comprehensive understanding of the series by exploring how these characters who have amassed wealth and are considered to meet the indicators of success by white individuals contribute to the overall narrative and thematic development.

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