



problem of bigotry against sub-atomic particles. That of course brings to mind the subject of ethnic and the current ethnic humor crisis. The issue, I guess, deals with the fact there are cruel jokes told in ethnic humor as often as not, but occasionally--I say occasionally--the jokes really are funny. Well, this raises a serious dilemma. On one hand, we don't want to hurt anyone but on

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the other we have the world-wide shortage of funny jokes. Jokes change with time and what was funny thirty years ago is not funny any longer (e.g., Milton Berle). Then some humor becomes less funny through over-exposure (e.g., Monty Python). In the current shortage the world cannot afford to rule out any jokes that really are funny. There have been desperate attempts to find new jokes and new humor while there is still time, but most of these efforts have gone disastrously awry. I think we have all been touched to see news footage of some of these disastrous displays of young comics bashing watermelons with hammers and pulling rubber gloves over their heads. But it's generally acknowledged that not all the experiments into humor will pan out and while not all the failures will be so spectacular, there will be failures.

But I digress. I think we are all aware of the extent of the humor shortage. It really is the driving force behind the controversy on ethno-cultural humor (ECH). On one hand you have the shortage; on the other hand, you do not want to sanction humor that might be taken the wrong way and might be used against people. And the rules are not by any means straightforward. I think we all can agree that a black comic--say an Eddie Murphy or a Richard Pryor--telling "white people" jokes and doing exaggerated impressions of white people is both funny and acceptable by contemporary standards. Reverse the two colors and the joke is not nearly as funny or acceptable. Similarly there are funny, perceptive books written by women on what is wrong with men. Try an innocuous-sounding change like reversing the two sexes and you end up with inflammatory sexism. The International Congress on Humor and the Funny has been examining the issue of the humor shortage and has set up the now famous Board for the Licensing of Ethno-Cultural Humor (or BLECH) to decide what humor is politically correct and to make an effort to preserve ethnic jokes, without being unfair to any group.

BLECH has published several specifications for what is politically correct in ethnic humor. Specification B487, expected to be ratified by the member nations this year, proposes that ethnic jokes making fun of inanimate objects--I am not sure if subatomic particles count--is allowable the committee further recognizes that there is some ethnic humor that will not work if it is not aimed at a human. It has come up with the much-lauded proposal B625, which sanctions the telling of "bigot" jokes.

This clever decision defuses the whole ethnic joke issue rather nicely. The vast majority of people who are negative on ethnic jokes are even more negative on bigotry. In fact the only organization that has spoken out to protect bigots from being slurred is the ACLU.

In the meantime, amendment B625.14 has laid out characteristics of bigots that are "fair game." People may tell jokes making fun of

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bigots for their 1) low intelligence, 2) inconsistent attitudes, 3) low-income lifestyle, 4) their drinking, 5) their predilection for mystical secret societies, 6) regalia associated with their organizations (e.g., white sheets, helmets, arm-bands, etc.), and a wide array of other specified characteristics.

It should be pointed out, however, that B625 has yet to be ratified by the member nations and may not be until the early 1990s.

2. There is no film festival this week, or for the next couple of weeks. Stay tuned for the announcement of the next festival.

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SHY PEOPLE  
A film review by Evelyn C. Leeper  
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As you watch S h y P e o p l e, you're sure you know what it's about. Don't be so sure. At the end, it makes a right turn in another direction entirely. This is not bad, just unexpected.

Jill Clayburgh is a writer for C o s m o p o l i t a n who decides to visit her distant relatives in Louisiana as research for a series on family roots that she is doing. She drags her teen-age daughter along to get her away from the daughter's 45-year-old boyfriend and they head off into the swamp. There she finds her cousin, played by Barbara Hersey. Hersey rules her family with an iron hand, and a somewhat odd family it is. One son has left the swamp and is treated as dead by Hersey, one son is kept locked in the shed, one son is "missing a button," and one son is trying to trap enough crayfish to keep the family fed. Clayburgh and her daughter have difficulty understanding the life their cousins lead; for their part, Hersey and her sons look askance at Clayburgh and city people in general. (They keep saying Hersey comes from Baltimore, even though she repeatedly tells them she is from New York, probably to soften the blow of having "Yankee" city relatives.)

Some of the subplots seem unnecessary, but they all fit together in the end. Only Hersey's character is fully developed. Clayburgh doesn't seem to know how to play her character and remains unconvincing (or perhaps vague is a better term) through most of the film. Hersey's sons and Clayburgh's daughter seem more like types than characters, but the wonderful acting job by Hersey manages to overcome these flaws and make this a film worth watching.