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Art, consisting of drama, music, etc, is an interpretation of reality. That is what art really is, one's own interpretation of what is presented. Great Teacher Onizuka, by Tohru Fujisawa, is an interpretation of the social fabric of world culture, and questions whether our way of life is truly viable. He also hints at economic and social problems that need to be addressed. This Shonen comedy and drama, "GTO" and its characters are a satire of modern day life in Japan and in Western culture.

### *Summary*

The story follows Eikichi Onizuka, former street punk and bike gang leader, who could not obtain a high class job with a Sociology degree things were looking slim for Onizuka. Somehow he found himself wanting to be a teacher after a chance meeting with a troubled female student. After that meeting, he signed up for student teaching where the administration delegated him to teach a class full of problematic youth. But soon after, he was pranked by his students with a rude but much needed wake up call. A student pretended to strip in his bedroom in front of him, as other students took photos for collateral. Turning the prank around, he caught up with those students and gave them a "lesson" of real life, informing them that if they continue it would consume and torture them later. After this he wins over the class, and finishes the student teaching. Finally, Onizuka decides to become a full teacher, but since missing the mandatory teaching exam his only chance is teaching in private schools where the public exam is not necessary. Ironically, it is at the most prestigious school in that area of Kichijoji. This is where the main story begins for Onizuka and the students of Holy Forest Academy begin. Both students and teachers create obstacles for Onizuka to get him fired. But his new goal in life to be the greatest teacher Japan will ever know will not allow that. He needs to help the troubled

students lead a more mature and responsible life, but to do that he has to overcome the obstacles he confronts from the students, peers, and society. He has to prove to the teachers, students, and the society that his methods of dealing with the students work over traditional methods.

### *Economics of GTO*

Right after the pacific war, around the 1950's, Japan's economy blossomed and around the 1980's, Japan's economy was at its peak, believing they were miraculous and invincible with their economy because of from their magnificent workmanship and their ideas. Curtis Andressen reports that in the late 80's Japan's domestic economy and position in the world economy was in a better position than it was twenty years prior. By 1988, twenty four of the world's largest banks were Japanese (Andressen, 2002; 171-174). The workers of Japan worked under the lifetime employment benefits. But, the Japanese workers have forsaken their own quality of life for financial gain (Andressen, 2002; 202). We shall see this over and over again as we discuss some of the disillusionment social disillusionment among Japanese society.

By the 1990's, things went wrong, their growing economy busted and entered a period of recession, since the early 90's. Today, the once second largest economy, in terms of purchasing power, is now the third. Many travelers' reports that a cup of coffee would cost ten dollars, dining out required a small loan from the bank, rents were astronomical, and living conditions crowded. This was their sacrifice for their economic growth (Andressen, 2002; 202). Creating policy adjustments would inhibit economic growth, and to adjust policies would be difficult because of Japan being a very traditional culture. In 1993, twenty one largest banks in Japan claimed \$145 billion loans and one-third was believed to be lost forever, a possible conclusion presented was creative book keeping (Andressen, 2002; 181). Japanese companies were wary to lay off their workers, but with this economic predicament many felt compelled to do so. Their

widely accepted system of lifetime employment was not viable anymore, sending shockwaves of anxiety through the society (Andressen, 2002; 182). Workers were, either, being laid off or restructured. Many were forced to take the lower level position when they were middle managers prior to that.

There is a term known as *karoshi*, known as death from overwork, is believed to take 10,000 Japanese lives per year. Working has become a necessary evil in their society, no longer for personal satisfaction. Stress and pressure motivate individuals towards this kind of death.

#### *Social and educational issues*

This is the heart of the problem displayed in Great Teacher Onizuka. The youth are facing severe pressures from competition from schools, to conform, employment, and cramped living spaces (Andressen, 2002; 206-209). The economic recession of the early 1990's created a negative affect of disillusionment and lack of faith in the existing system, where secure employment is no longer viable (Andressen, 2002; 197). These youths did not experience the pains of war, reconstruction of Japan, nor the sacrifice that created the economic "miracle." However, they have known peace, stable education, good healthcare, and a large range of consumer goods.

A casual glance at the statistics from the educational system of Japan would create awe at their educational system, in comparison to the education of America. Japan does not lump children by skills and tracks, instead, they believe that all children are inherently good and with proper guidance every child would be able to succeed, therefore, developmentally and mentally challenged children are grouped with regular students. They mainstream these children in with "normal" children in classrooms. Japanese students are in school for the majority of the year, with two months for vacation in the summer. Yet they are not in class the entire year; the

schools provide festivals, special activities, and programs which help maintain school loyalty and enjoyment. Catherine Lewis (1996) states that art, music, physical education, home making, and special activities are as important as mathematics and science in Japanese education. These are mandatory courses that every child has to take by law from the Ministry of Education. The Ministry of Education's goals for the students of elementary school is to generate interest in learning, nationalism, reverence of life, reverence of the arts, and exercise (Lewis, 1996). While the United States press educators to show "accountability" measured by achievement tests and standardized testing, Japan, encompasses the matters of the heart and soul with the mind (Lewis, 1996). The United States neglect the arts and aesthetic skills, but the Japanese educational system creates a much broader mat of education for the children.

Instead of harsh disciplinary action, the teacher encourages by positive and negative reinforcement. The teacher encourages the students' positive actions by paying attention the positive actions, while neglecting the negative. Thus, the teacher suppresses and eventually decreases the likelihood of the unwanted behavior from occurring. A six year old boy named Shoji Itoh would repeatedly jump out and shout 'baka yaro' (you are a jerk) at the teacher (Lewis, 1996). Normally a teacher from America would either discipline the child, while giving attention to the unwanted behavior or send the child to the principal's office which increases the likelihood of the unwanted behavior. Attention is gold for children they will do anything for it. Ms. Nakanishi places her arms around Itoh and told him that he was smart by praising and encouraging him whenever he gave the right answer (Lewis, 1996). The teachers appeal to the feelings of objects which help the student-teacher relationship, an example of this is "if you break your hat, your mother will cry" (Lewis, 1996). Teachers enable students room for misbehavior and keep a low profile as authority figures. They trust the students to work things

out themselves and the student leaders in the classroom to maintain healthy and disciplined attitudes. The students take care and clean up the school creating a sense of ownership and love of that school.

What happens when the student enters middle school after elementary school? It is an awkward transition. The move was a transition from a free and warm environment to a stricter school setting. Where inequality of education within children of different SES, now broadens between those of a higher socioeconomic status and those of lower SES status. Much evidence has found that those of higher SES are more likely to perform better in school and have a better chance of getting the top high school and occupation in the future. Just the same as in America, those of higher SES have better chances of getting into the desired schools and perform in tests in comparison to those of lower SES. The students are rigorously educated with a rote education method to help prepare them for the entrance exams to get into high schools. What is at stake if a child does not get into a well known high school is his future. Many colleges and occupational places look at the high school that the child goes to as part of their acceptance process. This makes it imperative for those students to forgo their life for their studies causing the current turmoil in the middle and high schools. Not just for the students, but also for the teachers as well. Mothers, teachers, and the students receive tremendous pressure from the schools, the board of education, and other parents to succeed. The mothers are seen as the ones who encourage and rear the children to success in schools. An adolescent who was not accepted to the desired university will bring shame to the mother (Andressen, 2002; 198). So what will these students do now with all this pressure to get into a well known high school and university? Enlist into cram schools. The typical school day in Japan lasts around till almost 5 o'clock and then those that can afford it goes to cram schools which will keep them until night. The Ministry

of Education is concerned about uniformity and standardizing the schools and the growing rates of school violence and assorted problematic behaviors displayed by the students (Andressen, 2002; 198). It is currently estimated that 100,000 high school students are refusing to go to school.

Some of the problems lie in the Confucian style of teaching, which may lack in critical and creative thinking. The competitive entrance exam has led to many problems. Firstly there is a positive correlation between what university one attends and the future occupation one gets (Andressen, 2002; 197). “Shiken Jigoku”, examination hell, is also positively correlated with the entrance exams, since only one of sixteen applicants make it into the prestigious universities (Andressen, 2002; 198). The students who could not make it into prestigious universities cause severe stress within the student body and for themselves. This increased the amount of criticisms that created propositions to eliminate of the examination system with an alternative form of education (Andressen, 2002; 199). What happens to the talented individuals who are inept in written exams? They will have to fulfill their ambitions by alternative methods to succeed, but those methods will cost a tremendous amount of money and effort to maneuver around in this rigid social system (Andressen, 2002; 200).

The education system is also heavily gender and social status biased. The females take part in “hanayome shugyo,” training to become brides, which is preceded by marriage. Women, now, have higher access to education, but that is still only an ideal. In 1999, 29 percent of females completed high school and went to universities, 46 percent of men went to high school and to universities. Just about 2 percent of the male population went to junior college, while 20 percent of women went to junior college (Andressen, 2002; 200). What do these rates tell us is that more men go to universities than junior colleges, while less women go to universities, but

more opt to go to junior colleges. The situation is much better than the past. Only in 1960 the percent of women in all forms of university or college settings was 3 percent. Today they may, though, get education to get credentials to compete with men to get jobs, but it only will add to their marriage potential.

#### *GTO's relevance to the social issues of Japan*

The psychosocial issues that troubles Japan is illustrated in GTO in a satirical method. Instead of just telling the audience about the problems, the creator portrayed the characters working out these issues on their own with their coping methods. Each main character represents at least one psychosocial issue, across cultures from either bullying within classes to pressures from outside sources to succeed. Each student has their own problem with Eikichi Onizuka serving as a catalyst for those students to redeem themselves and cope to become a better individual.

#### *Nanako Mizuki*

Nanako was the first student ever to be touched by Onizuka's new methods of teaching. Nanako's problem is not directly a psychological problem, but rather a social issue. Her parents do not see eye to eye and hardly communicate with each other in their own household. This created a real physical barrier and mental barrier between the two and insecurity, depression, and instability within Nanako. Both parents neglected their daughter because of their work. The desire for attention, created the forms of classroom pranks created in Onizuka's classroom. Later on, Onizuka breaks down the physical barrier between the parents' rooms when Nanako finally confesses, but it was Nanako who breaks the mental barrier between the parents.

#### *Noboru Yoshikawa*



This student was the very first student of the new school who accepted Onizuka and wanted him as a friend. He spends most of his time playing video games and watching Japanese animation. But being introverted and reclusive makes him a great target for bullying. In America, we have already seen what bullying has done to victims, with extreme cases seen in the school shootings in San Diego and Columbine. Yoshikawa attempts to commit suicide, but Onizuka saves him twice by cushioning his fall. Yoshikawa is tired of being picked on and wants it to end, since he has no friends his attempt is a call to see if anyone would care if he died. Suicides are common in Japan and in the rest of the world. Luckily in the United States the rates of suicide have remained relatively the same. Noboru represents the one who is trying very hard to compete, but being bullied back into his corner. Onizuka's lesson for Noboru is that there is someone who will be his friend. By the middle of the manga it is discovered that the bully, Anko Uehara, has a crush on Noboru.

#### *Kikuchi Yoshito*

Kikuchi represents the student who was smart enough, but was not able to get into the prestigious school that he wanted. Taken out of the context from the live action version of GTO, Kikuchi was not able to get into the school of his choice because of an illness, thus creating the idle youth lifestyle. He believes that he does not need teachers or friends because they do not study as voracious as him nor live the same lifestyle as him. Possible reasons for this are social acceptance and parental influence. We do not see the father in the story, but we do see the influence of the mother on the teenager. Parents, although never stating explicitly, tend to want their children affiliate with friends of the same SES, and culture. Onizuka's lesson for Kikuchi is not to take friends and friendships for granted because friendships should not be based on a set of ideals, they should be for who they are.

### *Kunio Murai*

Not only does he have an oedipal complex, but he is also an aggressive youth who requires attention from people. He was raised by his mother, and has a general distrust of adults. Society shunned Julia Murai after her boyfriend broke up with her when it was discovered that she was pregnant at the age of 13. Even though premarital sex, in the researcher's opinion is not right, it is even worse to shun and deny the rights to the mother and child. The hardship that bares down on Kunio has helped create the situation that he is presently in with school. In his mind he believes that all adults are repulsive and treat others the way that his mother has been treated. Onizuka makes many attempts to show Kunio that not all adults are like that. He teaches Kunio that most adults are perverted and crude at times, but they do not back down when it is important or when they have to protect someone that they love.

### *Nomura Tomoko*

Nomura Tomoko is a shy female with low self esteem. She needs people's recognition in order to feel good about herself. After Miyabi removed her from her clique, she became like a lost puppy waiting for someone to love her again. In school she is horrible in academics and most of the teachers look down on her because of that. Not just her teachers and friends, but her family as well. This constant social belittling on Tomoko is harmful to her self esteem and behaviors. She feels repressed and that she believes that she cannot do anything right without someone to help her or transitional object. Through these transitional objects, she uses fantastical thinking to create imaginary stories that display her natural abilities in acting and in drama. Onizuka was the only one who saw this talent to help Tomoko realize this talent by putting to show her and everyone else that she is a talented individual. Tomoko represents an average adolescent female. Being rejected by one's clique is a serious detriment in the life of an

adolescent, and hence, Tomoko feels tremendous depression when she got ousted from her group of friends. Onizuka not only teaches Tomoko to be herself, but that she can be recognized for her personality instead of her image.

### *Urumi Kanzaki*

Urumi Kanzaki is a genius of over 200 IQ, but was artificially created from the sperm of a genius and her mother's ovum. However intelligent she is, she is also emotionally devoid. There are several issues presented with this character; first, the effects of the lack of a loving environment and secondly, the controversial topic of "nature versus nurture." An emotionally neglected child will always come with a bag of negative issues that will need to be resolved, loss of self worth, lack of empathy, low self esteem, lack of confidence, and other forms of emotional disabilities. Urumi may be intellectually well stimulated beyond what is considered normal limits, but there was never much care given from her primary care giver. It is believed that the artist poses a question of nature versus nature with this character, Urumi Kanzaki. Are we born intelligent or is it an environmental stimulus that provides intelligence. Many scientists believe that it is a combination of both genetics and environmental stimuli that bolsters intelligence. Onizuka also believes that it is both that creates and promotes intelligence, especially with empathy, would create the model child that the artist creates.

### *Koji Fujiyoshi*

Koji Fujiyoshi represents a member of the working class family. Common in lower and working class families are multiple children, Fujiyoshi has five or six other siblings. His mother works very hard to enable her son to go to Serin academy. A lot of families are forced to work

hard so they could send one child off to a prestigious school. In the United States, Alissa Quart (2003) reports that there is a notion that one must get into a “brand name” university to make it. One case reports with one girl feeling that it was imperative that she get into an Ivy league school because there would not be any jobs that would accept her if she did not (Quart, 2003; 146). It is becoming more aware that both cultures, in terms of where one has to go to school, are becoming more alike.

### *Miyabi Aizawa*

Depending on which version that you are viewing, the motivations for Miyabi’s actions differ. However, she is one of the main reasons why the entire class revolts in against the teachers. In the original manga, she purports that she was raped by the teacher that she admired it was discovered later that she lied about the rape. In the Anime version of GTO, her best friend had a relationship with the teacher, but after it was discovered that she was pregnant, her best friend committed suicide. In the live action version, her boyfriend was forced to transfer but died in an accident. Since the manga is the original concept, the researcher will focus on the manga version for Miyabi. What occurrences led to Miyabi’s actions? Close examination of her SES, environment, and biological factors is needed to be examined. Miyabi comes from an upper class family, which in front looks like a “healthy” family model. Underneath the “skin” of that family shows that both the father and the mother are cheating on each other and lying to the daughter. Creating a multi-faceted façade, Miyabi adopts her parents’ way of life for her own. The environment around her reinforced her own behavior to create her façade as the victim of a rape. Miyabi did not realize her parents’ activities until she became an adolescent. She went through her entire developmental stages of adolescence with this behavior being unnoticed.

Onizuka teaches that Miyabi and her family, as well as everyone else, to take responsibility for their actions.

### *Hiroshi Uchiyamada*

Vice-principal Hiroshi Uchiyamada, in GTO, represents that middle manager who fears being restructured or, worse, being fired. With constant worries about rent, the increasing amount of loans, his daughter's future, and his own health, it is impossible to see how Uchiyamada not represent the average worker in Japan. Andressen would also call Uchiyamada an example of an "economic animal," sacrificing his quality of life for financial gain (Andressen, 2002; 198). As a matter of fact, most of the teachers at Holy Forest academy are guilty of this as well. They all ignored their lives for their financial gain. As an educator, he preaches the ideals of the past. Disillusioned about the future, those very same students are cynical about their perspectives in this tumultuous economy as well as a marked amount of cynicism towards the so-called "traditional" teacher. Uchiyamada represents more than just the middle manager, but also the ideals of the 50's. He grew up during the 50's to 60's, during the Pacific War between the United States and Japan. He is familiar with the economic boom that started in the late 60's into the late 1980's. Making him believe, that the once impoverished nation, was now an economic superpower by miracle one that could heal its own wounds by its strong authoritarian methods. It this ideal is where the conflict between Onizuka and Uchiyamada begins. Their two different ideals clash, and do not look for a compromise.

### *Eikichi Onizuka*

Eikichi Onizuka represents some ideal methods to solving the problems in schools, whereas Azusa Fuyutsuki represents the real person and how a real person might attempt to deal

with these problems. From an initial view, one would question his teaching but with a closer look, he teaches Sociology. The key to how Onizuka teaches is the subtlety of his teaching, while the lavish antics cover it up. However other teachers and parents do not see his overarching lessons, but believe that his once punk life will always make him a punk. Peter H. Kim, Donald L Ferrin, Cecily D. Cooper, and Kurt T. Dirks (2004), confirm this in their study stating that someone would still label someone else a miscreant, even if he hasn't done a wrong thing in years (Kim, Ferrin, Cooper, & Dirks; 2004). However negative the label may be, it did not hinder Onizuka from his goals he continued to strive for his goals. Onizuka sets up a multi-faceted theme to the readers. One of those themes is to be to not let labels and brand names rule your life. Onizuka was once one of those troublemakers in his class. Hence, he knows fully what belittlement from a teacher can do to a young person. Maybe that is why he can handle his classes so well.

### *Discussion*

The researchers state that trust was generally thought to develop over time; recent observations suggest that individuals can exhibit large levels of trust even without some sorts of interpersonal history (McKnight et al. 1998; Meyerson, Weick, & Kramer; 1996). Apologies seem to weaken trust because it implies the acknowledgement of the guilty party, but also creates a sense of responsibility. But trust can be repaired if the mistrusted parties take, at least, some ownership for destroying the trust. Even if apologizing does acknowledge guilt, the signals from an apology is intended that the guilty party wants to avoid my similar violations and rebuild trust (Kim, Ferrin, Cooper, & Dirks; 2004). This strengthens Onizuka's point that once one takes responsibility for one's actions, trust will slowly follow. Even those suffering from psychological harm, generally have a more favorable impression of the perpetrator once an

apology is given. Research in social dilemmas demonstrate that, in short term interactions, apologies can be very advantageous and highly affective in re-establishing cooperation (Kin, Ferrin, Cooper, & Dirks; 2004).

A problem seen with apologizing, though, is the acknowledgement of guilt. According to this model, this guilt would damage trust greatly. Therefore denial, represents a more effective response to a trust violation, which gives the accused party the benefit of the doubt (Kim, Ferrin, Cooper, & Dirks; 2004). This gives the guilty party leeway that the person does not have to take responsibilities for their actions and relieve them from rectifying the behavior. This may be the case with Miyabi and many of the teachers, denial. If the person removes denial, interventions led by Onizuka may win trust back.

Many problems seen with the economic and education system is due, partially, to the unwillingness to reform Japanese society. The economic turmoil that contemporary Japan faces are due to the need of reforms, politicians borrow extensively from corporations to fund their campaigns. This makes economic reforms an entirely tricky quagmire for politicians. The politicians will always be stuck in debt to those corporations that supported them through the campaign, and will be stuck in trying giving aid to citizens. The school system is also in the same position as the politicians with the corporations. Since both institutions are intertwined between the two.

The characters in GTO do not want to take responsibility for their actions and not sure of their lives. Eikichi Onizuka is the form of intervention that the characters need. However he only gives them ideas and the characters put those ideas into actions so that they can take ownership to their changes. If the characters took responsibilities of their actions and shared the blame, the problems seen in class 2-4 would not have existed. Taking this into the realm of

reality, if everyone took ownership and responsibility of their misdeeds and mistakes, this world would be a better place.

This study does not have empirical studies into account for the issues described. The work was done through literature review and interpretation of the artwork. What needs to be done to continue this work is field work inside Japan to gather empirical evidence that the occurrences described are true. Another issue with this study was that it did not incorporate all of the characters in GTO.



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