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Is This Pickup Artist Actually... Helping People?

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by Sharon Adarlo



“Once you go Asian, you can’t go Caucasian. Once you go yellow — *hello!*” JT Tran told his audience of hopeful men.

This was in a Manhattan conference room on Valentine’s Day, and JT was running a weekend-long bootcamp with a simple mission: to help Asian men get some skin in the dating game, and maybe even get laid.

The class’s methods and language were taken straight from the pickup artists’ world. And yet, the course also

resembled a rollicking post-grad symposium on race. Yellow fever. That infamous OKCupid survey that showed Asian women overwhelmingly preferred white men. The culture clash between an Asian upbringing and a Western world that has different expectations for success. And the ease with which people speak racistly of Asian men — like the way Lorde and her Asian boyfriend were recently torn into on Twitter.

Laboring in a dating world that seems stacked against his kind, JT, whose name is Jerry and who bills himself as a transformational figure in the Asian community, is a man on a mission to transform the Western image of Asian men from asexual nerds into shagworthy dating material — all through the science and/or art of picking up women.

The depth of subjects covered during the course belied the sleazy promotional photos of JT and his students, bathed in the sharp light of a camera flash, sucking face and embracing mostly white, leggy women at clubs and bars, as displayed on his dating company website, ABCs of Attraction.

As a Filipino American woman and feminist, I had a problem with these photos. Are white women the ultimate, idealized dating goal? Aren't pickup artists inherently scammy and sleazy? It was troublesome. But I'm the wife to another Filipino, and the sister of five brothers, one of whom is comically inept with women, and so I came with an open mind. Can a pickup artist actually make men into better, more confident versions of themselves?

“If you want the girl of your dreams, you have to be the man of her dreams,” JT said, during his lectures. That's a non-gross principle that just might work. Throughout the weekend's bootcamp, the eight men in attendance actually changed. A tall and shy Chinese student talked to the most girls during the group's first nightclub outing. On the next night out, another student, who had a halo of scruffy black hair around his bald head, underwent a makeover, danced with girls, and managed to score a phone number. There was even kissing.



Often clothed in a sports coat with a dress shirt unbuttoned almost mid-chest, his hair styled into a small quiff, JT has a round, open face and is stockily built. He is five foot five. He is 35, from Los Angeles, and Vietnamese American. He is a short, average-looking Asian guy.

But he also has a certain panache. He moves like a man completely sure of himself — a turn-on for some women. A skilled flirt, he doesn't let his physical attributes deter him.

Raised in a poor family with two brothers and a tiger mom (speaking of stereotypes!) who emphasized school, JT was a cliché: a nerdy, studious, shy Asian boy. He went to prom by himself, before jetting off to major in aerospace engineering at the Florida Institute of Technology.

After college, he worked as a subcontractor for NASA and the Air Force — literally as a rocket scientist, he said — and settled in Los Angeles. He was working out. Driving a Mercedes. A nice pad at the beach. But he had zero luck in the dating game.

“I tried everything. Speed dating. Match. eHarmony rejected me. They told me I was too cerebral and analytical. ‘We have no matches for you,’” he said. “What's wrong? No girls chose me. It was brutal that my market value in the dating world was non-existent.”

Things changed when he became a student of Mystery, the infamous, funny-hat-wearing pickup artist who was immortalized in Neil Strauss' book *The Game: Penetrating the Secret Society of Pickup Artists*. The lessons, which encompassed psychology and self-improvement, changed his life.

“My God, this is possible,” he said. “This was like discovering light and fire. It was the first time I ever thought that talking to girls is a learnable skill.”

He gave himself the nickname the Asian Playboy and started a blog detailing his successes and failures — a kind of “Sex and the City” chronicle for Asian men.

His recreational pickup practice turned into a profession when he answered a call from a Chinese woman who begged him to help her son, who was getting harassed by neo-Nazis in Toronto. He helped his first student gain confidence to deter his bullies along with the skills to talk to girls.

“I never really thought of making this into a career,” said JT. “Just fighting racism and being a role model to other Asian men.” But by 2005, he'd started his company.



The boot camp had eight students. The men were a motley group. A doctor, a scientist, and everything in between, they made up various ethnicities from Filipino to Chinese. One had come from Newfoundland, Canada. They were of varying levels of attractiveness and fitness, some handsome, some overweight. They had differing levels of experience with women, from limited exposure to a few coming off long term relationships. Their names have been changed to protect their identity.

There was Eugene, the balding Chinese scientist with the heavy Fresh Off the Boat (FOB) accent. He came in wearing a wrinkled military-style shirt that made him look like a reject from the Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Heart's Club Band. Total ladyboner killer.

Derrick was a cute Korean American who had traveled to the boot camp from Northern Virginia and had told no one about his weekend plans. He was coming off a long-term relationship and was ready to branch out beyond dating other Koreans.

Chris, the Filipino from Montreal, probably had more experience with women than the other guys. He had long-term relationships before and was comfortable in clubs, but felt like he needed a refresher course due to a demanding job.

Henry, the tall shy guy from mainland China, had the same deep voice as Dolph Lundgren.

One student, Ken, was Jewish — and was taking the course a second time. The 20-something sported a nimbus of blonde curls and social skills that deteriorated under a punishing 60-hour work week on Wall Street. JT said he's had white students like Ken take the course before, which is marketed to not just Asians but also other ethnicities and “not classically good looking” men. (“Imagine if we taught clients who didn't have any unfair disadvantages (like stereotypes) and all they needed were the techniques. It's like throwing gasoline and napalm all at the same time on a 10-foot bonfire,” JT once wrote.)

The course started unceremoniously.

“I call this a tough love program but without the love,” said JT, who pointed to a message on the computer screen: “If you are not ready for constructive criticism, then you should not be here! Over this weekend: I may hurt your feelings.”

What followed was a lecture on self-improvement, about putting in the work to become better, more attractive men, and psychological principles about dealing not just with women but also with other guys. JT rattled off his success stories: the virginity lost, the multiple sexmates, students who dated celebrities, serious girlfriends, the weddings. One student repaired his relationship with his parents. Another quit drugs.

“It’s how much you put in,” he said. “The possibilities of your success are limitless.”

Befitting his background as an engineer, he put up sine wave charts on the dance and pull of flirtatious encounters. There was a flood of material. There were intricate tips to remember about voice tonality.

“My God,” one overwhelmed student whispered.

JT had his students act in role-playing games with his trainers and his designated wingwoman, Katie.

Katie was a tall, pretty brunette who exuded an unforced sensuality. In a past life, she was a pageant queen. With her face framed by wavy brown hair, she made the perfect wingwoman as she gently corrected the students with a flirty, sweet smile.

There were three other trainers, all former students: Andrew, an elfin Taiwanese American, was a daredevil. He had played with poi and had old burn marks on his chest that looked like mild eczema scars; Drew, the beefy bro-ish Vietnamese American guy, with the strong, empathic handshake; Jared, the handsome Jewish guy, who had a bedroomy stare and a fine, slender figure.

There were instructions:

“Body language is more important than what you say.”

“If you feel nervous, wiggle your toes. Nobody can see your toes.”

“Attractive women are very rarely single for long. There’s an infinite supply of desperate horny men.”

“Nice guys. They don’t rock the boat, but nobody likes them. It’s okay to be polarizing.”

They also did “kino exercises,” a PUA classic, where the students practiced getting a woman’s attention by turning her shoulder to pivot towards them. They all practiced on Katie and the trainers, who corrected them on their touch, approach, and all the cues of the body.



Two hours in, JT deemed the men ready to hit the field.

It was cold and dirty snow littered the ground.

That night, the DL on Delancey Street on the Lower East Side was full of couples, packs of drunk single chicks coming off work, men prowling in groups, and us. I met up there with my friend Emily Chu, who is Chinese American, pretty, and a lesbian, and who was just as excited and curious about the outing as I was.

After smokes in a chilly patio with a few of the men, JT parked himself next to a lounge area and set his students loose in the loud nightclub.

They approached girls one after another. They kined. A few were brushed off by women; the the trainers stood by to quickly give advice to the rejected students. Henry, the Chinese Dolph Lundgren, started talking to a tipsy black woman, who looked like she'd just left her cubicle farm. She exhibited actual interest.

One of the students, a chubby doctor from the hinterlands of Canada, disappeared with a woman to the dance floor. Eugene — poor Eugene! — stuck out like a sore thumb with his baggy military-style clothes and bad haircut. He would approach women but couldn't sustain a conversation.

The other students had varying levels of success. A few got phone numbers. Henry won the distinction of approaching the most girls that night.

And whenever I approached the bar for a drink, men — white, black, and Asian — would try to kino me. One young Asian guy with a weird Donald Trump pompadour grabbed me by the arms and led me to his group of other Asian friends.

“Did you know you look like this Anime character?” he said, showing me a picture of a short, four-eyed Asian anime girl with black bangs and wearing kiddie clothes; a chibi.

“You suck at this,” I told him.

One 20-something white man pivoted me on the shoulder and introduced me to his other white male buddy.

“Hi. I am married,” I said.

It was strange and funny. I wasn't trying to attract attention. I had greasy bangs (I was on a no-shampoo kick) and I thought I looked rather innocuous with jeans, leather jacket, and my heavy Harvard Bookstore bag slung over my shoulder. I'd fancied that would serve as a chastity belt — *no man shall pass*.

“They are wannabes,” said JT, about these other would-be pickup artists at the club.

Despite being subjected to the same maneuvers myself in the club, it was actually gratifying to see JT's guys approach women, fall, and dust themselves off again — and then succeed. I actually clapped when Henry did a successful pivot on a woman and engaged her in a long chit chat.

Emily spent the night alternately chatting with JT and the students and thumbing through girls on Tinder. She was impressed too. “Online dating has made me lazy,” she said.

The night ended at a pho place in Koreatown, where the students and trainers dissected their encounters or “sets.”

The outing could be summed up by that Samuel Beckett quote: “Ever tried. Ever failed. No matter. Try again. Fail again. Fail better.”



If it had not been for the pickup scene, JT would have probably fulfilled his childhood dream and trained to be an astronaut, instead of teaching Asians the finer points of approaching women, seduction, dating, and grooming.

But there is a need. His company’s mission dovetails with certain facets about being yellow in a Western hegemony, where white men are at the top of the social and economic pecking order.

Let’s get to the facts first: In that [OKCupid survey](#) that basically showed everybody is racist, white men got the most replies from women of every ethnicity.

Looking at white, Asian, and Hispanic women:

“These three types of women only respond well to white men. More significantly, these groups’ reply rates to non-whites is terrible. Asian women write back non-white males at 21.9%, Hispanic women at 22.9%, and white women at 23.0%.”

Specifically, Asian women responded to Asian men 22% percent of the time, and to white men, 29% of the time.

“White women prefer white men to the exclusion of everyone else — and Asian and Hispanic women prefer them even more exclusively,” OKCupid concluded.

Data from the Facebook app, Are You Interested, showed that white, Latino, and Asian women [again responded most frequently](#) to white men. All the men, except for Asians, responded the most to Asian women. Tellingly, Asian men responded the most to Latinas.

A study on intermarriage [by Pew](#) showed that Asian women are twice as likely to marry outside of their race than Asian men.

This data is borne out in the field during boot camp. The Asian women JT and his cohorts encountered during class outings either walked away or explicitly said they were not into Asian men.

“I used to obsess over it,” said JT, about being snubbed by Asian women and the many Asian women with white men he would encounter. “I saw it constantly.”

Why the marked preference for white men?

Is it a Western culture that glorifies white men and stereotypes, slanders and marginalizes other races? Asian men are seen as nerdy, feminine, short nobodies with small penises, black men as loudmouth gangbangers with not much income potential, Hispanic men as short, creepy guys who beat their girlfriends.

I see this stereotyping at my husband's work, where his non-Asian, mostly white co-workers call him "a small Filipino guy." (My husband, five foot seven, has the same build as Bruce Lee, slender and muscular.)

"You lose status when you date an Asian guy. Socially, you are at the bottom of the pecking order," said JT.

Case in point, the vitriol directed towards Lorde and her boyfriend James Lowe, who's been called every name in the book online.

"That upset the natural order of things," said JT, who called Lorde's boyfriend a hipster.

JT also believes Asian American women imbibed this cultural stereotype of weak Asian men and implicitly prefer white men because they are at the top of the power structure in this country. Tall white guys are the type that Asian women go after, at a significantly higher rate, he said.

A dirty little secret in the pickup world is that white professional pickup artists can inflate their success numbers if they just target Asian women, said JT, who described it as a "cheat code." Many white pickup artists have yellow fever, which is a whole different can of worms.

JT described many professional white pickup artists as former nerds, like himself, and they gravitated towards Asian girls because they are seen as studious and nerdy like themselves. And there's the whole image of Asian woman that they are drawn to: different and exotic.

"He has social status as a white male. It's easy to pick up girls, of course, because you are a decent looking white guy and you are targeting Asian women," said JT.

I asked him repeatedly: "Are Asian women easy?"

"You are marrying into the ruling class," JT said. "I am not blaming Asian women because they use it to make life easier."

As for the snubs from Asian women, JT left those hang ups a long time ago.

"Nowadays I don't give it much thought. The only thing you can control is what you do," said JT. He himself has a thing for blondes.

He encourages his students, who are mostly Asian, to branch out and see women from other races. A great deal of Asian men in the U.S. will never get married, he said, citing census figures. (In 2012 government data, 36% of Asian men in the U.S. aged 30 to 34 have never married, compared to 22% of Asian women the same age.) So it's best to expand your dating pool, he said.

"The biggest misconception about Asian men is that they only date Asian women," said JT, more than once during the boot camp.



The strangest thing happened during boot camp. I found that many of the lessons he gave to his students could apply

to me, an Asian woman.

Like many Asian families, my parents were strict towards me and my five brothers — probably stricter than other similar families. They forbade us to hang out with friends and made it difficult for us to participate in after school activities. Academics and church were to be the main focus of our lives.

When I went to college and into the workplace, I was ill-equipped and socially inept. I felt out of place, an alien in my own country.

“They taught us to survive, but not to thrive,” JT said about Asian immigrant parents.

Drawing from the same conclusions as that [Wesley Yang story on Asian Americans in *New York* magazine](#), I also decided that the tools and standards of success my parents had instilled in me were not going to help me in the workplace or the social arena. I was great dealing with institutions that had quantitative measurements, like earning grades. But navigating the social minefield of college and work was tough. It was difficult for me to make friends and allies in either place, and difficult to make my voice heard above the din of more socially skilled peers.

Some people call this barrier to achievement for Asians the bamboo ceiling — a series of factors and processes that impede the advancement of Asians in the working world. Sure there’s racism in this process, but I blame mostly cultural reasons. We’re taught to be quiet and diffident to authority. There’s a mindset that many Asians take on that hurts their self-esteem: not being white enough, not being American enough.

When I was a crime reporter, I could be assertive and aggressive when I interviewed people in the streets. When it came to dealing with difficult bosses or coworkers, I was meek, and I hated myself for it.

This learned cultural behavior doesn’t help us in the Western working world, and also doesn’t do Asian American men any favors in the dating realm, where they are seen as quiet, weak and passive. Easily cowed. All the while, they’re battling an internal racism that they don’t quite measure up.

So I couldn’t help but see pieces of myself in the students. The goal here, after all, even when couched in the language of pick up artistry, was to better themselves and overcome whatever cultural or learned behavior that was thrown up in their path.

Their success on the second night out was gratifying.

Eugene got a haircut (thank fucking God!) and he bought new, more stylish clothes. He had much better luck on the second night’s outing. At one point, two blondes were vying for his attention.

And Chris chatted up and then made out with a model-beautiful Indian woman on the second club outing.

“Even I was jealous,” said Drew.

Three girls were looking for Max, a Chinese guy. Two girls kissed Derrick.

“Yes, it was awesome,” he said, and smiled.

“There were multiple people on fire,” said Andrew.

After the boot camp was over, I asked JT, “Have you thought of modifying your classes for the corporate world? For both men and women, to combat the bamboo ceiling?”

Taking a course like that would have probably saved me many years of trial and error. The journey to be surer in myself might have been shorter.



I told friends and relatives that I was following these guys, and they chimed in with their take on JT and pickup artists.

A few asked for JT’s contact information. My shy brother, a gifted artist and illustrator, wanted me to give him the skinny on JT and his cohorts.

Another friend, who shall remain nameless and is clumsy with women, said: “I am horny. And I want to get laid. Do you think he can help me?” (“Uh, thanks for telling me,” I said.)

One of my best friends, Suleman, a Pakistani Canuck, wrinkled his nose at the numerous pictures of white women draped over the arms and laps of JT’s Asian students.

“They are just picking up drunk, stupid white girls,” he said. “I don’t think there’s any achievement in that. I think it says more about their racial insecurities than their ability to talk to woman.”

One female friend had strong negative feelings about the whole pickup scene. She called it predatory and manipulative — especially after the dustup over a Kickstarter campaign last year to fund a seduction guide that ostensibly encouraged rape and other creepy behaviors.

“They are objectifying women. We become interchangeable commodities,” she said.

That can be true. The PUA world runs the gamut from the horrific to the fascinating, with lots of stops in-between. (Reading materials on JT’s website, you can get all of it at once: the mercenary methods are also mixed with insight, like that a woman might resist hopping into bed with a strange man because of “the hazards it presents to her mind and body.”)

To me, pickup seems innocuous to other methods of snagging a mate, such as mail-order brides. I have a friend with an Asian fetish who has been cycling through long distance girlfriends from Philippines to Thailand. He would share photos of girls he was talking to online. At one point, he even shared a photo of me on his Facebook wall without my permission.

In light of exploitive practices such as those, JT is closer to someone with his heart in the right place.

“I thoroughly condemn any use of force against women, having been raised by a single mother myself who had to deal with domestic violence. As you yourself saw during the last day of the ABCs Of Attraction lecture, I always tell my students that when a woman says no, you stop (if, in fact, you as the man don’t stop first before she even says it),” he wrote to me.

After talking to girls he dated, he learned more about the vast extent of sexual assault. He took those lessons and the trials his mother had suffered to heart.

“The world is a dangerous place for women,” he told his students during a bit on how to make women feel comfortable and safe during the course of a hookup or date.

This talk, though, preceded a lecture on how to take a (consenting!) woman’s clothes off in two easy steps. In case you need to know: 1. After asking her to take off her shoes, slip off her thong and skirt in one move and 2. Unhook the bra and lift that off along with shirt. (My very deep thoughts on this matter: there should be a merit badge for that.)

When it was all over, students said they would recommend the course.

“I definitely learned a whole lot. If I didn’t take boot camp, I wouldn’t have learned this by myself for sure,” said Chris, the Canadian Filipino, probably the most experienced student.

“I took another boot camp but with a white guy. But I wanted something Asian specific,” said Eugene, the FOBish scientist. “It’s really good with social skills.”

The boot camp’s influence is more evident in JT’s former students turned trainers, who took the class’ lessons to heart. Drew turned his life around because of the course. Before he was henpecked and emotionally abused by his tiny Vietnamese girlfriend, who used her size to demonstrate her power over him, he said.

During a lull in the course, he showed me photos of women he had dated — all who appeared to have the same curves as [Daphne Joy](#), cover model and rumored mother of a child with 50 Cent. Drew’s last girlfriend was a busty, pretty black woman.

Andrew, JT’s Taiwanese American trainer, said the course changed him from a sad college student who was friendzoned a lot to the more confident man he is today.

“I was very good at hiding my emotions, but in reality I was really depressed,” he said. “I took the course and I admitted to myself I had to put the effort in to change.”

This was the same guy who, on the first night of boot camp, necked with a woman he had just met at the bar. Photos of him getting kissed by leggy white chicks adorn the company website.

And there is Jared, the 20-something Jewish trainer with the soulful eyes. It was hard for me to believe that he was a shy, more diffident person in the past.



But what about the master himself?

While running his dating business, he has had serious relationships, mostly with white women, one of whom got involved in the company. But he said he’s learned to separate “church and state,” especially after the relationship ended.

He's said he's looking to get married, but isn't in a hurry.

"I'm looking for an almost impossible alchemy of class and crass, beauty and practicality, style, wickedness and sexiness with an irreverent attitude who thumbs her nose at the establishment and healthy love of fun," he wrote to me after boot camp. He described his ideal woman to be in the mold of Audrey Hepburn, whatever race she happens to be.

Most likely she will be non-Asian. He admits to liking taller, gregarious women, but it also comes to simple practicality, he wrote. There are many Asian women who don't want to date Asian men, he again reminded me.

"Am I little jaded? Sure. It's hard not to be after 10 years of socializing and seeing female behavior condensed into a four-hour Darwinian struggle for survival that exposes the harsh, hypocritical and politically incorrect side of dating and sexual preference," he wrote. "But I'm still that rocket scientist who dreamed of being an astronaut when I was younger. I may not be as big of a romantic as when I was younger, but he's still there. The biggest difference is that I no longer put girls in the 'fantasy girlfriend zone' and instead treat them as normal human beings with all their flaws and foibles."

In March and April alone, JT will be teaching in San Francisco, Miami, Las Vegas and Atlanta. He may teach again in New York in the fall. Prices for the bootcamps are tiered by access, ranging from \$499 to \$2999.

At the end of the boot camp in February, JT turned to his students and gave them his version of a commencement speech.

"How many days are in a human lifetime? If you live to 100 years, that's 36,000 days. That's not a lot. Time is the most important non-renewable resource that you can never get back. You have already spent one third of it. Those first 12,000 days are gone. The best 12,000 days are right here, right now. Do it now. It's your turn to fulfill your destiny and not just lazily lay back." He paused. "Congratulations, you are all graduates."

Sharon Adarlo is a writer and artist based in Newark. She can be found at her [personal website](#) or on [Twitter](#).



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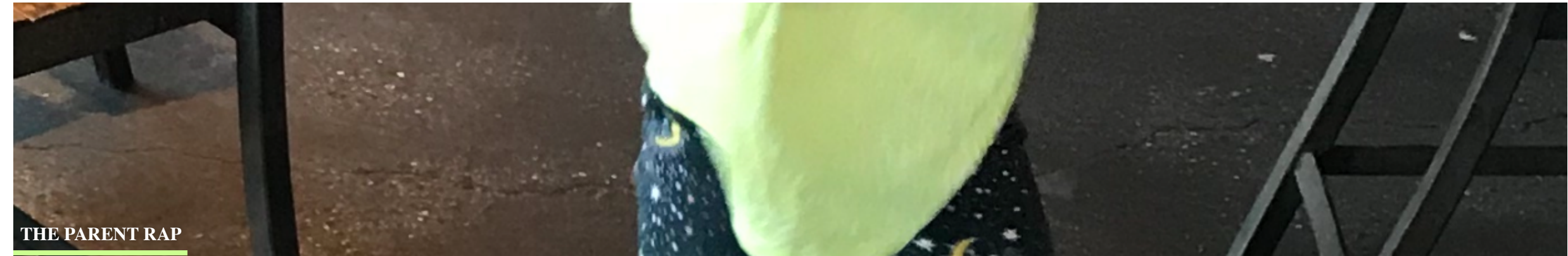
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