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Celebrating the Unruly Body: Race, Sexuality and the Politics of Pleasure in Margaret Cho's Stand-up Performances

This paper examines Korean American comedian Margaret Cho's stand-up comedy performances from *I'm the One that I Want* (2000) to *Beautiful* (2008) focusing on how she critiques racism, sexism, and homophobia through personal narratives about negotiating dominant notions of beauty, femininity and body size. I contextualize Cho's work historically and politically within that of other Asian American comics as well as within her own career trajectory. Through close readings of these performances, supplemented by reviews, interviews, and autobiographical material, I consider how Margaret Cho's popularity among progressive American and Australian audiences might signify for the emerging transnational visibility of Asian diasporic performers. Ultimately I argue that Cho's broad appeal lies in the seemingly contradictory mix of playful irony and straight earnestness used to describe, perform and refute racial and gender stereotypes, particularly those of Asian women.