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### The Damage of the White Media

The media portrays certain ideals that influence American society's view point. The media refers to any communication outlet including TV, magazines, and music. Hollywood is the main contributor to the media and mandates how people are portrayed. The media industry is mainly controlled by white men who portray different ethnic minorities through a white world view. Alongside with creating stereotypes and stigma, they create exoticism. Latin American and African American woman in the American mainstream media are exoticised and hypersexualized. This representation in media causes minority women to face the ideals of the white standards and creates pressure to act according to their media representation.

White culture uses the media to depict any ethnic minority outside of whiteness as exotic and sensual. Ethnic minorities are portrayed as exotic because they are different, reinforcing the idea that being white or having white features is the norm. Being from a foreign country makes people different, which automatically sparks curiosity in white people. Even if an ethnic minority is white-passing, when their nationality is revealed it heightens their sexual appeal. Would the person have the same sex appeal if they were from Georgia or Alabama? According to the Oxford dictionary, exoticism is “the quality of being attractive or striking through being colourful or unusual.” Minorities in media are portrayed in a hyper-accentuated view where their ethnic and cultural backgrounds are over emphasized.

Hypersexualization intensifies physical attributes and features in terms of sexuality to increase women's sex appeal. Women in film or television are portrayed with revealing, or no clothing, sexual inciting poses, and sexual expressions.

Henri Tajfel created the social identity theory. Using this theory, the public can understand how minority women struggle with relating to what is represented in the media. Social identification is how people self-identify in relation to others by what they have in common. The theory speaks about an "us vs them" based through social categorization. In terms of ethnic minorities it becomes "white vs non-white." According to Tajfel, "group members of an in-group will seek to find negative aspects of an out-group, thus enhancing their self-image." Humans search for "a sense of belonging to the social world." Lacking an honest representation in the media, ethnic minorities struggle with relating to the social world Tajfel talks about.

The media plays a prevalent role in exoticsim. A race gets called exotic because of the lack of representation there is in the mainstream media. However, when a minority is represented, it has either white wash representation or a representation of how white people see them. Rachel Kuo, writer for online magazine Everyday Feminism, says "Exotification is a reminder that women of color fail to meet Western, white standards of beauty that favor light skin and eyes, straight hair, and thin figures."

Latino women are hypersexualized by the media. This hypersexualization has to do with the roles assigned to actresses. A big contributor to latinias being seen as a sexual objects is due to the amount Miss Universe titles Latin America holds. Venezuela is the second country with most wins, totaling in 7, and Puerto Rico is the third, having five wins.

The exploitation of Latino women increased with popular stars contributing to exoticism. Actress Sofia Vergara increased exoticism with her portrayal of Gloria in *Modern Family*, and with it sparked a series of stereotypes. Vergara interprets a Latina trophy wife that is always in high heels, sexualized clothing, and hot headed. Suddenly, Latinas became a hot commodity and have the expectations of following the media's image of a Latina. Jennifer Lopez contributed to the stereotype of Latinas. Her fit body, and exploitation of her sexuality in her music videos increase the stereotype of a hot Latina.

According to *Cosmopolitan* magazine, the majority of Latinas are portrayed "in television, movies, or ads super-sexy — huge boobs, a voluptuous figure, always wearing a low-cut, skin-tight dress." A *New York Times* article discussed how Latina women are portrayed as "the emotional sex kitten." That media portrayal transfers into the real world where Latinas feel the obligation to dress explicitly or are expected to do so by white men in order to be accepted in society. Following the self identity theory, this big stereotypification can harm the way Latinas view themselves.

Latina women are seven times more likely than any other ethnicity to be shown nude or partially nude on screen. While Latino men are most likely to be wearing "tight, alluring or revealing clothing," according to the University of Pittsburgh's Center for Latin American Studies blog.

"The problem here is that the idea of the curvy, sexy and sultry Latina denies many Latinas their cultural identification based on their physical appearances and sexual attractiveness, alone," wrote a student of Portland State University for a class blog. It is hard for Latinas to escape this stereotype. The media has a powerful influence, therefore if Latina women keep

being represented that way it tells them they have to be that way, hence they will start adopting and becoming what the media wants them to be. Minority woman struggle with self-identification because the media portrays what they should be like, yet by not identifying with it, they lack the feeling of belonging.

The vast hypersexual portrayal increases the objectification of Latina women. The media representation helps feed the idea that Latina women are more sexual versus women from a different race. Latina women are a minority, hence, white men are more likely to intensify their objectification since they see Latina women as inferior.

In “Eating the Other: Desire and Resistance,” by Bell Hook, she further explains the ideology of exoticism. Hook refers to white culture as a commodity and ethnicity as a spice.

“...seasoning that can liven up the dull dish that is mainstream white culture.

Cultural taboos around sexuality and desire are transgressed and made explicit as the media bombards folks with a message of difference no longer being based on the assumption that ‘blondes have more fun’. The real fun is to be had by bringing to the surface all those ‘nasty’ unconscious fantasies and longings about contact with [a different ethnicity] embedded in the secret deep structure of white supremacy.”

Hook is not the only one that refers to ethnicity as a seasoning. White culture has normalized latinx being called ‘spicy’. The phrase “spicy Latina/o” has gained popularity, it objectifies and sexualizes the person. Spicy food is commonly consumed in Latin America, so white people use the word ‘spicy’ as an exotic way to call Latinx hot. Spicy is a culinary flavor, not a compliment.

Hook points out that the exoticism of a race comes from racism. White people fantasized about being with someone outside of their race, however, this was unattainable due to non-whites being considered inferior. The fantasy evolved into a fetish. A race cannot be a fetish, hence the term exoticism took a new meaning of the sexualization of a different ethnicity. A different race and ethnicity become a commodity for pleasure. Their culture and their bodies are regarded for the entertainment and use for the members of the dominant race, “who affirm their power over in intimate relations.”

The media is not exclusive to the screen. Exoticism also extends into music and closely relates to cultural appropriation. This is appreciating another culture because of its difference, yet not valuing it the same as their own. Electronic musician Jacob Ferrini, graduate from Berklee College of Music, understands how exoticism affects the music industry. Ferrini referred to music records pre-1980's. “If we look through records and music collections, we see foreign and distant lands as being exotic. Exoticisation can turn into appropriation because in the western world they are taking the [musical] traits in a rapid version of them and appropriating them to be exotic and be out there.” Ferrini said that white musicians take foreign influence to their advantage to be seen as progressive and gather attention. By appropriating foreign sounds, the music loses its real meaning because white people lack the deep cultural understanding of the sounds. Hence, music provides a method for white people to appropriate a culture without it being seen negatively. “It is a way for white people to be like look at us we are so foreign, we are so progressive,” Ferrini said. An example of exoticism in music is “La Esperanza” by German electronic musician Sven Vath. The techno track has no Latin influence, while portraying a

sensual female voice saying 'la esperanza' on loop. The title and language of the song is out of context, while the hypersexual voice exoticises Latin culture.

The way the media portrays minority women is distorted in order to fit the dominant race standards of beauty. This is the white standard, where their features, personality, and culture are modified to accommodate what the white male desires to see. When there is an ethnic representation in media it is because a white male decided that the actress fit a stereotype or white beauty standard.

White is the norm, labeling someone as exotic emphasizes that there is solely one standard of beauty. Having sex with a person from different ethnicity is considered something unusual. White people believe that a sexual experience with an ethnic minority will be extraordinary. Hence, white people hypersexualize ethnic minorities and see them as a sexual experiment. Different races become 'must have' experiences, they become part of a checklist.

Connie Johnson a graduate student of Minnesota State University did her dissertation on how ethnic minority women are hypersexualized in magazine covers. She looked at 278 popular magazine covers including Cosmopolitan, Glamor, Vogue, Seventeen, Teen Vogue, amongst others. Her criteria for hypersexuality focused on body language, outfits, and facial expression. Out of the 278 magazine covers only 52 of the covers displayed women of color.

"90% [of] the magazine covers with WOC had hypersexual images, contextual cues, and content. The percentage on magazine covers with women of color with ethnic traits being masked by whiteness was also 90%. Twelve, magazine covers of the 52, displayed images of WOC portraying objectification attributes. About 42 percent of magazine covers with WOC portrayed intensified exoticism attribute."

Boston University student Chiamaka Amaefuna, College of Arts and Sciences '21, explained her experience with exoticism. Exoticism in the context of blackness is when a black person has a distinguishing aspect that sets them aside from the other black people. The media white-washes the representation of Black women. Black women from a mixed ethnicity are considered more attractive than those solely black. To fit in with the white media standards, the black woman needs “to have curly hair, speak another language, [have] light skin and light eyes in order to be attractive, and those are all things that come with other cultures being added to black culture,” Amaefuna said.

“When I have my curly hair wig on, guys will approach me that will never approach me when I have my natural hair or my braids on. [The guy and I would] have been in a class for the last 3 months but now that I have a curly wig on you come and talk to me,” Amaefuna said.

The distinguishing factor can vary from speaking a different language or having a foreign name. Amaefuna was born in America, but her background is Nigerian, which is reflected in her name. “People will be talking to me and a friend at a party and they will ask what is my name, and I’ll say it’s Chiamaka, they’re like that’s foreign, that’s different, that is exotic,” said Amaefuna. She claims that people find her more attractive because she is exotic, and does not fit in into the typical American black person. Such stereotype is what has been set by the media portrayal of African Americans. “It is just unnecessary infatuation with foreign things,” Amaefuna said, “they expect my name to be stereotypical black and when it isn't, it is a pleasant surprise.”

Nigerian Emmy award winner and Boston University alumnus Uzo Aduba has also used her media influence to speak up on her name. She did not change her name to a conventional

‘white passing’ name when starting her acting career. In an interview with the *Improper Bostonian* she explained her reason for not changing her name. “My family is from Nigeria, and my full name is Uzoamaka... in grade school, because my last name started with an A, I was the first in roll call, and nobody ever knew how to pronounce it. So I went home and asked my mother if I could be called Zoe. I remember she was cooking, and in her Nigerian accent she said, “Why?” I said, “Nobody can pronounce it.” Without missing a beat, she said, “If they can learn to say Tchaikovsky and Michelangelo and Dostoyevsky, they can learn to say Uzoamaka.” Although the media shortens her name for easier western pronunciation, it still keeps its Nigerian origins.

Exoticism extends all the way to how a person speaks. The media’s hypersexualization of Latina women has associated their accents with being sexy, hence a whole language gets hypersexualized. A language is a method of communication, not a way to fulfill white desires. The media has hypersexualized the Spanish words for mom and dad. White men expect Latina women to call them “papi” in a sexual context, or use the term ‘mami’ as a sexual compliment. White people do not understand that Latinx use these terms to refer to their parents. White people further sexualize a language by saying the language sounds hot, sexy, passionate. A language should not be personified with explosive words such as hot, sexy, or even cute.

The media’s white standard creates the hypersexualization of ethnic minority women that leads to exoticism. The media creates a standard to which ethnic women are upheld and feeds white men’s fascination with them. The social identity theory explains why exoticism is damaging towards minority women. Latin American and African American women struggle with

their representation in media because they feel pressure to adopt certain standards or lack the sense of identifying with society.

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