

INTERNALIZING STEREOTYPES, PART 1 - FROM THE OUTSIDE IN

by *Racialicious* Special Correspondent [Latoya Peterson](#)

Dear average-sized penis,

Ugh. I don't really know how to say this. We've been in and around so much together. And I really do appreciate the effort you've put in thus far. But I'm sure you have sensed my growing disappointment over the years. I guess the bottom line is I expected you to be a lot more at this point. I keep waiting for you to grow up, but you never do [...]

What's that? Look, I don't want to hear it. Yeah, maybe if you were on a white guy, or an Asian guy, or a girl, your reputation would be a lot better at this point. You might be a little more "remarkable." But the fact of the matter is you're on a black guy, and you are underachieving.

— *"An Open Letter from a Black Guy to His Average Sized Penis," [The Assimilated Negro](#)*

In an earlier [Racialicious](#) post, I wrote about Details magazine and their coverage of the Mandingos - a subset of swingers who play to interracial humiliation and domination fantasies.

Several posters noted that members of certain minority groups seem to internalize positive stereotypes. While I did not quite agree, I couldn't exactly disagree either. So, ever since the post was published in February, I've been taking careful notes of what happens when you - as a minority - do not fulfill your stereotypical role.

Stereotype: All Asians are smart/intelligent/diligent/ mathematically inclined.

One day, not too long ago, I was relaxing back at my apartment, watching AZN network. Hae was with me, flipping through some of my manga collection. She harbors a healthy disdain for AZN network, feeling like it does not represent anything close to what she wants to watch. I, on the other hand, adore AZN network (or at least, pre-staff cut AZN network) because it allows me to get access to music videos, movies, and dramas I would not otherwise see.

And Hapa (host of the Bridge) was pretty hot.

Anyway.

The Bridge goes to break, and AZN starts promoting their show line up. One show had two perky co-hosts who were supposed to be the new voices of generation 1.5. During the quick promo, the male host flippantly commented, "Well, we can't all be doctors and lawyers."

Hae snorted. “For real,” she affirmed, not looking up from her book.

Uh, rewind that back?

Hae shared with me some of her reality, growing up Asian-American and wanting to be an artist. While she never felt family pressure to be a doctor or lawyer, her family insists on higher and higher levels of education. After almost a year of fighting, Hae finally convinced her mother to pass on graduate school and to allow her to get a teaching certificate instead. Hae hasn’t been interested in school since completing high school. This pressure is compounded by her other friend’s career choices. In Hae’s circle, many of her friends are high achieving doctors, lawyers, optometrists, architects, and tech gurus. Her career choice is glaringly different, especially considering we live outside of the nation’s capital, home of the highly driven.

I was also privy to the issues that pop up with positive stereotyping at my last job. My boss, as cool as she was, made a comment to me on a day Hae was off. I told her that Hae was a bit confused about her timesheets and wanted to make sure the changes were correct. I also wanted to get a quick check on how she was doing in her first couple weeks, as Hae was concerned. My former boss waved away the concerns saying, “Well, I tend to find that Asian employees are more diligent and hardworking. I knew there wasn’t going to be any trouble.”

I guess my skeptical expression registered on my face, because she quickly added, “Not that I am saying other employees aren’t. I’m just saying that my experience with Asian employees has been positive.”

Right.

I wonder what would have happened if Hae had turned out to be a “rebel Asian.”

Stereotype: All black men are well-endowed.

My ex was unbelievably concerned with penis size. He would often hold his penis out for scrutiny, say something like “unimpressive,” and then tuck it back into his pants.

(I wish I was making this up. Guess who was on ruler duty?)

My ex, an African-American male, made a lot of jokes about his lack of length...with me, that is. In public, he would be quick to trot out the “once you go black, you never go back” stereotype. While he always passed his penis issues off as jokes, his anxiety popped up in many different places. In the gym locker room, at the pool, wherever there were dicks on display. At the time, I wasn’t really aware of the stock that men put into their [insert obvious rhyme here]. However, after reading Scott Poulson-Bryant’s [Hung](#) (key phrase: the color is the size) I started to see the whole penis issue a bit differently. Upon reading the Assimilated Negro’s archives, I am starting to see that this is a widespread “issue.”

Woe is the black man who comes up a little “short” to society’s expectations.

I think that sentiment is best expressed by the Assimilated Negro:

I guess I could do my part and cut down on the whole alpha-male shit-talking. Telling girls your nickname is “The Pulverizer” is probably setting you up for failure. But what should I say your nickname is, “average joe johnson,” or “okey-dokey pokey,” those kinds of names end the game before it even begins [...]

Cause truth be told, I personally could care less about your size and such. If it were just me, smaller might be better, that way you wouldn’t get in my way when I’m trying to scratch my balls. But ultimately, it’s all about impressing the ladies. You know they’re going to talk, and we want to give them something to talk about. When Bonnie Raitt sings that song, you’ll notice there is no mention of a black guy with an average-sized penis. That’s not something to talk about.

Stereotype: Black women are bootylicious.

For the record, I hate that word (and the song that spawned the term.) But bootylicious does describe one of the hallmarks of African-American beauty. I just read an article in Vibe Vixen about women of color and plastic surgery - apparently many of us are going under the knife to get nose jobs, breast implants, liposuction...and butt implants. More and more women are trying to emulate video stars like Buffy the Body and Ki-Toy Robinson by boasting astronomical curves. Some women have argued that the different body shape standards in the black community have insulated us from eating disorders because “our men like meat on our bones.”

Are thicker beauty standards better for black women? Not even close.

Two of my close friends are thin black women. My best friend draws comparisons to Sarah Jessica Parker, as her body was made for fashion. (Note to [Stefano Pilati](#) - stop hating!) And yet, she is on a constant quest to increase her assets. Two years ago, it was an Ensure shake everyday. Three years ago, it was a quest for jeans with built-in butt pads. This year, it is the quest for padded bikini tops and bottoms. While white women -especially the ones who have worked with her in any capacity - openly covet her petite frame, my home girl has just one wish: to gain 20 pounds.

My other friend tends to blame her lack of booty for her relative lack of black men trying to date her. While my riot grrlish friend is curvy, particularly considering her small size, she is quick to lament her lack of behind.

I try to tell them the grass is not greener on the other side. Having a super-thick body means that it is super-easy to pack on extra pounds. Also, the famed “black girl booty” has some downsides. Have you ever tried on a pair of pants, only to find that the pair that goes up over your thighs leaves a nice little moat of air between your waist and the fabric? Woman cannot live by stretch jeans alone.

Or, what about the comments that come with said black girl booty? Having back like that simply means that you now have a heart-shaped beacon for ignorant comments. Once, I was walking with my boyfriend and we passed a group of guys sitting on some benches. In a stage whisper, one of them proclaimed "She has a body like a stripper!" Sigh. And that was one of the more polite overtures. Stories from my high school days have me trying to camouflage my body in wide leg jeans and sweatshirts tied around my waist - only to still be passed notes saying, "Toya got a big ole butt - oh yeah!"

So while I feel my skinny sisters who are bucking cultural norms, it isn't any easier on this side of the fence.

So while this isn't damning evidence that positive stereotypes are harmful, there is a very strange feeling involved when you find out that you do not fit the mold. I wish I knew a few other stories - I'm sure there are plenty more where this batch came from.