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“Yellow Fever” + Pornhub Statistics: A Sociological Sickness

WGSS-350

Dr. Kiki Kosnick

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Short Analytic Essay - Audre Lorde Prize Submission

“Yellow Fever” + Pornhub Statistics: A Sociological Sickness

Sexual preferences are everywhere: in day-to-day conversations, social media posts, or mainstream media. While it's not always as overt as the cliché woman at the bar explaining her “type,” people tend to have a romantic bias in some sense. A popular case of said bias is the sexual preference for Asian women, commonly referred to as “Yellow Fever.” Pornhub released their “2022 Year in Review” this December, outlining its top searches and trends of the year. In accordance with “Yellow Fever,” words such as “hentai,” “japanese,” “pinay,” “asian,” and more topped the list (Pornhub). The most recent statistics relating to Pornhub's viewership come from their “2019 Year in Review,” revealing that at the time, “there were over 42 Billion visits to Pornhub, which means there was an average of 115 million visits per day.” With a website drawing so much traffic, their statistics exemplify much of the world's desires, leading back to Asian women. People with a bias for Asian women tend to argue that having a racial preference when it comes to dating or sexual desire is “simply a preference,” often insisting it is a natural inclination. When people show a sexual preference for Asian women, they base the bias on inaccurate yet historically prominent stereotypes. Such a preference is problematic, as the stereotypes they rely on perpetuate microaggressions against Asian women and assist in oppressing other people of color.

The false, stereotyped belief of the “model minority” must be terminated, as it creates a psychologically devastating sexual bias toward Asian women. Asians are often implied to be the “model minority,” a racist sentiment insisting that the Asian population is considered a superior people of color. The concept rests on the stereotyped intelligence and passive mannerisms of Asian individuals. Such expectations place a psychological burden on people of Asian descent, as they feel the need to live up to the standards placed on them. As Wong puts it in his article,

Asian Americans as a Model Minority: Self-Perceptions and Perceptions by Other Racial

Groups, “The fact that Asian American students also perceive themselves as the “model minority” only makes it more problematic because it may have serious consequences for students who "bought into" the “model minority” belief and who as a result strive to "keep up" the "good student" image” (113). The concept of the entirety of the Asian race being the “model minority” makes them seem more appealing to other racial populations, as they are deemed as acceptable romantic interests in their eyes. As a result, Asian women grow conscious of “Yellow Fever,” sometimes avoiding dating people who show red flags or contemplating their likeability outside their racial identity (Zheng 407). In turn, Asian-identifying women fear their race defines them in the dating world and paints them as sexual targets, almost like they are on a checklist on the subject of sexual experience.

As an extension of the “model minority” myth, Asian women specifically are stereotyped as submissive, quiet, and dainty — *especially* in pornography. From a sexual lens, Asian women are often expected to adhere to such stereotypes in pornography as a facet of their audience’s sexual gratification. Adult performer Jade Kush is verified on Pornhub and ranked 269th in popularity, with many of her video titles containing the words “Asian,” “shy,” “submissive,” “nerdy,” and “teen” (Pornhub). To an individual with a bias toward Asian women, the aforementioned traits are the generalized ideal characteristics of a woman; with the goal of boosting their self-confidence, they find themselves seeking out Asian women in particular. The stereotypes of Asian women being infantilized, exotic, or docile place the viewer in a position of power, thus enabling the dynamic of the woman as the partner with lesser power in the relationship, albeit a para-social relationship. The gender-role-charged power dynamic is ever-present on Pornhub, as “there are thousands of videos featuring performers of Asian descent

as masseuses, maids, or geishas, as well as more than one video in which a woman performs fellatio using chopsticks” (Rolling Stone). In pornography, Asian women are portrayed as something to take ownership of or use to fulfill your needs. While these stereotypes could not be farther from the truth, the commonality of their representation in pornography further perpetuates and normalizes the notion of Asian women as the ideal, docile partner via the “model minority” myth. In an interview with Rolling Stone, Kush discusses her experiences as an Asian porn performer. Kush mentions refusing to wear chopsticks in her hair, being asked to use broken English, and dealing with unsettling video titles selected by the directors (Rolling Stone). Adult performers’ racial identities are exploited for views, and therefore money, at the expense of their wellbeing. Pornography videos capitalize on stereotypes to appeal to more viewership, and clearly, it’s working, with “Japanese,” “Hentai,” and “Asian” being some of Pornhub’s most viewed categories of 2022.

Alongside the “model minority” concept, the historical sexualization of comfort women and geishas is another tremendous factor in modern Asian fetishization. Asian women have been historically objectified, contributing to contemporary sexual biases and enforcing stereotypes today. Understanding the history of comfort women is integral to grasping the full scope of Asian women’s hypersexualization. Comfort women were often lower-class Asian women made to ‘sexually entertain’ troops during wartime. As illustrated by Min, comfort women were forced into sexual activity “from 10 to 30 times per day. They were regularly subjected to torture, beating, burning, and sometimes stabbing” (941). Soldiers viewed the comfort women, and by proxy, Asian women, as objects meant for their pleasure. The establishment of Asian women’s hypersexuality stems from the history of comfort women and the past of geishas. While most geishas were simply entertainers, their reputation for beauty and charm captivated audiences

across the globe. Geishas were not typically seen as sexual beings, but at times it was difficult to distinguish them from geiko; both were professional entertainers. Geishas were not allowed to be sex workers, but their geiko counterparts were (Stanley 540). The geikos who participated in sex work influenced the overall reputation of geishas, contributing to their general sexualization. When considering the geisha's silent, elegant, feminine nature, the contrast with those characteristics alongside sex work tells a complex narrative. At the intersection of historical objectification and contemporary remnants of stereotypes comes the modern idea of “Yellow Fever.”

The vast complications behind Asian fetishization connect to queer theorist Gayle Rubin's concept of the charmed inner circle and the sex hierarchy. Rubin proposed the concept of normed sexual activity, such as married, monogamous, and vanilla sex, and directly contrasted it to more stigmatized aspects of sex, like BDSM, in public, or queer. Together, they are juxtaposed between the good charmed circle and the bad outer limits. Within the notion of Asian fetishization, copious factors are at play. Individuals with “Yellow Fever” have a sense of adhering to the good charmed circle with their (potentially parasocial) relationship with a docile Asian girl, as they perpetuate gendered power dynamics. Daydreams of a starstruck housewife plague them, but there is more beneath the surface. They can still factor in their “exoticism,” allowing for a best-of-both-worlds scenario. Factoring in pornography aligns with the bad outer limits, not to mention the variety of content an individual with “Yellow Fever” could consume, aligning with other stigmatized characteristics.

Asian fetishization is a form of racism that many people view as flattery when it is, in fact, dehumanizing Asian women and even those who do not identify as Asian. In popular culture, Asian women are stereotyped as exotic and submissive beings — both of which are

considered appealing sexually to males. However, as Zheng argues, “The supposed sexual superiority of Asian women ultimately renders them inferior as full human beings; they are more completely reduced to having value only as sexual or domestic objects” (411-412). Zheng’s point calls back to the aforementioned comfort women and geishas, assisting in perpetuating the idea of hypersexualizing Asian women. By exemplifying “Yellow Fever,” participants fetishize their targets while simultaneously degrading them. Meanwhile, the idea of the “model minority” alienates other races from even being considered options to those with a preference for Asian women. The concept of the “model minority” signals to the general public that Asian women are the ‘ideal’ women of color to date, thus implying all other people of color are not on the same level of acceptance. In conversations of race, Zheng explains, “Less marked by overtly negative stereotypes, Asian/Americans are often invisible from mainstream narratives of racial discrimination and prejudice faced by more conspicuously disadvantaged groups such as Blacks and Latino/as” (403). In essence, the “model minority” reputation protects Asian people while tearing down other persons of color. African Americans or people of Hispanic/Latinx descent have more negative stereotypes associated with them, making them seem less desirable or, to some, less *capable* than Asian people. The stereotypes don’t stop at sexual attraction but have much deeper consequences than outwardly projected. It should be noted that the terms “ebony” and “latina” were also heavily searched terms in Pornhub’s 2022 demographics, searched even more frequently than “asian” in the U.S. However, Black and Brown bodies were portrayed in extremely different contexts, stereotypes, and presentations compared to Asian women. The distinct fetishization of Asian women consolidates the prejudice against other people of color in contemporary times, alienating and othering them in the overall conversation of racial dynamics today.

Many people who favor Asian women believe it's "simply a preference" but refuse to acknowledge their contribution to modern-day racism. A preference for Asian women is not the same as "I just like brown eyes more than blue eyes" or "I'm attracted to blondes." Hair and eye color are phenotypes: they are purely biological. Meanwhile, cases of "Yellow Fever" rely on racial stereotypes rather than merely phenotypical components. Another point brought up by Zheng dives further, stating, "Blondes and brunettes as such have not suffered histories of exploitation, colonization, slavery, prosecution, and exclusion on the basis of phenotype" (409). Historically, people of color have been alienated and differentiated from each other and white folk based on racial generalizations. The stereotypes through which people form such sexual biases are the same stereotypes that otherize Asian people. Therefore, by having a sexual bias toward Asian women, one is also solidifying the structural hierarchy created to oppress people of color today. The social order in terms of race is not only dependent on stereotypes but also the lightness of skin tone, falling under the umbrella of the term "colorism". According to studies, people perceived as more white hold a higher social status (Curington 767). Asian people are generalized as having lighter skin tones, therefore seen as higher up on the ladder than others seen as having darker skin. The glorification of Asian people, Asian women in specific, is placing other races on a lower rung as a result.

Having a sexual preference for Asian women is problematic, as it is based on stereotypes and is accompanied by psychological burdens. The modern idea of Asian fetishization stems from a long history of objectifying comfort women and geishas (or geikos). For generations, Asian women have been hypersexualized and reduced to domestic objects due to false stereotypes. Today, the modern version is "Yellow Fever," stemming from both historical elements and the idea of the "model minority." As shown by Pornhub's 2022 year in review,

Asian women are heavily in demand in pornography as well, utilized to satisfy desires behind closed doors. The concept of Asian people being the “model minority” places psychological stress on them and on persons who don’t identify as Asian. The concept of the “model minority” ensures that Asian women are acceptable mates and that other women of color cannot compare — a falsity that embodies modern racism. The sexual preference of Asian women is a covert component of racism, and to acknowledge its manifold negative impact is to work toward equality in the modern world.

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