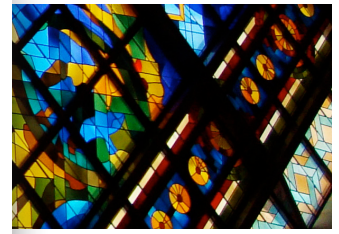




40 DAYS OF ENGAGEMENT on *Anti-Racism*



DAY 13

Unmasking Racial Fetishization

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Learning

Racial fetish is a term for sexual attraction exclusively towards one specific—and different—racialized group, also called a racial out-group. A well-known example of racial fetish is “yellow fever,” which is a sexual preference towards Asian people.

The fetishization of BIPOC is racist and oppressive, and derives from colonialism. When European colonizers invaded different parts of the world, the land was considered something to be conquered or owned. This translated into the treatment of Indigenous and racialized peoples, especially women, as needing to be owned or tamed. Europeans also portrayed Indigenous and racialized peoples as less civilized, which included how they portrayed their sexuality. These derogatory beliefs and understandings of Indigenous and racialized peoples made them seem less human, and was a way for colonizers to validate Black enslavement and Indigenous assimilation.

In addition, media promoted by Western countries in the 19th to

20th century created stereotypes of BIPOC people, especially women. Madame Butterfly and Madame Chrysanthemum (both characters in stories about a young Japanese girl who falls in love with an American naval officer) are examples of the fetishization of Asian women. These stories portray these women as submissive, obedient, and obsessive over the White man in the story.

Today, we continue to see racial stereotypes which feed into racial fetishes. Racial fetishization impacts all genders, but for the purposes of this article we will focus on women.

Why *exactly* is racial fetishization problematic?

In the media, Black women are associated with curvy body types, which are sexualized. Asian women are stereotyped as seductive and dangerous, or submissive and docile. Latino women are stereotyped as sassy, hot-tempered, and seductive. Indigenous women have been labelled as “savage,” inferring they can be tamed or conquered.

These misogynistic characteristics are seemingly normalized and sexualized.

These characteristics are not complimentary. Assumptions made about racialized groups strip the person of all human qualities except one: their race and culture. When someone makes Asian women an object of their sexual fetish, they are viewing women as objects. They are forcing those women to be a role in their fantasies, rather than exist as people. It is dehumanizing, objectifying, and against the will and consent of the person being fetishized.

Racial fetishization is harmful because it can lead to sexual harassment, sexual assault, and violence. Most BIPOC women will experience being racially fetishized at least once in their lifetime, which will put into question their sense of safety, identity, and self-worth. For some, it is a traumatic experience that may take a lifetime to heal. Our emotions, dreams, and beliefs are unique and complicated. Our youth are more so, as they are grappling with the pressures of the future and

forming their own identities. Let us thus be conscious and caring of how youth are impacted by the media and allow them to become as complicated and magnificent as they can be.

Racial fetishization is not often discussed within church, so we are invited to engage in this crucial step in fighting the fetish and unmasking the various aspects of racism. Thank you for exploring this theme today. We hope that this

space was a moment of safety for quieter voices, as well as one of

discomfort to arouse courage in all of us.



Faith Reflection

This [prayer](#) of confession was written in mourning for the murder of eight people, six of whom were Asian women. They were victims of a shooting spree in Atlanta, when a man targeted three spa businesses. He stated that it was an attempt to help others resist “sexual temptation.” This is a racially fueled hate crime, but it also involves the harm of racial fetishization. Let us keep the victim’s names in our hearts as we engage in our anti-racism work.



Children’s Activity

Invite children to watch or read a movie, book, or other form of media where there are diverse characters (of all genders) with more than one characteristic.

After watching the media, ask some questions about the characters. As a parent or peer, invite your peer/child to answer how they feel the characters were portrayed.

Ask questions such as:

- If you could describe this character in three words, what would they be?
- How do you think this character is feeling? Happy, angry, or sad? Why?

Invite the child to explain their reasoning. If the child is older, simply ask them to think critically about how the characters are represented.

End the discussion by ensuring the child knows that when writing or telling their own stories, it is important to give all characters more than one defining characteristic, in the same way that all people should not be categorized or defined by one trait. These terms and this dialogue give a space for youth to critically think, learn, and grow into anti-racist thinking and work.



Group Commitment

It is possible that the topic of fetishization has not yet been addressed in your congregation. Exploring this theme today is a step towards normalizing the topic in an institution historically known to silence expression of sexuality or healthy sexual relationships. You are invited to ask yourself how this portrayal has affected your own relationships.

How you answer these questions will impact your view of race,

beauty, and sexual attraction. As we continue to explore the themes in this 40-day journey, let us confront our own biases and analyze

the pieces of media we see. Let us be forgiving with ourselves; this is a constant process that encourages us to look towards the future.

Have you ever been sexually/romantically attracted to a person of color, solely due to their race/ethnicity? Have you ever wondered whether someone is approaching you solely due to your race/ethnicity? Is the media you consume defining a group of people by one characteristic? Are they BIPOC? Are they being sexualized? What audience is this piece of media geared towards?



Advocacy

Advocacy for change is everlasting and ever-evolving. It is not just a checklist to complete and file away. These suggestions will take energy and time, and are not the only options to engage in advocacy work.

Think Critically: Be prepared to consistently question or reflect on your own biases and assumptions of others. Racial fetishization is under the umbrella of stereotypes and sexism; by being aware of other biases we can often connect to this theme as well.

Speak Up: If you see bias or fetishization of Indigenous and racialized groups in the media, speak up about it to peers and family. If they bring up the topic, state your opinions on why it is harmful.

Engage: If you are part of a community of faith, explore different ways to discuss racial fetishization with others. Consider safe ways that you might be able to learn more about racial fetishization from the first-hand experiences of BIPOC peoples.



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