

## The Beast in Me



*Terrine Friday is a Canadian journalist whose work has been published by Reuters, TrustLaw, National Post, The Toronto Star, the LSE's POLIS institute and various other publications. She completed her BA in Journalism at Concordia University in Montreal, Quebec, and is currently pursuing her MSc in Gender, Media and Culture at the LSE.*

I remember as a little girl my mother always called me her princess while my father told me I was capable of anything. I'll even admit, at times their words were in excess. I shrugged it off as being totally spoiled. Only now, looking back on my later childhood years, adolescence and young adulthood, do I know why my parents felt the need to repeat their mantra of beauty and intelligence: my self-worth would rarely, if ever, be publicly legitimized anywhere in the world. I would be expected to survive against a constant barrage of images of young women with long, limp hair, thin legs, little to no backside and fair skin. If I survived, my purgatory would be the constant reminder that I am perhaps a mistake, an anomaly within a skewed global context of what beauty is supposed to be.

Don't believe me?

In the U.S., Beyonce, Rihanna, Jennifer Hudson et al. remind me that I either need to wear a (ridiculously expensive) **weave of lace-front** to completely hide my natural hair while Michelle Obama and Condoleezza Rice **suggest I should use damaging chemicals** every six weeks (the choices are either sodium hydroxide or potassium hydroxide) to be taken more seriously, **a silent ode to Madam CJ Walker**.

In Brazil, **home to the largest African diaspora** in the world, women of colour are not invited to compete in national or international beauty competitions. Since they're already subjected to the harsh realities of South American race segregation **resulting from colour-blind policymaking after abolition**, and beauty competitions are typically limited to relatives and friends of the elite, black or mulatta women have little to no access.

In Quebec, being francophone or completely fluent in French often isn't enough to be fully accepted into québécois culture. Further differentiation means I must be "**purelaine**," meaning my ancestors must be the rejected French men and women who landed on Mont Royal more than 400 years ago.

But I'm not the only anomaly to beauty.

In Bollywood film, casting directors often find their light-skinned and green-eyed actors from other south Asian/northern Arab states where Hindi is a minority language. Even Elle magazine took heat for their **misrepresentation of Indian actress Aishwarya Rai Bachchan** by whitewashing her for their magazine cover. In Afghanistan, Hazaras continue to be shunned, their East Asian heritage a scorn upon the flesh that carries forth the Causasian phenotype into subsequent Pashtun generations.

And in China, major make-up labels use bleaching cream in their foundation. This means if you're buying any number of North American and European beauty supplies which are booming in Asia, you must decipher the coded message that your skin is not, and will never be, white enough.



Supposing I decide that I can live in this purgatory for a lifetime, it would then be beneficial to expand upon what I know about the world I live in and how it works. As a working journalist, I decided to come to the LSE so that I could get an international perspective on the debates and real issues regarding minority groups that are so evident within news culture. As a world-renown institution that offers an international perspective within a political economy framework, I thought it the best place for me to think about where I might fit into the global equation after I get my diploma with a slick brand on it. I am truly lucky.

Except that my university also employs a supposedly reputable professor who says, **according to his scientific research**, I cannot possibly be beautiful. His conclusion, which is based entirely upon the content analysis of subjective material, says black women are “far less attractive than white, Asian, and Native American women.” He then states the following:

“There are many biological and genetic differences between the races. However, such race differences usually exist in equal measure for both men and women. For example, because they have existed much longer in human evolutionary history, Africans have more mutations in their genomes than other races.”

By the same logic, Satoshi Kanazawa **never mentions why super-Aryan Nordic women are not considered as ugly as black women in the diaspora**. The social and political histories and psychological circumstances behind this discrepancy are completely ignored.

He then attempts to compute the “latent physical attractiveness” of black women with some good-looking graphs that make it *look* like you might be reading ground-breaking research about dark matter. He also shows me a bunch of diagrams that are supposed to spell out for me exactly why I am less worthy.

Although Psychology Today removed the drivel fairly quickly from their website which Kanazawa’s personal blog, Kanazawa received a slap on the wrist from the LSE. I still do not understand how departmental rules within an academic milieu become instituted to the point of non-sense and non-accountability. It is important to allow freedom of expression and room for intellectual debate. It’s also equally important to call sexism and racism what it is. There is no scientific basis for perpetuating beauty ideals and racial difference by trying to entrench it in academia. Eugenics and artificial selection were based on opinion. So was Kanazawa’s piece. What adds salt to the wound is the claim that Kanazawa apologized. Rather, he **chooses his words wisely** by suggesting he is not sorry at all for what he wrote and would probably do it again (after all, he did it **before this piece** in question).

The only compelling information contained in Kanazawa’s piece is what he says about how black women view themselves:

“It is very interesting to note that, even though black women are objectively less physically attractive than other women, black women (and men) *subjectively* consider themselves to be far more physically attractive than others.”

I’ll bet my mother could tell you why.

---

November 22nd, 2011 | [Science & Technology](#) | [4 Comments](#)

---



