

SNAPSHOT – RACISM IN THE ILLICIT MESSAGE INDUSTRY:

The Sexual Stereotyping of Asian Women by U.S. Sex Buyers

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WARNING: *The following document contains comments from sex buyers that contain lewd and offensive language.*

When a sex-buying shooter killed eight people at three illicit massage businesses (IMBs) in Atlanta in March 2021, the crimes were immediately linked to race, and activists called for prosecutors to bring hate crime charges. Georgia's recently enacted hate crime statute, passed in response to the death of Ahmaud Aubrey, provides enhanced criminal penalties for perpetrators who "intentionally select [a] victim... because of such victim's... race." The shooter himself, however, claimed the crimes were not racially motivated, but were caused by his "sex addiction." According to the shooter, the women he killed were sources of "temptation".²

Sexual stereotyping of Asian women in the United States is not new. As early as the mid-1800s, American media described Chinese women as "lustful and sensual in their dispositions; [concluding that] every female is a prostitute, and of the basest order."³ A recent scholarly article examining the portrayal of Asian women in American cinema described the archetype character of "the dainty China Doll or the diminutive Butterfly [which] infantilizes and hypersexualizes" Asian women.⁴ In film, these female characters "prioritize the lives of [a] White [male] character and... exist as long as his desire for her exists [in] service and obedience, and... [then] she must disappear without a trace... to ease his guilt and purge his sin."⁵

Asian-American women recognized this stereotype in the Atlanta shootings almost immediately. Karen Suyemoto, professor of clinical psychology and Asian American studies at the University of Massachusetts Boston, told The Washington Post, "There's a whole stereotyped package of Asian women as sexualized, subservient, small... whose existence is diminished to their ability to serve."⁶ In the same article, Yale University sociologist Grace Kao noted that harmful stereotypes are everywhere from the porn industry to dating websites, saying, "These women are seen as objects who don't have the right to refuse." Reflecting on the shootings, Elizabeth Kim of Restore NYC, an anti-trafficking organization specializing in serving immigrant women, said, "the racism and the misogyny and the violence are very much intertwined."⁷

A substantial portion of women working in IMBs are Asian immigrants.⁸ Sex buyer review websites and online comments reflect multiple layers of sexual stereotyping and depersonalization of Asian women, in addition to overt racism and xenophobia. After much consideration, we decided to put together a small sampling of these explicit reviews posted over the years from IMBs throughout the country.⁹

¹ Ga. Code Ann. 17-10-17(b).

² Brumback, Kate, et al., "Man charged with killing 8 people at Georgia massage parlors," The Associated Press, 17 March 2021. Accessed 27 April 2021. <https://apnews.com/article/georgia-massage-parlor-shootings-leave-8-dead-f3841a8e0215d3ab3df23d489b7af81>.

³ *Chinese Immigration to California*, N.Y. TRIB., Sept. 28, 1854, at p. 4.

⁴ Lee, Joey. 2018. "East Asian "China Doll" or "Dragon Lady"?.
Bridges: An Undergraduate Journal of Contemporary Connections 3, (1).
http://scholars.wlu.ca/bridges_contemporary_connections/vol3/iss1/2

⁵ Lee, supra.

⁶ Contrera, Jessica, "Atlanta spa killings lead to questions about sex work and exploitation," The Washington Post, 19 March 2021. Accessed 7 April 2021. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/dc-md-va/2021/03/19/asian-massage-business-women-atlanta/>

⁷ Kelly, Cara, et al., "Atlanta spa shootings: Illicit reviews raise red flags that shooter target vulnerable women," USA Today, 17 March 2021. Accessed 7 April 2021. <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/investigations/2021/03/17/atlanta-spa-shootings-illicit-reviews-massage-parlors/4737755001/>

⁸ Chin, John J, et al., "Illicit Massage Parlors in Los Angeles County and New York City: Stories from Women Workers." 11 October 2019, p. 3. Accessed 8 April 2021. <https://apnews.com/article/georgia-massage-parlor-shootings-leave-8-dead-f3841a8e0215d3ab3df23d489b7af81>

http://johnchin.net/Article_Files/MP_Study_10.11.19_FINAL.pdf

⁹ All sex buyer reviews are from Rubmaps (www.rubmaps.ch). Select words have been censored with an asterisk from the following excerpts of reviews. All other spelling, grammar, and punctuation has been retained with the intent to capture the full nature of the reviews.

OBJECTIFYING AND DEPERSONALIZING

According to Rubmaps.ch, a sex buyer review site self-proclaimed as the “Internet’s #1 massage parlor review site”, the primary descriptive category for any establishment is worker ethnicity.¹⁰ And by their own admission, a large number of sex buyers who visit illicit massage businesses are in search of their “Asian fantasy”:

- *I've always had a thing for Asian women, and so have many of my buddies. But, as you may very well know, there aren't a lot of Asian broads in the area. So as soon as I found out about this website I subscribed and now I've been fulfilling every Asian fantasy that I could possibly think of. —New Jersey, posted September 2013*
- *[Speaking about other men in the parking lot] Sh*t, some of them are probably connoisseurs of the moist asian taco stand, just like you and me. so f*ck it!! hold your head high, and enjoy what you "came" for!!! LOL—Nevada, posted December 2020*
- *My ultimate Asian fantasy is to f*ck a Japanese girl in the a** and hear the moaning of those weird a** Jap porn. —California, posted July 2019*
- *very beautiful Asian fantasy doll. not much of a massage. But other services on a scale of 1 to 10 i give an eleven. —Ohio, posted February 2014*
- *Then slowly and deep inside her sweet Nippon p*ssy. What a wonderful h*le, it was just the perfect fit for my not so big d*ck. She moves her hips like a stripper and f*cked my brains out until she O with that crazy moaning only worthy of Japanese porn. —Hawaii, posted October 2019*
- *Even the recipient of a non-sexual massage still described his masseuse in ethno-sexual terms: Better luck next time mates, she's every white guys asian fantasy...to infinity [sic] and beyond!!! Massage was very well on a positive note, but us bulls don't take well to sexual tension and no [Happy Ending]! . . . The cookies fortune reads "nooo cookie ferrrr yeyyyouuu." —Illinois, posted April 2018*

SEXUAL STEREOTYPING

Sex buyers describe a good service provider as “innocent,” “shy,” eager to “please,” and deferential, but they also describe their physical characteristics in racial terms.

- *I just wanted her to act innocent and sweet during the experience. I touched her early on and she would play like this wasn't the right thing to do. I pulled off her bikini top and she would call me sir and stuff like that. Kind of hot. —Illinois, posted January 2021*
- *[S]he acted like she didn't want to do and I forced her. She would say it was so big and that it hurt her. It was really enjoyable and great acting from her. —Illinois, posted January 2021*
- *They have some very cute Asian girls here... too shy to give out their names, some of them. I was able to break the ice with [T], she's average looking with big t*ts. —Texas, posted March 2021*

¹⁰ www.rubmaps.ch

OVERT-RACISM AND XENOPHOBIA

Other reviews casually make blatantly racist remarks to refer to immigrants and other cultures.

- *She's not fresh off the boat so her English is good. I appreciated it since I didn't have resort to the translator app. [She] has a sweet personality and genuinely wants to please you.—New York, posted November 2020*
- *Soon after my donation to her cause or Chinese communist girls scouting team or whatever she took off her dress...—Texas, posted March 2019*
- *The girls were a little confused at this point why we were all 4 in the same room, and that is when the BOMB was dropped... wait for it... Coach Steve told the girls that he is buying me an early Christmas gift!! word for word it went like this- " I want both of you to f*ck my friend, and i get to watch!?" " There was a second of confusion (until their brains processed the english words into their communist language) and then there was a shocked expression.—Nevada, posted December 2020*

CONCLUSION

The sex buyer reviews speak for themselves. The hyper-sexualization of an entire race of women based on stereotypes is racism. The Illicit Massage Industry systematically exploits Asian women nationwide to meet these racist and sexist demands of U.S. men.¹¹ The cries of racism following the Atlanta shootings are not misplaced, but the shooter is not the only racist. Men regularly seeking their “Asian fantasy” at IMBs do so at the expense of the dignity and humanity of the women they believe exist to serve them.¹²

¹¹ Muller-Tabanera, Chris, and Huang, Beisi. “Modern-Day Comfort Stations: Human Trafficking in the U.S. Illicit Massage Industry,” in Chisolm-Straker, Makini, and Chon, Katherine, (eds), *The Historical Roots of Human Trafficking: Informing Primary Prevention of Commercialized Violence*, 2021. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-70675-3_5

¹² Contrera, supra.