

A Foreigner At Home

I am a black male. When you see me walking on the streets, you expect me to walk with my back slouched, my hoodie overhead and my pants sagging below my waist. You expect me to look a little shady. Sometimes you lock your cars when I'm nearby. Sometimes you hold your children closer to you when I pass by. I am still a foreigner in the country I call home.

While these stereotypes are not as exaggerated on the Andover campus, there are still nuanced microaggressions that perpetuate the negative portrayal of the black man.

For one, there is an assumption that all black males are from the ghetto and that all of us are on financial aid. When we wear a Brooks Brothers vest, sometimes people will come up and ask us, "Is that yours?" While this may seem like a joke to others, it is a microaggression that hurts us deep down. But even if it hurts us, to cry or express weakness is a huge "no-no": as black males, we are expected not to show our emotions.

Our dialect is held to a different standard in the eyes of society; it is seen as inferior. Whenever we speak "proper" or "academic" English, others respond with statements like: "Wow, you speak so well." First of all, there is no "correct" way of speaking English. Everyone has a different way of expressing the English vernacular, which is often based on their upbringings. Many African Americans speak African-American Vernacular English, or "Ebonics," with grammar and speech patterns that are akin to those in West African languages. But why does speaking this "proper" or "academic" English like the rest of Andover result in surprise?

When we enter the classroom, we turn from the "rowdy ghetto kids" to the quiet kids in the back of the room. We are expected to not be able to participate in discussions, and, when we do contribute insightful thoughts like the rest of the class, we draw remarks like "You're actually smart," as if to say we were not smart to begin with. These preconceived standards propagate the necessity to always prove our intelligence because we're seen as inherently less so.

What people fail to realize, is that we, like every Andover student, are here because the admissions officers saw something unique in us. Black males did not just get into Andover to fill a quota. Just like everyone else on campus, admissions officers saw in us a potential to succeed at Andover, whether it be in the classroom, the theatre department, athletic field or just for being nice. We hope that students come to see us as an integral part of this community and not simply for "diversity" on campus.

Yes, sometimes we do dress in hoodies and sagging pants. But that is a part of who we are, where we were raised and the culture we came from. If we choose to change into a Brooks Brothers vest, we should not be received with a surprised expression. No matter how we dress, we hope that people see us just as Andover students trying to understand boarding school life,

not as “the ghetto black students.”

When we speak English in a different way, don’t see it as a “lesser” form. See it as our way of developing an intimacy with the English language and making it our own. Come to accept it as part of our community, not something that should be eradicated from the community of Andover.

In the end, we just want to be seen as other Andover students. We want people to recognize the wide array of experiences, thought and skills that black males bring to campus instead of looking at us as simply needed to fill a quota. We want people to recognize us as contributing to this community’s dialogue in a positive way and as equals to other Andover students.

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