

Being Big, Black, & Ugly in a World that Ain't Got Space for Your Fat Ass:  
A Solo Performance of My Own Design

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A thesis

submitted in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of

Master of Fine Arts

University of Washington

2018

Committee:

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Program Authorized to Offer Degree:

School of Drama

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Abstract

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*Being Big, Black, & Ugly in a World that Ain't Got Space for Your Fat Ass* is a thesis solo show that examines the direct effect of beauty standards and body images on the big, black female body. This thesis explores my creative development and self-love journey in making and building my show from the ground up. From brainstorming to affirming myself, I was able to create a piece of work specific to my life story but so universal that it can transport any audience member through nostalgia, laughter, trauma, and reclamation. This show was created from my mother's first words of reaffirmation: "Bria, don't let that get to you. You are wonderfully and fearfully made. And when people talk bad about you, they are just jealous because they see God all up and through you, baby. You are beautiful. Never forgot who you are and whose you are. God made you in his own image."



Being Big, Black, & Ugly in a World that Ain't Got Space for Your Fat Ass is a solo performance created out of a need to expose and bleed my truths of insecurity and shame on a stage. The University of Washington School of Drama, Professional Actor Training Program gave me space to create a show as this one, as well as equipped me with the necessary knowledge and skills to execute my solo performance.

Purpose. I needed a reason, an idea, a seed to start from. My solo show class taught by Valerie Curtis- Newton from second year informed me on how to brainstorm from nothing to something. Our first week, she asked us not to write anything down but make note of different things that interested us: music clips, poetry, writings, tv shows, quotes, dances, images, nature, clothing, anything. Something that I could make note of and put in a box, keep safe, be inspired by, and return to. So that is exactly what I did this time around for my third-year solo show. I made note of quotes, articles, drawings, pieces of art. I even started to build a solo show playlist on Spotify, I did everything to feed my imagination, but write. This was quite a task since I am a writer who gets inspired by my own writing. But I stayed the course because I did not want to cheat my creative process especially this go around. I did not know what my show was going to be but I knew that I wanted it to be visceral, raw, loud, and something an audience can taste.

Planting. After looking at what I collected over a few months' time, I knew that my show would be centered around the topic of body image. I, being a plus sized black artist, body image is an issue that meets me at every door I walk through. So, I thought it was only appropriate to end my time in the program with a show centered on myself and my truths. I had gathered pictures of full figured black women covered in tribal body paint, quotes admiring black women, music reiterating the black girl magic anthem, and small poems that I had written to myself over the years about my self-esteem.

Pen to Paper. I started writing. Not poetry, my usual go-to. I started writing from the perspective of different characters. It was beyond me, I used the archetype method that our Voice Instructor, Bridget Connors, guided us through to create these characters, get lost in them, and write from their minds. It was a very spiritual process. Each of these women were all black and plus sized and they all battled body image problems and dealt with them in different ways. By the end of this writing challenge, I had compiled pages of short monologues of these different women. But I still felt it was not real and truthful enough for me to put on stage. Until I spoke to a friend who asked me “How would your solo show go if it was a tv series?”

I am enough. Three words that were reintroduced to me through the wisdom of Valerie Curtis-Newton. Still three words that I grapple with but I wanted to operate in that headspace. What story would I make if I am enough? Slowly, but surely, I found the narrative, my own life. I decided to write from my own point of view, all the messages I received throughout my childhood and how that shaped how I walk and stand and project as a young woman. I decided to write things I told myself I would never repeat out loud or even share. Make theatrical events in my life that brought a lot of pain and insecurity and allow the audience, readers and viewers to share with me my childhood experience.

Being Big, Black, & Ugly in a World that Ain't Got Space for Your Fat Ass is not just a mouthful of a title. But it's a mouthful of art that I as the creator, writer, and performer make each person taste, eat, chew, choke on, and swallow just so the world can digest my story so it can carve empathy in their intestines.

# Being Big, Black, and Ugly in a World That Ain't Got Space for Your Fat Ass

A Satire by Bria Henderson

*This story is told through the point of view of BRIA. The actress playing BRIA will transform into the other characters but will always return to BRIA; each time even more affected and changed.*

**Blackout. Sound. The show begins.**

## YOUNG BRIA

*I was going to Kentucky, a lucky, lucky land  
I met a senorita with buckles in her hair  
Oh shake senorita, shake it like you can  
Shake it like a milkshake and do the best you can  
Oh she wobbled to the bottom, she wobbled to the top  
She turned around and turned around until she made a stop  
S-T-O-P spells STOP  
She never went to college, she never went to school  
Until she found out she was big, black, bitch like you*

**Pause.**

Me?  
I'm not fat, I'm just bigger than you...and you...and you  
And you...and you  
See we are all different sizes

**Pause.**

No, my mom said I'm beautiful. I am wonderfully and fearfully-  
*Pause.*  
I'm not ugly. I was made in God's i-

**Pause.**

Stop saying that "watch out for the big girl"  
I'm not a big girl  
I'm just a girl  
Watch out for the big girl  
The thick girl

The fat thighs and hips girls  
The obese girl  
The one with fat crease girl  
The rum shaker  
The earth-quaker  
Her mom made her  
My mom made me  
Big  
**Stomp.**  
Black  
**Stomp.**  
Ugly  
**Stomp**

**BRIA**

This is where it all began. But stuff like this wasn't new to me. Any time the kids would tease me, I would run straight to my mom. She always had the best advice, even if it was the same advice she's been giving me all my life.

**YOUNG BRIA**

Momma. The kids at school called me big, black and ugly today.

**MOM**

Bria, don't let that get to you. You are wonderfully and fearfully made. And when people talk bad about you, they are just jealous because they see God all up and through you, baby. You are beautiful. Never forgot who you are and whose you are. God made you in his own image.

**YOUNG BRIA**

Well, God must be ugly as fuck!

**MOM**

Bria, what did you just say?

**YOUNG BRIA**

Uhhh...I...I...I

**MOM**

You done lost your mind. You better gone somewhere and sit your fat, black ass down.

**YOUNG BRIA**

You mean my wonderfully and fearfully made ass down, right?  
(*MOM slaps BRIA, walks away and door slams.*)

I don't know why she called me fat when she fat too. I get it from you. She made me eat all that food. (starts beating belly) Get out of food, get out of me. I wish I could just cut my belly open, take out all the fat, and then sew it back up. So, I can look like Beyoncé. But I'm not light skin. Well, more like Kelly Rowland. She still cute and skinny and she at least Beyoncé's friend...that's a good job at least. And then Jotaynun would like me.

**BRIA**

Jotaynun was this boy I use to have the BIGGEST crush on. It was bad. I was madly in love with this little boy at like 8 years old. Cupid hit me hard early. I use to just sit on my bed, write in my purple diary, and daydream about Jotaynun.

*Diary sound effect.*

**YOUNG BRIA**

Jotaynun is amazing. He's everything I want. He taller than me, which is a plus. He got braids in his hair, which is another plus. And he light skin, which is a double plus. I think the reason why people like light skin people so much is because they light like the sun and every body loves sunshine. Jotaynun plays with me at recess and he makes the funniest jokes. All other the boys at school should aspire to be like Jotaynun.

**BRIA**

Y'all Jotaynun is probably in Richmond city selling drugs or in jail for selling drugs or working on his third mixtape while selling drugs. But back then he was still the cutest first grader I'd ever seen. And I was in love and you do some crazy things for love. One time, my daddy gave me money to buy snacks at lunch. Which is rare cause my Dad was always stingy with money, but he was feeling generous that day.

**DAD**

How much them snacks cost at school?

**YOUNG BRIA**

Two dollars.

**DAD**

Gatdamnitall! Two dollars?! Aite, Ima give you the two dollars. Now don't be a gluttony and buy all the snacks cause you know you don't need it. But gon head and treat yourself. Make sure you bring my change now.

**YOUNG BRIA**

Yes sir.

**BRIA**

Now, I had bought my little snack at lunch and had a good amount of change leftover. But then I saw Jotaynun. Hmm hmm hmm. And something overcame me and I just gave him all my change.

**YOUNG BRIA**

Take it, you fine specimen. And take my heart too.

**BRIA**

I forgot I had to go home and see my dad, who may or may not be high when he picked me up from school. See my elementary school was behind my house, so my dad would pick my brother and I up from school and we would walk home. Well march home. My dad was in the Vietnam War and I guess that explains the marching. He would make us march home; him acting as our sergeant, and my brother and I high off of ignorant joy marching to my dad's commands.

**DAD**

YA LEFT, LEFT, LEFT, RIGHT, LEFT. LEFT, LEFT, LEFT, RIGHT, LEFT. Bria, let me get that change.

**YOUNG BRIA**

I don't have it.

**DAD**

Huh? What you mean you don't have it?

**YOUNG BRIA**

I lost it.

**DAD**

You lost it? You ain't lose it?

**YOUNG BRIA**

Yes, I did.

**DAD**

Why you gotta be ignorant? Why you gotta lie? Gatdamnitall. Stop telling tales. I keep telling you and your brother to stop telling tales. We get home, you getting a beating. Take all your clothes off and lay on the bed.

**BRIA**

Ain't nothing worse than getting a beating from a black parent. Cause they not just hitting your ass, they trying to get whatever demon they see in you out of you. Honestly, a black parent spanking is more like an exorcism. But there was no demon in me, just love. So, I had to find a way to get out of this beating. I tried to use God to get me out of punishment. As my dad is hitting that black, leather belt over ass, I make a quick turn and land on my knees prayer position and start spitting the Lord's prayer. And I knew once he saw me praying to God, he'd see the God in me.

***Jumps into prayer position.***

**YOUNG BRIA**

Our father which art in heaven  
Hallow be thy name  
Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in Heaven  
Give us this day our Daily bread  
And forgive us our trespasses as we forgive who trespass against us  
And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil for  
thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory  
Forever, and ever Amen

***Open eyes quickly and looks up at father.***

***A moment.***

**BRIA**

I looked at him. He looked at me. I looked at him and he looked back at me. And there was a moment. I thought I had won.

**DAD**

Yea, you need to be calling on God.

**BRIA**

Man, the things you do for love. But Jotaynun was so worth it. Even though I oin't think he thought I was cute cause...well you know. Look at me. So I just stayed his friend with his light skin fine self all the way to middle school. And he became even finer. WOOO! His light skin sorta caramelized, so he was like a little toasted caramel. And I was still

Big

***Stomp.***

Black

***Stomp.***

Ugly

**Stomp.**

I would see Jotaynun walking through the hall and I just waited for a moment where I could just be with him by myself so I could show him the best of me.

*Rolled paper drops from the sky or rolls right to her feet. She opens it. Extreme excitement comes over her face. She starts to run switches to YOUNG BRIA.*

**YOUNG BRIA**

Ma! Mom! Mom! Momma! Ma! Mommy! Mom! I ain't yelling at chu. No, I was just trying to get your attention. No. Sorry. I wanted to tell you that my school is throwing a junior dance for the 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> graders. Can I go? Yay! I was thinking I could wear some pants and a cute top. No? Why not? A dress?! Mom you know dresses don't fit me right cause of my shape. No. Mom. I really don't wanna wear a dress. It's gonna look ugly on me. And I wanna look good for Jotaynun. He's gonna be there.

**MOM**

Jotaynun? Who is that? And what kind of name is that? Jotaynun? Hmmm. (laughs). How you spell it? J-o-t-a-y-n-u-n. My God. (laughs) Now that's a name. That's a little big head boy you like? Is he nice? Do you speak to him? Hmm. Well, alright. Got a little crush on him. That is so cute. (laughs) I'm done. Well, you will look cute in a dress, Bria. And we could go on a diet and exercise so none of stuff hanging out. But you got to eat what I tell you to eat and run when I tell you to run. We got two weeks until the dance.

**YOUNG BRIA**

I can do that. As long as I look good in the dress. I promise I will run two miles every day on the track until the dance. Yes, ma'am! 14 days!

*A shift. Sound change. YOUNG BRIA starts to warm-up for running. Running music starts and she begins to jog. Through this jog sequence, YOUNG BRIA counts the days down. 14 day countdown and each time, Bria gets slower. Finally the 14 days are over! She falls out, catching her breathe.*

**YOUNG BRIA**

I'm skinny! I'm skinny. Yes, I did it. I'm finally skinny.

**BRIA**

Ya'll I was so damn happy. I finally was skinny and I found a dress. It was black and came right above my knee with a pendant right on the waist for added effect. And I remember when I first tried it on.

**YOUNG BRIA**

Mom, the dress is cute. But I'm still fat. When will my results show? They won't. I guess. Yes, I'm beautiful and wonderfully made blah blah blah. I don't look bad in the dress. I think Jotaynun will like it. Oh, when I see Jotaynun, it's gonna be fucking magical. Like in Cinderella-

**BRIA**

The black one, not the white one.

**YOUNG BRIA**

Yea. And I'll walk in the dance and he'll see me just like when when Prince Charming and Cinderella first saw each other at the Ball and he asked her for a dance and swooped her off her feet and then they sang that song together in perfect harmony. That's gonna be and Jotaynun. And he won't even notice I'm fat, he'll just be in love just like in the movies. And we'll dance.

*Bria starts to Waltz.*

And then we'll sing.

*Bria sings*

*In the arms of love I'm flying  
Over mountains and meadows and glen  
And I like it so well that for all I can tell  
I may never come down again  
I may never come down to earth again*

Jotaynun, I love you.

**BRIA**

So it's party time and I'm ready for Jotaynun to see me in my black dress that hides my stuff from hanging out and so he can see how well this fat girl could dance.

*A shift. Crank that x Soulja Boy plays. Young Bria dances and notices that Jotaynun doesn't even notice her. Defeat. A shift. She gets in the car.*

**BRIA**

My mom had picked me up when the dance was over and she wanted me to spill the tea about how everything with...Jotaynun.

*Bria moves as if she is in the backseat of the car.*

**YOUNG BRIA**

It was fun. Yea, I danced. Jotaynun? No, I didn't dance with him. He didn't even look at me. No, I'm fine. I know I shouldn't worry about it. *Pause.* Mom, can I get some McDonalds? Thank you.

**BRIA**

Well after middle school and that damn dance, I heard no more of Jotaynun and he probably forgot my ugly ass. But now, I was in high school. Brutal ass world. I had befriended some dope girls. They were all beautiful. The light skin ones were beautiful, by light skin default and the dark skin ones were cute too cause they were small and had big ass booties. I mean huge. Puberty was their best friend. And there was me mis-shaped, knocked kneed, and flat assed. My ass ain't flat no more cause I grew up and did some squats. But being big, dark skin, and having a flat ass was the worse. It was this one nigga in high school, who was the class clown. His name was...was...Jaquan! We all called him "Pip". That was his street name. Pip. I know, I know. This boy use to say the meanest jokes to me. One time in PE class, all the students were required to wear these public school uniforms. These horrible blue uniforms. It looked so ugly on me. And on the first day of class when everyone had their uniforms and we were doing exercises. Pip looks over at me as were trying to do push-ups and says.

**PIP**

DAMN! Girl, your ass is flat. What the hell! Aye yall look at how flat Bria's ass is! AHAHAHAHAHAHA!!! Oh shit. Bruh how you big and got a flat ass??!!! AHAHAHahha! Sponge-bob square ass! AhAHahaha! SpongeBob-square ass. That's your new name.

**BRIA**

I was deemed SpongeBob- square ass for about three years in high school. Sponge-bob Square ass. I went from being fat, black, and ugly to being fat, black, and ugly and no ass. Great. I didn't there was anything possible I could add to the list. But I needed to figure out a way to maneuver in my small little world that did not have space for me to be me. I needed to thug it out. Which is what one of my best friends from high school told me one day. Her name was Amani. Amani was one of my dark skin friends with a big ole booty and walked liked it too. She was like...

**AMANI**

Look, Bria. Let me tell you something about these niggas. I bag em like it nothing. Boom bada boom boom bam and a nigga has been bagged. That's how I do. But see you want niggas not to play you that's the trick. You gotta nigga them which means just act like a nigga and they can't play you. Crack jokes on they ass and show no mercy. That's all I do. Thank me later, bitch. Aha!  
*(sticks tongue out)*

**BRIA**

So, I became the funniest person in the room. I kept the jokes rolling so before anyone could hurt me, I would get them first. That's how I protected myself. I was armed with deadly jokes and I was always on the ready. I kept every one laughing and I made space for myself.

**YOUNG BRIA**

Aye yo, Pip. I'm talking to you and your niggas. Fuck you! Fuck you! And fuck you, too! What kind of name is Pip, anyways?

Roasted.

Your mommy so fat when she sits down in a room, she sit next to everybody. Roasted!

Bruh you ugly too, so you have nothing to say to me. Roasted.

Nigga, when the doctor gave you to your mom she probably was like "what the fuck is that?" Roasted.

Boy shut up with your Mr. Potatoe-head looking ass. Roasted

Okay, you call me SpongeBob- square ass. But that's prolly the name your inmates will be calling you when you drop the soap in jail nigga! Roasted.

Forget you, too.

Oh that's so old. "Watch out for the big girl". That don't phase me no more.

Watch out for the big girl

The thick girl

The fat thighs and hips girls

The round, loud, and profound girl

Can't hurt her cause she wears a crown girl

The obese girl

The one with fat crease girl

The one who laughs before she cries tears girl

The rum shaker

The earthquake

Her mom made her

My mom made me

Big

Dark

Fat

And oh so so so so so so so so **BEAUTIFUL!**

**THE END.**