

Cultural Daily

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The Healing of Black Women

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Black women are told from a young age and reminded throughout their life that navigating through society as a woman of color will always come with certain challenges that non-black people will never understand. When embracing womanhood as a Black woman, there are certain unspoken rules that Black women must follow in order to maintain respectability when conveying our emotions to others. When experiencing basic human emotions, such as anger or sadness in response to micro-aggressions, Black women are seen as aggressive and combative. Although Black women are more likely to experience higher rates of trauma than other groups of women, their emotions are minimized and silenced (West).

The normalization of violence against Black women has roots dating from chattel slavery. Although enslaved people were already not considered to be human, Black women held in captivity were forced into roles that led to sexual abuse, physical mutilation, as well as death. One of the most prominent cases of violence against Black women would be the case of Sarah Baartman. According to the article *Sara Baartman: Inspection, Dissection, and Resurrection* by Zola Maseko, Sarah Baartman is considered to be one of the first Black women recorded to have been human trafficked (Maseko). She was enslaved under false pretenses and had her body paraded around Europe as what was considered to be a “freak show” because of her large breast

and lower body. She was sexually abused and objectified for the remainder of her life, where she died at the young age of 26. The trend of exploitation throughout history directly contributes to the active colonization of the Black female body.

The forcing of Black women to undergo medical experimentation as well as the violation and mutilation of the Black female bodies gave way to many modern day advancements in medicine that are still used today. Although these advancements are positive and save lives, to not acknowledge the lives that were prematurely taken due to the violation of Black women is an unequivocal comparison to the erasure of Black women and their forced contribution to modern day science.



Black women leading a protest in Oakland. Photo by [Annette Bernhardt](#); used under [CC BY-SA 2.0](#)

The invalidation of Black women's trauma has deep lineage in how we navigate through society. It is the unspoken rules that we as a collective experience through learning from others as well as from our own experiences that directly contribute to the statistical rise of systematic violence against us. We are taught to process our emotions in private to avoid looking like the "angry Black woman" in settings where we are the minority. Although any deviation from the predetermined archetype that society gives us as Black women is seen negatively, one of the most impactful forms of protest to these misogynistic ideals is to counteract them with positivity. When giving Black women the role of traditionally feminine, to show them as career women, and kept wives and mothers, we are able to rewrite the narrative of what the average Black woman looks like. Normalizing that we are not a monolith allows space for all Black women to gain access to community and representation.

In order to fully understand the importance of Black women's portrayal in the media and why it correlates to how we are seen it is imperative to distinguish what role it plays in both the younger generation as well as the older generation of Black women. In a recent interview, two Black women belonging to two very different generations were asked to discuss what positive and negative depictions of Black women play in the way that they are treated.

Being that this is a topic that is not really discussed amongst Black women, very similar responses were articulated from both women. Both believed that the portrayal of Black women on mainstreamed media was almost always seen in a negative connotation.

"If we are not given the role as a woman who is a victim of a toxic romantic relationship, we are given the role of being the mammy in support of the lighter skinned main character," stated K, the millennial Black woman.

When both millennial and older generation Black women were asked to describe a time in their

lives where unnecessary aggression was displayed against them in non-violent settings both the millennial and older generation of Black women had unique stories with almost identical undertones. If not conveyed through initial interaction, overall disposition towards Black women who express any emotion, with the exception of the few that are displayed in a way in which other races are comfortable being around, are characterized as being overtly aggressive and hostile.

K, the millennial Black woman, was adamant and forthcoming about her experiences of being harassed by white men specifically more than any other group she has come across. Although she was unable to describe the reasoning behind why she believed this to be the case, she made the point to vocalize that each time she has experienced escalated hostility it was always initiated by the other party. The times she had experienced verbal hostility that later resulted in physical harm was also initiated by white men.

There are many times where I have had aggression projected towards me and most of it came from white men. There was a time specifically where I was overcharged for a product when checking out at a store, I was not angry but the interaction with the cashier was a little annoying to continue to explain. Shortly after expressing I was overcharged to the white female cashier, I was immediately asked by a random white man to leave the store because I was causing a scene. If he was security or another employee, he did not tell anyone that and immediately went to force. I was threatened to have the police call on me and my teenage son, and the man who aggressively confronted me physically pushed me away from the register as if I was a man off the street. The only thing I could think of was if the police came, how would they treat me and my 6 foot Black teenage son who sees a grown man who he does not know physically assault his mother.

Because of the negative depiction of Black women to be antagonistic and masculine throughout history and modern day media, Black women are treated by society with excessive rashness and severity compared to other groups of women. The “Black Brute” caricature that derived from chattel slavery impacts Black women specifically due to the fact that they are seen as predators to one of the most protected groups in society, white women. White women are characterized as beings that are deserving of protection while Black women are seen as the exact opposite lead way for increased statistics of domestic violence against Black women compared to white women.

In the comparative article “Black Womanhood: ‘Essence’ and Its Treatment of Stereotypical Images of Black Women,” promotive examples of black women in mainstream media unequivocally contribute to how we are viewed and treated in society (Woodard, Jennifer Bailey, and Teresa Mastin). Positive promotion such as Essence magazine play a key role in dismantling negative assumptions of what Black women are by promoting them playing roles that are not commonly seen depicted of Black women. When showcasing Black women of all skin tones as business women, mothers, as well as in successful marriages and partnerships, it allows for us to be seen in a more positive outlook and promotes the normalization of these situations to be incorporated more often. Jennifer Bailey, one of the authors of the article, would describe Essence as being exclusively “for and about” Black women, and acts as a catalyst to dispel negative stereotypes of Black women.

Black feminism is defined by the National Museum of African American History and Culture as being a catalyst to Black female liberation (Peterson). The most common method of healing for Black women comes when we acquire the ability to rally behind each other as we have done for generations. The depiction of modern day black women under positive pretenses embodies the importance of Black feminism as well as the need for systems catered to preserving the reputation of Black women.

When discussing the importance of preserving Black feminism amongst both older and younger generations via interview, both agreed that having some sort of community put in place to promote the protection of Black women allows allyship and protection for many Black women in society.

Establishing agencies and communities centered around protecting the rights and promoting the fair treatment of Black women would help decrease the number of cases of misconduct and violence against Black women. Studies on domestic violence and non sexual violence Black women fall victim to shows the increase in these cases due to lack in support systems. Because of this constant reality of having little to no support as a Black women, society plays a key role in making sure that Black women are casted away from being illustrated as a victim, but more so the aggressor, even in situations of blatant misconduct.

Modern day Black female liberation agrees with the importance of separate therapeutic and medical facilities that specialize in Black women's mental health and physiology. In the words of Alexandra J Scott, who studies the liberation of Black women through the use of trauma therapy, the critical need of these resources derives from preventative methods that Black women already incorporate by healing eachother allows for a sense of community while allowing a greater understanding of where our trauma stems from.

There is no denying the disparities Black women face when seeking health care in a racist and unjust healthcare system. According to a study found from Endofound.org Black women are three to four times more likely to experience maternal mortality and higher injury rates regardless of income levels than any other race of women. The lack of urgency that is normalized by health professionals when assisting Black female patients has led to poor bedside manner and in many cases death. Having systems in place that centers the advocacy of Black women's medical treatment would have drastic effects on the amount of mistreatment that Black women fall victim to in the medical field. The establishment of Black female advocacy systems in the medical field would also improve overall trust towards Black female patients receiving and accepting proper medical care.

Since our non consensual arrival to this land, a strong sense of community within the Black community, especially within Black women, has been one of the most important aspects of African American culture. The innate familiarity that the Black American diaspora possesses with one another is cultivated from the importance of a family and community dynamic within Black households and has contributed to Black Americans healing the scars of our history for generations. It is important as we continue to rally for Affirmative Action and systematic change, that we uplift and encourage the Black women around us.

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