

## Ain't I A Woman?

Why is it when Latinx women are angry and passionate it is fetishised and seen as sexy? Why do White women get to show rage that is brave and vulnerable but when Black women have legitimate reasons to be angry they are seen as childish and irrational? The standard of White femininity has exiled many different forms of womanhood but none more so than the Black Woman's. With Black woman's anger comes public punishment and fear. Not only are there mental health risks that accompany the effects of Angry Black Woman stereotype but in turn Black Men themselves would choose not be romantically involved with that kind of misperceived degradation and so the Black family dynamic also suffers. The Angry Black Woman stereotype developed by White patriarchy as a means of control has assisted in idolizing white femininity as the ideal and in turn created a binary establishing what is seen as womanly and what is not. In trying to meet this ideal while also being expelled from it Black women face mental health issues, relationship struggles, and a hate based public perception. With the constant bombardment of false messages from mainstream society that hypersexualize while simultaneously condemning Black femininity and the inevitable altering of the way Black Women are seen from birth, Black Women have every reason to be angry.

White women's placement as the ideal for womanhood and femininity is based in "piety, purity, submissiveness, and domesticity" that exiles Any other ways of being tied to race and outside cultures of this norm are seen as the other side of the binary

(Collins, 1990) Throughout history they have been seen as the ultimate trophy of fragility deserving ultimate protection. Men of all races have lived and died protecting and being the victim of this perceived fragility. The Exonerated Five, or more popularly known as the Central Park Five, lost years of their childhood in prisons and juvenile detention centers on the fear and suspicion of allegedly raping a White woman. Emmet Till at 14 years old was gruesomely tortured and beaten to death by two men for, again, allegedly whistling at a woman which decades later turned out to be false. In Hawaii during 1931 a native man was murdered for allegedly raping a White woman. Their femininity is based in a religious chastity and purity with no overt sexualization that is systematically protected at all times. With white evangelical sexual purity comes promise rings and sex-ed classes to protect the virtue of White women and girls while Black people are seen to have a voracious sexual appetite. In these more affluent communities sexual education curbed teen pregnancy and continued to promote the pristine image but for Black communities there was no education and so teen pregnancy was rampant and continued to perpetuate this toxic cultural standard (Cooper, 2019). With these protections in place White women can do no wrong. When they have committed a terrible act the vulnerability and power of their tears saves them from punishment. Due to the expectation of this White standard binary thinking of what is feminine and what is not inevitably follow. This binary of femininity then brings the topic of strength and weakness into the light. When White Women cry because they're feeling attacked for any reason the world stops and comes to their aid but when Black women do the same they are seen as weak. No one is murdering anyone or starting a

war for a Black Woman which is currently best demonstrated in the still missing Chibok girls of Nigeria for the last five years. There has been little uproar for their safe return. The contrast of hypersexualization against White chastity leads to another damning construct that Black Women are seemingly indestructible. This perceived strength opens room to other believing they can and should be able to take all pain. This was often use as a justification for the sexual violence Black women faced during slavery at the hands of White Masters. This creates the idea that Black Women must be strong during all times and at all costs.

Mental health is not often a subject of conversation in Black households let alone for Black women. The luxury of being able to contemplate your mental state, nurse it in due time, and have the support necessary to do so is one almost only White Women can afford. Vulnerability is not available for Black Women where the Strong Black Woman stereotype prevails. All throughout history we have had to make a way out of nothing while handling our challenges with a stoic demeanor because no one is helping a Black woman conquer the duties, violence, and baggage that have been foisted on us for consecutive lifetimes. In an article by the Crunk Feminist Collective the authors discuss Fantasia Barrino's suicide attempt in 2010. Her vulnerability to speak up for herself after all the psychological weight she was bearing was a crack in the mask and a step in the right direction towards the public acknowledgement that Black Women are just as vulnerable as anyone else. Despite this step Fantasia could still not escape the powerful stereotype laid out for her. Within only a week following her attempted suicide she was back to handling her affairs, claiming she was fine, and writing a new studio

album on her newfound personal freedom (Rboylorn, 2010). This constant bravery and silence has forced Black Women to censor themselves through all pain. Any breaking of that mask of strength is weakness whereas White vulnerability is feminine and sometimes seen as brave. However, while mental health for Black women is a taboo never to be discussed, health problems still persist. As a direct cause of this constant stress and fear on our bodies mental health issues such as depression and PTSD. From out of the constantly contradicting power schemes comes the culture of dissemblance. Black women master creating the outward appearance that all is fine but in her home life it is nothing like this facade. This constant strength perpetuated and created by White men and their systematic power structures only reinforces an invitation for more trauma for Black Women to experience.

These same stereotypes churn themselves into controlling images that perpetuate the hypersexuality and public perception of masculinity forced on Black Women. Patricia Hill Collins writes about images such as Mammies, matriarchs and Sapphires in her research on these sinister power schemes. Due to the White femininity binary Black Women are seen as much more masculine than their White and other Woman of Color counterparts. One such image that promotes this is the Sapphire or Matriarch image. This woman was created out of the necessity to care for her family in difficult financial times and has pushed her man away with constant nagging and bombarding. She is seen as emasculating of men while being too masculine herself. It follows that the matriarch lacks the femininity to care for her children properly and is too angry to keep a man. She blames herself for the racist challenges her children face and

her inability to remain in a stable relationship with Black men. This lack of male companionship is seen as yet another reason as to why she is constantly and irrationally furious. In reality this image only serves to control the public perception of Black women and deceiving people into thinking the systematic issues Black women face are of their own doing. While White women were seen as strong for entering the workforce and demanding rights, Black women were already struggling to provide support their families since slavery. In this struggle they were again condemned for surviving and deemed too masculine. These matriarchal images reinforce the cultural inferiority of Black people and create unrest within the family dynamic leaving room for more outside criticism of Black women and their supposed lack of female behavior.

Born out of these biased tactics is the fight Black Women have to live their life on their own terms. While these racist schemes in place are very powerful and span generations Black Women have used their anger over these topics to create social change and chip away at forging a new identity for themselves in White spaces. In this fight now is a love amongst Black women for their unique beauty in the face of eurocentric standards and an embracing of speaking up on issues of mental health despite being seen as angry. On social media platforms discussions concerning self and Black love are slowly becoming more prominent, helping to destroy the construct that we are unloveable and not fit for marriage because of a lack of submissiveness. These images will not be changed overnight but the newer generation helping to speak up regarding these issues on large spanning platforms is met with hope and progress.

Black Women face radical opposition from all sides that are constantly attempting to force labels on them to create control. Stereotypes like the matriarch and Angry Black Woman manifest themselves into microaggressions and hate from a dominantly White society. This lifetime of constantly surviving instead of living freely turns inwards and results in mental health issues that plague Black Women and their families for more years to come. We have a right to be angry that our identity has been chosen for us and falsely degrades the struggles we have endured in the face of a society that creates those challenges in the first place. For a country to have stolen Black women from their home to be enslaved, worked to death, deemed sinfully hypersexual and masculine to only have been desired by the creators of these images themselves is laughable. The attempts to help destroy Black culture, families and Black women's health through the degradation of Black women from the inside out is more than enough reason to be furious.

## Works to Read

Collins, Patricia Hill. *Black Feminist Thought*.

Cooper, Brittney C. *Eloquent Rage: a Black Feminist Discovers Her Superpower*.

"Life Is Not a Fairytale: Black Women and Depression." *Crunk Feminist Collective*