

Stigma in the Black Community: Breaking the Barriers of Mental Health

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There is a mental health crisis going on that is increasingly killing the black community. Devante Harris, who researches explicitly and looks at mental health in the black community at *Bennett College*, says how “black adolescents, as well as children, have been in a crisis for a while now, far more than ten years (“The Black Youth”). There is a stigma in the black society with mental health. The main root of this problem starts with slavery, as well as other factors stemming from it. Uncovering the stigma of mental health in the black community, addressing outside contributing issues to increasing mental health problems, and discovering ways that the black community can decrease homicide and suicide rates in the black community can lead to improved overall mental health in the black society.

If one goes back to slavery times and looks at how blacks were treated, it shows how it left lifelong damage that became hereditary and passed down through generations. The Tuskegee experiment is another prime reason as to “why so many members of the black community continue to distrust the medical industry to this day” (Harris). Slavery was also a really big event that left lifelong damage among blacks. All these traumatic historical experiences can lead to generational traumas. Studies have found specific structures of DNA found in offspring that can be altered by trauma experienced by the parents or even by the experiences of ancestors from centuries ago (Harris). Examples include abuse in black households, black boys being told they cannot cry, and black mothers being hard on daughters. Fathers who sexually and physically abuse their daughters or girls in their families and boys who do not have a father figure in their life. These are things that have been passed down genetically because back in slavery, black people were taught to keep quiet and stay strong because nobody supported them, and they would get burdensome and have traumatic consequences. Because of this, they started to train

themselves to keep quiet and stay strong. These traits get passed down from generation to generation and cause internal scars that have been carried on from generations in the past.

There are many ways that these scars can show up into offspring. Scars like black boys growing into men expecting society that they must be tough, potentially causing them to be violent and have high chances of being incarcerated, or little black girls grow into women who are often overlooked and overworked and do not say anything because they are supposed to deal with it and this can have a significant impact on declining mental health. Also, in black households, it is common for black parents to tell kids to keep things quiet even if they are hurting from it. Terrie Williams shares a story of someone named Yvonne who had to deal with these problems in her household. Since she was the darkest in her household and her dark skin was seen as “ugly,” her mother “saw darkness as a strike against her” (“I Am Not Your Superwoman”). Her mother never defended her or told her brothers to stop picking on her, nor did she ever teach Yvonne to feel comfortable in her skin. Yvonne was also being abused by her father sexually and physically, which her mother also refused to protect her from. Although Yvonne saw past what her family did, she still could not escape the traumas due to society and its stereotypes. Darker-skinned women are often looked down upon more. For example, society stereotypes dark-skinned women as “the maid, the prostitute, and the hip-hop ho” (“I Am Not Your Superwoman”). These are all ways that contribute to why black women feel they have to fit into society's standards so they are not seen as less than others. Society's standards are like white skinny women in magazines, books, or shows. Black women often face depression because they are constantly being torn down.

A further look into examples of how racism and slavery are the rooted problems associated with the stigma of mental health in the black community shows how there can be

improvement. Tahmi Perzichili exemplifies how the heart of the stigma of mental health is racism. Years ago, “scientific racism was used to justify Slavery” (Perzichilli). Because of these factors, it results in black people feeling ashamed of talking about their problems or ashamed of talking about the overall topic of mental health in general:

63% of black people view perceived mental health conditions as a sign of personal weakness. The cultural stigma around mental health results in people bottling up their emotions and refusing to speak freely, even to friends or family, fearful of how they will be perceived, and only 12.5% of people who identify as black feel the same way about being able to open up to close friends and family (Harris).

Back when slavery happened, blacks were beaten because of their skin color, feeling emotions of anger and sadness because of what was happening to them. Benjamin Rush, who was known as the father of American Psychiatry, said that “negroes are suffering from an affliction called negritude. This “disorder” was thought to be a mild form of leprosy in which the only cure was to become “white” because of this black people are often misdiagnosed through biased opinions. Let us look further into how mental health plays a significant role in the black incarcerated population.

The justice system can play a significant role in the decline of the black incarcerated population. There are too many people in the incarcerated population, especially the black incarcerated population, that are abandoned mentally because they are just seen as criminals and not people who need help. In that regard, “Statistics show that over fifty percent of those incarcerated have mental health concerns. This suggests that rather than receiving treatment for mental illness, BIPOC end up incarcerated because of their symptoms” (Perzichili). This is because these people who are being locked up with mental illness need mental help. After all,

that helps better than being locked up in prison, where mental health can get worse. There is a need to continue and start to face uncomfortable situations for a better outcome, like speaking up about mental health and being more conscious of what is going on in terms of mental health in the black community. This can decrease the problems the black community faces with mental health: “Despite such efforts, racial disparities still exist even after controlling for factors such as income, insurance status, age, and symptom presentation” (Perzichili). Those who are incarcerated matter, too, because they struggle as much as people who have mental illnesses, if not more.

Fifty percent of those incarcerated who are dealing with mental issues have a low chance of getting help because of the lack of care in the justice system due to the fact of them being incarcerated and also being black. These two factors give it a low chance of seeking help because the systems do not see these individuals as people. Black people are often misdiagnosed because of biased opinions, like assuming that black people are violent and aggressive. Because the justice system is unfair and does not see the black incarcerated population as humans, as well as biased opinions, this results in minimizing the chances of getting the support they need if they are diagnosed with the wrong mental illness. This can shift their mind and make matters worse. This is because if they are getting diagnosed with the wrong thing, then their mind will shift to believe they have that mental illness. Schizophrenia is a prime example of a mental disorder that's often misdiagnosed with black people, and more specifically, black men. At first, it was used and seen as a harmless condition, usually in older white people. Then, as time went on, the aspect of the illness changed to something different. People saw illness as something that was caused by aggression, rage, and violence. Then schizophrenia got more diagnosed in black people because they were seen as more violent and aggressive by white people. This also

justified police brutality because when black people would seek help for expressing normal emotions of anger and sadness, they would automatically get diagnosed as having schizophrenia. Psychiatrists also believed that “schizophrenia was described as ‘protest Psychosis’ in which black men developed hostile, aggressive feelings and delusion anti whiteness after listening to or aligning with activist groups such as Black Power, Black Panthers, or the Nation of Islam” (Perzichilli). Now, since then, the majority of black men have been misreadings and misdiagnosed because of having these emotions of anger or rage.

If the focus is on the root of why there is stigma concerning mental health in the black community, more representation in the field brought in, and talking about it more can increase the rates of black people seeking help. Understanding why things are the way they are to uncover and break generational traumas and curses to minimize problems from these factors is essential to fixing and bringing attention to these issues. Not only should the focus be on the root but also on personal experiences that black people have had, bad or good, to see where the barrier of the stigma in mental health is. A look into personal experiences shows the authenticity of dealing with mental health.

Terrie Williams embodies her life experience as well as others to showcase the realism of depression and mental illnesses. Williams wants to be able to support and break the stigma between black people and mental health, as well as describe ways we can move forward and progress in making things better by being more aware of mental health, especially in the black community. She starts by introducing her own realistic experiences while she was battling with depression and the coping mechanisms she used (good and bad). Then, she talks about others’ personal experiences. In the book *Black Is Pain*, author Terrie Williams begins by telling how she began talking about mental health. She wrote an article on depression, which paved the way

for many more to come about what many other people in the black community were going through as well. By doing this, Williams has already taken steps towards improvement. When she wrote the article, nobody knew what she was going through, not even her family, so while this was the first time people across the country were hearing about this, this was the first time her family and friends heard about it, too. She did not like talking about what she was going through because she felt she could carry the load alone. This is very common for black people, especially black women. In black households, girls are not as nurtured as boys, which leads girls to become independent at a young age. African Americans are always expected to be strong and put a brave face on even while hurting and struggling mentally. Although African Americans have come a long way, justice will not be served until they can fully deal with and focus on the ongoing problem of the decline of mental health in the black community.

Terrie Williams went through a deep depression in her 20s and 30s, but before she knew or had a clear understanding of what she was going through, she would not focus on herself, and more so the people around her and work. Then, as it got worse, she decided to go to a therapist, but whenever she would go, she would not go below the surface when talking about her personal life and problems because she did not feel safe. A cause for this could be because her therapist was white. Often, black people, specifically those who may go to a therapist who is not black, will be misdiagnosed because the therapist does not understand or cannot relate. Terrie's therapist ended up giving her a "shallow reading" of her symptoms and got misdiagnosed. At the time, she did not understand misdiagnoses, so she took the reading and believed it and then went on and started to feel "better," but really, she pushed her problems away or was often distracted with work and other things that she did not have time to catch up with. However, just because she pushed them down and "forgot" about them does not mean the problems are all solved.

Terrie started to become more aware of what her therapist was doing, as well as her depression and coping mechanisms and spoke out about what she was going through publicly. Although she was already speaking publicly about it, she was able to gain more attention and find more ways to bring more awareness. Even though this was the right thing to do and helped others, it also tore her apart because she had so many public meetings, interviews, and magazines that she was not paying attention to herself. This is why taking mental health days is important because even though Terrie and people like her want to help others, we must help ourselves first. After all, how can we help others how we want to if we cannot or are not taking care of ourselves? Things started to become worse for her, and those things were draining her, so what she did to make herself feel “better” was using food as a coping mechanism. Often, in the black community, we look for different outlets to cope with weather, food, drugs, or violence. Terrie felt most comfortable with food, and it did “work” for a while until it did not. Terrie began to feel detached from reality, meaning she was not focused on work or social life and was even struggling to do simple things like showering or brushing her teeth. Nobody noticed until she went MIA. Williams did not go to work, text or call anyone, or get out of bed for three days straight. Luckily, she had good friends who came and helped her schedule an emergency appointment with a new therapist. She was diagnosed with clinical depression. She was terrified when she heard that because she did not want people to see or think of her as a crazy person. Often, this is how many people feel, especially in the black community, which is a reason why they are less likely to seek help or talk about it because they are scared of the backlash they will get. It got easier when she spoke out again about her experiences.

Williams then explains the different experiences of other people because many people go through these things, even if they are rich, successful, or famous. A man named Carl Anthony



Foreman was diagnosed with bipolar disorder and depression. This affected his personal life and family so much that he had to move away from his wife and kids. Although he was near and did support them, he did have to move away to take care of himself. From this, he slowly increased, working on getting better. His taking off some weight with work helped a lot since this was a factor that weighed him down.

Terrie Williams showing and talking about her experiences and being open with depression helped open the door for people who were suffering in silence and scared to come about their problems. Outside factors like racism from society or work play significant roles in a decline in mental health. Still, it is also essential to focus on what goes on inside our homes and the traumas or the backlash we may get from families. Outside factors like society's standards and standards in our homes are another reason why we, as in the black community, are less likely to come to family and friends about problems. Mental health in black women is also a big factor in mental health alone because of how society makes us feel, even in our households.

Many black women have to deal with carrying the load of what society has placed—things like being a mother, daughter, sister, wife, or coworker. Society has a lot to do with the decline of mental health in black women. Society's "norms" shape us into having a mindset that sets us back. What "we believe about life and the world is shaped by our environment, both home life and the larger society. This puts black women smack between a rock and a hard place" (Williams "Chapter Two: I Am Not Your Superwoman"). It is a lot to handle to try to reach society's expectations. It is like black women are expected to be superwoman, and because of this, "black women's documented rate of depression is twice that of black men" (Williams "Chapter Two: I Am Not Your Superwoman). As black women, there is a mindset that they can just handle it all. This is why working is a primary cause of depression

because we care about others more than we care about ourselves. It is very common for the black community just to push away problems: “Not acknowledging trauma is one of the most common causes of depression, and black women are no exception”(Williams “Chapter Two: I Am Not Your Superwoman”). It starts at a young age, during childhood, when told to keep things quiet or are too young to be able to get help or even know what to do to help with trauma. As a result, it starts to linger into adulthood, pushing the mindset that we can handle it all, but since the trauma started at a young age, society expects us to “be over it by now.”

Childhood trauma and not receiving help leads to staying silent about their traumas in adolescence and adulthood: “By keeping the trauma a secret, they are not only sowing the seeds of depression but preventing themselves from growing emotionally” (Williams “Chapter Two: I Am Not Your Superwoman”). The trauma just comes back stronger, and it shows up in the forms of alcohol and drug abuse, overeating, fear of relationships, panic attacks, and eventually, leading into depression.

Solliah Bryant is a good example that Terrie Williams mentions. She faced many traumatic experiences throughout her childhood and early adulthood. She was sexually abused by her father and molested by other family members, and as a result, she had depression. She then eventually got help and started to heal: “She changed her name to S.O.L.L.I.A.H, which means she only looks like it ain’t hurting” (Williams “Chapter Two: I Am Not Your Superwoman”). Although this was the name God gave, it also represents every black woman.

Yvonne is another person who represents “how both our home and our society can send us the message that being black and female makes two strikes against us before we even bat” (Williams “Chapter Two: I Am Not Your Superwoman”). Yvonne faced many traumas that negatively impacted her life. Her father raped her, talked down on by her mother because of how

her skin was darker than the rest of her family. Her mother never taught her to be comfortable in her skin, nor did she protect her from her father's abuse. As a result, she had very low self-esteem, and she never believed that people would compliment her skin or be agape because of her beauty. Even though she was going through all these traumatic experiences, she still kept straight in school and was a good student. Then she went to college and got a scholarship, and during her first semester, she maintained good grades, but things started to decline when her second semester came. She could barely get out of bed and did not focus on her studies and grades. So, as she was struggling, she went to her financial officer about it, but they told her to go to her social worker. Her financial officer just assumed that she had a social worker: “Although she was not doing well in school, she would still do anything so as not to return home to her parents. She got different jobs while she put school on pause”(Williams “Chapter Two: I Am Not Your Superwoman”). Her trauma led to her relationship, the flashbacks from her father, and the guilt she had, and then it eventually led her to overdose.

Through childhood, we are taught that things will just go away if we wish them to or pretend it is not there, but as we get older, those things that are troubling us and wish to go away turn into wishing they will go away by having “just one drink, just one joint, just one pill, just a pair of shoes, or even just a scoop of ice cream”(Williams “Chapter Two: I Am Not Your Superwoman”). Black women specifically think that things will just go away from these factors, but the more black women try to disguise the pain, the stronger it will come back. Let us go deeper into these urges and the negative and positive ways of going about them.

In society, many people “act out” or give in to their urges from their feelings instead of going about these urges positively. The positive way of responding to these negative urges is called sublimating. Sublimating means to take a healthier approach to a negative situation.

Sometimes, we think or want to respond healthier to negative feelings, but when those feelings come, we forget all that and act impulsively. There are many ways people act out, such as overeating, undereating, drinking, doing drugs, violence or lashing out, gambling, and so much more. Williams explains short examples of how to take a healthier approach to negative feelings. Williams had a friend who used to cheat on every girl he was with, and it was not until he found someone that he was strongly committed to. When he would think about cheating, he would turn those thoughts into something positive and do things like taking his girlfriend out to eat, giving flowers, and words of affirmation. “This is an example of sublimation because he took those negative feelings and urges and turned them into something positive”(Williams “Chapter Two: I’m Not Your Superwoman”). Overeating is a prominent example of acting out.

More recently, body types with more curves are becoming more accepting, but it was not always that way. For generations, there have been many ways that bodies “should” look. This also shows a lack of representation, especially for the black community, and more specifically, black girls. There are different ways there have been misrepresentations and ways of what bodies “should” look like. Images in magazines mainly show white girls who are very thin or Barbie dolls who have “perfect” bodies. This impacts women mentally because these images and representations are misleading. Women and little girls are undereating because they feel that they should be skinny or being told that they “need more meat on their bones,” and as a result, this can cause bulimia, which is binge eating followed by vomiting. On the other end of the scale, there are girls and women with more curves that they need to eat less. This can result in anorexia, which is a fear of getting fat that makes sufferers diet to the point of malnutrition or even death. As a whole, women of all different body types face depression because they feel they do not fit

into society's norms or standards. Most women often find comfort in food because it seems to be the only thing there when nobody else is.

Other ways of acting out can happen but are less noticeable or visible. Things like when people dress up in their Sunday best or Saturday night best, this is to cover up the fact that they need to feel up to par with society's standards. People spend a lot of money and time trying to fit society's standards, and "a lot of us have overspending as our drug of choice"(Williams "Chapter Two: I Am Not Your Superwoman"). This is often overlooked because even though people who shop to hide their pain, they think that they are still okay because they do not drink or smoke or overeat. This is still an example of how everyday things can be taken and turned into something excessive to hide the pain. On top of acting out, knowing and understanding self-worth is essential, and replacing acting out with sublimating is important.

As generations tend to grow, it seems that the line is blurred as to where self-worth is important, especially for black women: "In almost every sphere of life, black women are either desexualized completely or represented as sex machines" (Williams "Chapter Two: I Am Not Your Superwoman"). Since the lines are blurred on where self-worth and disrespect stand, younger black women are using derogatory terms like "bitch" as a form of friendliness or closeness. For example, Williams mentions how Don Imus, a radio talk show host, referred to the Rutgers women's basketball team as "nappy headed ho's." Although these women are talented academic scholars, he still decided to pick on them and call them out by their names. This goes to show that "no matter what position we hold in American society, we are not safe from racist and sexist abuse" (Williams "Chapter Two: I Am Not Your Superwoman"). When the CEO of *my daughter's keeper* discussed with a group of young girls about the concern of what Don Imus said, they seemed to be careless and not have any emotions of anger or concern. This shows how

desensitized black girls become and how they grow into desensitized women who seem to lose respect for themselves and also sense of their own emotions and feelings. We know how “racism diminishes a black man's sense of confidence in himself” and how black men are more likely to be in prison than in college or even dead (Williams’ chapter four “I wish it”). Although this is a massive problem in itself, black women, young and older, should still recognize their self-worth and recognize instead of letting people get away with sexualizing and diminishing black women as a whole. Black women often face many challenges regarding mental health and having to deal with different factors contributing to it and although they go through so much black men do as well but the struggle of mental health looks different in black men.

The way depression shows and the standards for black men are very different from black women and white men. For black men it’s all about survival proving your masculinity and this typically starts at a young age. Little boys being told not to cry and go to their moms when they’re hurt or scared and if [they] do they’re weak. In society being a man means standing [his] own two feet even if [they] just learned how to walk a week before. As a man one can never just be themselves even as a little boy with something little as not letting people know [they] love your teddy bear and as they get older men often seem to have to prove their masculinity by being tough and aggressive and not emotional because if you do [they’re] “weak”. Men are taught through society that “being aggressive and assertive, and ambitious go hand and hand with achievement, but for black men being aggressive is seen as a social threat and an ambitious black man is *uppity*” (Williams “Chapter Three: I Wish It Would”). This goes into how depression can form in a black man.

Being depressed as a black man isn’t shown as being sad or crying. There are often black men who can be the most energetic and kind person but are deeply depressed. This can also show

as a man always working or moving even if he's not getting anything done because one thing black men won't do is anything where they let themselves sit miserable with unbearable feelings. This is often because they'll be seen as weak for showing too much emotion. Men often don't go to suicide, instead they go to things like violence, gangs, doing or selling drugs, and this is because society often works against black men and set them up for failure. These men who go to gangbans. Sell drugs, go to prison, and make babies they can't support are just truly and deeply depressed that they can't even name or tell themselves.

Terri Williams shares a story of someone named Michael who is very successful which means he works a lot and it leaves no time for his family. Because he worked a lot and left no time for his family it resulted in him getting a divorce and even though he was around physically and financially for his kids he wasn't there emotionally because he centered his life around success (Williams "Chapter Three: I Wish It Would"). Most men center their life around success because they believe manhood equates to success; to be a man you have to be successful. It also can be a way to mask their true pain and feelings because according to society if you show your emotions as a man you're weak.

Racism is a big factor as to why so many black men are depressed because "many of our brothers feel like racism strips them of their power and they either react by overachieving at the expense of their emotional well being"(Williams "Chapter Three: I Wish It Would") because this is their way of being powerful and show they're not weak. Or they react by "underachieving at the expense of their material and emotional well being" (Williams "Chapter Three: I Wish It Would") because they feel powerless and feel that racism has defeated them. Another trigger for depression is a man having to prove his masculinity because black men always feel they have

someone always to prove themselves to. This feeling of being powerless is what leads many to drug abuse, sex, and violence.

Everyone has a gameface they put on for something, whether it's to mask pain, embarrassment, or nervousness. There are many different reasons that people put on a game face. Sometimes people put them on unknowingly because they don't know how to take them off. For men it's masculinity but "[they've] got to learn to recognize that game face, and to see how hiding our pain disconnects us from ourselves and from each other" (Williams "Chapter Three: I Wish It Would"). For many cases being a man means being up for anything and this goes into proving your masculinity which also goes into never putting it down because black men are always proving their masculinity. This is why many men find it easier to be angry than to express other emotions that may contribute to pain. The reason why many black men don't receive help is because there has been a stereotype within the black community that many say that black men don't or won't do therapy which isn't true. It's really that they aren't surrounded by people who believe therapy can help. Because many black men are likely to end up in prison this can have a big impact on depression and this is where it may seem like there's no hope.

There are too many people in the incarcerated population that are abandoned mentally because they're seen as less than everyone else, and this is especially for the black incarcerated population. All people see incarcerated individuals, especially black people, as just criminals or bad people nothing more, and sometimes not even people. In reality these people are struggling mentally and are hurting. Williams gets many letters from people in prison that feel abandoned and worthless, and although many of them are aware of what or how they got into prison "that's when they realize no one is interested in their rehabilitation" (Williams "Chapter Three: I Wish It Would"). This often makes it harder mentally because it's really a dead end because of how



people see the incarcerated population: “It has been said that the United States has more mentally ill people in prisons than in hospitals and mental health facilities” (Williams “Chapter Three: I Wish It Would”). Many of the incarcerated population suffer from bipolar disorder and major depression. The incarcerated population isn’t the only demographics of people who are overlooked when it comes to mental health.

Kids are just as human as adults, meaning that they experience the same level of feelings as adults do if not deeper. Adults' actions play out in the lives of children. Children observe everything adults do, especially their parents. Many adults who are depressed now have most likely felt it in their own childhood or early years. Depression is different for everyone and different groups: “Children, very young, who don't yet have verbal skills to put their feelings into their own words may never say they're feeling down or upset, but instead they act out their emotions” (Williams “Chapter Three: I Wish It Would”). By bullying their siblings or kids at school, picking fights at school, stealing, doing drugs, joining gangs, etc. Most adults ignore these signs because they can't handle or they ignore their own feelings. And like said before, kids observe adults and watch everything they do because essentially they are the role models: “But unless children are taken more seriously as fully human beings and take issues that trouble them just as seriously we are dooming them to repeat the worst points of our own lives” (Williams “Chapter Four: It's A Hard”).

Adults don't value how complicated childrens' lives are because as kids, especially in the black community, [they're] often told “[they're] too young to be depressed and angry” or “[they] don't know real pain until you're an adult”(Williams its a hard). The youth is also often looked down on because they don't have all the same rights as kids (voting, drinking, smoking, driving, etc.) so they're seen as less than. Kids' feelings, emotions, and opinions matter just as much as

adults do. Kids actually can feel more deeply because they haven't learned or had enough practice to numb or ignore their feelings. But because adults underlook their own feelings and neglect them or ignore them then they do the same things with their own children and others, and this is especially in the black community. But all in all "the bottom line is kids are people too" (Williams "Chapter Four: It's A Hard"). Adults should start paying more attention to kids and their well being.

Kids are smarter than adults think. Adults feel as though they have to keep secrets because kids can't handle or deal with pain, but kids actually see these secrets as lies. The real truth is that kids can handle pain. Just like everyone else nobody likes unhappy feelings, but, what makes kids suffer is their parents or any adults denying their pain whether it's the kid's pain or their own. Adults who show kids that pain is real and life has problems, but deals with them in a healthy way is being a good role model into transforming these secrets that kids see as lies as transparency and honesty and a less likely chance for them to grow up and have mental illness and an overall better outcome on a child's development. It's also better than pretending that life's okay while secretly juggling and carrying unbearable problems: "Kids of depressed parents are ten times more likely to suffer from depression than kids who don't have a parent who's depressed"(Williams "Chapter Four: It's A Hard"). Which is why actions matter and the way you deal with things because like said before children see everything whether the adult knows it or not.

There's many things that parents do that can cater to a child's mental illness but what they don't do can affect the child just as much: "Not paying sharp and close attention to what's important to your child, how they are doing in school, or what their ambitions and desires are, or they're mental well being and happiness, can be experienced by the child as a form of

abandonment, and that abandonment can lead to depression” (Williams “Chapter Four: It’s A Hard”). It’s important because society in the U.S. already devalues black children. Things like this just don’t stop at early childhood but also in teens and in college students: “The age of onset of depressive illness tends to peak during the ages of fifteen and nineteen” (Williams “Chapter Four: It’s A Hard”). This is also an opportunity to know that “college is also another important time to identify depression and get treatment because untreated depression will most likely lead to future episodes” (Williams “Chapter Four: It’s A Hard”). Mental development in a child starts with how they’re raised and that’s really where it starts, so we can take measures into improving children's behavior and mental development. .

It takes two to make a child and to raise one. Absent parents play a major role in a child's mental health and development: “Children growing up in single-parent homes are five times more likely to be poor, three times more likely to commit crimes that could lead to prison, and three times as likely to drop out of school” (Williams “Chapter Four: It’s A Hard”). Even with having successful parents, that's not the only thing that's important in a child's life. It’s all about being there mentally and giving the love, support, and care a child needs.

It’s very common in the black community to grow up with one or both parents being absent. First let's discuss one absent parent. Fathers are the most common parent to be absent in a child's life because, like said previously men often act out their depression by having kids they can’t take care of. But the biggest problem of an absent parent is the missed love and what a fatherless kid misses out on most is a father's love: “Many studies say that the absence of a father leads girls to sexual activity and getting pregnant at a young age because they tend to end up looking for that missed love from their fathers in men” (Williams “Chapter Four: It’s A Hard”). Many young boys who are fatherless tend to end up in gangs or in jail. This is when the youth

becomes at risk and more prone to having mental health illnesses because of how things start in their childhood.

Mental health isn't something commonly talked about in the black community and even less in the black youth. Because of this children are easily exposed and redirected to things that contribute to a decline of mental health: "Depression can mask itself as anger, the anger covers feelings of helplessness and frustration of sadness, and the anger can too easily play itself out in violence, especially among young men " (Williams "Chapter Four: It's A Hard"). Because as talked about previously on the topic of depression in black men, young black boys are taught early on that showing emotions is a sign of weakness and violence is a sign of power and strength: "These young men have become more comfortable in their misery; they enjoy the block that houses drug dealers and they glorify *mama drama*" (Williams "Chapter Four: It's A Hard"). Williams mentions she's heard someone say they want to get shot to show that they're just as strong as the "big guys". This shows how kids are observant and observe adults and their parents and also how adults play a significant role in their kids' lives because they are supposed to be the role models. Young black men often join gangs because "youth will often get their advice and support from members of an underworld they respect and understand" (Williams "Chapter Four: It's A Hard"). This happens mostly because these kids don't have a role model that gives them that advice and support so they seek it in other people and in other ways. Imagine how it is when only one parent is absent, but both? It's even more difficult.

The foster care system was made for children whose parents can't take care of them. It's supposed to be a safe space and the government even gives the foster parents or parents money to help out. But of course there's always a dark side to something. These parents may use the money for other things or themselves. This is just one way the foster care system is failing

children today. It really starts with parents or family members who neglect these kids. Most of the time this is why kids end up in foster or care: “There are over half a million kids in the system right now and yet the only time you hear about the system is when a child has died from abuse or neglect by foster parents and even then it's not always recognized” (Williams “Chapter Four: It’s A Hard”). Williams goes on to discuss the staggering statistics of children in the foster care system. She states, “Two thirds of the kids in the foster care system are african american and they stay in the system longer than any other racial or ethnic population; it’s like another world in there that no one knows about, or they know but just ignore it” (Williams “Chapter Four: It’s A Hard”). Children have evolved when it comes to ways they express their feelings and as older generations and other adults, they often overlook these signs.

Music can be a way of how children act out their feelings: “In the past quarter century hip-hop has been the center of some of the greatest artistic creativity in the black community”(Williams “Chapter Four: It’s A Hard”). Older generations often overlook and call the music we listen to a bad influence or that it’s all bad, which isn’t true. But in reality music is used as another way to talk to each other. Williams states that “I’m convinced that what people talk about as the worst part of hip-hop is actually the cries of people’s pain”(“Chapter Four: It’s A Hard”). Now that all the ways the black community stigmatizes mental health and how it affects the black community as a whole is discussed, it's time to get into ways it can be improved and how the black community can overcome and break the stigma and generational traumas that can all contribute to mental health.

Family is one of the main ways they can help with the improvement of mental health: “Anyone who loves a depressed person is also afflicted by this illness and the closer you are to someone who is depressed the harder you’re likely to be hit” (Williams “Chapter Five: That’s

What”). This is why it's important people pay attention to the ones around them and not just themselves. Although everyone's else's mental health is important too and if nobody helps themselves then they can't help anyone else. Sometimes people may feel different emotions if they know something is wrong with someone who is close to us. We may feel things like confusion, anger, betrayal, frustration, loneliness, sadness, helplessness, and even depression. Sometimes we may also try to help but feel that our efforts go unnoticed. This is because we ourselves think we can help that person and fix them but really all we can do is help those people help themselves. This is a common mistake made as well as “assuming that we ourselves are responsible for the suffering of the person we love” (Williams “Chapter Four: It's A Hard”). The truth is that nobody can cure anyone from depression but we can do is help the person dealing with mental illness to help them feel better. It's already hard enough for individuals in the black community to recognize their own mental issues but what we don't realize is that we also don't recognize anyone else, even those closest to us. This is why in the black community “we have to get over the shame and denial of mental health because if we do this we will be able to help not only ourselves but those around us too” (Williams “Chapter Four: It's A Hard”). I think it's also important that we recognize the healthy ways to do this. Williams suggests that, “A supportive friend, family partner, etc. does not mean they do all the work. It means they let the person know that they're there for them and that they're ready and willing to help with the healing process too” (“Chapter Four: “It's A Hard”). Mental health is a process and takes time. Especially for those around you that you want to help or for even yourself, you just have to be patient. If you want to help someone else with mental health you can start but not rush them to do something. This is because this can make matters worse by them feeling pressured.

Williams mentions that there are actually two responses that can make things worse in which she calls the avoider and the savior. She defines these terms first by discussing what the avoider is: “The avoider is what we become to the depressed in our lives” (Williams “Chapter Five: That’s What”). This shows in the avoider as denying the problem or distancing ourselves from the person all together. This is usually because “we feel that we’re saving ourselves from being depressed but really we’re just making that person feel even worse due to the feeling of isolation or loneliness” (Williams “Chapter Five: That’s What”). On the other hand there’s the savior which is the complete opposite of the avoider. These are the people who try to help and think they can cure or fix the person with mental health. Some people think that you can fix it with money, good intentions or anything materialistic. But in reality that doesn’t help because they’re not professionals. These people need professional treatment: “The most loving thing you can do to see their suffering end is to help them get help and the key to taking this step is communication” (Williams “Chapter Five: That’s What”). For communication to be effective it can’t be a one time thing but instead something that's practiced. This is because with communication you can gain clarity on how one feels and just take a healthier approach all together.

Another way we can move toward improving depression is family therapy. Yes therapy is very helpful with just going by yourself, but oftentimes especially in the black community family can contribute to mental illness and also experience mental illness themselves as well. Therefore, “family therapy creates tools to reduce the family distress that may contribute to or come from the ill person’s symptoms”(Williams “Chapter Five: That’s What”). This sends us the message of acceptance and that “we’re all in this together”. Succeeding with mental health is a big goal in itself but “what matters most, fr our own mental health as well as theirs, is not that we succeed,

it's that we start now"(Williams "Chapter Five: That's What"). It's better to start even if it takes more than one try or is a long process because that means that you're already improving by just taking that first step.

Religion and spirituality is another way that many people in the black community connect and find relief when dealing with something big. Especially with mental health or things that set us back. At which point, "About 85 percent of us identify ourselves as either fairly religious or very religious" (Williams "Chapter Six: A Spiritual Hospital"). It dates all the way back to slavery, this is because this was the only black people could connect or see each other; this is also what gave people hope about the ending of slavery. Religion and spirituality is at the center of the black community. Focusing on spirituality is a great way to get in tune with your body and mind and helps you to focus on getting better if dealing with mental illness or any uneasy emotions. Although this is true black people tend to think that that's the only thing that can help. But even in the bible it's said that there are mental health professionals here to help. This is what needs to be recognized, that therapy can help too.

A big reason behind the shame of mental health and talking about mental illness is because often many people invalidate their feelings, making us feel like what we're feeling isn't normal. But the truth is we're all human, and humans have feelings: "Sometimes we feel low, sad, or even hopeless and that's actually okay in situations that *should* produce those feelings" (Williams "Chapter Seven: *Don't Snap*"). Since depression can be a long term illness then these feelings can be long term too and usually when we feel these feelings we can just snap out of it, but with society people often think you can just snap out of depression and if you can't you're a loser. The reason why many people are unsympathetic with other people's pain is because we can't see their pain and this is especially if you can't even see your own pain. Often we react to



people's pain and emotions instead of responding to them as someone who is a thinking and feeling human being, because we feel there's just no time to get to what's behind it. People often don't admit that they're too scared, or busy or hurt to deal with someone's pain but they "blame things outside us from emotional work we could be prepared to do in every encounter and then we wonder why our encounters are frustrating and don't satisfy us"(Williams "Chapter Seven: *Don't Snap*"). This is why we need to help ourselves so we can be there and help other people too and create a healthy community. Another thing with being unsympathetic with someone's feelings can also come with not realizing what someone could be going through and just labeling them as crazy, because they're not crazy they're just hurting. People also don't realize that "emotional healing is not quick and dirty, and more than physical healing is "(Williams "Chapter Seven: *Don't Snap*"). It's a long process that takes a lot of patience.

To have an overall improvement in society it starts at mental health and black people often play a huge role in mental health, but when we uncover the stigma between mental health by recognizing that slavery is the main root of the problem. Then following with generational curses and traumas in the black community that can affect everyone differently like the youth and men and women; it still contributes and affects the black community as a whole. Then if we're able to name and recognize how this affects us then that leads us to finding ways to improve in ways that not only are we helping ourselves but helping those around us as well as looking into it and talking about it as early as childhood. All these things can help show us that we can improve and break the stigma between mental health to create a better community.

Black mental health is important and in the black community we deserve morality and justice. But we won't get that until we break and uncover the stigma behind the black community and mental health. Slavery is one of the most tragic events that happened in history and because

of it the black community and mental health has been failing for years. This is why I believe that everyone should have some kind of outlet or safe haven whenever going through things. I personally have experienced and know what it feels like to deal with pain and mental health, and I can tell you it is a struggle. I think if we pay attention to black people's mental health more and make it a more comfortable topic it will decrease rates of suicide and homicide and violence. Life is valuable and it's not right to have to lose someone due to mental health. Many suicide rates, racism, and police brutality are continuously increasing and if we uncover the stigma and find ways to improve to create a better community because I believe everyone should be happy. Happy in a healthy way and if everyone is happy then the world can be a happier and better place. Although it may be impossible to achieve everyone on earth being happy, I do believe that more peace is necessary because it can create a safer environment and better living. Although this paper is about black mental health; mental health is extremely important for everyone in all aspects of life.

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