

The Sisters Are Alright: Changing the Broken Narrative of Black Women in America

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DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

The Trouble with Black Women

- How do you judge the impact of stereotypes on black women? Do you think any stereotypes are positive or affirming?
- To what extent do you agree with the overall perception of black women described in this chapter? What personal experiences have shaped your views?
- What affects decisions you make about your personal style—hairstyles, dress, etc.? Do you feel your race confines or frees you?

Beauty

- What makes you feel most beautiful? Do you think this is the same for women of other races?
- Have you ever remarked positively on very, dark skin, very kinky hair or exceptionally broad features? Why or why not? Do you think your vision of beauty is influenced by Eurocentric standards?
- If you are a black woman, do you wear your hair straightened or with kinks and curls? What influences your decision?
- Do you think women of all races are equally influenced by the American beauty industry and shifting standards?

Sex

- “I would love to see more women feel free to think beyond this sense of sex as obligation or a chore or something we give away or something we do to keep men, but instead to think of sex and personal satisfaction.”

How do you view sexual freedom?

- As a young girl growing up, what messages about respectability did you receive?
- Do you think that high-profile, black female celebrities who are aggressively sexual in their performances, negatively affect other black women?

Marriage

- “How can a black woman find someone to love her just as she is if she is constantly encouraged to be someone else—to execute some rote and reductive performance to appeal to the allegedly universal needs of the opposite sex?”

What are your thoughts?

- Is marriage necessary for women today?

- Are you married? Do you want to be? Why or why not? Can you legally marry your preferred partner where you live?

Motherhood

- More than 72 percent of black children are born outside of marriage. How do you think this affects black women?
- Most children born to women under 30 (of any race) are born outside of marriage. Do you think there is exceptional attention paid to single, black women?
- What do you think makes a good mother?

Anger

- If you are a black woman, does the Sapphire myth hinder your reaction in potentially anger-inducing situations?
- Do black women as a whole have justifiable reasons to be angry? If so, what are they?

Strength

- Do you think the myth of unique strength has a primarily positive or negative effect on black women?
- Would you describe yourself as “strong?” How do you think your strength impacts how people relate to you?
- How do you take care of yourself—physically and mentally?

Health

- A 2012 study revealed that although black women, as a group, are heavier than white women, black women have “appreciably higher self-esteem.” What do you think explains this disparity?
- Do you consider it positive that women who may have physical challenges related to overweight still can feel good about themselves?
- If you were struggling with depression or a mental illness, would you feel comfortable seeking a professional’s help and/or taking medication? If not, why not?

The Sisters Are Alright

- If you are a black woman, do you consider yourself alright? Why or why not?
- How can black women encourage younger generations to be alright?

READING LIST

Learn more about black women, their history, and black feminist thought by reading these works:

- *Ain’t I A Woman: Black Woman and Feminism* by bell hooks
- *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment* by Patricia Hill Collins
- *Black Macho and the Myth of the Superwoman* by Michelle Wallace
- *The Black Woman: An Anthology* by Toni Cade Bambara and Eleanor W Traylor
- *Black Women in White America: A Documentary History* by Gerda Lerner

- *Bulletproof Diva* by Lisa Jones
- *Black Feminist Politics from Kennedy to Obama* by Duchess Harris
- The Cohambee River Collective Statement by The Cohambee River Collective
- *Home Girls: A Black Feminist Anthology* by Barbara Smith
- *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens: Prose* by Alice Walker
- *Mad at Miles: A Black Woman's Guide to Truth* by Pearl Cleage
- *Sister Citizen* by Melissa Harris-Perry
- *Sister Outsider* by Audre Lorde
- *This Bridge Called My Back, Fourth Edition: Writings by Radical Women of Color* by Cherríe Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa
- *When and Where I Enter: The Impact of Black Women on Race and Sex in America* by Paula J. Giddings
- *We Specialize in the Wholly Impossible: A Reader in Black Women's History* by Darlene Hine (Editor), Wilma King (Editor), Linda Reed (Editor)
- *When Chickenheads Come Home to Roost: A Hip-Hop Feminist Breaks It Down* by Joan Morgan
- *Women, Race and Class* by Angela Y. Davis
- *Words of Fire: Anthology of African-American Feminist Thought* by Beverly Guy-Sheftall

Tamara Winfrey Harris specializes in the intersection of race and gender with current events, politics and pop culture. Her work has appeared in *The Chicago Sun-Times*, *In These Times*, *Ms.* and *Bitch* magazines and online at *The American Prospect*, *Salon*, *The Guardian*, *Newsweek/Daily Beast*, *Jane Pratt's XO Jane*, *The Huffington Post*, *Psychology Today*, *Change.org* and *Clutch* magazine. She has been called to address women's issues in major media outlets, such as NPR's "Weekend Edition."

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