

I Am Not (Your) Superwoman, Black Girl Magic, or Beautiful Struggle: Rethinking the Resilience of Black Women and Girls

Keisha L. Bentley-Edwards¹ and Valerie N. Adams²

¹ General Internal Medicine, Samuel DuBois Cook Center on Social Equity, Duke University

² Department of Childhood Studies, Rutgers University–Camden

The concept and social media hashtag, #BlackGirlMagic, is used to demonstrate the ability of Black women and girls to create paths and to succeed despite intersectional racism, sexism, and classism. Conversely, the concept of Black Girl Magic and Strong Black Woman schemas have been used to glorify struggle, undermine support, and victim-blame. Therefore, resiliency for Black women and girls requires clarification on how and why it is used and understood by researchers and practitioners. This article examines the experiences of Black women and girls by (a) evaluating the use of resiliency research and theoretical frameworks (Luthar et al., 2000; Spencer, 2005); (b) exploring unrecognized strengths and vulnerabilities across the lifespan; and (c) providing recommendations for researchers, interventionists, and practitioners to rethink resiliency for Black women and girls. Black feminist thought and womanism frameworks are integrated to promote sustained healthy development for Black women and girls. Resiliency can only be promoted in Black women and girls if (a) immediate psychosocial and physical needs are addressed while (b) concurrently eliminating systemic barriers and social norms that allow Black women and girls to experience outsized adversity.

Public Significance Statement

Using research and theoretical frameworks, this article clarifies and redefines how resiliency is understood for Black women and girls. Rather than pressuring Black women and girls to be resilient, radical shifts in societal norms and the elimination of systemic barriers are necessary for enduring health. The article explores unrecognized vulnerabilities and strengths across the lifespan as opportunities to create avenues for healthy functioning for Black women and girls.

Keywords: resilience, Black girl magic, Black women and girls, phenomenological variant of ecological systems theory, womanism

The concept and social media hashtag, #BlackGirlMagic, was created by Black women to demonstrate Black women and girls'¹ ability to succeed despite intersectional racism, sexism, and classism (Adams-Bass & Bentley-Edwards,

¹ In this article, Black and African American are used interchangeably. Although there are many shared experiences of gender across the African diaspora, this article focuses on the experiences of Black girls and women in America. Further, the authors acknowledge the expansive nature of gender identity, while also recognizing that the experiences of gender nonconforming and transwomen are not sufficiently captured in this article.

Keisha L. Bentley-Edwards  <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8430-4850>

Valerie N. Adams  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0209-9564>

This research was partially supported by an Academic Award from International Business Machines, Inc., to Keisha L. Bentley-Edwards. The funding source had no other role other than financial support. The authors have no known conflicts of interest to disclose. Research, data, and theoretical frameworks included in this article are appropriately cited and available.

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Keisha L. Bentley-Edwards played a lead role in conceptualization, administration, visualization, writing—original draft, and writing—review and editing. Valerie N. Adams played a lead role in conceptualization, writing—original draft, and writing—review.

Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Keisha L. Bentley-Edwards, General Internal Medicine, Samuel DuBois Cook Center on Social Equity, Duke University, Box 104407, Durham, NC 27708, United States. Email: keisha.bentley.edwards@duke.edu



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2020; Jordan-Zachery & Harris, 2019). As the term has moved outside of Black cultural spaces, Black Girl Magic is often used to demonstrate excellence without the context of resilience or to encourage a goal-oriented Black woman who is also juggling multiple obligations. Although the authors agree that the achievement of Black women and girls is magnificent, the expectations of resilience are used to undermine support, demand service and sacrifice, or even blame Black women and girls for the adversities they face (Abrams et al., 2014; Aniefuna et al., 2020; Evans-Winters, 2011; McGee & Bentley, 2017).

A quandary exists of honoring the creativity and resourcefulness of Black women and girls through the concept of Black Girl Magic while providing the space and grace to make mistakes, grow, and be cared for (Adams-Bass & Bentley-Edwards, 2020). The pressure to continuously rely on Black Girl Magic reinforces and contributes to superwoman/strong black woman schemas for Black women, leading to cycles of achievement, burnout, and somatic concerns (A. J. Thomas & Speight, 2005; Woods-Giscombé, 2010). Drawing on the Luthar et al. (2000) construct of resilience and Spencer's (2005) phenomenological variant of ecological systems theory (PVEST)-linked vulnerability status and resiliency prediction dual-axis model, this article challenges assumptions about the hardiness of Black women and girls, offering alternative approaches to supporting, advocating, and encouraging holistic growth.

How and why researchers and practitioners use resiliency for Black women and girls requires clarification. V. G. Thomas (2004) challenged the field to integrate and develop theoretical psychological frameworks that include the contexts of Black women and girls to ensure this knowledge is included throughout psychology training, research, and practice. As

such, this article examines the experiences of Black women and girls by (a) evaluating the use of resiliency research and theoretical frameworks (Luthar et al., 2000; Spencer, 2005), (b) exploring unrecognized strengths and vulnerabilities across the lifespan, and (c) providing recommendations for rethinking resilience in Black women and girls.

Luthar's Resiliency

Psychologists have investigated why some people who live in challenging environments struggle, while similarly situated people can lead relatively healthy or normal lives. The construct of resiliency has ranged from ideas of personal invulnerability due to a biological fit to one's environment (Anthony & Koupernik, 1974), to perseverance and passion or grit (Duckworth et al., 2007), to understanding contexts and processes (Luthar et al., 2006; Spencer et al., 2006), or a combination of these approaches (Kim-Cohen et al., 2004). Regardless of the approach to resiliency, psychologists are attempting to discover the key to supporting healthy development after exposure to trauma and adversity. Luthar's concept of resiliency is both elegant and complex for exploring the experiences of Black women and girls across the lifespan.

Luthar et al. (2000) operationalize resiliency as a "dynamic process encompassing positive adaptation within the context of significant adversity" (p. 543). The team further clarifies that the conditions of resiliency require that the adversity must pose a sufficient challenge to healthy development and that positive outcomes must occur despite exposure to this adversity. This dynamic process relies less on biological considerations and more on the interplay between social/environmental contexts and family or individual attributes (Luthar, 1999; Luthar et al., 2000).

Particularly for Black women and girls, the latter condition for resiliency is often misapplied. Rather than "the achievement of positive adaptation 'despite' major assaults on the developmental process" (Luthar et al., 2000, p. 543), it is interpreted as positive adaptation that occurs because of major assaults on the developmental process. From acknowledging barriers to perceiving them as necessary for success (i.e., the beautiful struggle), initiatives that are designed to promote healthy development can pressure Black girls to be more resilient, rather than easing the burden of relentless adversity. Additionally, resiliency-supporting programs for Black girls have goals representing nominal educational achievement (better than Black boys but less than White peers) or, conversely, put pressure to always be exceptional at all things. Thus, the execution of resiliency interventions for Black girls can manifest as both high stakes/low expectations and high stakes/high expectations.

These misapplications of resilience align with Luthar et al.'s (2006) critiques of how resiliency is often conceptualized. They assert that resilience occurs as a process rather than as



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static supports and risk factors—particularly those based on individual (biological or personality) traits. Protective factors or supports are the conditions and experiences that typically lead to positive outcomes or buffer the severity of adverse conditions. Risk or vulnerability factors are the conditions and experiences that present significant challenges to an individual and are typically associated with negative outcomes. Regarding support and risk factors as fixed can lead to an oversimplification of the adversities faced, the existing supports that allow the adversity to be countered, and how positive adaptation is defined.

For example, living with two custodial parents is often seen as a protective factor for children and teens. However, this factor is most protective when these family members devote time to sustaining self-esteem and racial identity (Murry et al., 2001; Smith-Bynum, 2023). These family processes should be evaluated on a continuum within their contexts. Unhealthy family processes can explain how the children of wealthy parents, who in isolation can be seen as a support or protective factor, can also have poor mental health and substance use outcomes (Luthar & Barkin, 2012; Luthar & Latendresse, 2005).

Further, positive adaptation is often narrowly defined as a single adjustment outcome (e.g., academic achievement or depression) without accounting for the overall well-being or trajectory of the adaptive response (Brody et al., 2013; Chen et al., 2022; Infurna & Jayawickreme, 2019; Infurna & Luthar, 2018). Researchers are gaining interest in understanding not just the process of resilience but also the cost of resilience. For Black young adults with economically disadvantaged childhoods, high psychosocial competency and educational attainment were also related to greater allostatic load or propensity for diabetes (Type 2); the latter

relationship was not found in similarly disadvantaged White or privileged Black young adults (Brody et al., 2013; Brody, Yu, Miller, & Chen, 2016). Allostatic load assesses the cumulative toll of chronic stress and is noted for its association with hormonal functioning related to aging and metabolic disorders (Guidi et al., 2021).

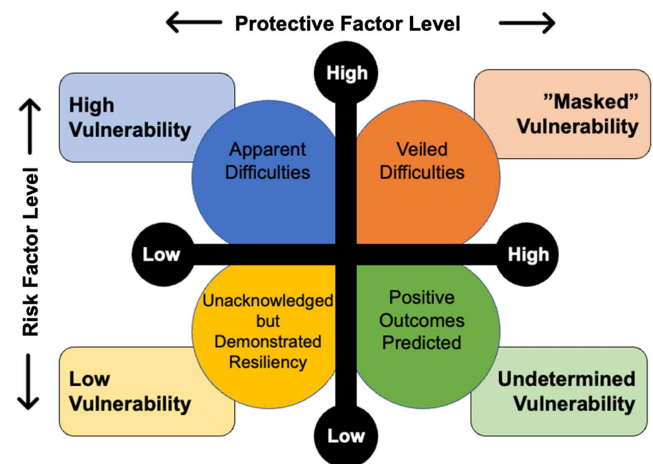
Context matters for conceptualizing the process of resiliency in general, and specifically for Black women and girls. Researchers and practitioners must contemplate how support and risk factors of resilience apply in the context of American racism and sexism.

Spencer’s PVEST

Luthar’s assertion of resilience as a process, as opposed to an individual trait, fits well with Spencer’s (1995) PVEST. PVEST is a cyclical and recursive model of development that considers the interplay between contexts and how this interplay informs perceptions, appraisals, and outcomes at the individual and system levels. Net risk/vulnerability level, net stress engagement levels, reactive coping strategies, life-stage-specific coping outcomes, and emergent identities are the five elements. The PVEST has been previously applied to the psychosocial and physical development of Black women and girls across the lifespan (Bentley-Edwards & Adams-Bass, 2022) and specifically for Black adolescent girls (Adams-Bass & Bentley-Edwards, 2020; Carter et al., 2017; Seaton & Carter, 2019).

The PVEST-linked vulnerability status and resiliency prediction dual-axis model (Spencer, 2005) augments the overall model by surveying the risk and protective factors, Element 1 of the complete PVEST model, which contribute to resiliency (see Figure 1). Spencer’s dual-axis model is

Figure 1
Adaptation of Spencer’s (2005) PVEST-Linked Vulnerability Status and Resiliency Prediction Dual-Axis Model



Note. PVEST = phenomenological variant of ecological systems theory. See the online article for the color version of this figure.

influenced by prior concepts of resilience (Anthony & Koupernik, 1974) and ecological theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). However, PVEST and its dual-axis model evaluate the balance between risk and support factors while also considering the context of multiple system influences (Spencer, 2005; Spencer et al., 2010). Spencer and Swanson (2013) make the distinction that everyone has “exposure to risks and protective factors, but the nature of the risks is different, and the protective factors correlate with specifically experienced cultural supports and protective factors” (p. 1559). As such, the consequences of risk and the benefits of support are not evenly distributed across race and gender. The dual-axis model also provides an opportunity to identify within-group differences in outcomes.

Considering the experience of Black women and girls, many characteristics that can be seen as support in some areas may also provide increased risk in other areas. Rather than thinking about static supports “or” barriers, the dual-axis model requires the critical evaluation of supports “and” barriers, acknowledging that a factor may serve both roles depending on the context. Additionally, the dual-axis model provides the flexibility to consider how support and risk factors may vary across the lifespan (Spencer et al., 2010), as what may be a support for Black women, might be a risk for Black girls.

Black Feminist Thought and Womanism

Outside of traditional psychological research, scholars and activists have thought deeply about the wellness and resilience of Black women and girls in ways that complement Luthar’s and Spencer’s frameworks (Luthar et al., 2000; Spencer, 1995). Specifically, the fields of Black feminist thought and womanism are particularly useful in understanding the collective wisdom and experiences of Black women and girls (Hill Collins, 2000; Walker, 1983).

Womanism was coined by Walker (1983) to identify Black women’s (and women of color’s) approach to feminism, which includes cultural expression and joy, emotional flexibility, spirituality, hope, an appreciation of loving relationships in all their forms and gendered counterparts, autonomy, community building, and a key distinction being the commitment to the “survival and wholeness of an entire people” regardless of gender (p. 11). Although coined by Walker, the components of womanism can be found in Anna Julia Cooper’s work on supporting Black women’s development and fighting racial oppression in the early 20th century, as well as in contemporary womanist theology and psychological frameworks with the same goals (Baker-Fletcher, 1993; Bryant-Davis & Comas-Díaz, 2016; Coleman, 2008; Cooper, 1988; Moody et al., 2023; E. M. Townes, 2006). Using the womanism framework enables support for the holistic healthy development of Black women and girls.

Black feminist thought acknowledges the heterogeneity of Black women’s experiences based on age, social class, education, sexuality, and citizenship, among other identities (Hill Collins, 2000). However, Hill Collins (2000) asserts that “a Black women’s collective standpoint does exist, one characterized by the tensions that accrue to different responses to common challenges” (p. 28). From this perspective, a Black girl can recognize the challenges that her mother faces as a shared obstacle that most Black women in her community endure. She can consider how she will navigate these situations herself—even if it is not a present threat. With Black feminist thought, the individual and group experiences intersect to understand how the world sees Black women and girls, and how their supports and vulnerabilities inform how Black women and girls process these appraisals into identities and behaviors.

Unrecognized Vulnerabilities and Strengths of Black Women and Girls Across the Lifespan

The real-world experience of Black women and girls may run counter to the preconceived notions of their strength and invulnerability. Therefore, the resilience of Black women and girls can be put into conversation with the findings of Luthar and Latendresse (2005) on children from affluent backgrounds regarding missed opportunities to identify vulnerabilities and provide appropriate support. The dual-axis model (Figure 1) also supports the unacknowledged strengths and protective factors of Black women and girls. The culturally supported behaviors of Black women and girls that are often encouraged by family members to avoid harm, can simultaneously be viewed as a risk factor by those unfamiliar with their context. This section presents the complexities of unacknowledged strengths and vulnerabilities for Black women and girls to highlight areas where researchers and practitioners can bolster support. In taking a lifespan approach, the contexts and processes of resiliency that are noted by Luthar and Spencer can be better understood. Hill Collins (2000) acknowledges that although the experiences and appraisals of individual Black women are diverse, there is also group knowledge and shared experiences that can touch Black women and girls’ lives. The following examples of unacknowledged strengths and vulnerabilities can manifest across the lifespan. However, this section demonstrates the ways that life-stage contexts and developmental processes can inform self-perceptions and how the world responds to Black women and girls in ways that may both fortify and diminish well-being.

Girlhood

Girlhood connotes a developmental period of innocence when girls are provided protection and afforded opportunities to explore, identify, and strengthen hobbies and other

interests as a preface to adulthood. Yet, until recently (for the academy), the girlhood experience of Black girls has been an understudied phenomenon. Embedded in the adultification of Black girls is the perspective that Black female children are not innocent or deserving of protection (Epstein et al., 2017). In the adultification process, Black girls are not as emotionally mature as their imposed life stage, which renders an unrecognized vulnerability in their interpersonal relationships. Believing that Black girls are emotionally hardy or somehow culpable leads to their absence as victims in the bullying discourse. When assessed using a multidimensional measurement of bullying behaviors, Sawyer et al. (2008) found that Black elementary school-aged girls reported significantly more bullying than other girls. However, when simply asked if they were being bullied, Black girls' responses were not significantly different than their peers. At the very least, Black girls should be equally considered in antibullying interventions.

To counter issues of harassment and bullying, Black parents often encourage their daughters to be assertive and to stand up for themselves. This functional approach to bullying is done to prevent future bullying and may serve to protect Black girls from seeing themselves as bullying victims because they may be defending themselves either verbally, online, or physically (Adams-Bass & Bentley-Edwards, 2020; Bentley-Edwards & Adams-Bass, 2022). On the one hand, this strength-based approach can teach Black girls self-advocacy in environments that don't always intervene on their behalf. On the other hand, school zero-tolerance bullying/violence policies may result in Black girls being disciplined, even when defending themselves. Even though girls are practicing self-advocacy, repeated emotional and physical assaults become a source of childhood trauma. Teachers, school administrators, and parents should recognize that the bullying experiences of Black girls may look substantially different than bullying archetypes. For example, the bullying of Black girls may be associated with phenotypic markers that are uncommon among non-Black girls, such as hair texture, or it may be associated with their willingness to self-advocate verbally. As such, adults should seek opportunities to intervene, shield, promote conflict resolution strategies, and ultimately keep Black girls healthy and safe.

Adolescence

Media exposure and consumption have become a formidable variable in Black girlhood experiences. Media involves exposure to mass communication (television, radio, internet, newspapers) messages, which teach people socially accepted behaviors that have: (a) a direct influence on cognitive ability and behavioral functioning and (b) a mediating or facilitative indirect influence on learning (Adams & Stevenson, 2012). Media socialization is the

basis for how youth come to develop static or stereotypic selves and other representations (Adams-Bass, 2021).

Television, advertising, and social media are primary sources of information and socialization. Images of Black women and girls have increased in mainstream media over the past decade. Reality television shows targeting Black audiences catapulted to the number one genre for youth aged 16–25 with the introduction of *Flava of Love*. Stereotypic caricatures of Black women continue to be recycled in reality TV franchises such as *Love and Hip-Hop* and *The Real Housewives of Potomac*. Distorted depictions of Black women remain a staple of this genre. Unfortunately, these images, rooted in negative archetypes of Black women, that is, the sapphire or jezebel, are often projected onto Black girls in schools and other spaces where adults and peers are responding to them as adults instead of children (Adams-Bass, 2021).

Black girls are managing virtual and in-person interactions that heavily rely on false narratives about who they are and/or their ability to manage difficult encounters, with an assumption that resilience mitigates the impact of these experiences on their psychological and physical well-being. Negative Black stereotypical images are a challenge when Black youth encounter people who are exposed to this type of media content without cultural context, who endorse these images as representative of Black people (Adams-Bass & Henrici, 2019).

Black girls experience online racial victimization directly and indirectly, and both have been found to have a significant impact on self-esteem and psychological distress (Tynes et al., 2010). Tynes and colleagues found that exposure to online racial victimization is significantly correlated with posttraumatic stress disorder. Matsuzaka et al. (2022) investigated the online sexual victimization of Black young adult women from a womanist orientation. Online sexual victimization was significantly negatively associated with body esteem, but high levels of womanism buffered the harmful impact of general online victimization on body esteem. The results of these studies suggest media socialization and engagement represent the dual-axis high vulnerability quadrant with apparent difficulties associated with media content. Black girls are managing body and gender politics as they experience puberty (Carter et al., 2017); commodified Black beauty standards are an additional layer of messaging to be decoded and understood (Bentley-Edwards & Adams-Bass, 2022).

Black teens also find social media as a mechanism for resistance, joy, camaraderie, and innovation (Adams-Bass & Bentley-Edwards, 2020; Bentley-Edwards & Adams-Bass, 2022; Martinez, 2022). In these ways, social media sites like TikTok have been a vehicle for Black adolescent girls to share a key strength, the ability to unapologetically take up space (Adams-Bass & Bentley-Edwards, 2020; Scott, 2022). On TikTok, Black girls have created unique

dance trends that have become viral sensations and have been able to distribute their creative pursuits in areas that often diminish their contributions, like the hip-hop and beauty industries (Adams-Bass & Bentley-Edwards, 2020; Adams-Bass et al., 2014; McNab, 2023; Scott, 2022). While resisting false narratives of Black girlhood and womanhood, these teens are also using social media to become informed and engaged in social justice issues (Anyiwo et al., 2020; Hope et al., 2015). This early onset of social protest and civic engagement has enduring effects of racial agency that remain throughout the lifespan (Bentley-Edwards, 2016) and follows in the legacy of prior movements involving Black youth who engaged contemporary media (i.e., Black music) to gain traction for Black civil rights (Bentley-Edwards & Adams-Bass, 2022; Chapman-Hilliard et al., 2022). The benefits garnered from teens' social media use should be balanced with monitoring from trusted adults in their lives to minimize the risks of exploitation and distorted self-image.

Adulthood

The assertiveness and self-advocacy that are socialized in girlhood are often coupled with encouragement for ambitious education goals that persist into adulthood. Black families will specifically encourage their daughters to pursue higher education and training as a route for upward social mobility, but also to protect them from dependence on unhealthy relationships and at-work exploitation. Black women are often nontraditional college students, with roughly 40% responsible for at least one dependent child, often while working part time or full time (Besser Doorley et al., 2023).

The ability to manage multiple responsibilities with little or no help is associated with the superwoman or strong Black woman schema (A. J. Thomas & Speight, 2005). The superwoman schema is often perceived positively as an acknowledgment of resilience despite enduring struggles and suffering. It can be argued that the superwoman schema is at the root of the Black Girl Magic phenomenon. However, research has consistently found the adoption of superwoman or strong Black woman schemas as harmful to mental and physical health and interpersonal relationships (Abrams et al., 2014; Allen et al., 2019; Moody et al., 2023; Woods-Giscombé, 2010). Engaging in superwoman schemas allows Black women to meet immediate needs or goals but leaves them vulnerable to long-term health consequences.

Engaging in superwoman schemas offers a shield and a direction in managing every day and racial stressors, helping others, as well as meeting goals and obligations. The superwoman schema may appear to be low vulnerability with unacknowledged but demonstrated resiliency (see Figure 1). Because of its association with achievement markers and responsibility, superwoman and strong Black

woman schemas are often seen as part of successful Black womanhood, sometimes called learned and compulsory resilience (Abrams et al., 2014; Allen et al., 2019). However, the gains achieved from this schema may come at the expense of health, similar to those found in resilient African American adolescents and young adults (Brody, Yu, & Beach, 2016; De France et al., 2022). Allen et al. (2019) found that when interacting with experiences of discrimination, specific aspects of Strong Black Woman schemas (motivation to succeed and obligation to others) were associated with higher allostatic load indicators. Over the long term, this schema veils difficulties and masks vulnerabilities until they show up in health outcomes.

Black women who have achieved educational and career success are often expected to have positive health outcomes (see Figure 1) because these statuses are related to better health outcomes in the general population. However, health data reveal that pregnancy-related death rates for college-educated Black women are 5.2 times higher than their equally educated White counterparts and 1.6 times higher than White women who did not graduate high school (Petersen et al., 2019). Two major intersecting issues represent an unacknowledged vulnerability for educated Black women. First, health professionals have a history of appraising Black women, including pregnant or postpartum women, as strong, having high pain tolerance, and/or drug-seeking which leads to mismanaged care opportunities (Johnson et al., 2019; Taylor, 2020). This phenomenon occurs for Black women regardless of socioeconomic status. Second, the perceived Strong Black Woman Schema and assumptions that educated Black women are low risk/high support, represent an unacknowledged vulnerability and missed opportunity to put appropriate safety protocols in place.

Older Adulthood

The need for loving relationships is necessary across the lifespan, and Black women are no exception to this need. It has been acknowledged that older Black women typically rely on spirituality and involvement in the church to cope with stress and manage daily living (Brown et al., 2008; Smith et al., 2021). The nature and quality of interpersonal support processes in religious settings for older Black women are unacknowledged strengths (Bentley-Edwards & Adams-Bass, 2022; Bentley-Edwards et al., 2021). Even in traditional or gender-conservative Black churches, older Black women have esteemed status and influence. Older Black women can become "Church Mothers" who serve as standard bearers of cultural norms and religious standards within their faith institution (Casselberry, 2017). As Church Mothers, older Black women are highly visible, wield power, and are respected by their fellow congregants and church leaders. Outside of church services, older Black women who live alone are checked on with calls and visits, with church members

providing family-like support that can influence health behaviors and outcomes (Mattis & Jagers, 2001). With that in mind, prayer and spirituality are only one part of the support gained from church involvement for older Black women. The relationship dynamics in church may provide significant yet unacknowledged influence on psychosocial and health outcomes.

Whether in or out of the church setting, older Black women have a need for social networks and intimate relationships. Active senior residential communities provide outlets to find companionship and engage in sexual relationships (Frankowski & Clark, 2009). The intimacy needs and behaviors of older adults in general, and Black women specifically, are understudied. Like their younger counterparts, older Black women's intimate relationships are challenged by limited partner options, prior trauma, and health concerns (Laganá et al., 2013). Despite these barriers, older Black women are having sexual relationships with the gender of their choice (Laganá et al., 2013; Woody, 2015). As researchers gain interest in older lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer adults, the experiences of Black women are typically not included. In a small but robust qualitative study, Woody (2015) found that the older Black lesbians in their study often felt isolated, even when partnered, because they may not have extended family support or children, or the ability to tap into traditional religious supports. Older Black lesbians and other sexual minority women have difficulty in finding intimate relationships with partners within their age group and racial preference.

With life expectancies that exceed that of Black men by roughly 8 years, heterosexual older Black women may find themselves dating younger men. Older Black women typically know less about sexually transmitted infections than younger generations. Public health workers see this population as low risk for sexually transmitted infection, even though HIV and other sexually transmitted infection transmission rates have increased for older adults (Lichtenstein, 2008; Tillman & Mark, 2015). Recognizing societal and gender power imbalances should inform frameworks for building and maintaining healthy intimate relationships for older Black women regardless of sexual orientation.

Rethinking Resiliency for Black Women and Girls: Recommendations for Research, Interventions, and Practice

Extend Your Theoretical Toolkit

Theoretical frameworks are the foundation for rigorous research practices and evidence-based interventions. Researchers should reconsider the success and healthy functioning of Black women and girls through the lens of dynamic, evolving, and interdisciplinary theoretical frameworks. In designing conceptual models for resiliency-promoting

interventions for Black women and girls, these programs must consider Luthar's assertion that resiliency is a process rather than a personality or biological trait (Luthar et al., 2000). Spencer's (2005) PVEST-linked vulnerability status and resiliency prediction dual-axis model provides a framework for the design of research studies and the analysis of data. From this perspective, interventions can shift from a deficit approach (changing flawed people) to a strength-based approach by reinforcing ongoing supports and either eliminating or reducing the impact of direct and systemic barriers. Additionally, researchers must look at how theoretical frameworks outside of psychology may complement or improve our understanding of resilience and well-being. Black feminist thought and womanist theory provide paradigms that allow researchers to thoughtfully integrate both risks and protective factors for understanding resilience specific to Black women and girls throughout the lifespan.

Take a Two-Pronged Resiliency Approach

Prior work on promoting resiliency in African American children and families has focused on psychosocial, mostly individualized outcomes (American Psychological Association, 2008). These strategies can help children navigate the systemic challenges of their environment without changing the circumstances that placed them at risk. These are stop-gap efforts that can help Black girls and their families deal with their lived realities. For example, the timeframe for girlhood or pregnancy is fleeting, so urgent needs cannot wait on institutional change. As a result, efforts to promote resiliency are implemented, and structural barriers in schools and healthcare remain unresolved (Clay, 2019). How many times should a Black woman or girl overcome adversity before the adversities are also addressed?

For sustained, progressive, and healthy development to occur at every stage of life, interventionists should take a two-pronged approach to promoting resiliency that will (a) address the immediate psychosocial and physical needs of Black women and girls, which should co-occur with (b) addressing policies and social norms that allow Black women and girls to experience outsized adversity.

Researchers and interventionists must aim higher than surviving trauma or the absence of maladaptive behaviors as the goal for Black women and girls' healthy development and functioning, paying attention to distinct lifespan markers when designing a study. Rethinking resiliency and health for Black women and girls requires a reflection on existing interdisciplinary frameworks. Womanism and Black feminist thought serve as excellent launching points for multidimensional approaches to healthy functioning (Barrett et al., 2005; Collins, 2022; Moody et al., 2023; Pinto, 2023; V. G. Thomas, 2004; E. Townes, 2015; Walker, 1983).

Rethink Safe Spaces

A running thread in Black feminist thought and womanism frameworks is that Black women and girls need safe spaces to share their experiences and come together in mutual support relative to their life stage or experience. Therefore, building safe spaces is an essential part of long-term self-care. Collins (2022) remarks that Black women need spaces where self-care is a “practice to foster wellness in the social context of harm and injury” (p. 361). In these spaces, Black women and girls are given the opportunity to exist outside of Black girl magic; their struggles are not seen as beautiful but as a call for action, and they can put down their superwoman capes. Although the contexts may differ, Black women and girls need support across the socioeconomic spectrum. For example, Luthar et al. (2017) found that mothers who were health professionals benefited psychologically and with lowered cortisol levels after a series of structured, safe spaces for dialogue and resource sharing. Black women and girls can similarly benefit from peer support groups. Historically, kinship circles organically formed in communities and often served to meet the needs of Black women and girls. The evolution of Black communities and geographic migration patterns suggest that kin remains a vital resource for Black women and girls.

Ideally, the safe spaces that Black women and girls have among peers would also exist in therapy, schools, and other health settings—places that are expected to nurture learning and well-being. From the classroom to clinical settings, practitioners must reflect on whether they are providing a safe space for Black girls and women. Safe spaces for Black girls would likely be similar to spaces for Black women but be developmentally appropriate for their life stage. As noted by Woods-Jaeger et al. (2022), schools can serve as a respite as well as a source of adverse childhood experiences. School counselors and other mental health practitioners must consider how racial microaggressions and their own racial stress responses can interfere with the care of Black women and girls. Training that addresses the unique experiences of Black women and girls should be a requirement for professionals who are working with these populations.

Traditionally “safe space” has been defined as a physical space. The practice of social distancing instituted in response to the COVID-19 pandemic created high vulnerability for the Black community (Bogan et al., 2022) and is counter to communalism that is part of womanism and the Black social experience. As Black women and girls have come under increased attack with fewer allies, virtual platforms such as podcasts, vlogs, Twitter threads (now called X), TikTok, and Facebook groups for Black women and/or girls have become a prominent landing place. However, many of these spaces are hosted on free platforms and are often facilitated voluntarily by Black women and girls who are responding

to a community need. As a result, digital safe spaces are open to outsider critique for being exclusive, infiltrated by non-Black interlopers as well as data mining for marketing. Nevertheless, these digital safe spaces serve to decrease physical and emotional distance and to create an affirming supportive community. Systemic changes are within reach that would make educational and care spaces more trustworthy and promote the healthy development of Black women and girls without them exclusively carrying the burden of care.

Support Womanism Over Superwoman Complex

Ultimately, Black women and girls need to be fully seen, heard, and valued beyond their ability to endure adversity. For example, it is not enough to recognize the perseverance of a pregnant college student working odd jobs while coping with insecure housing—to do so would promote superwoman schemas. Providers can support the self-efficacy of Black women while also directing them to relevant resources that ease their struggles. Moody et al. (2023) found that identifying with superwoman or strong black woman schemas was associated with self-blaming and emotional detachment coping strategies. Conversely, identifying with womanism was positively associated with responding to discrimination with engagement coping strategies (education and activism). The engagement strategies utilized in womanism allow for encouragement, resource sharing, and opportunities to fight against systemic racism and sexism. Therefore, womanism, with its focus on interconnected and supportive spaces, is a healthier approach than the strong black woman schema.

Understand and Practice Racial Socialization

Like other American girls, African American girls are exposed to phrases like “Girl Power” and other empowerment affirmations. Additionally, Black girls receive gendered racial socialization messages from family and other important adults in their lives. Racial and ethnic socialization includes the “transmission and acquisition of intellectual, affective, and behavioral skills toward the protection and affirmation of racial self-efficacy” (Bentley et al., 2009, p. 96).

Gendered racial socialization provides additional direction on navigating cultural norms and stressors based on the intersection of race and gender (Stokes et al., 2020; A. J. Thomas & King, 2007). Parents and other caregivers actively share messages about racial pride, heritage, and images of beauty that reflect the cultural perspectives of African Americans; academic achievement and performance are also of high priority (Hill, 2001). For Black girls, these messages often revolve around building confidence in their appearance (especially hair and skin color), their voice (self-advocacy), and self-determination. Parenting processes are central to the

transmission of racial and gender attitudes. The reality of racism's impact on opportunities for African American children guides the decision by African American parents to engage in proactive racial and gender socialization (Bentley-Edwards & Stevenson, 2016; Charity-Parker & Adams-Bass, 2023; Hill, 2001). These messages align with womanism and Black Feminist Thought concepts of self-definition and validating the experiences of Black women. Overall, racial, and gendered racial socialization can build the competencies to manage racial and gender stress (Anderson & Stevenson, 2019). Gendered racial socialization messages reframe pathological messages communicated about beauty, intelligence, and worth to become a source of empowerment that Black girls.

In school or clinical settings, psychologists must support family racial socialization practices and recognize their own role in the racial socialization of Black girls and women. Black women and girls are not any less Black or gendered when in provider care. It is imperative for psychologists to evaluate the messages they convey about what is possible and acceptable for Black women and girls in their care. Psychologists, especially White psychologists, should reflect on their racial positioning and personal socialization to ensure their guidance is not contributing to the enforcement of gendered and racial hierarchies that impede the health of Black women and girls (Bartoli et al., 2015).

Restorative Justice Practices for Peers and Educators

For Black girls, their self-advocacy is often misinterpreted by teachers as confrontational, and even class participation can be seen as disruptive rather than engaged (Adams-Bass & Bentley-Edwards, 2020; E. W. Morris, 2007; E. W. Morris & Perry, 2017; Stewart et al., 2009). Black girls face higher rates of disciplinary actions in comparison to other girls and some boys, despite unremarkable differences in behaviors from their counterparts (M. W. Morris, 2015). Black girls are typically suspended due to perceptions of "talking back" to authority figures rather than for violence or illicit activities. Black girls are often seen as pseudoadults and culpable for their actions at a very young age (Epstein et al., 2017). Instead of viewing Black teenaged girls as engaging in age-appropriate boundary-pushing, their interactions are perceived as being on equal footing (and maturity) with the adults charged with their care (Adams-Bass & Bentley-Edwards, 2020; Bentley-Edwards, 2021; Bentley-Edwards & Adams-Bass, 2022).

These consistent findings provide opportunities for practitioners and educational systems to evaluate who provides advocacy and safe spaces for Black girls in their academic environment. Restorative justice, with its focus on diminishing power imbalances through relationship building, mediation, and empowerment strategies, should not only be used to improve peer relationships. Indeed, restorative justice

practices can promote healthy communication between Black girls and their teachers and counselors.

Healthy development for Black girls includes allowing them to be seen as children and being surrounded by trustworthy adults who will focus on the content of their interactions rather than punishing their self-expression (Adams-Bass & Bentley-Edwards, 2020). This is important for all Black girls including those who have not achieved a sense of racial identity (Buckley & Carter, 2005) or exposure to gendered racial socialization that can buffer efforts to denigrate their cultural selves. Practice-based and school settings should build on the leadership skills of strong-voiced Black girls so that they will not be seen as disruptive, and as a result, they can become disruptors of inequitable systems as adults.

Conclusion

In a recent article, Collins (2022) reflected on whether Black women can "aim for wellness within a society that is unwell. Black women who uncritically try to fit into a system that is predicated on the devaluation of Black female humanity are unlikely to be on the road to mental health" (p. 367) or physical health. Essentially, the wellness of Black women and girls is unattainable without eliminating systemic barriers. Additionally, researchers and practitioners must find the balance between providing encouragement and glorifying the struggle for Black women and girls. Otherwise, struggle and suffering will continue to be normalized and perceived as necessary for the success of Black women and girls.

Whether it is in response to enduring adversity, such as living in a resource-poor neighborhood, or a specific trauma, supporting adaptive recovery from these issues is a key aspect of the practice of psychology. The concern about how resiliency for Black women and girls is understood includes the assumption that resiliency is common and that prolonged suffering is necessary for healthy development. As resiliency research has evolved, it is clear that resiliency in response to adversity is not as ubiquitous as previously assumed (Infurna & Jayawickreme, 2019; Infurna & Luthar, 2016), and there may be a physical toll from constantly facing adversity (Brody, Yu, Miller, & Chen, 2016; Geronimus, 1992).

Black women and girls who manage high vulnerability with finesse can obscure the high risks to their health (Abrams et al., 2014; Allen et al., 2019). Earlier studies suggest Black girls learn to navigate uncomfortable situations by association and modeling of behaviors of those in close proximity, usually the behaviors of their mothers (Hesse-Biber et al., 2004). As such, intergenerational coping mechanisms must be understood in supporting the well-being of Black women and girls.

It is great that Black girls and women have demonstrated such resilience. We applaud and encourage Black girls and women to be resilient and to activate Black girl magic.

Yet, Black women and girls deserve to simply exist without the pressure of overcoming systemic obstacles. Resiliency interventions and research were designed as stopgap measures to help youth manage contemporary societal ills. Resiliency was never intended to be a final resolution for structural problems. Creating an atmosphere for healthy development despite structural barriers, while also generating solutions to eliminate these barriers, is an ethical responsibility of research and practice. If changing adverse circumstances was the primary intervention strategy, then Black women and girls would not have to constantly be resilient and rely on Black Girl Magic.

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Received March 3, 2023

Revision received November 29, 2023

Accepted November 30, 2023 ■

Correction to “The Narcissistic Appeal of Leadership Theories” by Steffens et al. (2022)

In the article “The Narcissistic Appeal of Leadership Theories,” by Niklas K. Steffens, Mark S. P. Chong, and S. Alexander Haslam (*American Psychologist, 2022, Vol. 77, No. 2, pp. 234–248, <https://doi.org/10.1037/amp0000738>*), Mark S. P. Chong was incorrectly omitted from the author list. The online version of this article has been corrected.

<https://doi.org/10.1037/amp0001418>