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Sydni Davis
University of Mississippi

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SOUL FOOD AND SOUL SEARCHING: HOW THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN FOOD IN BLACK CULTURE AND RACIALIZED BEAUTY STANDARDS CAN LEAD TO DISORDERED EATING SYMPTOMS IN BLACK WOMEN

Sydni Davis
Class of 2024

Sydni was born in Tupelo, Mississippi to Carolyn and Willie Davis. She graduated from Tupelo High School in May of 2020. She has one sister, Leah, an alumnus of the University of Mississippi who now resides in Birmingham. She is majoring in African American Studies and minoring in Museum Studies. She hopes to become a museum administrator and amplify Black people’s rich history.

ABSTRACT

Food is an important part of Black culture, expression, and history, but it is often underrepresented in research on eating disorders. Previous research has shown that Black women experience eating disorders comparable to White women when measured using the Questionnaire for Eating Disorder Diagnoses. In light of this, I wanted to know the stories behind women that might exhibit eating disorder symptoms. I used oral histories gathered from three women in my family and autoethnography to amplify the voices of Black women. I found that of my small sample size, 50% felt that they had an unhealthy relationship with food which could be linked to eating disorder symptoms. These findings help further the conversation around Black women and their complex relationship with food. Continuing to expand on the research of Black women and food helps dispute negative stereotypes and taboos.
**Introduction**

My writing relays Black women’s stories on body image, eating disorder symptoms, and beauty standards through autoethnography and oral history interviews. In depth interviews were conducted with 3 women and their answers were thematically categorized. The women were 23, 55, and 70 years old; they were asked 17 questions ranging from topics on food, body image, mental health, and media influences. I chose this project because I have seen the effects of eating disorder symptoms and Eurocentric beauty standards on my own body and life. Black women are often “othered,” meaning that we are easily ostracized especially in the arenas of beauty and health. I have felt the effects of beauty standards I will never live up to because they were not meant for me in the first place. My hope for this project is to give Black women a voice, so we can speak for ourselves. So much literature on Black women and eating disorders is missing from scholarly writing. Most eating disorder research is gathered from White populations. While food plays a large part in all cultures, it is especially important for those of African descent. Foods specific to Black culture are often deemed unhealthy because they contain high amounts of sugar, salt, and fat. Eating these foods causes weight gain and weight distribution to vary. Many young Black women develop eating disorders because of their environments. When surrounded by negative comments about their bodies and the impossible societal standard of beauty, most Black women seem to not fit in. American beauty standards hold black women to an impossible level that few achieve without extreme criticism and obstacles. Eating disorders often go unnoticed because these women do not fit the typical standard of beauty. Many researchers have studied the intersections of race and gender, but many miss the firsthand accounts of people who live their research every day. Rarely do Black people have the spotlight to themselves. This especially applies to Black women. This research will ask African American women about the types of foods they eat, media influences, body image, and beauty standards. My research questions are based in three categories; history, food, and society.

**Research Question 1:** Historically, what has made Black women more susceptible to this unjust treatment?

**Research Question 2:** What impact do soul food and the culture around food have on body image and ED symptoms?

**Research Question 3:** In recent years, what trends in media have perpetuated beauty standards that exclude Black women?

**Literature Review**

Germaine Awad’s 2015 study, Beauty and Body Image Concerns Among African American College Women, focuses on body image concerns in Black women of college-age but also looks into the history of the exploitation of Black women’s bodies throughout history. Awad’s research posed several relevant questions. Her first question was “What are the unique issues related to African American women’s body image and beauty and which themes are the most frequent?” In Awad’s research, one of the most important things to the women was their hair. One of the most prevalent things in the category of hair was the ignorance and microaggressions they received. The paper expresses that many white people just do not understand how Black hair works. Awad also writes that Black women’s hair is often a conversation starter with non-Black people. One participant says that many tropes and activities are assigned to her just because she wears her hair naturally. Her
third research question was “What are the sources of the messages they receive?” One of her participants answered that they went to a predominantly White school where everyone was ‘skinny and tall.’ The participant also explained that she worked out constantly and barely ate so she could conform to the dominant White culture.

Family and media were the most common sources of messaging about beauty standards. Messages coming from family were often passed down from generations past and focused on the importance of other people’s perceptions. One participant speaks of her mother’s lesson on the impact of others’ seeing you for the first time, especially if you do not look your best. Awad’s research found that although Black women are present in media, they are not represented well (Awad, 2015). Because this article studies Black women’s womanhood and how it is constantly being questioned and negotiated, Rana Emerson’s 2002 article titled, “Where Mei Girls At? Negotiating Black Womanhood in Music Videos” continues that conversation. Her article focused on Black women’s music videos on MTV. Although Black women are present in Black hip-hop spaces, men’s warped perception of them and their sexualities is often even more present. More often than not, Black women are presented as one-dimensional characters. They are presented as eye candy and not given the fullness of their humanity. The author found that in the videos she watched, only 3 of the women were older than 30. That finding continues to reinforce that Black women are there for entertainment. These one-dimensional characters are sexual objects and have little to no agency apart from that. After analyzing the stereotypes and Black women’s counter-activity to these myths through unity and autonomy, the author concludes that Black women are reclaiming their sexuality.

Both Awad and Emerson’s studies gave light to the history of Black women’s appearance and perception. Redict Taddele’s 2020 article on the Tignon Laws advances research on the history of Black women’s appearances and the degradation they have experienced throughout history. The Tignon Laws forced Black women to cover their hair to degrade them. Black women accepted this challenge and adorned their headwraps to prove their beauty could not be hidden. All of these writings culminate into the body image of Black women and their outward perception and their eating habits. Howard University’s Veronica Thomas and Michelle James 1988 study had 102 Black women complete a questionnaire that gauged their body image, dieting tendencies, and sex role traits (their perception of outside desirability). 34.7% of women expressed some happiness with their bodies while 54.5% of women were unhappy. 23.8% of the women used liquid dieting formulas, 11.9% revealed the use of diuretics, while 2% said they self-induced vomiting. Thomas and James’ results revealed that Black women have comparable numbers to research on women in general despite popular belief inside and outside of the Black community. Even though within the Black community weight in certain areas is not as demonized compared to general populations, Thomas and James found that restrictive dieting habits were increasing popularity among younger women. One interesting thing that James and Thomas found was the women expressed that although they were not confident in their weight, they still did not feel prohibited from any activities. This spotlights the resilience of Black women and their unwillingness to give up despite their personal struggles.

Using restrictive dieting methods such as self-induced vomiting and diuretics are eating disorder symptoms according to the National Eating Disorders Association (NEDA). Amy Mulholland and Laurie Mintz’s 2001 study examined 413 Black women at a public university through a questionnaire called the “Questionnaire for Eating Disorder Diagnoses.” Of the 413, 2% of the women’s results yielded that they had a diagnosable eating disorder. Of the non-disordered participants, 23% had eating disorder symptoms. This study’s results were comparable to similar studies done with predominantly White participants. The connection between Black women and...
their eating habits can also be tied back to the food they consume. Growing up Black, especially in the Southern United States, soul food is specifically prevalent. Hearty foods cooked down with meat and lots of fat are meals full of history, soul, and love. Even with this being a part of cultural norms, Black women may feel pressured to back off of soul food or use other methods to maintain weight while regularly eating these high caloric, starchy, and heavy foods. Conversely, they might ‘overindulge’ in these comfort foods and begin to binge and gain weight. Despite this, soul food is important to African American culture and is not the only culprit of eating disorders or weight gain.

Understanding the culture of soul food and the history was important to clearing its name. Erika Kendall’s 2012 writing on soul food disputed claims that soul food is unhealthy despite the very organic nature of it. The author explains that in most kitchens, everything was made from scratch. While processed foods were the primary cause of many people’s weight gain, Kendall makes the point that most of the past Black generations’ diets were plant-based and homemade. Kendall also argues that Black Americans are not the only population that are overweight. Adrian Miller’s 2013 book, Soul Food: The Surprising Story of an American Cuisine, One Plate at a Time, focuses on soul food while dispelling some myths of the food’s culture with a lighthearted comedic tone. Presented as almost a cookbook, each chapter focuses on a different aspect of soul food. But Miller starts with the history and importance of soul food. Miller uncovers the complexities of soul food while presenting the history and infusion of other cultures. Adrian Miller questions that soul food is a joke or a “killer” of Black people. With this book, Miller wanted to help oppose that idea. Miller argues that it is not only important, but vital, to keeping Black culture alive. These made me reflect on my own perceptions of food, body image, and my experience as a Black woman. Carolyn Ellis and Arthur Bohrner’s 2014 book writing autoethnography and Heewon Chang’s 2008 book Autoethnography as a Method helped frame the autoethnography and how the content related to the topic of this research. Ellis’ approach prompts the author to involve the reader and speak directly to them. The book is framed as a workshop on autoethnography and incorporates handouts to help guide research. Robin Boylorn’s 2008 autoethnographic essay titled “As Seen On TV: An Autoethnographic Reflection on Race and Reality Television” was written by a Black woman and contained some relevant information as well. This helped guide methodology as it was structured similarly. In this article, Boylorn looks at reality television and analyzed how Black women consume media and are represented in it. Even though her essay is an autoethnography, she calls for other Black women to join her. She delves into the different stereotypes of Black women, tracing their roots back into slavery and colonization. She also uses the example of her younger cousin emulating a Jezebel caricature she saw on TV. This was a great read because Boylorn analyzed her own identity in relation to reality television. Its relevance also translates because it explores the perception of Black women and the expectations put on them by society.

**Method**

I recruited the participants by asking women in my family. I purposefully chose a wide age range to ensure that I had useful data. Although this type of sample is not as useful for generalizing data, it still provided a wide scope to view Black women through. This is most useful because I did not use data to make generalizations of Black women, only listened and reported the stories of several Black women. I used the autoethnography method to reflect upon myself and my experiences while still the world around me. Autoethnography is the act of looking within with the intention of reflecting back to the world around the subject. It requires that the writer be able to self-reflect without placing blame on others. Autoethnography does not attempt to speak on behalf of others but center the writer (Boylorn, 2008). I wanted to include the reader in my story and in my
writing. Therefore, I grounded my writings in Ellis and Bochner’s work in order to craft a story instead of just relaying information. I wrote down every story and experience I could think of on paper before typing them up. After years of suppressing certain memories, it was hard to deal with the emotions that came about while recording them. This is also part of autoethnography, dealing with the complex emotions.

Interview Procedure

All participants were given the list of questions to review beforehand to ensure their comfortability with the questions. Once the interview started, participants were reassured that all questions were optional and they could stop at any point without repercussions.

I sought IRB approval, but these fell under oral history/ethnography so IRB approval was not needed. All women were given the option for an alias, but opted for their names to be used. The interview started with asking for the participants name or the name they’d prefer in addition to their age.

I promised that I would not use their data if they wanted to stop or became uncomfortable. Interviews consisted of 17 questions and ranged from 17 minutes to 42 minutes. The question topics were food, media/outer influences, body image, beauty, and mental health. Even though all questions were optional, all 3 participants opted to answer them all. I recorded each woman’s responses on the voice memos app on my phone. All memos were then transferred to my laptop and locked using the DeskUtility app on MacOs. I used Descript to transcribe each interview and backed up each recording to Google Drive.

Both Leah and Ella’s interviews were done over the phone due to distance and scheduling conflicts. I also asked myself these questions and answered them honestly. I wrote and recorded my answers in a document. I then used these to fuel my autoethnography and guide my writings. Please see Appendix A at the end of this article for a full list of the interview questions.

Participants

A convenience sample was implemented for recruiting interviews. I asked 3 women from my family to participate in this study. They were aged 23, 55, and 70 years old. I tried to get a wide range of ages to ensure that each generation was covered and every woman had a different perspective. I also wanted a range of background and life experience. For example, Carolyn was a stay-at-home mom for over a decade and has only recently re-entered the workforce while Ella is retired and spends her days practicing her faith and helping others. Leah, a recent college graduate, was in her first year of being among the post-grad workforce. Although this type of sample is not as useful for generalizing data, it still provides a wide scope to view Black women through. This study may have its limits because of the limited amount of sampling, but it still yields vital results.

I also used myself as a participant and answered the interview questions not only to satisfy my autoethnography portion, but also to give more perspective. I have very different answers than the women that I interviewed, so the contrast between those was interesting to see.
Food

My favorite food, most notably, is my dad's macaroni and cheese. The freshly grated cheese melting with the custard is, by far, my favorite thing. My sister and I always beg him to make it, but we normally don't get it unless it is a holiday. We savor every bite, not knowing if the next holiday will bring that cheesy goodness. My momma's spinach pot pie is also ranked highly on the list of my favorite foods. It is made with cooked down spinach, ricotta cheese, and shredded chicken carefully folded into a pie crust topped with shredded cheese. It is a perfect meal steaming from the oven or cold because of its resemblance to quiche. I love eating raw bell peppers for snacks; I am absolutely in love with Brussel sprouts, and also ice cream. A good salad with fruit and feta is also practically a daily staple in my mealtime routine. When I asked the women what their favorite foods were, they replied with varying answers. Ella said she loved to mix peas and butterbeans. She mentioned she loved corn, baked and fried chicken, and sweet potatoes. Carolyn loves to sweat out zucchini, mushrooms, onions, and peppers in a skillet. She says she loves to eat it especially this time of year. Leah said she loves fried green tomatoes or a really good salad.

My mom was a professional chef and a private caterer for the first half of my life, so I was no stranger to amazing dishes hailing from countries around the world. We had a lot of food restrictions growing up, not only because of my allergies, but because my mom was very conscious of what we consumed. I didn't have my first happy meal until two weeks before I turned eighteen. My mom is a holistic and clean caterer—she can make any vegetable taste brand new. Growing up, mealtime was very family oriented. My sister and I were not allowed to eat in our rooms. We ate at the dinner table or together watching a TV show. For breakfast, we might have oatmeal, egg bites, or yogurt parfaits. If my dad was home for breakfast, we might have omelets, normally packed with last night's dinner protein. My dad also makes the best pancakes that are gorgeous and fluffy, and my mom makes her homemade syrup. For most meals now, we eat separately watching our own shows or online videos, but we still share videos and repeat one liners from whatever show is playing. When I'm at school, mealtime is normally sitting down in front of my laptop streaming a show or watching YouTube videos. Breakfast often consists of a mix of whatever is in the house along with a coffee and a couple of bottles of water. I often skip lunch or grab something quick unless I am out running errands. Some days I can go all day without sitting down to eat. Often, I don't feel hungry enough to justify eating. When I asked Ella and Carolyn what mealtime looked like growing up, they both mentioned that they grew up with their own livestock and growing their food. With similar experiences, it was amazing to hear the differences in their answers.

Carolyn stressed the importance of not compromising flavor or heritage, but also keeping your health. She described how she cooked her greens with different spices and stocks but left out the traditional fatback or any pork at all. She also emphasized the importance of removing food from the center of your universe. She talked about food many attached to memories and emotions—especially in Black culture. If someone dies, food. If someone is sick, food. Marriage, food. You had a bad day? Food. So, when she had kids, she made it her mission to detach food as a revolving point for memories. She wanted her daughters to be able to remember a vacation and the beautiful scenery without attaching it to a meal. And as her daughter, I can say it is difficult. She explains that her father had two very large gardens and a hog. Her father would grow his own vegetables and then her, her siblings, and her mother would can, pickle, or cook the vegetables. Ella described the difficulty of separating from the ways she grew up eating and creating the healthy conscious and trendy foods of today. She described that small switches helped, but she enjoyed making the meals of her heritage and bringing comfort to her family. She explained that her father often reached out and helped feed others in their community. Similar to Carolyn, Ella's family had cows and chickens from which they could gather meat, eggs, and milk. Even though her family
was poor and she mentions that they didn’t have much, she was still thankful for the way her family raised her. Referenced earlier, Erica Kendall’s article mentions that she does not think that weight gain or “unhealthiness” is derived from consuming soul food. The stories of Carolyn, Ella and many others describe hearty and homegrown foods. These whole, unprocessed products, according to Kendall, are not the culprit, but processed and fast-food is more to blame (Kendall, 2015). While many doctors may believe that food is what is causing many problems, nutritionists often steer away from discouraging foods. It is believed that completely abstaining from certain foods or food groups (i.e carbs) can lead to more harm than good in the long run. Adrian Miller faced these types of biases when touring the American South to write his book. He recognizes that soul food has a hard time shaking its unhealthy stigma because of the fried, sweetened and starchy food and its connection to health issues among African Americans. But all of this continues to play into the systemic oppression of Black people and racial caste system (Miller, 2013). Black food has been long stigmatized because of race and systems that African Americans could not help but adhere to. Currently, soul food has been rebranded as southern cuisine and made ‘healthy,’ co-opted by the very group of people who demonize it outside of its original heritage.

If I were to describe my relationship with food, I would rate it a 3 on a scale of 1 to 5. Food is sustenance. I believe my food should nourish me, but I also deserve to enjoy what I eat. A bad meal can sometimes ruin your mood, so food should be savored and loved by the consumer. I also have, and still, struggle with eating disorders, so separating food from the stigma in my head can be difficult. Remembering that food is not a punishment, but necessary and sometimes a reward is an everyday thing for me. There have been many times when someone has told me I do not suffer from eating disorders because I’m still fat. In those times, I have to remember that bigger women are often left out of the conversation of eating disorders because of the presentation of eating disorders. Being both Black and fat made it hard for people to believe I had an eating disorder. My freshman year during my choir’s Christmas season production, I hadn’t eaten anything in two days. We always had food catered from local restaurants and nothing seemed appetizing to me during the time. I was also very worried about fitting into my costume even though it was erring on the side of being too big. After starving myself for two days, the first thing I ate was a fun size Twix which made me sick. I was very scared to eat any “real food” after that out of fear I’d be sick again. My relationship with food has improved in the last four years, but it is still a very hard thing to recover from. Some days I still view food as an enemy rather than a comfort.

I asked the participants to rate their relationship with food on a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being the unhealthiest and 5 being the healthiest. I clarified that this rating was not about how “healthy” the food they ate on a daily basis was or how many calories they consumed, but how they viewed food. I used healthy in quotes because it is a subjective word in this context, meaning whatever the participant thought was good for their body. All of the women said they did not feel as if they had an unhealthy relationship with food. Only one woman said that she had 3 or a fairly healthy relationship with food while the other two participants rated themselves a 5. It was very interesting to see this range because I rated my relationship a 2. It was interesting to see that out of the women I interviewed, they did not have comparable answers to the literature I read. Although I am not using my data to generalize, I found this difference intriguing. More often than not, having an inconsistent relationship with food leads to issues with beauty or body image. Non-black people disparage the foods but have no problem remaking them. This applies to everything from food to music and fashion. This is why I found it imperative to examine how outside influences made Black women view themselves. Black culture and looks have, for so long, been degraded, but in more recent years there has seen an uptick in use and virality on the Internet.
Media and Beauty

Black women played many roles and wore many hats throughout the four hundred years of slavery. The stereotypes have stuck to Black women into the present—without their consent. The Mammy, Jezebel, and Sapphire stereotypes created during slavery and honed through the years, shine a light on everything thought to be wrong with Black women. The mammy stereotype was motherly, desexualized, bossy, stern, and fat with larger breasts (Fuller, 2001). Mammys were, and still are, seen as caretakers of White America. They were in the family, but still knew their place of servitude (Collins, 2000). The mammy stereotype carries into the present day as seen by Lorraine Fuller’s 2001 study, ‘Are We Seeing Things? The Pinesol Lady and the Ghost of Aunt Jemima.’ Through her study, Fuller concludes that the Pinesol lady is perceived to be a mammy stereotype through her size and need for cleaning. Diane Amos, the infamous Pinesol lady, says that she does not believe she is portraying a mammy stereotype, she is just herself. Her response to writings like Fuller’s is that they are a commentary on America’s systemic racism, not on her as a person or a personality (OWN, 2017). Amos even noted she thought executives would not want her on screen because she’s a bigger Black woman.

The Jezebel stereotype was a sexually promiscuous and loose woman. She flaunted her sexuality and it was an integral part of her representation. While white women were portrayed as the model of self-respect and self-control, Black women were portrayed as quite the opposite (Pilgrim, 2002). Although most Black women did not fit into this stereotype, promiscuity was still forced upon them to justify White America’s horrible actions towards them. These stereotypes allowed sexual violence towards Black women to continue into the present.

I remember being a young girl and not being permitted to wear red, especially red nail polish or lipstick. Black girls are taught that red causes them to ‘grow up too fast.’ Or that it makes them easy targets for violence. While it may be seen as a protective measure, it continues to perpetuate violence against Black women through stereotyping. One notable use of the Jezebel stereotype still being used today is Olivia Pope on the show Scandal. In Kendall King’s 2015 writing, she notes that Pope is not only a seductress by being the mistress to the U.S. President, but she is also seduced by other American government intelligence officials? (King, 2015). While it might be as obvious that Olivia Pope is playing into the stereotype, another look shows that the negative stereotypes are still present in media today.

One of the last stereotypes is the sapphire. A combination of both the mammy and the Jezebel. She is abusive and irrational in her anger, characterized only as an angry Black woman. The trope even carries into real life when Black women try to express the smallest amount of emotion and they are shut down under the guise that they are being aggressive or hostile. Sapphires, also known as “Sassy Mammys,” are constantly berating those around them. Esther from the 1972 show Sanford and Son is a notable Sapphire character. She constantly attacked and berated Fred and his friends. The only man safe from her wrath was her nephew, Lamont. Even though she was a Black woman, White men were not safe from her stern righteousness. Another notable Sapphire stereotype is Frozone’s wife in the Incredibles franchise, a disembodied voice heard yelling at her husband, ridiculing him for his life as a superhero.

I never felt that I saw myself on TV. I grew up pretty sheltered, so most of what we watched was older movies that starred Frank Sinatra, Doris Day, Gene Kelly, and others of their time. The shows we watched were either on PBS or Christian programming. There were not many Black women on these shows and movies. Even though I was surrounded by my amazing Black women, it did not feel the same as seeing a girl that looked like me on screen. I read a lot of books as a kid, so I got to make my own images of what characters look like no matter what the cover showed. To me, Junie B. Jones looked just me and so did Meg Cabot’s Allie Finkle. With books, I
was able to imagine myself in every scenario even if it was created for a girl who looked nothing like me. Especially since I was always a chubby kid, I did not see a chubby Black girl that was represented as pretty, smart, and anything other than insecure or sassy. It was not until a few years ago, with the rise of social media, that I began to see women that looked like me gaining followings and being praised for everything they were. I never felt connected to any of them, or any celebrity, really. I always tried to disconnect myself from celebrities because I realized they were regular people that could easily make mistakes. In mainstream media, Black women are not celebrated. They are there strictly for people’s entertainment, and if they make any moves for autonomy, they are shunned and berated. This is how we see the rise of Black women’s actions being “memed” or turned into a joke, no matter how serious. Leah expressed similar views when I asked her if she felt Black women are celebrated now. She felt that mainstream media did not care about Black women, and only once you got into niche pockets of social media were Black women celebrated/praised. When asked, both Ella and Carolyn said that Maya Angelou was a celebrity that inspired them and brought a positive light to Black women. For them, it wasn’t about beauty or notoriety, but the impact of her words. Leah mentioned Tia and Tamera, but said there were not a lot of positive influences she saw in media growing up. All the women said they did not feel represented positively as a whole in the media, and still don’t today. It is understandable when you look at the history of Black women’s representation in media. Many Black women’s characters in media are based off of stereotypes that still exist today.

Black women have been denied the status of being fully human so, it becomes difficult to integrate them into thought and they become the jumping point of other groups to gauge their normality (Collins, 2000). Black women have often been creatives and produced art only to be erased from their own creations. Zelda Wynn Valdes is the Black woman who created the notorious Playboy Bunny outfit. Her innovation for the boning in the corset had never been seen before and hugged the women who wore it perfectly. Even with her creation being easily recognizable, women who looked like the creator were excluded from it. The Sapphire image and Black women being excluded from beauty or their creations go hand in hand. One hot button subject that Black women call out, but will get slandered for, is speaking negatively about the Kardashians. The Kardashian-Jenner family get to have the benefit of looking like Black women with tanned brown skin, enhanced lips, and curvy bodies. These same features on Black women are often condemned and deemed fake. The family also benefits from being with Black men—so they get to look and act like Black women without the burden of being a Black woman (Franklin, 2017). These features, often associated with the three stereotypes aforementioned, lead to abuse, and the justification of abuse, in Black women. As a Black woman with larger lips, I have personally endured the crass comments of passersby in public. So, the double standard of the Kardashians being able to become multi-millionaires and billionaires off of features I am ridiculed or abused for, is upsetting at the least.

Both Carolyn and Leah said that Black women have to deal with different aspects of beauty than White women. Carolyn wanted to keep both of her daughters’ hair natural and unprocessed, but it was a struggle due to the lack of access to the needed products. She mentioned making products for her daughters’ natural hair because there weren’t a lot of products available to use. With plenty of products available for people with straight hair to choose, it is a challenge. With Black beauty being so stigmatized, it can be easy to see how Black women can be susceptible to unrealistic beauty pressure and eating disorders as well.
Conclusion

In the words of Malcom X “The most disrespected person in America is the Black woman. The most unprotected person in America is the Black woman. The most neglected person in America is the Black woman” (1962). The commodification of Black women’s bodies has gone on for centuries without our permission. Black women have been told how to feel, view our bodies and society for many years. Research helps break the cycle of Black women being excluded from our own narrative. Other women have been allowed to speak on the behalf of Black women while donning their features and getting praised. This article was written to give Black women their deserved voice—uninhibited. With my own struggles with beauty, body image, and healthy eating habits, I knew the stories of other Black women had to be broadcasted. My hope is that Black women will be encouraged by seeing some of their experiences being shared and will share their experiences to foster a better environment for future generations.
APPENDIX A

Interview Questions

Food
• What are some of your favorite foods? Could you name a few?
• What did mealtimes look like for you growing up? Could you describe what types of food you ate at breakfast, lunch, and dinner?
• What does mealtimes look like for you now? Could you describe what you typically eat for breakfast, lunch, and dinner now?
• How would you describe your relationship with food? On a scale of 1 to 5 (one being unhealthy, 3 being fairly healthy and 5 being the healthiest) This is not determined by the healthiness or caloric content of the food you eat, but by how you think about food.

Media/Outside Influences
• Growing up, what tv shows/movies did you feel represented and celebrated by?
• What celebrity did you feel most connected to?
• Do you feel that Black women are being celebrated now in the media?

Body Image
• Do you think Black women deal with body image issues that other races do not have to deal with? (hair, ethnic features, etc.)
• Have you ever had to deal with body image issues growing up?
• Where did you receive most of your sources about your body worthiness? (magazines, family, TV)

Beauty
• Have you felt that you’ve had to overcompensate (in clothes, makeup, attitude, etc.) to feel beautiful?
• What makes you feel beautiful? Can you think of particular times in your life where you felt beautiful?
• What have you taught your daughters (nieces, mentees, etc.) about beauty?
• How do you think you have been perceived throughout your life physically?
• What did your mother or mother figure(s) teach you about beauty?

Mental Health
• Did you ever suffer from anxiety or depression because of your body?
• Did you ever feel as though you had disordered eating or an unhealthy relationship with food?
REFERENCES


