

# Black Women's Coping and Resilience in the Face of Racial Trauma, Discrimination and Oppression

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# Introduction

*“I swore never to be silent whenever and wherever human beings endure suffering and humiliation. We must always take sides. Neutrality helps the oppressor, never the victim.”*

~Elie Wiesel

# Historical Legacy & Coping

- Slavery
  - →idea of the “strong black woman” who is selfless, nonsexual, all-giving, and protective of family/community members (i.e., “Mammy” stereotype required connection to the oppressor and disconnection from self for survival (Abdullah, 1998)
- Racism
  - Traumatic experience
  - “Microinsults” and “Microaggressions” (Pierce, 1988)
  - Minimize these experiences to mask anger and persistent feelings of powerlessness, or internalize experiences
- Sexual Assault
  - Continues to be endured and hidden in the black community
  - Silencing
- Stereotyping
  - Institutionalization of the image of sexual permissiveness
  - Internalized by society
- Self Image
  - Shame associated with beauty – distorted images of beauty based on Euro-American Ideal

# A current example

- “Compton Cookout” UC San Diego, 2/15/10



# Invitation details for a WHITE fraternity's "celebration" of Black History Month 2010:

- Description: "February marks a very important month in American society. No, I'm not referring to Valentines day or Presidents day. I'm talking about Black History month. As a time to celebrate and in hopes of showing respect, the Regents community cordially invites you to its very first Compton Cookout."
- "For guys: I expect all males to be rockin Jersey's, stuntin' up in ya White T (XXXL smallest size acceptable), anything FUBU, Ecko, Rockawear, High/low top Jordans or Dunks, Chains, Jorts, stunner shades, 59 50 hats, Tats, etc."

# “Compton Cookout” (cont.)

- “For girls: For those of you who are unfamiliar with ghetto chicks- Ghetto Chicks usually have gold teeth, start fights and drama, and wear cheap clothes - they consider Baby Phat to be high class and expensive couture. They also have short, nappy hair, and usually wear cheap weaves, usually in bad colors, such as purple or bright red.
- They look and act similar to Shenaynay, and speak very loudly, while rolling their neck, and waving their finger in your face. Ghetto chicks have a very limited vocabulary, and attempt to make up for it, by forming new words, such as "constipulated", or simply cursing persistently, or using other types of vulgarities, and making noises, such as "hmmg!", or smacking their lips, and making other angry noises, grunts, and faces. The objective is for all you lovely ladies to look, act, and essentially take on these "respectable" qualities throughout the day.

# Coping Mechanisms

- Spirituality
  - Reliance on faith
  - Belief in a higher power
  - Prayer
- Family/Social Support
  - Connection to family (extended/non-blood)
  - Friends/colleagues
- Activism
- Artistic expression
  - music, poetry, dance, journaling
- Self care
  - exercise, sleep, nutrition, relaxation, rejuvenation

# My Reflections

- Whether I think about the college women on my campus having to cope with coming into a racially hostile academic environment in which they make up less than 1% of the student population or the black female psychologists I have come into contact with over the past 19 years who constitute 1.8% of practicing psychologists in the U.S., it is clear to me that one of the most powerful facilitators of our coping and resilience has to do with our connection to each other.