

Research Article

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The Girls Are Alright: Examining Protective Factors of US Black Culture and Its Impact on the Resilience of Black Girls and Women

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Abstract: An overarching narrative exists that the self-concept of Black girls is adversely impacted by the negative portrayals of Black Americans in the mainstream media. We assert that this mainstream narrative presents a deficit model account in which Black girls are perpetual victims of white racism. A more complete narrative, one that we offer in this essay, is that while the white patriarchal society has tried, through various means, to undermine the self-esteem of Black Americans, Black girls are healthy, confident, and full of belief in themselves, their beauty, and their power. We argue that much of the power exhibited by Black girls can be attributed to three crucial supports. First, the Black childhood facilitated by the Black family, Black spirituality or “Black girl magic” as it has come to be known in the mainstream, and sisterhood with peers and elders. We offer this counter narrative in order to challenge the predominate account but also to enable critical thought about the resilience Black girls possess, a magic wherein they engage in self-definition and see their worth despite society’s attempts to crush their souls.

Keywords: Black girl magic, Black Family, Black spirituality

An overarching narrative exists that the self-concept of Black girls is adversely impacted by the negative portrayals of Black Americans in the mainstream media (Stanton 465; Diuguid 2016; Burns 2017). We challenge this narrative because, we argue, it is intentionally incomplete. We recognize that white patriarchal institutions and values harm, or attempts to harm, the self-concept of Black girls through not only media images but also racist systems like the school to prison pipeline, food deserts, environmental racism, residential segregation, redlining, police brutality, and so many more; yet we present a counter narrative that demonstrates how various other systems, created and enabled by the Black community, provide a form of support for Black girls that counters any attacks from white systems. Furthermore, we assert that while the mainstream narrative is, in some cases, constructed as a critique of white patriarchal systems, we assert that it is a deficit model account in which Black girls are perpetual victims of white racism. A more complete narrative, one that we offer in this essay, is that while the white patriarchal society has tried, through various means, to undermine the self-esteem of Black Americans, Black girls are healthy, confident, and full of belief in themselves, their beauty, and their power.

We argue that much of the power exhibited by Black girls can be attributed to three crucial supports. First, the Black childhood facilitated by the Black family. We challenge the mainstream constructions of childhood, which has been defined by the white middle class experience, and highlight how Black families are providing safe spaces for children to grow. Second, Black spirituality or “Black girl magic,” as it has

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come to be known in the mainstream, shields Black girls in a multitude of important ways. Finally, sisterhood with peers and elders promotes self-loving at very young ages and extends into adulthood. Black girls build networks of strong female support beyond their families that act as both an immediate and extended kin network that provides invaluable emotional and material support. We offer this counter narrative in order to challenge the predominate account but also to enable critical thought about the resilience Black girls possess, a magic wherein they engage in self-definition and see their worth despite society's attempts to crush their souls.

The Mainstream Narrative: Black Girls are Negatively Impacted

Historically, scholars have posited and presented evidence to suggest that the self-concept of Black children suffers as a result of their interaction with white racist institutions and values. One of the more famous examples, the “doll study” (Clark and Clark 591; 159) by Black psychologists Drs. Kenneth and Mamie Clark heartbreakingly showed little Black girls defining the “good doll” as the white skinned one, and the “bad doll” as the one that shared a similar complexion to her own. The doll study clearly demonstrated the negative consequences of internalized racism on the psyche and self-concept of Black girls. Although the validity of this work has been critiqued (Banks 1179; McMillan 69; Burnett and Sisson 19), these forms of studies have been replicated (Powell-Hopson and Hopson 57) and continue to push the narrative that negative stereotypes pervade Black children's sense of personal worth as members of underrepresented groups (Burnett and Sisson 19). Authors have also grappled with the idea of self-hatred among Black girls. In Toni Morrison's famous work, *The Bluest Eye*, the protagonist Pecola Breedlove is described as an “ugly, dark skinned” little girl who desires nothing more than blue eyes, a trait she equates with the ultimate pinnacle of beauty and whiteness (Morrison). Her disdain for her dark features is discussed in the context of whiteness, helping the reader to see that: Pecola has seen herself through the eyes of the white world and has come up wanting. These two examples are standouts in the long list of academic and artistic discourse on the ways in which white racism harms the self-concept of Black girls. For almost a century, academics and authors have rightly picked up on the way in which white society distorts the lens through which Black children see themselves.

Contemporarily, the conversation on how America's white racist society harms the self-concept of Black girls has extended beyond the general systems that influenced the works of Clark and Morrison to the new technology that specifically targets Black women. Candice Benbow argues that for Black women, the virtual world is an escape from their daily pressures; yet the emphasis on unrealistic bodies, blackfishing, and the strong black woman mantra, in addition to the rampant viralization of Black murder, is bad for black women, young and old (Benbow). In one tributary of the social media analysis is the conversation on how Black women are harmed by viewing and comparing themselves to the stereotypical Instagram model physique, one that emphasizes a surgically enhanced small waist and ample posterior. The assertion is that Black women are the prototype, target, and to some degree, the perpetrators of these exaggerated images, and that Black girls' consumption of these images negatively impacts the way they view themselves creating a new form of technologically fed body dysmorphia. Interestingly, although Black women and girls are often harmed from viewing and internalizing the over exaggerated features of Black women on the internet, it is white women who most often financially benefit from these same images, which compounds the damage Black girls experience.

“Blackfishing,” a phenomenon in which non-Black women exaggerate their features through tanning or surgery to mimic Black women in order to gain more popularity and appear more attractive online, has highlighted how, in American society, the Black female form is most appreciated when it is co-opted by non-Black women (Gawronski 2019). This enhances the notion that Black girls are not only being harmed by social media images, but they are then being shown that Black features, real or exaggerated, are only marketable commodities when they are on the body of a white woman. Conversations such as these highlight, and rightly so, the constant assault and insult against Black femininity by white culture and media,

and call to question how Black girls are able to love their authentic selves when they are growing up in a world that tells them they should not. But even positive images, meant to some degree, to push back against the negative images, Black women have suggested, do not always have the desired positive affect.

The strong black woman/black girl magic imagery has come under considerable critique for its contribution in harming Black women and girls (Stanton et al. 465). While Black women are lauded for their resilience, there is a notion that the *strong Black women* concept separates Black women and girls from their fragility and ultimately their humanity. The need to be perpetually strong can lead to a denial of emotions and depression if one is unable to maintain the strong Black woman image. The pervasiveness of the portrayal of Black female bodies that have been surgically altered blackfishing, and over exaggerated mental strength, while the mechanisms are different than what Toni Morrison or Drs Clark and Clark envisioned in their earlier work, the premise is the same: Black girls are growing up in a hostile environment that breeds self-contempt. We, the authors, agree that while the historical and contemporary examples listed above are indicative of the pressures Black girls face as they navigate defining themselves in a white racist, capitalist, patriarchal, heteronormative society, they do not encapsulate the true breadth of the self-defining narrative.

In this essay, we assert that Black girls are consciously aware of the abovementioned forces that seek to negatively shape their self-image, and yet, unbothered, they continue to define themselves in a way that defies the odds. Data from the National Comorbidity Survey's Adolescent Supplement, a nationally representative survey on mental health in US children, support this. Collected from 2001 to 2004, the data were from 1,016 Black girls (approximately 10% of the sample) from various socioeconomic backgrounds and regions of the United States. The data show that Black girls not only highly appraise their beauty, intelligence, and abilities, but when compared to Black boys, and white girls and boys, in many cases, rated themselves higher (Kessler 380). They also had some of the lowest rates of anxiety and depression. This would appear to be surprising in the face of the aforementioned factors that attack the self-esteem of Black girls, yet we assert that is to be expected due to three main factors. We present the Black childhood facilitated by the Black family, Black spirituality, and Black sisterhood, as three crucial forces that not only protect Black girls from the external assaults launched at them by white systems of oppression but also provide a protective space for Black girls to define and love themselves.

Black Childhood/Black Family

The Black childhood, facilitated by the Black family, largely contributes to the unshakeable self-image Black girls have cultivated. Black children are raised in villages and egalitarian homes with progressive gender roles (Lyles and Carter 101). The village is crucial to the development of Black girls because they are surrounded by a network of adults who are dedicated to aiding in the safety and development of each child. Unlike two-parent households, in villages the work of raising children is spread across many adults providing Black girls with a network of people upon whom they can rely. Furthermore, the egalitarian way in which Black families are structured also positively contributes to Black girls' development of a strong sense of self. This enables Black girls to be both independent and strong while not sacrificing their gentle, nurturing sides (Rosenfield and Mouzon 277). It is also important to note that Black children are raised in spiritual homes that interweave Judeo Christianity and ancestral traditions (Iruka). This impacts the way Black villages teach their children how to make sense of the world and themselves. Black children are taught their history in pro-black language and are taught world history, politics, and economics at an early age in order to help them understand, not internalize, the white gaze. This childhood, we argue, supports Black girls as they develop positive self-concepts despite their interactions with a hostile outside world.

We recognize the assertion that Black families provide childhoods in which their children can thrive stands in opposition to the overwhelming narrative that Black childhood doesn't even exist. In 2014, the Washington Post published an op-ed piece entitled *In America Black Children Don't Get to Be Children* and in

2020, the New York Times published *Why Won't Society Let Black Girls Be Children*. In 2014, the American Psychological Association published a press release stating Black children are often seen as less innocent than their white peers. All of this rhetoric suggests that Black children not only do not get to have childhoods, but that they aren't children at all. We challenge these claims for two reasons. First, these claims suggest that Black children aren't children because of the way white people view and treat them. We contest this because it overlooks the work of Black adults and families while giving all power to white racist actors and constructions. This narrative completely ignores the work of Black families and falsely suggests that the work done by Black families is inadequate in the face of white racism.

Second, these claims are using a definition of childhood that is synonymous with the experiences of white, middle class children in the United States post-industrialization. They suggest that not only is childhood defined as the modern, white, middle class experience but that it *should* be defined as such. By that definition, when a Black child's lived experience is compared to the white middle class definition, they come up short. First, we argue that it is a gross mistake to compare two groups with distinctly different histories that operate in different social/cultural milieus, especially in a society where racism is pervasive and flourishing (Lyles and Carter 101). However, even without comparing the Black childhood to the white middle class childhood, a global comparison of childhoods would find that the white middle class experience is neither normative nor best.

While the white middle class childhood involves a great deal of parental supervision, in Japan, children are taught to be very independent, even walking or riding the bus to school in busy Tokyo by themselves. While the white middle class childhood involves early education with pre-kindergarten, preschool, and even mommy-and-me classes for babies, in Finland, school doesn't start until age 7, with the first 7 years focused on play, physical activity, and creativity. Both Japan and Finland have lower crime rates, healthier citizens, and their students have better academic outcomes than Americans. These two from Finland and Japan show not only is the white middle class American childhood not the only way to experience childhood, it is not the best way to experience childhood either. Therefore, it is appropriate to discuss the Black child's childhood, not in comparison to the white middle class experience, but, to the best of our ability, as a standalone entity. Just as Patricia Hill Collins wrote about the importance of self-definition and combating controlling images in *Black Feminist Thought* we argue that the Black childhood is cultivating a space for Black girls to create their own ideas of self that are overwhelmingly positive.

Interestingly, in previous research using the National Comorbidity Survey's Adolescent Supplement it has been shown that Black girls reported having significantly less family support than Black boys and white and Latinx children. Yet, despite having less family support, a critical element for mental health, than their peers, they were no more likely to experience negative health outcomes (Bennefield 15). How do we reconcile the notion that Black girls come from supportive families with the reports that Black girls report feeling less family support than their peers? First, it is important to highlight that data from the NCSA are extremely limited and narrow in focus. It is a cross sectional, quantitative, psychiatric data set, which means that it was a onetime survey meant to ascertain the prevalence of mental disorders and the factors associated with mental disorder. It was not intended to critically understand the complex dynamics associated with factors like the nature of family support in different cultural groups. Because of the limited nature of the data, certain information was omitted from the survey. Namely, Black parents have different goals than parents of other racial groups. Thus, using quantitative data to compare support between Black parents and daughters to white parents and their children must be situated in the overarching social context in which parenting happens.

Due to their unique historical context, Black parents in the United States, unlike parents of any other racial group, have to prepare their children, especially their daughters to enter a white, patriarchal, racist society. For example, Black parents have to drill their children on how to behave if ever stopped by the police (Lopez). They also train their children on how to act in public areas where they may be followed and falsely accused of theft, and instill in them a pro-Black paradigm that children must learn before they even go to kindergarten in order to protect their intellectual minds from white racist education systems (Suizzo 287). Had questions on these aspects of parenting been present in the NCSA we are confident that Black girls would have reported feeling more supported than their peers. However, because those questions were not

present, and instead measures of family support were limited to constructs like “feeling heard” or “feeling close” to parents, the reports show that Black girls are not supported. Unfortunately, these questions fail to acknowledge that it is not simply that Black girls are not being heard as much as their parents are trying to instill in them the importance of listening as they teach vital, life-saving lessons, nor is it completely accurate that Black girls are not close to their parents as much as Black parents are doing the sacrificial work of taking a step back from their daughters in order to cultivate independence and awareness of inner strength (Suizzo 287). Thus, we conclude that Black families are immensely supportive even if the best data and mainstream reports argue the contrary. And it is this support that enables Black girls to thrive.

Black Spirituality and Black Girl Magic

Spirituality plays a large part in why Black girls have such high rated self-esteem, positive self-concepts, and optimistic outlooks on their futures. We recognize that spirituality is often an umbrella term that encompasses traditional religion and more personal spiritual practices. Past research suggests that religiosity serves as a coping mechanism for Black people contending with negative mental health outcomes related to racism and discrimination (Lewis et al. 51; Shorter-Gooden 406). Praying, attending church services, or religious activities provide an opportunity for social support and feelings of belonging. A church family serves as a part of the village or means of child-rearing, where Black children are taught cultural values and pride in their racial identity, while also being loved and supported throughout their lives (Boyd-Franklin and Lockwood 141). The church provides a physical space where Black women can discuss their experiences with racism and discrimination, organize for political change, and offer each other guidance as well as support (Mattis and Watson 91; Higginbotham 201). In addition to the support and comfort the church provides, Black women also seek out other forms of spirituality that are not directly tied to a religious institution (Crumpton). The Black church does not always get it right when it comes to centering Black women in leadership roles or primary teachings, so some find other methods to incorporate spirituality into their lives and implement sacred practices that align with their lived experiences and identities. The cultivation of healing spaces outside of historically patriarchal religious institutions provides additional evidence of Black women and girls coming into themselves and connecting to divine energies that uplift and help them cope with the stressors of daily life (Crumpton).

However, when it comes to Black girls’ spirituality, which we define as the conscious awareness of and communion with that which is true, everlasting and unseen, participation with religious institutions often buffers negative mental health outcomes (Forrest). Spirituality helps Black women make sense of the world around them and grapple with their life circumstances. For example, Reed and Neville (384) find that spirituality is an indicator of positive psychological well-being among Black women. Conscious awareness can also create a strong connection to departed ancestors and loved ones (Banks-Wallace and Parks 25; Mattis 101). Therefore, spirituality allows Black women to examine their relationships with themselves, other people, and their ancestors, as a powerful protective source. Black girls then learn, from their mothers, aunties, and sisters, the importance of spiritual connection.

In addition to the Black spiritual tradition, Black girlhood, in particular, is sacred and rooted in spirituality. Black girls possess a certain level of cultural consciousness passed down from generations of Black women who have been forced to navigate gendered racism. A number of things deemed sacred, from New Year’s Eve rituals, the perfect macaroni and cheese recipe, or remedies for a persistent cough, are “ways of knowing” that Black women elders teach Black girls from an early age (Garner 105). It is with these generational teachings Black girls are able to deeply understand that their practices are sacred, their histories rich, and their futures open to positively impact other Black girls one day. As Black girls come to understand their own spirituality, they are able to dream and imagine different circumstances because they know they possess the power to successfully navigate the world around them. Scholars have noted the importance of Black girl spirituality to explain their power and resiliency. For example, Black girls engage in a process Porshe Garner (105) describes as “other-word-making,” where inequality, white supremacy,

racism, and sexism do not hinder Black girls from living carefree and defining themselves as they really are. Garner (105) goes further to suggest that Black girls' "experiences are more than secular, they are sacred. Black girl spirituality allows us to mobilize, create, and transform our circumstances to envision the world differently" (119). Highlighting the importance of spirituality in the lives of Black girls allows us to better understand the ancestral, protective forces that are not only passed down by praying mothers, aunties, and sister-friends, but also a sacred practice they engage in order to imagine, protect, and articulate their lived experiences.

It is important to note that spirituality is both an individual and collective endeavor. The placement in supportive villages ensures that the collective spiritual experience is interwoven into the community in which Black girls are raised. Evidence of this is seen in the relationship between spirituality and sisterhood when Black girls celebrate and honor each other. Ruth Nicole Brown (2013), founder of Saving Our Lives Hear Our Truths, asserts that Black girls engage in a process called "homegirling," where they "commit to a very sincere practice of remembering Black girlhood as a way to honor oneself and to practice the selflessness necessary to honor someone else, remembered whole" (Brown, 47). This process of homegirling requires the sacred work of honoring the power of Black girlhood and reimagining what freedom looks like (Brown 47).

Recently, the relationship between spirituality and the collective has been called to respond to widespread violence. In the summer of 2020, Black women and girls honored and remembered the life of Breonna Taylor, who was killed by police while sleeping in her own home in Louisville, Kentucky. Breonna's death was not publicized in the media until several months after her death, and the process to gain justice for her murder was yet another disappointment. Black women and girls around the world decided to place her accomplishments as an emergency response worker, her beautiful smile, and heartwarming spirit at the center of coverage to honor her life and legacy (Lewis). The same practice took place after Oluwatoyin "Toyin" Salau was murdered in Tallahassee, Florida (Burke). Black girls everywhere remembered Toyin's selflessness and activist work, for all Black people, at such a young age. Memorials, murals, candlelight vigils, songs, poems, and initiatives were lovingly created by Black girls everywhere. While unfortunate, Black girls have to engage in these spiritual practices to honor lives lost, and they, again, create safe spaces to imagine a world where Black girls are safer and protected. Black feminist scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw created the hashtag #SayHerName to highlight the tendency for Black women and girls killed by state violence to go unnoticed. As a result, Black girls make sure names like Sandra Bland and Breonna Taylor are not forgotten within the larger movement. Connecting to the spiritual and prioritizing sisterhood is another way to #SayHerName.

Sisterhood as Social Support

There are two types of sisterhood that are important to Black girls' healthy development: sisterhood between peers (the homegirls) and the sisterhood between young Black girls and older Black women (the aunties). In a society that constructs the narrative that Black girls are inherently catty, mean, or aggressive, Black sisterhood further challenges controlling images that negatively impact Black girls mentally and psychologically (Donovan and West). Collective coping is a crucial survival strategy and coping mechanism (Lewis et al. 51). Black women rely on each other due to shared life experiences, and they cultivate communities of support passed down from previous generations' spiritual kinship traditions (Williams). Black girls engaging in supportive and loving relationships is an act of resistance that allows them to be cared for by people who understand and can relate to their struggles. As McDonough explains, "Black sisterhood is an unexplainable bond that includes love and respect for one another that we were forced to support early on. After all, if we didn't support each other, who would? This bond has been passed down throughout generations." Much like the term "Black Girl Magic," Black sisterhood is a practice Black women strategically cultivate to protect each other from the misogynoir (Bailey) they experience on a day-to-day basis. Whether it is Taraji P. Henson giving Viola Davis a well-deserved tear-filled standing ovation

as she accepts her Emmy award for Best Actress in a Drama Series, Beyonce raising her hands in celebration as Serena Williams advances to her next match, or even Oprah Winfrey and Gayle King's life-long friendship, Black sisterhood is but one protective factor that prepares Black girls to be self-assured, confident, and true to themselves.

These sources of support come in a variety of forms including friendships, "play aunties," or support on digital platforms. For example, "sister friends" enhance Black girls and women's overall health and mental well-being (Greif and Sharpe 791). Friendships between Black girls can provide a necessary place for healing and truth-telling (Bryant-Davis 110). Some scholars have cited Black girl friendships as sites of empowerment and resistance. Hooks describes Black female friendship as a "home place" where Black women and girls are able to navigate the inequalities they face in the world. In *Sisters of the Yam*, Hooks (2014) describes the power of Black girls "telling it like it is" as an experience of self-actualization while in community with other Black girls. This support allows Black girls to "let their hair down," be themselves, and commiserate on the experiences of being a Black girl.

Now, social media platforms like Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram have become digital spaces where Black girls can affirm, uplift, and engage in healing with each other. Scholars like Ashleigh Wade have developed specific terms to describe Black girls' digital networks and relationships. For example, Wade (80) describes digital kinship "as a relational practice through which familial ties – with both origin family and chosen family – are established and/or maintained through digital technologies." Wade's (80) ethnographic study on a Digital Expressions course for Black girls in high school found Black girls use social media platforms like Instagram and Snapchat to develop and maintain social support networks with each other, as well as maintain important connections with other friends and family. This particular study also provides a necessary example of the opportunities for Black girls to offer emotional and social support to each other online in a safe space. It is important to note that the digital space, where #BlackGirlMagic gained its popularity, continues to be a space where Black girls push the envelope to celebrate their hair, beauty, accomplishments, and identities. Consequently, even though the Internet is a toxic place where Black girls are subjected to gendered racism (Benbow 2019), backlash, and disrespect, Black girls are committed to offering social support through affirmations and counter narratives.

As mentioned earlier, social support from family members and friends buffers Black girls' self-esteem, aids their ability to navigate an unjust world, and mitigates negative mental health outcomes. Although parents have a significant impact on Black girls' development and sense of self, friends of the family or distant relatives also play a necessary role in providing love and support to Black girls. For example, Black aunts provide care that extends beyond the nuclear family. Sometimes their parents' actual sister or family member, or other times their mothers' best friend or co-worker, Black aunties serve as second mother figures. This form of sisterhood is crucial to understanding how and why Black girls thrive. This form of sisterhood is not between peers, but between a young Black girl and the older women who step in to help raise them. They are godmothers, counselors, and caregivers and often fill in for certain childcare responsibilities (Davis-Sowers 231). As a result, Black girls have trusted Black women within their care network, who they can rely on and turn to for guidance and social support. Black aunties help raise their friends' or sisters' children and offer additional positive role models for younger Black girls to aspire to. The role of the Black aunt thus signifies the important tradition of the community helping raise a child in the Black community, "We've all heard that it takes a village to raise a child. Often, Black women are the village" (Williams).

Black women teach Black girls about collective care from a very young age, with various Black women helping take care of each, lift each other up, and provide financial and emotional resources. Furthermore, because their support networks extend beyond the nuclear with Black aunties, young Black girls see more evidence of the resilient behaviors passed down to them from previous generations. Since they were once little Black girls themselves, aunties, godmothers, and church moms understand the importance of building up the souls of Black girls. These practices are generational and pull from ancestral kinship traditions rooted in collective care and protection within the Black family. Black girls begin this work in their early childhood friendships because they see these strong care networks in the adult Black women in their lives. Social support is not taken lightly, and the care devoted to uplifting and affirming Black girls' identities are

strategic acts lovingly performed to shield Black girls from white racism as much as possible. The cycle then continues, and more self-assured and self-aware Black girls develop, suggesting this is not a magical or mythical process, but the culmination of the Black family, the sacred bonds of Black sisterhood, and communal care.

Conclusion

Despite living in a nation that has historically and contemporarily utilized a stratification system that attempts to place and keep Black people firmly on the bottom, Black Americans have been, and will continue, to thrive. Interestingly, it is not our successes that make the headlines of mainstream news; it is our presumed failures. The “fact” that we are more likely to be incarcerated, sick, in poverty, under-educated, and victims of state violence overrun the narratives in not just white, but often Black media. While we do not argue that these stories are false, we do inquire as to why they are the main, if not only, messages shared about Black people. We assert that by focusing on negative narratives, even under the guise of dismantling white racism, it reifies age old beliefs about black inferiority. Thus, it is imperative to balance these negative narratives with positive accounts of the ways in which Black peoples are successful. We assert that it is important to talk about the ways Black girls are thriving in order to combat and balance, the predominate messages produced by mainstream media, academics, and thinkers that Black girls specifically and Black people in general are perpetually suffering and struggling at the hands of white systems of oppressions. While we recognize that the existence of Black peoples in the United States has been and continues to be decorated by struggle, the challenges we face are not who we are, they are simply what we have had to overcome. To dismantle white systems of oppression, we must first deconstruct them in our minds and cultural lexicon, and that begins with acknowledging the power of the positive combined effect of Black families, Black spirituality, and Black sisterhood.

Black families are strengthened in the face of white racism because there is an understanding of the importance of safe home spaces. Home is more than a structure; it is a village of people dedicated to the greater communal good. The reliance on integrated religiosity and spirituality continues to give Black Americans access to the spiritual realm where race is nonexistent. In this space, Black folks are not only able to see themselves for who they truly are but use that confidence to operate in a seemingly hateful world. In this space, Black girls engage in the sacred work of growing up, creating their own worlds and words to shelter them. Finally, Black women have built sister support networks that transcend blood relations. These networks are filled with women who are willing to serve the greater good of the culture as well as each other. Swaddled in family, spirituality, and sisterhood, Black girls are nursed and raised and come to form the exceptionally high opinions they have of themselves because their formative years are spent in an environment that encourages them to do so. From this we argue that Black girls are not simply magical, a term that is synonymous with mythical. They are powerful, and that power has been bestowed upon them by their villages, ancestors, and sisters, a collective that has withstood the tests of time. By highlighting the ways in which our most vulnerable, our children, are thriving, we simultaneously recognize the parents, villages, and culture that are also excelling and become consciously aware of all of the ways in which Blackness is privileged, excellent, beautiful, and powerful.

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