

Miss Purity Ring

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Miss Purity Ring:

Examining Sex Positivity Through a Young Womanist's Lens

By De La Fro

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Introduction

Let's talk about sex.

No, really. Let's talk about sex but let's talk about it in a different perspective. Let's talk about it in terms of culture. Let's get into the core of what sex positivity really means in today's society. I want to look at how sex positivity pans out through my own experiences as a young Womanist (or Black Feminist).

Sex positivity is the belief that one should not be shamed or judged for their sexual activity or for how they choose to express their sexuality. Sex positivity is the idea that sex is not taboo. It's not inherently good or bad. It just is and people should allow others to interpret it for themselves without shaming those whose relationship with sex differs from their own. It teaches people to understand that others have their own relationships with respect and we should respect each other's journey.

I was introduced to the idea of sex positivity through my journey of understanding Black feminism and Womanism. Through my findings and personal experience, I realized that sex positivity is vital for the liberation of women. At the core root of misogyny is the belief that women are simply objects; that our bodies do not belong to us but are for public use and consumption; that we're not human beings inherently worthy of respect unless we present ourselves in a "modest" way and even then, we still don't receive the respect we deserve.

When a woman takes control of her body, she's then chastised. If she exercises her agency against the grain of "modesty" then she's called all kinds of a "hoe" and "slut." This harmful beration fuels rape culture; a culture where actions, thoughts, and feelings normalize and excuse sexual assault which makes it hard for survivors to come forward about their assault.

Sex positivity fights against that. Sex positivity argues that women should be able to engage in sex however they want. If a woman wants to be "modest", she can be. If a woman wants to be sexually active and show off her body, she has every right to do so. When we push the truth--that women are multi-faceted human beings who are worthy of respect regardless of fitting into "respectable", patriarchal molds, we are slowly but surely breaking down the walls of sexism.

But let's dig even deeper. What does sex positivity mean for Black women? How does sex positivity work when you complicate it with race? Why is it that when white women exercise their sexual agency, they're marked as some sort of feminist revolutionary but when Beyoncé twerks, it's "self-objectifying" and "anti-feminist?"

Sex positivity is vital for my Womanism* and Black feminism because I feel that when we remove the idea that women, specifically Black women, are objects meant for consumption and that respect for us is contingent on how we present ourselves, we break down the foundation that misogyny, but contextually, misogynoir--anti-black misogyny--is founded upon.

This book contains a series of short essays I've written that capture what I have come to understand regarding sex positivity and how it relates to Black women and Womanism. Follow me as I examine sex positivity that is inevitably complicated when race becomes a factor.

*Womanism is an ideology that focuses on how race, gender, and class impacts Black women. The term was coined by author Alice Walker in her book,

Miss Purity Ring

“You have to wait until marriage.”

I just stared at my mom blankly. She repeats herself, “You hear me? You have to wait until marriage to have sex. I know these little fast girls are running around having sex with whoever but you don’t need to be doing that.” I nodded.

Ever since puberty started knocking at my pubescent door, my super pious mother hammered into me that having premarital sex was a sin and unrighteous in the eyes of God. She told me that my virginity was precious and that I shouldn’t just “give it away” to just anyone. The only person who can have my virginity, according to her and the Bible, was my husband. The only sex partner I should have, ever, in my life is my husband.

I never questioned that honestly. I just went with it. Being born into a sheltered, Christian household I never really got the chance to think for myself. All my morals and values were decided for me and laid all out in the Bible. My mom nagged me about waiting until marriage so much that, eventually, that was what I sought to do.

When I was around 15 years old, I decided that I would buy a purity ring. With my allowance money, I went to the Christian merchandise store and bought a silver purity ring that had “True love waits” etched along the band. I wore it proudly. My parents were very pleased with my decision to openly state that I was abstinent.

At school, my classmates would tease me about wearing a purity ring. “So you’re waiting until marriage to have sex?” “Wow, so you’re still a virgin?” “So does that mean no oral or anal?” I would just nod and brace myself for the incredulous responses I knew I would receive. Word got around school about my purity ring. Even my teachers knew. Some praised me and some found it humorous. From then on, I was no longer known as Candace. I was now “Purity Ring.”

Initially, I wasn’t bothered by it but as the jokes persisted, my annoyance grew. It was as if I was being reduced to my walk in abstinence and there was nothing more to me. When people would tell me that they were “proud” of me for waiting until marriage to have sex, in the back of my mind, it kinda fascinated me. Why were they proud? What was so special about me waiting? Why was it such a huge deal? What made me different from other girls, in particular, who were sexually active?

Even though I was being heralded for “saving” myself until marriage, it didn’t change the fact that I’m human. Like any other growing teenager, I was hormonal. I was constantly thinking about sex. I was looking at boys in a different, more mature way. All these emotions were somewhat of a challenge to channel because I was taught that sex outside of marriage was a sin and any thought or feeling that was remotely sexual was not Christ-like.

My parents were open about sex. They were very honest with me about what sex was and how it affects people emotionally and physically. They were also realistic in thinking that there would be a slight possibility that I would choose to have premarital sex so they taught me about contraceptives. They taught me about keeping myself protected and safe. Don’t get me wrong,

that's awesome but while they're educating me about safe sex, my mother, in particular, is deciding what I should do with my body for me.

As I grew older, I began to grow more apathetic towards the whole "waiting for marriage" thing. I began to realize that hey... marriage is a long time away and I doubted my hormones would be able to take that. Instead, I decided if I wasn't going to wait until marriage to have sex, I would at least "lose" my virginity to someone I truly loved. That was the compromise I made with myself.

Then came college.

With college came temptation. I was free. I didn't have my parents riding my back, clocking what I was doing. At this point, I no longer wore my purity ring. I was so apathetic about it that I didn't even care to flaunt it anymore. Plus, I would've felt dishonest. I wasn't waiting until marriage anymore.

As my college career progressed, I began to come into what is now widely known as my Black feminist identity. I was introduced to Black Feminism and Womanism through social media but mostly Twitter. I began following Black feminists and Womanists on social media. Their thoughts about Black women, culture, and sexuality were so insightful to me. Insightful to the point that I began to identify as a Black feminist myself.

With becoming a Black feminist, my perspective on a lot of things changed, including my perspective on religion and spirituality. How drastically my views changed as a result of Black feminism could almost be another book or chapter of its own so, in short, I will say a lot of Christian ideals I once believed in, made me raise a brow now. These same ideals clashed with things I now believed in.

One of the main things I believed as a young Christian woman was virginity was this precious "gift" I had to "save" for someone special--that special someone being my husband. How could I not believe this right? My mom shoved this down my throat. I had no choice.

Although, in the Bible, this same expectation is extended to men, ultimately, this standard is held against women in reality. A man "saving" himself for his wife is a luxury. It's not an expectation people really have for him. I thought that was unfair. I also wondered, "Well, why is that?"

Unfortunately, we live in a world where a woman's morality is measured by shallow things such as her sexuality. Personally, I would cite abrahamic religious dogma as the source for such mentality. For many, the idea of chastity was introduced to them through religious texts. The Bible teaches that a person's purity is dependent upon their willingness to not "fall weak" to sexual temptation. As I've stated before, what may have been meant to be a Biblical standard for both men and women, became something ultimately held against women.

Women are taught that they should be "modest" when it comes to their bodies. Cover up and close your legs is the mantra. If you're "modest" that means you're in moral good standing, you respect yourself, and others, but more importantly, men, are guaranteed to respect you supposedly. Do the opposite and you're an abomination to yourself and all of mankind. If a woman is "modest" that means she's inherently a "good woman" to most people because that's what we're socialized to believe. A woman who does not reveal it all to the world isn't "tainted."

From this idea of modesty, comes the social construct of virginity. Yes, you read it right. I did just say social construct. That's what virginity is. A social construct. It's something fabricated by society. Yes,

there is a such thing as people who haven't delved into any kind of sexual activity but the idea that they're somehow more "pure" than others is a construct and it's a toxic one at that.

When we hound into young girls that their virginity is something that's supposedly "precious" and is only to be "taken" by someone worthwhile, we are already, inadvertently, teaching them that their bodies are solely meant to be consumed. We are subconsciously already instilling into them that their bodies are objects and sex is something that happens to them instead of something they actively engage in and enjoy. Yes, enjoy. Through this idea of modesty and virginity, we're teaching young women that their bodies, including their sexuality, are something to be ashamed of.

Are you not buying this? Well, let's just examine the language we use in regards to virginity.

"He 'took' my virginity." "I 'gave' him my virginity." Sex isn't something that should be "taken." A woman doesn't "give" a part of herself away whenever she has sex. This kind of language hints to rape culture and we don't even realize it because it's so normalized. Sexual assault is about power. It is about denying one of agency of their body. To imply that something is "taken" from a woman when she has sex for the first time is reinforcing the idea that sex is something that happens to women and not something we actively engage in. It is implying that our body is some sort of commodity you can give or take from.

Along with this toxic language, with this construct of virginity, comes this notion that virgin women are better because we're supposedly more "pure." It fuels this false sense of superiority above women who are sexually active. It teaches women that their self-worth should be informed by the standing of their sexuality instead of who they are as full, multi-dimensional human beings. It tells women that the more sexually active they are, the more their value as a woman depreciates... and we don't see an issue with that?

It never ceases to amaze me how we, as a society, don't see the superficiality of modesty, virginity, and this false sense of "purity." We allow ourselves to reduce women to their sexualities which hinders us from engaging women as actual human beings. We let a woman's sex life tell us about her moral standing more than we do about any other, more definite indication such as... I don't know... how she treats other people?

Now, hear me out, this is what I'm NOT saying. I'm not saying that women can not want to have their first time with someone they love and care about. There's nothing wrong with waiting until marriage if that is what you really want to do. I'm not saying that people who have never engaged in any sexual activity can't call themselves "virgins." However, what I AM saying is we have to rid this notion of "purity" that comes with virginity because it does nothing but indirectly objectify women. It does nothing but create this hierarchy where "modest, pure" women are exalted and women who are "immodest" or sexually active are persecuted.

If we want young women to grow up to have healthy relationships towards their bodies and sex, we have to dead the narrative of virginity = pure. We have to stop teaching girls that their bodies are property whose value depreciates when she engages in consensual sex.

Fast-Tailed Girls

One day I was scrolling my timeline on Twitter as per usual. As I was scrolling, I came across a video clip of a Black mother beating her daughter. As I watched the video, I learned that the mother was beating her child for “being a thot.” I was incredibly disturbed by the video but what I was almost more disturbed by was people’s reactions. Black Twitter was actually applauding this woman for beating her daughter, saying that the child shouldn’t have been “fast” in the first place. Her mother was just “teaching her a lesson.”

Hm.

“Fast.”

Remember when I said my mother told me that I didn’t need to be running around, being “fast” like other girls my age? Fast-tailed. A common adjective used in the Black community to describe young Black women and girls who are “promiscuous.” An adjective that does so much damage to a Black girl’s self-image and her relationship towards sex. It’s also a term that fuels rape culture within the Black community because it ignores how older cishet Black men prey upon these impressionable young girls. It allows statutory rape to thrive in our community.

When I saw the video of the Black mother beating her child for “being a thot”, of course I was disturbed but unfortunately, this wasn’t the first time I’ve seen a young Black girl get humiliated via social media by their very own parents for being sexually active.

A while back there was a picture of a Black father humiliating his daughter because he caught her “dating” a grown man. Again, people praised the father for “teaching” his daughter a “lesson” and that she shouldn’t have been a “little thot”, in their words. I just find this all so interesting and by interesting, I mean disturbing.

You found out that your daughter was having sex and your first reaction is to beat her and humiliate her publicly? Instead of opting to having an honest conversation with her about sex, contraceptives, and making well-informed choices? You found out that your daughter was “dating” a grown man and instead of holding the adult man responsible, you publicly punished your young daughter? That makes sense to you?

What happened between these Black parents and their daughters is a reason why the hashtag conversation, #FastTailedGirls, facilitated by Black women, was necessary and still is. When we refer to Black girls as “fast”, we’re fueling our very own intraracial rape culture. We’re neglecting to put the fault on the grown man for preying upon a young, vulnerable girl. We’re, instead, placing blame on her, creating an environment where young Black girls are afraid of coming forward about being sexually assaulted by men in their community.

What also trips me out is when older Black people call young Black girls “fast” for filling out and growing into their curves. Not only are we sexualizing young teens but, again, we’re teaching young girls to be ashamed of their bodies; that they should scale back and hide themselves. A girl’s growing body is not an invitation for grown men to prey on her and try to take advantage of her.

What’s incredibly sad is that we see no fault in reacting violently and abusively upon hearing that our

young teen girls are being sexually active. What good does that do? Have we ever stopped to ask they're sexually active? Does beating them help us get that answer? How is that fruitful for our community? All we're doing is making our daughters not want to come to us with questions or concerns about sex. Now they'll continue to go behind our back and unfortunately, make ill-informed choices.

Our daughters are not our property. They may be young but they are still afforded agency. Agency is a human right. Your daughter will make her own choices at the end of the day, regardless of what you'd like to believe. Instead of assuming that your daughter won't have sex, why not have a conversation with her about taking care of herself sexually? Why not talk to her about condoms and birth control? Why not just be real about it?

We need to have honest conversations about sexual assault and statutory rape within our community. We need to work to ensure safety and comfort for young Black girls. We need to make sure they develop healthy relationships towards their bodies and sex. It's time to be honest and it's time to stop finding the easy way out--victim blaming and chastising our girls for their budding bodies and men in our community finding that as a green light to take advantage of them.

Queens vs. Hoes

I'm sure you've seen or heard these type of statements before:

If you've had the pleasure of not hearing any of these kinds of statements before, consider yourself lucky. Unfortunately, I can not say the same. I've heard these statements repeatedly throughout my teen-young adult years. The funny thing is, very few see the harm in the queen vs. hoe dichotomy.

What's the difference between a "queen" and a "hoe" honestly? Typically when people refer to a woman as a "queen", it's a woman who is "modest." Meaning, she doesn't show "too much" skin. She stays inside on the weekends instead of going out and partying. She's what men consider "wifey material." She cooks, she cleans, she basically lives life along the grain. Her womanhood is "acceptable" and the blueprint of what a woman "should be."

The "hoe" people are referring to in the binary is the woman who is "immodest." She loves showing off her body. She is sexually active past what's considered "acceptable" for women. She may be involved in sex work. She may also regularly go out on the weekends and party. She is the woman who lives against the grain. She is what people consider to be the worst kind of woman.

People have this horrible obsession with compartmentalizing women. They can not gauge women unless they can fit a woman in some sort of box whether it's a "queen", "good girl" box or a "hoe", "thot" box. They do not care enough to gauge women as the complex beings that they are. This narrative is harmful because it denies women's humanity. It denies that women are people with a myriad of characteristics, feelings, and thoughts. It is also harmful because it suggests that only one kind of woman is deserving of respect. It is essentially saying that as long as a woman lives within what is socially acceptable she will be worthy of respect and love but even that "respect" is limited.

I call this regard for women "conditional respect." People can not respect a woman or give her common courtesy unless she fits into their idea of what a woman should be. Their respect for women is so minimal that shallow things such as clothing determines how they will treat and regard said woman. Just because a woman presents herself in a way someone does not care for, does not mean that gives them the right to degrade her.

In order to fully accept and understand this, people have to examine why they feel that only one kind of woman is deserving of respect. From the day we are born, we are taught a patriarchal, rigid notion of what a woman should be: a mother, wife, homemaker, "nurturing", and "modest." We are not taught to respect women as individuals but rather by how well they fit into a box.

Think about it. We are taught to judge a woman's value by shallow things such as what she chooses to wear, what she looks like, and who she's sleeping with but rarely by who she is as a person. Rarely about what she believes in and stands for. Rarely by how she treats other people. The sad part is we don't even interrogate why we view women is such a rapid way.

In order to fully understand why the "queen vs. hoe" binary is harmful, one would have to unlearn these toxic, patriarchal ideals they've been fed about what a woman should be. In short, people would actually have to see women as human beings. Amazing, right?

If someone can only respect one kind of woman, they don't actually respect women at our core. If they can only respect a woman for some archaic reason or because she has some familial value to them, they don't actually respect women as a whole. If the only thing that's keeping you from disrespecting me is because I'm related to you or because I fit into this mold, you don't respect me, as a woman. Meaning, you don't even see my womanhood as something that's inherently worthy of respect. In a patriarchal society, we are not brought up to default women as valuable. We are not brought up to believe that "woman" as an identity is something alone worthy of respect and worthy of humane treatment. You are taught that a woman has to be suitable for your consumption--in some sort of aspect--for you to be able to value and respect her. Her being a human being like yourself is not enough for you. You have to be given a reason to find her worthy of respect. How can we not see that as troubling?

All kinds of women are deserving of respect. The "modest" woman is deserving of respect, yes, but so is the woman people call a "hoe." How someone treats a woman should not be contingent upon a woman's sexual activities, identity, and expression. A woman's sex life doesn't speak to her morality. That should not be the deciding factor on whether a woman is a "good" person or not.

What a woman does in the bedroom is none of our business nor does it affect us in any way. So why is it that we use that to decide whether she's a good person or not? Does it ever cross one's mind that a woman can be "modest" and still be a horrible person? A woman can be dressed from head to toe, "saving" herself for marriage and still treat others poorly. A woman can show lots of skin, have all the sex in the world, and have a heart of gold. Her heart of gold isn't even considered because she's written off as a "hoe" because in our minds, we believe a woman's sex life and how she sheaths her body is the epitome of her morality.

People have to unlearn this impulse to place women into boxes. Instead, we need to view women as human beings who are individuals and not caricatures. Society has to stop insulting us by simplifying our complexities as human beings and recognize that we can be multi-faceted. A woman can be book smart, love to cook, be a bomb ass mom and know how to twerk. A woman can love sex and have a degree. It does not have to be one or the other. We have an array of interests and characteristics. Once people stop seeing women in an one-dimensional lens and respect all types of women--not just the ones who "keep their legs closed" and are fully clothed--we'll be making progress to alleviating women of the exhausting weight of misogyny.

The Hoe Does Not Exist

We now understand why the “queen vs. hoe” binary is harmful but let us talk about how harmful it is to call women “hoes” in the first place. Let’s take it even a step further:

What if I said “hoes” do not exist?

Yep, you read that right. I said what I said.

“Hoes” do not exist.

Read it again. Read it one more time for safe measure. Read it until you’re past your shock and denial. I know what you’re thinking: “Hoes do exist. I see them everyday. They’re walking around my campus as we speak.”

Before I delve into why “hoes” do not exist, let’s talk about what a “hoe” actually is. For one, I can strongly argue that it is a gendered term geared towards women in particular. Whenever you ask someone what a “hoe” is, they often start their response with “a woman that…” Along with that, when people jokingly talk about a very sexually active man, they say a “man hoe” or “man whore” implying that the slur--yes, slur--is not typically meant for men but for women. Lastly, the social consequences of being called a “hoe” are felt heavily by women--not men. Women are literally shunned for being “hoes” whereas men are praised.

Now, the classifications of what makes a woman a “hoe” varies from person to person. Some say a woman who exposes a lot of skin and has a lot of sex partners is a “hoe.” Some say a woman who simply wears leggings instead of pants is “hoe.” I’ve even seen men go as far as calling women “hoes” for using the puppy and flower crown filters on Snapchat. Women have been called “hoes” for saying yes and women have been called “hoes” for saying no.

So basically, a woman is a “hoe” for exercising one of her human rights--agency over her body.

People don’t even stop to think about they feel the need to call women “hoes.” I remember awhile back on Twitter, I asked what was the purpose of calling women “hoes.” What do people get out of doing that? No one could answer me. I’ll answer for them.

There is no meaningful purpose behind calling women “hoes.”

The slur “hoe” is meant to control women and our bodies. It is to shame women for doing anything outside of what’s considered acceptable for a woman to do. We are “hoes” when we dare to be sexual for our benefit and not for a man. Women being sexual is considered acceptable, as long as it is for one man.

You still don’t think it’s all about control? You ever noticed that when a woman posts her own nudes, people flip out and call her all kinds of “hoes” but when a man leak her nudes, the backlash she receives is minimal compared to the backlash she would get if she posted her own nudes? People even heart eye her nudes. It’s incredibly troubling that a woman’s nudes are relatively accepted when her privacy and trust has been violated by a man as oppose to her posting her nudes herself.

Another example: Nicki Minaj's single cover for her track sparked controversy because she was squatting with a thong as thin as dental floss on. People said that she was putting out a negative image to young girls. People shamed her to death about that single cover. Now, those same people are quiet when women dressed just like Nicki was on that single cover are squatting at the feet of some male rapper on his album cover. Women are allowed to be sexual... only if it is for the male gaze-- only if it is at a time that men see as acceptable.

This is incredibly violent. Chastising women for being sexual outside of the male gaze implies that as women, our bodies are not ours but solely for the consumption of men. Denying a woman of her human right to agency contributes to rape culture. Sexual assault is about pillaging one's body. It is about taking power over their body and denying them consent. Suggesting that women should not be sexual unless for a man goes along with this notion of denying women power over our bodies. In other words, when you call women "hoes" for being sexual, you're also contributing to rape culture.

People even go as far as using a woman being a "hoe" to discredit sexual assault or harassment that happens against her.

These are just a couple of statements I've heard that were intended to discredit sexual assault victims. How little do people value women that they excuse sexual assault because a woman wasn't covered up to their standards? You care about a woman being covered so much that you think if she isn't, that warrants her body and space being violated? How much do people reduce the fluidity of a woman's sexuality to the point that they believe that simply because a woman has said "yes" to sex many times before, there's no way she could say "no" or express that she doesn't want sex one time?

If we have any sincere intention of ridding our society of rape culture, we have to rid the idea of "hoes." We have to rid the idea that the only appropriate time for a woman to be a sexual being is when it's beneficial for a man. When we rid that notion, we also rid the toxic idea that a woman's body isn't hers.

What a woman does with her body is her business and it is not our place to judge her morality off of something so superficial. She should not have to be met with such harsh criticism and judgement for simply being human. Calling women "hoes" does nothing but shame women out of feeling in control of their bodies and sexuality. It does nothing but take ownership of a woman's body away from her into the hands of a man. It does nothing but stigmatize sex and hinders necessary conversations about sex. Not only do we need to move away from the binary "queens vs. hoers" but we also must rid the notion that "hoers" even exist in the first place.

You Played Yourself

I get a kick out of pointing out contradictions. Specifically contradictions made by cishet men in regards to women and sex. There are so many contradicting statements cishet men spew because they seem to never understand that they can not shame women for being sexual while also asking for women to be asexual.

As I have mentioned before, calling women “hoes” never served a fruitful purpose. It is simply a way to control women and our bodies because calling women “hoes” serves no initial purpose but cause fog and mirrors. Men can never decide on what it is they want from women. Their standards always end up contradicting themselves because there is no logic or rationale in the policing of women and our bodies.

For example, how can you expect a woman to perform well in bed if you do not want a woman with experience? Men seem to think that women with a “body count” of -1 can perform in bed as if they’re porn stars. This is not how this works. Personally, I believe that men are caught up on a woman’s “body count” because it’s an ego trip for them. Once again, this goes back to men seeing women as objects. Why do you think they use language such as “She’s been ” or “Everybody done ?” Obviously they believe that our bodies depreciate in value the more we have sex since their language reflects the idea that women’s bodies are nothing but objects and the less it has been touched, the more of value and pure it is.

Another example: how in the world do you want women to have casual sex with you yet you shame women for having casual sex? We bring up young men to believe that they are to get as many girls as they can. What’s funny to me is, while we teach boys that getting a lot of girls signifies their manhood, we’re also teaching girls that they must reserve themselves for one man. Okay, the math isn’t adding up. How are you, a cishet man, suppose to have sex with multiple women when you’re telling women they shouldn’t have sex outside of a monogamous relationship? Who are you going to have sex with? Why set a standard for one thing and expect another?

What also trips me out is that men complain about women not wanting to just have sex as if they weren’t the ones to socialize women to operate like that in the first place. Many women do not want to have sex casually because they’ve been brought up to reserve sex for a man who they have an emotional connection with. If they do not reserve sex for said man, then they are called “hoes.” Women don’t want people to think they’re “easy” which is why some women make a man wait to have sex after months--maybe even years. Why be upset at a standard you set, being followed?

Now, when you do find women who just want casual sex, you feel the need to call her a “hoe.” Why? What is the point? Why not just dap her up and thank her for having consensual sex with you? Does it feel better when you have to lead a girl on, thinking that your relationship will not just be physical, in order for her to have sex with you? You realize how manipulative that sounds?

Men also have this weird thing where they want to have “no strings attached” sex but if a girl does not catch feelings after having sex with them... she’s a “hoe?” But if she does catch feelings, they call the girl annoying... What in the world? What is it that you want? Do you even know?

Another interesting contradiction is men saying that women should not make it easy for men to

have sex with them but some men expect women to have sex with them for simply paying for a date or meal.

Additionally, in conversations about having sex on the first date or having sex “too soon”, men often refer to the women who have sex upfront as “hoes” and I find it so interesting. Because a woman knows what she wants--which is to have sex with you--she’s now a “hoe?” She is now not as valuable as a woman because she had sex with you “too soon”...? What does that say about you though? When your hand touches a woman you strip away her magic?

The reason why they catch themselves contradicting themselves is because most of these rules are created out of the need to police women and preserve their egos as cishet men. If one is trying to find the logic in these “rules”, you’ll only come up short. I have a solution though. It’s pretty revolutionary if I do say so myself.

Are you ready for it?

How about have consensual casual sex with a woman respect her as a fellow human being? I don’t think that’s too much to ask. Start seeing the humanity of the women you’re sleeping with and you will begin to flourish. Stop hurting your heads making up weird rules and standards. Instead, let it flow and allow women to have consensual sex whenever they want. Don’t chastise women for having casual sex and then complain about how you can’t find a woman who just wants casual sex. Don’t let your sexism make you end up playing yourself.

The Thot vs. The Slut

I know you raised a brow at the title of this chapter. “The thot vs. slut?’ aren’t those two the same things?” That’s probably what you’re asking yourself. Well, yes and no. Both are slurs that are pinned against women for expressing and exercising their sexuality but if we want to examine them culturally, “slut” is usually used by White people. How often do you hear Black people call Black women “sluts?” Usually Black people opt for “thot” or “hoe.” I bring up these two slurs to bring up a point that is rather overlooked--well...ignored.

When talking about the ways women are shamed for being sexual beings we need to examine the way this generation uniquely impacts Black women as compared to white women. Yes, both groups of women are ostracized for being sexual but it would be a disservice to completely ignore the disproportionate criticism Black women are put up against.

Historically, Black women were painted as sexually deviant by white supremacist narratives. Black women were said to be “sexually immoral” and “promiscuous”--the “Jezebel” stereotype. Black women’s supposed deviant sexual nature was blamed when it was revealed that White male slave owners were sexually assaulting Black enslaved women. They did not call it what it was--rape. Instead they claimed that Black enslaved women were seducing these White men into having sex with them.

Not only were Black women demonized for their sexuality, Black women were fetishized for their bodies. Black enslaved women such as Sarah Baartman were placed on display where White people sickly poked, prodded, and “studied” their bodies. Black women’s bodies were even used, without consent, to study gynecology. Black women’s bodies were never humanized but rather mocked and made into sexual objects for the racist’s perverse pleasure.

Now, White women have also been objectified for their sexuality and bodies but when placed against Black women, their sexuality is seen as more pure--more worthy of protection. When a White woman embraces her body and sexuality, although she may be met with criticism, she is ultimately championed as a revolutionary for women’s rights. When a Black woman does the same, she is met with harsh criticism. Black women’s sexuality being regarded as deviant can still be seen today in areas such as mainstream pop culture and politics.

One example would be when Nicki Minaj posed in a thong for her single cover and was met with slander. Minaj responded to the hatred by posting photos of white models in swimwear with the caption “acceptable.” She also posted her single cover with the caption “unacceptable.” Minaj accurately pointed out how White women’s sexuality is seen as angelic and more acceptable than Black women’s. Another example can be seen in how people regard Beyoncé and her expression of her sexuality.

In 2014, Beyoncé publicly and explicitly revealed that she was a feminist. Her announcement was more so publicized at her MTV Video Music Award performance later that year when she stood proudly in front of a screen that clearly flashed “FEMINIST.” After her announcement, of course, think pieces were hot and fresh the next morning. White feminists, such as Annie Lennox, placed Beyoncé’s feminism into question because Knowles’ work is so open about her sexuality.

Here's the irony: In the same breath, White feminists claimed Miley Cyrus was a feminist for twerking at the VMA's. Interesting, right? So, why is it that when Cyrus twerks, it's progressive but when Beyoncé does the same, it discredits her as a feminist?

What these White feminists refuse to do is interrogate why it is that they see progress in White women championing their sexuality and the complete opposite when Black women do the same. White supremacist narratives are deeply ingrained into us, mostly without us even realizing it. White women perpetuate the "Jezebel" stereotype by seeing Black women expressing our sexuality as something that isn't conducive to the women's rights movement.

It is one thing to acknowledge that women are shamed for being sexual beings but it's another to acknowledge how Black women are oftentimes placed underneath even more severe scrutiny for their sexuality. If women's liberation is our goal, we must understand how sexism operates against women of color but specifically Black women in this instance.

Women's liberation is not black and white. It is not simple. It is layered, complicated, and calls for nuance because women, ourselves, are complicated. In order to go forward, we must call this "Jezebel" stereotype into question and stop allowing it to thrive in today's society and culture. It is important that if White feminists are interested in making a better community for ALL women, they must also examine their own anti-black misogynistic notions that have towards Black women's sexuality.

Misogynist Mathematics: Body Count

“What’s your body count?”

Who said it? A serial killer or superficial people who think how many people one has slept with determines the value of said person?

I like to call the discussion of “body counts” mathematics for misogynists because typically, talks about having a cap on “body counts” are targeted towards women. “Body counts” are another tool used to police women’s sexual agency. Again, the “body count” discussion reinforces the belief that women’s bodies are objects and the more they are “used”, for lack of better words, the more their value as a woman depreciates.

We place a woman’s value on the most shallow things. A woman’s “body count” does not determine the standing of her morality. A woman could have a “body count” of one and still mistreat others. A woman could have a “body count” that’s in the double digits and treat others with care and respect. The issue is we don’t even judge a woman by how she treats others--something of substance and actually pertains to us--but by the measurement of how sheathed in clothes her body is or by how many people she has slept with.

I have even heard men break up with girlfriends they were in love with because they heard her “body count” was high. I find that truly amazing. You cared and loved for this girl but because she’s had more partners--from the past--than you would like, that’s reason enough to break up with her? To me, sounds like you didn’t truly love her to begin with.

A woman’s “body count” does not matter. Many will argue that it does but their reasonings are simply rooted in misogyny. A woman’s “body count” or whatever activity she does in the bedroom is not of our concern. It is no one’s business. It is also not something you should hold against a woman seeing as it has nothing to do with you--even if you are sleeping with her.

I always say, the only information one is entitled to know when considering becoming intimate with someone is that person’s sex health. If someone has had a sexually transmitted infection, that’s something that can affect you, your body, and your health. That actually is your business if you both plan on engaging in consensual sexual activity. Someone’s “body count” on the other hand? Why is that necessary to know? How does that impact anyone in anyway?

Many will argue and say that women should not have a “high body count” because women’s vaginas supposedly “stretch” from having too much sex. Well, for one, this is cissexist. Meaning that it ignores that there are women who do not have vaginas and non-binary/non-conforming people who do have vaginas. Second, this is proven to be biologically inaccurate.

Vaginas do not “stretch” from too much sex. A vagina is a muscle. What muscle do you know “stretches” out from being exercised too much? If vaginas stretch out from too much sex then does that mean that a woman who regularly has sex with the same guy have a stretched vagina too? Vaginas have the elasticity to stretch out babies that can weigh 5-9 pounds and return to normal. Is it rational to claim that penises that are 5-9 inches long are capable of permanently stretching out a vagina? The misogynistic mathematics is not adding up, my friend.

If a vagina feels “loose” that means that the person is very aroused. When vaginas are properly aroused, they relax to prepare for penetration. If a vagina feels tight, that means the person is not aroused enough yet. It takes a vagina up to twenty minutes to be fully aroused. A person’s vagina feeling loose or tight is outside of their control. It is not determined by how many people that person has had sex with.

Some will argue that a woman shouldn’t just “give it up to anybody” because apparently you exchange or tie souls when you have sex. The important aspect of sex positivity is that sex means different things to different people. As long as someone’s relationship to sex isn’t harmful to others or themselves, there’s nothing wrong with it. If a woman wants to believe sex is just a casual thing for her, she has a right to see it that way. If a woman thinks sex is this emotional exchanging of souls, she also has a right to believe that as well. What people don’t have the right to do is judge women for seeing sex differently than from what they would like women to see sex as.

There really is no solid argument against why a woman’s “body count” shouldn’t be “high”--whatever that means. People’s reasonings are not only just rooted in misogyny but they’re also rooted in pure ego. A man doesn’t want a woman to have “too many” partners because then she has people to compare him to. Men thinking that a woman is reserved for them is an ego boost. To learn that you are not the only man who has been intimate with her, taints your ego.

People also use dehumanizing language such as “No one wants a woman who has been passed around” to argue why a woman should not have a “high body count.” In order to believe a woman could be “passed around”, you would first have to believe that women are objects that can be passed around in the first place. Language such as this shows how conditionally men value women. It shows how disposable people think women are. Something as superficial as “body count” can be reason enough to not see the humanity of a woman.

The idea of there being an ideal “body count” for women needs to die. It again teaches that women’s value is measured by where we fit on the “purity” scale. A woman’s “body count” does not determine her character or her morality. It just shows that she’s a sexual human being which is nothing to be ashamed of. It is a part of human nature along the spectrum of human sexuality.

Threesome or Train?

If you ask the common person whether it is a threesome or train when a man is having sex with two women, people will say “threesome” with no second thought. Now if you flip the question and ask if it is a threesome or train when it is two men and one woman having sex people insist that it is a “train.” Why? It simply takes three adults engaging in consensual sex together to constitute a “threesome” so why is it that people are so adamant in resisting calling a two man-one woman threesome just that--a threesome?

If you noticed, a lot of times when people talk about women’s roles in sex, the language is never framed to suggest that women are active participants of sex but rather an object being used for sex or something to be conquered. People have a hard time wrapping their heads around the fact that sex is not something that happens women but something that women actively participate in. It is evident in the language used when talking about women engaging in sex:

“I .”

“She been bro.”

“She been .”

When you can’t grapple with the fact that a woman with two men is a threesome, you are guilty of believing sex is not something women can dominate in but rather another space where women have to be dominated and subjugated.

Now, people have tried to counter my argument with “Well, in a two women, one man threesome, they’re all having sex with each other. If it’s two men and one woman that’s a train because they’re just having sex with the woman.” I’m not buying that because why are you even assuming the men in the latter situation aren’t having sex with each other? Will homophobia and rigid masculinity--yes, I said it--not allow you to even consider that to be a possibility? Also, you honestly feel that people would comfortably call a man-two women a “train” simply because the women aren’t having sex with each other? It doesn’t matter whether the women are having sex or not. People’s first impulse is to call a two women-one man sexual encounter a “threesome.”

People are so attached to the word “train” because it feeds into calcified masculinity’s need to thrive off the subjugation and domination of women. The idea of a woman being pleased by more than one man at the same time challenges the very premise toxic masculinity stands upon. It suggests that the woman is not in a position of subjugation but in fact, she is centered and is possibly the dominant one.

People are also hesitant to call a one-woman, two-man threesome a threesome because it goes against the idea that a woman of morality should only reserve sex for a man she is romantically involved with. It is socially acceptable for a man to have sex with multiple women. A great portion of manhood’s validity is founded upon how many women a man can get. Validation, for womanhood, on the other hand, is founded upon how a woman can remain reserved and reserved for one man only. A woman engaging in sex with more than one man, at the same time at that, completely challenges that notion.

This logic is also cis-heteronormative--meaning it centers cisgender, heterosexual people and excludes individuals who do not find themselves within this identity. What happens when it's not even one man/two women or one woman/two men? What if it is three men or three women? Are those not threesomes as well? What if said threesome involves someone who is non-binary or trans? Is that a threesome or train?

The fact of the matter is, people's reasoning behind why it's not a threesome when it is two men and one woman is simply rooted in sexism. They guise it with excuses that are not founded in logic. A threesome is when three adults engage in consensual sex. Gender is a non-factor. In order to fully understand and accept this, you would have to actually see women as your equal and not as something to be conquered through sex.

Where is her father?

You know what's a quick way to turn me off?

Mention my father when you see me being sexual.

No, really. I honestly do not understand this impulse to bring up a woman's father when she is being sexual. It's actually pretty creepy and sick. It gets even worse though. People don't even stop at bringing up a woman's father but men, somehow, also think of their unborn daughters when they see a woman being sexual. Take a trip on Twitter and underneath a tweet of a woman expressing her sexuality, there is a man saying "This is why I don't want a daughter" or "Where is your father?" It's extremely odd.

But you know what? Their responses speak to a larger idea that is a permeating issue in our society. It is the idea that a father owns his daughter's body and her sexuality. It is the same idea that fuels these virginity pledge balls where young girls pledge to their fathers, through an extravagant ceremony, that they will remain virgins until marriage. The fact that these balls are only for fathers and daughters also trumps the counterargument that remaining "pure" is just as much as an expectation for men.

What I find most troubling is the fact that a father essentially owning his daughter is a normalized idea. People don't even stop to think that it's rather odd and quite alarming that when they see a grown woman talking about her love for sex or showing off her body, they have this urge to bring up her father who is completely unrelated to what is going on. It's also weird that men think of their unborn daughters when they see a woman being sexual.

For a man to deny that his daughter will possibly be a sexual human being is not only immature, it's unrealistic. There might come a time where your daughter will want to engage in sex. In order to accept that, a man will have to accept that women, related to them or not, are sexual human beings and they have every right to be. Men's denial is informed by sexism. They can not and do not want to accept that their daughter will want sex because they do not want to "tarnish" their daughter's "purity." They do not want their daughter to be a "hoe." They are fine with their sons having sex with as many women as they want because that is what "makes them a man." For men, how many women they can "conquest" is one of the key things people value them for. For women, it is how many men they can keep out until they find their partner--that is where people place women's value. Misogynist math is so funny right?

Before men bring daughters into this world, it is important for them to unpack patriarchal notions they have come to internalize--the thought that their daughter's body and sexuality belonging to their father being one of them. A woman's body and her sexuality is hers and only hers alone. Instead of denying that their daughter will have sex, men must accept this and instead educate their daughter about what all comes with sex--contraceptives, emotional and physical impacts, and so on.

I know one thing for sure. If you were to show my dad my tweets of me being sexual, I'm sure he'd be weirded out because I'm his daughter but most of all, he'll probably be disturbed by you feeling the need to show him that. Thankfully, I have a father who understands that my body is mine. Sex is inevitable fate for me in particular. He gets that and he accepts it because he is mature and he

understands that I make the rules when it comes to my body. Hopefully, one day, more men will understand this.

Put Some Self on myRespect

I've come to hate the term "self-respect." It has gone from simply meaning someone's respect for themselves to people using their own standards to measure how worthy you are of their respect. People often conflate how little respect they have for you with your own self-respect. It is inaccurate for people to feel they are entitled to determine someone else's self-respect simply because they do not respect them themselves.

People regularly make the argument that a woman who "does not respect herself" is not worthy of respect from others. Now, a logical person would ask, "If self-respect is determined by the self, how can they determine if she respects herself or not?"

Great question.

They can't.

When people say statements such as that, they are usually saying that because the woman presents herself in a way to oppose what they believe an ideal woman should be. If a woman is not clothed enough to people's liking, you can hear people patronizing her with remarks about her needing to respect herself. If a woman is sexually active, past what is considered socially acceptable, people also wag their finger at her and tell her she needs to respect herself. Notice how it is less about how the girl feels about herself and more about how people feel about her?

That's the thing though. When people claim a woman needs to have SELF-respect, people do not consider her own standards for herself. People don't even consider her at all in the determining of her "self-respect." People are only considering what they believe a "respectable" woman is and if a woman veers away from that ideal, she obviously does not respect herself, in their minds.

As I mentioned before, people are taught what the ideal woman is--"modest." Where a woman fits on the scale of modesty, in people's minds, determines her morality. Seeing as that is what people are conditioned to believe, when they see women who do not fit into what "modest" is, their first thought is that this woman is immoral and does not care for herself or her image.

What people do not ever consider is that a woman's self-love is determined by the SELF. It is determined by her. What one may not consider a self-love, another woman may. For example, a woman who likes to reveal a lot of skin might do so because she loves her body and loves showing off her body. Another example would be, a woman who is sexually active finds self-love in treating her body to pleasure. Maybe for a woman who genuinely likes to be discreet, "modesty" is what she prefers because for self-love, to her, it means only allowing herself to see the beauty of her body. Self-love means different things to different women. It is important for people to remember that just because you do not respect a woman, for whatever patriarchal reason, it does not mean she does not respect herself.

Also, not for nothing but let's be hypothetical here. Even if a woman does not respect herself, supposedly, why would you want to knock her when she is already down? "Oh look, this girl feels terribly about herself. Let me go and make it even worse." Sounds to me that people are just searching for an excuse to disrespect women because they do not even value women, whole fully, to

beginwith.

It is important that women determine their own self-respect and what that looks like. That is a vital part of a woman's agency. People need to cease with conflating their own standards with the standards a woman sets for herself. People also need to not confuse the level of respect they have for a woman and the level of respect a woman has for herself. A woman's self-respect is hers and it is not up for debate.

Well, What Were you Wearing?

“What were you wearing?”

A phrase that we probably all have heard in response to a woman coming forward about being sexually assaulted. A phrase that inadvertently encourages other women to stay silent about their assaults. A phrase that fuels the normalization, delegitimization of sexual assault--rape culture.

When the topic of sexual assault against women comes up, people show how disposable they believe women are. They believe that because a woman was not wearing “enough” clothes, that warrants her being sexually assaulted and antagonized. This way of thinking not only comes from people not valuing women but it also comes from people not understanding the dynamics and motives of sexual assault.

People think that rape is sex that someone wanted badly enough, they went to great lengths to violate someone to get it. That's such a reductive take on what sexual assault actually is. Sexual assault is not about sex. It is not about desirability. It is about seeking for a perverse sense of power by denying one agency of their body. It is about thinking so little of someone, you think you are entitled to their body and space by any means necessary.

What a woman wears does not determine whether she will be assaulted or not. The presence of a rapist determines whether a woman will be assaulted. Women are sexually assaulted and harassed in many different types of clothing. Women in Burkas are still sexually assaulted. How do you explain that? Are they not covered from head to toe? What would've “provoked” someone to sexually assault them?

This is why measuring a woman by the clothes that she wears is toxic. Not only is it policing but it also perpetuates the idea that a woman is no longer worthy of respect when she is not dressed a certain way; so much so that people think it's rational to fault her for being assaulted. Can you imagine, from the outside looking in, a world where people think it is logical for a man to sexually assault--to violate and ruin a woman's life simply because her skirt wasn't as long as they thought it should be? How little do we actually think of women?

This, in retrospect, also shows how little men think of themselves. Men paint themselves as so primitive when they claim a woman not being covered up enough provokes them to sexually assault her. They go as far as comparing themselves to wild animals. “When you wave meat in front of a lion, what do you expect?” Okay, but men aren't lions. They are humans who are capable of self-control. They do not have to be these rigid, sex-driven creatures they paint themselves as.

As a Black woman, what I also find interesting is how cishet Black men can understand they should not be racially profiled, frisked, and lastly killed because they're perceived as “thugs” for wearing hoodies and sagging their jeans but they seem to not “get” how a woman should not be sexually harassed or assaulted for wearing “skimpy” clothes that result in people perceiving her as a “hoe.”

I have said this many times before on Twitter and every time, cishet Black men have gone blue in the face trying to argue what holds to be very true. It is the same premise. Both marginalized groups-

-Black people and women--are made disposable under most circumstances--of course--but people also use their attire as an excuse to attack and antagonize them. Both the "hoe" and the "thug" are being mistreated because of people's perceptions based on how they are dressed as the frowned upon demographic they are--Black and woman. Neither should be mistreated for how they are dressed.

Cishet Black men who refuse to see the correlation are only doing so because they are way too invested in their sexism to even acknowledge the very sound correlation. They only see the fault in how they are treated--not in how they treat women, specifically Black women.

For a cishet Black man to accept this comparison, they would have to unlearn that sexism packed inside of them that makes them believe a woman should expect and accept that she will be mistreated for "dressing like a hoe." If we're going by this logic, shouldn't you expect to be treated as a "thug" for dressing as so? I mean, what exactly is the truth?

Calling women all kinds of "hoes" and "sluts" also contributes to rape culture. Whenever I tell people that shaming women for being sexual contributes to rape culture, I'm always met with incredulous remarks. "How in the world does calling women 'hoes' help rape culture?"

Remember when I said earlier that the whole point of calling women "hoes" is about control? It is about denying a woman agency of her body. It is about fetishizing and objectifying women's bodies but when women want to celebrate their own bodies and sexualities, it is frowned upon. Control. Now, I'm not saying calling a woman a "hoe" is the equivalent of sexually assaulting a woman. I am saying that both acts are fueled by the idea that women should not be in control of their bodies and sexualities.

Not only that, but people use sex-shaming women as a way to discredit women who have been sexually assaulted.

"She ain't get raped. She just don't wanna be called the hoe that she is."

"She be giving it up to everybody. Ain't no way she got raped this time."

These are few of the many examples I have heard and read on Twitter from people who wish to discredit a woman as a sexual assault survivor. You know, just because a woman has said yes many times before, does not mean she cannot say no this one time. "Hoes" can get raped too.

Shaming women for being sexual continues to show that it serves no purpose other than to degrade women. In the end it only helps create a culture where women are afraid to come forward for being assaulted. It helps create a culture where when a woman does come forward, instead of believing her, people resort to using her sex life as a means to discredit her. If we want to make this world safer, if we wish to eradicate our world of rape culture, we have to begin by allowing women to own their bodies--and respect that.

“Pick me! Pick me!”

From the day we are born, women are socialized to believe that our ultimate goal in life is to appease men. We are taught that the purpose of our existence is to submit to and be consumed by men. When women don't, whether purposefully or not, meet this expectation, people try to belittle them for it.

People hold a woman being single over her head as if it is something to be ashamed of. That is why remarks such as “That's why you're single” are specifically meant to sting women in particular. Because it is expected of us to find ourselves on the arm of a man and when we do not do that, we have essentially failed as women. That is what we're brought to believe is the epitome of our existence--besides being baby dispensers.

Unfortunately, many women internalize this notion, which has resulted in women feeling as if they need to compete against each other for the attention of men. Holding sexist and misogynistic standards above other women makes them feel as if they are better. Instead of rejecting this patriarchal notion, they grasp onto it because their entire self-worth is built upon the backs of other women. These women are what we call “Pick Me” women.

I should note that this title has become an umbrella term for women with internalized misogyny. Let us not undermine the complexity of patriarchal conditioning to reduce all women who are internalized misogynists simply as women feigning for attention from men by reinforcing sexist standards. There are also women who sincerely believe in sexist notions regardless of male approval. There are women who have no interest in men who hold onto sexist standards because they still need to feel superior to other women. There are women who resent their womanhood and take it out on other women. Nonetheless, their internalized misogyny is still an issue that should not go unchecked.

I digress though. Let's break down and analyze Pick Me women. Here's some examples of some daft things a Pick Me woman would say:

“No man wants a woman with a high body count. No one wants a woman who has been ran through.”

“As women, we have to cook and clean for our man. It is our duty.”

“I'm a girl who doesn't dress like a hoe and party all the time. Yes, girls like me still exist.”

Yes, these women say things like that and actually do it. What doesn't help is the men who egg them on which is what these women wanted in the first place. It is often said that food is the way to a man's heart but upholding sexist notions--something men benefit from--is an even better way to their heart... or so these women think.

Now I can't stand on a mountaintop and act as if I have never been in their shoes. I once was a Pick Me girl too. There was a time where I did honestly feel incomplete if I was not getting attention and praise from men. I am not considered conventionally attractive. I'm a plus-size Black woman with kinky-textured hair. I use to think that pointing out the “flaws” in other women would help elevate myself. In other words, I was very insecure and instead of working through my insecurities in a productive way, I took it out on other women.

I gradually began to unlearn this need to put other women down via sex-shaming when I began to become more comfortable with myself. When I was content with myself I did not feel the need to minimize other women. Coming into myself also made me more appreciative of my womanhood which resulted in me becoming drawn to feminism.

Unlearning internalized misogyny is no easy task. It is basically drilled into women from the day we are born. We are brought up to view our womanhood in such a superficial way. We are told to not take up too much space and to make enough room for a man even if it comes at the expense of ourselves. When you're taught that your womanhood can ultimately only fit into two categories--queen vs. hoes--and this notion is heavily perpetuated amongst society, it becomes normalized. You don't even think to interrogate these dehumanizing narratives about your womanhood.

There are many downfalls to being a Pick Me woman. One being the need to attach themselves to sexist narratives because they need to feel above other women. This is why they do not think to refute the idea that women are to be compartmentalized and only one end of women is worthy of respect. Without this leverage, they do not know how to shine. They do not know themselves--truly themselves. They are unaware of their power and capability as women--as individuals. They suppress so much of themselves, especially their sexuality, because they care more about being "wifey material" to men. Honestly, who could blame them? Women are socialized to think that way.

But you know, in a way, Pick Me women do understand how freeing it is to reject sexist notions about womanhood. They are aware of how much they hold back. That is revealed when their jealousy for sexually liberated women rams its little green head. I argue that Pick Me women, at times, can be envious of "hoes." "Hoes" are essentially women who do not care about society's expectations of them. They do not what they want despite the harsh judgement they will face. I recall even hearing one girl say that she was jealous of "hoes" because they got a lot of d*ck and did not care about people's judgement.

Pick Me women thrive off men putting down other women for being "hoes" (while at the same time desiring these same "hoes"). Pick Me women think that in the end, these same men will value and respect them. That they will be seen as some sort of exception because they decided to keep their clothes on and their legs closed. That's probably one of the best ways to sell yourself short as a woman.

If a woman not wearing "enough" clothes and having a "high body count" are all it takes to make a man not respect her, what makes you think he will respect you in the end? The only thing that is stopping him from disrespecting you, blatantly, is you adhering to his standards. Once you veer away from what he sees fit, you will also be boxed in with the same women you thought he distinguished you from. Look how quickly men stopped praising Ayesha Curry when she had an opinion that differed from theirs. At the end of the day, if a man has conditional respect for women, he will not respect you in your entirety.

Men will praise you for being a "good girl" instead of a "hoe" and then turn around and cheat on you with the "hoe." Men will tell you you need to do X, Y, and Z to "keep" him and he will still step out on you and that is because sexism is not rooted in logic. It makes men self-serving and it allows them to completely forget all types of rationale.

When a man does not see you as a human--a human being who comes with thoughts and feelings--

he will never respect you the way you need him to as a woman. Men who preach about “wifey material” see women as ideas instead of actual people who are afforded agency and have a purpose that is beyond being consumed by men.

People will try to scare women out of their human right of agency. In the end, it is up to a woman to either accept or reject this. It may be a generic feminist chant but a woman’s body really is body and she can do whatever she wants with it when it does not harm others. In a world that is constantly seeking to deny women the rights to their own bodies, it is revolutionary when a woman owns her body and sexuality.

Freeing myself from the chains of internalized misogyny was one of the best journeys I ever decided to embark on. Quite frankly, I am still on this journey and I’m a feminist. No one is free of flaws. In order for Pick Me women or women with internalized misogyny to come to the winning side--not necessarily the feminist side but the side where women don’t have to tear each other down--they have to look within themselves and tackle those insecurities head on. I’ve been there before. It is not easy but in the end it is worth it.

Free Yourself

This is not an easy road.

This road to alleviating the remnants of misogyny from our community but it must be done.

Misogyny pervades every aspect of our culture. The fight to stop it has been a long one. I argue that the most important to tackle misogyny head on is by stop shaming women for being sexual human beings. If people want to build a safer community for women, they have to stop regarding women as objects. They must examine how they themselves perpetuate rape culture--a culture that harms women and girls.

Too much of our value as women is emphasized on things that do not matter such as how we dress and how many people we have had sex with. It is time to move away from that. It is time that people value women for the full human beings that we are. It is time that people stop placing into boxes that do not give us enough space to breathe, enough space to feel our full potential and power as women... enough space to be human.

Respect for women can not be conditional. That is not respect at all. That is merely tolerance. If all that is stopping a man from disrespecting a woman is by what she wears, that shows how little he respected her in the first place. When people say that a woman must maintain "modesty" in order to be treated with respect, it shows how disposable people think women are. A woman should not have to be modest to be treated with respect. A woman should not have to hide herself in order to be accepted.

We have to free the chains. We have to free all the chains. We have to recognize how sexual abuse impacts Black women and girls, particularly. People must unpack why they view Black femme sexuality as something deviant instead of something that should be respected. The Black community must work to dismantle rape culture within our community. It is time to stop calling our young girls "fast-tailed" when they are preyed upon and sexually abused by older men in our community.

I want a better world for women. I want women to be able to be regarded as whole humans. I want people to recognize our humanity. All of it. I want people to stop reducing a woman down to her sexuality because they do not understand and accept that women are multifaceted and we come with a myriad of thoughts, emotions, and feelings. A woman's body is hers. Her sexuality is hers to express and own. Understand this. Accept this. Once we all come to the light, we might all be free.

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