

Ep 15 We Inherited Healing 4Feb2021

Wellness for Black Girls Podcast

TaReon Jael: [00:00:00] Welcome to the Wellness for Black Girls podcast, a semimonthly podcast that exists to help Black Women bloom while moving to the dimensions of wellness. I'm your host, TaReon Jael, a Certified Health Educator and Medical Lab Scientist. For more information, please visit wellnessforblackgirls.com. While I hope you enjoy listening to and learning from the podcast. Please remember that it is not intended to be a substitute for a relationship with the licensed healthcare provider.

Hello, and welcome to episode 15. We're back. I want to start out by giving a huge shout out to the ladies and gents that have been tuning in and supporting the show regularly, even while we took a break over the holidays. I recently took a look at the stats for the podcast. And I was pleasantly surprised to see that the podcast has steadily been receiving hundreds of downloads a week.

I was even more surprised to see that the podcast family includes listeners from all over the world in places like Canada, the UK, South Africa, Germany, France, the Netherlands, Australia, Bermuda, Mauritius, Namibia, Zimbabwe and Haiti. And of course I have to shout out to the listeners in my home country, in the U.S. in cities like Atlanta, Denver, Chicago, Houston, Dallas, Baltimore, Philly, Las Vegas, LA, and the Bay Area. So thank you so much for listening to and supporting the podcast. It fills my heart with so much gratitude. It's my hope that the things shared on this podcast have and will continue to touch your life in a positive way.

Before we dive into today's episode further. I want to let you know that the podcast will return to a semimonthly schedule. So be on the lookout for the next episode on Thursday, February 18th. I also want to give a quick warning. We're going to be talking about trauma. We're not going to get into any detailed stories, but I will be mentioning trauma in a general sense.

So if you feel like this may be a topic that may bring up difficult emotions for you, feel free to skip this episode if that feels right for you.

It's officially Black History Month 2021 in the U.S. and Canada, and recently President Biden signed executive actions to help work towards racial equity in our nation. I appreciate President Biden's willingness to tackle racial justice issues and not ignore them. I'm hopeful that his actions will inspire others in positions of power to join in the pursuit of achieving racial equity and not just in this nation, but in other nations as well.

My husband and I recently watched Small Axe on Amazon prime video. It's a collection of five films by Steve McQueen that tells the stories of London's West Indian community. It's set from the late 1960s to the mid 1980s. The overarching theme being the West Indian communities' ability to maintain their culture, pride and unity while fighting against the rampant racism and discrimination they faced. It's a phenomenal series with so many themes to uncover and unpack, but the themes that stood out to me were generational trauma and generational healing.

So all of these things, President Biden's executive actions, the start of Black History Month and the Small Axe film series got me thinking about racial justice issues and especially generational trauma and healing.

Of course, I started doing a little research to help me better understand generational trauma and healing specifically. So in this episode, I hope to share what I've learned.

So let's start out by defining what generational trauma is. Simply put it's trauma that's experienced by one person that extends into the next generation. It's also referred to as intergenerational trauma or transgenerational trauma. Generational trauma is a relatively new field of study. So there's a lot left to explore about its impact and how it shows up in people.

To date Holocaust survivors and their descendants have been the most widely studied as it relates to generational trauma, but it's possible for anyone to be impacted by it. And this is especially true for those from historically marginalized groups, those who've endured repeated and ongoing abuse.

So how exactly does this form of trauma happen? There are two ways this can be passed down. The first is through learned behaviors, beliefs, and patterns that parents pass on to their children.

Dr. Joy DeGruy, researcher and educator, best known for her studies on the African-American experience starting with slavery and the Post-Traumatic Slave Syndrome, found that survival behaviors slaves used back then are often still taught to generations today. One example of this survival behavior includes when parents of Black and Brown children make it a point to sit down with their kids to talk to them about potential encounters with racism and potential police encounters.

Dr. Alfiere Breland-Noble, a psychologist who studies mental health disorders and treatments for African-Americans, says that the dread many African-American parents face in talking with their children about potential police encounters is "traumatizing for parents and for kids." She goes on to say that the scenario is part of a legacy of shared stress.

She defines shared stress as the feeling that you have to manage everything within your own community, because you don't know what you'll encounter in society at large.

She says that there is a sense among African-Americans and other marginalized people that our stressors are unique to us and not necessarily shared by people outside our groups. So we share stories of our lived experiences to help set the stage for how our loved ones encounter the world.

And as a side note, I've included links for you to learn more about Dr. DeGruy and Dr. Breland-Noble and their work.

Generational trauma can also be passed down genetically due to trauma's affect on our genetic processes. Through the study of epigenetics, it is known that behaviors and environment can cause changes that affect the way our genes work. And these changes can be passed down through generations.

The effects of generational trauma can show up in a person's life in many different ways. It can have emotional manifestations, like hyper-vigilance, a sense of a shortened future, mistrust, high anxiety, depression, panic attacks, nightmares and issues with self-esteem and self-confidence. The physical manifestations can include effects on the immune system. The immune system may be overactive, and this is when we see auto-immune disorders or disorders that occur when the body attacks itself or the immune system may be underactive. And in this case, we see a person experience increased infection and illness.

Generational trauma can also affect the immune system of the brain, which consists of microglial cells. Under normal conditions these cells enhance the growth of the nerve endings and get rid of damaged neurons and infection. But when the cells are in high trauma, reactive state, they go haywire and eat away at the healthy nerve endings. This damage can lead to anxiety, depression, and dementia.

So what about healing individually and as a community? You may or may not have heard people say that "we" are the generation that will be "the generation" that breaks generational curses and does the generational healing work. I believe that previous generations also did this healing work in a way that was relevant and accessible during their time. They simply had different practices and language for it. So what about generational healing, love, joy, expression, creativity, and resilience? Our ancestors survived through experiences that we can't even begin to imagine, but they found ways to survive it. They found ways to raise their families, to fight for freedom and justice, to gather together for times of celebration and to make a way out of no way.

I refuse to believe that we only inherited trauma. We inherited healing. We inherited love, joy expression, creativity, resilience, and so much more.

So how do we continue this generational healing work? The first is through self care. This step speaks specifically to the epigenetics that I mentioned before.

Unlike genetic changes, epigenetic changes are reversible, because they do not change our DNA sequence. They simply change how our body reads a DNA sequence. It's believed that epigenetic changes can be reversed by changing our behaviors. We can do this through our self-care practices, especially practices that help us manage stress.

We can also continue this work through community care. This was also a common theme I noticed throughout the Small Axe film series I mentioned earlier. There were many scenes that show the West Indian community supporting and looking out for one another. This was and continues to be one of the sources of strength for our people throughout the African Diaspora. Generational trauma has impacted our community, so generational healing has to happen at the community level as well. I want to dive into this topic more in a future episode, so please be sure to stay tuned for that.

The biggest thing to understand about generational trauma is that it is real trauma, not a character flaw.

It simply means that we are affected by the way, our ancestors experienced, processed and adapted to trauma. Through self care and community care we can practice and share healing strategies that build us and our communities up.

I've created a few journal prompts to help us on our generational healing journeys.

The first prompt says, think about your ancestors and the things they endured. What thoughts or emotions come up for you when you think about this?

Now imagine your ancestors finding moments to celebrate and rejoice together. What thoughts any emotions come up for you when you imagine this?

If you could write a letter to one of your ancestors, what would you say to them?

What steps can you take to help continue the generational healing?

And the final prompts. If you could write a letter to one of your descendants, what would you say to them?

I hope I was able to encourage you today and provided you with some helpful reflection questions. Head to wellnessforblackgirls.com and click on episode number 15 for show notes. There you'll find links to references and resources mentioned in the episode. If you're not already go ahead and follow the podcast @wellness4blackgirls and follow me @tareonjael.