

Sobriety as an Act of Resistance for Black Womxn

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For most Black womxn (before the Covid-19 outbreak), our day-to-day life involved going to work or school and coming home to tend to our responsibilities there. Some of us did both while being caretakers. If we were lucky, we went to the gym two or three times a week. Typically, Black womxn are the main providers in their households (even when partnered), so we often feel responsible for keeping (or pretending to keep) ourselves and everyone else together.

We ran errands and gathered on the weekends - making time for friends and family obligations, food shopping, household chores, and the children's weekend activities. We drank, and we believed we did so responsibly. If we did have a problem with consumption, we didn't notice. We were too busy trying to take care

of ourselves and others.

I started working at the age of 14. While attending law school, I simultaneously worked multiple jobs and held positions in student and community-led organizations. Desperate to prove to white people that we were not lazy and dumb, my parents instilled in me (as a child) that I had to be productive and I had to be “the best”. As the first-born daughter, I had to set an example for my younger siblings. I was to always work hard – with intention and grit.

So when the world declared Covid-19 a global pandemic last March and instructed us to quarantine, a lot of us felt stuck. It seemed as if the earth had stopped rotating, and we didn’t know what to do with the stillness. We could no longer attend school or work or commit to our everyday obligations.

Many of us had to be strong for our loved ones. We couldn’t let them know that the pandemic scared us too. We masked our grief, stress, and anxiety with smiles and humor. We couldn’t appear weak or as if we didn’t have things under control. Searching for ways to cope, many of us turned to alcohol or drugs.

I noticed I had a drinking problem in 2018 – a year after I graduated from law school. I was working for a mid-size law firm while living in a beautiful, luxury apartment. I drove the car of my dreams and was making a decent salary, yet I was unhappy. Nothing felt good enough. I drank to manage my thoughts and numb my feelings. I self-medicated with alcohol until I couldn’t and sought professional help soon after.

While in recovery, I learned that my constant state of sadness was the result of having low self-esteem and a lack of self-awareness and actualization. For years I based my identity on my accomplishments and on the words of others. I believed I was beautiful because people said I was beautiful. I believed I was intelligent because my professors gave me good grades. I took awards and accolades very seriously. For approximately 15 years, my life consisted of being the best (or at least trying to be) in my classes, afterschool programs, dance company, gymnastics team, soccer squad, and places of employment. My sense of identity was shaken when I left the educational setting and entered the 9-5 workforce.

For the first time since I could remember, my life focused on a single event – work. It felt dull and uninspiring. I was a new attorney and spent most of my time writing briefs for more experienced attorneys. I hardly went to court, and when I

did, it was to file paperwork. I typically went to happy hour after work. If I was too sad to drink with other people, I went straight home and drank alone. Drinking seemed like my only option. Looking back, I could have picked up a hobby, but (at the time) the thought of doing anything that didn't bring me tangible awards or acknowledgment was unfathomable. The idea of going home to "rest" was too. I felt meritless, which is why it was easy to relate to womxn who said that being quarantined and unable to work made them feel "empty".

Similar to how I based my identity on my productivity, the folks I met through [Sober Black Girls Club \("SBGC"\)](#) did too. I created SBGC in 2018 as a blog to document my journey in sobriety. When the pandemic progressed, I began receiving emails from (mostly) womxn stating that their drinking habits had become a problem too.

Most of the womxn I spoke with were so accustomed to being overworked, overburdened, and overextended, that they didn't know how to cope with their less busy schedules. They believed that working and taking care of others was the essence of who they were. Most couldn't recall the last time they participated in an activity they didn't feel was an obligation.

The sentiment was too familiar, and I knew that SBGC had to become more than just a blog.

Today, SBGC is a non-profit organization and community for Black womxn, non-binary folks, and members of the LBGTQIA+ community seeking support in sobriety. We offer a range of resources: meetings, a mentorship program, and a medical fund that helps members obtain quality professional healthcare services for their addiction.

The pandemic has caused a lot of problems. At the same time, it has brought us together and gave us space and time to examine and transform our lives. We want to live fully. Putting down the bottle was just the first step for most of us. Today we are rediscovering who we are. We are setting boundaries and engaging in hobbies we have genuine interests in. We are redefining what it means to care for and love ourselves and others. We are restoring our relationship to nature and its resources, and we are resting when we feel called to do so. Unapologetically.

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Conflict of Interest Statement

Ms. Oluwatoyin has no conflicts of interest to disclose of personal, financial, or other benefits that could be seen as influencing the content of this editorial.

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