

Black magic? No, just a normal, imperfect black womxn

I WANT to dedicate this Womxn's* Month to black womxn around the country.

And I dedicate this day to black womxn specifically because of the constant struggles that we experience – from erasure, to fetishisation, to abuse, to carrying more than one family, to fighting against the structural racism, sexism and classism that was constructed to guarantee our failure.

In her debut collection of poetry *Milk and Honey*, Rupi Kaur described womxn of colour as follows: “Our backs tell stories no books have the spine to carry.” Our experiences, successes and hardships shape us in every way.

However, there is a myth that we must deconstruct. We need to dismantle this myth until there is nothing left of it. It is a myth that black women are superheroes. It is this myth that continues to damage us beyond repair.

The simplest definition of a superhero is “a benevolent fictional character with superhuman powers”. To refer to black womxn as superheroes and gladiators dehumanises us. It makes the pain we feel and the suffering we endure minute. In fact it normalises the pain as a necessary challenge for a “superhero”

Analysis

FARAI MUBAIWA

to face. It also downplays our achievements and successes that we work beyond hard to achieve. At times we perpetuate this myth when we refuse to acknowledge our weaknesses or refuse to ask for help. Other times, this myth is thrust upon us by colleagues and friends who say: “Oh, what you’re experiencing is not a big deal. You can totally get through it”. Those words and thoughts downplay the sexism, racism, classism, black tax and other challenges that we face every single day to survive and at times to live.

Black womxn are excellent, don’t get me wrong.

We ignore our mental health issues, as if we are exempt from this. Black womxn, it is okay to be despondent. It is okay to not want to smile. It is okay. As Jesse Williams recently said: “Just because we’re magic doesn’t mean we’re not real”. We are real. We are entitled to our emotions and to move from just surviving

to living, we need to engage with our emotions and feel them.

A friend recently asked me why I have been quieter than usual on social media. I explained some hardships and mental health challenges that I was experiencing and the person responded “No but you’re Farai. You can get through anything.”

No. I am not a gladiator. I am not a superhero. I am not a robot.

Yes, I am a black womxn. And I love the body that I am in. Yes I am black girl magic. But I am imperfect. There are days when I do not want to get out of bed because I do not want to deal with oppressive spaces that dehumanise my existence. I make mistakes. Oh so many mistakes and I learn from them.

I worry about my fees and my sisters’ fees. I worry about the chances of getting employed. I want to start working to assist my family financially. I deal with insults from racists and patriarchs on a daily basis simply because I challenge the dehumanisation of my people.

Sometimes, I just exist. It drains me to constantly teach people to unlearn sexism, racism, ableism and other social justice issues.

Key points

» I want to dedicate this Womxn's* Month to Black Womxn around the country

» And I dedicate this day to black womxn specifically because of the constant struggles that we experience

» In her debut collection of poetry *Milk And Honey*, Rupi Kaur described womxn of colour as follows: “Our backs tell stories no books have the spine to carry.” Our experiences, successes and hardships shape us in every way

» However, there is a myth that we must deconstruct

I try to hide many of these issues because I want to be a pillar of strength to the people around me and my family.

* The spelling of womxn encompasses everyone who identifies with the spectrum of “women”, so as to include those who reject the socially constructed meaning that the word woman carries.

Farai Mubaiwa is a management accounting honours student at Stellenbosch University and a member of the Students Representative Council