



Memoir and Black Women's Health

Tulane University's 5th
Biennial Black Women's
Health Conference

February 17, 2024

*Dr. Martin Luther King Charter School
5300 Rocheblave
New Orleans, Louisiana 70117*

*www.bwhconference.com
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Black Women's Health Task Force At Tulane University Welcomes Conference Participants to New Orleans, Louisiana

TWELVE YEARS AGO, A GROUP OF FACULTY AND STAFF FROM TULANE UNIVERSITY AND COMMUNITY ORGANIZERS WORKING IN METRO NEW ORLEANS CONVENED TO BRAINSTORM WAYS TO ORGANIZE CONSCIOUS THOUGHT AND PURPOSEFUL ACTION TOWARD IMPROVING HEALTH OUTCOMES FOR BLACK WOMEN AND GIRLS. THE GROUP WAS DRIVEN, IN PART, BY DISPARITY STATISTICS THAT CHARACTERIZE THE HEALTH AND WELLBEING OF BLACK WOMEN AND GIRLS IN COMPARISON WITH OTHER GROUPS. BUT WE WERE ALSO MOTIVATED BY THE LONGER HISTORY OF STRUGGLE FOR HUMAN RIGHTS, CIVIL RIGHTS, AND EQUAL PROTECTION UNDER THE LAW, WHICH SHOWS THAT STRATEGIC COORDINATION OF PEOPLE WORKING WITHIN AND OUTSIDE ACADEMIA HAS ALWAYS PLAYED A VITAL ROLE IN INSPIRING, SUPPORTING, AND SUSTAINING MASS EFFORTS TOWARD CHANGING AND IMPROVING HEALTH OUTCOMES FOR PEOPLE OF COLOR. WITH THE PIONEERING EFFORTS OF ORGANIZATIONS SUCH AS THE BLACK WOMEN'S HEALTH IMPERATIVE AND THE INSTITUTE OF WOMEN AND ETHNIC STUDIES AS MODELS, THE BLACK WOMEN'S HEALTH TASK FORCE AT TULANE UNIVERSITY WAS FOUNDED ON A PHILOSOPHY OF AWARENESS-RAISING AND RESULTS-ORIENTED ACTION.

BIENNIALLY, THE BLACK WOMEN'S HEALTH TASK FORCE AT TULANE UNIVERSITY HOSTS A CONFERENCE IN NEW ORLEANS, LOUISIANA THAT GIVES PRACTITIONERS, ACADEMICS, COMMUNITY ACTIVISTS, AND COMMUNITY MEMBERS THE OPPORTUNITY TO COME TOGETHER AND FORMULATE A COMMON VOCABULARY FOR FOSTERING BLACK WOMEN'S HEALTH AND WELLNESS. THIS YEAR'S THEME, "MEMOIR AND BLACK WOMEN'S HEALTH," INFORMS A RICH VARIETY OF WORKSHOPS, PRESENTATIONS, AND PLENARY DISCUSSIONS THAT ILLUSTRATE HOW BLACK WOMEN HAVE WRITTEN THEMSELVES INTO EXISTENCE, THROUGH TRAUMA, AND AROUND OBSTACLES AND, IN THESE WAYS, UNDERSCORED THE INDISPENSABLE ROLE THAT MEMOIR PLAYS IN EVIDENCING AND FOSTERING BLACK WOMEN'S HEALTH.

THE TASK FORCE IS ESPECIALLY GRATEFUL FOR THE SUPPORT WE RECEIVED TO HOST THIS YEAR'S CONFERENCE FROM THE NEWCOMB COLLEGE INSTITUTE AND LAVIN-BERNICK FACULTY GRANT PROGRAM AT TULANE UNIVERSITY. WE ARE ALSO ESPECIALLY GRATEFUL TO OUR LONGSTANDING COMMUNITY PARTNER, DR. MARTIN KING CHARTER SCHOOL, FOR SERVING AS THE CONFERENCE SITE. AS WELL, WE THANK YOU FOR YOUR PARTICIPATION AND CONTRIBUTIONS TO ADVANCING THE VISION AND MISSION OF THE BLACK WOMEN'S HEALTH CONFERENCE TASK FORCE AT TULANE UNIVERSITY. WELCOME TO NEW ORLEANS!

**BLACK WOMEN'S HEALTH CONFERENCE TASK FORCE
TULANE UNIVERSITY**



PROGRAM

Saturday, March 17, 2023
Dr. Martin Luther King Charter School
5300 Rocheblave
New Orleans, LA 70117

OPENING

8:00AM - 9:00AM

Breakfast & Registration

9:00AM - 9:15AM

Welcome

Councilman Oliver Thomas

9:15AM - 10:00AM

Morning Plenary Session

Sesali Bowen

Known for being a self-proclaimed bad fat Black girl and a "fat femme," Sesali Bowen is a body positivity activist, who has helped to bring trap feminism to the forefront of intersectionality, which she writes about in *Bad Fat Black Girl: Notes From a Trap Feminist* (2021). Bowen is a proud champion of Black girls with nearly 45,000 Instagram followers, who look to her for plus-size style, confidence and an authentic perspective on life. Aside from her successful career as an entertainment journalist, Bowen is one of the subjects in *Black Girl Church*, a documentary about Black women and one of their magically sacred spaces: the beauty supply store.

10:00AM - 10:15AM

Break

10:30AM - 11:30AM

Concurrent Workshops

Dr. Regis Fox
Facilitator

"Women's Health: Advocacy in Action"

Panelists: Alma Stewart Allen, RN, MS, CCHC;
Dr. Terri L. Byrd; Keri Monks; Dynisha Benson

This session will describe the successful campaign to establish the Office on Women's Health and Community Partnerships, what we envision as next steps for partners and the office as the work continues; and how this work promotes civic and community engagement in relation to women's health.

PROGRAM

“Collective Combatting: Breaking the Cycle of Intergenerational Trauma”

Quanishia Gibson
Chavaughn Gibson

Intergenerational Trauma is an ever-growing topic in the mental health landscape. Black communities are often indirectly exposed to trauma through lineages and or predisposal to trauma before birth through epigenetics. This workshop considers the ideals and findings behind intergenerational trauma, the symptoms and causes, how it impacts black individuals and families, and how we can collectively work to combat intergenerational trauma in our family lines.

“From Ancestors to Algorithms: Black Women and Digital Health Literacy for Memoir and Black Women’s Health”

Tomesha Campbell

Due to the rise of misinformation in digital media, digital health literacy is a crucial medium for Black women to make informed health decisions in this ever-evolving healthcare landscape. This workshop will address digital health literacy and its profound impact on the healthcare experiences of Black women. Acknowledging the ancestral fortitude that has carried them through historical adversities, particularly under the weight of systemic oppression, this workshop will highlight both the barriers and pathways to accessing vital healthcare information within digital media.

“Breastfeeding Equity for Black Women: A Georgia Case Study”

Dr. Kim Gadsden-Knowles

This workshop presents findings from an investigation of equity-oriented policies, practices, and programs that support breastfeeding in the hospital and in the community, and how these initiatives were implemented. The researcher drew heavily from the stories of black women, which related barriers to breastfeeding equity in both hospital and community contexts. To this end, an exploratory, multiple case study using an action research and appreciative inquiry approach was conducted with Baby-Friendly Hospitals in the Atlanta, GA metropolitan area. The researcher found that the current, future, and ideal state of breastfeeding equity for black women relies heavily on policies, practices, and programs that are shaped and informed by black women’s lived experiences.

PROGRAM

“Post-Roe Impact on Black Women’s Health”

DeShawn Taylor, MD

Black pregnant and birthing people face barriers to accessing the full range of quality, culturally appropriate care throughout the spectrum of decisions they may make about their pregnancies and birth. Now, more than ever, it is extremely important to connect the dots between access to abortion care and Black women’s health. This workshop explores the historical context for the reproductive health inequities we see today and the intersections of rising maternal mortality, the status of abortion access in America, and criminalization of pregnancy outcomes with Black women’s health.

11:30AM - 11:45AM

Break

11:45AM -12:45PM

Concurrent Panels

Panel I Dr. Deidre Hayes, DSW, LCSW-BACS,
BCD
Facilitator

“Zora Neale Hurston’s Theorization of the
Spiritual/Energetic Effects of White Sexual
Abuse of Black Women and Girls in
‘Drenched in Light’ and *Seraph on the
Suwanee*”
Dr. Jane Caputi

This presentation focuses on representation of exploitative exchanges in relation to a White person’s abuse of a Black girl in Zora Neale Hurston’s “Drenched in Light” and *Seraph on the Suwanee*. Though fiction, these works might also contain aspects of memoir. “Drenched in Light,” often seen as a light-hearted and semi-autobiographical story about a lively child and a kind stranger, can alternately be read as a horror story, Hurston’s way to tell about, and analyze, something terrible that happened to her in childhood. The specific exploitation of Black girls is also presented in Hurston’s last novel *Seraph on the Suwanee*, which provides an analysis of what today is understood as ecowomanism or ecofeminism.

PROGRAM

“I was Born Into Jim Crow: Theorized Beginnings”

Jeanette Coleman

This presentation explores my lived experiences during Jim Crow. The time frame and location explain the context of segregation, sharecropping, and the onset of the Civil Rights Movement. By theorizing my lived experiences, I engage in what Sarah Wall calls a “qualitative method that offers a way of giving voice to personal experience for the purpose of extending sociological understanding.” While autoethnography is not the same as memoirs, it is important to recognize the role African American women’s narratives of self, in relation to place and time, play in navigating the various forms of oppression we experience and survive.

Panel II

Dr. Regina Fox
Facilitator

“Overcoming Visible challenges to Self-Esteem and Mental Health: The Power My Childhood Stutter Taught Me”

Kennetia Brooks

This presentation considers lessons learned, coping mechanisms, and empathy-building tools in relation to negotiating speech disorder and (re)claiming self-worth. Implications of personal struggle with barriers to speech are considered and drawn out for persons struggling with other speech, cognitive, and developmental disorders.

“Black Women’s Digital Spaces for Mental Health”

Bria Nickerson

Social media, a virtual form of narrative communication, has many advantages and disadvantages related to black women’s health. Social media consumption can lead to disordered eating, poor self-esteem and body image concerns, heightened chronic stress, mental health problems, and reinforcement of harmful stereotypes. Social media can be used to educate, protest, and form community. This presentation examines the ways social media impacts the mental health of Black women, especially in relation to fostering a space of belonging, acceptance, and self-expression.

PROGRAM

Panel III

Dr. Nghana Lewis
Facilitator

“Softball, Baseball, and Dugouts”

Dr. Liza Swedarsky

This presentation excerpts parts of Dr. Liza Swedarsky’s memoir to demonstrate how self-writing can be used to break intergenerational patterns of remembered trauma, despite its “triggering” effects. In writing the piece and telling her story, Dr. Swedarsky emphasizes how the body can be re-triggered at any time. However, the act of writing creates a pathway to self-liberation, affirmation, and healing.

“Are We Really Concerned about All Women’s Health?”

Syrita Steib and Dr. Victoria Williams

This presentation outlines findings from the work of Operation Restoration, a 501c3 organization that builds a community and support system for women impacted by incarceration. These findings challenge us to reframe our thinking about black women’s health, by centering the lived experiences of women impacted by the ever-evolving landscape of criminal legal reform in America.

PROGRAM

Panel IV

Black Girl Joy: Redefining Movements

This panel explores how Millennial, Generation Z and Generation Alpha are in search for movements that seeks to amplify Black Girlhood, advocating for childhood, adolescent years, and young adult years that are rooted in joy instead of generational trauma. The presentations reflect on the canon works of Black feminist scholars and seeks to connect a line through their work to the new movements today across social media communities, advocacy groups, the performing and entertainment arts, and grassroots efforts to transform Black girlhood. The presentations highlight how new movements provide a space for voice and empowerment centering the wellbeing of Black girls and young Black women as part of their full liberation in a society that is often hostile to their race, gender and age.

#BlackGirlLuxury trend : I can do bad - all by myself

Katherine Jones

Wish I can be: Black Girl Representation and the Black Mermaid

Brier Evans

Toned: In Search of a Colorism Movement

Ming Tate

Show Up For You, Community and Coping for the Eldest Black Daughter

Aarinii Parmis-Green

From Taboo to Affirmation: Black Girlhood and Sexual Health

Osoniya Wodi

12:45PM - 12:50PM

Break

PROGRAM

12:50PM - 2:00PM

Keynote Luncheon Featuring Dr. Joan Morgan

“Catching Up with Our Sister: A Hip Hop Feminist Update on the State of Black Women’s Health”

**Dr. Nghana Lewis,
Dr. Sika Dagbovie-Mullins,
Dr. Regis Fox
Discussants**

Dr. Joan Morgan is a Jamaican-American essayist, memoirist, and journalist, who coined the term “hip hop feminist,” in her germinal study, *When Chickenheads Come Home to Roost: A Hip Hop Feminist Breaks It Down* (1999). Dr. Morgan served as the Black Women’s Health Conference’s keynote speaker at the inaugural conference that took place at Tulane in 2012. Currently, Dr. Morgan is the program director of the Center for Black Visual Culture at New York University. In 2018, she published *She Begat This: 20 Years of the Miseducation of Lauryn Hill*, with Simon & Schuster.

2:00PM - 3:00PM

**Closing Plenary Session: HerStories:
Where Do We Go from Here?**

Professor Deleso A. Alford is a Shreveport, Louisiana native doing ground-breaking work bridging legal and medical education by telling stories—what she refers to as “HER stories”—the unique and particularized lived experiences of black women intersecting with health care and research. Professor Alford’s groundbreaking 2012 law review article, *HeLa Cells and Unjust Enrichment in the Human Body*, played a pivotal role in shaping the legal strategy of co-lead counsels Ben Crump and Robert Klonoff in *Estate of Henrietta Lacks v. Thermo Fisher Scientific Inc.* (US. Dist. MD). In addition to her work as a legal scholar, Professor Alford has served as Adjunct Faculty, Associate Professor of Medicine (Medical Education) at the University of Central Florida (UCF) College of Medicine, and Co-Director of the Longitudinal Curricular Themes (LCT) in Culture, Health, and Society (2014- 2018).

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This conference is currently under review for CLE/CEU approval by the NASW-LA and the Louisiana State Board of Nursing.

