

The Souls of Black Girls

[Transcript]

Introduction

Narrator: Am I beautiful? I don't really think so. Because if I am then where are all the girls that look like me? A question that many young women of color ask themselves.

Young Woman: I have to look like her. She was real fair skinned. I have to look just like that, and I'll be all fine. She had light eyes and all this stuff, and that's why people liked her.

Narrator: Many of them are young, innocent, and vulnerable to the world and its messages. Many of them seeking a level of acceptance within themselves, and in the eyes of others, to look and feel beautiful. Which for some seems impossible.

Young Woman: I don't know. Just because I'm trying so hard to get somewhere and I'm not there yet.

Young Woman: What it really boils down to, I'm so insecure it's ridiculous. When I'm home, I'm always in the mirror looking at myself. I could walk around my bed and go (deep breath), look in the mirror, then sit here, then go back down - sit back down - and look at myself.

Regina King: So now you have this whole generation of lost women who don't know that it's okay to be you.

Narrator: So what is beautiful and who defines it? Many young women of color decide that if beautiful doesn't look like them then they must be ugly, often leaving many trying to understand why.

Young Woman: Beautiful is like having stuff on, you know what I'm saying? That's beautiful. So if I don't have nothing on, I have nothing on me to say "oh, that's beautiful." Myself, but then what?

Narrator: These girls feel unaccepted, unworthy, and unwelcomed in our society, which places a much greater emphasis on physical appearances.

Michaela Angela Davis: There is this need to try to manipulate ourselves in order to conform to something that we think is acceptable or to disappear. We can't do either one.

Narrator: And so it begins. The journey to be beautiful and accepted. For many women of color, this journey begins at a young age when they are bombarded with media images encouraging them to seek a European standard of beauty. It's a journey filled with feelings of inadequacy and an obligation to appear to be something other than themselves. For the darker women of color, it's a journey that finds them lost, confused, and hurting the most.

Young Woman: Maybe if I get her legs and her stomach, then maybe he'll love me a little more. Suck your stomach in.

Young Woman: She used to be like, when you walk around, when you get up, suck your stomach in because it's always hanging out. And I remember middle school doing that when I was walking around, just sucking my stomach in.

Narrator: Could it be that women of color - dark, light, chocolate, brown, and in between - suffer from a self-image disorder as a result of trying to be beautiful within our society?

King: I think that self-image disorder is probably the best way to describe it in three words.

Narrator: Symptoms of what could be considered a self-image disorder can vary from woman to woman. But they are all attempts to obtain a white standard of beauty.

Young Woman: I was one of the minorities in the school, everybody was white. I didn't get any attention from boys because they were all white boys. They didn't like me. They liked the white girls, so I just thought that was prettier.

Narrator: As far as white women are concerned, some had noticed the ways in which women of color attempt to manipulate themselves.

Katie Magrane: Have I seen girls with burnt scalps because their parents are trying to straighten their hair way too young and not doing it the right way? Years I've been working with kids, and it's not one time I've seen burnt hair or burnt scalp from a straightening treatment or relaxer. Not the first time.

Narrator: Although some are completely unaware of the blatant media messages to be beautiful, some white women do notice how tough it is for women of color.

Deidra DeStefano: Like, black girls, it's so much harder. I didn't realize it. It's so much more work they have to put in being what is considered pretty.

Narrator: Deidra DeStefano discovered during our discussions that the subtlety of media messages to be beautiful are very effective.

DeStefano: They're really sneaky about it. They don't make you realize that you'll never see a black girl on this cover unless she's Beyoncé (laughs). And she's like us anyways.

Davis: There's no place to win. So you're gonna look at Teen Vogue, and you're not anywhere in there. Or you're gonna look at the videos, and you're there like a ho. There's no balance.

Narrator: Actress Regina King says she's been affected by the pressure to look a certain way. But fortunately for her, she was able to reject any feelings of inadequacy.

King: So I was able to shake it as quick as it came. Fortunately for me. But for a lot of other women, it doesn't go down that simple. They can sink into the abyss.

Narrator: So as the journey to be beautiful and accepted within our society continues for all women, for the women of color the journey is even more complex.

King: If you're gonna look at what is the biggest part of the problem is that women focus so much on an exterior and how we look on the outside. Not how we feel on the inside.

Narrator: Where there was once a void or a lack of representation within the media of women of color, there is now an overall abundance of only one image.

Davis: Finally, finally, finally. We're on TV. There are curvy brown girls on TV. But they got on bikinis and high heels. And all they do is just shake their ass. It's just so ironic.

Young Woman: It does affect me a lot actually because I can stand here and be like, "I gotta lose weight," but when my friend sees me, or when people that are close to me, they're like, "you look fine." But I don't think I look fine. Because that's what I think mentally. In my mind, I'm already like "no, I need to get rid of my stomach" because that's what I'm seeing. And if that's what I'm seeing and I like it, I'm obviously going to work to get it.

Narrator: So a conflict arises where women of color feel an unconscious obligation to either manipulate themselves in order to obtain the unattainable European standard of beauty or to emulate the one image of themselves in the media that is no different from the image of a female prostitute. However, it's an obligation that many would rather not have.

Young Woman: I don't want to have to have earrings on in order to make myself feel good. I just want to automatically feel good about myself with or without earrings or with or without nice clothes on.

Young Woman: If I see a video and she looks nice, I'm like "dang, I want to look like her. I want to have a body like her." That does bother me because if I'm looking at something, the first thing I do, my mirror's right there, my TV's right there. I'm gonna be like "damn." (laughs) I need to lose this little bit of fat.

Narrator: Davis says that, for some girls, trying to emulate the prostitute image that is seen in the videos and glorified in today's music has more to do with gaining a position of power.

Davis: You know no 13-year-old girl wants to [bleep] five guys at a party. They don't really want that. But then, they at least become a girl that's somebody. It may be a negative somebody, but she's got a name, she's got a face, she's got position in the culture.

Narrator: To say that women of color are suffering from a self-image disorder, where they feel the need to manipulate themselves in order to fit the unattainable standard of beauty, is not a far-fetched concept.

Amelia Marshall: The same as the anorexic disorder. We do have that small percentage who are anorexic. But as opposed to just saying, "I'm not gonna eat," they're saying, "I will get a wig. I will put the fake nails on. I will try and bleach my skin, which we know will not happen."

Pamela Edwards: What hurts me more so than anything else is that if I were a 13-year-old black girl today, and I paid a lot of attention to music videos, which is hard not to, and even also to some of the celeb magazines, I don't think there'd be any examples of how can you just be a pretty girl.

Narrator: And what seems to be a self-image disorder that women of color are suffering from remains undetectable, discreet, and unspoken.

Marshall: Anorexia is a dangerous condition. It's a life-threatening condition. Whereas these other things, it's a deeply buried emotional condition. It doesn't scream out for help.

Narrator: But young and old, from magazine editors to accomplished Hollywood actresses, they all say that women of color have been screaming for help since the time of slavery, but the screams have been kept internally and translated into low self-esteem and self-confidence.

Juanita Jennings: I hope before I close my eyes that they'll be a difference in how we feel about ourselves. It's scary. It's scary.

[Title Screen – The Souls of Black Girls]

Why Do We Feel This Way?

Chuck D: You don't know what to be? We'll tell you what you can be. We'll fill you up on exactly what role to act. And if you get confused, we'll sell you some things that might unravel you. We'll sell you, though. We ain't giving it away for free.

Narrator: Rapper Chuck D understands exactly why and how media images affect the self-esteem and self-confidence of women of color. As a member of the rap group Public Enemy, he has witnessed firsthand how media corporations make their profits, often at the cost of women of color.

Chuck D: Well, you got a music industry and a rap industry that's really been built over the last ten to fifteen years on black women's blood, sweat, tears, gyrations, or whatever. But the reward hasn't been reciprocated as far as black women in power.

Narrator: The power that Chuck D is referring to is economic and corporate power. Sociologists argue that corporate powers try and maintain control over the audience by selling them distorted ideas of what they should want and need. Actress Jada Pinkett Smith says that she has also come to understand this type of manipulation.

Jada Pinkett Smith: What I find being in this business that most of the people that make the decisions about who goes in these magazines live very isolated lives.

Davis: Black women, or women of color, have never been in a position to define our own sexuality. So when people are talking about, "we have to redefine..." We never did it in the first place. It's been a slave owner, master, then men, and now media.

Narrator: Urban fashion specialist Michaela Angela Davis says that because people who control media images have no relationship or interest in women of color they fail to promote accurate depictions of black women.

Davis: Because the media is in control right now, mostly in that white seven-figure hand, someone that is never ever ever gonna know anybody that looks like those girls in the video. So they have no reason to be invested in the fact that we're being destroyed. That our collective social psychology is being destroyed.

Narrator: Actress Regina King says part of the problem lies in gender as much as in race. Men, not women, control media images of women of color.

King: Let's just really get down to it. It's all generated from men. These are men that are doing these commercials. These are men that are head of the marketing campaign. It's not women. And when you do see those marketing campaigns that are women that are in control of them, it's a totally different campaign. Not always, because there's even some women that are in those positions pimping ourselves.

Davis: Young women and young men are stressed out. Nobody wants to be that. Nobody really wants to be a thug. Nobody really wants to be a hood rat or a [bleep]. They have just been assigned those things as a position of power.

Narrator: Research indicates that the audience, by accepting these images, reinforce the stereotypes, putting down people of color while elevating those already in power. These stereotypes are profitable.

Davis: Mainstream media is concerned with the bottom line. And their loyalties are with their shareholders. And that's all about money. And so they're not conditioned or cultured to care about us.

Narrator: As a screenwriter, Kenyetta Smith suggests that the media are not only concerned with making a profit but also selling an image of women of color that doesn't challenge the stereotype.

Kenyetta Smith: It's plausible for a white kid to be interested in science, and to do weird science, and to be into things like chess or astronomy or something like that. It's plausible for a black girl to want to be Whitney Houston. Or do Double Dutch. Or run track. But it's not plausible for a black girl to love chemistry.

Narrator: Sociologists and media experts argue that media corporations actually get audiences to comply with its distorted messages. Chuck D says, for example, the music video is specifically targeted to a demographic group that buys into the idea of whatever is being sold.

Chuck D: In the moving picture, number one is the video, then it influences the film world. And then the film world, the video world, influences what? What people can actually buy on the newsstand and look and open up and say, "wow!"

Narrator: But the audiences aren't the only ones buying into the ideas pushed by the powers that be. Chuck D suggests that, in fact, women of color continue the profit-making cycle when they run these media companies.

Chuck D: So if the head of MTV and the head of BET and the head of Radio One networks are black women, then we have to know these people and black women should know these people or who's basically selling them out or who's actually using whatever it takes to go ahead in business, in the white man's way of business, sacrificing black people and especially black women along the way.

Narrator: By repeating these distorted stereotypes, young black men and women reject their own reality and accept the reality of a stereotype.

Davis: Human beings learn by repetition. So if you see the same thing over and over and over again, first of all, you're not going to think anything's wrong with it and you're gonna believe that it's true.

Narrator: Images of white women behaving provocatively in videos such as Girls Gone Wild require money and effort to purchase them. But Davis says that similar images of black women are free and readily accessible.

Davis: You can turn on BET: Uncut and see black ass for free. So what that does to you psychologically is you gotta pay for white breast, but you can get black ass for free. And those same girls, when they get off spring break, and they pull down their t-shirts, and they graduate, they get a job. Once you are a black ho, you a black ho for life.

Narrator: The news media also distorts the images of women of color by rarely showing them. Senior correspondent and Washington Week moderator Gwen Ifill says, in a subliminal way the news business fails to recognize the range of beauty.

Gwen Ifill: You don't have to go around saying I'm better or more beautiful than those other people but just that my beauty has value. That, I think, is missing when in the news media for instance we make a big deal out of missing women only when they're young and blonde. We can spend hours and hours on women who've gone missing in Aruba and none on black women who go missing in St. Louis. So there's a definite imbalance.

Narrator: And with this imbalance, Chuck D suggests that ultimately media corporations have been playing a game of manipulation.

Chuck D: It's almost like television and media dictating to people how to think and how to talk and how to react. And all of a sudden, what was unacceptable in 1988, is endorsed and welcomed and saluted in 2006, and that's mind control.

Narrator: This so-called mind control can also be considered an extension of slavery. African American studies professor Dr. Lez Edmond says this is where the debased image of women of color originated.

Lez Edmond: All women of color are looked at and looked down upon as objects of pleasure, which is easily documented. And particularly during the slave trade and how women were put on display when they were being bought and sold.

Narrator: Dr. Edmond explains that before the institution of slavery, women of color were regarded with respect and dignity.

Edmond: Women were always treated with great honor. It's only in the western world, to my knowledge, and western ideas, that women are treated so badly. Because in ancient African history, women held just as much power as men held.

Narrator: He also suggests that within western society women have been systematically placed in second-class positions while men continue to hold the top positions of authority.

Edmond: In western society, even the religions are against females. And they make males head of everything.

Narrator: And as far as the way women of color are portrayed in the media, Dr. Edmond says it's nothing new. It's actually history repeating itself.

Edmond: Well, the imagery's still there, like when you see some of the females in the videos. The way they're dancing. Very provocative. And they're never, very rarely, displayed as something to be respected.

Narrator: And by allowing history to repeat itself, Dr. Edmond says people of color are as much to blame as anyone else.

Edmond: We're all guilty of it because we allow it to happen. People that ruled themselves would not allow that to happen.

Narrator: Dr. Edmond also says that the institution of slavery is responsible for the fragmented relationship between men and women of color that continues through today. He says the traumatic events of slavery caused an almost immediate disconnect between the male and female African slaves.

Edmond: To take advantage of your women, what they would do, they would tell the women that you were not any good and turn you against your own people. And then they would humiliate the male by making him witness the slave master taking advantage of not only the wife but of his female children.

Narrator: Dr. Edmond suggests that also led to the justification of white skin privilege and the idea that fair is better.

Edmond: The movies in this country when I was a boy had beauty standards set to look like a white woman. That has not changed.

Narrator: Black media entities also bought into the white skin privilege idea. Actress Juanita Jennings says that dark-skinned women were rarely seen on the covers of their magazines and in their advertisements.

Jennings: It wasn't, I guess, until the 70s, as I said, when we had Cicely Tyson on the cover, and we had the brothers at the Olympics raising their hands, but prior to that a lot of our own magazines had fair-to-tan but not over that on the covers of the magazines.

Narrator: Black media entities like Ebony magazine even advertised skin bleaching products. This idea that fairer is better has created a level of self-hatred among people of color, which Dr. Edmond says can only be changed by understanding its history.

Edmond: Just that we need to do much more in rebuilding and rehabilitating our own self-esteem. And when you know your own history, you don't have those kind of inferior feelings.

Narrator: For the woman of color, she struggles from a triple consciousness condition to be a woman, a Negro, and an American. And within that identity, she also struggles to define her own standard of beauty.

Her Struggle...

Text on screen: The *thing* to fear was the *thing* that made her beautiful and not us... (from *The Bluest Eye* by Toni Morrison)

Davis: I don't think that it's in the media's best interest to celebrate us at all. But that still creates a schizophrenic environment.

Narrator: Many say that black men have abandoned black women, which has caused this schizophrenic environment.

Pinkett Smith: Black men are struggling to find their identity as black men. And unfortunately, we get the brunt of that.

Chuck D: They talk about fatherless boys, but I think the last twenty years fatherless women have really caused a ball of confusion in the mass schism in society because there's no reference points on how men should act towards women. And if people gotta look and rely on television and videos, then you know you sipping the poison that's gonna eventually not just kill you off but the whole nine yards.

Pinkett Smith: Because, you know, our men are our soldiers. They're the ones who will protect us. So if our soldiers lead us astray, if they leave us out to dry and abandon us, we're kinda left vulnerable to the world.

Narrator: And once women of color are abandoned, this vulnerability leaves many of them searching for a way to reclaim their soldier, their protector, the black man.

King: Black men is dating everything but a black woman. Black men, when they get successful, a lot of them leave their girl that they were with in high school and college and get a girl, another nationality, and then you have black women trying to look like that. Because they want their king back.

Narrator: TV producer Darlise Blount says that the TV images are where many of these women find the instructions as to how they should look for these men.

Darlise Blount: You know nothing about a certain subject, and you turn on the TV, you use that to be gospel. If you see women walking around in little outfits, doing this, trying to get attention from guys, you think, as a woman, I'm supposed to do this if I want to get attention. That's the only way a guy is going to value me.

Narrator: As a producer for BET, Blount says that she has been one of the few black women fighting against the predominantly male environment that fails to understand the effects of these images.

Blount: I'm looking through the eyes of a female, and the guys are looking through things as a man, and they figure that most of the viewers of BET are men, so they want to cater to that. I would be like an island. Sometimes I feel I have no one to bounce ideas off of so when I'm saying "no" because of this, I'm not hating it. It's just that we have to look at the bigger picture. We don't want to prostitute our own women.

Narrator: Blount explains how she felt being the only female producer of BET's Rap City and fighting with other male producers to depict women of color in a positive, rather than negative, way.

Blount: How did it affect me? It hurt. Because I felt, am I crazy because I'm the only one thinking this? Some of the guys who I thought were sound, who would understand me, they're still a guy. So they're gonna still be turned on by the visual and not necessarily take value or want to see the substance.

Narrator: Young black women have been bombarded with this prostitute image through their own popular music.

Chuck D: Music past 1990 has been largely confrontational. So come up into a club with loaded weapons because everybody, "I got my scope. Don't come close." You know, the girls are with each other in packs. And spreading more words of love in their own packs as opposed to across to each other. The dudes are, "my boys." He got a closer line with his boys. And a woman is an infiltrator.

Narrator: But despite being abandoned by black men, and left vulnerable to the world and its media messages, King says that black women have yet to abandon the black men.

King: Black women are the last to venture and date outside of their race. Even though you have the most trifling guy, and every one of them has been tired, we just won't. There's some place deep within us. We holding on to something.

Narrator: An part of what they're holding onto is the idea that fairer is better.

Mirror, Mirror on the Wall...

Pinkett Smith: There's definitely a standard in the media. There's no denying that aspect. There is a certain look that works. It's conforming to what they believe the mass majority wants to look like, which is skinny, white, blonde, whatever.

Narrator: Just or unjust, accomplished women of color in the media have to conform to the idea that fairer is better. And whether or not it's a conscious decision, actress Regina King says that the ultimate goal is sales.

King: J. Lo In Living Color days cut to now. (laughs) (tries to speak & laughs) The media is a powerful thing. It's a powerful thing. When it comes down to it, they want to make money too. And they want to sell, sell, sell. And whether it's conscious or not, they have to conform so that they can sell. It's as simple as that. I'm not gonna say that it was a conscious change, but Beyoncé Destiny's Child was much different than Beyoncé Pink Panther.

Jennings: It seems as if our young black men seem to want the white girl image. If they can't get the white girl, they want as close as they can get to the white girl.

Narrator: And wanting the girl who is as close to white as possible often leaves dark-skinned women feeling left out.

Jennings: There's an array. We come in all hues and shapes and sizes. And when I look at the videos, what's supposed to be sexy and beautiful, it's always the same shade, the paper bag test.

Narrator: The brown paper bag test was a form of discrimination practiced among blacks of the early 20th century. To be considered good enough, an individual had to be lighter than a brown paper bag. It's also a test that Jennings says is still being carried out today.

Jennings: Where are the darker brown sisters? So our little boys are looking at these videos and the images that are being projected through the music and this is what they're looking for.

Narrator: The test being carried out today might not be blatantly obvious, but consciously or unconsciously, some are passing it to be accepted.

Deidra DeStefano: Beyoncé. Everyone loves Beyoncé. (laughs) Because she has the long hair, and it's lighter, and she's like that perfect color in the middle. So she's like... Nobody even thinks of Beyoncé as black.

King: That's just it. She looks white to that white girl. And to how many other white girls? You know, which makes her more acceptable.

Narrator: And once a woman of color in the media has passed this subliminal test, she is no longer regarded as a woman of color. Instead, she's just a name, which signifies that she's earned acceptance.

King: Halle Berry probably is about the only one. I don't think that white people really look at her as black. I think they just look at her as Halle Berry.

Narrator: But earning total acceptance within our society, even for Halle Berry, took becoming the very first African American woman to win an Academy Award for best actress. And only since becoming the first has she been accepted as a beauty standard to be celebrated like the others.

Pinkett Smith: Let me tell you something. It took Halle Berry to win a [bleep] Oscar before she got on Vogue. I mean, I can't even imagine what could be more idealistically beautiful than Halle. You know what I'm saying? So, once again, the idea of trying to fit an image of the masses, which black women are not a majority in this country.

Narrator: In order to pass this ultimate test of acceptance in Hollywood, some say, being able to pass for both light and dark makes taking the test a little easier.

Marshall: That notion, that sort of stereotype or that sort of prejudice, is so deeply buried within the subconscious of the director, of the casting director, that they don't even realize they're applying it. We are looking for a low-income mother to play this part. What color do you think she's gonna be? Is she gonna be high yellow? Mmhmm. Probably not. We are looking for the sexy secretary to play opposite Denzel. What do you think's gonna walk in the door now? Of course, unless Denzel puts his foot down and says, "I don't want that image."

High Yellow Girls Over Here...

Ifill: If you're a little girl of whatever, and you look at everybody on television looks blonde and pale, and that is held up as the standard of beauty, you can't help but look at yourself and say, "does that mean I'm not beautiful?"

Narrator: While the celebration of one type of woman continues, the internal demise of another begins, which Davis says comes from being conditioned to think that one shade is better than the other.

Davis: A lot of the women I knew that were light-skinned were taught to think that they were better. So they acted that way. So again, the darker-skin sisters would respond to them, so there's this built in tension out of nothing.

C'nay Hines: Just as far as skin color. Am I valued? Am I less worthy because of my skin color? Because I don't feel like the majority of television now represents people of my skin tone. And then if it does, then they have to have a long weave down to their shoulders so why can't we just be natural and be who we are?

Pinkett Smith: Me being light-skinned, short and skinny was an issue. You know? (laughs) Do black men like small women? I always had a problem with that.

Narrator: Whether they are accomplished actresses in front of the camera or the ones behind the scenes as producers and writers, women of color agree that a struggle exists, and they've all been victim to it.

Pinkett Smith: I do remember being younger and going through a period of shame about being a woman, when gangsta rap first started. I remember when Eazy-E, when NWA first came out, and I remember going through a period of shame of being a woman.

Marshall: They line us up. All the high yellow girls over there. All the dark brown girls over there. And I was left in the middle. And I went... And then they split us. They went that way. They went that way. And they said, "we're gonna keep you on file, but don't get a tan this summer."

King: Especially in my industry, that's because you're supposed to look a certain way. And it could've been something as simple as somebody, "you look a little bit thicker when I saw you on such and such" or times where someone says, "you're so thin." And I totally take that as, "oh my gosh, I'm getting thin." But I would say because of the media images, I've been a victim of it. And I'll cop to it.

Davis: I thought that to feel as black as I did, you were supposed to look a certain way. And it took me a long time to get to the place where I just started blowing out my hair on occasion because I felt like I didn't have to wear my hair in an afro and a "Free Mumia" t-shirt to prove that I was black anymore.

Narrator: Actress Juanita Jennings says that accepting her natural beauty came at a very high price. She lost her precedent-setting job on *As the World Turns* when she refused to cut her dreadlocks.

Jennings: I looked at the executive producer and said, "no, I will not do that. This is a hairstyle that expresses who we are as black women. This is a personal choice." They wrote me off the show.

Narrator: She also said she received a lot of criticism among her peers who criticized her for accepting her natural beauty.

Jennings: I remember some of my own friends who may have thought I was cutting my nose off despite my face by always wearing natural hairdos or wearing my hair low or wearing dreads or sisterlocks, but that's just how I felt. I had to stay true to myself.

Hines: For me, I had just pretty much every other hairstyle known to man. And I always thought about going natural. But part of you always wonders what would other people think and would I be accepted, and would I be considered pretty?

Kadija Minah: My features, the features of my face, they didn't fit that "cute girl" features. I have a big nose, slanted eyes. There were a lot of things with myself that I was not comfortable with and I didn't see that on TV, and I didn't see that in magazines, or whatever the case may be. So it kinda had me feeling maybe I'm not cute. Just because... I don't know. It was just that I was not comfortable, and I didn't have the regular, conventional look.

Narrator: Senior correspondent Gwen Ifill says that growing up during the era of black pride made her feel proud of who she was, despite being insulted by others.

Ifill: I was raised, it should be said, in the 60s and 70s when "black is beautiful" was the mantra. So I internalized that. My father used to say that if anyone ever called us a racial slur, if anyone ever called us, which at the time being called "black" was a racial slur because we were supposed to be called "colored," our response should be to say "thank you." And by saying that, I found it accomplished a couple things. One, it shut people up because they didn't know what you meant when you said "thank you." They thought they had insulted you. But the second part was I internalized that. I believed in a real way that it was a compliment to be called "black." And so it never occurred to me that there was any negativity associated with that.

Narrator: But for Davis, having been a part of the system that has caused so much internal pain and turmoil for women of color, she realizes that she should have done something.

Davis: I knew better. And what I did was just step away but I didn't step towards.

Narrator: But women of color in the media, like Davis, have decided that it's time to step forward.

Where Do We Go from Here?

King: It's not just one solution. We are discovering the solutions as the time goes by.

Narrator: Actress Regina King says that one solution is not the answer to the self-image disorder affecting women of color. She says that, for some women, this problem can be reversible by changing the image.

King: What would be the medical treatment for self-image disorder? And what we do know is that a different image is the only thing that's gonna kinda help that.

Narrator: And members of the black Hollywood community have already started taking steps towards changing these images. Actress Jada Pinkett Smith decided to start with the younger generation with her children's book, *Girls Hold Up This World*.

Pinkett Smith: It just helps the little, tiny ones kinda get an idea of who they are. You start planting those seeds so that hopefully those seeds will blossom within the consciousness of a young girl. She might not get it when she's 3 or 8, but something might snap when she's 12.

Narrator: For King, who's earned success in film and television, she hopes to be offering an alternative for women of color by taking more realistic roles in more realistic projects.

King: Brown skin girls want their face to be seen. So if anything, even when you take a role like Boyz n the Hood, there were a bunch of girls in every hood across the country that was like, "that's me. That's me on TV. That's me on the screen. I can do it."

Narrator: Collectively, King says that women of color in the media are looking to make changes through their own production projects.

King: And you have people like Jada Pinkett Smith and myself and Queen Latifah that are all in the process of starting production companies and we're all very conscious about the kind of work we want to do.

Narrator: The existing images of women of color like Lauryn Hill, Jill Scott, Erykah Badu, and India Arie have all started to offer an alternative to combat the standards of beauty within our society. However, King says that celebrating those images still isn't enough.

King: Thank god for Lauryn Hill and Jill Scott and Erykah Badu for young black girls. These are beautiful black women that are different than what's normally put out there. But it's not enough for them.

Narrator: Senior correspondent Gwen Ifill recognizes that in her position she seems to be leading the way as a positive image of women of color to see.

Ifill: I am frequently approached by women who say, "thank goodness you're here for my daughter." I'm not conscious of that, necessarily, when I'm on the air. But I have had many people come up to me and say that they are happy to see me because it gives their daughter an opportunity to see something that they could be.

Text on screen: Define & Love Yourself...

Pinkett Smith: You gotta find it within. I think that's the problem with most people today is that everybody's looking for the answer outside of themselves because nobody wants to confront. And the real deal is it's in you.

Jennings: How can you choose a mate, and say I love the mate, if you don't love yourself?

Chuck D: A look is a look is a look. Your inner character is what dignifies and makes your look distinct and makes it come out. Your inside is your battery to your outside.

Pinkett Smith: Young girls have to decide who they want to be. If you want to be a woman of respect, if you want to be a woman that can support herself financially and not have to depend on any man, if you want to be a woman who's considered beautiful. But it's gotta be you. It's gotta be you.

Text on screen: Love...

Chuck D: You have to have at least reference points that allow you to feel that you're loved from both perspectives.

Davis: Who is lower, in terms of how the culture and society sees you, than a black prostitute? Who needs more than that person in this world? You're a woman, you're black, and you're a prostitute? You need more love than anybody.

Edmond: First thing that the males must recognize that their females are equal partners. And promoted! And promoted! So it's more than just lip service.

Text on screen: I'm Sorry...

Davis: I feel like I owe them an apology because this happened on my watch. Do you feel me? And I don't even know why. I didn't call 100 black women and go protest in front of VH1, BET, MTV. I didn't protect our little sisters. So I have to say I'm sorry first and then move forward because I think that's where any sort of healing happens.

King: If more people came out and came clean that they have been a person that has been in that place, or that they're guilty of living that right now, then maybe that might be a change.

Pinkett Smith: Most people want the easy way out, of leaning on the backs of someone else or pointing the finger at someone else or "these people aren't putting us on their magazine." [mumbles] Pump the breaks on it because really we, as individuals, have to take that on for ourselves. We do because it's no one else's responsibility but our own.

Edwards: We, as a community, have to take responsibility for making sure that our children feel beautiful. Because we can't expect outsiders to do that. Why would we expect that? They've never done that before. If I'm waiting for Us magazine, and I'm waiting for NBC or ABC to tell me that someone that is chocolate and gorgeous, I might be waiting until the cows come home.

Pinkett Smith: To give that much power to those people is a mistake. It's just wrong. (laughs) You know what I mean? It's just wrong.

Davis: We need some balance. We can't just have Oprah and nothing. Do you know what I mean? One Essence. We need some stuff in between. And we need more films regularly. I need to go past the kiosk and see more representation of the kind of people that I actually see on the street or on the subway or at the mall.

Narrator: Actress Regina King says that despite the media and its messages for women of color it is necessary for them to admit their pain with honesty rather than shame.

King: That's the reason why I think people love Oprah so much. Because she does take off her makeup sometimes. She's honest. You know what I mean? I guess a little more honesty will probably help.

[End]