

BLACK FEMALE PROJECT

REFLECTIONS 2020:
OUR FIRST FIVE YEARS



BLACK FEMALE PROJECT

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Special thanks to our #100SistersStrong members, Advisory Council and all those who formally and informally shared their stories, attended events, participated in conversations, and provided financial or in-kind support.

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If we dare to show up Black, our colleagues are afraid or say that we are difficult to get along with, hard to understand, or unqualified for our roles. The unique experience of being African American and female requires a toolkit unlike any other. This project creates a space for Black female truth-telling, affirmation, and healing.

**BLACKFEMALEPROJECT PREPARES
BLACK WOMEN FOR THE REALITIES OF
THE WORKPLACE AND AFFIRMS BLACK
WOMEN WHO THRIVE AT WORK.**





WE BELIEVE IN THE POWER OF STORYTELLING TO SPUR HEALING, GROWTH, AND CONFIDENCE AMONG BLACK WOMEN AND GIRLS TO SUPPORT THEM TO STEP INTO LEADERSHIP AND WORK THROUGH BARRIERS OF OPPRESSION.

BlackFemaleProject uses digital media and in-person events to bring Black women together—across generation and industry—to engage in sisterhood, resource and knowledge sharing, inspiration, healing, and growth, all focused on improving career experiences for Black women and improving the overall well being of workplaces. We envision a world in which Black women can show up and be celebrated as their full selves without any negative consequence.

Through our work, BlackFemaleProject addresses gender inequity through an intersectional lens, interrupting some of the many impacts of structural racism and sexism with intergenerational community building. We create space for Black professionals to hear their experiences reflected through documentation and dissemination of personal stories of those who thrive at work, as well as in conversations that allow for sharing and comparing experiences in real time. We celebrate the unique experience and resilience of Black women while arming the next generation with wisdom and resources to help them thrive as well.

For over five years, we have collected and shared women's stories in print, digital media, and through numerous events in order to center Black women in statewide and national conversations about organizational culture, communications, and inclusion at work.

*Our podcast is one way to learn more about BlackFemaleProject.
Click the link to the right to listen.*



**What is
BlackFemaleProject?**
podcast episode

Click to listen to the podcast

HOW BLACK FEMALE PROJECT CAME TO BE

“

I resolved that someone had to document what we're going through. Because over the past generation, there wasn't documentation about our lived experience at work. That first wave of female executives in the '80s was a breakthrough for all women, including women of color. But we're still talking about only a handful of Black women actually making it to senior management. Yet, this statistically insignificant growth was enough for some to make the case that there was now an equal playing field. What did that mean for Black women? If Oprah made it, we just need to work harder, right? However, there is another important conversation to be had regarding the realities of the workplace. If we can't have a conversation about systemic oppression with our employers then I have a personal obligation to make sure that my sisters, my nieces, my daughters and granddaughters know the truth so that they can elevate above the status quo and break old patterns of self-sacrificing behavior in the name of social progress. Deserving of respect and proper compensation, Black women will no longer be defined by what institutions think we are worth. This is the vision that led to BlackFemaleProject.



BlackWomenThrive!

Click to view the video

”

- PRECIOUS J. STROUD,
FOUNDING EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, BLACKFEMALEPROJECT

The reception to our work has been monumental; Black women appreciate having space to share, and employers are ready to listen to what they have to say.

BLACKFEMALEPROJECT PROMOTES:

- Embracing cultural identity
- Gaining an understanding of systemic inequities and an ability to identify them
- Affirming self and others

BLACKFEMALEPROJECT ASKS PARTICIPANTS:

- How can we prepare the younger women coming behind us?
- How will the next generation benefit from what you've learned?
- What do future generations need in order to stand confidently when faced with opposition?

BLACKFEMALEPROJECT CONTINUES TO:

- Document women's stories using various media
- Bring women together for live events and networking
- Share our findings, formally and informally

**“ and when we speak we are afraid
our words will not be heard
nor welcomed
but when we are silent
we are still afraid

So it is better to speak
remembering
we were never meant to survive. ”**

**- AUDRE LORDE,
IN “A LITANY FOR SURVIVAL”**

The goal of *Reflections 2020* is to lift up what we've learned over the first few years of deep listening to individual and collective stories of professional Black women; to share the ways we imagine moving the work forward; and to invite the engagement and insights of you, our audience and community.

LETTER FROM THE EDITOR



When Barack Obama was elected U.S. President in 2008, many Americans wanted to believe we were moving into—or had already arrived at—a “post-racial” reality. Black women in the U.S. are one of many groups of people who knew firsthand this was certainly not the case, as they continued to experience persistent discrimination in the workplace and beyond. If there is any so-called “silver lining” to the surreal 2016 election of Donald Trump into the presidential office, it is simply that more people understand the absurdity of the claim that America has somehow moved beyond race. We know that some of the harsh realities our BlackFemaleProject community has encountered in their professional lives are directly rooted in the inequitable foundation upon which the United States were built; they are contemporary manifestations of age-old discrimination that continues to plague educational, political, healthcare, economic, and housing systems in our nation.

Workplace oppression in the U.S. stems from roots of a chattel slavery-based, patriarchal, capitalist economy that created a system of race-, class-, and gender-based discrimination. These dynamics still impact social, political, and economic freedoms; some people experience disproportionate discrimination and poverty while others experience heightened privilege and affluence. As women who are also Black, our participants are exponentially impacted by oppression in the workplace and broader

community; it impacts their access to education, earnings, chances of being promoted, ability to provide for their families, and their overall wellness.

Though there are a number of professional affiliation organizations for Black women, they often separate by class, sector, and other societal differentiators, impeding sisterhood across age, industry, income, and education level. BlackFemaleProject exists to bridge this gap.

We at BlackFemaleProject believe the purpose of life is to realize our wildest dreams and live in alignment with our gifts and calling. This belief is at the core of our work. Black women continue to thrive in spite of having long been disproportionately impacted by workplace oppression. We celebrate their resilience and acknowledge their sacrifices. BlackFemaleProject is committed to helping Black women heal and helping all of us to learn from these healing journeys.

“**Beloved community is formed not by the eradication of difference but by its affirmation, by each of us claiming the identities and cultural legacies that shape who we are and how we live in the world.**”

- **BELL HOOKS,**
IN KILLING RAGE: ENDING RACISM

For more information on the content referenced in this report, explore our online presence in the following places:

- Read the inaugural BlackFemaleProject story collection [here](#).
- Listen to the voices of BlackFemaleProject by checking out our [podcast episodes](#).
- Keep up with our [events calendar](#) to see when and where you might catch us in person.
- Stay up with current BlackFemaleProject happenings and related content on our [blog](#).
- Follow us on [Instagram](#) (@BlackFemaleProject), [Twitter](#) (@blackfemaleproj), and [Facebook](#) (@BlackFemaleProject).

Over the past five years we have collected and shared women's stories in print and as podcast audio, and hosted numerous events and workshops—streamed online and in person—to center Black women in statewide and national conversations about women and oppression at work (equal pay, #metoo, #workingwhileblack). *Reflections 2020* gave us the chance to formally partner with Black woman researcher and BlackFemaleProject community member Dr. Tameka L. McGlawn.



“ We are grateful and humbled to have partnered with Dr. McGlawn on *Reflections 2020*. Dr. McGlawn is a close friend of BlackFemaleProject whose values-centered research approach aligns with our perspectives and priorities. ”

- PRECIOUS J. STROUD



LETTER FROM OUR RESEARCH PARTNER

I was humbled by the invitation to review data from written submissions, various BlackFemaleProject events, and other community contributions. To be invited into such a process where people are asked to bare their souls, their stories, their voices, their experiences—that invitation is one I didn't take lightly; it was quite the honor to be asked and invited into a tremendously vulnerable process. To be trusted, to hold the sacredness of what was emerging as Precious and the team collected stories along the way, holding events and inviting people to really step into their own voices, to be exactly who they are and stand in their own truth about it.

The gravity of what BlackFemaleProject has created has also been counterbalanced by the healing that its founder created for herself in the vulnerable space of her own journey, which became a model that inspired the rest of the BlackFemaleProject network to follow suit. My interest arose not only from witnessing Precious in the nascent stages of ideation, brainstorming, and contemplation around what was possible, but also from seeing the way in which she facilitated the process from a stance of inclusion for others. Recognizing that BlackFemaleProject is the vehicle for Precious to address the essential needs of other women experiencing comparable and compatible challenges, I was drawn to serve in a leadership capacity and contributing role, as a listener, an observer, and a humbled student to Precious's vision.

The intersection of research, practice, and policy across multiple institutions is where I am a broker, a bridge builder; I utilize my leadership to influence decisions and support efforts that are about capacity building, legislative practices, and ways in which we use a range of different research methodologies along the continuum of evaluation and assessment to see where we're making progress, where we're not, and what has to be done to make a shift. I thought my experience positioned me to contribute to the individual and collective power that was emerging through BlackFemaleProject. As an education professional and researcher, I'm acutely aware that we're still dealing with the residuals of a structural system that doesn't serve all children and families in the way in which those who designed the system would want for their own. These patterns are not limited to educational institutions, though; they are also at the root of the patterned experiences of intersecting racism and sexism that BlackFemaleProject participants speak to through their testimonies.

Given my own personal journey as a Black woman professional, I had to be extremely thoughtful and give myself permission to take time, so that I wouldn't get lost in how I was interpreting the

data. I had to make sure that I had an authentic and rigorously reflective practice in the design of the methodology to review the information and not react to it. It was important to make sure that I didn't recreate history for someone else or project my own ideas, reactions, or feelings into their experiences. I wanted there to be purity in terms of how I was able to interpret the information from the surveys, written stories, and experiences people were articulating in ways that were so real, telling, and revealing. And so it was critical for me to make sure I had a transformational stance as I used my technical skills and assets to interpret the information that I was consuming, while also being thoughtful about how I could humanize the data and emphasize compassion in my analysis and translation. There was such profound vulnerability and raw trust emerging through the entire inaugural collection; I felt it was my responsibility to honor it all in a comprehensive and sacred way.

The observations, of course, are filtered through my interpretation and I recognize the probability of bias and constraints. Even though analysis is objective, it's still my lens. As much as I can attempt to mitigate them, there are some limitations to maintaining total neutrality, as everything about my lived experience is lived through this Black female body.

-DR. TAMEKA L. MCGLAWN



**Be Expressly You:
An Interview with
Dr. Tameka L. McGlawn**
podcast episode

Click to listen to the podcast

Learn more about Dr. McGlawn on the BlackFemaleProject podcast. Click the link above to listen.

ABOUT TAMEKA L. MCGLAWN, ED.D.

Dr. Tameka L. McGlawn serves as the Executive Director of the University of California Berkeley's College and Career Academy Support Network (CCASN). Dr. McGlawn offers a unique perspective on student-centered assets and achievement, leadership optimization, equity-based outcomes, and intersectionality. An effective consensus builder and action-oriented researcher, Dr. McGlawn brings an ideal synthesis of research savviness, practical application and a deep devotion to increased equity and economic opportunity for all the students, families, and communities she serves.

“ I found amazement inside of all of the pain that was also present; it not only demonstrated resilience, but the capacity to endure. ”

- DR. TAMEKA L. MCGLAWN



RESEARCH QUESTIONS & TYPES OF DATA COLLECTED

QUESTIONS:

- In what spaces are Black women thriving at work in a holistic manner?
- How are Black women affected by racism and sexism in the workplace?
- What spaces do Black women have in which they can share their experiences and stories?
- What role does BlackFemaleProject offer in service to the Black woman's lived experience?

TYPES OF DATA COLLECTED:

- Story Collection: Interviews and Narratives
- Conversations: Group Process
- Events: Exit Surveys
- Workshops: Exit Surveys

CONTEXTUAL FINDINGS

Our key findings affirm many truths that we as Black women already know on a personal level; the power of drawing attention to patterns across many women's journeys is that it depersonalizes the experiences and reminds women that the discrimination they're encountering in their workplaces is often not about them. Rather, it's about the injustice embedded in the institutions they're working in, which impacts their institutional and interpersonal interactions.

HEALTH AND HARM: In reviewing the data, it became clear that BlackFemaleProject provided a much-needed solution and healing outlet for Black women's personal and professional identities, and that few places create space for Black women to show up fully, wholly themselves. What I was able to observe primarily in the stories was some form of practiced compartmentalization. And when one does that, there's something that deteriorates in the capacity to stand in one's own wholeness. There are several different implications of that compartmentalizing that increase stress and compromise health—implications that were very apparent across the stories shared. Doubt, frustration, and other mental and emotional factors that manifest through stress or being in environments that are toxic, but also physical manifestations: weight gain, hair loss, and unhealthy practices around self-care. All of these implications sacrifice women's wellness.

TRIUMPH AND PAIN: Black women's resilience and capacity to endure is a major theme in our findings, reflected in the consistent trend of women saying that they didn't

feel they had a story to tell, only to uncover several trying experiences and just as many victorious triumphs. Many women reported that they were oftentimes not only trying to “prove themselves” in their workplaces, but also working to demonstrate that they weren’t a threat just by the nature of them being there. There’s something very complicated that happens when someone has to prepare for situations, experiences, relationships, and environments that can be everything from hurtful to painful to assaultive to abusive. And this need to prepare for adversity was something that was evident along the way. I think it’s important to recognize and uplift not only what was triumphant, but also what was painful, and at what costs women were able to transcend some of those challenges.

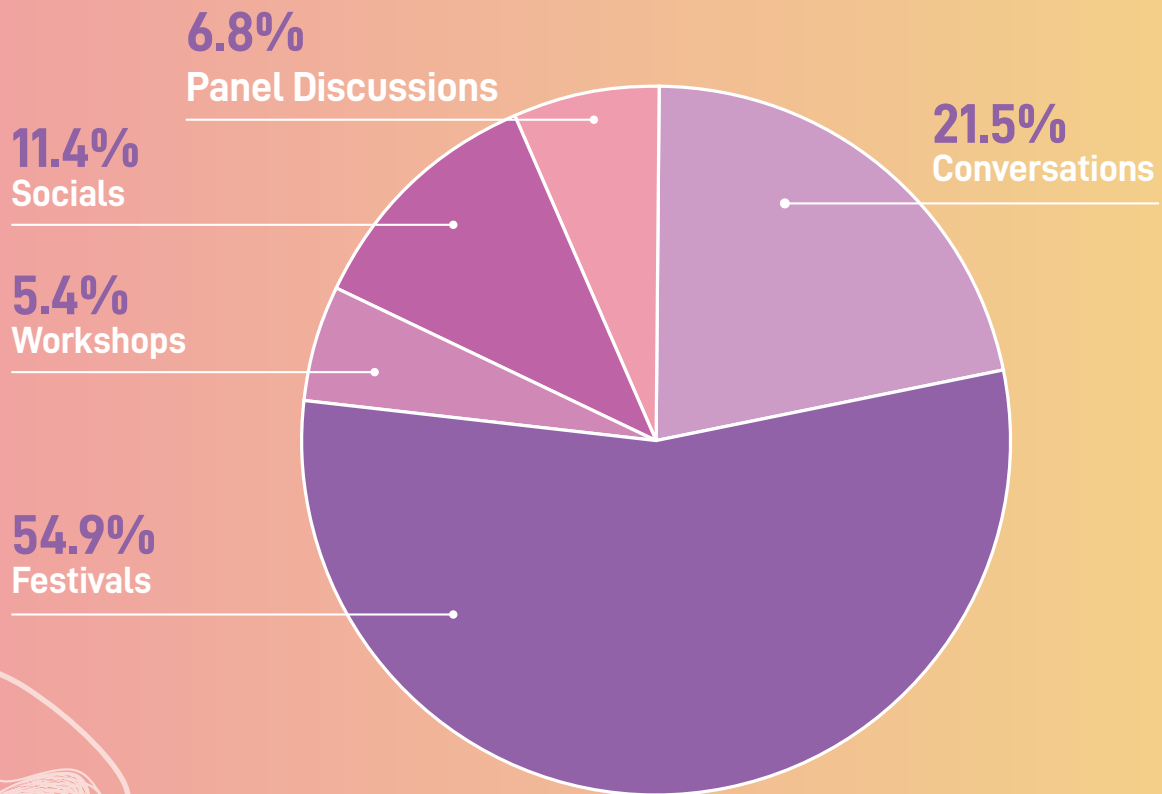
SELF SUSTAINABILITY AND MITIGATING RISK: We found that being vulnerable in the workplace is nearly- to non-existent for Black women. Most of the participating respondents and contributors for BlackFemaleProject felt as if, not only did they not get to be themselves at work, but they actually had to arm themselves against what they were going to encounter, knowing what kind of culture and environment they were stepping into. Through the individual and collective experience of BlackFemaleProject, participants and contributors were often able to eliminate or better navigate a certain situation based upon their own self-confidence, agency, and attention to putting health and wellness at the center of their priorities. Leaders in their workplaces did not provide them with spaces or supports to make this happen, thus they had to be deliberate in order to survive and thrive in their respective settings.

A LIFE-AFFIRMING SACRED REFUGE: BlackFemaleProject has provided an inviting and affirming space in which women can access support and resources to inform how they approach their daily work experiences. People wanted more time and people wanted to express their appreciation for having an experience that honored them and left them feeling seen, heard, and respected. BlackFemaleProject created a space where participants are given the rare opportunity to speak about their professional experiences. In some cases, it was the first time women had ever been in such an environment, and hearing other people’s stories held meaning for them and gave them permission to tell their own. I found a clear thread throughout the content, especially in the survey data, around appreciation, gratitude, and the desire for more time.

“It’s comforting knowing I am not alone in my struggles. Listening to the beautiful BlackFemaleProject stories helps me articulate my own story, claim my space, and navigate my professional journey. I’m working toward being my best authentic self in the workplace.”

- MONIQUE CLARK, BLACKFEMALEPROJECT #100SISTERSSTRONG MEMBER

OUR IMPACT



EVENT TYPE	ATTENDEES
Conversations	565
Festivals	1440
Panel Discussions	178
Socials	298
Workshops	143

Number of Story Contributors: 60
Number of Donors: 130
Mailing List Subscribers: 900
Social Media Reach: 3K+

Data collected 2014-2019

DATA CONSIDERATIONS

- Different data sets, collected over time
- Varied data collection approaches
- Responsive modifications to data collection tools
- Iterative and emergent engagements across data sets; timeframes (data collection instruments changed over time with feedback and experiences)
- Creative, reflective, and culturally relevant methods used to mitigate researcher bias



**Dr. McGlawn sat
down with us to talk
through her findings**
podcast episode

Click to listen to the podcast



RECOMMENDATIONS

FOR BLACKFEMALEPROJECT

Program Considerations

- Host a full-day BlackFemaleProject Retreat
- Continue convening "safe spaces"
- Develop a BlackFemaleProject "Sister Match Process"
- Establish mentorship component: peer/intergenerational

Offerings

- Design "Success Principles"—Leadership, Career Continuum
- Create an e-accessible BlackFemaleProject Resource Guide
 - Codify themes across needs: design engagements based on themes



#100SistersStrong Member Spotlight

Click to read more

FOR READERS

Be present, be available, be able to suspend judgment, assumptions, and your own expectations. If you are invested in reading stories, I think being able to suspend your own ego and everything I just mentioned is necessary in order to show up in an honorable place as a reader.

FOR FUTURE CONTRIBUTORS

Be courageous, authentic, truthful. Be fearless, vulnerable, and don't hold back. When we're in spaces that don't invite you and us into our full expression of self—"belonging," as John Powell would call it—we're oftentimes creating the kind of experiences where we're countering or being in a stance of defensiveness just to protect our humanity. When we're in the position to engage in these spaces where "othering" is occurring, it's important to recognize how essential it is to have other spaces like BlackFemaleProject where we can contribute, share our stories, and be seen. I didn't find any evidence of the ideal place to work, so we must utilize spaces like BlackFemaleProject to stay in touch with our true voices.

EVERYONE:

- **Advocate** for Black women and challenge practices of injustice within your work, family, and social networks.
- **Collaborate** with, and actively support Black women in your communities.
- **Access** the resources listed below for more insights into the professional circumstances common for Black women. Don't expect Black women to educate you on their experiences.
- **Ally** with Black women, keep your eye out for seasonal events that are open to all.
- **If you're a Black woman**, get involved in BlackFemaleProject conversations, workshops, and more! If you prefer remote community, check out the [podcast](#), [Instagram](#), and [Facebook](#) page.

IF YOU'D LIKE TO BE A PART OF THE MOVEMENT TO SUPPORT BLACK WOMEN'S HEALING, PLEASE CONSIDER MAKING A RECURRING DONATION!

This is a great way for all people, regardless of race and gender identity, to contribute to this crucial work.

You can make a recurring or one-time donation to support our general work at this [link](#).

CLICK HERE TO DONATE

APPENDIX A

ELEMENTS OF VALUES-CENTERED RESEARCH APPROACH:

- Emergent Process: Constructivist Approach
 - An exploratory process in which participant knowledge is valued and created from and through the lens of their lived experience
- Integrative: Quantitative & Qualitative Data
 - The balanced and deliberate use of both numerical and narrative data
- Honorable Analytics: Culturally Responsive
 - An ethical method of examination that respects cultural identity
- Sacred Stance: The Beloved Community
 - A purposeful position that prioritizes unity, fellowship, and love
- "Humanize the Data"
 - Actively recognize, acknowledge, and appreciate the full humanity of those who contribute to our research and learning

APPENDIX B

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR YOUR PROFESSIONAL JOURNEY

YOUTH/YOUNG ADULTHOOD

- Gain cultural education and knowledge of self.
- Develop creative outlets.
- Explore a broad range of personal and professional activities.
- Learn from your mistakes; every experience is a teacher.

COLLEGE/GRAD SCHOOL

- Got involved in interest groups/clubs.
- Utilize institutional resources (classes, libraries, archives, opportunities, memberships, networks).
- Take advantage of institutional career resources.
- Learn from school staff and faculty about their respective fields.

EARLY - MID - CAREER

- Join professional associations.
- Learn from peers and senior colleagues.
- Research pathways for growth in your workplace and field.
- Establish career goals and make a plan to work toward them.

ALL ALONG

- Connect with, learn from, and support Black women around you; we need each other!
 - Find and embrace your voice. There is only one you, and we need you!
 - Invest in mentor and peer relationships.
 - Pursue a healthy, balanced lifestyle.

LATE CAREER

- Support younger Black women in your workplace and industry.
- Volunteer or consult for groups that support Black woman professionals and girls.
- Share your professional journey a story with others.

RETIREMENT

- Make yourself available to mentor/advise Black women.
- Stay connected to committees you are about and ask for supports you need.
- Volunteer and sit on boards of organizations doing work you care about.

DOWNLOAD OUR GUIDE!

BLACK FEMALE PROJECT

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