

SUFFER

A

LITTLE

LOUDER

: The passing of trauma through people of color

By

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Submitted to Sculpture Board of Study

School of Art + Design

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree

Purchase College

State University of New York

December 2018

Sponsor: Katherine Gilmore

Second Reader: Nancy Bowen

Acknowledgements

Finances for this project wouldn't have been fulfilled without the help of the Affiliates Award and the SUNY Impact Foundation Grant.

Thank you to my senior adviser Katherine Gilmore and faculty Nancy Bowen for pushing me to dig deeper.

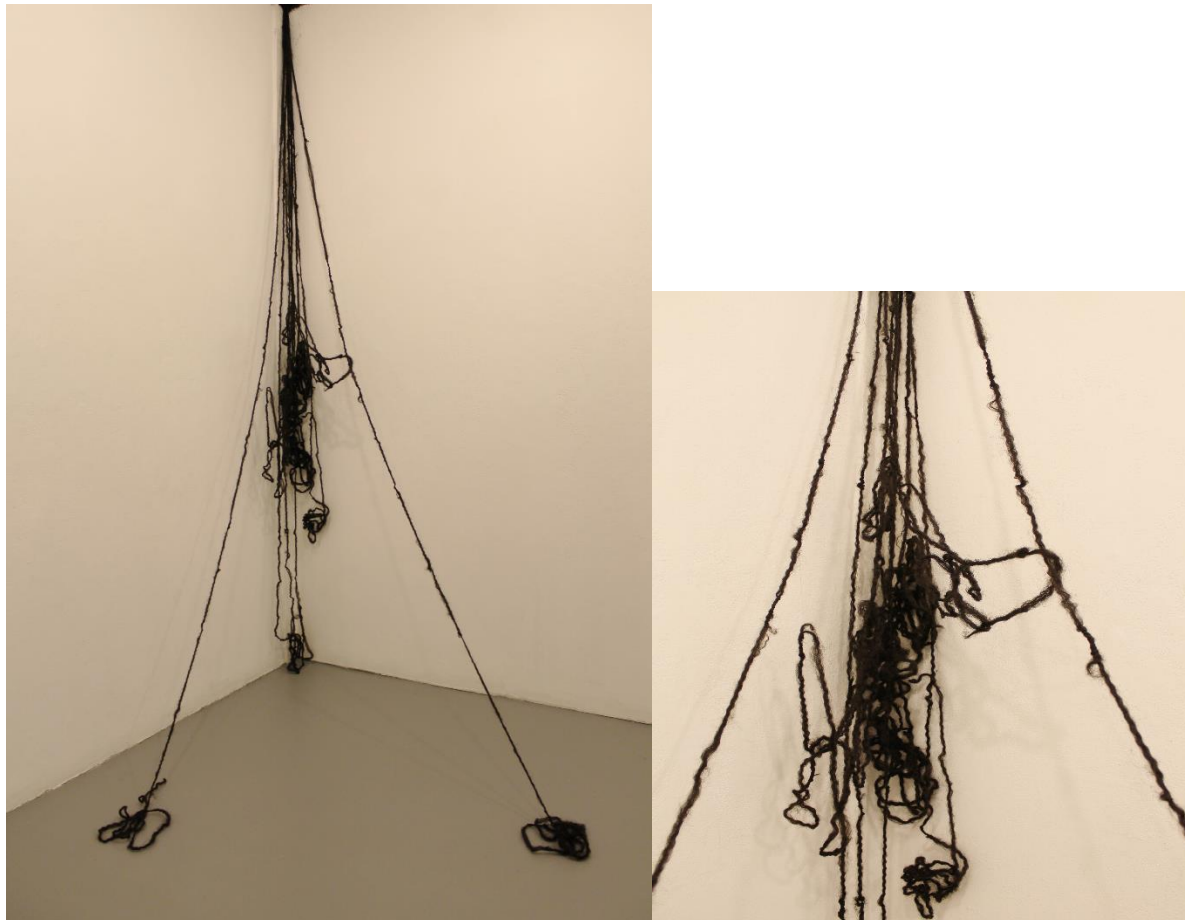
Big thank you to all family and friends who supported me and shared their experiences to better the understanding of this project!

Introduction

Being a woman and a member of the black community, it is easy to see the flaws that are carried on throughout life as if it is tradition. Flaws like parents restricting their children's chance to speak up for themselves (leading to communication complications), family members ignoring each other's mental state, talking down on others, no conversations about emotions, the constant assuring of what material things a parent has provided the child (leading to the thought that nothing should be wrong with the child because they have shelter, food, and an education). Ignoring the signs of suffering has been passed down for generations. Our own family rather see us looking the part of a strong person than to commit time towards selfcare. Through experiences of friends and myself, I have seen that many people have trouble trying to talk their families about stress, anxiety, depression or anything that is going on in their life. A lot of the elders want the younger members to just focus on getting education and making money. This is understandable because most of them had to sacrifice a lot to get their family to where it is now. Black people have always been excluded from family values, education, health, communication but were the influences for these movements in society. Throughout our history of "coming to America" we had to fight. It is understandable that they might have ignored their own suffering to provide for their family. As this current generation continues to grow, people start to realize something needs to change. People of Color (POC) are trying to be more open with how they express themselves but are still turned down by those close to them. For research in this subject, I found interest in the way artists Doreen Garner and Carlos Martiel expressed the brutal use of black bodies throughout history. Martiel focuses and "reflects on the way black bodies are sequestered, seized, and abducted; and the consequent plunder and despoil of the cultural and material wealth of the African continent" as expressed in an article by Laila Pedro. It has been a common theme within his last few shows. He uses his own body in performance to express the ability to tolerate pain. His work is important to my research because there is a physical and emotional abuse to the black bodies when they encounter this kind of mental abandonment, I look to his work to see how he projects the theme of pain. Doreen Garner worked on a show called *Purge* where she focused on the experiments of gynecology performed by J. Marion Sims on black enslaved women without any anesthesia. Throughout this show Garner expresses the brutal and cruel emotions that are felt when looking into this subject. She brings up in an interview with Forrest Muelrath "We begin here in order to make visible that which has been intentionally presented as inevitable so that we can move forward into more revelatory conversations about race". Visually my work is not brutal as these artists express in their work, but the subject matter provokes the same emotion and this need/want to end abuse on black bodies. *Suffer A Little Louder* focus on the brutal aspect that goes on inside of households and the act of failing in order to realize your mistakes. My work brings attention to the trauma passed down through families to create an opportunity for those suffering to speak freely on this subject.

“Ouch Mother” - 15ft of braided hair extensions October 2018

There is always a constant feeling of trying to fit in by changing the natural hair. Changing the texture, using different products, and applying heat daily. In the process of trying to manage these thick curls, all the products and heat applied damages the natural hair in the long run. *Ouch Mother* shows hair extensions braided together making the length of fifteen feet. Its expressing power and fear, it pulls certain parts of the strands while uplifting others. The piece specifically talks about the tensions physically and emotionally of growing up with natural hair. It always starts at a young age and is passed down from generations. The altering of one’s hair for styling; the pulling, teasing, breaking of combs, the smell of heavily applied pink lotion, and getting beat in the midst because “you need to stop moving”. As the generations go by, POC are starting to accept their natural curls more often. There's still tension in how we present our hair. Business’ and work places tend to discriminate on those who choose to let their natural hair be. Who is to say that afros, dreadlocks, and Protective hairstyles aren’t well kept and professional? *Ouch Mother* expresses the stress that is still ongoing for naturals. A black woman’s hair shapes their ideas on race, class, sexuality, self-esteem, ideas of beauty, and feeling like their connecting back to Africa. Kinky hair was once deemed as inferior when enslaved, but now black women are once again glorifying their kinky curls.



“I Know You Hear Me” - 7-minute video May 2018

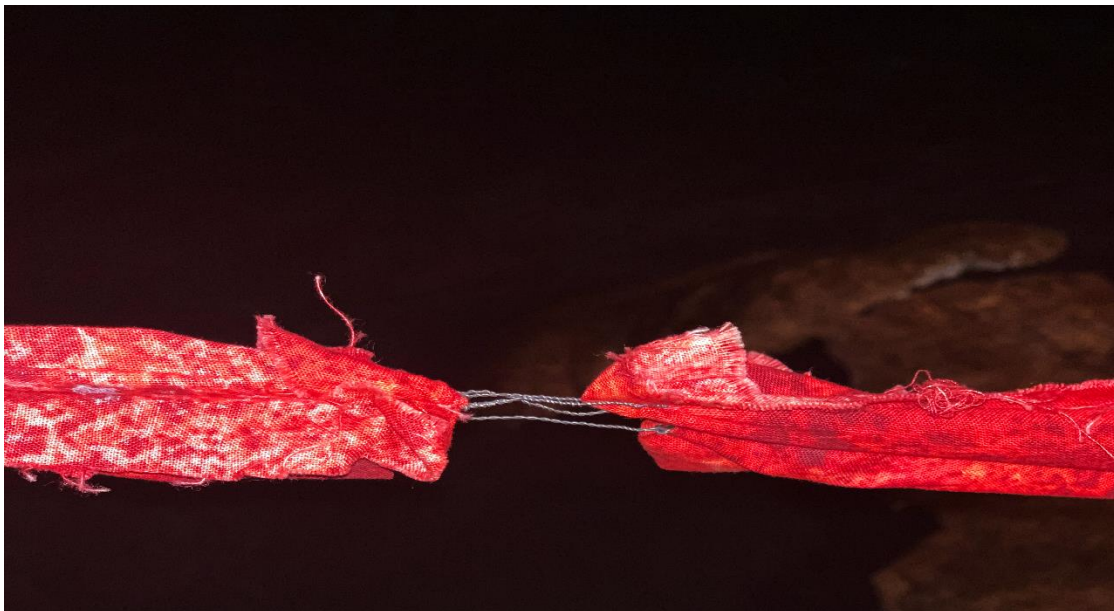
The video shows a black woman being tied up in red fabric trying to break free, while two black female dancers acknowledge her presence but don't provide any assistance. *I Know You Hear Me* speaks on the subject matter of mental health within the black community. Members of families tend to not want to approach the subject of mental issues or anything that doesn't involve getting an education and money. Many within the community suffer from common things like depression, anxiety, and other serious mental issues. A lot of the older generation think the most important thing is to not let others see this break down, because if one does it shows weakness. Yes, this can boost confidence, but it can also weaken the mind and body. It restricts people from dealing with their health or hesitating to go to the doctors/therapist. Whether this was verbally taught or something that just shows off through the elders, it holds a heavy impact on the younger members. There is a fear of trying to express these emotions because of rejection from family members. There are many cases where the younger members feel like they can't approach any of the elders with discussions of mental health. There are some people who do get the courage to speak up. A lot of the time what happens is the child/grandchild gets blamed for victimizing the elders or saying they did a bad job at raising them, when that's not even the subject matter. This kind of pressure and playing the victim is the reason why a lot of POC don't focus on their mental well-being or feel like they can't express themselves. With this piece I bring up these issue and display what these closed-minded conversations can do to a person.

The main character struggles to break free throughout the whole video, in relation to not being able to escape the pressure from my family's expectation. The dancers are doing choreography around the character while she is trying to break through the ties. They aren't mocking her, but they aren't helping at all. The only time they encounter her is to push her around. This reflects how the people around are watching and might provide their ear but aren't helping the situation or are making it worse. The video also cuts in and out with black frames to separate moments with the dancers and the character. There is an introduction of the song “Oya” by Ibeyi that speaks about death and rebirth. It plays into the need for change in these “old traditions”. The song goes in and out, and as it loops there is no understanding of the beginning and end of the video itself.



“Do You Feel It Now?” Red design fabric 30ft October 2018

Do You Feel It Now? Includes a red fabric with acidic looking design cutting a room in half by hanging diagonally from corner to corner of the room. In this setting it continues to be a resistance, a block from getting to the other side, it holds a certain weight to itself and the room. The fabric brings a gruesome uncomfortable feeling, an uneasy weight and tension. This fabric was also used in *I Know You Hear Me* to tie up the main character, restraining her freedom. This piece talks about the internal weight being brought upon myself through stress and letting external forces get to me, making the internal feelings physical. I am constantly hard on myself and sometimes push myself past my limits. We as people are the biggest critiques of our own selves. This can happen unconsciously and tends to damage the emotional, physical, and mental well-being without knowing the source. The source is self-harm inflicted by outside sources. This piece also had an addition of wire connecting each strand to each-other. This represented the passing down of trauma through generation. The wire holding the pieces together were the breaks in generations and the possibility to put an end to the hand down of trauma.



“Self to Self for Self” November 2018

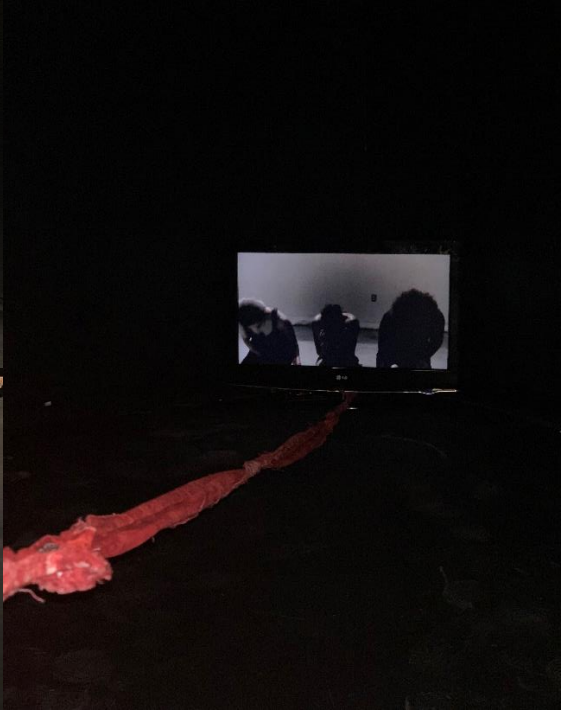
Realizing people speak just to hear themselves talk, others tend to keep to themselves. Keeping everything in causes tensions and self-damage within the body and can easily detonate like a contact explosive. POC often are not listening to one another especially within households. We want others to hear our life descriptions but never take the time to listen to theirs. It has become a habit. It happens unintentionally; causing self-doubt, and a higher expectation of rejection. It means not being able to tell my story, or an expectation of continuously getting cut off. Playing into the annoyance of others when

trying to express myself, they make it seem like a complaint or that I am telling them they are wrong. The result of being shut down and feeling alone, not able to talk to any family members makes you afraid of the consequences. *"Self to Self for Self"* shows two castings of my black feminine body out of cement with pieces of African black soap pressed into the surface, transforming the texture. Both pieces are broken parts of the body with no head or arms, showing signs of suffering. The African Black soap helps connect to a majority of POC because the scent is something they'd recognize, and the color reflects skin difference. These two castings talk about the stress that goes on when external forces are put onto one person. It speaks to black women who are not allowed time at the podium to express their emotions. When an opening is found they are shut down immediately. Mothers and grandmothers are quick to tell the young women "stand tall, strong, and never let them see you cry", but don't seem to ever question their mental health. It is rare to see a black mother or grandmother cry when it doesn't involve a funeral. From my experience the only emotions seen are joyful and stern. Many women of color feel they need to be this stereotype of a "strong black women" in order to survive, and sometimes it does save your life. But to feel the need to put on this mask daily is draining one's body physically, emotionally, and extremely heavy on one's mental well-being.



Conclusion

It is clinically proven that traces of trauma can be passed down through generations. In this article on the Scientific American website, they show the results of testing this theory on mice. It showed that the baby mouse that was taken away from its mother grew up to have different characteristics such as “depressive behaviors, cognitive problems, antisocial behaviors, risk-taking”. As that mouse grew up and had a baby of its own, the baby then shared similar characteristics. This can be reversed if the father after being traumatized was exposed to a positive environment. Bringing this context to humans, if a person isn’t exposed to a positive environment like the mouse then the trauma can’t be reversed. It just keeps cycling and eventually is passed down to their children. This is what keeps getting recycled within the black community. We take on the trauma that wasn’t ours and adjust it to our lives. In a book written by Mark Wolynn *It Didn't Start with You: The Mystery of Inherited Trauma* he mentions, “There are also cases where we are born with inherited traumas. We might have a life-long depression that feels like ours but isn’t ours. We never think to unpack it. We never think to separate it from us. Biologically, when trauma takes place in a family, it can affect the genes for generations.” *The Black Community* is a book that talks statistically about how certain things after being enslaved have affected the black community. James E. Blackwell explains how slavery was responsible for establishing a “caste system” that relegated the lower status in POC. More than 200 years of being enslaved, then almost 200 years later of being discriminated and segregated. POC are still carrying those 400 continuous years of abuse and suffering. People are traumatized continuously throughout history till this day, yet they suffer in silence. Blacks never really had recovered from the suffering and it affected their families. Those within the community need to change the heritage, stop being oblivious to the reality that POC suffer. There needs to be a change where it's okay to talk about how one is feeling. Elders in the family continue to ignore when this current generation reaches out which is only continuing the cycle. This subject is important to me because I feel like there is a lack of attention within the community of how certain traditions and societal expectations can harm one another. This subject affects me personally because of the lack of communication within my own family. Many members see that others are struggling and decided to talk behind their back instead of reaching out. POC families would function productively if their experience and existence were reflected as a dominant value, but since they’re not, the community itself needs to glorify and unite with one another. As I became more verbal about these situations, I realized that this was a common thing in most families of color. Something needed to be done. Using my artistic platform to speak up about these serious issues, I intend to spread this knowledge and start these conversations.



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