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Jul 21 · 6 min read

Overcoming Sexual Assault

A survivor's story on healing and accountability.

Trigger warning. Sexual Assault. Names Redacted.



If you came here looking for a tabloid style tell all, you will be disappointed. This is my truth and not an attempt to gain sympathy or bring anyone to my side. My purpose in sharing this is to challenge myself and y'all to be more transparent about how violence is perpetuated in our lives, our homes, our

churches, our jobs, in movement spaces and online. It is crucial that we find ways to heal from and overcome sexual abuse because the movement and more importantly our lives depend on it.

In the midst of responding to all of this year's tragedies I somehow found time to fall in love and lose my virginity. It was the first time I had sex... by choice. The first time in 25 years that I wasn't forced to do it either by coercion or survival. Our relationship existed largely online and we bonded over all the little things only black trans folks can understand. After years of searching, I thought I found the second piece to the holy trinity I wanted to create, complete with a black trans man and our black non-binary baby.

I was wrong. He made it clear to me that some trans men do not wish to carry children and it's not ok to fetishize them in that way. Needless to say our relationship didn't last long, on our first real netflix and chill, he suffered an asthma attack and we spent hours in the emergency room. The next week we had sex after a night of drinking and smoking but I know that I broke two of the most important rules... consent and safe sex. When he told me that he felt used and violated, I immediately stopped, apologized and offered to support in whatever way I could. I was afraid that I had become the thing I feared the most, an abuser and technically I did. I was filled with shame and guilt and questions. In hindsight I realized that it was impossible for either of us to consent, while under the influence.

*The next morning I called my mother in tears and asked
what happens when the victim turns into the abuser?*

One of my earliest memories is the taste of cum. I was only three years old the first time I was forced to swallow. For the next six years I was forced to keep that taste in my mouth. I understood it as a punishment for refusing to be a man. Instead of playing outside with the boys I preferred the company of my grandmother. When others treated me bad for being different, she made me feel special. She let me drink coffee and watch Jerry Springer, while she assembled care packages for our neighborhood pantry. She let me play dress up in her church hats and heels, while she sewed quilts for the homeless shelter. She was my superwoman, but there is no safe space for young black trans girls... not even home.

Like so many black girls, I've tried to bury, deny and suppress being raped. I thought that if I ignored the trauma it would go away. It didn't. I kept quiet during the downfall of Bill Cosby and Jared Fogle not wanting to participate in the media frenzy. But I couldn't hold my peace when Officer Daniel Holtzclaw was indicted for raping 12 black women and a little black girl. I joined with black feminist leaders in a national outcry to #SayHerName and center sexual assault in conversations around police brutality.

Cherno BIKO on HuffPostLive WMN



I knew the statistics and the talking points:

- *In the last 6 years over 1000 cops have been decertified due to sexual abuse.*
- *More than half of all trans folks report being sexually assaulted.*
- *60% of black girls are raped as children.*

But I was still unable to process my own trauma. Last year it began showing

up in movement spaces. January seems like so long ago but that's when I chose sides and stood with a coalition of young black trans leaders creating change in Chicago. For the first time in my life I saw folks mobilizing and organizing to protect a young black trans girl. I found it easier to confront abuse removed from my own. I imagined that those survivors were me, but they weren't. Not all victims receive the same level of protection and support and not all abusers are publicly shamed or sentenced to 10 years in prison.



<https://www.instagram.com/p/BEWol4bmSd-/>

A few months later I heard about Keyonna Blakeney. This was the second time in a 6 month period that I was being called down to Montgomery County Maryland to bury a young black trans who didn't survive. Many movement leaders were hesitant to say her name because a week before her death she was arrested for statutory rape. Like Zella Ziona before her, I supported the Blakeney family with fundraising but I regret never making it back down there. Even if she was an abuser she didn't deserve to be brutally beaten and left to die alone at that Red Roof Inn. It's one of the reasons I traveled to Baton Rouge Louisiana, to fight for justice for Alton Sterling who was convicted of statutory rape 16 years ago. In the words of Marissa Johnson "his felony status was shared as widely as his murder" and I wanted to answer her questions from the *Complexity of Justice*:

Does a rapist deserve support from Black women after his unjust murder? Were the police justified in killing him

because of his past deeds? Are we willing to discard him solely on the basis of a conviction in a justice system we know to be deeply biased and anti-Black?

I was determined to never again allow respectability politics to compromise my belief that ALL BLACK LIVES MATTER, no matter what.

In the days following my I wanted to respond in all the ways my abuser didn't especially since I knew they were mentally unstable. I listened more than I shared. I validated their feelings and answered all of the questions. I gave them space, read: "they blocked me on twitter." But when they began to ask for money that I didn't have I knew that they would call me out on social media. After all it's where we met but I was worried about the implications it would have on the movement. I didn't want to become the ammunition for our enemies to keep framing folks like us as predators who need to be kept out of public bathrooms. As I began to learn more about consent I discovered that under NYS law it is impossible for a person who is mentally unstable to give consent. I struggled with this idea because it leaves no space for varying degrees of mental illness or for people who experience mental illness but have never been diagnosed like myself. I knew I wasn't a rapist, but what was I now? I had to be honest with myself and admit that I didn't have all the answers. I had to get my ego out of the way and ask for help. As storyteller Hari Ziyad wrote a year ago.

"I don't think we yet have the language to discuss the sexually violent things we do and experience. It is so normative and yet so terrifying that it's almost as if addressing mere reality makes us all demons, and no one wants to be a demon."

Since then I have recommitted to overcoming sexual abuse both personally

and politically by:

Healing from my own trauma and abuse. Reevaluating my relationships with drugs and alcohol. Recognizing risk factors and triggers.

Creating a network of guidance and accountability led by black trans folks who are survivors of sexual assault.

Supporting the Free Ky Project. Ky Peterson is a black trans man who was sentenced to 20 years in prison for defending himself against a sexual assault.

I take these issues seriously and apologize for any damage I've caused. While I remain open to healthy and mediated resolutions with anyone I've wronged, if they so choose. In the coming weeks and months I'll be launching a conversation series on sexual abuse, intracommunity violence and restorative justice as a way to hold myself publicly accountable and document my own healing not as a victim or an abuser but as a survivor.

I have called on many community leaders and healers to aid me in this process and thank you all for getting me off the ledge and onto a path of restoration.

If this is something you struggle with the National Sexual Assault Hotline is there to help 24/7.

