

Too Aggressive, Too Sensitive, Too Angry

By Danielle Guardado

Throughout my life, I have often been singled out as the “angry brown girl”. I have experienced this labeling in many areas of my life, whether it was on a bus ride to school, a heated discussion in my English class, and even in my own home. When it comes to issues that I feel deeply passionate about, particularly about race and gender, I have always found myself having to validate my opinions and support my ideas with “concrete” evidence. As a result, I have not only formed a sense of anger and bitterness within me, I have also resulted to silence as a defense mechanism. Speaking out always meant having to “prove” my experiences as a woman of color to an often white (and sometimes male) audience, which led to others delegitimizing what I had to say. When I chose to combat these moments by speaking my truth, I was either labeled as overly aggressive, too sensitive, or just another, “angry woman of color”.

In Mia McKenzie’s essay, “Am I A Bully? One Angry Black Woman’s Reflection,” she reflects on how difficult it was for her to express herself without coming across as a “bully”. McKenzie writes about “making space for black women” and about “responding with compassion” when we see black women speaking up for themselves. Her reflection resonated with me in that I could relate to whole idea of being seen as “intimidating” and “mean” to my peers. She writes, “Whenever I asserted myself in any way, even when I intentionally being super-nice about it, I was intimidating. If I was not completely in agreement with someone’s opinion or just shutting up altogether, I was argumentative” (132). This experience is one that many women of color face and it is deeply rooted in misogynist and racist ideas that are prevalent in our society.

In her essay, McKenzie describes how she started Black Girl Dangerous to fight back against the notions of being a “bully”. Creating Black Girl Dangerous served as a way for her to have her own space to put her ideas forward, as well as an outlet to express herself and her experiences. She writes:

I started BGD because I got sick and tired of being told that as a black woman I could never assert myself without being perceived as aggressive. That I could never stand up for myself without being perceived as mean. That I could never draw a line past which I would not allow myself to be mistreated without being perceived as violent (136).

Women, especially women of color, have to conform to certain roles our society has set up for us. But being an opinionated woman of color is something that is unacceptable. It is something that is viewed as dangerous and scary. This whole notion is what keeps us silent. “My choices were to be silent and pushed around, or to speak up for myself and be perceived as too aggressive, mean, or violent” (132). Silence is a defense mechanism that I have resorted to throughout the years. However, I found that in the face of my silence other people would often times take it upon themselves to do the speaking for me and I am not okay with this. I’m not

okay with feeling as though I cannot speak up for myself without having to worry about the feelings of the people who do not want to hear me or think my voice is not worth their time. I am not here to make anyone comfortable and it is often in our discomfort that we are able to have real and honest discussions about racism and misogyny and how this silences the experiences of women of color.

I have gotten used to making myself stay silent and it is something that I need to break out of. Whether I am at school or at home, I have to constantly remind myself the importance of speaking out for myself and other women of color in instances where we are not encouraged to speak out. The fact of the matter is that I am angry. But it's okay that I'm angry. My anger is justified. This is why it is important for women like Mia McKenzie to create spaces for women of color to speak out for themselves and stand together in solidarity. She writes, "I have been able to do everything that I have been able to do precisely because I refuse to become smaller in order to accommodate to other people's anti-black racism and misogyny" (136). To combat the oppressive moments we experience on a day-to-day basis we need encourage each other to break free from the discomfort of our own silence to make our voices heard and known.

Work Cited

McKenzie, Mia. *Black Girl Dangerous*. 2004. Printed.