

**I know myself.** But it's amazing to think of the traits that I have that I don't know about them but working daily to distinguish between my good and bad habits. Although my first relationship was 8 years, in its total, I always had a feeling that I was going to leave. Okay, let's try again. But what are we doing? I was going through that abandonment shit is real. I got to realize just how prevalent those "daddy issues" are. As big as I am about time, and not wasting it, I am understanding the enabler, I had become. Ultimately, I had "fix" broken men, knowing my ass was broken as well.

# WRITTEN IN OUR OWN HAND

REFLECTIONS ON THE SURVIVAL  
OF BLACK WOMEN

Edited by Daya T. Stanley '22  
Colorado College Feminist and Gender Studies

# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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*Lindsay Maroney*

In the grand scheme of things Lindsay Maroney has been sharing her original poetry with Colorado Springs for only a blink of time.

Although she's been an active listener in the Springs for years, it wasn't until a few years ago that she crossed the border between seat and stage and took to the mic to see how her words played out loud in front of strangers.

She's been refining this skill since with the support of the phenomenal creative community here in the Springs. Drawing inspiration from all disciplines of artistic expression as well as her day-to-day life, Lindsay finds ways to transmute her experiences as a Lindsay in this time and place into a means for healing, growth, and definition of self.

She hopes her words land beautifully for you, or at the very least stir up the air around you enough to inspire you to put pen to paper and lips to mic for yourself!

You can follow her exploits on Instagram via @GreenGriot



*Aaliyah Moton*

Aaliyah Moton is a Florida based poet. Reflecting on her life and experiences as a Black woman, Moton invites readers to explore her thoughts, feelings and inspirations.

Aaliyah Moton can be found on Instagram and tiktok at [liyahthepoet\\_](#)



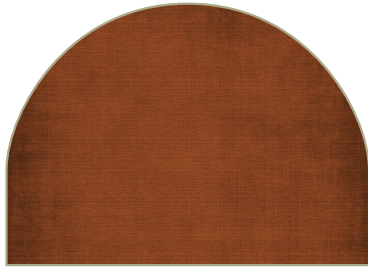
*Coko Oshun*

A healer and founder of Waisted N Nature LLC, Coko Oshun finds it to be a blessing to authentically be and love herself. Through this blessing, she turns life's lessons into art, sharing the gift of healing with others.

Reflecting on her beginnings with crystal work Oshun says:

" As a small child, I was always drawn to rocks, crystals, and stones. I believed even then that they emit healing vibrations. And I still believe in the healing powers of crystals and within the self today."

# CONTRIBUTORS



*Jae Carter*

Jae Carter is an Arizona based creator. Some of her notable projects are Glo'N Up Publications, LLC. and homeschool yo kids, an app designed to help parents start their homeschooling journey. View their contribution within the gallery's community journal.

Learn more about Jae and her projects on Instagram at [glonup.publications](#) and [homeschoolyokids](#) respectively.



*Daya Stanley*

My name is Daya Stanley. I am a multimedia artist and graduating Feminist and Gender Studies major at Colorado College. Through my art and academic studies, I strive to paint vibrant portraits of Black American life, specifically focusing on the experiences of Black women.

You can find out more about me and my artistic practice at [strugglingbgmclub](#) on Instagram.



*Krystle Nesmith*

Krystle Nesmith describes herself as a blessed mother. Through sharing her experiences as a Christ-centered single mother/parent, Minister In Training, student, and entrepreneur. Nesmith hopes to support and help other single parents. She will be debuting her 100% all-natural candle line, Kreativ3 Kandl3z Koll3ction, later this year.

Learn more about Krystle and her experiences as a Christ-centered single mother from her blog, [www.blessedmamakroniclez.com](#).

FOREWORD:

# A LETTER FROM DAYA



Dear Reader,

I am writing you this letter to tell you the truth or at least my truth. Academia is not a language everyone speaks. Originally, in place of the letter you are now reading, I was supposed to use my capstone paper as the foreword to this chapbook. However, like many things in my life, my capstone paper is unfinished and a fragmented representation of my thoughts. So I have written this letter in hopes I can tell you the events that led to this project more authentically.

I think about survival a lot. How it is that oppressed people such as myself continue to lead normal lives as we go through world-changing events, such as the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic and continued violence against Black bodies at the hands of the police. I wondered what sustains us. Is it community? Dollar dreams? Spite? I hope it is spite.

I think about the stories of survival are cut short. What do these stories have yet to tell us?  
I think about Breonna, who was killed in a time of rest.  
I think about Thea Hunter, taken from this world by capitalism and its insistence on labor.  
I think about my cousin Shantal, a woman killed by the police hellbent on making an arrest.  
I think about Miriam Carey and her mental health.  
I think about Black women and death.  
I think about myself and many times my right to survival was called into question.

Survival is many things and nothing at all. Through this chapbook and installation, I hope to (re) introduce you to a new way of seeing your survival.

Sincerely,  
A fragmented thinker

# Introduction

"Written in Our Own Hand" is a two part multimedia project. The first part is a mini chapbook consisting of four Black women's writing and art reflecting on survival. The second part is an in-person art installation that reimagines the works within the chapbook as different living spaces in which Black survival is practiced. This work is grounded in Black feminist thought because it centers Black women and because Black feminist theory concerns itself with centering the experiences of Black women in the analysis of a plethora of issues including, but not limited to race, sexuality, gender, and class.

Black feminist theory offers many approaches to examining the experiences of oppressed people, however for this project we will primarily engage with intersectionality and the matrix of dominance.

## Intersectionality

Intersectionality, a term coined by scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1989, asserts that sexism, racism, and classism are interconnected. And that this cultivates unique experiences of oppression for individuals with multiple identity markers. Crenshaw illustrates the impact of intersectionality by analyzing the court proceedings of *DeGraffenreid v General Motors*. In this employment discrimination case, five Black women were denied the opportunity to argue in court that they were denied employment because they were Black and female due to evidence proving the employment of women and Black people. The judges involved in this case note that despite there being statutes aimed at addressing discrimination due to gender or race, addressing a combination of sex and race discrimination could give Black women unjustified special treatment not originally intended by the writers of the statutes. However, as pointed out by Crenshaw in this statement: The court's refusal in *DeGraffenreid* to acknowledge Black women encounter combined race and sex discrimination implies that the boundaries of sex and race discrimination doctrine are defined respectively by white women's and Black men's experiences. Under this view, Black women are protected only to the extent that their experiences coincide with those of either of the two groups" (143).

Black women may experience oppression in the form of sexism from Black men despite struggling with them against racism. Similarly, in interactions with white women, Black women often experience racism even though they share the experience of sexism. It is this experience, Crenshaw points to when stating " [The] adoption of a single-issue framework for discrimination marginalizes Black women within the very movements that claim them as part of their constituency ..." (152). This experience of alienation within Black power and feminist spaces can be observed in early Black feminist writings. Famously, it can be observed in Sojourner Truth's "Ain't I A Woman?", where she denounces the limiting of her freedom on the grounds of her being Black and a woman. Another foundational Black feminist writing where early insights on intersectionality can be seen is Ida B. Wells' "Lynch Laws in America", where she points out the inconsistencies in treatment of female Black sexual assault victims and white ones. Through Intersectionality, one can observe the ways identity creates limitations to our ability to connect to others and our own humanity.

Patricia Hill Collins' Matrix of Dominance, also known as the Matrix of Oppression, asserts that there are four domains of powers (structural, cultural, disciplinary, and interpersonal) that serve as avenues for disseminating narratives that promote the supremacy of certain groups. Each domain represents different breadths of influence, ranging from interpersonal to the structural. The narratives disseminated through these domains of power can be promoted and challenged by the individual at these levels: "the personal biography, the group or community level of cultural context and the systemic level of social institutions" (Collins 4). Additionally, Collins claims,

The domains of power framework also sheds light on the ways that ideas about difference can uphold social inequalities within and across all four domains of power. For example, within the structural domain, new commodity relations have found the focus on difference profitable. In the search for ever-expanding consumer markets, understanding differences of race, gender, class, and sexuality helps in identifying segmented consumer markers. "Racial" profiling and market research are two sides of the same coin. (72)

And from understanding the ways progressive ideas like inclusion can be co-opted into existing oppressive structures, Black women have created spaces in which challenging oppression is prioritized. Collins states this in writing "The spheres of influence created and sustained by African-American women are not meant solely to provide a respite from oppressive situations or a retreat from their effects. Rather, these Black female spheres of influence constitute potential sanctuaries where individual Black women and men are nurtured in order to confront oppressive social institutions" (222).

## Interpretations of Survival

With these approaches explained, we can now explore different interpretations of survival. In the work of confronting oppression, Black women also seek out clearer understandings of their role in society. This search for understanding often takes place within discourses on Black survival. For example, Caitilin Gunn claims the word survival invokes memories of Black women striving to just make it through to the next day, knowing Black women before and around them have endured decades of oppression. To Gunn, engaging with this version of survival prevents Black women from fully envisioning and actively working towards a future where they have been freed from oppression. To that point, she writes, "Under the rhetoric of survival, we struggle to manifest a fundamental component of black feminist praxis: imagining ourselves and our lives beyond white supremacist oppression. If we reject rhetoric delineating what we can or should have, we can begin to conceptualize the radical futures we desire" (1). This interpretation of survival reveals survival as an idea holds a variety of meanings to Black women. Through exploration of interpretations like Gunn's, we can learn new ways of attending to building of realities that better serve those of us affected negatively by current systems of oppression.

Another interpretation is that survival in a world that does not support or actively tries to limit your ability to survive is a radical act of defiance. For example, in her memoir *The Cancer Journals*, Audre Lorde asserts her choice to live life openly with her body and life altered by having breast cancer reflects a commitment to challenging the societal belief of hiding the marks trauma leaves. Thinking on the lambswool prosthesis she was continually encouraged to wear by medical professionals and breast cancer survival organization volunteers, she asserts a prosthesis "encourages women to dwell in the past rather than a future" and prevents a woman "from coming to terms with the changed plan of her own body" (50), keeping them "from developing the strengths that challenge structures within our lives support the Cancer Establishment" (51).

Here, many organizations handling the care of breast cancer survivors encourage survivors to not critically engage with the changed state of health and being having cancer brings by prioritizing care that is oriented towards restoration, instead of reflection on questions such as what preventive care was available to them prior to the diagnosis.

There are also interpretations that question the necessity of Black survival. These interpretations are controversial, as many see continued existence as foundational to creating better Black lives. For example, in Kevin Early's study of Black religion, Black Southern pastors "expressed a deep sense of the incompatibility of suicide with the Black experience" (Ryan 391). As Katy Ryan notes in her review of the study, "Resistance to the word suicide generally proceeds from a reluctance to identify oneself or one's community with victimization, powerlessness, and hopelessness" (391). She also writes, "Sometimes suicide does signify precisely these realities; it can also indict a brutal, dehumanizing culture that makes life unbearable" (391). Sort of along these lines, in *Emergent Strategies*, adrienne maree brown argues against the necessity of survival as part of the creation of better Black lives. She claims, "Africans leaping off of slaver ships were afrofuturists... Those who raised the children of violence, and those who chose not to, all were predicting the future and articulating their choices" (162). In this way, they all followed a desire to see a futurity that honored the dignity of Black bodies. brown articulates this desire to honor the dignity of Black bodies in claiming, "It is the emphasis on a tomorrow that centers the dignity of that seed [the possibility of better Black life], particularly in the face of extinction, that marks, for me, the afrofuturist" (162).

In this view, survival does not need to be a priority of those who seek a reality in which Black people are free from oppression. Survival is no longer compulsory, but rather a subjective choice of the individual. That subjective choice being whether to live within the confines of oppression or seek out an unrealized better condition. This approach to realizing better Black life can also be observed in Frances E. W. Harper's poem "SHE'S FREE." Here, Harper reflects on the deadly conditions slavery presses upon Black bodies and what more one is willing to face for a different future, writing, "Oh! poverty, danger and death she can brave, / For the child of her love is no longer a slave" (33). Beyond the context of slavery, this interpretation of survival can also be observed within the writing of Huey P. Newton. Newton, as observed by Ryan, reframes suicide as a testimony to "the severe and likely repercussions of black resistance", abstracting it from "submission to a hostile, governing culture" (391). The continuation of discourses across time around the necessity of Black survival in realizing better Black lives reflects a need in broader discourses for discussion on acceptance of radical approaches to change.

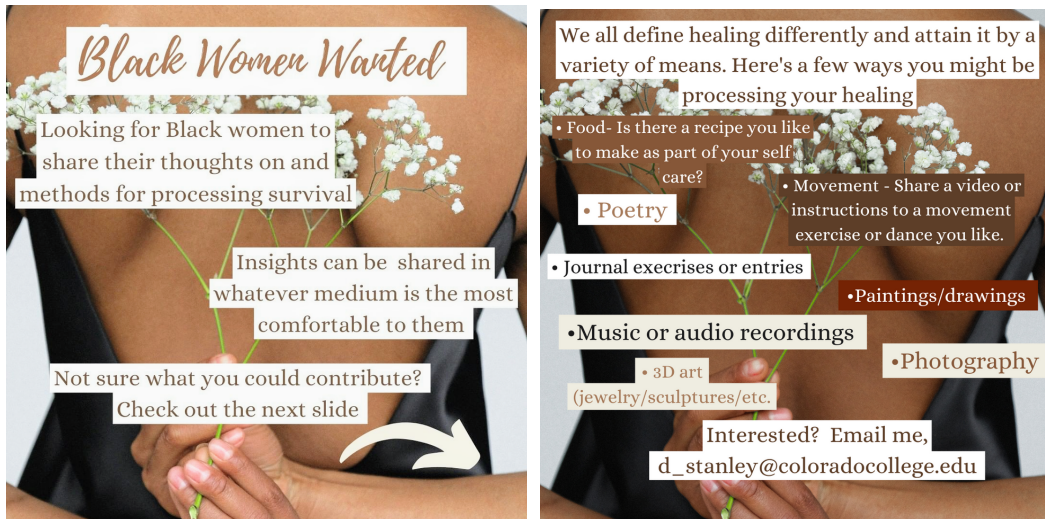


# Methodology

The writing pieces and art featured in this project were sourced by Black women off the internet. My communications with each woman begin with them responding to my call for collaborators on Instagram. The call for collaborators was released on Instagram as a targeted advertising post for six days in October 2021. The advertisement post's visual asked Black women to share their insights on survival in whatever creative medium feels most comfortable to them. At that time, over 15 expressed interest in the project. Of the numerous responses received from the first release of the call for collaborators, only five women featured in this project followed up with a submission of work. A second call for collaborators was posted to my personal and artist social media pages. This second release did not include a targeted advertising post. It did not yield any responses.



The visual used in the first release of the project's call for contributors.



The visuals used in the second release of the project's call for contributors.

## Importance of Poetry

With all of these different interpretations of survival swirling around Black feminist discourses, there is a need for a way for Black women to articulate what survival is for them as an individual. One way Black women have articulated themselves is through poetry. Poetry in the hands of Black women reflects an objection to the idea the work of understanding oneself and the world they occupy is not only a privilege of those schooled in European traditions of knowledge. Audre Lorde, in her writing piece "Poetry is Not a Luxury", expands on this by stating "The white fathers told us, I think therefore I am; and the black mothers in each of us-the poet whispers in our dreams, I feel therefore I can be free. Poetry coins the language to express and charter this revolutionary awareness and demand, the implementation of that freedom".

The usage of poetry as a space of self-exploration and affirmation has also been observed by the writer Renée Watson, who states, "Poetry has been speaking to me and to me these days. It has been an anchor, keeping me from drowning in despair and fear of the unknown. I am turning to poems like one calls up an old friend who always knows what to say". Meaning to get a full understanding of the interpretations of survival Black women live by, we must engage these women in the format they feel most comfortable sharing their insights in. Across the poetry featured in the "Written in Our Own Hand" chapbook, six themes of survival can be observed predominantly: loss, acceptance, perseverance, self-care, self-reflection, and stereotypes. They reflect some of the most prominent goals set forth for survival by Black women.

## Elements of the Gallery

The installation consists of five distinct settings, each representing different living spaces or personal experiences. Entering the space, you will walk a path lit by candles and garnished with dried flowers. This path is intended to signal you to the change in your surroundings. It also encourages you to slow down and connect with yourself for a moment. (Figure 1)

Next there are the bleachers, in which a rose or photograph has been placed in the first two rows of seats. The roses and photographs represent many Black women whose survival has influenced my own directly and indirectly. Some of the women in the photographs include Miriam Carey, a victim of police violence, and my great grandma Annie Dale Sharp- Taylor. (Figure 2)

In the center of the installation, you can find a kitchen table. The table is the center of the installation as kitchens and, by extension, kitchen tables have long served as spaces for community, rest and reflection in Black households. I observed in my own memories of life in Chicago with my family and media, such as the Kitchen Table: Women of Color Press and Carrie Mae Weems' Kitchen Table photography series. To reflect the kitchen table's role as a space of connection and reflection, the table is littered with family photos. There also is a communal journal. The journal encourages the sharing of stories and personal truths. The journal contains written entries by Jae Carter, Krystle Nesmith, and myself. (Figure 3)



Figure 1



Figure 2



Figure 3

## QUEEN AALIYAH MOTON

You shine your light so bright. Your appearance when you walk  
into the room,  
The glares that you get because of how stunning you look  
taking everything thrown at you bruises of life being weighed  
down  
without letting your current state ruin you.  
Something that could of destroyed you.  
As life goes on so do you. You are growing everyday. Achieve all  
your goals.  
Queen I know that things may be tough but you are strong.  
You seem to surprise everyone who crosses your path.  
With tears in tears you are a woman.  
People say you have no choice but to be strong.  
Figuring out your own war while dealing with everyone else in  
your life.  
Constantly being misunderstood and judged.  
The word gets one look at you and assumes.  
Assumes that they know the real you.  
Don't let anyone make you feel less about yourself.  
Never settle. Keep your head high along with your crown.  
Remember you are beautiful.  
The storm doesn't last long.  
You are a queen.

Against the back wall, you will find a bedroom-like space. This space consists of a bed with a painting replacing the mattress and a vanity with the mirror replaced with a painting. The vanity's painting is a visual response to Aaliyah Moton's poem Queen. The substitution of the vanity's mirror with a painting is made to represent the idea of defining oneself for themselves presented in the poem Queen.

(Figure 4)

## HOW WE HEAL DAYA STANLEY

How do Black women heal?

In the wisp of incense smoke  
In dried flowers on altars  
In the puff of what you promised  
yourself would be your last  
cigarette

In daily breads, dream journals  
Between the sheets you were  
once  
assaulted in  
In honey sweetened teas

In your return to tobacco,  
In deep seas of emotion  
In the return and rejection of  
What is you.

As previously mentioned, the second work in the bedroom like space is a bed with the mattress replaced with a painting. The painting depicts women in various positions of rest and leisure. This represents the various phases of healing and embodiment of emotions that one can go through in the privacy of their bedroom. The painting also has the lines of the poem "How do Black Women Heal?" painted in random spots through the painting.  
(Figure 5)

## LINDSAY MARONEY

### FULL

Another handful tangled between fingers  
Black lines a calamity cradled in my palm  
No direction, just falling  
Out  
Falling out  
Falling down

Around your face  
Down your shoulders  
Out your head

What's the use in crying?  
They're already dead

The shower water is falling down too  
Washing away tears  
And those tangled pieces of you

How much more before the drain backs up?  
How much more before they decide she is he?  
How much more before you decide you can't hold it

In your palm  
Or on your heart

And taking control means more than turning off the water  
Or wrapping yourself in a towel

But taking your life and all its pieces  
Away  
Before they fall apart  
And are just pieces of you  
Falling down and becoming trapped  
Tangled and confused and lost  
in the drain

### FALL

When her hair comes down she says,

"This is me, Undone.  
No filter.

I want you to take your hat off  
and put it at your chest.

I want you to take a knee.

Because I don't let it fall  
to hide my face  
or obscure my intentions.

It is a crown  
turned royal robes  
to knight my shoulders,  
signal my glory.

You are in the company of the divine."

On the adjacent wall, there is a bathroom-like space. This space consists of a video, audio recording, and a tub. The video shows a Black woman (me) standing in the shower running over her body. It also includes clips of the woman washing and messing with her hair. This ends with the woman turning off the water and exiting the shower. The audio is Lindsay Maroney reading her poems "Full" and "Fall". The audio also includes readings of the poems by Laniah Moon. Video can be viewed via the qr code provided alongside Figure 6.  
(Figure 6)



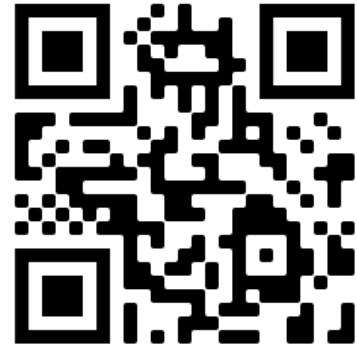
Figure 4



Figure 5

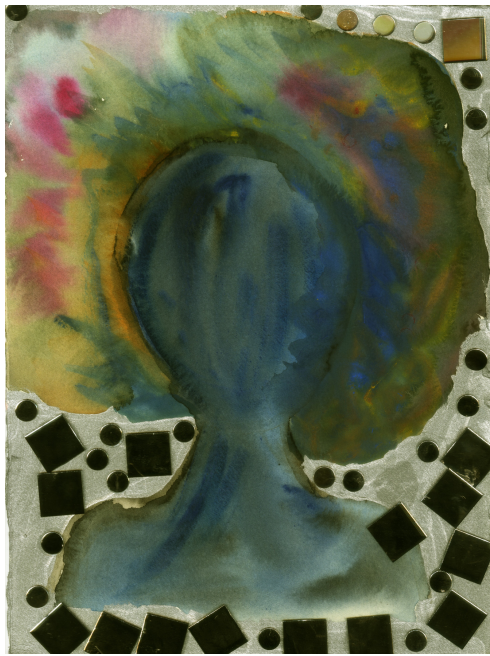


Figure 6



Lastly, existing the gallery and in viewing the back and front cover of this booklet you will see images of a beaded dragon fly. This dragon fly is the work of Coko Oshun. In some cultures, dragonflies are associated with change and transformation. An association both myself and Coko Oshun drawn onto reflect on transformation in life.





Close-up of painting for Aaliyah Moton's "Queen"



Landscape shot of the installation



Crystallized Dragonfly  
Damsel fly cage free  
Amethyst winged energy  
Soaring higher liberty  
- Coko Ishun