

I didn't know why my friendships kept ending. I realized it was because I was the only Black girl in the group.

The pandemic gave me ample time to reflect on where my failed friendships went wrong

Perspective by Ebony Purks

Lily contributor

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Many of my childhood friendships did not carry over into adulthood, but experience has taught me there's likely more nuance to the end of these friendships than it being just a "me problem." There were times I thought I was incapable of forming long-term, platonic companionships with others. What I'm coming to understand is that many of my childhood friendships no longer exist because I was always either the only Black girl or one of two Black girls within a non-Black friend group.

This dynamic isn't inherently problematic; however, Black girls in predominantly non-Black friend groups all too often endure the worst of racial microaggressions. And my experiences were no exception.

Talk to any Black girl, and they'll likely be able to attest to things like having to navigate snide from others or being forced into one-sided competitions (i.e., jealousy-fueled competitions we don't instigate, perpetuate or likely even know we were an unwilling participant of) with non-Black friends. We're often made the butt of jokes, and have to take passive aggression without complaint. Not to mention, we're expected to be perfect; because we are already different because of our race, we can't have the same flaws as others in the group. We can't have serious mental health symptoms, either — we're not allowed the same humanity as other friends.

Personally, I've assumed many roles among my non-Black friend groups, and each one acted as a double-edged sword. For example, sometimes I was the group's mammy figure. For context, [mammy-ism](#) — a term coined by scholar Afi Samelia Abdullah in 1998 — describes "Black women's [tendency] to accommodate White people by acquiescing to their needs and assuming an inferior position," as Cheryl Thompson simplifies in an article for [the Conversation](#). With my non-Black friends, I would often be the go-to person for advice, the person others could rely on to clean up a mess fueled by petty drama, even if I wasn't initially involved.

This may seem like an honorable role, because my friends thought I was wise enough to offer effective help when there was trouble. However, I never had the same support system from the rest of the group. There was never space for me to be messy or difficult or morally lost. Consequently, acting like everyone else's pit stop toward reformed behavior worsened my mental health over time. I was always left to tend to my healing as best as I could on my own.

Other times, I played the role of the sassy Black friend. People would look to me when it was time to put someone in their place or reprimand someone for their poor behavior (sometimes this role also crossed over with the aforementioned mammy stereotype). There were even times I was called upon to literally, physically fight the battles of my non-Black friends. All of which was always fun for others to watch, lest I ever make the wrong people in the group feel uncomfortable by directing the same "sass" they loved so much back onto them.

With time, I began to notice these patterns. I came to understand that there are expectations Black girls are supposed to accept — and subsequently acquire a demeaning, limiting or downright oppressive role among a group of non-Black friends: be the caricature they created for you and don't ask for much else. Sadly, many of us don't realize these harmful dynamics until we've grown up a bit. However, that realization doesn't erase the damage that's been done to our self-esteem, confidence and mental health.

For me, it was only last year I distinguished these problematic reoccurrences within my friendships. Right before the pandemic forced much of the country into lockdown, and shortly before my 22nd birthday, I had a falling out with several longtime friends at once. The newfound isolation from being iced out of my previous friend group, coupled with the requirement that we stay inside indefinitely, gave me ample time to reflect on where my failed friendships went wrong. The common denominator? That simply being a Black girl often caused people to treat me poorly with no initiative to take accountability or offer up an apology, which unfortunately included my own friends.

Why isn't she texting me back? The pandemic has us doubting our friendships.

A lot of people who are publicly against racism, or at least believe they are, treat their Black female friends horribly in private. Not only are White and non-Black people unwilling to check their misogynoir, but they also often wield it mercilessly against their Black female friends.

Despite the poor quality of many of my friendships with White and non-Black people over the years, I always mourned the loss of each one. In hindsight, there were a lot of warning signs I missed within these friendships; racial microaggressions can be a tricky

thing to spot, even for other Black people. Shontel Cargill, a licensed therapist and assistant clinic director at [Thriveworks in Cumming, Ga.](#), explains how the covert nature of microaggressions can cause harm. “Microaggressions and other toxic behaviors can directly impact essentials to [a] healthy relationship and often lead to hurt feelings, mistrust, conflict and even [the] end of friendships,” she said.

But, she insisted, an imbalance within interracial friendships that contain only one Black female friend doesn't have to be the end of that relationship. Rather, conflicts can be rectified through a little reflection. “The good news is microaggressions and toxic behaviors can be addressed in a way that can reconcile and repair friendships,” she continued, adding that having a safe space to communicate your hurt in friendships is crucial. “What may be the most important factors in healing and forgiveness in the friendship is the non-Black friends' willingness to be empathetic without defensiveness, truly listen to their friend's concerns and be intentional about changing toxic behaviors moving forward in their friendship.”

For any Black girls who find themselves noticing toxic patterns or demeaning altercations within their non-Black friend groups, Cargill suggests remembering “that you deserve to be loved and valued in all of your relationships, including friendships. If you feel you were hurt by anyone in your non-Black/White friend group, your feelings are valid, and you deserve to be respected, protected and supported.”

Cargill provided additional tips on how Black girls can prioritize ourselves when leaving a toxic or one-sided friendship. Here are some steps:

1. Give yourself grace and time to grieve the loss of the friendship.
2. Permit yourself to say “I'm not okay” or “I still feel hurt.”
3. Try not to internalize guilt for ending the friendship.
4. Take care of yourself. Self-care is self-love.
5. Practice daily affirmations.
6. Prioritize your mental, physical and spiritual health.
7. Consider starting your healing process with therapy.
8. Make peace with your decision.

Black girls: Do also remember you're not alone. I've had my fair share of toxic friendships, and so have many others. Friendships are an essential part of our lives, and we deserve to be surrounded by people who recognize our worth and work to ensure we're given empathy and respect.

As Cargill put it, if you do leave a friendship, know that “you made the best decision for yourself. Give yourself time to grieve, heal and seek help when needed.”

Because contrary to how people may have treated you in the past, your well-being is important, and there *are* people out there who will properly value your friendship without using abuse or racism as a rite of passage first.