

About the Black Health Story Series

The Black Greek Letter Consortium (BGLC) will speak directly to the Black American community about our unique health needs and experiences with the Black Health Story Series. Through weekly blog posts written by Black leaders during Black History Month, we will increase awareness about health disparities and encourage health literacy. Our community is historically underrepresented

in medical research and we are doing our part to achieve health equity. After this series, we hope that our readers will speak up when they feel something is wrong, prioritize visits to physical and mental health care providers to start the new year in the know, and consider participating in the *All of Us* Research Program.

The Online Crisis Putting Everyone's Mental Health At Risk

Written by Dr. Shavon Chambers-Williams

“Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me” is a mantra that I have heard all my life, yet it couldn't be farther from the truth. As a young girl, I attended seven different elementary schools and two high schools, so being “the new girl” was a title that I wore frequently.

A crucial element of being a new student is adjusting to each new environment and praying that you fit in. Unfortunately, I experienced many lows and faced a lot of bullying through written notes and even verbal altercations. My self-esteem and overall mental health were terribly impacted, yet therapy for teens was not something people in my household, let alone my culture, did. Thus, I was left to maneuver these difficult times on my own. I can recall my sophomore year of high school when I promised myself that I would focus on my studies and ignore the bullies as much as possible because eventually they would no longer matter.

As I grew up, despite my educational accomplishments, a lot of the teasing I experienced as a child would continue to plague me as an adult. I practiced a strategy to stay out of the public eye unless it was connected to work or something I excelled in. However, this tactic did not work for long.

With the emergence of social media, especially Instagram, there is a lot of cyberbullying that many adults may experience but do not talk about. I recall reading a screenshot with subliminal messages directed at my appearance by a member of my own sorority. Despite being in my thirties, this cyberbullying incident instantly reminded me of the crushed 7th grader who simply wanted to fit in.

Bullying is a chronic problem that impacts adults and teens and often leads to untreated anxiety and depression with unique consequences on each individual's mental health. As an administrator, I have counseled dozens of students who suffer emotionally due to teasing and bullying they experience on social media. In addition, the pandemic has increased the amount of time spent on social media with limited supervision, resulting in a profound increase in cyberbullying.

In an effort to support the prevention of cyberbullying and provide key resources, my organization Zeta Phi Beta Sorority, Incorporated, along with the men of Phi Beta Sigma Fraternity, Incorporated will be hosting a forum, “It Starts with Me: Beyond the Keyboard,” on Tuesday, October 26, 2022 at 7:30 p.m. During this forum, there will be youth facilitators providing valuable information on preventing and recognizing the signs of cyberbullying as well as a rich Q&A discussion. It is my hope that through this event, we can all begin to view cyberbullying for what it really is: a threat to the emotional wellbeing and mental health of both adults and children.