

# Editorials 4: Does Black Love Exist?

October 2010

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When thinking about black love I instantly think about the complexity of the two words together. Qualifying anything as “black” - whether it be art, a neighborhood, an emotion, or something as entangling as love - becomes difficult. We then have to consider how individuals classify race and all other pluralisms the word denotes.

One can visualize the many nuances suggested by the term Black. Being Black is attributed to the social construct we call race and is an umbrella term that spans the world. While the United States does not have a monopoly on the word, the nation does have its own unique set of identifiers and notions of “blackness.”

Consider the historical representations of black love. We have always fought against the double standards depicted in the media. Black men and women were primarily defined by their race before anything else. In most cases, race is the most salient, noticeably represented, of all identities, and a phenomena that links people together, or of course breaks people apart. Until very recently, Blacks were either hypersexualized or desexualized. In any case, images of love rarely existed.

In the age of information, we can “google” just about anything and signup for informative email lists and newsletters to our liking. Occasionally, I receive email blasts from Essence magazine filled with articles that often feature Black love and matrimony. Jada and Will Smith were interviewed once about how to maintain a marriage. When journalists ask this question the Smith’s usually talk about the importance of spontaneity and a healthy sex life, which keeps them going.

Essence has a daily blog about the Obamas, where they provide updates about the President’s whereabouts, Michelle’s accomplishments and news on Sasha and Malia. Like with any celebrity we wonder about, their relationships and habits are at the forefront of the news. Naturally, the Obamas don’t divulge their sex life, but they often expose the not-so-glamorous reality of everyday married life, as well as the importance of compromise and reciprocity in relationships. They share the glory and the failures, but work through them both.

The Obamas rarely insert black as a prefix to their lives. This is quite a revolutionary act today considering the history of blacks in the media and the continuous pressure to be black even though we are so much more than our race.

Like most mainstream depictions of black love, *Essence* rarely ventures beyond the norm. Black love is vast. With a mixed response from Black communities, the comedian and actress Monique received flack for coming out about being in an open relationship in a March 2010 Oscar special; a type of relationship generally unheard of, but more common than we realize.

Author Ytasha L. Womack wrote a book in 2010 entitled *Post Black: How A New Generation is Redefining African American Identity* where she challenges assumptions of what Black is. The ten chapter book discusses how limiting Black has been in the past by excluding the pan-African identities and multiracial Americans. Womack challenges the typical hetero-normative conversation of black love by including gay and lesbian relationships and debunking the binary idea that black love is only meant for the prototypical man and woman, excluding all else.

Instead of asking the alarming question: Is Black Love in America? One could, and perhaps should, ask: What is Black love like today? It is something that has evolved beyond our grandparents' and parents' expectations and has remnants of the past. It probably won't fit into any of our boxes but it does in fact exist.