

#### Section 4: “Mama Love”

From *salvation* by bell hooks

I was raised in a two-parent household with five sisters and one brother, and my mother consciously talked with her girls about the ways competition and envy divide and separate. She let us know in no uncertain terms that there would be no catfights, no wars over boys, that we would respect and love one another as sisters. Her powerful lessons in sisterhood have stayed with us.

We know how to open our hearts.

Black women make a mistake when we assume that closing ourselves off and wearing the mask of indifference makes us strong or keeps us well. Repressing our feelings leads to stress and that leads to a variety of illnesses. Allowing ourselves to feel only rage is equally debilitating. To love ourselves rightly, to love others, we have to claim all our emotions.

Following the path of Sojourner Truth and other wise black women elders, black females must constantly assert our full humanity to counter the impact of dehumanizing forces. Expressing our full range of emotions is healing to the spirit and engages us in the practice of self-acceptance, which is so essential to self-love.

Underneath the stern expression I saw my mother and many of her friends wear was an ongoing fear that if they let their guards down—even for a minute—they would be disrespected, hurt, or violated in some way. To love, we have to let fear go and live faith-based lives. Living in faith means that we recognize, as our wise black female ancestors did, that we do have the power to decolonize our minds, invent ourselves, and dwell in the spirit of love that is our true destiny.