

**Getting to Happy: Is It Possible for Black Women?**

In 1992, Terry McMillan stunned the world with her novel, *Waiting to Exhale*, which later became a film starring four of the most prominent Black women in Hollywood: Angela Bassett, Whitney Houston, Loretta Devine, and Lela Rochon. Where has McMillan been since such a pivotal film for Black women? Well, we all saw *How Stella Got Her Groove Back*, and long story short, it was about McMillan—except she found out that her gorgeous, young, Jamaican lover was actually gay. McMillan went on to be angry for three years, and in 2010 she finally published the sequel to *Waiting to Exhale*—*Getting to Happy*.

I read *Waiting to Exhale* years ago when I was in my early teens, and I couldn’t wait to be in my thirties to have Robin’s sass, Bernadine’s strength, Savannah’s intelligence, and especially Gloria’s unconditional love. And, even if these things didn’t lead all of these women to stable relationships by the end of the book, I was determined to have all of this and a genuine love interest like Gloria did Gregory Hines.

Now that I’m in my early twenties, and I see that life is not even close to what *Waiting to Exhale* made it seem to be, I was in need of a book entitled *Getting to Happy*. Getting to happy is not easy for Black women—especially Black women at Boston College. As much as we may have fantasized about having strong and successful Black girlfriends like Robin, Bernie, Savannah, and Gloria; and engaging in vibrant, Black love as though we were our own version of *Sex and the City*, this is nearly impossible on BC’s campus. I have spent a lot of my five years at BC disappointed in the Black community, because frankly, there is no community. Black love is not present enough on this campus, whether the love is between significant others or a love of sisterhood or brotherhood.

McMillan’s book came right in the nick of time when I was about to declare myself the infamous angry Black woman. This is my fifth year at BC, and as a grad student, I was not surrounded by my close girlfriends anymore, and I was also at a low in my dating relationships. What better way to pick myself up than by reading *Getting to Happy*? Boy, was I wrong. In *Getting to Happy*, the same four women are now in their fifties and still going through drama that only Terry McMillan can create. In the first few chapters, it is clear that Savannah, Bernadine, and Robin still have not gotten their lives together, and you hope that by the end of the book they have gotten to happy. Gloria, on the other hand, has lost a significant amount of weight, and she and Marvin are about to celebrate an anniversary. She’s as happy as can be, but only for the first few pages. I won’t ruin it for anybody, but I will say that my only reaction was “Damn, Terry!”

I finished the book, and got as close to closure as possible with the Jerry Springer-like twists, but I did not get out of it what I thought I would. I did not get to happy by reading about Robin, Bernie, Savannah, and Gloria. All I read was Terry McMillan’s anger—for which she had reason, but once again, I was disappointed. I actually had to think about how to get myself out of this angry Black woman funk without the help of Terry McMillan, because clearly, she was in it herself. I am determined to get to happy very soon, but the role of Black women and our relationships are changing drastically, and it is illogical to maintain fantasies of a book written twenty years ago, nor a book written today, if it is written by a bitter Black woman.

The title of this article questions whether or not getting to happy is possible for Black women. I think it is. Terry McMillan might not, but I do. A lot of Black women have reason to be “angry Black women,” but a lot of people in general have reason to be “angry people in general,” yet they are not justified, and we shouldn’t justify our anger just because that’s the
prevailing stereotype of Black women. The point of all this is to say that even though Terry McMillan is too bitter to not be an “angry Black woman,” it does not mean that the rest of us have to be one as well. Black women, go out and get to happy on your own!