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Photography

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Throughout my childhood and adolescence, it seemed almost no one in the world looked like me outside of my family. All the characters in the storybooks, especially the princesses, were pale skinned and blonde haired. Most of my neighbors, though not blond, were certainly pale. There were a few places I could go to see others who looked like me – the Cosby Show, A Different World and Ebony Magazine, but this smattering of representations was not enough, especially when it came to Ebony magazine. Even as a young girl, I could see the contradictory ways in which Black identity and concepts of beauty were being constructed. Despite its alleged purpose, Ebony did little more than reflect and perpetuate the internalized racism and European beauty standards that have become cultural norms within White capitalist patriarchy. It wasn't until I discovered the writing of bell hooks that I felt all my pain and frustration articulated. Her book, *Black Looks: Race and Representation*, created a revolution within me. I wanted to make the kind of imagery that she wrote about, the kind of imagery I had been hungering for my whole life. I wanted to take pictures of Black life and Black people that reflect who we are in all of our beautiful complexity away from the White supremacist gaze. I turned to photography because I was not seeing the images I wanted to see. I remember the sharp pain of isolation as a little girl who saw few cultural representations of Black people that were not stereotypical or essentialist and felt helpless in the face of a racism that seemed to be around every corner. I know the importance of representation- how it shapes not only the perceptions of people outside a certain group, but within it as well. Even to this day the majority representation of Black folks is not in our hands. I am working to change this as much as I can.

