WOMEN IN SCIENCE AND MEDICINE
Molecular biologist Dr. Flossie Wong-Staal (1947-2020) was the first person to clone the HIV virus, a major research advancement in the treatment of AIDS.

African American trailblazer and Chemist Alice Ball (1892-1916) developed the first successful treatment for Hansen’s disease, also known as leprosy. The “Ball Method,” was used on thousands of infected individuals for over thirty years until sulfone drugs were introduced.

In 1986, Dr. Patricia Bath invented the Laserphaco Probe system for removing cataracts—a laser-based system that made removal of cataracts more accurate and less painful. Bath was both the first African-American to finish a residency in ophthalmology in 1973 and the first African-American female doctor to win a medical patent in 1988.

The first American woman to win a Nobel Prize in the sciences Gerty Cori’s (1896-1957) work involved studying the mechanism by which the body processes food (the Cori cycle) leading to treatments for diabetes and other diseases.

Ellen Ochoa was the first Hispanic woman astronaut. She went on four missions with NASA, spending 978 hours in outer space. She also added co-inventor to her resume when she helped develop three patents in the field of optics.
"BECAUSE SHE’S A WOMAN"

As a female mental healthcare provider, it’s hard to not acknowledge the evolution of women’s roles in the field of psychology, both as providers and patients, across time. Initially, women who experienced difficulty with mood and emotions were dismissed with a single diagnosis: hysteria. It did not take long for this diagnosis to be used as the medical scapegoat for a multitude of physical and emotional disorders. The male-dominated field of psychology in the 18th century further simplified the explanation of mental and emotional symptoms experienced by women by attributing the cause to an organ thought to be “wandering the body.” Not only was this unfounded and not empirically supported, it was also widely accepted in society at the time. This planted the seeds of a dangerous stigma against women and emotions in general, one that would bleed beyond the realm of women seeking medical and psychological help and into all areas of a woman’s life.

Fast forward to present day…I sometimes reflect back to the origin of “hysteria” and slightly chuckle at how silly this thought was…yet how easily it was accepted as a true cause for females struggling with a variety of disorders. “Did they really think organs just floated around unattached,” I wondered to myself. My chuckle is quickly followed by a long blink and a deep sigh as I am reminded of how this sexist, unfounded belief developed hundreds of years ago often still prevails and is applied to women across various situations and roles. These microaggressions are easily evident every day. When someone makes a joke about a woman being “on their period” when she responds to a situation with anything other than a flat, unemotional response; or when someone believes a woman is unqualified to hold a professional position at a certain level of responsibility out of a worry she might be affected by mood swings brought on by “their time of the month.”

It strikes me as ironic how, despite the psychology profession transitioning from a male-dominated to a female-dominated field, there is still a substantial implicit bias toward women being viewed as “not good enough” existing in me and others. This may account for why it is not uncommon for female patients to enter treatment in a psychological state well beyond when treatment could have (and likely should have) been initiated in a meaningful, appropriate manner. Most will share they did not want to admit they were struggling out of fear of being judged as being weak and needy. Other female patients often use “broken” or “damaged” to describe themselves, believing they are the only ones experiencing this level of meaningful, appropriate manner. Most will share they did not want to admit they were struggling out of fear of being judged as being weak and needy. Other female patients often use “broken” or “damaged” to describe themselves, believing they are the only ones experiencing this level of vulnerability is not their weakness is palpable, powerful, and equally heartbreaking.

As we celebrate and honor women’s history this March, I think you may be surprised to find that early sexist teachings and opinions surrounding women’s mental health and behavior are still floating around and influencing our interpersonal connections. Let’s make an effort to better understand what lessons and experiences we’ve endured, and are potentially showing up as a bias for ourselves. Only when we do the hard work and identify these roadblocks can we grow and change the future. And when discomfort presents, which I guarantee you it will, I hope you will lean into it; allow it to be present so you can strengthen your newly found beliefs and behaviors while finally letting go of a past that never really served you in the first place.
Podcasts of Interest

Eliminating Shame, Stigma & Sexism from Health Experiences: Medical Herstory- Peer Med Foundation

MELANIN MEDICINE: A PODCAST FOR BLACK, INDIGENOUS & WOMEN OF COLOR COMMITTED TO THE HEALTH JUSTICE MOVEMENT
https://melaninandmedicine.co/podcast/

Articles of Interest

Regarding Women in Science and Medicine

As More Women Enter Science, It’s Time to Redefine Mentorship
https://www.wired.com/story/as-more-women-enter-science-its-time-to-redefine-mentorship/

Women Physicians and Promotion in Academic Medicine
Each time a woman stands up for herself, without knowing it possibly, without claiming it, she stands up for all women.

- Maya Angelou

**Additional Articles of Interest**

**Stop Telling Women They Have Imposter Syndrome**

by: Ruchika Tulshyan and Jodi-Ann Burey

[https://hbr.org/2021/02/stop-telling-women-they-have-imposter-syndrome](https://hbr.org/2021/02/stop-telling-women-they-have-imposter-syndrome)

**Dear Black [woman] Boss**

from Reflective MedED Newsletter


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**Kids' Books Showcasing Empowered Women**

**Black Women in Science: A Black History Book for Kids**

by: Dr. Kimberly Brown Pellum

[Image of book cover]

**Counting the Stars**

by: Lesa Cline-Ransome and Raúl Colón

[Image of book cover]
"I stand on the sacrifices of a million women before me thinking "what can I do to make this mountain taller so the woman after me can see farther"?"

-Legacy: Rupi Kaur