MOTHERHOOD TO POSTPARTUM AND BEYOND

A GUIDE TO HEALING FOR WOMEN OF COLOR

AMY PACITI

WELCOME



I'm so excited for you to read this ebook about my personal journey from Motherhood to Postpartum and Beyond. By writing this book it was a way for me to heal from past traumas and break the chains from passing them onto my beautiful daughter.

In this book, I'm going to show you what has worked for me and it's my hope that you are able to utilize some of the information that I share. Know that you are seen, you are heard and that you are worth to be loved!

— AMY PACITTI



HI, I AM

AMY PACITTI

Personal Stylist + Image Consultant and the Founder of **Wrapped with Amore Inc.**

What began as a passion for fashion at the age of 5, is now a company inspiring women especially women of colour who are returning to work from maternity leave communicate their worth through their choice of clothing by leveraging the power of colour, silhouettes and fit and empowering them to be more confident to get noticed for ALL the right reasons, attract more clients and earn more money.

I am a woman who is walking in her truth, saying yes to opportunities even though I feel like I'm not ready and being lead by God following Him wherever He leads me.

I have BIG dreams and happen to be a mom and with the support of my wonderful family, I can and will do it all!

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"Each time a woman stands up for herself, without claiming it, she stands up for all women"

MAYA ANGELOU



Motherhood, especially for women of color, can be a challenging experience. Navigating cultural expectations and societal norms while caring for a new baby can be daunting. Add to that, the stress of postpartum depression and anxiety, and it's easy to feel overwhelmed.

It's important to understand that you're not alone in this experience. Many women of color face similar challenges when it comes to motherhood. One of the most significant challenges is the lack of access to quality health care, resources and opportunities. This often leads to a variety of problems postpartum and beyond.

Racism or skin color often plays a role in this inequality, and we must discuss these issues openly and honestly. We need to support each other through this journey and offer assistance where we can.

Many women around the world are struggling with the same issues. The challenges of motherhood are universal, but we mustn't forget the unique struggles of women of color. We must continue to support each other and fight for equality.

We are known as the backbone of the family, and we must remember our strength. We are warriors, and we will prevail.

Furthermore, we have seen influential and great women of color like Oprah Winfrey, Viola Davis, and Michelle Obama - just to name a few - who have become powerful figures and showed the world what we're capable of. They have become beacons of hope for many young girls and women of color around the world.



We must remember their stories and continue to fight for what's right.

In the corporate sector, business or entrepreneurship, more women of color are taking the lead and becoming CEOs or running their own businesses. We are slowly but surely breaking the glass ceiling and making our voices heard. In fact, black women are the fastest-growing group of entrepreneurs in the US. We are powerful, and we are making a difference.

So, to all the mothers out there - keep going. You're doing an amazing job. To all women of color - remember your strength, your power, and your worth. We are mothers, and we are powerful. Let's continue to support each other and fight for equality.

Our skin color shouldn't be a disadvantage but something that makes us even more beautiful, powerful, and resilient. We are mothers, and we are strong. We are the driving force behind our families and our communities.

As a mother of one, I have had my share of challenges, but I am grateful for my daughter and for the strength that she gives me. I know I am not alone in this experience, and I am committed to supporting other mothers of color.

My inspiration for this book came from my own experiences as a mother of color and the challenges many of my friends and family have faced. I want to offer a voice to those who feel like they don't have one. I want to provide support and guidance to other women of color who are struggling.

Within the chapters of this book, I have shared amazing tips on how to heal from the traumas faced by women of color.



You will find the tools and knowledge to navigate motherhood to postpartum and not pass that down to your children. You will learn how to handle rejection and discrimination, lack of adequate care, and healing postpartum depression syndrome. This book will advocate for women in corporate spaces, social circles, and institutions.

Moreover, you will find a well-articulated and comprehensive guide on how to transform your mind positively, as well as the deliberate use of fashion and style in a way that exudes and radiate self-confidence and positivity in all situations.

I hoped this book would help open up the conversation about these topics and help women of color feel seen, heard, and valued. We are important and powerful and deserve to be treated with respect.

By the end of this book, you should feel encouraged, inspired, and motivated to take on the world. You should feel like you can achieve anything you set your mind to. And most importantly, you should feel like you are not alone. There are others out there who understand what you're going through, and we are here to support you.

So let's begin this journey together and show the world what we're made of!



THE TRAUMAS OF POSTPARTUM AND WHY NO ONE IS TALKING ABOUT IT!

A certain stigma or taboo is talking about the traumas we face during our postpartum journeys.

Motherhood can be an incredibly rewarding experience filled with love, joy, and happiness. But it can also be a traumatic experience, full of worry, sleepless nights, and constant fear for the safety and well-being of your child.

Mothers often deal with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) after giving birth, and there's no easy way to heal from the trauma. However, understanding and accepting what's happened is the first step to recovery. It's important to remember that postpartum trauma is different for every woman.

Let me share my story with you.

42 weeks. 6 days in the hospital. 25 minutes of pushing. 6lbs 5oz my beautiful baby girl was born.

That's right, you read it correctly, I was pregnant for 42 weeks, and my OBGYN already warned me that since this was my first time being pregnant to expect a full-term pregnancy. At 40 weeks, my doctor wanted me to do an ultrasound to see the size of my baby to determine if everything was normal and okay.

Why? Because I was small, I'm only 5ft 2," and I wasn't gaining much weight, all I had was a belly regardless if others stated that I was HUGE or had twins. At 41 weeks, it was a Monday, and I was supposed to be scheduled and placed on the induction list.

Monday afternoon, no call.

Tuesday, nothing!

During the pandemic, the hospitals were crowded, and operating rooms were scarce as COVID took over. No visitors except your partner were allowed in the room, and if you had a doula, they would have to wait outside. I often saw women waiting to give birth in the movies, constantly walking back and forth down the long hospital hallways. Nope! COVID put an end to that! Once you were admitted, you were confined to that room - Lockdown!

I can't believe they have forgotten about me! How could they forget?

I called the hospital to see if I was on their induction list. They replied, "No, sorry, how far along are you?" I'm 41 weeks and 2 days.

The hospital told me that someone would call me back later that evening because the nurses were doing a shift change. No one called. Panic set in; my first thought was that I'm going to have this baby at home, and we're not prepared; that was not the plan! I called them back again, and they suggested bringing all our belongings just in case we were admitted.

48 hrs later, I still haven't given birth, and I'm on my second round of cervidil.



My cervix was still closed, and my water couldn't be broken; I just needed to wait for my body and my baby to be ready. When the nurse and doctors checked, I was finally at 1 cm and I cried tears of joy.

I experienced mixed emotions, relieved that I would soon be able to see my baby girl but disappointed that my body couldn't perform. It quickly progressed doing oxytocin until level 6, where the pain was unbearable; I was exhausted and drained as my body had contractions for the past 24 hrs, and I thought to myself, I'm not even active labor! How am I going to get the strength to continue? We decided to take the epidural, I was finally free of the pain, and my body could relax and recover from the main event.

My first experience with discrimination at the hospital came from a Black nurse who treated me so horribly that I felt helpless and violated. I couldn't understand how my beautiful sister could treat her fellow sister this way. The head nurse went to have dinner at 4 am; I was completely frozen from the waist down, fatigued, losing my voice, and vulnerable. I was at 8 cm and felt accomplished... that soon will change.

A new nurse walked in speaking French, and even though I am fluently bilingual, I was too drained to understand what she was saying, confused because my request was to be addressed in English, and soon would become shocked by the series of events.

Usually, my doctors warn me about doing a check to measure how far along I am – a mental prep.

THE TRAUMAS OF POSTPARTUM AND WHY NO ONE IS TALKING ABOUT IT

They don't know that I have been a victim of sexual assault or that I am feeling nervous about everyone staring at me and being completely exposed. I tell myself it's for our baby girl. She was different. She was rough and cold-hearted, and I was just another patient.

She told me that she needed to check me up; no introduction, no bedside manners, just a quick hello, it was time to get checked. I am finally beginning to understand how seniors are being mistreated and violated. She told me that I was 5 cm dilated... a few minutes ago, I was 8 cm; how was it possible to go backward?

She forced me to change position; she just stared at me as I struggled, my epidural was wearing off, and my intense contractions were coming back. I would usually collapse on the medicine ball in agonizing pain.

She told me to turn on my side since my daughter's heart spiked during each contraction.



ANYTHING WORTH HAVING TAKES TIME

We had been dealing with this issue with the other nurse for the past 20 hrs, and she warned me not to remain only on one side with the epidural because it won't distribute it effectively. Regardless, she told me to go on my side then I became very numb on my right side; she asked me to turn again, but this time to the left.

Now, I'm trying to get my husband's attention as she's watching me struggle; I'm tired, in pain, very cold, and asking my husband to wake up to bring me a blanket.

In only a few short minutes, I'm left numb, violated, and distraught as I'm told that I'm only at 5 cm, feeling sick and nauseous, and my baby's health is slowly deteriorating as she has meconium, and they believe that the umbilical cord is wrapped around her neck causing her heart to spike with each contraction.

Worrying is an understatement. Fear of the unknown is soon flooding my thoughts... it's been 4 days in the hospital. All the nurses have seen me at least once during their rotation.

My head nurse came back, and I was on the verge of tears when we told her everything that had happened, and she apologized and told me that I couldn't go backward with dilation but it depends on each nurse's perception of how they measure.





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My head nurse came back, and I was on the verge of tears when we told her everything that had happened, and she apologized and told me that I couldn't go backward with dilation but it depends on each nurse's perception of how they measure.

The doctor confirms that I'm at 8 cm, but if there's no change, I would have to get an emergency C-Section because my daughter needs to be delivered urgently within the next 1.5hrs.



We do everything possible with the peanut ball, a.k.a medicine ball, to help her descend rapidly. Again, I feel helpless and like I have come so far to 8 cm, and all my efforts were in vain because I honestly did not want to have a C-Section. I wanted to feel her moving through the canal and experience that beautiful moment of her delivery.

In 1.5 hrs, I FINALLY get to 10 cm, and I can't rejoice too soon as it's time to push because my daughter needs to come out. They bring the NICU to my room, and in 25 minutes of pushing, she's out – but no cries!

No sound; the room was busy trying to clean her to get her to cry as she was covered in meconium.

Seconds and minutes pass; I keep asking the nurse if everything is okay, and I keep looking at my husband for the thumbs up that my daughter is alive and well.

As I waited, the nurse explained that I would get a needle to stimulate my body to contract and release my placenta. I don't feel anything in my legs, as I'm still very numb.

I tell myself as a short prayer: Please, Lord May I come home with a baby; I didn't wait 42 weeks to leave without her!

I keep staring at my husband. I finally get the thumbs up, and she gives a faint cry. She's tiny, 6lbs 5oz, mama's little fighter, and beautiful! But we need to stay another 36 hours in the hospital to monitor her glucose levels because she's so small.



My pregnancy was uneventful, as my doctor stated, even though I was 42 weeks gestation. My fear wasn't the delivery; how could I protect her once she was out? How can I protect her from the negative, stereotypical, ignorant and racist comments being bombarded in the media?

How can I protect myself from the ignorance of people who had asked me to go back to my country and return to Africa? For so long, they have questioned my ethnicity, whether I'm black or not; black enough, pretty, but for a black girl!

No one told me that all my past traumas would soon resurface when I had children, hence where my postpartum anxiety stems from.

During news coverage of casualties and seeing the confederate flag being displayed on TV, I experienced my first moment of postpartum rage. It was the fear of wondering if I was right to conceive her and raise her in this world.

Did I do the right thing, or was I selfish?

Fear that they won't accept my daughter, and ultimately anxiety that I could not control her surroundings to prevent her from all the hateful and ignorance that people will think and say to her the first time someone calls her the n-word, comments on her skin tone, touches her hair or makes her feel different because she's mixed.





That's where my anxiety stems from, and I'm acknowledging my struggles as I speak to my doctor, no medication is needed, but I am still finding solutions to help me heal from my childhood traumas. My daughter's sweet, kind and beautiful soul reassures me every day that I made the right decision because everyone should get to know my daughter and be touched by her overflowing love!

The Challenges of Motherhood for a Woman of Color

"Each time a woman stands up for herself without knowing it possibly, without claiming it, she stands up for all women." —Maya Angelou.

As a woman of color, you will likely face many traumas throughout your life. From social stigma, discrimination, and Racism to inadequate healthcare and Lack of support, you may feel like you are constantly fighting an uphill battle. This can affect your mental and physical health, particularly during the most vulnerable time – postpartum.

There is no one-size-fits-all solution to healing the trauma of postpartum or being a woman of color.



Some Of the Different Types of Traumas that Can Occur During and After Childbirth?

There are a lot of different types of traumas that can occur during and after childbirth. Some women may experience one or more of these types of traumas:

Physical: when a woman has a complicated delivery or an emergency C-section or is forced to have a different type of delivery other than the one originally planned. (For example, if she's told she has to have a C-section even though she doesn't want one).

Emotional: occurs if a woman feels like she's not in control of her delivery or is not given enough information about what is expected during the delivery. We women go through a roller coaster of emotions, highs, and lows due to hormonal changes, which can be very draining.

Sexual: one of the most painful experiences to heal from and can occur before, during or after childbirth.

Psychological: if a woman is not supported or aware of the changes that will happen to her body during and after childbirth.

Traumas from delivery: women are thought to be simply a vessel and not regarded as a person, we are made to feel invisible in the delivery room where people just come and poke you at all hours of the night, check the most private and intimate areas, and that everyone's main concern is the baby! We quickly realize that our bodies are NOT our own!

They care for us new moms for 9 months, sometimes 10 in my case, carefully monitoring our every move, then once you deliver and 6 weeks later, you're supposed to become a fully functioning human being - LIES! They say you could do everything you did pre-pregnancy, like jump, run, work out, have sex, go to the bathroom, etc.

Some of us take longer to heal, and some of us have hands inside us that turn our babies to the correct position, with no concern for the trauma that it will cause the mom. Some of us had major surgery - C Section- and are still recovering after 12 months and feel numbness near our scars; some had 1, 2, 3, or even 4-degree tears!! How can you tell me that we can go on regularly about our business after 6 weeks??... WHO made these rules??

Some of us are STILL suffering from childbirth years after delivery: stretch marks, skin discoloration, hormonal changes which lead to early menopause, cellulite, weight gain, flabby skin- MUFA, especially after a C-section, postpartum hair loss, incompetence, numbness in certain areas, and many more physical, emotional, and mental traumas that aren't properly addressed. We need to do more for our mothers and more for us women of color!



There are some steps you can take to begin the healing process:

- 1. Acknowledge the trauma: The first step is to acknowledge that what you're feeling is real and valid. Feeling scared, angry, sad, or any other emotion is okay. Don't try to bottle up your feelings or pretend they don't exist.
- 2. Talk about it: Once you've acknowledged the trauma, it's important to talk about it. This can be difficult, but it's essential to begin the healing process. Talk to your partner, friends, family, or a therapist about what you're going through.
- 3. Seek out support: Many organizations and groups offer support for women of color who have experienced trauma. Seek out these resources and connect with other women who understand what you're going through.
- 4. Self-care: It's important to care for yourself physically and emotionally. Eat healthy, exercise, take a walk, read a good book, pray, meditate, sleep whenever you can and find other ways to relax and de-stress.
- 5. Seek professional help: If you're struggling to cope with the trauma, consider seeking professional help. A therapist can help you work through your emotions and develop a plan for moving forward. With time and effort, you can heal the trauma, and with



What is
Postpartum
Depression?

the right support, you can get through this and be the best mother you can be.

What Is Postpartum Depression?

Postpartum depression (PPD) is a type of depression that can happen after you have a baby. It's also called postnatal depression or perinatal depression. PPD can happen any time in the first year after having a baby.

For some women, the changes that happen during and after pregnancy can bring on depression. Hormone changes sleep deprivation, and stress can all play a role in PPD. PPD differs from the "baby blues," which are common and usually go away within a couple of weeks post-delivery. PPD lasts longer and is more severe.

How to Handle Postpartum Anxiety in Women of Color

Studies show that about 1 in 7 mothers experience postpartum depression in the immediate year after giving birth. Black and Latina's women are at a higher risk for developing postpartum depression, with rates as high as 1 in 5.

Only about 4% of Black mothers obtained postpartum mental health care, compared to 9% of Caucasian mothers, even though Black mothers are twice as likely to suffer from postpartum depression.



Many factors contribute to the increased risk of postpartum depression in women of color, including:

- · Racism and discrimination
- · Lack of support from family members, friends, and other mom groups
- · Poverty
- · Poor access to mental health care

I was diagnosed with postpartum anxiety during my daughter's 4 months doctor's appointment, I knew I had it, and I did the famous google search to self-diagnose. Still, when my family doctor did the assessment questionnaire, I received a high score. She confirmed that I had postpartum anxiety and told me what my next steps were.

I knew that I wasn't crazy; no matter how often I would voice my concerns and feelings to my family, they would downplay it as if it was not real... I'm making it up, or I'm just going through the phases of being a sleep-deprived new mom.

I felt relieved knowing it was anxiety, but I also knew I would overcome it through prayer, resilience, and determination. I was starting a new corporate job the next month and knew this would help change my morale.

I'm a perfectionist and a type A personality who likes to do everything herself, so when I couldn't physically do anything, frustration and anxiety kicked in. I wasn't in control; I couldn't just get up and clean the house the way that I wanted to, or cook or get dressed; I had to trust others and rely on someone else.



I don't need anyone's help...

I have difficulty trusting others, which goes back to when I was growing up without a father. He walked out on me when I was 5 years old, never to come back to visit, even though my parents had shared custody – he had me on the weekends. He would pick me up on a Friday afternoon and drive me back home on Saturday sometime during the day. I conditioned myself to never let anyone in or be vulnerable so they won't hurt me and leave me.

To this day, 34 years later, I haven't seen him again; we lived in the same old apartment, his home, when my parents got married, and we had the same phone number for over 20 years. He still chose never to visit me again, remarried the woman he cheated on with my mother, and 15 years later, I heard he had a son.

I did search for him, reluctantly, before I moved out West to his last known address, but he had sold his house four years prior. We lived in the same city, and I have never bumped into him. As I write this now, I understand where my anxiety or control lies to ensure that I hold the reins over who and how much others are allowed to be involved in my life. I control the time and how long they stay and can do everything myself. I don't need anyone's help.

In my struggle to accept my new situation, I had to learn how to use my anxiety to benefit me, learn to ask for help and break down my pride. My new job gave me life; as simple as it was to get dressed up in the morning for work, even though I worked from home, it gave me back my sense of self. I finally felt like me again, and when my daughter started sleeping at night, I could clean and do everything as I once did. That saved me and my prayer, and I had to surrender and give everything to God and be still. Knowing that he has everything under control and does not freak out or worry.



It's a constant battle every day in my head, and I'm still a work in progress. One bit of advice, don't let other people use your anxiety as a disability or make you feel like you're less than an amazing mother. Find support groups, talk to your therapist or doctor if you're struggling, and perform small self-care daily, whether going for a walk, taking a bath, going out to the spa, salon, or gym, reading a favorite book, or taking a nap. I love naps; they help me rejuvenate for the long sleepless nights ahead.

Whatever you do, find something that makes you happy. Do what feels best for you & your baby, please move at your own pace.

WHY Should We Care?

"Being a Black mother in the U.S. is a life-threatening endeavor," says Nathalie Walton, CEO of "Expectful," a meditation and sleep app for fertility, pregnancy, and motherhood. "Racism in maternal care is widespread and lethal. Regardless of socioeconomic status or physical ability, to be pregnant as Black women in the United States remain an existential risk," she explains.

Black mothers die in childbirth at three to four times the rate of Caucasian mothers, according to the most recent data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Maternal mortality rates have risen in the U.S. over the past few decades, and Black women are disproportionately affected.

Several factors contribute to the high maternal mortality rate among black women, including systemic Racism, Lack of access to quality health care, and pre-existing conditions like obesity and hypertension. But one of the most significant factors is stress.

"Racism is a form of chronic stress that takes a toll on the body," Walton says. "It's been shown to increase the risk of preterm labor, low birth weight, and a host of other health problems."

In addition to the stress of Racism, Black women also face the added stress of caring for their families while navigating a white-dominated society. This can lead to what Walton calls "Secondary Traumatic Stress," or the stress that comes from witnessing or hearing about another person's traumatic experience.

"Black women are constantly bombarded with images and stories of violence against Black people, whether it's in the news, on social media, or in our communities," Walton explains. This constant exposure to trauma can significantly impact our mental and physical health.

And Why Black Moms Are Less Likely to Get Adequate Medical Care for Postpartum Anxiety and Mood Disorders?

According to Dr. Ana Langer, director of the Women and Health Initiative at the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health in Boston, "The reasons behind the racial disparities are many and complex."

Langer points to several factors, including that Black women are more likely to be uninsured, underinsured, or have Medicaid coverage, which can lead to delays in care. In addition, Black women are more likely to experience discriminatory treatment from healthcare providers.

"There is a long history of racism in medicine has led to Black women being treated as second-class citizens," Langer explains.

"This includes everything from being denied pain medication to being subject to involuntary sterilization."

As a result of these and other factors, Black women are less likely to seek help for postpartum mood disorders. And when they do, they are less likely to receive the care they need. "We need to do a better job of reaching out to Black women and letting them know that help is available," Langer says. "And we need to ensure that when they seek help, they receive culturally competent care that meets their needs."

"Black women's concerns aren't taken seriously," says Richelle Whittaker, LPC-S, PMH-C is an educational psychologist and maternal mental health therapist specializing in women of color. "Many healthcare providers are not well-versed in PMADs," she says. "And the stigma of PMADs and mental health issues, in general, contribute to the racial disparities."

Symptoms of Pregnancy and Postpartum Anxiety and Mood Disorders

"The symptoms of pregnancy and postpartum anxiety are very similar to those of generalized anxiety disorder," says Urmi Patel, PsyD, Mental and Behavioral Health Program Lead at Mahmee, a maternal care management platform. "Women who have postpartum anxiety can experience elevated levels of worry, symptoms of panic, fear of childbirth or child-raising, excessive worry over their baby's health, and even fear of leaving home while pregnant or after the baby is born.

You may also experience panic symptoms, including shortness of breath, rapid pulse, dizziness, and chest or stomach pain. Fear may include feeling like you have a heart attack, feeling detached from your baby or others, having thoughts of doom, fear of dying, or debilitative and excessive worrying thoughts."

Dr. Richelle Whittaker wrote about looking out for the following signs and symptoms in new and expectant mothers of color:

- 1. Anxiety
- 2. Depression
- 3. Rage
- 4. Psychosis
- 5. Hemorrhage
- 6. Sleep disturbances
- 7. Fatigue
- 8. Irritability
- 9. Mood swings
- 10. Lack of interest in activities that used to bring joy
- 11. Intense worry or fears
- 12. Racing thoughts
- 13. Memory problems
- 14. Difficulty concentrating
- 15. Increased startle response
- 16. Aches and pains with no known cause
- 17. Headaches
- 18. Digestive problems
- 19. Loss of appetite or overeating
- 20. Intrusive thoughts
- 21. Obsessive behaviors
- 22. Avoidance behaviors

If you are experiencing any of these symptoms, please reach out to your healthcare provider, a trusted friend or family member, or mental health professional.

Creating a support system of people, you trust who can offer emotional and practical support is also important. "Make sure to surround yourself with people who will listen to you without judgment and who will support you in getting the help you need," Patel says.

You are not alone.





THANK YOU

THANK YOU FOR ALLOWING ME TO BE VULNERABLE
AND SHARE MY JOURNEY WITH YOU. IT MEANS THE WORLD TO
ME AND I HOPE I INSPIRED YOU, MADE YOU LAUGH, CRY AND
EMPOWER YOU TO STAND UP FOR ALL WOMEN.

BESOS MI AMORES