

Tennis Star Naomi Osaka Prompts Talk About Racism and Mental Health

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Tennis star Naomi Osaka recently refused to speak to the press during the French Open, citing mental health reasons. In response, tournament officials fined the champion, and some in the press characterized her actions as diva-like.

But now, a growing wave of support for the athlete is sweeping across the mental health and tennis communities, as evidenced by articles in the [Chicago Crusader](#) and [Washington Post](#). The stories focused on gender and racial bias and lessons Black women can take away from Osaka's latest stand.

In late May, the 23-year-old athlete announced on Instagram that she would not participate in the post-match news conferences required by the French Open. Osaka explained that she feared recent bouts of [anxiety](#) and [depression](#) might impact her performance. Afterward, officials fined her \$15,000, and she ultimately withdrew from the tournament. That move caused an international uproar about what constitutes acceptable behavior by athletes as they contend with challenges inside and outside the [sports](#) arena.

"Naomi Osaka's complaint of being asked repetitive questions that lead to self-doubt is one many Black women can relate to," commented Inger Burnett-Zeigler, PhD, a psychologist at Northwestern Medicine, to the [Chicago Crusader](#). "Much of the backlash Osaka has received falls in line with the unspoken belief that women should just do what they have to do and put up with things that are harmful to them in order to pacify others, be agreeable and keep their 'good jobs.'"

Burnett-Zeigler, who also conducts research on Black women's mental health, said the athlete took three key proactive steps in response to the problems she faced: She pinpointed features of her work environment that triggered her anxiety and depression; set boundaries to protect herself; and placed her needs before other people's opinions and agendas in support of her mental health.

To learn more about how Black women can take control of their mental health, read "[Beyond the Blues](#)."
