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Examining the Effects of the “Strong Black Woman” Stereotype on Black Women’s Experience with Domestic Violence

Taylor Tristine

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Positive Perceptions

- Attribution of strength is empowering & becomes an integral portion of identity
- Observe presence & importance of strength from mother figures & follow their lead
- Young Black girls continually taught to be strong rather than emotion regulation or boundary setting
- Stereotype can be comforting, especially for younger women, & becomes source of pride, as compared to “weak” White women

Negative Effects

- Over time, expectation for Black women to *exclusively* exhibit strength wears them down & can lead to mental health issues
- Often denied expression of other emotions & are shamed if they ask for help
- Due to slavery's dehumanization, Black women are seen as callous sex/child-making/working machines & are treated as if they are incapable of femininity or weakness
- More likely to leave an abusive relationship, but also more likely to have multiple, shorter abusive relationships over their lifetime as compared to White women

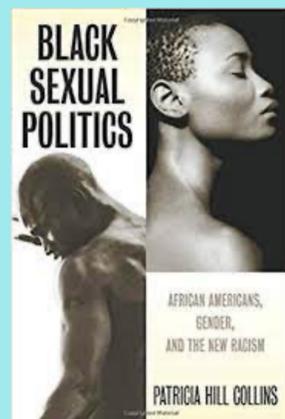
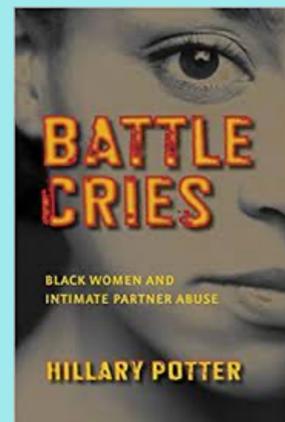
Examining the Effects of the Strong Black Woman Stereotype on Black Women's Experience with Domestic Violence

By: Taylor Tristine

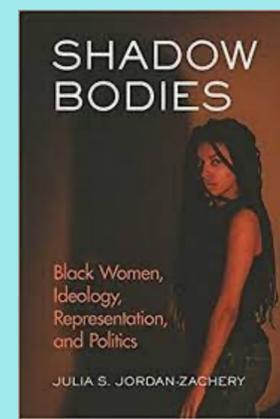
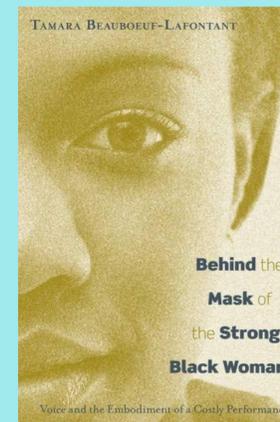
Advisor: Dr. Maureen Outlaw, Dept. of Sociology and Anthropology

Introduction

While many Black women take pride in being “strong,” this label can have surprisingly complex and simultaneously positive and negative effects on a Black woman's psyche. Additionally, many effects of the application of this stereotype may seem positive to Black women at the time, but after constant application of the stereotype these women are consistently worn down and treated as “less-than.” This phenomenon can be traced back to images of Black women from times of slavery. This work focuses on the added struggles battered Black women must endure, and how the intersection of their race and their gender provide an additional platform for them to undergo suffering.



“Aggressive African-American women create problems because they are less likely to accept terms of subordination; therefore, these Black ‘bitches’ must be censured, especially those who complain about bad housing, poor schools, abusive partners, sexual harassment, as well as their own depiction in Black popular culture. They and their children must be depicted as unsuitable candidates for racial integration,” P.H. Collins, *Black Sexual Politics*



The Harm of the Stereotype

- Though many Black women believe their perception of strength is a useful tool, it often causes irreparable damage to them
- Black women often have “breakdowns,” or intense depressive episodes due to the unsustainability of constant strength
- If a Black woman finally expresses her frustration with needing to be strong all the time, she then experiences the Angry Black Woman stereotype, which dismisses her as emotional & uncontrollable

Implications for Survivors of Domestic Violence

- If it is known that a Black woman is experiencing abuse, she is shamed for not being strong enough to avoid/escape it
- Black women are discouraged from getting the police involved, due to the threat police pose to Black men, so Black women are expected to be strong & take the abuse
- Strength is often used against them by men as a tool to invalidate their feelings & gain more control over Black women
- Black women recognize their strength, & often will leave abusive relationships & fight back more than White women do