

Women's History Month: Strong Black Women Schema

BLACK MENTAL
WELLNESS



Black Mental
Wellness

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Let's Talk about Strong Black Women

The Strong Black Women Schema describes society's unrealistic expectation of Black women to demonstrate emotional strength, caretaking abilities, and independence, despite what they are truly feeling beneath the "strength" and to prevent looking "weak." Dr. Jazz Keyes reported that the Black Women Schema stems from the stereotypes of "Mammy" and "Superwoman". Mammy has been described as a Black woman who serves and tends to the needs of others and Superwoman is a woman who has the power to continue to keep pushing through without showing any signs of weakness.

Dr. Cheryl Woods-Giscombé coined the term Superwoman Schema to highlight five elements that many Black women may experience including, feeling an obligation to present an image of strength, an obligation to suppress emotions, resistance to being vulnerable, a drive to succeed despite limited resources, and feeling an obligation to help others.

Impact of Black Women Schema

Research suggests that the Strong Black Women Schema is negatively associated with Black Women's mental health, health outcomes, and relationships. Due to the perceived pressure to maintain and uphold strength, the Strong Black Women Schema may increase symptoms of depression, anxiety, and avoidance. In addition, Castelin and White (2022) found that the Black Women Schema is related to depression and is a risk factor for suicidal ideations in Black Women.

The Theory of Silencing Self (Crowley Jack, 1991) suggests that women suppress their thoughts, feelings, and needs in order to avoid conflict, rejection, or abandonment by others. Building on this theory, Adams et al., (2019) reported that silencing behaviors lead to inhibiting self-expression to maintain relationships and to circumvent retaliation, loss, and conflict. This pattern is evident through the Strong Black Women Schema as women silence themselves to present as accommodating outwardly, but may feel anger or resentment internally, either towards society or themselves, as they try to meet society's unrealistic expectations.

Dear Black Women



You have probably been told at some point in your life from family, friends, acquaintances or even strangers that you are too angry, too sensitive, you give such a motherly energy, or you can handle everything. This is your sign to take all of the labels that people have projected on to you, and let them go. I know it is hard trust me...living in a world that was not built for your advantage. It may seem that you have so much to do and so little time to do everything. You may also be feeling the pressure of the world sitting on your shoulders. However, it is time to let it go. Let go of the labels, let go of the stereotypes, let go of the pressures of being a *Super Black Woman*. That cape can take a break today. Go enjoy the sounds of the outdoors, whether that is in a city or in the suburbs, sit with your feelings, allow yourself to cry, or go catch up with a friend. It is time to honor yourself not only during Women's History Month but every month, every day, and every chance you get.

As Black Women, we have the power to redefine the narrative of what it means to be strong. Strong does not mean sacrificing yourself for others or silencing your emotions or needs. It also does not mean that you have to do everything for everybody. It takes strength to carve out time to care for yourself in a world that thrives off of you staying busy. It takes strength to tell the world to pause while you refocus your efforts internally to protect yourself. I am not saying that you should overlook everything that you have to do, but it is time to take the pressure off of yourself and start to level up. Start to surround yourself with people who check in on you and support you and reconsider who you follow on social media. Everyone in your life is not suppose to understand the shoes you walk in everyday but they are suppose to support you and help you and allow you to take that pressure off.

Black Queen continue to take up space, even if it feels uncomfortable, you start second guessing yourself, or if imposter syndrome starts to arise again. Remember you got this. Celebrate yourself and to take time for yourself. We all are holding so much, whether that is school, family, work, or life. But, do not forget that you are made for yourself, not for what society thinks you should be. If you needed a reminder today, here it is— take care of yourself, check in with your body and mind, and ask yourself, "what do I need today?" It is okay to cry, it is okay to express your emotions, it is okay to seek help. It does not make you any less of a Black Woman, in fact it takes strength to be vulnerable..

I want you to ask yourself today: How are you going to REDEFINE "Strong Black Woman"?

Love,
Another Black Woman



Resources

- [Healing is a Journey](#)
- [Center for Black Women's Wellness](#)
- [Loveland Therapy Fund for Black Women and Girls](#)
- *How We Heal: Uncover Your Power and Set Yourself Free* by Alexandra Elle
- *Matters of the Heart. Healing Your Relationship with Yourself and Those You Love* by Dr Thema Bryant
- *Sisterhood Heals: The Transformative Power of Healing in Community* by Dr. Joy Harford Bradford
- Take time for yourself
- Gain support from your inner circle
- Remove people from your social media that no longer serve a purpose
- Reevaluate your circle and what you are consuming from these relationships

Thank you for reading!

References

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