

# The Contradictory Effect of the Strong Black Woman Trope in the Media

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# INTRODUCTION

The strong Black woman trope was created as a way to deny the systematic victimization of Black women, and the impact of this trope creates a contradiction where Black women are socialized to rely upon their victimization in order to obtain the idea of becoming a strong Black woman.

# INTRODUCTION

- History of the Strong Black Woman Trope
- The Impact of Media
- Effect of the Strong Black Woman Trope
- The importance of creating better images of Black women in the media



# INTRODUCTION

- What is the Strong Black Woman Trope?
  - Resilient
  - Self-sacrificing
  - Caretaker – “Mammy” (Carter & Rossi, 2019)
- Why was the Strong Black Woman Trope created?
  - Perfect Model of a Slave
  - Black women don’t need help
  - Deflect responsibility for abuse

# INTRODUCTION

- What are the negative effects of the Strong Black Woman Trope
  - Emotional Suppression
  - Poor mental health
  - Fails to set boundaries
- What is the Contradiction of the Strong Black Woman Trope
  - Carries undue burdens of others
  - Subject to abuse because everyone believes she can handle it
  - Uses her strength to protect people from accountability

# Current Research

- Socialization of Black women through the Strong Black Woman Trope
  - Low levels of self-compassion
  - Dating Violence
  - High levels of racial centrality (Thomas et al., 2022)
- The Strong Black Woman and Cultural Betrayal
  - Protect within group abusers
  - Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)
  - Black male privilege
  - Coddling Black boys



# CURRENT RESEARCH

- The Strong Black Woman Trope in the Media
  - Internalize Media Images (Jean et al., 2022)
  - Embrace the Strong Black Woman compared to other Negative Stereotypes
    - The Angry Black Woman - Sapphire (Jones et al., 2021)
    - The Jezebel Stereotype (Leath et al., 2021)
  - Influence on Domestic Violence (Moss et al., 2022)

# CURRENT RESEARCH

- Using the Media to Map New Paths
  - Decision making process to leave violent situations (Arboit & Padoin, 2022)
  - Decision of informal support to contact a domestic violence hotline (Gregory et al., 2021)
  - Male responses to domestic violence programs with “positive masculinity” (Taliep et al., 2021)



# BIBLICAL APPLICATION

Galatians 4: 22-30

- Our inheritance in the Kingdom of God is Freedom
- The Strong Black Woman Trope was born of slavery and mentally trains Black women to embrace a slavery mentality
- In order to be free audiences must become aware of images that promote a slavery mentality and embrace new images that promote freedom

# Gaps in Research

- Studies have been conducted on mental health issues related to the Strong Black woman trope, but not specifically how to combat the damage the trope creates in the media
- Studies have also investigated the Strong Black Woman trope in the socialization of Black women, but they have not paired the Strong Black Woman trope with the coddling of Black men

# Proposed Study

- Evaluate the association between the coddling of Black men and the contradictory effect of the Strong Black Woman
- Understand the types of media that demonstrate the contradictory effect of the Strong Black Woman Trope
- Develop media that will be empowering to Black women



# Purpose of the Study

- Describe the contradictory effect of the Strong Black Woman Trope
- Expose audiences to media that demonstrates the contradictory effect of the Strong Black Woman Trope
- Qualitatively assess the reaction of the audience and map the type of media images that would empower Black women in the media

# Research Questions

- What types of media images would help audiences become aware of the contradictory effect of the Strong Black Woman trope?
- What types of media images would be empowering for Black women in the face of so many negative media stereotypes?

# Proposed Method

- Expose participants to media that demonstrates the contradictory effect of the Strong Black Woman Trope
- Participants
  - Black women ages 18-45
- Measurements
  - Focus Group Interviews
  - Survey data
- Experimental manipulator
  - Film Media



# Proposed Method

- Interview Questions

- How has the image of the Strong Black Woman effected you?
- In what ways can you see the Strong Black Woman as both weak and strong at the same time?
- What can black women do to avoid the contradictions of the Strong Black woman trope?
- What types of images in the media do you think will help reverse the negative impact of the Strong Black woman trope?

# Proposed Method

- Survey Data
  - Have you ever experienced Intimate Partner Violence?
  - Do you feel as if you have ever coddled a significant Black male in your life (son, brother, intimate relation)
  - Have you ever felt as though you had to bare more social responsibility than your Black male counterparts?



# Proposed Method

Film Clip: Then Sings My Soul (Andrews, 2023)

A Black woman defending her man against her daughter





# Future Research

- Black women developing and sharing their own narratives using film with the themes from the research
  - Black women coddling Black Men
  - The negative aspects of the Strong Black Woman Trope
  - Themes that emerge from the research

# Conclusion

- The character trait of “strength” can be misleading when discussing the weakness of the Strong Black Woman
- The socialization of Black women to be strong can be associated with the coddling of Black men
- In addition to the historical application from slavery the Strong Black Woman trope may also be related to Black women using strength to compensate for the failures of Black men
- The Media can be used to make audiences aware of this schema and write new narratives to empower Black women



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