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The Harmful Effects of the Strong Black Women Ideal: A Mediation Model



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Introduction

- The Strong Black Woman (SBW) ideal depicts someone who is nurturing, self-reliant, hides their emotions, and strong willed (Nelson, Cardemil, & Adeoye, 2016).
- This ideal is associated with psychological distress, low self-esteem, and chronic health conditions (Thomas, Witherspoon, & Speight, 2004).
- Maladaptive perfectionism (MP) is defined as having unrealistically high standards, being overconcerned with mistakes, and perceiving a discrepancy between personal standards and one's actual performance (Slaney, Rice, Mobley, Trippi, & Ashby, 2001). MP is associated with greater stress, negative affect, and suicide ideation (Chang, Watkins, & Banks, 2004).
- Women who endorse the SBW ideal are likely to be self-critical and set high standards for themselves, thus, the SBW ideal may be associated with MP, which is associated with negative psychological outcomes.
- Self-compassion is defined as viewing oneself with kindness and nonjudgment in the midst of personal suffering, perceived failure, or feelings of inadequacy (Neff, 2003).
- Studies have shown that maladaptive coping serves as a mediator between MP and mental health outcomes (Flett, Hewitt, & De Rosa, 1996).
- Because those with high MP are likely to be self-critical and focus on imperfections, they are unlikely to be kind to themselves in the midst of difficulties. Leary and colleagues (2007) found that MP was associated with low self-compassion, which is linked to psychological distress.
- Those who endorse the SBW ideal might be vulnerable for MP tendencies, which is associated with low self-compassion, in turn influencing psychological outcomes.

Hypothesis

- We hypothesized a serial mediation model wherein SBW would be associated with MP, which is associated with low self-compassion, in turn leading to negative psychological outcomes.

Method

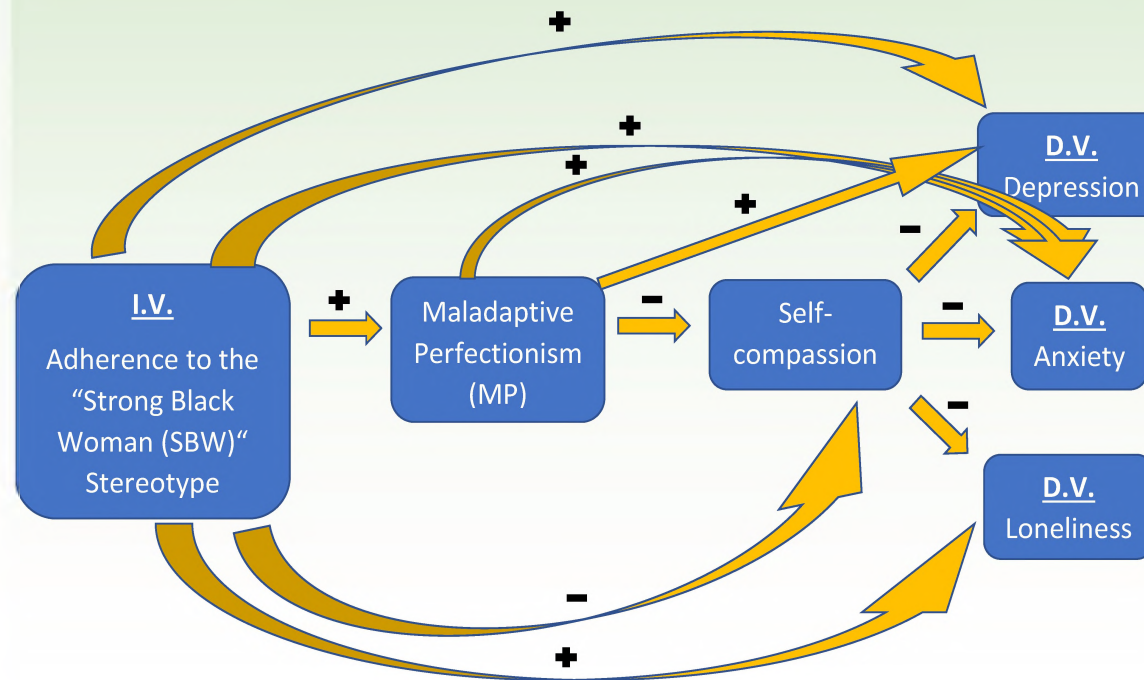
Participants

- 237 female African American undergraduate students took part of our online survey.

Measures:

- Almost Perfect Scale-Revised (Slaney, Mobley, Trippi, Ashby, & Johnson, 1996).
- Depression, Anxiety, and Stress Scale (Lovibond & Lovibond, 1995).
- Self-Compassion Scale (Neff, 2003).
- Short Loneliness Scale (Hays & Dimatteo, 1987).
- Stereotypic Roles for Black Women Scale (Thomas et al., 2004).

Results



The model was a good fit to the data: $\chi^2(116, N = 237) = 143.58, p = .042, CFI = .99, RMSEA = .03$ (90% Confidence Interval [CI]: .01, .05), SRMR = .03. All the paths were significant except for the path from SBW to MP and to loneliness. The bootstrap procedure for testing the indirect effects indicated that the serial mediation effects from SBW to MP to self-compassion and to each of the three outcomes were significant.

Conclusion

The results supported our serial mediation hypothesis and suggested that MP and self-compassion are two mechanisms that underlie the association between SBW and negative mental health. The study's clinical implications highlight the importance of creating coping strategies for MP and to cultivate SBW's self-compassion.

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