Original Research Article

When Being Strong Is Bad: The Strong Black Woman Stereotype's Effect On Young Girls

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ABSTRACT

This study explores how the Strong Black Woman (SBW) stereotype impacts Black girls in high school. The SBW stereotype portrays Black women as tough, resilient, and self-reliant, but it can also pressure them to hide vulnerability and avoid asking for help. It draws on qualitative research with Black high school girls –ages 14 to 18– focusing on how they experience this stereotype, the sources of pressure, and its emotional effects. Thirteen girls were interviewed following a semi-structured interview approach, to which they all shared feelings of being expected to always be strong, whether from teachers, peers, or society at large. That led to stress, anxiety, and emotional suppression. Many described ways they try to resist, like seeking supportive friends or redefining strength to include vulnerability. The study uses Critical Discourse Analysis by connecting these experiences to the historical roots of the SBW stereotype, from slavery to media portrayals and social norms today. These findings show the importance of creating school environments that allow Black girls to be seen, supported, and free to express their full selves. While the study is limited in size, it highlights the hidden costs of the SBW stereotype and the need for spaces where Black girls can thrive, both resilient and human.

Keywords: Strong Black Woman Stereotype (SBW); Qualitative Research; Physical and Mental Health; Black High School Girls; Racialized Gender Stereotypes; Adultification Bias; Coping Mechanism

INTRODUCTION

The Strong Black Woman stereotype is a deeply embedded cultural narrative that positions Black women as consistently resilient, emotionally stoic, self-sacrificing, and capable of enduring hardship without external support. While often framed as empowering, this trope can obscure the need for emotional vulnerability and contribute to long-term psychological strain. Its origins can be traced to the transatlantic slave trade, and its reinforcements continue to influence contemporary media, educational institutions, and interpersonal relationships. Which shapes perceptions of Black women and girls as innately capable of withstanding adversity (1).

While prior research has explored the effects of this stereotype on adult Black women, particularly in professional or healthcare contexts, there remains a notable gap in understanding how younger Black girls encounter and internalize the SBW trope within educational settings (2). This study seeks to address this gap by focusing on the experiences of Black girls in U.S. high schools, where adolescence coincides with key stages of identity formation, academic pressure, and peer socialization. Drawing on semi-structured interviews with 13 high school students, this research explores how the SBW stereotype manifests in everyday school life and

how it influences emotional well-being and help-seeking behaviors. The study is guided by the overarching question: *To what extent does the Strong Black Woman stereotype impact Black girls navigating high school?* It is further structured around four sub-questions: To what extent do Black girls in high school internalize the SBW stereotype? In what ways do they experience pressure to conform to this stereotype at school (e.g., in classrooms, with peers, or from teachers)? What emotional or psychological effects do they associate with being seen as 'strong'? And how do Black girls navigate or resist the expectations placed on them by this stereotype?

To investigate these questions, the study employed a qualitative design using semi-structured interviews with 13 Black female high school students. Participants were recruited through purposive and snowball sampling, and interviews were conducted between January and April 2025 either in person or remotely, depending on participant preference. A flexible interview guide served as the primary research instrument, prompting students to describe how the SBW stereotype appears in their daily school experiences, how they understand and respond to expectations of strength, and how these expectations affect their emotional well-being and help-seeking behaviors. Interviews lasted 30–40 minutes, were audio-recorded using a digital recorder or built-in call-recording software and were transcribed verbatim for analysis. Data were analyzed using Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), supported by an Excel-based coding matrix that allowed themes, patterns in language, and discourse features to be organized systematically. Manual coding, iterative refinement of categories, and supervision through peer debriefing strengthened reliability and ensured the analysis remained grounded in participants' voices. All materials, such as audio files, transcripts, coding matrices, and analytic notes, were stored securely in encrypted folders, providing transparency and enabling the study to be evaluated or reproduced by other researchers. By addressing these questions, the study aims to contribute to emerging conversations about racialized gender norms in schools and highlights the need for more attentive, culturally responsive approaches to student well-being.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Origins of the SBW

The SBW stereotype has roots in 19th-century colonial narratives. European missionaries and explorers depicted African women as hypersexual, primitive, and physically resilient qualities, contrasted with the idealized image of White European women as delicate and virtuous (3). These accounts laid the foundation for the racialized view of Black women as inherently strong and emotionally stoic.

Colonial imagery reinforced these ideas. In a famous painting of missionary David Livingstone's lion attack, African figures in the background are depicted naked, disorganized, and animalistic, reinforcing the trope of Africans as uncivilized (4). Such portrayals, alongside written accounts like the 1908 novel describing "naked savages"[1] awaiting missionary guidance, reflect how normalized these racial assumptions became in Europe.

Although the SBW stereotype does not explicitly describe African women as uncivilized, colonial narratives that depicted them as intellectually inferior and emotionally hardened laid the groundwork. Many accounts describe Europeans forcibly impregnating African women on a massive scale, leading to the creation of new racial subgroups such as the Coloureds in South Africa and the Métis in French colonial Senegal (5). Though this was just one form of assault and exertion of power, the more African women did not resist, the more the mistreatment continued. Over time, it contributed to the internalization of the belief that they must endure everything in silence. Creating this as a racist and colonial narrative that painted Black African women as less intelligent helped lay the groundwork for the SBW. Furthermore, missionary Cicely Hooper's 1927 (6) account of a local woman protecting herself from a hyena, for instance, reinforced the image of Black women as brave and physically formidable. Narratives by European explorers and missionaries helped create the preconceived notion that African women were naturally formidable and uncivilized, which made it easier for people to accept ideologies like Social Darwinism and pseudoscience, both of which also laid the groundwork for the SBW stereotype.

Social Darwinism was an ideology that misapplied Charles Darwin's Theory of Natural Selection or "survival of the fittest," (7) to societies in the 19th to early 20th century. After Darwin's death, thinkers like Herbert Spencer and Francis Galton expanded on his ideas and applied them to race, class, and intelligence structures. Francis Galton in particular expanded Charles Darwin's ideas and coined a new term called "Eugenics" (8). Francis Galton, in particular, coined the term "eugenics" and argued that the white European race was biologically

superior to others. He advocated for selective breeding to "improve" the human species, characterizing non-European racial groups as naturally inferior (9). Galton's ideas were later discredited by many scientists in the late 20th century because they were built on an "incorrect understanding of Mendelian genetics". Still, his ideas had a long-lasting impact on how Black people were perceived, especially Black women. Social Darwinism viewed Black people as naturally physically strong but biologically inferior, meaning mentally they were not capable of processing or having real feelings (10). This sustained the idea that Black women were stronger, more capable of enduring pain, physical labor, and emotional suffrage in comparison to their white counterparts (11). This later becomes the central idea for the Strong Black Woman stereotype. By painting Black women as biologically tough and less sensitive to pain, (12) people were able to use Social Darwinist logic and excuse the physical exploitation of Black women. Social Darwinism also ignores and dismisses the emotional health of Black women by characterizing them as strong beings and implying that they are incapable of having real feelings. This has led to their vulnerability, and mental health being minimized or overlooked in places like the medical field. Although Social Darwinism, Pseudoscience, and slavery did not directly create the SBW stereotype, it laid the intellectual and cultural groundwork that reinforced and legitimized the stereotype.

Historical Reinforcement

The abolishment of slavery may have freed African Americans from slavery under the law, but the remnants of slavery are still present in the stereotypes. Throughout history, the SBW stereotype was reinforced by historical caricatures and portrayals in the media. The Jezebel is a stereotype of its own and portrays Black women as immoral and lustful beings that are seductive by nature (13). The Jezebel is usually a dark-skinned character that has wide hips, large breasts, and lips, and is supposed to embody a Black woman. Likewise, the SBW stereotype and the Jezebel stereotype origins derive from the same centuries-old societal idea that Black women are hypersexual, "uncontrolled" lustful beings, and the same pseudoscientific idea that Black people are intellectually and emotionally inferior (14). Those ideas played a part in creating this caricature that does not think or care about anything but her sexual desires (15). The creation of the Jezebel characterizes all Black women as immoral or complicit, even though Black women are different individuals, not a monolith.

In doing that, the caricature grew and "distorted the conceptualization of Black women." (16). The jezebels contributed to the reinforcement and perpetuation of the SBW trope because it stripped Black women away from their humanity, which would be used to justify any form of violence perpetrated towards Black women without protest or need for healing.

The mammy caricature (17) is another stereotype that uses a caricature of a subjectively unattractive and overweight Black woman. She is a caregiver/nanny to a white family that she so lovingly adores (18). The caricature is supposed to enforce that Black nannies love their white employers and their caregiving position so much that they spend their whole lives taking care of their white family. This caricature is quite simply a myth that alludes to the labor many Black nannies were doing was justified because they loved it so much. The mammy also contributed to Black women being seen as selfless and emotionally unshakable, never needing help or rest while doing labor-intensive work. The mammy was supposed to work without complaint, and added to Black women being seen as able to "handle anything". As a result, the Mammy trope laid the cultural foundation for the SBW stereotype by promoting the expectation that Black women must be strong at all times, even to their own detriment.

Modern reinforcements

Today, the SBW stereotype is enforced through modern television, music, social media, and even more social interactions. Black women are constantly portrayed as invulnerable caretakers, emotionally apathetic, and resilient to all hardships, even at the expense of their humanity, complexity, and emotional well-being.

Annalise Keating is a fictional character in the legal-drama show called *How to Get Away With Murder,* which first aired in 2014 (19). Media outlets and fandoms describe Annalise as a "self-sufficient" and "confident" character. Throughout the series, watchers learn that Annalise endured sexual abuse from her uncle as a child, the loss of her unborn child and husband, all while facing the pressure and hardships of invalidating Black womanhood in a white male-dominated field. Annalise's character mirrored how Black women are punished for vulnerability and rewarded for strength. After a mental breakdown, Annalise goes to rehab for her alcoholism and trauma, which in itself was a rare act of self-care and honesty. Instead of being met with compassion, she faces legal consequences like disbarment threats and public scrutiny in the media. As a

result, Annalise frequently suppresses her emotions and traumas as a survival mechanism. Like when she loses her unborn child in a car accident, she quickly returns to work to hide her pain and becomes emotionally closed off. Annalise suppresses her emotions to maintain control and protect herself (20) because she was raised in a society where her "strength" was a mask she had to wear to protect herself and succeed in a racist and sexist legal system. This role clearly emphasizes how Black women's strength and independence, which is pushed in the media, can become dangerous when they are not met with the proper emotional, institutional, or structural support.

In hip-hop, R&B, and pop, song lyrics highlighted the strength, resilience, and loyalty of Black women even after being mistreated. In 200,1 a popular girl group band called Destiny's Child released a song called Survivor (21). This song won multiple awards, like the Grammy Awards for Best R&B Performance by a Duo or Group with Vocals in 2001, and a Soul Train Award for Entertainer of the Year under the female category in 2001 (22). The lyrics in this song sometimes unintentionally reinforced emotional detachment and resilience negatively. The main chorus of the song has lyrics that say: "I'm a survivor, I'm not gonna give up, I'm not gonna stop, I'm gonna work harder." Although these lines are supposed to empower women, it also perpetuates some elements of the SBW stereotype. The lines allude to an image of a woman who not only endures hardships but thrives despite them. By implying that strength means not needing help or expressing emotion, it reinforces the stereotype that Black women are naturally resilient to the point of emotional numbness. This contributes to harmful beliefs that they don't experience pain or emotional distress in the same way others do. The lines also suggest a near-invulnerable strength that aligns with the SBW archetype.

Modern And Life-Threatening Effects of the SBW Stereotype

As a result of the SBW's reinforcements, many people today have pre-consumed notions of Black women's physical and emotional strength. Thousands of Black women are facing medical neglect as a result of the stereotype being internalized within healthcare systems. A paper published by The Harvard School of Public Health called "America is Failing its Black Mothers" goes into detail about how racial bias and the SBW stereotype contribute to disproportionately high rates

of maternal mortality among Black women in the U.S. The paper highlights that Black women in the United States are three to four times more likely to die from pregnancy-related complications than white women, even when education and income levels are controlled for. The report links these disparities to systemic racism and harmful stereotypes, like the belief that Black women are more pain-tolerant (the SBW), which can lead to providers minimizing their symptoms or delaying critical care (23).

In 2025, the National Institutes of Health (NIH) conducted an assessment of how the SBW stereotype is affecting Black women in professional settings such as the workplace. The study revealed that many Black women feel pressured to present themselves as consistently resilient, composed, and emotionally unaffected, even when experiencing high levels of stress or burnout. This emotional suppression is linked to a phenomenon researchers call "racial battle fatigue," where the chronic stress of navigating microaggressions, racial bias, and performance expectations takes a serious toll on mental and physical health (24).

The NIH also found that nearly 60% of Black professional women surveyed felt they could not express vulnerability or emotional distress at work without fear of being perceived as weak, incompetent, or "too emotional." Many participants also reported that their workplace environments lacked psychological safety, leading them to avoid seeking help or support, even in moments of crisis.

Moreover, the study indicated that over 70% of respondents felt a constant need to "overperform" to prove their worth in predominantly white or male-dominated work environments. This relentless striving, driven by both internalized expectations and external pressures, contributed to high levels of anxiety, insomnia, and depressive symptoms. The report also emphasized that the SBW stereotype doesn't just shape how others view Black women; it deeply affects how Black women view themselves and what they feel permitted to express.

There is currently little to no research on how the SBW stereotype affects young Black girls in secondary school settings. While some have been written about the stereotypes' impact on adult Black women in professional or healthcare environments, the experiences of Black girls during adolescence remain underexplored. This lack of focused research is concerning, as adolescence is when many young people begin to form their identity, respond to societal expectations, and internalize cultural norms.

METHODS AND MATERIALS

This study draws on primary qualitative research conducted between January and April 2025 with Black female high school students in the United States. Interviews were conducted both in person and remotely, depending on participants' preferences and locations. The study examined how the SBW stereotype shapes students' everyday experiences in secondary school, particularly in relation to emotional well-being, academic expectations, and interactions with peers and teachers.

Participant Recruitment

Empirical data were collected through 13 semi-structured interviews with Black girls currently enrolled in U.S. high schools. Interviews lasted approximately 30–40 minutes and were conducted using a mixed-modality approach: five were held in person, while the remaining seven took place via video call or telephone. A flexible topic guide was developed to allow participants to reflect on how the SBW stereotype manifests in their lives and how they respond to or resist the associated expectations. Questions explored the meanings they attach to the stereotype, their lived experiences in school contexts, and the emotional impacts of being perceived as "strong." Follow-up probes were used to explore examples and clarify responses.

Data Collection

A purposive and snowball sampling approach was followed to recruit participants. They were eligible if they identified as Black or African American girls and were currently enrolled in a U.S. high school (grades 9–12). Interviewees were initially identified by the researcher through existing relationships, with additional participants referred by peers and mutual contacts. While this recruitment strategy limits the broadness of findings, efforts were made to include participants with varied backgrounds, including different grade levels, academic profiles, and extracurricular involvement, to capture a range of perspectives. Verbal consent was obtained from all interviewees, and each participant was provided with an overview of the study's purpose prior to participation.

Analytic Method

Interview data were analyzed using Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), a method that explores how language and experiences reflect, reinforce, and contest stereotypes. CDA enabled me to make an in-depth examination of how the SBW stereotype is reproduced and negotiated within school contexts. The analysis follows the theoretical and methodological principles outlined in Louise Cummings's book, which emphasizes the role of race and power in educational discourse, and situates these ideas within the broader literature on discourse, power, and racialized gender identity (25). To support analysis, an Excel-based analytical framework was developed. Themes were identified through manual coding of participant responses, using an Excel-based matrix to organize patterns in language, tone, and emphasis.

Ethical Consideration and Confidentiality

This research was conducted in accordance with the National Institutes of Health's (NIH) research ethics guidelines. Participants were informed of their right to skip any question or withdraw from the study at any time without consequence. Interviews were audio-recorded and later transcribed, with verbal consent obtained before participation. Written parental consent was also secured, and participants' parents were fully briefed in advance. This consent procedure was deemed appropriate given the minimal-risk nature of the study and the participants' capacity to consent.

To protect participant confidentiality, all data were de-identified immediately after transcription. Names were removed and replaced with pseudonyms (e.g., Participant 3), and identifying details such as specific school names, teachers, or extracurricular affiliations were excluded. Ages were reported only within a range (14–18) rather than as exact values. Consent forms were stored separately from interview data to prevent linkage. Audio recordings were deleted after transcription, and all digital files were stored on a secure, password-protected drive accessible only to the researcher.

Extra Considerations

As a 17-year-old high schooler, my positionality inevitably shaped the research process. My existing relationships with the participants, along with our shared racial and gender identities, likely fostered trust and openness during the interviews. This also helped in facilitating deeper reflections on sensitive topics such as one's family's role in racialized gender expectations and emotional vulnerability. However, I remained critically aware of the power dynamics at play, particularly given my role as a researcher. I strived to approach each interview with humility, curiosity, and care, creating a space where participants felt heard and respected. My interpretations of the data are informed by both prior

scholarly knowledge and lived experience. I engaged in peer debriefings with my academic supervisor to mitigate bias and remain attuned to the participants' voices throughout the analysis.

RESULTS

Through this lens, the study explores how the SBW stereotype is internalized and reinforced by school administrators, peers, and family members, and how that internalization affects Black girls' mental and emotional well-being. Through my qualitative research, I found that the SBW stereotype has become ingrained in the minds of Black girls, which negatively impacts their mental health. This internalization is a result of school administrators, classmates, and family, whether consciously or unconsciously, reinforcing the stereotype.

Internalization of the SBW stereotype

To understand the extent to which Black girls internalize the SBW stereotype, I asked each participant: "To what extent is the SBW stereotype internalized by Black girls in high school?" While their responses varied, a consistent theme emerged: every participant showed some degree of internalization.

13 girls described feeling obligated to "defy all odds," "stay strong," or "not show weakness," even when overwhelmed. One participant shared that she avoided crying in front of others because it would make her seem "soft" or "weak." Another explained:

> *"Many girls at my school...internalize the stereotype, intentionally or unintentionally. On social media, whenever it's a post celebrating Black women, it's always like, 'Oh, you guys are so strong.' When young Black girls hear that, they internalize it whether they know it or not."*

These responses reflect key elements of the SBW schema: emotional restraint, caretaking, and self-reliance, even when personally harmful. That all 13 participants echoed these traits suggests that the stereotype is not only a societal expectation but one that Black girls begin absorbing as early as adolescence. This early internalization shapes how they express emotions, ask for help, and understand vulnerability.

School-based reinforcement

After establishing that SBW traits were internalized to some extent by all 13 participants, I examined the sources of this pressure within school environments. To explore this, I asked: "In what ways do you feel pressure to conform to the SBW stereotype at school?" Participants described both subtle and explicit reinforcements. Several recounted being praised for "maturity" or "independence" in ways that felt like expectations rather than compliments. Others described being relied on by peers for emotional support or academic help without receiving the same support in return. Participant 3 explained:

> *"A lot of the time, when I ask for help, like requesting an extension, my teachers dismiss it. I feel like it's because they assume I don't need it because of the way I carry myself at school."* She added, *"I was going through a lot, and I'd gotten good at not showing it. But getting an extension would've helped alleviate a lot of stress."*

Here, the denial of support reinforces the idea that Black girls must manage stress silently and independently. Repeated interactions like this normalize emotional suppression and contribute to feelings of neglect or invisibility. Another participant described how school-based expectations discouraged vulnerability:

> *"I can't afford to break down because no one else will have my back. If I'm not strong for myself, who else will be?"* (Participant 7)

Across the sample, all 13 participants reported being labeled "aggressive" by teachers or administrators when expressing frustration. Ten participants said they were told to "calm down," which made them hesitant to advocate for themselves again. This pattern aligns with research on adultification bias and emotional suppression in schools, illustrating how institutional responses reinforce the SBW stereotype by invalidating Black girls' emotions.

Psychological Effects on Black Girls

Participants consistently reported psychological strain tied to being perceived as a "Strong Black Woman." When asked, "What emotional or psychological effects do you associate with being seen as strong?" Many described emotional exhaustion, isolation, and pressure to maintain composure at all times. One student explained:

> *"Just because I chose not to show everything I was dealing with didn't mean I wasn't struggling.*

And when I finally did speak up...they still believed I was fine because I looked like I was handling it."

This reveals how the SBW stereotype can invalidate Black girls' emotional needs, making them feel unseen or unsupported. Several girls also described the expectation to "push through" challenges without complaint. One participant noted:

"If I ever show I'm tired or overwhelmed, people will think I'm weak. And if I'm weak, people will walk all over me. So I just suck it up until I'm burnt out."

These accounts illustrate how internalized strength might lead to chronic stress, exhaustion, and long-term mental health consequences. The pressure to appear strong prevented many girls from engaging in rest, practicing self-care, or seeking support when needed.

Resistance To The Stereotype

Despite the pressures associated with the SBW stereotype, many participants described ways they actively resisted it, often through overachievement. Several girls felt compelled to excel academically or in extracurricular activities to counter stereotypes of incompetence or laziness. Participant 8 shared:

"I feel like I have to be the best in class so nobody can say I don't belong here. If I mess up once, people will think I'm lazy or don't deserve my spot."

This reveals a double bind: resisting the stereotype through excellence often reinforces the expectation of constant strength. Over time, this can prevent girls from expressing vulnerability or seeking necessary emotional support. Participant 5 captured the emotional cost of this cycle:

"Sometimes I just want to be normal and not have to push myself so much. I don't know why I feel like I'm going to fail if I'm not excelling."

DISCUSSION

Being perceived as an SBW has significant psychological effects, as participants reported stress, emotional suppression, and pressure to appear resilient at all times. Black girls consistently reported that the

pressure to embody the SBW stereotype within school spaces, reinforced by teachers, peers, and classroom expectations, led to feelings of emotional strain, isolation, and the need to constantly suppress vulnerability.

To what extent is the SBW stereotype internalized by Black girls in high school?

Findings showed that all 13 participants demonstrated some degree of internalization. Many girls described feeling obligated to be emotionally resilient, avoid crying, and "keep it together" in ways that aligned directly with the SBW schema. These results are consistent with prior literature showing that Black women often internalize strength-based expectations beginning early in life (26, 27). However, this study extends previous research by demonstrating that internalization starts as early as adolescence, even before young women enter college or the workforce. This area has been largely understudied.

How do school environments reinforce the SBW stereotype for Black girls?

Participants reported that teachers and administrators reinforced the stereotype through both subtle and explicit practices. Being labeled "aggressive," denied help, or praised for "maturity" often made girls feel pressure to present as responsible, composed, and self-sufficient. Their reported experiences mirror findings from prior scholarship on adultification bias, which shows that Black girls are perceived as older, less innocent, and more emotionally resilient than their peers (28).

However, this study contributes new insight by showing how reinforcement occurs through routine academic interactions, such as requesting extensions, speaking up in class, or seeking support. These everyday practices—rarely examined in SBW research—demonstrate how school structures normalize emotional suppression for Black girls.

What emotional and psychological effects do Black girls associate with being perceived as "strong"?

Participants described chronic stress, emotional isolation, burnout, and fear of showing vulnerability. These findings align with research on racial battle fatigue (29) and the mental health burden of the SBW stereotype among adult Black women. Yet, this study provides a crucial contribution: while much research documents these effects among adult women, very little has focused on adolescents. The results show severe psychological strain that begins much earlier. Suggesting

that the stereotype's emotional consequences affect developmental trajectories well before adulthood.

How do Black girls resist or respond to the stereotype?

Participants resisted the stereotype most commonly through overachievement, using strong performance as a shield against negative assumptions. While literature on Black women has highlighted high performance as a coping mechanism (30), this study shows that the same dynamic appears among teens navigating academic spaces. Yet this resistance is a double bind: excelling helps them defy stereotypes but also reinforces the notion that they are endlessly capable and do not need support.

Implications for School Policy, Counseling, and Teacher Training

School Policy: Schools must recognize how disciplinary and academic policies such as extension requests, conflict responses, and emotional expression norms reinforce adultification and emotional suppression. Policies should be evaluated for cultural bias and updated to ensure Black girls have equitable access to academic flexibility and emotional support.

School Counseling: Counselors should be trained to identify internalized strength narratives, normalize vulnerability, and create safe spaces where Black girls can express distress without judgment. Increased access to culturally responsive mental health services is essential.

Teachers require professional development on: Adultification bias, interpreting Black girls' emotional expressions without defaulting to "aggressive" labels, responding supportively to help-seeking behaviors, understanding how seemingly positive praise (e.g., "strong", "independent", "mature") can create harmful pressure, a trauma-informed and culturally responsive approach is crucial for reducing emotional burden and fostering supportive school environments.

Teachers require sustained professional development that addresses adultification bias and supports more accurate, humane interpretations of Black girls' emotional expressions without defaulting to labels such as "aggressive." Such training should emphasize responding supportively to help-seeking behaviors and critically examining how seemingly positive praise (eg., "strong," "independent," or "mature") can inadvertently create harmful pressure. Adopting a trauma-informed and culturally responsive approach is therefore crucial for reducing emotional burden and fostering more supportive and affirming school environments.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this study demonstrates that the Strong Black Woman stereotype exerts a significant and enduring influence on Black girls' emotional and psychological well-being during critical developmental years. Although the stereotype is frequently framed as a marker of resilience, participants' accounts reveal its less visible consequences, including chronic stress, emotional suppression, and sustained pressure to meet unrealistic expectations. These findings underscore the need for schools, families, and communities to recognize the dual nature of the SBW stereotype and its implications for Black girls' mental health. Creating educational environments that allow Black girls to express vulnerability, seek support, and be understood beyond narratives of strength is essential. Such efforts represent not only an issue of equity, but an investment in the dignity, well-being, and future of Black girls navigating institutions that have historically failed to fully acknowledge their humanity.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The author declares no conflicts of interest related to this work.

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