Strong Black Womanhood, Stress, and Coping: A Quantitative Investigation of a Culturally

Encapsulated Phenomenon

Jasmine Graham

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Counselor Education

Laura E. Welfare

Norma Day-Vines

Nancy Bodenhorn

Beverly Bunch-Lyons

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to examine the influence of *Strong Black Woman* attitudes on how

African American women perceive and cope with stress. The study included 100 Black female

faculty, staff, and students from five universities in the eastern region of the United States

including a large, public, research university; a small, private, religious-affiliated university; and

three public, historically Black universities. The following research questions guided the study:

a) What are the respondents' levels of Strong Black Woman attitudes, perceived stress, and

culture-specific coping? b) How does perception of stress predict Strong Black Woman

attitudes? c) How does perception of stress predict the use of culture-specific forms of coping?

d) How do Strong Black Woman attitudes mediate the relationship between perception of stress

and culture-specific coping? These questions were explored through quantitative research

analysis using an Information Questionnaire to collect data regarding demographic background,

the Strong Black Woman Cultural Construct Scale (Hamin, 2003), the Perceived Stress Scale −

10 item (Cohen, Kamarck, Mermelstein,1983; Cohen & Williamson,1988), and the Africultural

Coping Systems Inventory (Utsey, Adams, and Bolden, 2000).

Simple linear regression revealed that Strong Black Woman attitudes of Caretaking, and

Affect Regulation, as well as the Cognitive-Emotional Debriefing form of culture-specific

coping were associated with higher levels of stress. Finally, multiple regression analysis revealed

that Strong Black Woman attitudes did not have a mediating effect on participants' level of

perceived stress and their coping behaviors used in response to stress. Implications of the

findings suggest a need to develop an empirical, theoretical, and clinical understanding of the impact of Strong Black Woman attitudes on women's wellness.

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Twelfth century theologian, John of Salisbury, once wrote:

We are like dwarfs sitting on the shoulders of giants. We see more, and things that are more distant, than they did, not because our sight is superior or because we are taller than they, but because they raise us up, and by their great stature add to ours." (John & McGarry, 1962, p. 167).

In the spirit of this sentiment, I dedicate this dissertation to my late grandmother Mrs. Mary Frances Greene Bryant; a woman among women whose loving tenderness, tenacity, and faith will always be a wellspring of deep inspiration for me; and faithfully acknowledge my grandfather, Mr. William Evans Bryant, Jr. Grandfather, you never have never let me forget the dreams and visions that I have for my life. Moreover, you have never let me forget the dreams and visions you have for my life. Thank you for steering me along the proper path, for instilling

within me values such as hard work and perseverance, and for allowing the light of your legacy to shine through me.

A host of family, friends, and colleagues have supported me throughout the course of my dissertation research project. To each, thank you. Yet, amidst the host, one stands out among them all – my mother. To my mother, Mrs. Maria Bryant Davis, only you know the depth of blessing this doctorate represents in my life. As a single mother, you raised me to live by faith in God. Look how faith has manifested! Look how God has blessed! Thank you for your foresight; for your saw a future ahead of me long before I knew what it meant to believe. To my stepfather, Rev. Ronald E. Davis, thank you for your tireless support of my academic endeavors. Your faith, words of wisdom, and your prayers have both covered and carried me throughout my pursuit of the doctorate. I also wish to specifically acknowledge the support of my father Ronald J. Graham who has always encouraged to me excel in leadership and education.

Finally, to my beloved son, who is yet being fashioned in my womb, I become speechless as I attempt to capture all that I wish to express to you within this acknowledgement. You have captured my heart and given my work a purpose that is beyond mere comprehension. May this body of work be an inspiration to you throughout your life – to know that you can do all things through Christ who gives you the strength and power to excel (Philippians 4:13). My hope is that you travel miles farther, climb degrees higher, and accomplish infinitely more than I have. Mommy loves you.

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Chapter One

Introduction

As a people, African Americans have displayed enormous strength given their survival of horrific moral atrocities such as the great Maafa, a Swahili term referring to the Atlantic Slave Trade; centuries of legalized servitude; subsequent manumission; institution of the Black Codes; and later Jim Crow legislation (Ani, 1994; Diedrich, Gates, & Pedersen, 1999; Edge & Rogers, 2005; Roberson, 1995; Robinson, 2010; Stetson, 1982). Survival of these atrocities has inculcated many African Americans with an identity structure that acknowledges the ability to withstand an enduring set of dehumanizing conditions and circumstances (Amankwaa, 2003; Edge & Rogers, 2005). Against this backdrop, the phenomenon of the Strong Black Woman has evolved. Disturbingly, many African American women have come to recognize and identify with indomitable strength in a manner that shields them from recognizing corresponding vulnerability (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2009; Hill, 2011; hooks, 1981; Jones & Shorter-Gooden, 2003). More specifically, recognizing one's strength is an adaptive response to oppressive forces that promotes survival but consequently is troubling in that it belies the true reality of the average human threshold for psychological distress (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2009; Mitchell & Herring, 1998).

The concept of the Strong Black Woman evolved as a consequence of the tremendous hardship withstood by enslaved Black women. The consequences of slavery were both physical and psychological in nature (Camp, 2004; hooks, 1993; Gaspar & Hine, 1996; Jacobs & Child, 1861; Morton, 1996; White, 1987). During slavery, emotional strength, under the guise of invulnerability and perseverance, became a paradoxical coping mechanism used to survive intolerable conditions (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2009; Boyd, 1999; Camp, 2004; Danois, 2010;

Harris-Lacewell, 2001; Jacobs & Child, 1861; Radford-Hill, 2002; Romero, 2000; Walker-Barnes, 2009; Wallace, 1990). Since female slaves' survival rested largely upon their own devices, skills of dissemblance – the ability to hide one's true feelings from being seen by others-became a self-protecting strategy used to circumvent African American women's inability to rely on others for support and protection (Winkle-Wagner, 2008). Skills of dissemblance were passed down through the generations and taught to children as a protective strategy that could be used to survive the hardships associated with slavery (Camp, 2004). As a result of their ability to demonstrate a superhuman-like strength in the midst of horrific conditions, Black women were perceived as being capable of withstanding acts of enslavement, abuse, and oppression (Painter, 1996). Many contemporary Black women continue to self-present in a way that invokes a mythological imperviousness to struggle which suggests that they, too, are capable of withstanding hardship by way of self-reliance, independence, and infrangibleness that makes them resistant to the reality of their humanity (Boyd, 1995; Harris-Perry, 2011; hooks, 2003; Wallace, 1990).

Background

Conceptually, the Strong Black Woman is an icon to which some African American women ascribe (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2009; Mitchell & Herring, 1998; Wallace, 1990; Woods-Giscombe, 2010). The perceived obligation to manifest emotional strength despite challenging circumstances is the hallmark cultural attitude of the Strong Black Woman icon (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2009; Higginbotham, 1982; Jones & Shorter-Gooden, 2003; Mitchell & Herring, 1998; Shambley-Ebron & Boyle, 2006; Wallace, 1990; Woods-Giscombe, 2010). Often this attitude is demonstrated by African American women in the form of emotional suppression and the portrayal of oneself as resistant to vulnerability and reliance on others (Walker, 1982).

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Additional cultural attitudes of the Strong Black Woman icon include, but are not limited to, possessing a determination to succeed despite insurmountable odds and a selfless obligation towards helping others (Epstein, 1973; Woods-Giscombe, 2010).

Origins of Strong Black Woman Cultural Attitudes

Independence, perseverance, and caretaking among Black women are traditions originated in African socio-cultural and religious heritage (Coker, 2004; Robinson, 1983). These cultural attitudes have been illustrated in the self-sacrifice, endurance, and resilience of generations of African American matriarchs and role models (Radford-Hill, 2002). Displays of strength and independence, while also being able to nurture loved ones and handle intolerable life circumstances, have become nostalgic images for contemporary African American women who aspire to uphold their cultural traditions of independence, perseverance, and caretaking (Coker, 2004; Hill, 2011; Mitchell & Herring, 1998; Shambley-Ebron & Boyle, 2006). Over time, these cultural traditions, attitudes, and behaviors have forged a cultural identity that many refer to as the Strong Black Woman.

Caretaking and Shifting

In addition to holding the day-to-day primary responsibilities of raising children and caring for aging parents and loved ones, African American women are often expected to provide emotional caretaking, in which they constantly avail themselves to the emotional and psychological needs of others, often without regard of their own needs (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2009; Woods-Giscombe, 2010). Given the collective nature of the African American culture, forms of caretaking are not limited to immediate relatives (Pedersen, 2008). Often, African American women selflessly provide support to extended family members, such as grandparents,

grandchildren, aunts, uncles, nieces, nephews, and cousins; as well as close friends; fellow community members; and to their church or other place of worship (Harris-Perry, 2011).

While women, in general, may encounter a myriad of responsibilities that can have a detrimental effect on their personal wellbeing, Black women are additionally subject to a culturally imposed notion that they are impervious to weakness, fragility, or brokenness (Boyd, 1995; Harris-Perry, 2011; hooks, 2003). Therefore, in order to selflessly attend to the needs and desires of others, African American women have learned to mask or dissemble inner feelings, such as frustration, anger, fear, shame, and guilt through acts of shifting (Jones & Shorter-Gooden, 2003; Winkle-Wagner, 2008). Shifting is an internal and invisible self-protective coping strategy that allows African American women the ability to utilize strategic facades of strength to accommodate the expectations of others (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2003; Hine, 1989; Crawley, 2006; Jones & Shorter-Gooden, 2003). Illustratively, shifting occurs when a person alters, or *shifts*, their outward appearance, speech, or demeanor in order to prevent genuine emotional expression (Jones & Shorter-Gooden, 2003).

Reliance on Informal Networks of Support

Women's own emotional and psychological support has often taken the form of religion, spirituality, and, at times, reliance on other women (Dessio et al., 2004; hooks, 2003; Lincoln & Mamiya, 2003; Mitchell & Herring, 1998). Since many African American women have survived atrocious circumstances without formal emotional or psychological support, such as mental health counseling, many African American women who ascribe to the Strong Black Woman identity have developed an internalized belief system which suggests that possessing strength insulates them from emotional and psychological distress (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2007; Boyd, 1999; Amankwaa, 2003). When internalized, Strong Black Woman cultural attitudes can create

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false expectations regarding one's ability to manage life's challenges (Gainor, 1992; Shambley-Ebron& Boyle, 2006; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2001).

Stereotypical Images

African American women have had to confront erroneous stereotypes surrounding race and gender such as the faithful, obedient, servantile *Mammy*; the provocative, sexually promiscuous, temptress *Jezebel*; and the loud, emasculating, uncouth *Sapphire* (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2009; hooks, 1993; Jones & Shorter-Gooden, 2003; McElya, 2007; Harris-Perry, 2011; Wallace, 1990). At times these stereotypes have been debilitating; perpetuating the internalization of Black womanhood as being the antithesis of White womanhood, which has historically been represented as pure, virtuous, and beautiful (Donovan & Williams, 2002; Collins, 1990; Wallace, 1990). In contrast, the Strong Black Woman stereotype, which presents an image that African American women are able to carry other's burdens as their own, all while being driven, capable, and able to succeed despite a life of trials and tribulations associated with race and gender, was constructed as an attempt to celebrate the cultural and gendered heritage of African American women (Epstein, 1973; Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2009). However, criticisms against the Strong Black Woman stereotype suggest that it may contribute to a false persona of superhuman strength which can have a detrimental effect on African American women's wellness (Harris, 1995; Higginbotham, 1982; Mitchell & Herring, 1998).

Statement of the Problem

African American women may feel an obligation to portray themselves as strong and able to survive even the most atrocious of human conditions unscathed (Schreiber, Stern, & Wilson, 2000). However, in believing themselves to be superhumanly strong, African American women may negate their true humanity. Furthermore, believing oneself to be excessively strong can

cause African American women to ignore their own psychological needs (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2009; Coker, 2004; Harris-Lacewell, 2001; Harris-Perry, 2011; Jones & Shorter-Gooden, 2003; Schulz et al., 2006; Radford-Hill, 2002; Reynolds-Dobbs et al., 2008; Robinson, 1983; Wallace, 1990).

African American women's experiences of psychological distress may manifest as anger, frustration, exhaustion, and excessive fatigue (Coker, 2004; Jones & Shorter-Gooden, 2003; Romero, 2000; Woods-Giscombe, 2010). Yet, many African American women who ascribe to Strong Black Woman cultural attitudes are out of touch with their psychological wellbeing and therefore may not recognize these as possible manifestations of psychological distress (Nicolaidis, et al., 2010; Schulz et al., 2006). When African American women do recognize manifestations of psychological distress, the cultural stigma associated with counseling may prevent them from seeking professional mental health counseling (Amankwaa, 2003). Stigma and the reluctance to seek professional mental health counseling is intensified by the fact that many African Americans live in a culture shrouded with secrecy, not understanding that talking about problems helps to alleviate distress and helps people feel less alone (Mitchell & Herring, 1998). It is possible that the culture of secrecy is particularly troubling for women with Strong Black Woman attitudes who, in general, are more reluctant to rely on others for support in times of need.

As a result of their survival of historical and contemporary hardships, African American women are susceptible to Strong Black Woman cultural attitudes which may lead them to minimize stress and result in inadequate coping responses (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2009; Coker, 2004; Edge & Rogers, 2005; Harris-Lacewell, 2001; Jones & Shorter-Gooden, 2003; Schreiber, Stern, & Wilson, 2000; Schulz et al., 2006; Radford-Hill, 2002; Reynolds-Dobbs et al., 2008;

Robinson, 1983; Wallace, 1990). The stigma associated with seeking psychological support along with a general mistrust of health care providers may exacerbate African American women's use of inadequate coping responses, such as self-silencing, "busyness" in the form of immersion in work and social activities, martyrdom through excessive caretaking, overeating, and substance abuse (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2003; Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2009; Hamin, 2008; Jones & Shorter-Gooden, 2003; hooks, 2003; Romero, 2000; Woods-Giscombe, 2010). While the use of some of these coping responses is fine in moderation, it is possible that Strong Black Woman rely exclusively on these strategies as a way to deal with life's challenges and further anesthetize emotional and psychological pain.

As a result of many American's progressive views on race and equality, along with increased opportunities for upward mobility among racial minorities and the re-election of the first African American president of the United States, some scholars have presented the concept of America as a post-racial society (Burnham, 2009; Parks & Matthew, 2011; Wise, 2010).Given the issues that African American women continue to confront, such as disparities in health, inequity in employment compensation, poor access to high quality education, disproportionate involvement with the legal system, and overwhelming economic instability; this study did not presume that America is a post-racial society (Brown, Anfara, Roney, 2004; Cutrona et al., 2005; Gosa & Alexander, 2007; Harris-Perry, 2011; Raphael, S. & Stoll, 2011; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2001; Washington 2006; Wider Opportunity for Women, 2010; Wise, 2010). Moreover, these ongoing societal issues provide only a small window to the specific and unique needs with which African American women contend on a daily basis.

Since comparative research between racial groups is less beneficial than examining the nuances that exist within racial groups, it is not feasible to generalize research about women from other racial groups into conclusions about African American women (Padilla, 2003). Additionally, it is important to note that there is no quintessential African American woman, but many different types of African American women who may be impacted by issues associated with race, gender, and class (Robinson, 2010). Therefore the specific and unique issues which impact the lives of African American women necessitate the need for culture-specific research. To date, few clinical interventions address the specific and unique concerns of African American women (Jones & Ford, 2008; Williams, 2005

In sum, inadequate coping strategies used in response to stress, inattention to mental health care, stigma associated with seeking professional counseling, and cultural mistrust of mental health providers can each create significant psychological distress that can serve as a source of the clients' presenting concerns (Amankwaa, 2003; Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2009; Poussaint & Alexander, 2000; Woods-Giscombe, 2010). A need for more culture-specific counseling research on African American women exists. Without sound clinical conceptualization of the Strong Black Woman syndrome, which is grounded in culture-specific scientific research, counselors and other mental health professionals are likely to ignore or minimize the experiences of African American female clientele (Carrington, 2006; Jones & Ford, 2008; Williams, 2005). Moreover, it is possible that some African American women's presentations of strength during counseling are strategic façades that cloak the need for help behind a mask of infrangibility; however this assertion must be empirically validated through more research (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2009; Hamin, 2008). Because Strong Black Woman cultural attitudes are interwoven into the cultural identity of many African American women, it

is vital that research be conducted on this phenomenon to examine the relationship between Strong Black Woman cultural identity and mental health.

Significance of the Study

Disparities exist in both access to and quality of mental health care for African Americans (Asch et al., 2006; Atdjian & Vega, 2005; Banks & Kohn-Wood, 2002; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2001; Wells, Klap, Koike, & Sherbourne, 2001). Research conducted on counseling African Americans suggests that the stigma associated with mental illness, the reluctance to seek mental health care, and cultural mistrust of mental healthcare providers are culprits in promoting and sustaining these mental health disparities (Copeland, 1982; Poussaint & Alexander, 2000; Sue, 1988). However, the influence of the Strong Black Woman has been rarely mentioned as a factor that perpetuates mental health disparities among African American women. This study began the process of filling in the gap by examining the relationship between Strong Black Woman attitudes and constructs related to mental health disparities among African American women.

The relationship between stress and psychological health is longstanding (Antonovsky, 1980; Cohen & Wills, 1985). However little is known regarding the specific and unique ways in which African American women experience and cope with stress (Woods-Giscombe, 2010). It is possible that Strong Black Woman cultural attitudes influence African American women's experiences of stress and coping behaviors. However these constructs have primarily been studied only in isolation. Specifically, only nine empirical studies have been conducted on the Strong Black Woman phenomenon as it relates to women's health and wellness (Amankwaa, 2003; Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2005; Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2008; Green, 2012; Hamin, 2008; Miller-Clayton, 2010; Shambley-Ebron & Boyle, 2006; Thompson, 2003; Winkle-Wagner,

2008; Woods-Giscombe, 2010). A more in-depth understanding of the Strong Black Woman concept is needed to provide insight to culturally relevant counseling approaches to working with women who ascribe to the Strong Black Woman cultural ideal.

The field of professional counseling has been criticized for its lack of cultural relevance (Sue, Arredondo, & McDavis, 1992). The majority of theoretical approaches, frameworks, and interventions used in counseling are culturally encapsulating in that they have predominantly focused on the needs and interests of mainstream, Caucasian Americans (Wrenn, 1962). Although there may be overlapping concerns, counseling has not fully taken into account the relevance of contextual issues, such as the influence of historical concerns on contemporary psychological functioning (Sue, Arredondo, & McDavis, 1992). When culture is taken into consideration, the significance of the influence of Strong Black Woman phenomenon on women's mental health becomes patently obvious. Interestingly, the Strong Black Woman has, too, been subject to cultural encapsulation in that it is an openly discussed, well recognized phenomenon within African American culture, yet has largely been absent from empirical literature (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2009; Edge & Rogers, 2005; Harris-Perry, 2011; Radford-Hill, 2002; Shambley-Ebron & Boyle, 2006; Woods-Giscombe, 2010). Given the foregoing discussion on cultural encapsulation, findings from this study will provide better insight on how to counsel African American women. In particular, findings from this study may help with the development of a counseling model that can be used to identify treatment approaches for women with varying degrees of Strong Black Woman cultural attitudes. Greater insight about the Strong Black Woman phenomenon may help researchers and counselors understand how African American women access support in times of need (Nicolaidis, et al., 2010). An increased understanding of strong black womanhood will also help counselors assist African American

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women in recognizing personal thresholds of stress, communicating her needs, enlisting others for support, and establishing personal boundaries.

Purpose of this Study

The purpose of the study was to expand upon the knowledge base on strength, black womanhood, and mental health. To date, the majority of research on Strong Black Woman phenomenon has used qualitative methodology (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2005; Shambley-Ebron& Boyle, 2006; Winkle-Wagner, 2008; Woods-Giscombe, 2010). This study, which used quantitative research methodology, will add to the body of knowledge regarding Strong Black Woman cultural attitudes, stress, and coping among African American women. In particular, this study examined how women with Strong Black Woman attitudes experience and cope with stress.

The following research questions guided the study:

1. What are the respondents' levels of Strong Black Woman attitudes, perceived stress, and culture-specific coping?

2. How does perception of stress predict Strong Black Woman attitudes?

3. How does perception of stress predict the use of culture-specific forms of coping?

4. How do Strong Black Woman attitudes mediate the relationship between perception of stress and culture-specific coping**?**

Conclusion

An introduction to the Strong Black Woman phenomenon and its relevance to counseling research were provided in this chapter. A rationale for an examination of Strong Black Woman cultural attitudes, stress, and coping was explored. Empirical investigation of the relationship

that exists between these constructs will be a significant contribution to the study of how African American women experience and cope with stress.

To reiterate, Strong Black Woman cultural attitudes have origins in African socio-cultural traditions, as well as African American women's survival of historical and contemporary hardship related to issues of race and gender (Amankwaa, 2003; Ani, 1994; Coker, 2004; Collins, 1990; Robinson, 1983). The practice of shifting, an emphasis on caretaking for loved ones, and the use of informal networks of support have been discussed as contemporary manifestations of Strong Black Woman cultural attitudes (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2009; hooks, 2003; Jones & Shorter-Gooden, 2003; Lincoln & Mamiya, 2003; Mitchell & Herring, 1998). Criticisms against the Strong Black Woman icon have been documented (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2009; Harris-Lacewell, 2001; Harris-Perry, 2011; Wallace, 1990). Some scholars suggest that Strong Black Woman cultural attitudes promote a stereotypical image of African American that contributes to a false persona of superhuman strength (Harris, 1995; Higginbotham, 1982; Mitchell & Herring, 1998). In turn, when internalized, this persona of strength can lead African American women to ignore signs of psychological distress and subsequently avoid mental health care needs (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2009; Harris-Lacewell, 2001; Harris-Perry, 2011; Jones & Shorter-Gooden, 2003; Mitchell & Herring, 1998; Schulz et al., 2006; Radford-Hill, 2002; Reynolds-Dobbs et al., 2008; Robinson, 1983; Woods-Giscombe, 2010). A dearth of research exists regarding Strong Black Woman cultural attitudes. The current study examined Strong Black Woman attitudes, stress, and coping in a sample of African American women.

Definition of Terms

1. *African American* refers to those who self-identify as Black Americans and are of direct African, Sub-Saharan Africa, and Caribbean ancestral descent. For the purpose of this study, the terms Black and African American are used interchangeably when identifying the race and ethnicity of women who are the subject of this study.

2. *Black womanhood* refers to the collective sociologically and culturally constructed characteristics associated with being an African American woman in the United States of America.

3. *Coping* refers to the cognitive and behavioral efforts used to manage "the demands of the person-environment relationship that are appraised as stressful and the emotions they generate" (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984, p. 19).

4. *Culture-Specific Coping Strategies* refers to efforts commonly used by members of a cultural group to manage, endure, or alleviate distress (Greer, 2011a).

5. *Dissemblance* refers to the way in which African Americans hide their true feelings and opinions, historically from those in positions of authority, as a way of protecting themselves from perceived threat or danger (Hine, 1989).

6. *Intersectionality* is a concept which suggests that race, class, gender, and sexuality are inextricably bound, interconnected systems that cannot be separated (Collins, 1990; Simien, 2004).

7. *Maafa* is a Swahili term for "disaster, terrible occurrence or great tragedy" and refers to the 500 years of suffering endured by Africans and the African Diaspora, through slavery, imperialism, colonialism, invasion, oppression, dehumanization, and exploitation. Maafa is

also referred to as "African Holocaust" in conceptual and research literature (Ani, 1994; Roberson, 1995).

8. *Shifting* refers to the way that many African American women alter their speech, demeanor, appearance, and countenance in order to appease others at the constant sacrifice of their own reality (Jones & Shorter-Gooden, 2003).

9. *Socio-cultural* refers to the inclusion of both social and cultural aspects of Black women's history, heritage, or experiences.

10. *Stress* refers to the psychological and emotional strain which results from excess pressure in one's life.

11. *Strong Black Woman* refers to the iconic image, stereotype, and syndrome where African American women possess a specific and unique set of cultural attitudes that promote the presentation of oneself as inhumanly strong, infrangible, and insusceptible to emotional and psychological distress (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2009, hooks, 1989; Mitchell & Herring, 1998; Wallace, 1990).

12. *Superwoman* refers to the tendency for some women to portray a superhuman-like ability to successfully manage multiple roles and responsibilities (Shaevitz & Shaevitz, 1984; Wallace, 1990; Woods-Giscombe, 2010).

Chapter Two

Review of the Literature

This chapter provides a review of the literature relevant to the study. After opening with an analysis of the Strong Black Woman stereotypical image, the chapter continues with an overview of the theoretical framework that guided the current study, the Superwoman Schema (SWS) (Woods-Giscombe, 2010). To illustrate the connection between African American women's lived experiences and levels of functioning; a discussion of historical and contemporary issues relevant to the Strong Black Woman phenomenon is embedded within the theoretical overview. A review of applicable literature on each of the three constructs: Strong Black Woman attitudes, stress, and coping follows. The chapter concludes with a brief synopsis and direction for the study.

The Strong Black Woman as a Stereotypical Image

Historically, gross misrepresentation of African American women through the use of slanderous images has perpetuated and sustained prejudices against Black women in the United States. Stereotypes, such as the faithful, obedient servantile *Mammy*, who has no personal desires and contentedly cares for Caucasian children and families at the expense of caring for her own family; the provocative, sexually promiscuous, temptress *Jezebel*, who is driven by her mythological animalistic sexual desire; and the loud, emasculating, uncouth *Sapphire*, whose abrasive demeanor and aggressive stance earn her a label as "angry Black woman", attempt to define how Black women occupy space in the context of American society (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2009; hooks, 1993; Jones & Shorter-Gooden, 2003; McElya, 2007; Harris-Perry, 2011; Wallace, 1990). These stereotypes have historical roots grounded in African American

women's experiences during slavery, and continue to perpetuate and sustain negative opinions regarding African American women even during more contemporary times.

Some suggest that the image of the iconic Strong Black Woman refutes the aforementioned negative stereotypical images of the Mammy, Jezebel, and Sapphire (Beal, 2008; Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2003; Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2009; Donovan & Williams, 2002; Harris-Lacewell, 2001; Harris-Perry, 2011; Collins, 1990; hooks, 1981; hooks, 1993; Jones & Shorter-Gooden, 2003; Mitchell & Herring, 1998; Radford-Hill, 2002; Reynolds-Dobbs, Thomas, & Harrison, 2008; Shambley-Ebron and Boyle, 2006; Thomas, Witherspoon, & Speight, 2004; Wallace, 1990; Walker-Barnes, 2009). In contrast, the Strong Black Woman presents an image that African American women are driven, capable, and able to succeed despite a life of trials and tribulations associated with race and gender (Epstein, 1973; Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2008; Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2009). In a society where Black women's identities have largely been defined for them, the *Strong Black Woman* is perceived to be Black women's attempt to define themselves through an image that appears to counter the negative attributions associated traditional stereotypes (Harris-Lacewell, 2009; Harris-Perry, 2011).

Unlike other stereotypes, the Strong Black Woman is widely accepted and has become the litmus test to define successful Black womanhood (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2009; Harris-Perry, 2011; hooks, 1993; Jones & Shorter-Gooden, 2003; Mitchell & Herring, 1998). However, the notion of strength is a culturally perpetuated paradox that is agential to the status quo in that it only appears to promote African American women's independence and protect them against a life of adversity (hooks, 1981). Critics suggest that, although the Strong Black Woman is an adaptive response that validates and affirms the integrity of the African American female experience, an emphasis on strength and resilience as the dominant discourse within the narrative

of Black womanhood fails to acknowledge the entirety of African American women's lived experiences (hooks, 1981; hooks, 1989; Reynolds-Dobbs et al., 2008; Robinson, 1983; Walker-Barnes, 2009; Wallace, 1990; Young, 1989). Therefore, in many ways, the Strong Black Woman icon is a generalized distortion of African American women's survival throughout a history of societal and personal adversity (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2009; Harris, 1995). Despite its outward portrayal of empowerment, the Strong Black Woman stereotype is potentially dangerous in that it convinces women that they are able to endure any hardship life delivers (Mitchell & Herring, 1998). Like the Mammy, Jezebel, and Sapphire stereotypes, the Strong Black Woman stereotype also has the potential to inhibit African American women's progress towards a salubrious gender and cultural identity (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2005; Carter & Banks, 1996; Higginbotham, 1982; Mitchell & Herring, 1998; Walker, 1983). The Superwoman Schema (Woods-Giscombe, 2010) provides a formal descriptive framework from which scholars can begin to examine the impact of the Strong Black Woman stereotype on women's health and wellness.

Theoretical Framework

The Superwoman Schema (SWS), a framework designed to operationalize the African American Superwoman role, also recognized by scholars as Strong Black Woman phenomenon, was used as the theoretical framework that undergirded the current study (Wallace, 1990; Woods-Giscombe, 2010). According to the Superwoman Schema, the Strong Black Woman is a multidimensional phenomenon with unique characteristics, contributing factors, benefits, and liabilities. Although the Superwoman Schema is the theoretical framework which guided the current study, the discussion of the theory is integrated and synthesized with the works of other scholars who have written similarly on the topic of strong Black womanhood (Beauboeuf-

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Lafontant, 2003; Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2005; Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2007; Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2009; Collins, 1990; Harris-Perry, 2011, hooks, 1993; Mitchell & Herring, 1998; Wallace, 1990). In this study, the terms Superwoman and Strong Black Woman were used interchangeably throughout this discussion.

Until Woods-Giscombe's (2010) conceptualization of the Strong Black Woman, the phenomenon had been encapsulated within the Black culture, but absent from empirical literature (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2009; Edge & Rogers, 2005; Harris-Perry, 2011; Radford-Hill, 2002; Shambley-Ebron & Boyle, 2006; Woods-Giscombe, 2010). Unfortunately, as a result of this cultural encapsulation, researchers and clinicians had not been able to fully understand the essence and depth to which Strong Black Woman phenomenon shapes and influences African American women's lives. The Superwoman Schema provides an entry point by which researchers and scholars may begin to examine the salience of the Strong Black Woman archetype. The current study furthered empirical understanding of the phenomenon by examining the influence of Strong Black Woman attitudes on how Black women perceive and cope with stress.

Characteristics of the Strong Black Woman

Woods- Giscombe (2010) identified five characteristics of the Strong Black Woman role: a) obligation to manifest strength, b) obligation to suppress emotions, c) resistance to being vulnerable or dependent, d) determination to succeed, despite limited resources, and e) obligation to help others. This section will provide a brief description of each characteristic. A discussion of African American women's practices of dissemblance and shifting will be provided within the description of *obligation to suppress emotions* characteristic. The cultural practices of dissemblance and shifting have relevance to the Strong Black Woman phenomenon as some

scholars believe these practices to be illustrative of how Black women cope and respond to stress (Jones & Shorter-Gooden, 2003, Winkle-Wagner, 2008).

Obligation to manifest strength

The first characteristic, *obligation to manifest strength,* refers to the notion that Black women often feel compelled to present themselves as capable of handling a myriad of challenges without complaint or the expectation of support. According to the Superwoman Schema, this obligation to present oneself as strong is imposed upon Black women by external forces (Woods-Giscombe, 2010). For example, Black women often feel compelled to immolate the image of strength displayed by other esteemed Black women, such as mothers, grandmothers, and notable Black women in history and media. Moreover, some Black women even compare the challenges they encounter to the obstacles endured by these esteemed women (Woods-Giscombe, 2010). In this way, Black women minimize their hardship as a result of perceiving others' experiences as more significant than their own experience. This practice of comparing and minimizing one's personal experiences promotes the rationale for having an obligation to be strong. Furthermore, gender role expectations of Black women along with the cultural normality of possessing strength while encountering hardship, are yet additional external forces that contribute to Black women's perceived obligation to portray themselves as strong and capable of handling a diverse array of trials and tribulations without the option of vulnerability or support (Woods-Giscombe, 2010).

Obligation to Suppress Emotions

The characteristic, *obligation to suppress emotions,* illustrates the difficulty some Black women have expressing their true feelings. According to the Superwoman Schema (SWS), Black women's avoidance of emotional expression is often derived out of a variety of fears

(Woods-Giscombe, 2010). Among these are the fear of being misunderstood and the fear of being perceived as weak. Women characterized within the SWS contend concern that emotional expression could lead others to think that they are crazy or unable to handle life's challenges as other Black women are able to. The fear that sharing emotion would make them guilty of placing their burden on others was an additional concern (Woods-Giscombe, 2010). While Woods-Giscombe refers to this characteristic of the Strong BlackWoman as an effort to suppress emotions, other scholars have described this concept as dissemblance and shifting (Jones & Shorter-Gooden, 2003; Winkle-Wagner, 2008).

Dissemblance and Shifting

From a historical context, African American women's practice of minimizing and ignoring one's own experience became a survival mechanism used to withstand the physical and psychological consequences of slavery. Slaves knew that displays of subservient behavior protected them from additional mistreatment. As a result, slaves developed the ability to dissemble, or hide, their true feelings of pain, frustration, and anger from being seen by those in positions of authority (Camp, 2004; Cummings, 2007; Hine, 1989; Greene, 1994).

In his poem, "We Wear the Mask", renown African American poet, Paul Laurence Dunbar, eloquently describes the emotional façades used by African Americans to dissemble their inner feelings from outward display. Dunbar writes: We wear the mask that grins and lies, It hides our cheeks and shades our eyes, — This debt we pay to human guile; With torn and bleeding hearts we smile, And mouth with myriad subtleties (Cummings, 2007). This quote illustrates the double consciousness (DuBois, 1903) that many slaves experienced as a result of having an undisclosed inner self that aided managing multiple realities (Greene, 1994; Hine,

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1989; Jones & Shorter-Gooden, 2003). Unfortunately, African American's need to rely on skills of dissemblance skills did not discontinue with the abolishment of slavery.

Today, the mandate to manifest self-sacrificial strength remains a defining hallmark for how Black women occupy space amidst intersecting patterns of discrimination within American society (Harris-Perry, 2011). Many Black women continue to dissemble their feelings a means of coping with the pressure and stress of this imposition. Jones and Shorter-Gooden (2003) have labeled the way in which Black women dissemble their feelings as *shifting*. By way of the act of shifting, Black women have relied on strategic facades of strength to fulfill the social and cultural expectation imposed upon them (Collins, 1990; Harris-Perry, 2011, hooks, 1993; Wallace, 1990; Woods-Giscombe, 2010). Shifting occurs when an African American woman strategically and self-sacrificially alters her speech, demeanor, appearance, and countenance in order to satisfy the, perceived or legitimate, needs and desires of others (Jones & Shorter-Gooden, 2003). As a result, African American women's authentic experiences are often hidden underneath a veil of secrecy (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2003; Hine, 1989). The act of shifting has become an integral practice among many African American women, but not without emotional cost. Overtime, the effect of ignoring one's own psychological needs can lead to psychological fatigue and a host of psychological ailments, such as depression, anxiety, disordered eating, and substance abuse (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2003; Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2007; hooks, 2003; Mitchell & Herring, 1998). In the long-term, shifting slowly deteriorates a woman's sense of physical and emotional well-being (Jack & Ali, 2010; Jones & Shorter-Gooden, 2003; Scott, 1991).

The cultural practices of dissemblance and shifting have important significance to counseling research. African American women's experiences of oppression during historical and contemporary times have compromised their psychological wellbeing (Collins, 1990; Israel,

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Farquhar, Schulz, James, & Parker; 2002; Parmer, Arnold, & Natt, 2004; Speight, 2007). Yet, the notion of African Americans' indomitable strength has prohibited many women from seeking help when it is really needed. Indeed, survival of historical and contemporary atrocities has created a resilient spirit in many African Americans, but those that present for counseling may be broken in some way despite outward appearances of composure (Amankwaa, 2003; Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2009; Hamin, 2008; Hill, 2011; hooks, 1981; Jones & Shorter-Gooden, 2003, Romero, 2000). This study, which examined the relationship between stress, coping, and Strong Black Woman cultural attitudes, will help clinicians better understand how stress and coping are influenced by Strong Black Woman cultural attitudes. In turn findings from this study could help clinicians understand and recognize African American female clientele's presentations of self-reliance and strength as possible defensive coping mechanisms that can potentially impede wellness.

Resistance to Being Vulnerable or Dependent

The third characteristic identified within the Superwoman Schema (SWS), *resistance to being vulnerable or dependent*, refers to the fear that some Black women have about appearing dependent and needy (Woods-Giscombe, 2010). Women who ascribe to the strong Black woman role have a tendency to believe that being dependent on others for support places one at risk of being hurt or manipulated (Woods-Giscombe, 2010). This characterization is consistent with Beauboeuf-Lafontant (2009) who denotes Black women's portrayals of strength as a self-protective strategy used to insulate them from mistreatment, disrespect, and pain.

The fear of asking for or accepting help seems to be driven by the prevailing notion that Black women's success and survival has largely been left to their own devices. Several researchers content that the need for independence and control is/was prevalent, during both

historic and contemporary times, because Black women could not rely on anyone for assistance and support. In the absence of external support, many Black women have come to feel that they can only rely on themselves and their spiritual faith (Woods-Giscombe, 2010). For some Black women the resistance to being vulnerable or dependent has resulted in a fierce independence and need for control in personal matters (Woods-Giscombe, 2010).

Determination to Succeed, Despite Limited Resources

The fourth characteristic, the *determination to succeed, despite limited resources*, illustrates the intense motivation and ambition that some Black women have to be successful (Woods-Giscombe, 2010). Within the Superwoman Schema (SWS), this characteristic was illustrated in women's confessions to working late and avoiding taking breaks, as well as choosing to sacrifice sleep, health, and personal wellness to achieve goals. For others, this characterization draws on the collective experience that is highly valued in the African American culture (Woods-Giscombe, 2010). Some respondents in the Woods-Giscombe study were intrinsically motivated to succeed, while other respondents felt external pressure to succeed. Findings also indicated that Black women felt emotionally drained because they shoulder a disproportionate amount of responsibility and stress for their family. When considered within the context of other characterizations within the SWS, such as a resistance to vulnerability or support, it becomes more evident that disproportionate shouldering is done so without the expectation of reciprocity. That is, many Black women assume responsibility for the wellness of loved ones, yet believe that others do not attend to their wellbeing.

Obligation to Help Others

Within the fifth characterization, *obligation to help others,* nurturing and caring for loved ones was described as a gender expectation central to the identity of Black women (Woods-

Giscombe, 2010). However, the obligatory nature of the helping relationship between Black women and their loved ones seemed to place Black women in a position in which they constantly avail themselves to others, even during times when they should be the recipient of support. For example, some women expressed a desire to contribute to the financial wellbeing of their loved ones, even though they were not financially secure themselves (Woods-Giscombe, 2010). This example illustrates the complexities that exist within the Strong Black Woman phenomenon: many Black women feel an obligation to selflessly extend themselves to others in need, but yet have been conditioned to defend themselves and be independent of the support that they give to others. The obligation to help others seemed to be met with dissonance among women within the Superwoman Schema. For example, some women expressed finding a sense of personal fulfillment in their caretaking roles. Other women identified the obligation to help others as a stressor and source of emotional baggage (Woods-Giscombe, 2010).

Summary: Characteristics of the Strong Black Woman

Five characteristics of the Strong Black Woman role, as operationalized within the Superwoman Schema, have been presented (Woods-Giscombe, 2010). The obligation to manifest strength; obligation to suppress emotions; resistance to being vulnerable or dependent; determination to succeed, despite limited resources; and obligation to help others are traits deeply rooted in Black women's identity. Manifestation of the characteristics are connected to Black women's desire to immolate the strength and resilience of esteemed Black women role models; the fear of being misunderstood, hurt, or manipulated by others; and being compelled to prioritize loved one's needs before one's own needs. The cultural practice of dissemblance and shifting are rooted in the African American slave experience and continue to be used today as a coping mechanism by which Black women suppress authentic emotion in an effort to maintain a

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façade of strength and infrangibility. An overview and discussion of the contextual factors which contribute to Strong Black Woman phenomenon follows.

Contextual Factors which Contribute to the Strong Black Woman Phenomena

Woods-Giscombe (2010) identified four contributing contextual factors: historical legacy of racial or gender stereotyping or oppression; lessons from foremothers; past history of disappointment, mistreatment, or abuse; and spiritual values. This section will provide a descriptive overview of each contextual factor. Within the description of the *historical legacy of racial or gender stereotyping or oppression* a discussion of how African American women's experiences during slavery, the post-slavery, Antebellum period, and Civil Rights era influence *Strong Black Woman* phenomena is provided. A discussion on relevant contemporary issues most detrimental to African American women who ascribe to the Strong Black Woman identity is included within the descriptive overview of the contextual factor: *Past history of disappointment, mistreatment, or abuse.*

Historical Legacy of Racial or Gender Stereotyping or Oppression

Women within the Superwoman Schema discussed how the collective and individual experiences of Black women attribute to the superwoman role (Woods-Giscombe, 2010). The historical legacy of oppression and discrimination, particularly slavery, racial and gender stereotyping, and occupational-related inequities, seemed to come to the forefront as significant contextual factors which have contributed to the superwoman role (Woods-Giscombe, 2010). It is likely that the characteristics are the outgrowth of Black women's historical legacy of oppression and discrimination experienced by Black women. For example, characteristics of having to fend for oneself, being distrust of others, and fearful of the consequences of vulnerability are a direct outgrowth of the oppressive conditions that occurred during slavery

(Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2009; Boyd, 1999; Camp, 2004; Danois, 2010; Harris-Lacewell, 2001; Jacobs & Child, 1861; Radford-Hill, 2002; Romero, 2000; Walker-Barnes, 2009; Wallace, 1990; Winkle-Wagner, 2008).

Slavery

As an ethnic and gender minority, slave women were subject to dual brutality (Gaspar & Hine, 1996). Female slaves were spared no mercy because of their gender. In fact, female slaves were held to the same rigorous labor standards as their male counterparts, but with an additional responsibility of caring for their families and children (Gaspar & Hine, 1996; Painter, 2007; Robinson, 1983; Stetson, 1982; White, 1987). For example, slaves were required to provide rigorous labor, against their will, and under the threat of brutal, unmerciful abuse, dismemberment, and even death; but without compensation, and in dangerous, unsanitary conditions which left them at an increased risk for developing injuries, illness, and disease (Gaspar & Hine, 1996; Jacobs & Child, 1861; White, 1987).

The destruction of the family unit, which is important to psychosocial functioning, was yet another dreadful consequence of slavery (Washington, 2006). The permanent loss of children and families was a common occurrence in the life of slaves. Female slaves had no parental rights to their children (Walker, 1982; White, 1987). In fact, it was common practice for infants to be wrenched from their mother's arms shortly after birth, and sold to another plantation; never to be returned to their birth mother (Washington, 2006). Additively, female slaves were powerless even over their own bodies – existing for the sexual pleasure of their slave master; often becoming victims of sexual violence, reproductive abuse, and treatment as human guinea pigs without the benefit of anesthesia during invasive gynecological medical experimentations (Camp, 2004; Gaspar & Hine, 1996; Jacobs & Child, 1861; Morton, 1996;

Stetson, 1982; Washington, 2006; White, 1987). Since male slaves were often powerless to protect their wives and children, female slaves were largely responsible for their own survival (Camp, 2004; Gaspar & Hine, 1996; Morton, 1996). It is possible that the self-protective, independent nature of some contemporary African American women is an adaptive coping response derived from African American women's need to be self-sufficient during slavery.

Today, African American women's reliance on strength is best illustrated in the image of the Strong Black Woman. Interestingly, historical characterizations of the Strong Black Woman, such as a reliance on strength and survival to endure the hardships of slavery, a resistance to appearing vulnerable in an attempt to alleviate additional threats of harm, the inability to depend on others for support or protection, and the emphasis on caring for children and family seem consistent with more contemporary traits of the Strong Black Woman denoted in Woods'-Giscombe's (2010) Superwoman Schema (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2009; Collins, 1990; hooks, 1993; Wallace, 1990).

Post-slavery Era

Although the Civil War liberated black Americans from slavery and the 13th, 14th, and 15th Amendments to the U.S. Constitution, along with the Civil Rights Act of 1875 granted basic citizens' rights, legalized and systemic mistreatment of black Americans continued to exist (Cummings, 2007). For example, the landmark United States Supreme Court decision in the 1896 Plessy v. Ferguson case upheld the constitutionality of state laws that required racial segregation in public facilities. Under the auspices of "separate but equal", the United States Supreme Court ruling established a precedent that led to segregated schools, restaurants, libraries, and other public areas (Cummings, 2007; Groves, 1951; Klarman, 2004). However the schools and libraries relegated to African Americans were far too often under-equipped, under-

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resourced, and inadequate in providing the quality education equal to that which was provided to Caucasian Americans(Chafe & Behind the Veil Project, 2001; Cummings, 2007). Furthermore, because Black Americans had been relegated to the lowest stratum of American society, they were forced to settle for menial employment such as ditch-diggers, servants, and shoeshine boys even when their educational credentials warranted more advanced occupational opportunities (Cummings, 2007).

Hate crimes against African Americans was rampant during the 19th and 20th century post-slavery era. Many black Americans were subject to inhumane, criminal mistreatment such as the infliction of brutal beatings and lynching by informal and formal White supremacist hate groups, such as the infamous Klu Klux Klan (Cummings, 2007; Giddings, 2008; Gitlin, 2009). Unfortunately, African Americans found little to no protection from these criminal acts as many self-proclaimed liberal-minded, Caucasian Americans such as law-enforcement officers, clergymen, and politicians ignored the continuous discrimination and oppression inflicted upon black Americans. Additionally, Black Americans could not refuge in church or mainstream religious doctrine either, as some churches denied them membership and mainstream religious doctrine preached that the subordination of Blacks to their White counterparts was ordained by God, and that black's submission and obedience to discriminatory, oppressive, and abusive societal practices would result in heavenly rewards (Cummings, 2007; Hopkins, 1999; Pinn, 1999; Raboteau, 2004). Consequently, these suppositions: the notion of God-ordained African American's suffering, the virtue of obedience to systemic and legalized oppression, and the promise of heavenly rewards during the afterlife drew attention away from African American's need for psychological healing from the traumas which occurred during the slavery and post-slavery eras, as well as communicated that abuse is a justifiable act.

Although the formal institution of slavery had been abolished, Black women in the 19th and 20th century post-slavery era continued to be ostracized and subject to oppressive conditions which warranted the need for strategic coping strategies for survival, as blacks were largely powerless over their wellbeing (Gilmore, 1996; Klarman, 2004). As a result, African American women continued to rely on the Strong Black Woman characteristics employed during slavery as means for coping with discriminatory and oppressive societal practices against such as racial segregation, the prevalence of unpunished hate crimes, inequitable opportunities for employment and education, and subjection to discriminatory religious doctrine (Chafe & Behind the Veil Project, 2001; Cummings, 2007; Gilmore, 1996; Gitlin, 2009; Klarman, 2004; Pinn, 1999; Raboteau, 2004). These treacherous circumstances created an impetus for the continuation of African American women's reliance on the Strong Black Woman image throughout more contemporary times (Edge & Rogers, 2005; Gilmore, 1996).

Uplift and Social Justice Advocacy

Historical encounters with marginalization and isolation, as exemplified in the slavery and post-slavery eras, created an impetus for Black women to advocate for their own unique issues and concerns (Cooper, 1988; Giddings, 2008; hooks, 1981; hooks, 1984; Terrell, 1902; Wallace, 1990; Wells-Barnett, 1991; White, 1987). The National Council of Negro Women, the advent of black sororities, and the development of black feminist ideals inspired the uplift of African American women as full citizens of the United States (Gallagher, 2011; Terrell, 1902; Washington & Nunez, 2005; Wells-Barnett, 1991). Through these networks, Black women began to formally resist the negative stereotypical images of the Mammy, Jezebel, and Sapphire. For many Black women, the effort to distance themselves from these negative stereotypes was embodied in the healthy aspect of the Strong Black Woman. Many believed the Strong Black

Woman allowed Black women to be seen in a respectable manner: strong, capable, emotionally contained, and driven (Collins, 1990; Wallace, 1990; Wood-Giscombe, 2010).

The need for Black women's self-interest groups remained necessary during the 1960s and 1970s despite the prominence of the Women's Movement for gender equality and the Civil Rights Movement for racial equality (Hull, Bell-Scott, & Smith, 1982). To many, the Women's Movement seemed to be predominantly focused on White, middle-class, educated women (hooks, 1984). First, too often, African American women who participated in the Women's Movement experienced racial discrimination, were excluded, and when recognized, were often treated as tokens that represented the experiences of all African American women (Burns, 2006). Secondly, the Civil Rights Movement, along with other Black liberation movements such as Black Nationalism and the Black Panther Party, were criticized for equating liberation with masculinity and manhood (Burns, 2006). The patriarchal influence of the African American culture seemed to be pervasive within black liberation movements. Additional criticisms against the movements insist that they failed to challenge the pervasive sexist oppression that existed within them, as well as failed to address African American women's concerns (Roth, 2004).

Unfortunately, there was no space for African American women's perspectives in either movement (Hull & Smith, 1982). African American women were, in many ways, invisible (hooks, 1981). The focus on women's rights typically emphasized the rights of Caucasian women (hooks, 1984). Similarly, the focus on African American's rights typically emphasized the rights of African American men (Burns, 2006). The absence of distinctiveness in being African American regardless of gender, or in being female regardless of race was a common misconception that contributed to African American women being further resigned to a low social status (King, 1988; Malveaux, 1990).

However, based on the concept of intersectionality, race, class, gender, and sexuality are, interconnected, inextricably bound social constructs (Collins, 1990; Simien, 2004). Therefore, social justice movements that strive to overcome sexism and class oppression but ignore issues of race, as was arguably evident in the Women's Movement; or in like manner strive to overcome racism and class oppression, but ignore issues of gender, as was arguably evident throughout Black liberation movements, subsequently ignore the experiences of African American women (Collins, 1990; Combahee River Collective, 1977; hooks, 1993; Wallace, 1990). The concept of intersectionality is central to black feminist framework (Collins, 1990). Black feminist scholars argue that, because Black women are subject to subordination within the intersection race, gender, and class hierarchies, the uplift of African American women requires the liberation of all people, since Black women's progress would necessitate the abolition of racism, sexism, and class oppression (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2009; Combahee River Collective, 1977; hooks, 1993).

Hailed by Giddings (1984) as the first black feminist, activist and educator Anna Julia Cooper (1988) spoke to the concept of intersectionality when she famously wrote in her collection of essays, *A Voice from the South,* "Only the BLACK WOMAN can say when and where I enter, in the quiet undisputed dignity of my womanhood, without violence and without suing or special patronage, then and there the whole Negro race enters with me" (pg. 31). To Cooper, the indivisibility of African American's racial uplift and women's liberation is best illustrated in the black woman. According to Cooper, Black women are "confronted by both a woman question and a race problem" that are inseparable and equally worthy of resolution. Cooper's argument continues to have relevance in contemporary times. Today, Black women continue to be disproportionately impacted by many of the social ills that continue to threaten the

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wellbeing of American society (Harris-Perry, 2011). Issues of occupational inequity, educational disparities, and financial insecurities are just a few of the significant challenges that impact African American women's opportunity for equality in more contemporary times (Minorities in Higher Education, 2011; Pinkney, 1984; Woods-Giscombe, 2010).

Occupational Inequity

Issues of occupational inequity, such as inequitable opportunities for professional development, education, and financial security, were also identified as contextual factors that support Black women's his*torical legacy of racial or gender stereotyping or oppression*. Within the Superwoman Schema (SWS), professional, college educated Black women spoke of the difficulty they encountered while seeking supportive professional mentoring. As a result of the lack of professional support, these women were forced to cope by learning how to create opportunities for themselves independent of mentorship. Thus in the absence of supportive, trusting, and facilitative mentoring relationships, these Black women have had to rely on themselves for success (Woods-Giscombe, 2010). This determination to succeed, as characterized within the SWS, seems to be directly related to these experiences of disappointment and mistrust.

Educational Disparities

Today, at just 7% of the entire U.S. population (U.S. Census, 2010), African American women are a relatively small group; yet represent some of the highest percentages within the nation's most significant social issues. Despite the notion of a post-racial American society and regardless of how often contemporary gender inequity is ignored or minimized by some, statistics bear witness to the inequalities that contemporary African American women endure (Brown, Anfara, Roney, 2004; Burnham, 2009; Cutrona et al., 2005; Gosa & Alexander, 2007;

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Harris-Perry, 2011; Parks & Matthew, 2011; Raphael, S. & Stoll, 2011; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2001; Washington 2006; Wider Opportunity for Women, 2010; Wise, 2010). Nevertheless, many contemporary African American women have been quite successful - ascending to the ranks of leadership in business, politics, education, and medicine (Harris-Perry, 2011; Nelson, 2011; Robinson, 2010). More Black women are pursuing post-secondary education, climbing the corporate ladder, and accumulating financial wealth than ever before (Minorities in Higher Education, 2011; Nelson, 2011; Robinson, 2010). According to the *Minorities in Higher Education: Twenty-Fourth Status Report* (2011), the rate of African American women earning baccalaureate degrees has increased over the last several decades, and during the ten year span from 1998 to 2008 alone, the most recent set of data available, the total number of master's degrees awarded to African American women more than doubled. Specifically, 21, 221 African American women obtained a master's degree in 1998. However, in 2008 the number of African American women who earned a master's degree increased to 44,569. Thus, the increase in African American women earning master's degree increased by 110% during the ten-year time span of 1998 to 2008.

Unfortunately, although some Black women have demonstrated an ability to achieve success, far too many continue to experience barriers that cause them to lag behind (Minorities in Higher Education, 2011; Pinkney, 1984). Despite the overall increase in African American women who pursue post-secondary education, fewer than 30% have earned a bachelor's degree (Harris-Perry, 2011). Furthermore, given that nearly 1 in 5 (17.2%) Black women aged 18-24 years old do not have at least a high school diploma, it is clear that educational disparities impacting Black women are not limited to the collegiate level (Minorities in Higher Education, 2011).

Financial Insecurity

Issues of race and gender are central to African American's women's identity and experiences of stress (Woods-Giscombe & Lobel, 2008). Economic inequity is a considerable manifestation of racism and sexism that disproportionately impacts Black women in the United States (NWLC, 2012). When compared to Caucasian women, African American women are twice as likely to live in poverty; and although all women in United States suffer from a wage gap in earnings that makes it more difficult to achieve financial stability, African American women are among those who experience the greatest income discrepancy (NWLC, 2012; Wider Opportunities for Women, 2010; U.S. Census Bureau, 2009a). For example, according to the U.S. Census Bureau (2009a), whereas Caucasian women earn .78 of a dollar earned by a Caucasian man for the same type of work, African American women only earn a mere .62 of a dollar earned by a Caucasian man for the same type of work. Strikingly, the differences here equates to an alarming 38 cent wage gap between African American women and Caucasian men, and a disheartening 16 cent wage gap between African American women and Caucasian women, who hold the same occupation.

Wage discrepancies have considerable implications for African American women. First, although some Black women have greater opportunities for employment, statistics show that they are not paid equitably for their labor (NWLC, 2012).Secondly, since African American women constitute a substantial percentage of the Black working force, discrepancies in wage and earnings can create distress among not only African American women, but also their families (Beal, 2008; NWLC, 2012). Finally, the wage gap fosters a degree of economic insecurity that is particularly troublesome for African American women of lower middle class socioeconomic

status who are most vulnerable to the consequences of financial hardship (NWLC, 2012; Pattillo-McCoy, 1999; Wider Opportunities for Women, 2010).

Data from the U.S. Census Bureau (2010b) indicates that 42% of full time employed African American women are of middle class socioeconomic status. However, the vast majority of middle class African Americans are actually of lower middle class socioeconomic status (Gosa & Alexander, 2007; Pattillo-McCoy, 1999). Being of lower class socioeconomic status has tremendous implications for African American women's financial wellbeing.

First, the significant difference between the income and wealth is most detrimental for the lower middle class. For example, computations of wealth do not take into consideration how middle class, or recently middle class, income is taxed in terms of having to extend support to family members (Gosa & Alexander, 2007). Since it takes up to four generations before people are solidly middle class, and because women with Strong Black Woman attitudes feel an obligation to help others, disparity between poverty and wealth has tremendous implication for Black women's financial wellbeing (Gosa & Alexander, 2007; Wilkerson, 1990; Woods-Giscombe, 2010).

Secondly, discrepancies between the income and wealth highlight the tenuous situation many African American women experience in their pursuit of economic stability (Gosa & Alexander, 2007; NWLC, 2012). The discrepancy is greatest for unmarried female head of households with children, who account for nearly one-third of African American family households (Conley, 1999; U.S. Census Bureau, 2010a). According to the U.S. Census Bureau (2010a) 29% of black women are single head of households. As such, thee women likely shoulder an enormous responsibility of single motherhood and caring for aging parents without the emotional or financial support of a spouse (U.S. Department of Health and Human

Services, 2011). The absence of spousal support may contribute to feelings of isolation and increased psychological distress among unmarried women who, in addition to having significant caretaking responsibilities, are susceptible to gender wage disparities (Johnson, E., 2010, April 21; Pattillo-McCoy, 1999; Young, 2010).

Thirdly, to be of lower middle class socioeconomic status suggests that a person is barely above the poverty threshold and likely does not meet the criteria for maintaining economic security (Gosa & Alexander, 2007; Pattillo-McCoy, 1999; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2011). Middle class socioeconomic status is based upon calculation of the United States poverty threshold. Originally derived as a measure of food security for economically distressed families, today's United States poverty threshold is a statistical yardstick comprised of income thresholds that vary by family size and composition to determine who is in poverty.   For example, if individual or family pre-tax, gross income, minus noncash benefits such as food stamps and housing subsidies, are less than the threshold appropriate for that family, then the family is considered to be in poverty. Similarly, if individual or family pre-tax gross income, minus noncash benefits such as food stamps and housing subsidies, is equal to or greater than the appropriate poverty threshold then that individual or family is not in poverty and is considered to be of middle class socioeconomic status (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012). According to the United States poverty threshold an annual income of $23,021 is needed to bring a family of four above federal poverty standards (U.S. Census Bureau, 2011). Yet, because the poverty calculation only accounts for income it is a woefully inadequate measure of what a family would need to withstand economic deprivation (Wider Opportunities for Women, 2010; Iceland, 2003, Zweig, 2004). Comparatively, the Basic Economic Security Tables (BEST) Index is a better measure of economic security, because in addition to gross annual income, the BEST Index

accounts for utility, transportation, childcare, incidental household items, and health care expenses; emergency savings; and assumes that one is an employed worker with health insurance (Wider Opportunities for Women, 2010). Thus the BEST Index accounts for the breadth of expenditures needed to garner economic security.   For example, although an annual income of $23,021 is needed to bring a family of four above federal poverty standards, according to the BEST Index, an income upwards of $100,000 in some urban areas is needed to secure economic independence for a family of four (U.S. Census Bureau, 2011; Wider Opportunities for Women, 2010). Thus, a $76,979 discrepancy exists for urban women who seek greater economic security (U.S. Census Bureau, 2011; Wider Opportunities for Women, 2010).

It is possible that the discrepancy between living above the poverty threshold and being economically secure may create added stress on Black women that can lead to psychological distress. Schulz et al. (2006) sought to understand the relationships between financial stress and psychological health, along with other constructs such as household income, social support, neighborhood social issues, and discrimination among a sample of 700 low-income, African American women who resided in a predominantly urban American neighborhood in Detroit, Michigan. Using structural equation modeling, Schulz et al. determined that financial stress and social support mediated symptoms of depression among the sample. More specifically, the analysis revealed that the direct effect of household income on symptoms of depression accounted for 61% of the total effect exogenous variables, such as age, education, income, length of time at residence, and marital status, on endogenous variables, which include discrimination, financial stress, police stress, safety stress, emotional support, and instrumental support. Household income was also found to be a strong predictor of financial stress, the strongest direct predictor of symptoms of depression. Interestingly, the direct effects of financial stress on

symptoms of depression accounted for 79% of the total effect, while an additional 21% of the effect of financial stress on symptoms of depression was mediated through the negative effect of financial stress on social support. The researchers concluded that higher household income may reduce African American women's financial stress and strengthen social support which may in turn reduce symptoms of depression.

Lessons from Foremothers

Women within the Superwoman Schema noted the importance of watching their mothers behave in ways similar to the strong black woman characterizations (Woods-Giscombe, 2010). The emphasis on intergenerational maternal influence is consistent with the literature on Strong Black Woman phenomena (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2008; Mitchell & Herring, 1998; Radford-Hill, 2002). Strong Black Woman characteristics of strength, independence, invulnerability, perseverance, and caring for others have been illustrated throughout generations of African American matriarchs and role models who have become nostalgic cultural images for many contemporary African American (Coker, 2004; Hill, 2011; Mitchell & Herring, 1998; Shambley-Ebron & Boyle, 2006). Over time, these cultural traditions, attitudes, and behaviors have forged a cultural identity that many refer to as the Strong Black Woman.

More broadly, Black women have a history inundated with examples of strength and independence that challenged the limitations imposed upon them as a result of racism, discrimination, and patriarchy (Cooper, 1988; Giddings, 1984; Giddings, 2008; Harris-Lacewell, 2001; Painter, 1996; Stewart & Richardson, 1987; Wallace, 1990). Harriet Tubman, Sojourner Truth, and Rosa Parks stand out as renowned examples of African American women whose inward strength and perseverance allowed them to overcome dire circumstances. Many Black women look to these strong Black women as models of how to manifest self-sacrificial strength

denoted by a spirit unbroken by a legacy of discrimination (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2009; Harris-Lacewell, 2001).

Past History of Disappointment, Mistreatment, or Abuse

Women within the Superwoman Schema discussed how their personal experiences of being let down attribute to the superwoman role (Woods-Giscombe, 2010). Disappointment, abuse, or neglect from parents, romantic partners, and friends seemed to produce a need for independence and emphasis on survival among these Black women. The relationship between how these past experiences have created intimacy issues in romantic relationships and an overall sense of isolation from others, particularly in times of need, seemed to be of relevance to these women.

Marriage and Intimate Partnerships

For many African American women, success is bittersweet as there is often an inverse relationship between education, financial independence, and heterosexual marriage within the African American community (Johnson, E., 2010, April 21; The Neilson Company, 2011; Nitsche & Brueckner, 2009; Young, 2010). The average age of first marriage in the U.S. today is about 26 for women and 28 for men, but closer to 30 for the highest educated (U.S. Census Bureau, 2009b). However, educated, heterosexual, African American women aged 30-34 face challenges when seeking suitable marriage partners with comparable levels of educational attainment and financial wellbeing (U.S. Census Bureau, 2009a; U.S. Census Bureau, 2009c; Young 2010).

Unlike women of other races, middle class African American women outnumber middle class African American men of comparable income brackets (Young, 2010). For example, while there are almost twice as many Caucasian men earning $40,000 to $74,999 as Caucasian women,

there are 25% more African American women than men in the same income range**.** At annual

earnings of $100,000, African American women outnumber African American men by over 1.5

times. In comparison to Caucasian men and women in the $100,000 income bracket, there are

approximately 4.5 times more Caucasian men for every 100 Caucasian women, as compared to

157 African American women for every 100 African American men (U.S. Census Bureau,

2009b; U.S. Census Bureau, 2009c; Young 2010). Although the gender disparity among African

American men and women switches at the highest income levels, high earning African American

men are more likely to marry interracially (Young, 2010).

The inverse relationship between education, economic security, and marriage may

contribute to stress among some African American women who seek a marital partner, and

therefore may be the basis for a counseling concern (Johnson, E., 2010, April 21; The Neilson

Company, 2010). It is possible that this stress is most disconcerting for women who possess

Strong Black Woman attitudes. In general, women who ascribe to the strong Black woman role

possess a degree of defensiveness to intimacy in romantic relationships. According to Woods-

Giscombe (2010) this defensiveness derives from a history of disappointment, an obligation to be

strong, and a resistance to emotional expression (Woods-Giscombe, 2010). A dearth of

literatures exists that examines the relationship between a variety of stressors and the Strong

Black Woman role. The current study explored how women who ascribed to the Strong Black

Woman role perceive and coped with stress.

Diversification of Black Women

A past history of disappointment, mistreatment, or abuse has created a sense of isolation

among Black women in that some Black women believe that no one understands or cares about

their personal interests (Woods-Giscombe, 2010). Similarly, the connection between education

and class has diversified Black women so that today there is no quintessential Black woman, but Black women of distinct classes, diversified by their political, spiritual, career, family, and leisure interests. For example, some Black women find community in the churches they attend, some seek out opportunities for civic engagement and political activism, some are stay-at-home mothers, some are professional moms who find pleasure in their career achievements, some live in poor neighborhoods, some reside in affluent neighborhoods in suburban communities, some are in committed same-sex relationships, some are in abusive marriages, some are healthy and conscious of their personal wellness, some are battling injury, disease, or addiction (Harris Perry, 2011). However it is possible that the diversification that exists among Black women has created a sense of isolation which contributes to Strong Black Woman characterization such as feeling obligated to be strong, resistance to seeking support, and emotional suppression. In his book, *Disintegration: The Splintering of Black America*, Eugene Robinson (2010) presents a conceptual model that supports this notion of a diversified black identity.

Prior to the Civil Rights Movement, African Americans were unified by shared social and political interests. Following the conclusion of the Civil Rights Movement African Americans has become more differentiated. African Americans now have migrated from one another socially, politically and geographically. This outward movement has resulted in several distinct groups of African Americans with interests and needs that are different and, at times, at odds with one another. Robinson's (2010) thesis contends that there is no undifferentiated black community. In fact, Robinson describes four very distinct classes of contemporary African American people: the *abandoned* class, the *mainstream* class, the *transcendent,* and the *emergent* class.

Robinson (2010) described the *abandoned* class as a sector of African Americans who experience intergenerational poverty and downward social mobility. For example, Black women within the abandoned class are often employed in low-wage, low-status occupations that do not garner economic security nor require post- secondary education (Wider Opportunities for Women, 2010). For them, psychological distress may result from an overall lack of opportunities for upward mobility, as well as relegation to living in high stress communities characterized by frequent acts of violence and crime, dilapidated housing, drug infested neighborhoods, and under-resourced schools (Brown, Anfara, Roney, 2004; Cutrona et al., 2005; Pattillo-McCoy, 1999; Raphael, S. & Stoll, 2011).

According to Robinson (2010) the *mainstream* class is the largest group and is comprised of African Americans who are of middle class socioeconomic status. Like women within the abandoned class, women within the mainstream class may experience psychological distress as a result of encounters with racism, discrimination, and intra-racial stressors. The fact that the vast majority of middle class African Americans are of lower middle class status suggests that women within the mainstream class may encounter similar struggles that parallel the struggles of women within the abandoned class, although they may have access to greater resources (Gosa & Alexander, 2007; Pattillo-McCoy, 1999). Additionally, women in the mainstream class may experience unique frustrations that may arise in pursuit of tenuous opportunities for educational, financial, and social advancement. For example, although women within the mainstream class may have educational and experiential qualifications that are commonly believed to garner economic security, the gender wage gap that greatly impacts African American women's degree of economic security; occupational inequities that result from lack of mentorship, discriminatory hiring and promotion practices; and the tendency of middle class African Americans to use their

income to care for low income loved ones may create excessive strain on mainstream class women's wellbeing(Lubrano, 2004; Minorities in Higher Education, 2011; NWLC, 2012; Woods-Giscombe, 2010).Gosa & Alexander (2007) suggest that it takes upwards of four generations to become solidly middle class. Therefore it is possible that women within the *mainstream* class do not have intergenerational wealth needed to ease the strenuous pursuit of financial security. Additionally, because there is often an inverse relationship between wealth, education, and marriage among Black women, success can be a bittersweet pursuit for women who desire to have it all(Johnson, E., 2010, April 21; The Neilson Company, 2011; Nitsche & Brueckner, 2009; Young, 2010).

Robinson (2010) describes the *transcendent* class as a sector of African Americans who have achieved enormous success which is unattainable by most people regardless of race, such as with Oprah Winfrey, Barack and Michelle Obama, and Will and Jada Smith to name a few commonly known examples. Although a dearth of literature exists regarding these populations, it is possible that women within the transcendent class may also use their income to support working class family members and friends, which directly impacts their ability to secure long-term wealth (Billingsley, 1992; Landry, 1987; Lubrano, 2004; Wilkerson, 1990). This dynamic may be particularly troublesome for women who possess Strong Black Woman attitudes who have both a perceived obligation to provide for loved ones and their intense drive for success (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2008). It is possible that, at times, these characteristics may oppose one another leading to cognitive dissonance and psychological distress. Women within the transcendent class may experience additional distress as a result of the values and norms that may exist between women within the transcendent class and their working class relatives and friends. For example, although related biologically, women within the transcendent class may

find themselves socially estranged from their working class relatives and friends; separated by the value orientations that arise as a result of class differences (Landry, 1987; Lubrano, 2004; Robinson, 2010).

According to Robinson (2010), the *emergent* class is comprised of bi-racial and immigrant black Americans. Like women within the transcendent class, women within the emergent class may, too, experience psychological distress as a result of issues related to social estrangement. However for these women social estrangement may arise from encounters with acculturative stress resulting from having the appearance of being African American, yet likely have encountered a unique Black American experience as immigrants or people of bi-racial heritage (Robinson, 2010). Like the transcendent class, a dearth of literature exists regarding women within the emergent class.

Spiritual values

The presence of spiritual values, such as the use of faith, religion, and spirituality to manifest Strong Black Woman characteristics, is an additional contextual factor within the Superwoman Schema (SWS) (Woods-Giscombe, 2010). The complex interplay between spiritual values and the characterizations of the Strong Black Woman are worth noting. For example, according to Woods-Giscombe, it has been through Black women's use of faith that they are able to manifest strength during difficult circumstances without the help of other people. In this way, the use of spiritual values promotes Black women's *obligation to manifest strength*, which is the first characterization of the Strong Black Woman identified within the SWS. Furthermore it is possible that religious values of charity and grace promote Black women's feeling of having an obligation to help others, which is an aforementioned characteristic of the Strong Black Woman.

Black women's dependence on God as a source of provision seems to be related to the second characterization, *resistance to being vulnerable or dependent*. Reliance on religion and spirituality as a means of psychological support is a cultural practice that developed during the difficult times of slavery where survival of the harsh realities of slavery required slaves to fend for themselves and become self-reliant (Camp, 2004; Gaspar & Hine, 1996; Morton, 1996, Painter, 1996). When human strength was not enough, slaves relied on spirituality to help them survive and overcome the treachery of enslavement (Hopkins, 1999; Pinn, 1999; Raboteau, 2004). As a result, reliance on spirituality for survival and success became a culturally accepted form of coping (Harris-Perry, 2011). In this way, spiritual values, such as the use of faith in God for survival seems to be directly related to Strong Black Woman characteristic: *determination to succeed, despite limited resources.*

Religious beliefs about how faith is manifested may contribute to Black women's tendency to suppress emotions, which is an additional characterization of the Strong Black Woman. Many people contend that fear or vulnerability equates to a lack of faith in God and lack of faith constitutes sinful behavior (hooks, 2003; Lincoln & Mamiya, 2003). As a result, African American women are sometimes left with few places to exercise the full extent of their humanity when facing stress and pressure that can lead to psychological distress (Harris-Perry, 2011; hooks, 2003; Hopkins, 1999; Lincoln & Mamiya, 2003; Pinn, 1999; Raboteau, 2004). For traditionally oriented African Americans who want to honor cultural values, people may push through by ignoring feelings of uncertainty and doubt and relying on faith (Utsey, Adams, & Bolden, 2000; Woods-Giscombe, 2010). Women who acknowledge symptoms of psychological distress and seek professional counseling place themselves at risk of being perceived, by themselves and others, as weak, lacking a strong racial identity, or lacking faith in God

(Amankwaa, 2003; Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2007; Coker, 2004; Harris, 1995; Schreiber, Stern, & Wilson, 2000). The cultural avoidance of formal counseling has particular relevance given that the fact that, traditionally, blacks have sought psychological support through informal networks of support, such as under the auspices of the church and from clergy, but not with a professional mental health counselor (Amankwaa, 2003; Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2009; Lincoln & Mamiya, 2003; Poussaint & Alexander, 2000; Woods-Giscombe, 2010). The reliance on cultural practice of religion and spirituality at the expense of seeking professional mental health care, can create a troubling circumstance for strong Black women who profess faith in God, and yet experience psychological distress in their personal lives (Shambley-Ebron, & Boyle, 2006; Williams, 2005; Woods-Giscombe, 2010).

Summary: Contextual Factors which Contribute to *Strong Black Woman* Phenomena

An in-depth overview of the contextual factors which contribute to the Strong Black Woman phenomenon: a historical legacy of racial or gender stereotyping or oppression; lessons from foremothers; a past history of disappointment, mistreatment, or abuse; and spiritual values, has been provided. The historical legacy of slavery, discrimination, and social injustice crated a contextual impetus for Black women's adherence to Strong Black Woman characteristics as a means of coping and survival. More contemporary issues: occupational inequity, disparities in educational achievement, tenuous opportunities for gender wage equality, and the prevalence of financial insecurity among African American women influence Black women's continued use of *Strong Black Woman* characteristics as a means to cope with contemporary race and gender inequities. The related aspect of the Strong Black Woman role has also been discussed as a means in which the role of strength is learned and internalized as an acceptable form of cultural coping. For example, the intergenerational lessons of strength taught to Black women from their

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foremothers, the fact that nearly one-third of Black women are unmarried head of households

with significant relational responsibilities of single motherhood and caretaking for aging loved

ones, and the inverse relationship between education, financial security, and marriage are a few

relational implications of the Strong Black Woman role discussed in this section. The

diversification of Black women in which Black women are no longer believed to be a monolithic

mass, but rather comprised of distinct classes each with separate and unique identities, needs,

and concerns adds to the complexity of the Strong Black Woman role and identity. Finally,

Black women's reliance on spirituality and religion was presented as a nuanced form of coping

that has broad implications for Black women's wellness. The perceived benefits of the Strong

Black Woman role will be presented next. An overview of the perceived liabilities associated

with the Strong Black Woman role will conclude the overview and discussion of the

Superwoman Schema.

Perceived Benefits of the Strong Black Woman Role

The Strong Black Woman is a celebrated cultural icon with roots in the collective

experience of resilience and survival of horrific social, political, and cultural practices

detrimental to Black women's health, wellness, and viability. As a celebrated cultural

phenomenon, it is most appropriate that Black women's perception of the perceived benefits be

explored. Specifically, the preservation of self and survival, the preservation of the African

American community, and the preservation of the African American family were identified as

benefits to the Strong Black Woman role (Woods-Giscombe, 2010).

According to the Superwoman Schema (SWS), being a Strong Black Woman has been

integral to Black women's survival, functioning, and movement towards wholeness (Woods-

Giscombe, 2010). The preservation of dignity and self-worth were also connected to the strong

black woman role. Consistent with the characterization of the Strong Black Woman, women identified the importance of the strong black woman as an aid by which they are able to provide opportunities to improve the lives of their loved ones (Woods-Giscombe, 2010). This emphasis on the collective is consistent with literature on African American culture values. These findings, however, illustrate how the Strong Black Woman role influences African American's collective ideals.

Reliance on the Strong Black Woman cultural ideal has provided a means by which Black women can present themselves as capable of enduring multiple, intersecting forms of discrimination. Thus, the use of Strong Black Woman cultural attitudes have become a self-protective strategy used by generations of African American women to cope with life's challenges and insulate oneself from harm. However, the degree to which Strong Black Woman cultural attitudes empowers black woman is debatable. Some scholars suggest that, when used in an extreme manner, Strong Black Woman cultural attitudes can compromise African American women's wellbeing (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2009; Collins, 1990; Harris-Perry, 2011; hooks, 2003; Mitchell & Herring, 1998; Wallace, 1990). Women within the SWS identify additional liabilities that are associated with the use of Strong Black Woman attitudes (Woods-Giscombe, 2010).

Perceived Liabilities of the Strong Black Woman Role

Within the Superwoman Schema (SWS), Woods-Giscombe (2010) found three perceived liabilities associated with one's role as a Strong Black Woman. The first liability, *strain on interpersonal relationships*, refers to strong black woman characteristics such as portraying oneself as strong, independent, and resistant to vulnerability contribute to challenges in Black women's relationships, particularly romantic relationships. As a result of the effort to maintain

independence, avoid vulnerability and emotional expression, as well as the lack of reciprocity in giving and receiving support, it may be that Black women who ascribe to the Strong Black Woman role have difficulty loving fully and being loved (Woods-Giscombe, 2010). The second perceived liability, *stress-related health behaviors*, refers to Black women's tendency to postpone self-care, engage in emotional eating, and have poor sleeping habits. Since Black women who ascribe to the Strong Black Woman role put other's wellbeing before their own, tend to minimize or ignore personal problems, and have a tendency to rely on their spiritual values as a means of coping with stress, it is possible that self-care and personal wellness are not adequately prioritized (Woods-Giscombe, 2010). Beauboeuf-Lafontant(2008) found that some Black women use eating, alcohol consumption, and shopping as coping mechanisms to manage the stress associated with constantly having to portray an image of strength. The third liability, *the embodiment of stress*, refers how Black women internalize stress and use unhealthy coping strategies in response to stress. Here Woods-Giscombe notes participants' increased incidents of hair loss, acne, weight gain, migraines, and depression as embodied symptoms of overwhelming stress. This liability is consistent with Beauboeuf-Lafontant (2009) findings noting that stress functions as a troublesome side effect of ascribing to the strong black woman image.

Summary: Perceived Benefits and Liabilities of the Strong Black Woman Role

An overview of the perceived benefits and liabilities found to be associated with the Strong Black Woman role has been presented. The Strong Black Woman has been identified as a celebrated cultural phenomenon by which Black women have been able to survive atrocious social, political, and cultural circumstances. Secondly, the Strong Black Woman role has provided a means by which African American family systems, and the African American community with its collective ideals and cultural traditions, have been preserved despite the

historical context of hardship and pain. However, unfortunately, many women rely on Strong

Black Woman attributes in an extreme manner which can have a detriment to one's health and

wellness. Specifically, the strain on interpersonal relationships influenced by the characteristic

resistance to vulnerability and intimacy; the prevalence of stress-related health behaviors as a

result of focusing on others and not giving oneself adequate attention, and minimizing

experiences of emotional and physical pain; and finally, the embodiment of stress as a result of

internalized stress and not seeking outward support in times of need, are identified within the

Superwoman Schema as liabilities that threaten African American women's health.

Conclusion: Theoretical Framework

Black women have been faced with a turbulent but resilient past. Oppressive social

conditions, inescapable negative stereotypical image, intersecting social, political, and cultural

constructs such as issues of race, gender, class, religion, and sexuality have been detrimental to

African American women's health. The use of Strong Black Woman attitudes and

characteristics has become an acceptable form of coping with these experiences. The

Superwoman Schema (Woods-Giscombe, 2010), a framework designed to operationalize the role

of the Strong Black Woman, has been presented as the theoretical framework for the study. The

Strong Black Woman provides a means for Black women to present themselves in contrast to the

societal portrayals of their identity. The Strong Black Woman, as described in the Superwoman

Schema, presents as capable, strong, resilient, and independent of needing support from others.

Yet, when used in a polarized manner, Strong Black Woman characteristics can be harmful in

that it isolates women from avenues of support, promotes the irrational belief of superhuman,

and discourage authentic expression of emotion and experience. To provide a more in-depth

illustration of the Strong Black Woman, the nature of stress in the lives of Black women, and the

coping strategies used to restore a woman's sense of normalcy, a review of the empirical literature on each construct: strong Black womanhood, stress, and coping follows.

Empirical Review of the Literature

This section provides an empirical review of the literature relevant to the study. A series of studies on strong Black womanhood phenomenon, stress, and coping are presented thematically within this empirical review. For example, first, the empirical review of Strong Black Woman phenomenon is presented according to the themes: Strong Black Woman as a source of Dissonance, Strong Black Woman Role as an Intergenerational Practice, and Strong Black Woman and Psychological Health. Secondly, the empirical review of stress literature includes selected studies that examine the influence of racial and gender identity on Black women's perceptions of stress. Finally, two themes are presented within the empirical review of coping literature on Black women: Strong Black Woman as a Coping Mechanism and Culture-Specific Coping. Implications for the study, which examined the influence of Strong Black Woman attitudes on how African American perceive and cope with stress, are discussed throughout the empirical review.

Strong Black Woman Phenomenon

The relationship between Strong Black Woman cultural identity and African American women's gender and cultural identity has received minimal attention within the field of scientific research. For many women, the Strong Black Woman icon is the ideal image of what it means to be a successful African American woman (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2009; hooks, 2003; Mitchell & Herring, 1998). Yet, the absence of scientific research on this phenomenon provides an inadequate knowledge base regarding African American women's perceptions of their own identity. The current study aimed to provide greater insight as to how African American

women's identity as Strong Black Woman influence perceptions of personal stress, as well as serve as a coping mechanism used for personal stress management. A growing body of empirical literature related to Strong Black Woman phenomenon exists (Amankwaa, 2003; Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2005; Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2008; Hamin, 2008; Shambley-Ebron & Boyle, 2006; Thompson, 2003; Winkle-Wagner, 2008; Woods-Giscombe, 2010). A review of this body of literature follows.

Using grounded theory methodology to develop the Superwoman Schema (SWS), Woods-Giscombe (2010) recruited a community-based sample of African American women of diverse age and educational levels from a large urban, Southeastern region of the United States. Participants were placed in focus groups comprised of women of similar age and educational background. Forty-eight women participated in all. Characteristics of the Superwoman role were an obligation to manifest strength, an obligation to suppress emotions, resistance to being vulnerable or dependent, determination to succeed despite limited resources, and an obligation to help others. Contributing contextual factors found to be associated with the Superwoman Schema included a historical legacy of racial or gender stereotyping or oppression; lessons from foremothers; past history of disappointment, mistreatment, or abuse; and spiritual values. The Superwoman role was found to have perceived benefits that include the preservation of self and survival, the preservation of the African American community, and the preservation of the African American family. Three perceived liabilities associated with ascribing to the Superwoman role emerged from the research. These liabilities were: a) strain on interpersonal relationships, such as romantic relationships; b) stress-related health behaviors, such as postponement of self-care, emotional eating, and poor sleep; c) and the embodiment of stress, such as increased incidents of hair loss, acne, weight gain, migraines, and depression as a result

of internalized stress and unhealthy coping in response to stress. To reiterate, the current study used the Superwoman Schema as a theoretical framework for understanding Strong Black Woman phenomenon and its relationship to stress and coping among Black women.

Strong Black Woman as a Source of Dissonance

In a study of 12 African American female college students of diverse bodyweight, Beauboeuf-Lafontant (2005) explored whether overeating that leads to overweight and obesity could be an embodied protest against the expectation for Black women to silence their feelings, ignore their needs, and display selflessness as characterized by the Strong Black Woman image. Participants were interviewed individually and also placed in focus groups. Several findings emerged from the study. First, the study found that participants often felt compelled to demonstrate strength by hiding duress and minimizing concern for themself. Secondly, findings from the study suggested that overeating served as a way of paying attention to one's self in the absence of social opportunities to be recognized as a full human being. Furthermore, strength was affirmed to be a source of dissonance. Although participants were often critical of the role of strength, they also found protection and solace in possessing strength. This finding, in particular, is similar to the findings in Woods-Giscombe's (2010) Superwoman Schema research. Like Beauboeuf-Lafontant, Woods-Giscombe found that the phenomenon of strength is met with dissonance among participants- allowing for emotional protection, yet invoking a fear of vulnerability and intimacy in personal relationships.

As part of a larger ethnographic study about women's college experiences and identity, Winkle-Wagner, R. (2008) conducted a study exploring how the intersection of race and gender relate to African American female students' identity at a predominantly White, large, public college in the Midwestern United States. In a sample of 30 undergraduate female students who

self-identified as Black or African American, the researchers conducted weekly and bi-weekly small groups where participants described their notions of appropriate womanhood. Findings suggested that participants believed appropriate womanhood to be silent, passive, motherly, and religious. Strength and assertiveness were noted as empowering characteristics that were also perceived as a socially unacceptable and a liability on their college campus. Like Beauboeuf-Lafontant (2005) and Woods-Giscombe (2010), participants in this study noted both attributes and liabilities of ascribing to the strength role.

Based on the findings from Woods-Giscombe (2010), Beauboeuf-Lafontant (2010), and Winkle-Wagner (2008), it seems that for many African American women, the Strong Black Woman role is a source of dissonance. Participants in each study supported the notion of the Strong Black Woman as an iconic cultural symbol to which Black women commonly aspire. Nevertheless, participants in each study also cited liabilities that they associated with possessing characteristics of the Strong Black Woman. It is possible that the dissonance experienced by participants is, in itself, an additional liability of the Strong Black Woman role, however this assertion can benefit from empirically validated research.

The notion of the Strong Black Woman as a source of dissonance has potential implications for the current study which examined the extent to which Strong Black Woman cultural attitudes mediate the coping mechanism used to manage participants' perceived stress. First, it is possible that dissonance can lead participants in the study to minimize the degree to which they ascribe to the strength role. This is primarily because although many Black women are inwardly critical of the Strong Black Woman, the deep cultural epistemology and Strong Black Woman connection to African American women's identity may lead participants to avoid giving information that might portray Strong Black Woman cultural attitudes as a liability.

Strong Black Woman role as an Intergenerational Practice

Shambley-Ebron & Boyle (2006) conducted an ethnographic study on African American mothers diagnosed with HIV/AIDS. The purpose of this study was to explore how the concept of cultural strength, as evidenced in the Strong Black Woman icon, influenced participants' lives and mothering practices. Ten women, recruited from rural HIV public health clinics and private physician's offices in the Southeastern region of the United States, participated in the study. Semi-structured questions were conducted over three interviews to elicit participants' experiences, behavior, opinions, values, feelings, and knowledge regarding the concept of cultural strength, having HIV/AIDS, and mothering. Results of this study indicated that possessing strength is perceived as a cultural tradition transmitted to African American women by their ancestors. Participants in the study cited their mothers as role models who possessed courage and strength by enduring various trials associated with being African American women. In particular, participants referred to trials such as poverty, discrimination, childrearing with minimal resources, and frequent encounters with illness and death. Participants in the study cited cultural tools, such as spiritual and religious traditions, and female connections as means for gaining strength in the midst of their own illness and responsibility for mothering their children.

Amankwaa (2003) conducted a qualitative study to describe the nature of postpartum depression (PPD) among African American women. Participants in the study were either diagnosed with PPD by their health care provider, or acknowledged experiencing depression after childbirth. Additional criteria for study participation also included being an African American woman over 18 years of age, English speaking, and a mother who had PPD during the first year of a child's birth. Twelve women participated in the study. Six themes emerged from the study: "Stressing Out", "Feeling Down", "Losing It", "Seeking Help", "Feeling Better", and

"Dealing with It". According to Amankwaa (2003), the sixth theme, "Dealing with It," represented cultural ways in which participants managed depression. Within the "Dealing with It" theme, ascribing to the Strong Black Woman image emerged as one method of depression management. Participants in the study noted that the iconic symbol of being a strong woman was perpetuated by their mothers and others significant family members. Furthermore, participants discussed being socialized to be strong without regard for their physical or mental well-being. Internalized myths regarding mental health and depression, such as depression being an illness only experienced by Caucasian women, and the notion of depression as a sign of inward weakness, lack of control, and mental incapacitation seemed to sustain participant's basis for denial of their depression diagnosis and reluctance to seek mental health care. Findings from this study suggested that ascribing to the Strong Black Woman image has the potential to prevent women from acknowledging psychological distress, and even hinder women from receiving mental health treatment in times of need.

Ascribing to the Strong Black Woman image is an intergenerational, culturally accepted way of handling difficult circumstances. Participants in both the Shambley-Ebron & Boyle (2006) and Amankwaa (2003) studies identified their mothers and other significant family members as role models from whom they learned how to manifest strength in the midst of hardship. A collective history of hardship and discrimination, as a result of issues related to race and gender, has forged a spirit of strength within many Black women that led to the emergence of Strong Black Woman phenomenon (Woods-Giscombe, 2010). As a self-preservation strategy, matriarchs purposefully instilled the message of strength into their daughters (Mitchell & Herring, 1998; Radford-Hill, 2002; Shambley-Ebron & Boyle, 2006). Findings from these studies suggested that the message of strength continues to be instilled in many African

American females today, and that the appearance of strength continues to act as a buffer against hardships.

Implications for the current study may exist. First, as an intergenerational practice, it is possible that participants in the study, who also self-identify as Strong Black Woman, may have developed their Strong Black Woman cultural attitudes in the context of their family of origin. Thus, for these participants, it is possible that Strong Black Woman cultural attitudes are a learned coping mechanism that is connected not only to their cultural identity, but also their familial identity (Hamin, 2008).

Strong Black Woman and Psychological Health

Beauboeuf-Lafontant (2008) examined how Black womanhood contributes to depression in a nonclinical, convenience sample of 58 African American women ages 19 to 67. Qualitative analysis was used to determine the results of this study. Findings from the study revealed that participants perceive appropriate Black womanhood as practicing stoicism, silence, and selflessness through manifestation of the Strong Black Woman image. Similar to those of Amankwaa (2003), the findings of this study also revealed that participants in the study felt compelled to suppress experiences and realities that could be perceived by others as a sign of weakness or vulnerability, such as the need for mutual support in relationships or the periodic need for financial assistance during hard economic times. Beauboeuf-Lafontant suggested that these findings have relevance to the discourse on depression, and furthermore, concludes that future research is needed to determine whether the prevalence of depression among African American women is a psychological manifestation of the expectation to portray oneself as strong, as evidenced by constantly suppressing one's desires and interests.

Nicolaidis, et al. (2010) conducted a study designed to examine how racism, violence, and social context influence African American women's beliefs about depression and depression care. Participants in the study were low-income, African American women diagnosed with major depressive disorder, and a history of at least at least one lifetime experience of intimate partner violence, such as being physically hurt by an intimate partner or forced to have sexual intercourse. Thirty women, ranging in age from 19 to 53 years old, participated in 4 focus groups. Qualitative data analysis revealed twelve themes. The researchers found that although women described experiencing a cycle of violence, depression, and substance abuse that all negatively impacted their health, the majority of participants' discussions about health care revolved around their perception of racism and deep mistrust of the health care system. The expectation to be a Strong Black Woman emerged from the data as a barrier to recognizing depression, accepting it, and seeking depression care. Findings from this study support Beauboeuf-Lafontant (2008) such that characteristics of the Strong Black Woman are believed to be connected to how women experience depression.

Although the Strong Black Woman is an icon supported and upheld by many African American women, it is possible that, when practiced in a strict manner, Strong Black Woman ideals negatively impact women's psychological health. The research presented here suggests that not only does a Strong Black Woman identity potentially increases psychological distress, such as depression, but also increases the likelihood that women will minimize or ignore their psychological concerns. In regards to the current study which examined how Strong Black Woman cultural attitudes influence stress and coping in a sample of African American women, it is possible that the tendency to ignore or minimize psychological concerns might influence

participants who self-identify as strong Black women to minimize personal levels of perceived stress.

Summary of Empirical Review on *Strong Black Woman* Phenomenon

The review of literature reveals that the *Strong Black Woman* image can contribute to cognitive dissonance (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2010; Winkle-Wagner, 2008; Woods-Giscombe, 2010). Participants in the empirical studies cited above reflected on the Strong Black Woman image as an empowering symbol, while also referencing liabilities associated with adherence to Strong Black Woman ideals (Woods-Giscombe, 2010). These liabilities include a fear of vulnerability and a lack of intimacy in personal relationships. Furthermore, the Strong Black Woman is an intergenerational icon that has empowered centuries of African American women to manifest bravery, resilience, and confidence amidst challenging circumstances (Shambley-Ebron & Boyle, 2006; Amankwaa, 2003). Perhaps it is because of the Strong Black Woman image's enduring role in the story of African American survival, that many African American women continue to adhere to its mandate despite the psychological consequences associated with the Strong Black Woman image (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2008; Nicolaidis, et al., 2010).

Stress and Black Women

For the purpose of the study stress refers to the interplay of issues of related to race and gender which produce stress in the lives of Black women (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2009; Collins, 1990; hooks, 1993; Simien, 2004). Encounters with biased employment and promotion practices, instances of being ignored or made to feel invisible, experiences of sexual harassment, and subjection to the overwhelming negative and stereotypical messages about Black women that infiltrate the media are only a few examples of the stress-inducing manifestations of racial

and gender biases against Black women (Shorter-Gooden, 2004).   Persistent exposure to these stressors can lead to significant stress (Franklin & Boyd, 2000; Pierce, 1995).

Over time, such stress can contribute to a host of psychological and physiological concerns (Clark, Anderson, Clark, & Williams, 1999; Krieger, Rowley, Herman, Avery, & Phillips, 1993; Landrine, Klonoff, Gibbs, Manning, & Lund, 1995; Shorter-Gooden, 2004).   The current study examined how Strong Black Woman attitudes mediate the relationship between stress and coping.

The Influence of Racial and Gender Identity on Black Women's Perceptions of Stress

In a sample of 189 socioeconomically diverse African American women aged 21 to 78, Woods-Giscombe and Lobel (2008) used structural equation modeling to examine the fit of a multidimensional global stress factor and its ability to predict distress symptoms among African American women. To develop the global stress factor, the researchers used a combination of race-related, gender-related, and generic stressors. The researchers defined generic stress as events or conditions indirectly related to race or gender, such as accidents, chronic financial strain, and interpersonal conflict. Results of the study supported the multidimensional conceptualization and operationalization of stress in which race-related, gender-related, and generic stress contributed equally to the global stress factor. Results further indicated that the global stress factor was a significant predictor of distress. Based on the findings from this study it is clear that race-related and gender-related stress are central to African American women's overall experience of stress. With this understanding in mind, the current study examined the coping strategies African American women with Strong Black Woman cultural attitudes used response to their experiences of stress.

Jones, Cross, and DeFour (2007) examined whether racial identity attitudes moderate the relationship between racist stress events, racist stress appraisal, and mental health among a sample of 262 Black women. Of the sample, 118 participants were self-identified African American women and 144 self-identified Caribbean women. The Cross Racial Identity Scale, the Schedule of Racist Events, the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale, and the Center for Epidemiologic Studies Depression Scale were used as instruments in this study. Regression analyses revealed that racist stress events were positively associated with depression ($r = .35$) but not self-esteem. A significant, positive correlation between racist stress appraisals and depression and a small significant, negative correlation between racist stress appraisals and self-esteem were observed. Results of the study also suggested that, at the bivariate level, racist stress events and racist stress appraisal negatively impact mental health outcomes, particularly depression. Specifically, the results revealed that participants with multicultural identity attitude scores 1 standard deviation above the mean were somewhat protected from the impact of racist events, as evidenced by their lower levels of depression. There were no meaningful, statistically significant differences found between the African American and Caribbean women who participated in the study. Jones, Cross, and DeFour suggested that the lack of differences may be because the majority of Caribbean participants were not new arrivals to the United States. Overall, the results of this study indicated that multicultural identity attitudes are somewhat of a protective factor against the negative impact of race-related stress on Black women's mental health. Similar to this study which examined the relationship between culturally-laden identity attitudes and stress, the current study examined the relationship between Strong Black Woman cultural identity attitudes and stress among a sample of Black women.

Summary of Empirical Review of Stress and Black Women

Based on the findings from these two studies, it is evident that race and gender-related stress are central elements of African American women's experiences of stress. In particular, race-related stress events and Black women's appraisals of stress negatively impact mental health and can contribute to clinical ailments, such as depression. However, multicultural identity attitudes may act as a buffer that protects women from the negative psychological impact of race-related stress. The current study examined the coping strategies used by women with Strong Black Woman cultural attitudes in response to perceived stress.

Coping and Black Women

Recognizing the unique interaction between issues related to race and gender, along with their impacts on Black women's wellness, scholars have examined how Black women rely on various coping styles to manage stress (Green, 2012). In general, African Americans rely heavily on culture-specific coping styles such as reliance on the extended family and community, and spirituality and religious beliefs when facing stressful situations (Fowler and Hill, 2004; Thomas, Speight, and Witherspoon, 2008). Moreover, recent mental health literature suggests that, in addition to these coping styles, the Strong Black Woman is also a potential cultural relevant form of coping used by many African American women in response to stress (Green, 2012; Hamin, 2008; Thompson, 2003; & Romero, 2000).

Strength as a Coping Mechanism

Drawing on clinical observations of her work with African American women, Romero (2000) conceptualized the Strong Black Woman construct as a two factor model which included central themes of caretaking and self-reliance. Caretaking refers to the Strong Black Woman's acts of shouldering the problems of other, usually at the expense of her own needs (Hamin,

2008). Self-reliance refers to the Strong Black Woman's reliance on independence and control in personal affairs (Romeo, 2000). To empirically test Romero's conceptualization, Thompson (2003) developed the Strong Black Woman Attitudes Scale (SBWAS). In addition to the two factors, caretaking and self-reliance, conceptualized by Romero, Thompson's research resulted in a three factor model adding affect regulation, defined as the specific control of one's emotions, as a third factor to describe the Strong Black Woman construct.

In a follow-up study, Hamin (2008) revised the SBWAS to further explore the cultural components of the Strong Black Woman construct, as well as examine its relationship to stress and social support among African American women. In addition to confirming the existence of a three factor model, the results of the study also indicated that the Strong Black Woman construct is a possible coping mechanism used in relation to stress and issues related to racial identity. Hamin changed the name of the SBWAS to the Strong Black Woman Cultural Construct Scale (SBWCCS).

In addition to item revision and investigation of the psychometric properties of the SBWCCS, Hamin (2008) also measured the SBWCCS's ability to predict outcome variables such as racial identity, social support, and stress. Multiple regression analyses were used to measure the predictability of the SBWCCS in relation to the variables. In regards to stress, a construct central to the study, Hamin found that high levels on SBWCCS predicted both perceived stress and number of stressful events. Specifically, the overall SBWCCS, as measured by the total score, predicted stress among study participants. However, the relationship between the Caretaking, Affect Regulation, and Self-Reliance SBWCCS subscales and stress varied. According to Hamin, higher levels of caretaking, as well as higher levels of affect regulation, were associated with higher levels of perceived stress. In contrast, self-reliance was found to be

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negatively associated with perceived stress. In other words, women who scored higher on the Self-Reliance subscale had lower levels of perceived stress.

In a phenomenological study using qualitative research methodology, Lewis, Mendenhall, Harwood, and Huntt (2012) explored Black women's coping strategies in response to stress associated with racist and gendered microaggressions. The researchers conducted two semi-structured focus group interviews with a sample of 17 Black women undergraduate, graduate, and professional students. Five coping strategies were found to be used by Black women. Two of these coping strategies, *Using One's Voice as Power* and *Resisting Eurocentric Standards* were categorized as resistance coping strategies by the researchers. The coping strategy of *Leaning on One's Support Network* was categorized as a collective coping strategy. Finally, Becoming a Black Superwoman, along with Becoming Desensitized and Escaping, was found to be a self-protective coping strategies used by Black women. Consistent with the body of empirical literature on the Strong Black Woman phenomenon, here the Black Superwomen is characterized by her strength, independence, and self-reliance (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2005; Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2009; Romero, 2000; Woods-Giscombe, 2010. The Black Superwoman and the Strong Black Woman are both phenomena that reference Black women's cultural reliance on strength as a means of resilience and coping (Wallace, 1990; Woods-Giscombe, 2010). The term Black Superwoman and Strong Black Woman are used interchangeably in empirical and conceptual literature (Woods-Giscombe, 2010).

The specific coping strategies of the Strong Black Woman have not been examined in the research literature. Empirical validation of the specific coping behaviors used by women who self-identify as strong Black women is necessary to inform the practice of counseling research, clinical practice, and counselor education. The current study aimed to fill in the gap by

examining the relationship between participants' perceived stress, Strong Black Woman

phenomenon, and coping in order to examine how Strong Black Woman cultural attitudes

mediate the relationship between stress and coping strategies.

Culture-Specific Coping

To measure African American's use of culture-specific coping styles, Utsey, Adams, and

Bolden (2000) developed the Africultural Coping System Inventory (ACSI), a 30-item

instrument grounded in African-centered epistemologies which uphold reliance on the extended

family and community, and spirituality and religious beliefs as culture-specific values. The

Africultural Coping System Inventory (ACSI) has four subscales. The first subscale, C*ognitive-*

Emotional Debriefing, includes efforts to manage environmental stressors by attempting to forget

the situation, minimize the negativity of the situation, venting, processing stressful incidents with

others, or engaging in distracting activities (Utsey, Adams, and Bolden, 2000). Cognitive-

emotional debriefing is considered an avoidant and passive coping mechanism in that has been

found to be related to detachment, an externalization or denial of issues, or a minimization of the

severity of the concern in other measures of coping (Utsey, Adams, and Bolden, 2000). In

essence, this strategy attempts to manage, not resolve the problem at hand. The second subscale,

Spiritual-Centered Coping, focuses on universal sense of spirituality and the relationship with

the Creator. The third subscale, *Collective Coping*, includes items that reflect the Africultural

value of the importance of the group and family, including one's network of social support. The

fourth subscale, *Ritual-Centered coping*, includes rituals such as lighting a candle or burning an

incense for strength and guidance during difficult times, or using objects, such as a cross, for its

special powers when encountering a problem. These rituals are believed to honor ancestors and

deities, as well as be a culturally appropriate way to celebrate events (Utsey, Adams, and Bolden, 2000).

The four subscales of the Africultural Coping System Inventory (ACSI) are consistent with the literature on the Strong Black Woman role which suggests that women who ascribe to Strong Black Woman characteristics may suppress emotion, rely on spiritual values, place emphasis on their perceived obligation to take care of others, and desire to immolate the resilient spirit displayed in their matriarchal ancestors' survival of insurmountable odds, as strategies to cope with challenging circumstances (Woods-Giscombe, 2010). Although a limited number of studies exist that examine how Black women cope with life stressors, the ACSI has been used in empirical studies to measure the relationship between black women's use of culture-specific coping strategies and various wellness domains. The current study used the ACSI to examine the relationship between cultural coping, stress, and Strong Black Woman attitudes among a sample of Black women.

The effectiveness of culture-specific coping styles in alleviating psychological distress among African American women is questionable (Greer, 2011a; Greer, 2011b; Thomas, Speight, & Witherspoon, 2008). While Nasim, Belgrave, Jagers, Wilson, & Owens (2007) found culture-specific coping styles to improve the mental health of African Americans coping with stress, a body of research exists which seems to contradict these findings as it relates to African American women, in particular. Other research findings suggest that culture-specific coping styles can actually increase the severity of psychological symptoms (Green 2011a). Additionally, use of cognitive-emotional debriefing form of coping presents significant findings within several empirical studies that examine culture-specific coping among African American women (Greer, 2011a; Greer, 2011b; Thomas, Speight, & Witherspoon, 2008).

Using the Africultural Coping System Inventory (ACSI) to examine whether culture-specific coping strategies act as moderators of the relationship between individual race-related stress and mental health symptoms among a sample of 128 African American women, Greer (2011a) found that, in contrast to the hypothesis that frequent use of culture-specific coping strategies would lessen the strength of the relationship between race-related stress and psychological symptoms, high use of ritual-centered strategies in response to race-related stress was related to increased anxiety and interpersonal sensitivity. Thus, as ritual-centered coping increased, the effect of individual race-related stress on anxiety and interpersonal sensitivity also increased. Results from the study also found that while spiritual-centered and collective centered culture-specific coping styles had no moderating effect on depression, obsessive-compulsion, and somatization symptoms, the culture-specific coping strategy of cognitive–emotional debriefing was found to have a significant main effect in predicting anxiety. According to Greer, use of this coping strategy was associated with decreased symptoms of anxiety, suggesting that cognitive-emotional debriefing strategy, although avoidant and passive in nature may have some psychological benefit.

In an additional study, Greer (2011b) examined the moderating effect of culture-specific coping strategies to understand the relationships between race- and gender-based discrimination and psychological symptoms for a sample of 188 African American female college students. It was hypothesized that frequent use of coping efforts would be related to less severe psychological symptoms. Moderated structural equation modeling was used to test the study hypothesis. Results revealed that race and gender discrimination were associated with increased psychological symptoms. However, contrary to the study hypotheses, coping strategies were not found to be significant moderators. Interestingly, participants in the study reported using

cognitive-emotional debriefing strategies more than the other strategies assessed. Greer noted

that it is possible that participants' use of the cognitive-emotional coping strategy was not

enough to alleviate the psychological symptoms associated with discrimination. These findings

are similar to those of Thomas, Speight, & Witherspoon (2008), which also suggest that the

cognitive-emotional debriefing coping style, although readily used by African American women,

appears to be ineffective in fully alleviating psychological distress.

Using the Africultural Coping System Inventory (ACSI) as a measure of cultural coping,

Thomas, Speight, & Witherspoon (2008) explored whether coping served as a mediating variable

between gendered racism and psychological distress in a sample of over 300 African American

women. As aforementioned, regression analyses suggest some degree of partial mediation on the

relationship between gendered racism and global psychological distress via cognitive–emotional

coping styles. The partial mediation effect suggests that gendered racism may be related to a

coping style that is associated with heightened distress, further suggesting that the coping style

employed was not effective in alleviating psychological distress. The researchers note that an

interesting finding in the study was that cognitive–emotional debriefing coping was the only

coping mechanism that served as a mediating variable. More active styles of coping such as

spiritual-centered, ritual-centered and collective coping styles were not found to be mediating

variables suggesting that the psychological distress experienced by African American women

who participated in this study was not influenced by spiritual- centered, ritual-centered, and

collective coping styles.

Summary on Coping and Black Women

Women's use of the cognitive-emotional debriefing coping style was important to the

finding of each study within this empirical review on African American women's use of culture-

specific coping style in response to psychological distress (Green, 2011a; Greer, 2011b; Thomas, Speight, & Witherspoon, 2008). It is possible that African American women's reliance on cognitive-emotional debriefing coping strategies is a result of how they perceive stressful incidents (Thomas, Speight, & Witherspoon, 2008). For example, if a situation seems uncontrollable, it is possible that they are less likely to use a more active approach-oriented coping (Thomas, Speight, & Witherspoon, 2008). Furthermore, because African American women are conditioned to be strong, it is possible that they may be accustomed to relying on a coping strategy designed to manage emotions and distress (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2009; Mitchell & Herring, 1998; Thomas, Speight, & Witherspoon, 2008; Wallace, 1990). Thus, a coping style of avoiding or minimizing experiences may help to maintain the façade of strength (Thomas, Speight, and Witherspoon, 2008). Yet, avoidance has been found to be negatively related to self-esteem and life satisfaction, and, at best, may only temporarily minimize the pain for who have Strong Black Woman attitudes (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2009; Utsey, Adams, and Bolden, 2000). Since strong Black women are susceptible to unhealthy stress-related and embodiment behaviors, such as postponement of self-care, emotional eating, poor sleep, hair loss, acne, weight gain, migraines, and depression; examination of the coping styles employed by Black women in response to stress and strength will be a valuable addition to the current body of literature Black women, stress, and coping (Woods-Giscombe, 2010).

Conclusion

This chapter provided a review of the literature relevant to the study. First, an analysis of the Strong Black Woman as a stereotypical image was presented. An overview of the Superwoman Schema (SWS) (Woods-Giscombe, 2010) the theoretical framework that guides the study was provided. The connection between African American women's lived experiences and

levels of functioning was discussed along with an analysis of the historical and contemporary issues relevant to the emergence of Strong Black Woman phenomenon. A review of empirical literature on Strong Black Woman phenomenon, stress, and coping concluded the chapter.

Unfortunately, a dearth of literature exists that examines the constructs of stress and coping among Black women, and the majority of research on Strong Black Woman phenomenon has used qualitative methodology (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2005; Shambley-Ebron & Boyle, 2006; Winkle-Wagner, 2008; Woods-Giscombe, 2010). The purpose of the current study was to examine the influence of Strong Black Woman attitudes on how Black women perceive and cope with stress. In contrast to the majority of empirical studies on the Strong Black Woman, the study used quantitative research methodology to examine the construct and its relationship to stress and coping among a sample of African American women.

Chapter Three

Methodology

The purpose of the study was to examine the influence of Strong Black Woman attitudes on how Black women perceive and cope with stress. Participants were students, faculty, and staff of five post-secondary educational institutions located within the eastern region of the United States. The following research questions guided the study:

1. What are the respondents' levels of Strong Black Woman attitudes, perceived stress, and culture-specific coping?

2. How does perception of stress predict Strong Black Woman attitudes?

3. How does perception of stress predict the use of culture-specific forms of coping?

4. How do Strong Black Woman attitudes mediate the relationship between perception of stress and culture-specific coping?

This chapter is focused on methodology that will be employed for the study. It contains information on the research design, participant selection, survey procedures, and instruments that will be used in the study. A thorough description of intended data collection and analysis is also provided.

Research Design

A quantitative research design was used for this study. Quantitative designs are best suited for studies that aim to determine causal factors, relationships between variables, and predictive factors. Utilizing a large sample of participants is necessary for quantitative studies to achieve valid results (Pedhazur, Pedhazur, & Schmelkin, 1991). The calculated a-priori sample size at the .05 alpha-level for multiple regression analysis with two predictor variables

(Strong Black Woman attitudes and perceived stress) is a minimum of 67 participants. This calculation applies to a medium anticipated effect size ($f^2 = .15$).

Participants

The population included students, faculty, and staff who are of the female gender and who self-identify as African American. For the purpose of this study, African American refers to those who self-identify as Black Americans and are of direct African, Sub-Saharan Africa, and Caribbean ancestral descent. Additionally, classification as a student refers to one who is enrolled in either an undergraduate, graduate, or professional education program at one of three post-secondary educational institutions. Faculty refers to any person who is employed in a research or instructional role at either one of the three post-secondary educational institutions, including university employees who hold an affiliate, adjunct, instructor, or lecturer position. Staff refers to any person employed in a non-instructional or non-research role at either one of the three post-secondary educational institutions, including university employees who hold an administrative or support services position. The five post-secondary educational institutions from which students, faculty, and staff were recruited are a large, public, research university in the eastern region of the United States; a small, private, religious-affiliated university in an urban northeastern region of the United States; and three large, public, historically Black universities in the eastern region of the United States. Participants were between the ages of 18 and 65. African American female students, faculty, and staff with a valid email address were sent the recruitment email requesting their participation in the study. The researcher recruited participants through university listservs of Black students, faculty, and staff. Access to the listservs were solicited from each university.

The post-secondary education environment provides access to a diverse composition of Black women and therefore fits the rationale for use as a means of recruitment for the study. It is likely that Black women within the post-secondary environment vary by age, income, education, life experiences, and personal values. By recruiting participants from five universities very distinct from one another: a large, public research university in the eastern U.S.; a small, private, religious-affiliated university in an urban, northeastern region of the U.S.; and three large, public historically Black universities in the eastern region of the U.S., the researcher hoped to capture the in-group diversity of Black woman that may be reflected in the distinct environment, culture, and values of each university.

Survey Procedures

The population which was asked to participate in the web-survey most likely had convenient access to a computer due to the frequent use of computers in post-secondary educational environments. Therefore, to assist with achieving an optimal response rate, data was collected by electronic survey (Qualtrics) to increase efficiency and provide greater convenience for the participants (Dillman, 2000). When compared to postal mail surveys, web surveys have been found to achieve comparable response rates (Kaplowitz, Hadlock, & Levine, 2004). In order to assist those students, faculty, and staff who may have decreased computer literacy, the recruitment email provided a direct link to the electronic survey, creating a more respondent-friendly survey method (Dillman, 2000). The recruitment email also included disclosure regarding the purpose of the study, a request for informed consent regarding participation, procedures of the study, anticipated risks and benefits, protection of confidentiality, a description of compensation, and permission to withdraw at any time. The recruitment email is presented in Appendix C. An incentive was offered to participants upon completion of the survey. Offering a

financial incentive such as a lottery is a technique used in internet-based research to improve response rates (Wright, 2005). Therefore, when participants reached the end of the web-survey, they received a message thanking them for their time and willingness to participate in the study. As a token of appreciation, participants were offered the opportunity to enter a lottery to receive one of two Visa Virtual Gift Cards worth $20.00 each. Participants who responded 'Yes, I would like to enter into the lottery to win a Visa Virtual Gift Card worth $20.00 as a token of appreciation for my completion of this survey' were directed to a webpage where they disclosed an email address where the researcher could contact them if they were randomly selected to receive the lottery incentive. Participants who responded 'No, I would not like to enter into the lottery to win a Visa Virtual Gift Card worth $20.00 as a token of my appreciation for completion of this survey' were not asked to disclose an email address.

Two follow-up emails were distributed to the participant pool including the survey link. Follow-up contact is recommended as a way of increasing online response rates (Cook, Heath, & Thompson, 2000; Dillman, 2000). The first follow-up email (Appendix D) was sent five days after the initial recruitment email. The second follow-up email (Appendix E) was sent five days after the first follow-up email. After all data was collected, the researcher randomly selected two participants from the lottery to each receive a Visa Virtual Gift Card worth $20.00. Each participant was notified via the email address provided (Appendix F). One participant did not respond within three days. As a result, then the incentive offer was considered null in void and another participant was randomly selected and contacted via email. The same procedure was repeated until both $20.00 Visa Virtual Gift Cards were awarded.

Instruments

The following instruments were used to collect data for the quantitative study: an information questionnaire developed by the researcher to include demographic and background information, the Strong Black Woman Cultural Construct Scale (Hamin, 2008), the Perceived Stress Scale (Cohen, Kamarck, & Mermelstein, 1983; Cohen & Williamson, 1988), and the Africultural Coping Systems Inventory (Utsey, Adams, and Bolden, 2000).

Information Questionnaire

The information questionnaire was developed by the researcher to include variables identified in the literature as well as demographic information that will be used to describe the sample. Demographic questions include age, gender, and ethnicity/race. Background information supported by the literature discussed in chapter two include: occupational status (e.g., faculty, staff, student, employed by university and taking classes), highest level of education (e.g., high school or equivalent; some college, but have not completed a bachelor's degree; bachelor's degree; master's degree; Ph.D., J.D., M.D. or equivalent), student classification (e.g., current undergraduate student, current masters degree student, current doctoral degree student, other), gross annual income (range of options include $0 to $23,000, $24,000 to 50,000, $51,000 to 79,000, and $80,000 and above), marital status (options include single/never married, married, divorced, separated, widowed, other), number of children (options include 0, 1, 2, 3, 4 or more), community of residence (e.g., rural, urban, suburban), and finally a checklist of health symptoms experienced within the last 12 months. Appendix G contains the complete information questionnaire.

The Strong Black Woman Cultural Construct Scale

The SBW Cultural Construct Scale (SBWCCS; Hamin, 2008) is a 22-item instrument used to measure Strong Black Woman cultural attitudes. The SBWCSS is a revision of the Strong Black Woman Attitudes Scale (SBWAS; Thompson, 2003), a 30-item measure of Strong Black Woman cultural attitudes. The SBWCCS was created from SBWAS in order to revise the wording of the items in the SBWAS and investigate its psychometric properties. The 22 items within the SBWCCS are rated on a 5-point Likert scale (0= never, 4= almost always). The SBWCCS is scored by totaling all items on the scale. Cronbach's α was computed to measure internal consistency for the 22-item SBWCCS total scale. The SBWCCS was found to have adequate internal consistency (.76) in a sample of 152 women (Hamin, 2008). Appendix H contains the complete SBWCCS instrument.

To determine the number of constructs, Hamin (2008) conducted an exploratory factor analysis on a sample of 152 women of African descent. Consistent with the SBWAS (Thompson, 2003), three factors emerged from the analysis: self-reliance, affect regulation, and caretaking. Initial analysis of the correlations, based on an oblim rotation, was less than .3, indicating that the factors were not highly correlated. As a result, the Hamin used Varimax rotation to interpret the three factors. Varimax rotation of the three factor solution for the SBWCCS indicated that all three factors showed strong loadings, such that most items loaded substantially, at .30 or greater, on just one factor. However, one item, which loaded highly on more than one factor in the original analysis, was deleted. Six items that loaded highly on more than one factor were reworded to load solely on one factor. For example, the original item "I have difficulty finding ways to have my needs met" loaded highly on caretaking and affect regulation. The item was changed to "I cannot rely on others to meet my needs" to load solely

on the caretaking factor. In addition to rewording items that cross-loaded, Hamin increased the number of items that loaded on the Caretaking and Self-Reliance subscales by adding items to the original scale such as the items "In my family I give more than I receive" and "At times I feel overwhelmed with problems". Overall, three items were removed from the individual subscales, yet were retained in the creation of the SBWCCS total score because they all contributed to the internal consistency. Cronbach's α for the subscales of SBWCCS were: .75 for Caretaking, .69 for Affect Regulation, and .62 for Self-Reliance. Traditionally, values of .7 or higher are the acceptable values of internal consistency of reliability (Field, 2005). The Affect Regulation and Self-Reliance subscales of the SBWCCS are lower than the traditional accepted value of .7. However, according to Field (2005), values below .7 can be expected when measuring complex psychological construct (Hamin, 2008). Finally, the adjusted three-factor solution explained 30.3 percent of the total variance. The Caretaking factor, whose corresponding subscale includes 9 items, explained 13.4 percent of the total variance. The Affect Regulation factor, whose corresponding subscale includes 5 items, explained 9 percent of the total variance. The Self-Reliance factor, whose corresponding subscale includes 5 items, explained 7.9 percent of the total variance.

In the current study, an internal consistency of .84 (N = 100) was found in this sample for the 22 items on the SBWCCS. Since reliability estimates of 0.7-0.8 are acceptable for most instruments, the reliability estimate on the SBWCCS is sufficient for analysis in this study (Nunnally, 1978). In comparison to Hamin's (2008) original validation study which found the internal consistency of the total 22-item subscale to be .76 in a sample of 152 women, the internal consistency found within this study is slightly higher, yet representative of a smaller sample size. Among the SBWCCS subscales, the internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha) for the

nine-item Caretaking subscale was .68 (N =100); the internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha) for the five-item Affect Regulation subscale was .78 (N =100); and internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha) for the five-item Self-Reliance subscale was .63 (N =100). In the original validation of the instrument and its subscales, Hamin (2008) found Cronbach's α for the Caretaking (.75) and Affect Regulation (.69) subscales to be lower than the Cronbach's α reported in the current study. Internal consistency for the Self-Reliance subscale reported in Hamin's original validation study, .62 (N=152), is consistent with the internal consistency of the Self-Reliance subscale, .63(N=100), found in the current study.

Perceived Stress Scale – 10 Item

The PSS-10 (Cohen, Kamarck, Mermelstein 1983; Cohen and Williamson 1988) is a ten-item instrument used to measure the degree to which situations in one's life over the past month are appraised as unpredictable, uncontrollable and overwhelming. The PSS-10 is originally derived from the Perceived Stress Scale (PSS-14), a 14-item measure of individual's perceptions of what is considered stressful. The 10-items of the PSS-10 are rated on a 0-4 Likert-type scale (0= never, 4= very often).

In a large, probability sample of 2,387 respondents, Cohen and Williamson (1988) reexamined the psychometrics of the PSS-14. Factor analysis revealed that 10 items loaded positively on the first factor at .48 or above. Four items had relatively low loadings. Specifically, item 4 loaded at .17, item 5 loaded at .33, item 12 loaded at .11, and item 13 loaded at .39. The PSS-10 was derived by dropping the four items with relatively low factor loadings. The remaining 10 items were factor analyzed using a principal components with Varimax rotation. All 10 items loaded positively at .42 or above. Two factors emerged with eigenvalue over 1. Specifically, Factor 1, composed of negatively worded items, such as having been upset

or unable to control, emerged with an eigenvalue of 3.4. Factor 2, composed of positively

worded item, such as felt confident and effectively coping, emerged with an eigenvalue of 1.4.

The total variance of the 10 item scale was 48.9%, with both factors combined; an increase from

the 41.6% total variance of the PSS-14. Factor 1 accounted for 34.9% of the total variance,

while Factor 2 accounted for 14.5% of the total variance. However, the distinction between the

factors was deemed irrelevant for the purpose of measuring perceptions of stress. Cronbach's

alpha coefficient for internal reliability of the PSS-10 was .78, a slight improvement from the

internal reliability (alpha coefficient = .75) of the PSS-14. Cohen and Williamson suggested

that, in comparison to the PSS-14, the PSS-10 is as viable a measure of perceived stress without

the loss of any psychometric quality. PSS scores are obtained by reversing the scores on the four

positive items (items 4,5,7, and 8). To reverse scores are calculated as follows: 0=4, 1=3, 2=2,

3=1, and 4=0. An overall score is computed by calculating a sum of all 10 items. Higher score

indicates a greater degree of perceived stress. Appendix I contains the complete PSS-10

instrument.

In the current study, the ten items on the PSS-10 yielded an internal consistency of .806

(N = 100)which is higher than Cohen and Williamson's (1988) original validation study of the

PSS-10 that yielded Cronbach's alpha of .78.

Africultural Coping Systems Inventory

The Africultural Coping Styles Inventory (ACSI) measures African American's self-

reported use of unique coping behaviors during stressful situations (Utsey, Adams, and Bolden,

2000). The ACSI contains 30 items that are rated on a 4-point Likert-type scale (0 = did not use,

3 = used a great deal). The ACSI is grounded in an African-centered conceptual framework and

is comprised of four subscales: *Cognitive-Emotional Debriefing*, *Spiritual-Centered Coping*,

*C*ollective Coping, and *Ritual-Centered Coping*. Within the ACSI, eleven items are designed to measure cognitive-emotional debriefing, eight items are designed to measure spiritual-centered coping and collective coping each, and three items are designed to measure ritual-centered coping. To complete the ACSI, participants are asked to recall and describe a stressful situation that occurred within the past week, to briefly describe the stressful situation, and to indicate which coping strategies they used to cope with the stressful situation by rating each of the 30 items using the Likert-type scale described above. Appendix J contains the complete ACSI instrument.

To establish content validity, a focus group composed of seven African American and Afro-Caribbean adults completed the 74-item ACSI prototype (Utsey, Adams, and Bolden, 2000). Based on the focus group discussion, several changes were made to the ACSI prototype. For example, unclear items were reworded, several items were added to the ACS, and some items, although rooted in African cultural/value systems, were deleted as a result of being unfamiliar to many of the focus group participants. The focus group study resulted in a 57-item prototype measure of cultural coping.

To evaluate the logistics of the ACSI's administration, such as the time it takes to complete, the readability and clarity of the items, and the clarity of the ACSI's instructions, and to conduct an item analysis of the ACSI, a pilot study of 72 African Americans was conducted. African American women constituted the majority of the sample (72%). The pilot study's findings resulted in the elimination of 15 items from the ACSI that had low item total correlations, little discriminatory ability as indicated by extremely high or low mean scores, and lack of response variation (i.e., small standard deviation). The ACSI had a corrected item total correlation coefficient range from .00 to .54, and the Cronbach's alpha for the total scale was .90.

To establish initial factor structure of the ACSI, exploratory factor analysis was conducted on the 42-item ACSI using a sample of 180 African Americans. Women constituted a majority of the sample at 57.8% of total sample size. A four-factor orthogonal solution best accounted for 35% of the common variance. Specifically, Factor I accounted for 16% of the total variance, Factor II accounted for7%of the total variance, Factor III accounted for 6% of the total variance, and Factor IV accounted for 6% of the total variance. The criteria for retaining items to factors were as follows: (a) items with factor loadings of .42 or higher were selected and (b) items meeting the .42 criterion on more than one factor were eliminated. Based on the results of the exploratory factor analysis, a total of 14 items were eliminated from the ACSI prototype. However, two of these items were later retained for inclusion on the final ACSI prototype. The final version of the ACSI was comprised of a total of 30 items. Of the 30 items, Factor I, described as Cognitive-Emotional Debriefing, has 11 items; Factor II, described as Spiritual-Centered coping, has 8 items; Factor III, described Collective coping has 8 items; and Factor IV, described as Ritual-Centered coping, is composed of 3 items.

Cronbach's alpha correlation coefficients were calculated for the four subscales of the ACSI. The coefficient alphas for the four subscales of the ACSI were .80 for Cognitive-Emotional Debriefing, .79 for Spiritual-Centered Coping, .71 for Collective Coping, and .75 for Ritual-Centered Coping. Pearson product-moment correlation coefficients were calculated to evaluate the subscale inter-correlations for the ACSI. These findings indicated Cognitive-Emotional Debriefing was correlated .22 with Spiritual-Centered Coping, .28 with Collective Coping, and .14 with Ritual-Centered Coping. Spiritual-Centered Coping correlated .35 with Collective Coping and .25 with Ritual-Centered Coping. Collective Coping correlated .22 with Ritual-Centered Coping. On the basis of these low inter-correlations, the ACSI subscales can

best be conceptualized as measuring a related, yet distinct, constructs associated with the culturally relevant coping behaviors of African Americans.

To establish the concurrent validity of the ACSI, Pearson product-moment correlation coefficients were computed between its subscales and the subscales of the Ways of Coping Questionnaire – Short Version (WCQ; Folkman & Lazarus, 1985). The short version of the WCQ is composed of 33 items with five empirically derived factors: Problem-Focused, Detachment, Wishful Thinking, Seeking Social Support, and Focusing on the Positive. The Cognitive-emotional Debriefing subscale of the ACSI was positively and significantly correlated with the Detachment, Seeking Social Support, and Focusing on the Positive subscales of the WCQ. The Spiritual-Centered subscale of the ACSI was positively and significantly correlated with the Problem-Focused Coping, Seeking Social Support, and Focusing on the Positive subscales of the WCQ. The ACSI's Collective Coping subscale was positively and significantly correlated with the Problem-Focused Coping, Seeking Social Support, and Focusing on the Positive subscales of the WCQ. Finally, the Ritual-Centered Coping subscale of the ACSI did not correlate with any of the WCQ subscales.

To examine the construct validity of the ACSI, confirmatory factor analysis was conducted on the four-factor 30-item ACSI. Using a separate sample of 220 African Americans, of which 72% were female. The four-factor oblique model emerged as the best fit. Cronbach's coefficient alphas for the four subscales of the ACSI were .78 for Cognitive-emotional Debriefing, .80 for Spiritual-Centered Coping, .81 for Collective Coping, and .65 for and Ritual-Centered Coping. With regard to the ACSI subscale inter-correlations, Cognitive-emotional Debriefing correlated .40 with Spiritual-Centered Coping, .34 with Collective Coping, and .30 with Ritual-Centered Coping. The Spiritual-Centered Coping subscale correlated .50 with the

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Collective Coping subscale and .38 with the ritual-centered coping subscale. Last, the Collective Coping subscale correlated .39 with the Ritual-Centered Coping subscale. ACSI subscale scores are obtained by calculating a sum of items for each subscale. Higher subscale scores indicate more frequent use of the corresponding form of culture-specific coping.

In the current study and among the ACSI subscales, the internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha) of the Cognitive-Emotional Debriefing subscale was .80 (N =100), for eleven items. The internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha) for the Spiritual-Centered coping subscale was .79 (N =100), for eight items. The internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha) for the Collective coping subscale was .75 (N =100), for eight items. Finally, the internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha) for the Ritual-Centered subscale was .63(N =100), for three items. Overall, these reliability coefficients are comparable to Utsey, Adams, and Bolden's original validation study (2000) reporting coefficient alphas of .80 for Cognitive-Emotional Debriefing, .79 for Spiritual-Centered Coping, .71 for Collective Coping, and .75 for Ritual-Centered Coping. Interestingly, the internal consistency of the Ritual-Centered Coping subscale was higher for participants in this study compared to the internal consistency found in the original validation study.

Data Analysis

The primary purpose of this study was to analyze the mediating function of the Strong Black Woman construct on how African American women perceive and cope with stress. The researcher utilized a mediation model to identify and explicate the process underlying the relationship between participant's perceptions of stress (independent variable) and culture specific coping used to manage stress (dependent variable) through the inclusion of Strong Black Woman attitudes as a mediating variable. Baron and Kenny (1986) provide four steps frequently used to conduct a mediation analysis in statistical research. These four steps guided the research

questions for the study. The following section describes how the data was analyzed as guided by each research question. The rationale for each of the chosen analysis methods is explained.

Research question 1: What are the respondents' levels of Strong Black Woman attitudes, perceived stress, and culture-specific coping?

To address the first research question, descriptive statistics was used to compute means, standard deviations, as well as minimum and maximum total and subscale scores for the variables: Strong Black Woman attitudes, perceived stress, and culture-specific coping. Specifically, descriptive statistics will be used to report total Strong Black Woman attitudes as well as the subscales of caretaking, self-reliance, and affect regulation. Descriptive statistics were also reported for total perceived stress score. Finally, descriptive statistics were used to report the cognitive-emotional debriefing coping, collective coping, spiritual-centered coping, and ritual-centered coping subscale scores of culture-specific coping.

Research question 2: How does perception of stress predict Strong Black Woman attitudes?

To analyze results for the second research question, simple regression analysis was used to determine whether there is a predictive relationship among the independent variable (perceived stress) as measured by the interval level scale PSS-10 total score, and the mediating variable (Strong Black Woman attitudes) as measured by interval level SBWCCS subscale scores. Specifically, a regression equation was used to test the relationship between perceived stress and each SBWCCS subscale: caretaking, self-reliance, and affect regulation. This research question is in line with the first step of the Barron and Kenny (1986) approach to conducting a mediation analysis which required that the mediator variable (Strong Black Woman attitudes)

first be treated as if it were an outcome variable in order to determine correlation with the independent variable (perceived stress).

Research question 3: How does perception of stress predict the use of culture-specific forms of coping?

To analyze results for the third research question, simple regression analysis was used to determine whether there is a predictive relationship among the independent variable (perceived stress) as measured by the interval level scale PSS-10 total score, and the dependent variable (culture-specific coping) as measured by the interval level ACSI subscale scores. Specifically, a regression analysis was conducted to examine the relationship between perceived stress and each of the four ACSI subscales: cognitive-emotional debriefing coping, collective coping, spiritual-centered coping, and ritual-centered coping.

This research question was in line with the second step of the Barron and Kenny (1986) approach to conducting a mediation analysis which required that the research first confirm that the independent variable (perceived stress) is a significant predictor of the dependent variable (cognitive-emotional debriefing form of culture-specific coping); thus verifying that there is an effect that may be mediated.

Research question 4: How do Strong Black Woman attitudes mediate the relationship between perception of stress and culture-specific coping?

Since analysis of variance (ANOVA) provided a limited test of a mediation hypothesis, a series of regression analyses were used to determine whether perceived stress (independent variable) and Strong Black Woman attitudes (mediating variable) are predictive of cognitive-emotional debriefing form of culture-specific coping (dependent variable) (Baron and Kenny, 1986; Fiske, Kenny, and Taylor, 1982; Judd and Kenny, 1981). A regression equation was

developed to test the relationship between perceived stress (independent variable), each SBWCCS subscale: caretaking, self-reliance, and affect regulation to measure Strong Black Woman attitudes (mediating variable), and each of the four ACSI subscales: cognitive-emotional debriefing coping, collective coping, spiritual-centered coping, and ritual-centered coping to measure culture-specific coping (dependent variable). Additionally, the researcher controlled for perceived stress in order to determine the mediating effect of Strong Black Woman attitudes on culture-specific coping.

According to Pedhazur, Pedhazur, and Schmelkin (1991), multiple regression analysis allows for multiple independent variables, categorical and continuous, while controlling for interrelatedness of the variables and covariant effects. Barron & Kenny (1986) note that, in mediation analysis, controlling for the independent variable will confirm whether the mediating variable is a significant predictor of the dependent variable. Furthermore, this research question was consistent with the third step of Barron and Kenny (1986) which involves demonstrating that the previously path between the independent and dependent variable, as observed in the analysis of the first research question, may be significantly reduced when the mediator and the independent variable are used simultaneously to predict the dependent variable. In regards to the study, the researcher also examined whether the absence of Strong Black Woman attitudes (mediating variable) resulted in a reduction in the relationship between perceived stress (independent variable) and culture-specific coping (dependent variables), which would indicate that Strong Black Woman attitudes may be a significant predictor of culture-specific coping while controlling for perception of stress.

The fourth step of the Barron & Kenny (1986) approach to mediation analysis required that the researcher determine the extent to which the mediator variable accounts for all or some

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of the observed relationship between the independent and dependent variables. To assess

whether a mediation effect is significant, the Sobel test (Sobel, 1982) could be calculated to

determine if the relationship between the independent variable and dependent variables have

been significantly reduced after inclusion of the mediator variable. The Sobel test is considered

the most widely reported statistical test used to determine the establishment of full or partial

mediation in mediation analysis research (MacKinnon, Lockwood, Hoffman, West, & Sheets,

2002; Sobel, 1982). In regards to the study, the researcher planned to utilize the Sobel test to

establish whether Strong Black Woman attitudes account for full or partial mediation of the

relationship between perceived stress and culture-specific coping among sample participants.

Addressing Limitations

The researcher used safeguards to minimize the emergence of three limitations:

challenges associated with the use of an online survey, generalizability of the sample, and

response bias.

First, to address challenges that may result from the use of an online survey to conduct

the study, the researcher piloted the survey to four individuals who were not currently members

of either post-secondary institution used for participant recruitment: an undergraduate student, a

graduate student, a faculty member, and a staff member. Each pilot participant was asked to

describe the clarity of the survey items, length of time needed to complete the survey,

mechanical errors encountered during the survey process, and any general reactions to the

survey. The researcher then made revisions to the electronic survey per the feedback provided

by the pilot study participants.

Secondly, the findings from the study may lack generalizability. The sample included

students, faculty, and staff from only five post-secondary institutions, which were all located in

the eastern region of the United States of America. Therefore the findings may not be inclusive

of the attitudes, perception of stress, and coping strategies employed by all Black women. In

other words, the findings from the study may not be useful in drawing conclusions about all

African American women. The results of the study should be generalized with caution to

African American women outside of the sample.

The self-report nature of the study is the third limitation that must be considered when

interpreting research findings from the study. Self-report data has the potential to threaten the

validity and reliability of the study's findings (Furnham, 1986; Utsey, Adams, and Bolden,

2000). For example, the type of self-reported data required for the study, such that participants

must accurately recall a stressful event and their coping responses to the event, may negatively

impact the reliability of the study results as some participants may be unable to accurately recall

the requested information. Also, self-report information may attribute to social desirability

response bias, a prominent self-report response bias that occurs when participants present

themselves or their attitudes in favor of cultural norms (Crowne & Marlowe, 1960). In regards

to the study, participants may feel inclined to exaggerate or minimize their experiences or coping

behaviors.

Summary

Participants in the study were asked to respond to questions on the Information

Questionnaire, Strong Black Woman Cultural Construct Scale (Hamin, 2003), Perceived Stress

Scale (Cohen, Kamarck, Mermelstein,1983; Cohen & Williamson,1988), and the Africultural

Coping Systems Inventory (Utsey, Adams, and Bolden, 2000).The research questions for the

study were addressed using quantitative analyses, including descriptive statistics, simple

regression analysis, and multiple regression analysis to determine the mediating function of

Strong Black Woman attitudes on perceived stress and culture-specific forms of coping. Results

will be presented in the next chapter.

Chapter Four

Results

The purpose of this study was to examine the influence of *Strong Black Woman* attitudes on how African American women perceive and cope with stress. Strong Black Woman attitudes are a unique set of cultural attitudes that promote the presentation of oneself as inhumanly strong, infrangible, and insusceptible to emotional and psychological distress related to historical and contemporary experiences of stress encountered by Black women (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2009; Hamin, 2008; Wallace, 1990; Woods-Giscombe, 2010). Experiences of stress include U.S. slavery, institution of the Black Codes, Jim Crow legislation, disparities in access to quality education and health care, as well as disparities in financial security (Ani, 1994; Diedrich, Gates, & Pedersen, 1999; Edge & Rogers, 2005; Minorities in Higher Education, 2011; NWLC, 2012; Pinkney, 1984; Roberson, 1995; Robinson, 2010; Stetson, 1982; Wider Opportunities for Women, 2010; Woods-Giscombe, 2010).

Using mediation analysis, the researcher sought to quantitatively examine the extent to which Strong Black Woman cultural attitudes mediate the coping mechanism used to manage participants' perceived stress. To measure Strong Black Woman attitudes, the researcher used the Strong Black Woman Cultural Construct Scale (Hamin, 2003). The Perceived Stress Scale – 10 item was used by the researcher to measure stress (Cohen, Kamarck, Mermelstein, 1983; Cohen & Williamson, 1988). Culture specific forms of coping were measured suing the Africultural Coping Systems Inventory (Utsey, Adams, and Bolden, 2000). Four research questions guided this study. This chapter will provide results of the study as reported for each of the following research questions:

1. What are the respondents' levels of Strong Black Woman attitudes, perceived stress, and culture-specific coping?

2. How does perception of stress predict Strong Black Woman attitudes?

3. How does perception of stress predict the use of culture-specific forms of coping?

4. How do Strong Black Woman attitudes mediate the relationship between perception of stress and culture-specific coping?

In this chapter, indicators of quality and rigor for the research study are discussed. First, the sample of participants is described. A report of the reliability of scales used in the study follows. Finally, results of the study are reported as guided by each research question. Implications of the findings for the counseling profession, limitations of the study, and future directions for research on strong Black womanhood will be provided in Chapter five.

Participants

The sample for this study was comprised of Black female students, faculty, and staff members at five universities and colleges in the eastern region of the United States. Participants were recruited through snowball sampling, a non-probability sampling technique commonly used to gather study populations on research examining sensitive topics (Bryman, 2001). A total of 109 respondents agreed to participate. Before beginning data analysis, a thorough review of participant responses and missing items was conducted. The data cleaning procedures described below resulted in a final sample of 100 participants. A comparison of the final sample by student, faculty, and staff member occupational status is displayed in Table 1.

Table 1

Comparison of Participant Occupational Status5

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Student	69	69.0	69.0	69.0
	Faculty	15	15.0	15.0	84.0
	Staff	12	12.0	12.0	96.0
	Employed by University and Taking Classes	4	4.0	4.0	100.0
	Total	100	100.0	100.0	

Data Cleaning

For this study, students, faculty, and staff from six universities were invited to participate in an electronic survey. Five of the six universities participated in the study. There were 109 respondents. Following data cleaning procedures that are described below, there was a final sample of 100 participants.

Seven respondents completed the Information Questionnaire in its entirety, but did not proceed to continue the survey, and were removed from the sample. The study included three scales: The SBWCCS, PSS-10, and the ACSI. The total score on the SBWCCS and PSS-10, as well as subscale scores on the SBWCCS and ACSI were used in the statistical analyses associated with the research questions. The subscales of the SBWCCS have few items, ranging from five to nine items. The subscales of the ACSI also have few items, with each subscale ranging from three to eleven items. The PSS-10 total scale has only ten items. Therefore, respondents who omitted two or more of items on each of the subscales of the SBWCCS and

ACSI, or thePSS-10 total scale, were deleted for the sample. This resulted in the elimination of two participants. Therefore, a total of nine participants were eliminated from the sample.

Of the remaining 100 participants, only one item was omitted. The omission was an item from the PSS-10. Therefore, for the PSS-10, one case was modified by entering the mean score as the missing value for the respondent. This method of replacing omitted items with a mean scale score is known as *mean imputation* (Montiel-Overall, 2006). As a traditional method used to account for missing data, mean imputation prevents the omitted item from impacting the overall mean scale score.

Description of the Sample

The information questionnaire provided a variety of data regarding sample demographic and relationship information. Of the 100 participants, 69 (69%) identified occupational status as students, 15 (15%) as faculty, 12 (12%) as staff, and 4 (4%) as university employees and taking classes. Among the students and those employed by the university and taking classes, 45 (62%) were classified as undergraduates, 9 (12%) were classified as Master's degree students, 16 (22%) as doctoral degree students, and 3 (4%) were classified as other.

Participants' ages ranged from 18 to 65 years. Age was categorized according to a series of six ranges specified by the researcher. Forty-nine (49%) of participants were between 18-25 years, 14 (14%) of participants were between 26-34 years, 13 (13%) of participants were between 35-42 years, 16 (16%) of participants were between 43-50 years, and 4 (4%) of participants were between both ranges 51-58 years and 59-65 years each. With regard to racial subgroup, 87 (87%) participants were African American, 3 (3%) were Caribbean/Caribbean American, 2 (2%) were Biracial with one parent of African or Caribbean ethnicity, 7 (7%) were African, and 1 (1%) participant selected "other" as a racial subgroup , yet did not specify a racial

subgroup in the descriptor textbox. The majority of participants (57%) had post-secondary education, such as a bachelor's degree (21%), a master's degree (18%), or a doctoral degree (18%). Thirty-three participants (33%) had some college but had not completed bachelor's degree. Ten participants (10%) had earned a high school diploma or equivalent. In regards to gross individual annual income, 58 (58%) of participants reported earnings of $0 to $23,000, 16 (16%) participants earned $24,000 to 50,000, 14 (14%) participants earned $51,000 to 79,000, and 12 (12%) participants earned $80,000 and above. Overall, participants lived in rural (29%), urban (33%), and suburban (38%) communities proportionately.

Within the relationship data collected, participants were asked about marital status, number of children, and number of legal dependents. The majority of participants, 66 (66%), single/never married. Twenty-five (25%) of participants were married, while 7 (7%) were divorced. One participant (1%) was separated. One participant (1%) was widowed. The majority of participants had no children, while 12 (12%) had one child, 13 (13%) had two children, and 6 (6%) had three children. No participants had four or more children. Twenty-eight (28%) participants were caretakers of legal dependents: 4% spouse as legal dependent, 23% children as legal dependent, 5% parents as legal dependents, 1% grandchildren as legal dependents, 2% other adults as legal dependents, 1% other child as legal dependent.72 participants (72%) identified having no legal dependents.

Participants were also asked about health symptoms experienced within the last 12 months. Thirty health symptoms were provided on a checklist. Of the thirty health symptoms, seven physiological symptoms: Common Cold/ Flu Virus/ Seasonal Allergies; Tiredness/Excessive Sleeping/Fatigue; Headaches; and Trouble sleeping/Sleeplessness/Insomnia were reported more frequently than all other health symptoms. Health symptoms that are

psychological in nature were also reported highly among participants. Thirty-seven percent

(37%) of participants reported experiencing Depression/ Feeling the Blues/ Excess Sadness/ Low

Energy within last 12 months. Nearly one-third of participants (29%) reported experiences of

Nervousness/Anxiety/ Excessive Worry/ Panic Attacks within the last 12 months. Additionally,

nearly one-fourth (23%) of participants reported experiencing both Depression/ Feeling the

Blues/ Excess Sadness/ Low Energy and Nervousness/Anxiety/ Excessive Worry/ Panic Attacks.

Finally, over one-fourth of participants (26%) reported Excessive Anger/Frustration/Irritability.

Findings

This section describes results of the study as guided by each of the research questions.

Chapter 5 will provide implications and discussion of the results.

Assumptions of the Analysis

Variables were inspected to ensure that several assumptions were met in order to conduct

regression analysis. The first assumption is normal distribution of each of the variables (Osborne

& Waters, 2002). The researcher visually inspected data plots for each variable and found that

SBWCCS, PSS-10, and ACSI subscale scores all adhered to a normal curve. As an additional

check on normality, skewness and kurtosis were reviewed for each of the variables: Strong Black

Woman attitudes, stress, and culture-specific coping.

Multicollinearity, the degree to which variables measure distinct constructs, must be

examined in order to determine that variables do not have a linear relationship with each other. A

linear relationship among variables increases the risk for error in the regression equation.

Examining variables for strong correlations is one way to determine the existence of

multicollinearity (Garson, 2011). According to Pedhazur et al. (1991), a Pearson correlation

r^2value greater than .6 indicates a strong relationship, and values below .3 indicate a weak

relationship. A correlational matrix was generated and is displayed in Table 2. All variables

showed no multicollinearily, therefore further examination of multicollinearity was not

warranted.

Table 2

Correlation Matrix of SBWCCS, PSS-10, and ACSI Subscales

	1	2	3	4	5	6
SBWCCS						
PSS-10	.352**					
ACSI Cognitive Emotional	.111	.229				
ACSI Spiritual Centered	.067	.051	.323**			
ACSI Ritual Centered	.129	-.075	.032	.102		
ACSI Collective Coping	-.055	-.091	.445**	.515**	.051	

**.Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level(2-tailed).
*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).
Note. SBWCCS = Strong Black Woman Cultural Construct Scale. PSS-10 = Perceived Stress
Scale. ACSI Cognitive Emotional, ACSI Spiritual Centered, ACSI Ritual Centered, and ACSI
Collective Coping = respective subscales of the Africultural Coping Systems Inventory (ACSI).

Finally, reliability of measurement is a critical assumption that must be met prior to

analysis (Osborne & Waters, 2002). Reliability coefficients for each of the measures are reported

as: SBWCCS = .84, PSS-10 = .68, and ACSI Cognitive Emotional Debriefing, Spiritual-

Centered, Collective, and Ritual-Centered Coping = .80, .79, .75, .63, respectively. All of the

measures utilized in this study are reliable as evidenced by Cronbach's alpha coefficients.

Research question 1: What are the levels of Strong Black Woman attitudes, perceived

stress, and culture-specific coping?

Participants' Strong Black Woman attitudes were measured by the Strong Black Woman

Cultural Construct Scale (SBWCCS). The SBWCCS is a 22-item instrument with scores rated on

a 5-point Likert scale (0= never, 4= almost always). The SBWCCS includes three subscales:

Self-Reliance, Affect Regulation, and Caretaking. The Self-Reliance subscale measures the

degree to which participants' rely on being independent and maintaining control in personal affairs (Romeo, 2000). The Affect Regulation subscale measures the ways in participants seek to control their emotions (Thompson, 2003). Finally, the Caretaking subscale measures participants' acts of shouldering other's problems, often at the expense of participants' own needs (Hamin, 2008). Overall, participants held more attitudes of Self-Reliance (Item Mean =3.20). Affect Regulation attitudes (Item Mean = 2.31) were second highest after Self-Reliance attitudes. Caretaking attitudes the least by participants (Item Mean = 2.19). However, item mean scores for each factor were lower than the original norming sample revealed in Hamin's study. In the original validation study of the SBWCCS, Hamin reported higher sample mean scores for attitudes of Self-Reliance (M = 21.19 or Item Mean= 4.24), Affect Regulation attitudes (M = 15.55 or Item Mean = 3.11), as well as Caretaking attitudes (M = 29.13 or Item Mean = 3.24).

Participants' perception of stress was measured by the Perceived Stress Scale- 10 item (PSS-10). The PSS-10 is a brief instrument used to measure the degree to which situations in one's life over the past month are appraised as unpredictable, uncontrollable and overwhelming. The 10-items of the PSS-10 are rated on a 0-4 Likert-type scale (0= never, 4= very often). Compared to mean scores for women (M = 13.7) and Black participants (M = 14.7) within the norming sample, participants in the current study reported a substantial degree of stress (M = 18.84) (Cohen and Williamson, 1988).

Participants' coping behaviors in response to stress was measured by the Africultural Coping Systems Inventory (ACSI). The ACSI contains 30 items that are rated on a 4-point Likert-type scale (0 = did not use, 3 = used a great deal). The ACSI is grounded in an African-centered conceptual framework and is comprised of four subscales: Cognitive-Emotional

Debriefing, Spiritual-Centered Coping, Collective Coping, and Ritual-Centered Coping. The

Cognitive-Emotional Debriefing subscale measures participants' efforts to manage

 environmental stressors by attempting to forget the situation, minimize the negativity of the

situation, venting, processing stressful incidents with others, or engaging in distracting activities

(Utsey, Adams, and Bolden, 2000). The Spiritual-Centered Coping subscale measures

participants' universal sense of spirituality and the relationship with the Creator (Utsey, Adams,

and Bolden, 2000). The Collective Coping subscale measures items that reflect the Africultural

value of the importance of the group and family, including one's network of social support.

Finally, the Ritual-Centered subscale measures rituals such as lighting a candle or burning an

incense for strength and guidance during difficult times, or using objects, such as a cross, for its

special powers when encountering a problem. Overall, participants relied most on Collective

coping behaviors (Item Mean = 2.12), followed by Cognitive Emotional Debriefing (M = 2.10)

and Spiritual-Centered Coping (Item Mean = 2.09) behaviors, respectively. Participants relied

least on Ritual-Centered coping behaviors (Item Mean = 1.24).

Mean scores and descriptive statistics for the SBWCCS and subscales (Caretaking, Affect

Regulation, and Self Reliance), the PSS-10, and the ACSI and subscales (Cognitive Emotional

Debriefing, Spiritual-Centered, Ritual-Centered, and Collective) are reported in Table 3.

Table 3

Descriptive Statistics for SBWCCS and subscales, PSS-10, and ACSI subscales

					Std.
Descriptive Statistics					
	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Deviation
SBWCCS	100	30.00	82.00	55.6400	10.18170
SBWCCS Affect Regulation	100	3.00	20.00	11.5700	3.57673
SBWCCS Caretaking	100	8.00	32.00	19.7500	4.93058
SBWCCS Self-Reliance	100	9.00	20.00	15.9900	2.54850
PSS-10	100	6.00	28.00	18.8400	4.87774
ACSI Cog-Emotional	100	11.00	39.00	23.0800	6.18679
ACSI Spiritual Centered	100	7.00	29.00	16.6900	5.37239
ACSI Ritual Centered	100	3.00	12.00	3.7100	1.59098
ACSI Collective Coping	100	8.00	31.00	16.9500	4.56905
Valid N (listwise)	100				

Note. SBWCCS = Strong Black Woman Cultural Construct Scale. SBWCCS Affect Regulation, SBWCCS Caretaking, and SBWCCS Self-Reliance = respective subscales of the SBWCCS. PSS-10 = Perceived Stress Scale. ACSI Cog-Emotional, ACSI Spiritual Centered, ACSI Ritual Centered, and ACSI Collective Coping = respective subscales of the ACSI.

Research question 2: How does perception of stress predict Strong Black Woman attitudes?

Stress and Caretaking.

Simple linear regression was used to examine the relationship between the variables: perceived stress and the Caretaking form of Strong Black Woman attitudes. An *F*-value of 21.246 ($p < 0.05$) indicated a significant effect between the two variables. Therefore, perception of stress was a significant predictor of Strong Black Woman caretaking attitudes. For participants in the study, high stress was related to high caretaking attitudes ($\beta = .474$, p < 0.05). Results of the regression analysis indicated that 17.8% of the variance in Strong Black Woman Caretaking attitudes was explained by perception of stress ($R^2 = .178$).

Stress and Self-Reliance.

Simple linear regression was used to examine the relationship between the variables: perceived stress and the Self-Reliance form of Strong Black Woman attitudes. An F-value of .050 ($p > 0.05$) indicated that the effect between the two variables is not statistically significant. Therefore, the perception of stress was not a significant predictor of Strong Black Woman self-reliance attitudes.

Stress and Affect Regulation.

Simple linear regression was used to examine the relationship between the variables: perceived stress and the Affect Regulation form of Strong Black Woman attitudes. An F-value of 8.244 ($p < 0.05$) indicated a significant effect between the two variables. Therefore, the perception of stress was a significant predictor of Strong Black Woman affect regulation attitudes in that high stress was related to high affect regulation attitudes ($\beta = .409$, $p < 0.05$). . The results of the regression analysis indicated that 7.8% of the variance in Strong Black Woman Affect Regulation attitudes was explained by the perception of stress ($R^2 = .078$).

Research question 3: How does perception of stress predict the use of culture-specific forms of coping?

Stress and Cognitive-Emotional Debriefing Coping.

Simple linear regression was used to examine the relationship between the variables: perceived stress and the Cognitive-Emotional Debriefing form of culture-specific coping. An F-value of 5.426 ($p < 0.05$) indicated a significant effect between the two variables. Therefore, the perception of stress was a significant predictor of the Cognitive-Emotional Debriefing form of culture-specific coping. For participants in the study, high stress was related to high cognitive-emotional debriefing coping ($\beta = .264$, $p < 0.05$). Results from the regression analysis indicated

that 5.2% of the variance in the Cognitive-Emotional Debriefing form of culture-specific coping

was explained by perception of stress ($R^2 = .052$).

Stress and Collective Coping.

Simple linear regression was used to examine the relationship between the variables:

perceived stress and the Collective form of culture-specific coping. An F-value of .810 ($p>0.05$)

indicated that the effect between the two variables is not statistically significant.

Stress and Spiritual-Centered Coping.

Simple linear regression was used to examine the relationship between the variables:

perceived stress and the Spiritual-Centered form of culture-specific coping. An F-value of .251

($p>0.05$) indicated that the effect between the two variables is not statistically significant.

Therefore, the perception of stress was not a significant predictor of the Spiritual-Centered form

of culture-specific coping.

Stress and Ritual-Centered Coping.

Simple linear regression was used to examine the relationship between the variables:

perceived stress and the Ritual-Centered form of culture-specific coping. An F-value of .555

($p>0.05$) indicated that the effect between the two variables is not statistically significant.

Therefore, the perception of stress was not a significant predictor of the Ritual-Centered form of

culture-specific coping.

Research question 4: How do Strong Black Woman attitudes mediate the relationship

between perception of stress and culture-specific coping?

SBWCCS Subscales and Cognitive-Emotional Debriefing.

According to the Baron and Kenny (2008) approach to mediation analysis, examination

of a mediation effect can be assessed upon verification that the independent variable successfully

predicts the mediator variable, and that the independent variable successfully predicts the dependent variable. Because the independent variable (perceived stress) was found to only predict one of the four dependent variable subscales (Cognitive-Emotional Debriefing), mediation analysis was conducted only on Cognitive-Emotional Debriefing as a dependent variable. The lack of a statistically significant relationship between perceived stress and the remaining dependent variable subscales (Collective, Spiritual-Centered, and Ritual-Centered coping) precluded further mediation analysis. Similarly, perceived stress was found to not be a statistically significant predictor of Self-Reliance attitudes. Therefore, Self-Reliance attitudes were not included as a mediating variable in the analysis.

The overall model with the two mediator variables (Strong Black Woman attitudes of Caretaking and Affect Regulation) did not successfully predict the dependent variable (Cognitive-Emotional Debriefing) when controlling for the independent variable (perceived stress). The insignificant relationship between the variables: Caretaking, Affect Regulation, Cognitive-Emotional Debriefing, and perceived stress, was indicated by an F-value of .251 ($p>0.05$) and $r=0.051$ ($p>0.01$). Upon review of the contribution of each independent variable, the perception of stress remains a significant predictor of Cognitive-Emotional Debriefing in this model, as noted in response to Research question 3. However, when stress is controlled, the statistical significance between the variables relationship is lost, indicating that Strong Black Woman attitudes do not predict Cognitive-Emotional Debriefing coping above and beyond the effect of stress. Therefore the two mediator variables (SBWCCS subscales) were not significant in the model.

Summary

There were several key findings that resulted from this study of the influence of Strong Black Woman attitudes on stress and coping. First, stress was found to be a significant predictor of two forms of Strong Black Woman attitudes. Specifically, participants' perception of stress was a predictor of Caretaking, and Affect Regulation attitudes. Perceived stress was found to not be a significant predictor of Self-Reliance attitudes. Secondly, stress was found to be a significant predictor of only one form of culture-specific coping. This analysis revealed that while perceived stress predicted Cognitive-Emotional Debriefing form of culture-specific coping, it did not significantly predict Collective, Spiritual-Centered, or Ritual-Centered styles of coping. Finally, Strong Black Woman attitudes do not mediate the relationship between perceived stress and the Cognitive-Emotional Debriefing form of culture-specific coping.

In the final chapter, implications of the results are described as they pertain to the field of counseling and counselor education. The researcher will discuss how the results of this study may impact the development of future counseling interventions to effectively assist Black women. Limitations of the current study are also discussed, as well as the need for future research on the impact of Strong Black Woman attitudes on counseling and wellness.

Chapter Five

Discussion

In this chapter, the results of the current study are discussed. The purpose of this study was to examine the influence of Strong Black Woman attitudes on how African American women perceive and cope with stress. Using mediation analysis, the researcher sought to quantitatively examine the extent to which Strong Black Woman cultural attitudes mediate the relationship between respondents' perceived stress and coping behaviors. Instruments used in the study included the Strong Black Woman Cultural Construct Scale (Hamin, 2003), the Perceived Stress Scale – 10 item (Cohen, Kamarck, Mermelstein, 1983; Cohen & Williamson, 1988), and the Africultural Coping Systems Inventory (Utsey, Adams, and Bolden, 2000). A brief overview of the study is provided below. A discussion of the results from each of the four research questions that guided the study follows. After limitations of the current study are presented, the chapter will conclude with implications for professional counseling, theory, and future research.

Overview of the Study

The relationship between stress and psychological health is longstanding (Antonovsky, 1980; Cohen & Wills, 1985). However, little is known regarding the unique ways in which African American women cope with stress or the specific consequences to their psychological health that may result from stress (Woods-Giscombe, 2010). Recently, increasing amounts of attention has been given to the social and cultural expectation of strength as a factor influential to Black women's coping responses to stress (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2009; Woods-Giscombe, 2010).

For many Black women the social and cultural expectation to uphold psychological strength in response to challenging circumstances has been cultivated and sustained through the

legacy of Black survivorship of historical moral atrocities such as slavery, racial discrimination and oppression within the Jim Crow era, and more contemporary incidents of discrimination as a result of the intersection of race and gender in the United States (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2009; Boyd, 1999; Camp, 2004; Danois, 2010; Harris-Lacewell, 2001; Jacobs & Child, 1861; Radford-Hill, 2002; Romero, 2000; Walker-Barnes, 2009; Wallace, 1990). However, this legacy, when understood largely from a survivorship paradigm, provides an incomplete narrative that fails to adequately capture the psychological, emotional, and social consequences of experiencing such tremendous hardship (hooks, 1981; hooks, 1989; Reynolds-Dobbs et al., 2008; Robinson, 1983; Walker-Barnes, 2009; Wallace, 1990; Young, 1989).

Today, many Black women continue to rely on attitudes of strength and independence to cope with personal stressors (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2009; Winkle-Wagner, 2008; Woods-Giscombe, 2010). The reliance on psychological strength is best illustrated in the image of the Strong Black Woman. According to Woods-Giscombe (2010), the Strong Black Woman is a multidimensional phenomenon with unique characteristics, perceived benefits and liabilities, as well as factors that contribute to its existence in women's lives, such as historical legacy of racial or gender stereotyping or oppression; lessons from foremothers; past history of disappointment, mistreatment, or abuse; and spiritual values.

The current study, guided by four research questions, used mediation analysis to examine the extent to which Strong Black Woman attitudes serve as a mediator between perceived stress and culture-specific coping among a sample of Black women. More specifically, the researcher sought to discover a mediation relationship between Strong Black Woman attitudes as they influence stress and coping in Black women. Until the current study, the constructs: stress, Strong Black Woman attitudes, and coping had been studied in isolation. As a result, the unique

relationship that exists between the constructs had been absent from empirical literature. A discussion of the findings from the current study is provided below.

<div align="center">**Discussion of the Findings**</div>

Descriptive Data

Strong Black Woman Attitudes.

Participants were asked to report the degree to which they hold Strong Black Woman attitudes. Overall, participants scored highest on Self-Reliance attitudes. Affect Regulation attitudes were scored second highest by participants, while Caretaking attitudes were scored the least by participants. The descriptive information derived from these items reveals that participants in the current study hold more attitudes of independence than other Strong Black Woman attitudes. In the original validation study of the Strong Black Woman Cultural Construct Scale (SBWCCS), the instrument used to measure levels of Strong Black Woman attitudes in this study, Hamin (2008) found that participants also scored highest on attitudes of Self-Reliance. Therefore the finding from the current study that participants hold greater attitudes of independence than other Strong Black Woman attitudes is consistent with previous research. Unlike the current study, participants in Hamin's study scored second highest on Caretaking attitudes followed by Affect Regulation attitudes. Since the majority of study participants were college students and nearly half of the study participants were between the ages of 18-25 years old, the lack of Caretaking attitudes may make sense given that, in general, adults within this age range may still be reliant on others to support them versus supporting others.

Stress.

Participants were also asked about perceived stress and culture-specific forms of coping used in response to stress. With a Perceived Stress Scale overall mean score of 18.84 (sd =

4.88), participants' report of perceived stress indicated a significant amount of stress, just as the researcher anticipated. Perceived Stress Scale scores from the current study were higher than those reported in the original validation study of the instrument (Cohen, 1994; Cohen and Williamson, 1998). Of the 2,387 participants in the original validation study of the instrument, Cohen and Williamson found that sample participants who were of Black racial and ethnic identity (N=176) had an overall mean score of 14.7 (sd = 7.2) on the 10-item Perceived Stress Scale. The substantial degree of stress reported by participants in the current study suggests that these women likely perceive circumstances within their lives unmanageable. This finding warrants further empirical investigation since women who possess Strong Black Woman attitudes may be hesitant to openly acknowledge, or seek help for, experiences that result in stress.

Coping.

Participants were also asked to report the degree to which they use culture-specific forms of coping in response to stress. Overall, participants reported greatest use of the Collective form of coping, Cognitive-Emotional Debriefing and Spiritual-Centered forms of coping respectively. In fact, these three forms of coping were within three hundredths of a point of each other. Participants reported least use of the Ritual-Centered coping. In the original validation study of the Africultural Coping Systems Inventory (ACSI), the instrument used to measure levels of culture-specific coping in the current study, Utsey, Adams, and Bolden (2000) found that participants scored highest on the Cognitive-Emotional Debriefing coping behaviors, followed by the Collective and Spiritual-Centered forms of coping, and least on Ritual-Centered coping behaviors. Therefore the findings from the current study are consistent with previous research. A reliance on Collective coping behaviors may suggest that Black women are more likely to rely

on the support of family, friends, and other informal networks of support during stressful times. The preferential use of Cognitive-Emotional Debriefing coping behaviors may suggest that Black women are more prone to use behaviors such as venting, minimizing, and avoiding problems as a way of coping with stress. Finally, the use of Spiritual-Centered coping behaviors suggests that Black women may focus on their sense of spirituality, religion, and faith as a means of coping with stressful circumstances.

Stress and Strong Black Woman Attitudes.

As hypothesized, stress was found to be a significant predictor of Strong Black Woman attitudes. In regards to the subscales of the Strong Black Woman Cultural Construct Scale (SBWCCS): Self-Reliance, Affect Regulation, and Caretaking, Caretaking attitudes were associated with higher levels of stress. Interestingly, Caretaking attitudes were the least reported by participants as discussed previously. This finding, that Caretaking attitudes are associated with higher degrees of stress comparative to other Strong Black Woman factors, may suggest that the responsibility of caring for others creates tremendous pressure and strain on Black women (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2009; Pedersen, 2008; Woods-Giscombe, 2010). Affect Regulation was also associated with high stress. Affect Regulation attitudes measure the extent to which women control outward displays of their emotional experience. The relationship of both the Caretaking and Affect Regulation factor with stress suggests that although women may experience stress as a result of taking care of others, their experience of stress may be cloaked in an emotional façade as a result of their adherence to Affect Regulation attitudes (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2009; Jones & Shorter-Gooden, 2003). Self-Reliance, as detailed within the descriptive data, was not associated with high stress. This finding suggests that attitudes of independence may be a means of stress reduction for some Black women. The absence of

relationship between Self-Reliance and stress may also suggest that respondents may have greater confidence in themselves than others, and therefore attitudes of self-reliance may reduce aggravation and disappointment that can be associated with relying on others in times of need.

Stress and Coping.

Stress was found to be a significant predictor of the Cognitive-Emotional Debriefing form of culture-specific coping. Specifically, the Cognitive-Emotional Debriefing form of coping is associated with higher levels of stress. Cognitive-Emotional Debriefing is considered a passive, avoidant form of coping that relies on attempting to forget the situation, minimize the negativity of the situation, venting, processing stressful incidents with others, or engaging in distracting activities to deal with stressors (Utsey, Adams, and Bolden, 2000). The use of Cognitive-Emotional Debriefing may be a means for women to temporarily alleviate the strain of the stressor; yet may do little to actually resolve to source of stress. The association of Cognitive-Emotional Debriefing with higher levels of stress may mean that women who present as angry, frustrated, exhausted, and excessively fatigued may actually be internalizing stress, particularly since venting, a behavioral characteristics of Cognitive-Emotional Debriefing, does not lead to improved decision-making or the ability to identify action-oriented problem solving strategies (Utsey, Adams, and Bolden, 2000).

Collective coping, spiritual-centered coping, and ritual-centered coping were not associated with stress. Religion and spirituality, independence, and collectivism in the form of caretaking and looking out for others, are ritualized traditions within African socio-cultural heritage (Coker, 2004; Robinson, 1983). These traditions have been illustrated in the psychological strength, independence, resilience, and the ability to demonstrate dissemblance and shifting of generations of African American women (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2009; Hine,

1989; Jones & Shorter-Gooden, 2003). Today, these traditions are recognized as characteristics of the Strong Black Woman. Moreover, cultural traditions of religion and spirituality, independence, and collectivism are considered beneficial factors within one's Strong Black Woman identity that are believed to have protected and preserved generations of Black Americans through experiences of hardship (Woods-Giscombe, 2010). However, the lack of statistical significance between stress and the collective, spiritual, and ritual forms of coping suggests that although these styles of coping have protected and preserved African Americans' ability to survive hardship, they do not necessarily insulate women from the stress associated with experiences of hardship.

Absence of Mediational Relationship.

The researcher sought to determine the degree to which Strong Black Woman attitudes of Caretaking and Affect Regulation mediate the relationship between stress and the Cognitive-Emotional Debriefing form of culture-specific coping. Ultimately, no mediating relationships between the constructs were found. Caretaking was not associated with Cognitive-Emotional Debriefing . This may mean that women with Strong Black Woman attitudes rely on the Cognitive-Emotional Debriefing coping style regardless of their caretaking role. This finding is especially important since women who ascribe to Strong Black Woman attitudes may perceive caretaking as an obligation to which they are bound regardless of their coping strategy.

Cognitive-Emotional Debriefing was also not associated with higher levels of Affect Regulation. Psychometric issues with reliability of the affect regulation subscale exist and may have impacted the analysis (e.g., the marginal internal consistency reliability score of .69). Additionally, closer review of the two subscales reveals that although their titles imply similarities, the items reveal great differences in how the constructs are measured. For example,

items on the Affect Regulation subscale such as "I feel uncomfortable asking others for help" and "I believe that it is best not to rely on others" seemed to measure helping-seeking, independence, and to a lesser extent emotion, whereas Cognitive-Emotional Debriefing items such as "To keep from thinking about the situation, you found other things to keep you busy" and "Attended a social event (dance, party, movie) to reduce stress caused by the situation" measured behavioral responses to adverse phenomena. Since nuanced constructs such as Strong Black Woman phenomenon and culture-specific forms of coping are first operationalized and then measured, statistical instrumentation such as the SBWCCS and ACSI can have a tremendous impact on the results of statistical analyses. Therefore, given that this finding may largely reflect the nature of the instrumentation rather than the nature of Strong Black Woman ideals and coping in the sample, it makes sense that no significant relationship between the constructs Affect Regulation and Cognitive-Emotional Debriefing culture-specific coping above and beyond the relationship to stress was found.

Limitations

This sample consisted of a highly educated group of women. Although the rate of African American women earning baccalaureate and graduate degrees has increased over the last several decades, the educational profile of the current sample is not consistent with the group norm of Black women in the United States (Minorities in Higher Education, 2011). As a result, the findings from the current study may not capture the unique experiences of Black women less educated than this study's respondents; and since Black women are a diverse group with issues correlated to education, income, and social class, it is possible that the experiences of lesser educated Black women may be distinct from current sample that had access to educational and

employment resources (Robinson, 2010). The sample also consisted of a small percentage of participants with children. According to Rahim (2013) advanced education and career endeavors may have implications for women's family planning and childbirth. Additionally, childrearing has been associated with increased stress among mothers (Grant, Bautovich, McMahon, Reilly, Leader, & Austin, 2012). Yet, because only 31% of study respondents reported having children, it is possible that the unique experiences of women with children are not captured in the sample.

Methodological limitations also exist within the current study. First, the researcher used snowball sampling as the sampling strategy in the current study. As a non-probability sampling technique, the use of snowball sampling did not allow the researcher to determine possible sampling error or make possible inferences about the sample to Black women in general. As a result, the findings from this study should be generalized with caution. Secondly, the current study was conducted with a small sample of Black women. Given that Robinson (2010) discussed the different categories of Black women, such as the *abandoned* class, the *mainstream* class, the *transcendent,* and the *emergent* class of Black women in America, a larger in-group sample could have provided the ability to make important observations about in-group variability. Finally, the absence of an instrument to directly measure the Superwoman Schema – the conceptual framework used to the guide the current study poses an additional limitation. Therefore the instrumentation used to measure the constructs within the study may not have fully fit with the concept of the Strong Black Woman as described in the conceptual framework.

Implications

Professional Counseling

Counselors need to understand the profile of the Strong Black Woman, as well as the idea that the image of the Strong Black Woman emerged from a history of stereotypical images

erroneously ascribed to Black women. Counselors should also recognize that women who rely

on Strong Black Woman attitudes may demonstrate a tendency to minimize personal stressors.

Because women who ascribe to Strong Black Woman attitudes may minimize or ignore stressors,

counselors must understand that stressors that are minimized or ignored by a client may still

warrant attention in counseling. Therefore, a clinical understanding of the Strong Black Woman

may be a means for promoting multicultural counseling competence.

Moreover, counselors should be mindful that a client's appearance of strength may not be

as reliable as it may appear. Women who ascribe to Strong Black Woman attitudes may

perceive characteristics of , caretaking, and affect regulation as virtuous. As a result of this

perception, some women may be outwardly behaving to the virtue of strong Black womanhood,

despite being highly stressed. Therefore, because of the strong Black woman's tendency to

minimize problems and shield her inward reality from outward view, counselors should be

careful to not be misled by these behaviors.

Counselors should also explore and encourage the strong Black woman client to delve

deeper into her authentic experiences. To do so, counselors should first be cognizant of Strong

Black Woman attitudes such as a disposition toward presenting oneself as strong and over

prioritization of caring for others. When these attitudes are observed, counselors should

respectfully engage clients in dialogue about the influence of their attitudes on various aspects of

their life. Secondly, counselors should affirm the strengths of strong Black woman attitudes

while being mindful of the limitations of Strong Black Woman ideals. For example,

conceptually, the Strong Black Woman is a multidimensional phenomenon that includes unique

characteristics, contributing factors, perceived benefits, and perceived liabilities. Counselors may

celebrate perceived benefits such as the preservation of self and survival, the preservation of

one's community, and the preservation of the one's family when they are illustrated in the client's life. As counselors focus on clients' strengths, culturally competent counselors should ensure that such strength does not double as a personal liability within the client's life. For example, instead of being in awe of the strength some Black women clients may profess to have, a counselor may choose to explore client's experiences of taking care of others, being independent, and emotionally guarded. Counselors should also be mindful of perceived liabilities, such as strain on interpersonal relationships, stress-related health behaviors, and the embodiment of stress which may, in the long-term, impair a women's sense of wellness. To that end, thirdly, counselors should encourage clients to be more proactive in their coping strategies. For example, women with strong Black woman attitudes may be more prone to use an avoidant form of coping in response to stress. In this case, counselors may urge clients to consider more active forms form of coping to resolve stressors not simply manage them.

Counselors may also use psychoeducation as a tool to educate women on the distinction between ancestral survival of moral atrocities and their own survival of personal stressors. Specifically, that psychoeducation could include reference to the idea that, historically, several characteristics of the Strong Black Woman have been protective factors for Black women. Additionally, psychoeducation could help clients understand both the contextual and historical benefits of Strong Black Woman characteristics, as well as the potential psychological and relational consequences associated with contemporary reliance on these characteristics. Items in the PSS-10 measured women's sense that things in their life are unmanageable. Therefore, counselors may also explore how stress is manifested in a client's life. This is especially important since some African American women's psychological distress may manifest as anger, fatigue, hostility, or frustration. Since some women who hold Strong Black Woman

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attitudes may be out of touch with their authentic emotional experience and therefore less able to recognize anger, fatigue, hostility, or frustration as potential symptoms of psychological distress the way stress is manifested in a client's life is worthy of attention in counseling (Coker, 2004; Jones & Shorter-Gooden, 2003; Romero, 2000; Woods-Giscombe, 2010). To do so, counselors may ask clients to draw meaning from their feelings of anger, fatigue, hostility, or frustration to determine whether or not the client perceives these as acceptable ways of being. Counselors may also assess inter- and intra- personal implications for clients who experience chronic anger, fatigue, hostility, or frustration. Culturally competent counselors will recognize these as potential consequences of Strong Black Woman attitudes that are the possible result of an avoidant coping style.

Finally, religion and spirituality may be a useful outlet for many strong Black women. Counselors should understand that many women may find comfort and solace from life's burdens at church and within other religious institutions. Culturally competent counselors should support women's spiritual outlets by providing psychoeducation to women on the historical importance that religion and spirituality has contributed to Black women's wellness and survival, as well as by, when possible, using women's faith as a tool within the counseling relationship.

Theory

Although conceptualized and operationalized within Woods-Giscombe's (2010) Superwoman Schema, the concept of the Strong Black Woman is absent of an empirically validated theoretical base. Recent qualitative research has been conducted on the Strong Black Woman in relation to other phenomenon such as overweight and obesity, depression, and self-silencing (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2008; Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2009). Yet, without a solid theoretical base that is supported by empirical study, research on the concept of the Strong Black

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Woman is limited. Because the Strong Black Woman is a culturally-encapsulated phenomenon with strong implications for women's health and wellness, future attention should be given to the development of an empirical base to support the concept of the Strong Black Woman.

Research

The psychological manifestations of stress, such as anger, irritability, and fatigue, along with the correlations of these manifestations as symptoms of depression, suggests future research should use a measure of depression when examining stress and strong Black womanhood. Also, future research that replicates the current study and includes larger samples sizes to capture the demographic variables will be a meaningful contribution the growing body of research on stress and strong Black womanhood. Moreover, since stress, in the current study, impacted each factor of Strong Black woman attitudes differently, future research could examine the complexities of stress and Strong Black Woman attitudes through more sophisticated statistical methodology. Finally, the development of instruments with more rigorous psychometric properties is critical to ongoing quantitative research on the strong Black woman phenomenon. For example, future research using qualitative research methodology could improve the psychometric properties of the SBWCCS instrument in three ways. First, qualitative research methodology could assist researchers in strengthening the theory underlying the instrument (Rossman & Rallis, 2011). Secondly, the results from qualitative research can help support the development of factors that are grounded in, and supported by, research (Creswell, 2012; Rossman & Rallis, 2011). Lastly, the use of qualitative research methodology can be instrumental in the development of items that best correspond with each of the instrument's factors (Creswell, 2012; Onwuegbuzie, Bustamine, & Nelson, 2010). Improved instrumentation will allow future research and scholarship the ability to generate a theory of strong Black womanhood with greater confidence.

Counselor Education and Supervision

Given that the field of professional counseling has given increasing attention to issues of diversity, the concept of the Strong Black Woman has tremendous relevance to counselor education, training, supervision. As educators and supervisors of counselors-in-training, it is vital that counselor educators and supervisors are able to instruct counselors-in-training on issues that are relevant to African American female clientele. To that end, counselor educators and supervisors should seek ways to incorporate the concept of the Strong Black Woman into counselor education curriculum. For example, counselor educators may teach counselors-in-training about the history of the Strong Black Woman as a manifestation of women's survival techniques that emerged from a history of nuanced stressors related to race and gender. Counselor educators and supervisors should also inform counselors-in-training of the nuanced behaviors and attitudes of the Strong Black Woman, as well as the benefits and liabilities associated with these attitudes. Multicultural and diversity oriented classes may be an obvious avenue to broach this concept in an academic environment. Since the Strong Black Woman is a multidimensional phenomenon that impacts various aspects of women's lives, culturally competent counselor educators may also seek ways to incorporate teaching on the Strong Black Woman concept into other core counseling courses such as human development and lifespan courses, marriage and family counseling courses, and counseling skills and techniques oriented classes, to name a few. Counseling supervisors can help counselors-in-training gain an awareness of the manifestations of the Strong Black Woman concept through clinical supervision. Counselor supervisors can also teach counselors-in-training ways to acknowledge, broach, and guide counselors-in-training into counseling-relevant dialogue about the Strong Black Woman attitudes impact on their personal wellbeing.

Conclusion

The researcher of this study examined the relationship between stress, strong Black woman attitudes, and coping among a sample of Black women. The researcher concluded that higher Caretaking and Affect Regulation Strong Black Woman attitudes were associated with higher levels of stress. Increased use of the Cognitive-Emotional Debriefing form of culture-specific coping was also found to be associated with higher levels of stress. The research sought to find a mediational relationship between the three constructs. However, the research concluded that strong Black woman attitudes are not a mediator of the women's stress and coping as hypothesized. To promote the continuance of rigorous research on the Strong Black woman phenomenon, future researchers should use qualitative research to improve the psychometric properties of the instrumentation by assisting researchers in strengthening the theory underlying the instrument, helping support the development of factors that are grounded in, and supported by, research, and aiding in the development of items that best correspond with each of the instrument's factors.

The sample consisted of a highly educated group of women who endorsed several Strong Black Woman ideals. Among these ideals include Affect Regulation and Caretaking Strong Black Woman attitudes. Additionally, high levels of stress among respondents was also significantly related to the Cognitive-Emotional Debriefing form of culture-specific coping. Since respondents reported higher stress than normal, while also endorsing Strong Black Woman ideals that resulted in inadequate coping strategies, counselors, counselor educators, and supervisors should be aware of consequences of stress that may impact highly educated Black women. Also, since women who endorse Strong Black Woman ideals may be less likely to engage in professional counseling, and are more likely to minimize stressors during counseling,

it is important that counseling professionals understand and recognize the profile of the Strong

Black Woman, along with how her characteristics may manifest in a counseling context.

Counselors should promote wellness and authentic expression among female clients who ascribe

to Strong Black Woman attitudes by encouraging clients to be active in counseling and to make

meaning of their authentic experiences.

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Appendix A

Informed Consent

VIRGINIA POLYTECHNIC INSTITUTE AND STATE UNIVERSITY

Informed Consent for Participants in Research Projects Involving Human Subjects

Title of Project: Strong Black Womanhood, Stress, and Coping: A Quantitative Investigation of a Culturally Encapsulated Phenomenon

Investigator: Jasmine Graham

Advisors: Dr. Laura E. Welfare; Norma Day-Vines

I. Purpose of this Research/Project

The purpose of this study is to examine the influence of Strong Black Woman attitudes on women's experiences of stress and their coping responses to stress. Participants involved in the study include female college students, faculty, and staff between18-65 years of age. Participants must also be of African American racial ethnic background. For the purpose of this study, African American refers to those who self-identify as Black Americans and are of direct African, Sub-Saharan Africa, and Caribbean ancestral descent. Additionally, classification as a student refers to one who is enrolled in either an undergraduate, graduate, or professional education program. Faculty refers to any person who is employed in a research or instructional role, including university employees who hold an affiliate, adjunct, instructor, or lecturer position. Staff refers to any person employed in a non-instructional or non-research role, including university employees who hold an administrative or support services position.

II. Procedures
As a participant in this study, you will be asked to complete a secure, confidential online survey. The survey includes questions about stress, the way you cope with stress, as well as your attitudes and beliefs. The study will take approximately 15-30 minutes to complete.

As a token of appreciation, participants will be offered the opportunity to enter a lottery to receive one of two Visa Virtual Gift Cards worth $20.00 each. Entrance into the lottery is optional and voluntary. You do not have to enter the lottery to participate in the study.

III. Risks
There is no more than minimal risk associated with participation in this study, and are limited to possible discomfort while recounting stressful experiences and the coping responses used in response to stress.

IV. Benefits
Reflecting on how you cope with stress can be a powerful way to gain greater insight and self-awareness. However, no promise or guarantee of benefits has been made to encourage participants to participate in this study.

V. Extent of Anonymity and Confidentiality
Care will be taken to ensure the confidentiality of all participants. You will not be required to provide your name or other identifiable information in order to participate in the study.

Furthermore, all email addresses voluntarily provided by participants who agree to enter the incentive lottery, will be kept in a locked file cabinet. The email addresses provided will not be disclosed to anyone outside of the research team. Furthermore, no contact will be made to any participant aside from notification of being selected to receive the lottery incentive. All email addresses will be destroyed once both lottery incentives are awarded. Additionally, all information received as a result of being selected for the lottery incentive, such as a recipient name, mailing address, and email address, will be destroyed once both lottery incentives are awarded.

VI. Compensation
There will be no compensation for participating in this study.

VII. Freedom to Withdraw
You are free to withdraw from this study at any time, without penalty. You are free to not respond to any question or questions during the online survey.

VIII. Subject's Responsibilities
I voluntarily agree to participate in this study as described above.

IX. Subject's Permission
__ I hereby acknowledge the above and give my voluntary consent to participate in the research study. Please take me to the survey now.

If you have any questions regarding this research, please feel free to contact the Investigator or Faculty Advisors:

Investigator:

Jasmine Graham
Counselor Education
jasmine@vt.edu
(336) 383-0373

Faculty Advisors:

Dr. Laura E. Welfare
School of Education
welfare@vt.edu
(540) 231-8194

Dr. Norma Day-Vines
School of Education
Johns Hopkins University
Ndayvin1@jhu.edu
(410) 908-4983

Institutional Review Board Contact

If you have any questions about the protection of human research participants regarding this study, please contact:

Dr. David Moore, Chair
Chair, Virginia Tech Institutional Review
Board for the Protection of Human Subjects
Office of Research Compliance
2000 Kraft drive, Suite 2000 (0497)
Blacksburg, VA 24060
540.231.4991 / moored@vt.edu

(Note: Subjects must be given a complete copy (or duplicate original) of the signed Informed Consent Form)

Appendix B

Initial Recruitment Email

Greetings,

I am an African American female doctoral candidate conducting a study on how women of African, African American, and Caribbean descent cope with stress. I am writing to request your assistance in this research study. Your participation is requested because you are a [student/ faculty member/ staff member] at [university name has been removed] whose input is vital to this study. The online survey takes approximately 15-30 minutes to complete. Your identity as a participant is confidential.

If you choose to participate, you will have the opportunity to enter a lottery to win a Visa Virtual Gift Card worth $20. You may read the informed consent and participate in this research study by clicking on the link below:

[Qualtrics link inserted here.]

If you have questions now or at any time during the survey you may contact the lead investigator, Jasmine Graham, at jasmineg@vt.edu.

Sincerely,

Jasmine Graham, PhD Candidate

Counselor Education & Supervision

Virginia Tech

Appendix C

First Follow-up Email

The following email will be sent out five days following the initial recruitment email:

Greetings,

I am an African American female doctoral candidate conducting a study on how women of African, African American, and Caribbean descent cope with stress. I am writing to make a second request for your assistance in this research study. Many of you have already participated in this study and I am grateful for your time. If you have not, please consider participating as your input is vital to this study. The online survey takes approximately 15-30 minutes to complete. Your identity as a participant is confidential.

If you choose to participate, you will have the opportunity to enter a lottery to win a Visa Virtual Gift Card worth $20. You may read the informed consent and decide to participate in this research study by clicking on the link below:

[Qualtrics link inserted here.]

If you have questions now or at any time during the survey you may contact the lead investigator, Jasmine Graham, at jasmine@vt.edu.

Sincerely,

Jasmine Graham, PhD Candidate

Counselor Education & Supervision

Virginia Tech

Appendix D

Second Follow-up Email

The following email will be sent out five days following the first follow-up email:

Greetings,

I am an African American female doctoral candidate conducting a study on how women of African, African American, and Caribbean descent cope with stress. This is a final request for your assistance in this research study. Many of you have already participated in this study and I am grateful for your time. If you have not, please consider participating as your input is vital to this study. The online survey takes approximately 15-30 minutes to complete. Your identity as a participant is confidential.

If you choose to participate, you will have the opportunity to enter a lottery to win a Visa Virtual Gift Card worth $20. You may read the informed consent and decide to participate in this research study by clicking on the link below:

[Qualtrics link inserted here.]

If you have questions now or at any time during the survey you may contact the lead investigator, Jasmine Graham, at jasmine@vt.edu.

As a fellow Black woman myself, I understand the need for research that speaks to the unique concerns of women of color. Thank you for time and participation in this study!

Sincerely,

Jasmine Graham, PhD Candidate

Counselor Education & Supervision

Virginia Tech

Appendix E

Lottery Incentive Notification Email

Dear [insert name of email address]

Congratulations! You have been randomly selected to receive a Visa Virtual Gift Card worth $20.00 as a token of appreciation for your participation in the research study on how African American women cope with stress.

The Visa Virtual Gift Card worth $20.00 will be sent to this email address via GiftCards.com. You will be able to use your Visa Virtual Gift Card online or over the phone at any location where Visa is accepted. To claim your gift card, please respond this email and provide the information below:

1. First <u>and</u> Last Name of recipient

2. Recipient's Mailing Address

3. Recipient's Email address

The Visa Virtual Gift Card will be delivered to the recipient's email address provided above. The activation code needed to claim and activate the Visa Virtual Gift Card will be associated with the recipient's mailing address provided above. The recipient's name, mailing address, and email address will remain confidential and will only be used for the purpose of providing this incentive.

Please note: You must respond to this email within <u>three (3) days</u> to receive the $20 Visa Virtual Gift Card. Otherwise, another participant will be randomly selected and this offer will be null in void.

Again, thank you for your participation in the research study on how Black women cope with stress!

Sincerely,

Jasmine Graham, PhD Candidate

Counselor Education & Supervision

Virginia Tech

Appendix F

Information Questionnaire

Please answer each of the following questions.

1. Please select your age from the menu below.

2. Think of which racial subgroup best describes you and circle the category which is closest.

   A. African American

   B. Caribbean American

   C. Biracial (with one parent of African descent)

   D. African (born in Africa and immigrated to the United States)

   E. Black Hispanic

   F. Other (specify: _____)

3. What is your occupational status?

   A. Student

   B. Faculty

   C. Staff

   D. Employed by university and taking classes

4. If you are currently a student, what is your classification? (if you are not a student, please

continue to Question 5)

   A. Undergraduate student

   B. Masters degree student

   C. Doctoral degree student

   D. Other

5. What is the highest level of education that you have completed?

A. High school or equivalent

B. Some college, but have not completed a bachelor's degree

C. Bachelor's degree

D. Master's degree

E. Ph.D., J.D., M.D. or equivalent

6. Which is closest to your individual, gross annual income last year? Please <u>do not</u> include total

income for all members of your household. Please answer only for yourself.

A. $0 to $23,000

B. $24,000 to 50,000

C. $51,000 to 79,000

D. $80,000 and above

7. What is your current marital status?

A. single/never married

B. married

C. divorced

D. separated

E. widowed

F. other

8. How many children do you have?

A. 0

B.1

C.2

D.3

E. 4 or more

9. What type of community do you live in?

A. Rural (i.e., small town, less populated)

B. Urban (i.e., metropolis, city, highly populated)

C. Suburban (i.e., residential area within commuting distance from a larger city or town)

10. Within the last 12 months, have you experienced any of the following? Please check all that apply:

Common Cold/ Flu Virus/ Seasonal Allergies

Trouble sleeping /Sleeplessness/Insomnia

Tiredness/Excessive Sleeping/ Fatigue

Headaches

Blurred Vision/ Problems with eyesight

Change in Appetite/ Loss of Appetite/Increased Appetite

Weight Loss (from reason other than exercise or diet)

Weight Gain

Hair Loss

Skin rash/ Eczema/ Psoriasis

Heart Disease/Chest Pain/Increased Heart Rate

High Blood Pressure

Diabetes (Type II)

Diabetes (Type I)

Cancer

HIV/AIDS

Other Physical/ Medical Health Concern

Depression/ Feeling the Blues/ Excess Sadness/ Low Energy

Nervousness/Anxiety/ Excessive Worry/ Panic Attacks

Excessive Anger/Frustration/Irritability

Other Psychological /Mental Health Concern

Pregnancy

Miscarriage

Abortion/ Termination of Pregnancy

Other Reproductive Health Concern

Sexually Transmitted Disease (STD)/Sexually Transmitted Infection (STI)

Other

Appendix G

SBW Cultural Construct Scale

Instructions – Please rate how often you think that each of the following statements apply to you.

1. I believe that it is best not to rely on others.

    Never   Rarely   Sometimes   Frequently   Almost Always

2. I feel uncomfortable asking others for help.

    Never   Rarely   Sometimes   Frequently   Almost Always

3. I have difficulty showing my emotions.

    Never   Rarely   Sometimes   Frequently   Almost Always

4. I do not like to let others know when I am feeling vulnerable.

    Never   Rarely   Sometimes   Frequently   Almost Always

5. I believe that everything should be done to a high standard.

    Never   Rarely   Sometimes   Frequently   Almost Always

6. I am independent.

    Never   Rarely   Sometimes   Frequently   Almost Always

7. I take on more responsibilities than I can comfortably handle.

    Never   Rarely   Sometimes   Frequently   Almost Always

8. I believe I should always live up to other's expectations.

    Never   Rarely   Sometimes   Frequently   Almost Always

9. I should be able to handle all that life gives me.

    Never   Rarely   Sometimes   Frequently   Almost Always

10. I am strong.

Never Rarely Sometimes Frequently Almost Always

11. I need people to see me as always confident.

Never Rarely Sometimes Frequently Almost Always

12. I like being in control in relationships.

Never Rarely Sometimes Frequently Almost Always

13. I cannot rely on others to meet my needs.

Never Rarely Sometimes Frequently Almost Always

14. I take on others' problems.

Never Rarely Sometimes Frequently Almost Always

15. I feel that I owe a lot to my family.

Never Rarely Sometimes Frequently Almost Always

16. People think that I don't have feelings.

Never Rarely Sometimes Frequently Almost Always

17. I try to always maintain my composure.

Never Rarely Sometimes Frequently Almost Always

18. It is hard to say, "No," when people make requests of me.

Never Rarely Sometimes Frequently Almost Always

19. I do not like others to think of me as helpless.

Never Rarely Sometimes Frequently Almost Always

20. I do not let most people know the "real" me.

Never Rarely Sometimes Frequently Almost Always

21. In my family I give more than I receive.

Never Rarely Sometimes Frequently Almost Always

22. At times I feel overwhelmed with problems.

Never   Rarely   Sometimes   Frequently   Almost Always

Appendix H

Perceived Stress Scale

Instructions:

The questions in this scale ask you about your feelings and thoughts **during the last month**. To

answer, select the number that corresponds with *how often* you felt or thought a certain way.

1. In the last month, how often have you been upset because of something that happened

    unexpectedly?

0	1	2	3	4
Never	Almost Never	Sometimes	Fairly Often	Very Often

2. In the last month, how often have you felt that you were unable to control the important things

in your life?

0	1	2	3	4
Never	Almost Never	Sometimes	Fairly Often	Very Often

3. In the last month, how often have you felt nervous and "stressed"?

0	1	2	3	4
Never	Almost Never	Sometimes	Fairly Often	Very Often

4. In the last month, how often have you felt confident about your ability to handle your personal

problems?

0	1	2	3	4
Never	Almost Never	Sometimes	Fairly Often	Very Often

5. In the last month, how often have you felt that things were going your way?

0	1	2	3	4
Never	Almost Never	Sometimes	Fairly Often	Very Often

6. In the last month, how often have you found that you could not cope with all the things that you had to do?

0	1	2	3	4
Never	Almost Never	Sometimes	Fairly Often	Very Often

7. In the last month, how often have you been able to control irritations in your life?

0	1	2	3	4
Never	Almost Never	Sometimes	Fairly Often	Very Often

8. In the last month, how often have you felt that you were on top of things?

0	1	2	3	4
Never	Almost Never	Sometimes	Fairly Often	Very Often

9. In the last month, how often have you been angered because of things that were outside of your control?

0	1	2	3	4
Never	Almost Never	Sometimes	Fairly Often	Very Often

10. In the last month, how often have you felt difficulties were piling up so high that you could not overcome them?

0	1	2	3	4
Never	Almost Never	Sometimes	Fairly Often	Very Often

Africultural Coping Systems Inventory

Instructions:

Recall a stressful situation that occurred **within the past week**.

Please indicate which coping strategies you used to deal with the stressful situation.

1. Prayed that things would work themselves out.

0	1	2	3
Did Not Use	Used a Little	Used a lot	Used a great deal

2. Got a group of family or friends together to help with the problem.

0	1	2	3
Did Not Use	Used a Little	Used a lot	Used a great deal

3. Shared your feelings with a friend or family member.

0	1	2	3
Did Not Use	Used a Little	Used a lot	Used a great deal

4. Remembered what a parent (or other relative) once said about dealing with these

kinds of situations.

0	1	2	3
Did Not Use	Used a Little	Used a lot	Used a great deal

5. Tried to forget about the situation.

0	1	2	3
Did Not Use	Used a Little	Used a lot	Used a great deal

6. Went to church (or other religious meeting) to get help from the group.

0	1	2	3

Did Not Use   Used a Little   Used a lot   Used a great deal

7. Thought of all the struggles Black people have had to endure, which gave you

strength to deal with the situation.

0   1   2   3

Did Not Use   Used a Little   Used a lot   Used a great deal

8. To keep from thinking about the situation, you found other things to keep you

busy.

0   1   2   3

Did Not Use   Used a Little   Used a lot   Used a great deal

9. Sought advice about how to handle the situation from an older person in your

family or community.

0   1   2   3

Did Not Use   Used a Little   Used a lot   Used a great deal

10. Read a scripture from the Bible (or similar book) for comfort and/or guidance.

0   1   2   3

Did Not Use   Used a Little   Used a lot   Used a great deal

11. Asked for suggestions on how to deal with the situation during a meeting of your

organization or club.

0   1   2   3

Did Not Use   Used a Little   Used a lot   Used a great deal

12. Tried to convince yourself that it was not that bad.

0   1   2   3

Did Not Use   Used a Little   Used a lot   Used a great deal

13. Asked someone to pray for you.

0	1	2	3
Did Not Use	Used a Little	Used a lot	Used a great deal

14. Spent more time than usual doing group activities.

0	1	2	3
Did Not Use	Used a Little	Used a lot	Used a great deal

15. Hoped that things would get better with time.

0	1	2	3
Did Not Use	Used a Little	Used a lot	Used a great deal

16. Read passage from a daily meditation book.

0	1	2	3
Did Not Use	Used a Little	Used a lot	Used a great deal

17. Spent more time than usual doing things with friends and family.

0	1	2	3
Did Not Use	Used a Little	Used a lot	Used a great deal

18. Tried to remove yourself from the situation.

0	1	2	3
Did Not Use	Used a Little	Used a lot	Used a great deal

19. Sought out people you thought would make you laugh.

0	1	2	3
Did Not Use	Used a Little	Used a lot	Used a great deal

20. Got dressed up in my best clothing.

0	1	2	3

Did Not Use   Used a Little   Used a lot   Used a great deal

21. Asked for blessings from a spiritual or religious person.

    0   1   2   3

Did Not Use   Used a Little   Used a lot   Used a great deal

22. Helped others with their problems.

    0   1   2   3

Did Not Use   Used a Little   Used a lot   Used a great deal

23. Lit a candle for strength or guidance in dealing with the problem.

    0   1   2   3

Did Not Use   Used a Little   Used a lot   Used a great deal

24. Sought emotional support from family and friends.

    0   1   2   3

Did Not Use   Used a Little   Used a lot   Used a great deal

25. Burned incense for strength or guidance in dealing with the problem.

    0   1   2   3

Did Not Use   Used a Little   Used a lot   Used a great deal

26. Attended a social event (dance, party, movie) to reduce stress caused by the situation.

    0   1   2   3

Did Not Use   Used a Little   Used a lot   Used a great deal

27. Sung a song to yourself to help reduce the stress.

    0   1   2   3

Did Not Use   Used a Little   Used a lot   Used a great deal

28. Used a cross or other object for its special powers in dealing with the problem.

0	1	2	3
Did Not Use	Used a Little	Used a lot	Used a great deal

29. Found yourself watching more comedy shows on television.

0	1	2	3
Did Not Use	Used a Little	Used a lot	Used a great deal

30. Left matters in God's hands.

0	1	2	3
Did Not Use	Used a Little	Used a lot	Used a great deal