



**Innovations in Counseling: Working with Minority Populations- Part 6**  
**Session 7: A Culture of Stigma: The African-American Woman and Mental Health**

**Webinar Follow-up Question and Answer Session with Dr. Shana Lewis**

**Question from Daniel Burrell**

How do black males fit into this syndrome?

**Answer from Presenter**

Black men can contribute to this syndrome in one of two ways. They can create an environment of support for the Black women in their life that will allow her to feel safe enough to share her truth and ask him for help. Or Black men can alternatively, make it more difficult for Black women to be honest about her feelings and the need to depend on them by being unavailable or unwilling to support her when she needs it most thus only reinforcing the Strong Black Woman Syndrome.

---

**Question from Daniel Burrell**

What are the forces at work when a black woman comes to see a white counselor?

**Answer from Presenter**

When a Black woman is treated by a White counselor she may find it difficult to be open and honest about her thoughts relative to race and trauma. Additionally, her White therapist may overlook the impact of historical and generational trauma has had on her client. She may dismiss aspects of her experience which would be pivotal in her healing and recovery. The White therapist's biases may also show up in the therapeutic relationship as well in the form of microaggressions. Additionally, if the Black female client has had negative interactions historically with White women she may find it more difficult to trust this therapeutic relationship ultimately hindering her recovery.

---

**Question from Daniel Burrell**

How well does group treatment work?

**Answer from Presenter**

Group therapy can be an effective form of treatment for Black women. I have actually offered a therapy group in my office for Black women and they found it to be a helpful space to share their feelings and opinions. It may take a few sessions to build the necessary trust amongst group members but once a safe space is created it can be liberating as Black women begin to realize that they are not alone. Connecting to other likeminded women and having a shared experience that you feel safe enough to tell the truth about is important in the healing process for Black women.

---



**Question from Daniel Burrell**

Is there a Facebook group for Black Women?

**Answer from Presenter**

There are many Facebook groups that are specifically designed for Black women's empowerment. Two that come to mind are the Empowered Black Women or Strong Black Women groups. I believe the most important place, however, to have these conversations are amongst ones friend and family groups that Black women can actually touch and interact with. Social media allows us to hide behind the keyboard without truly being vulnerable with others as we would be able to do if we were face to face. I encourage us to have more face to face discussions with one another about this topic instead of seeking an online format only.

---

**Question from Dwayne Hensley**

How does the degrading music play into all this depression--degrading women, especially Black women, turning them into objects and not respected? That has to be some major weight on a heart to hear that constant sexualization of women, in general, in today's music.

**Answer from Presenter**

Absolutely, music can shape an entire generation especially in the Black community as music is deeply rooted in our society. I believe that the music that degrades us can make it difficult for our Black men to respect and appreciate us for who we are and what we have contributed to our families and community as a whole. When you hear repeated messages of degradation and negativity about us it speaks to the level of disconnect that can show up in our relationships and in our homes. Black men who are hypnotized by this type of music may find themselves unknowingly treating Black women in a *less than* manner only further perpetuating the need for the Strong Black Woman Syndrome.

---

**Question from Greg Hawkins**

What strategies would you recommend for working with an African American female who takes AP classes, but wants to get out of them b/c her parents or family are telling her she's too dumb to be in them?

**Answer from Presenter**

I would tell this young woman that she does not need the validation from others to know her own worth and capabilities. Sometimes others will limit you by their limitations but we must remember that no one else can decide what your truth is for you but you. Help this young woman to identify her core beliefs about herself that have nothing to do with what others may think of her but instead to base them on her actual experience. If she is doing really well in the courses I would certainly consider using CBT as a theoretical model to help her identify the evidence that disproves what others have said to her. Encourage her to continue to do her best and ask for help when needed as well. Additionally, ask her what she wants to do. If she doesn't want to be in the class



# Minority Fellowship Program

The National Board for Certified Counselors

herself then support her decision. Alternatively if she does want to remain in the class support her by teaching her the skills needed to withstand the negativity of others around her.

---

### **Question from Ebony May**

Once you can get her to seek help, which intervention are you finding the most & least effective with this population?

### **Answer from Presenter**

Therapy should be a place where Black women clients can safely step out of this role by displaying genuineness, vulnerability, and fear when appropriate. Second, an interpersonal approach to reducing role strain can be applied. Therapists should develop a broad knowledge of community resources and encourage Black women to utilize them as well as available spiritual, occupational, and family support systems. When using your guiding theory you want to look at it thru the lens of cultural sensitivity when working with a Black woman to account for those cultural aspects that may be in opposition to the tenants of the theory. Another resource to consider is The Handbook for Counseling Women Edited by Mary Kopala and Merle Keitel.

---

### **Question from Linda Pugh**

Where do I begin and how do I educate African American women and men about mental health and the importance of getting help?

### **Answer from Presenter**

I believe the first step in this process is to help the community label things accurately. Many times people will not do anything about a potentially serious issue because they mislabel it. We must educate the community on what depression/anxiety or other mental health problems actually are and how they manifest in our community. We must also provide this information to them in places that they are more likely to consume it such as at church, online, or at work. Also employ the assistance of other African American community members who are willing to speak out about their mental health issues and positive treatment episodes. Connecting faces that the community can relate to is important in their willingness to accept the new information and then translate it into an action.

---

### **Question from Kristen Qualls**

How does this syndrome effect women who identify as African-American born, but of caucasian skin from South Africa?

### **Answer from Presenter**

This is an interesting question. I have not done any research on this area but my thought is that it may have a complex impact as her external experience may be different than her internal experience. She identifies as



# Minority Fellowship Program

The National Board for Certified Counselors

African American but society may see her as a Caucasian woman and reject the idea of her being a Strong Black Woman. I can see how this may create many issues for women who may be struggling due to the syndrome but not accepted as having this experience by other Black Women or the community as a whole.

---

### **Question from Arden Tucker**

Where can I find the research showing black women experience depression more so than her counterparts from other cultures?

### **Answer from Presenter**

<https://minorityhealth.hhs.gov/omh/browse.aspx?lvl=4&lvlid=24>

<https://psychcentral.com/lib/african-american-women-and-depression/>

---

### **Question from Allen Vosburg**

I am a male counselor and I learned early on to be attentive and sensitive to the female who has trusted me to help. How does one stay in touch to these changing needs over time? Can you offer me a key tool to stay on top of this?

### **Answer from Presenter**

It is important that you continue to attend to the needs of your female clients in the context of their cultural, spiritual, familial, and societal experiences. Remember to not assume you understand but instead always ask for clarity. The most valuable resource you have is to just ask her what she's thinking or what she needs. When in doubt just ask.

---

Enjoy our webinars? Please [support](#) our efforts. Donate [here](#).

---