

The Origin of Black Working Mothers Guilt and Shame

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Abstract

I endeavored to comprehend the genesis of the guilt Black American mothers, navigate while facing the ongoing toils of balancing work life and motherhood. Research on this population, to include their internal struggles were studied. There was sustenance found surrounding the relationship between the expectations of others and self, the guilt of working, and the causation of the shame that eludes. This was a direct effect of the microaggressions and dual roles that this population also endures. A consequence of these constructs creates a cycle that finds mothers grappling with the microaggressions in the workplace, along with the guilt surrounding being away from their families. This thus creates a loop of shame. Additional, discoveries propose that an inclination to exhibit resiliency further intensifies their feelings of determination and steadfastness.

Keywords: Black American Mothers, Resilience, Microaggressions, Dual Roles, and Shame

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Literature Review

If you were to ask most mothers if they have heard of the term “mom guilt”, there is a very high probability that you would hear an astounding, “Yes”. If you were to ask most mothers if they have *experienced* “mom guilt”, there is an even higher probability that you will hear the same answer (Elvin-Nowak, 1999). Why is this?

Studies exposed mothers guilt surrounding topics on breastfeeding (Thomson, Ebisch-Burton, & Flacking, 2015), self-care (Nichols, Gringle, & Pulliam, 2015; Billotte Verhoff, Hosek, & Cherry, 2023), comparisons with other moms, and maternal shame (Stenzel, 2019; Dillard, 2018; Collins, 2021), just to name a few. But what is shame and guilt? How do we differentiate between the two? And why are they so widespread among?

Rationale

For black working mothers, the questioning of their skillsets leaves them in a space of having to constantly prove themselves to peers, and subordinates, alike (Holder, Jackson, & Ponterotto, 2015). To then do so, while navigating maternal guilt and shame for being away from their children (Aarntzen, Derks, van Steenberg, Ryan, & van der Lippe, 2019), speaks to their resilience and perseverance (Anderson, 2019; Leath, Billingsley, Jones, Johnson, Taliaferro, & Gaskin-Cole, 2023).

I propose that the constructs of the SBW, dual roles, along with the microaggressions that working black mothers face have created the initiation of the guilt and shame surrounding their work lives. I hypothesize that a combination of psychoeducation on the historical triggers surrounding this guilt and shame, along with narrative therapy can reduce the amount of shame encountered by this population.

Method

Participants

To recruit participants for this study I set up a meeting to speak with the Organization Director the Local Networking Organization, Black Women in Business, BWIB, which is a Non-Profit organization that strives to provide networking opportunities and business resources to Black female Professionals. I reached out to the CEO to let them know about the study. During our conversation I:

- Requested partnering with BWIB to solicit participants from their organization for my study.
- In participating in the study, BWIB undertook the responsibility of providing their members additional resources of therapeutic services, by way of this study.
- Once the study concludes, local minority owned private practices have pledged to offer additional therapeutic services at a deeply discounted rate for a duration of one year. This increases the potential response for participation.

Participants identifying as Black American (N=24), with at least one child, will be recruited from the local networking organization Black Women in Business, BWIB. Participants must have at least a part time job, working a minimum of 20 hours per week. To ensure the scales of maternal support are evenly balanced, only mothers with a partner at home are to be considered for this study. No single-family households were eligible to participate.

Measures

For each of the items listed, participants were inquired to indicate the frequency of the thoughts, feelings, or events on a 4-point Likert-type scale with:

- 0 indicating Never,

- 1 indicating a Little/ Rarely,
- 2 indicating Sometimes/ Moderate amount, and
- 3 indicating Often/ Frequently.

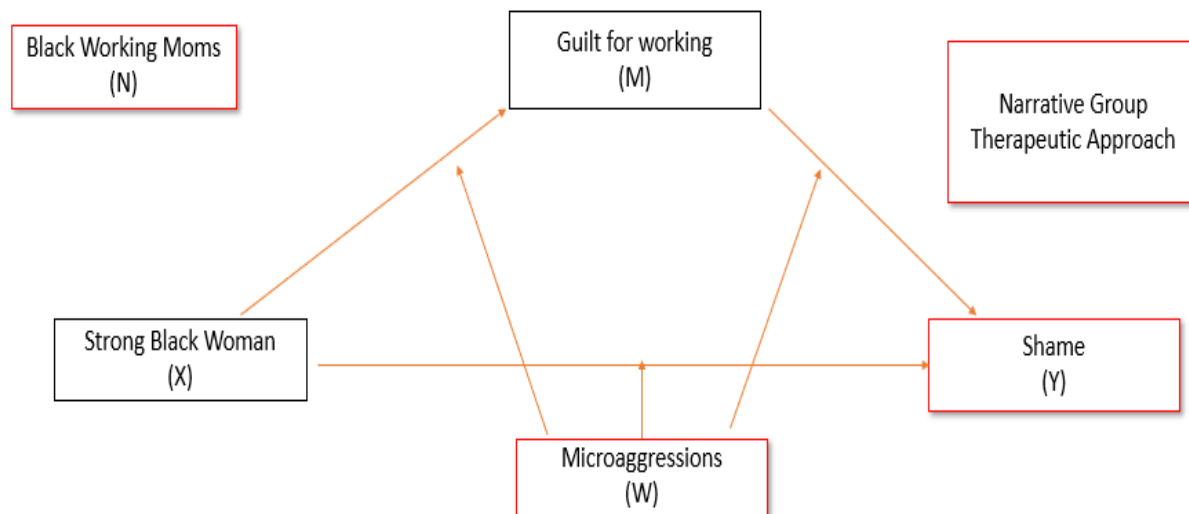
Questions will span thoughts, feelings, or events surrounding various *microaggressions*, *stereotypes*, and *personal self-talk* pertaining to the participants perceptions of their working environment and maternal satisfaction. The goal is to measure the various constructs that lead to feelings of shame. The Control Group will receive Narrative Group Therapy, while the Experimental Group will receive a combination of Narrative Group Therapy and Psychoeducation on the origin of SBW, Racial Microaggressions, and Dual Roles. The expectation of the treatment is to reduce and/ or relieve the resulting feelings of shame.

Variables

For this study, there is a causal effect model, where my dependent variable is the shame felt by the black working mothers. The independent variable is the treatment plan which is comprised of two layers:

1. the Control Group which will receive Narrative Group Therapy and
2. the Experimental Group which will receive a combination of Narrative Group Therapy and Psychoeducation.

The constructs of the SBW mindset are the covariant of guilt due to working. The microaggressions is a second stage moderator. An example of this can be found in the model below (Hayes, 2022).



Procedures

Things to consider when assigning the working mothers to groups include, varying levels of time spent away from home for work, the varying additional support provide for home responsibilities, and the varying gender roles established within the respective homes. For this study, participants will be assigned to either the experimental or the control group.

Through random assignment into the groups, the control Group will receive Narrative Group Therapy, while the experimental Group will receive a combination of Narrative Group Therapy and Psychoeducation on the origin of SBW (Nelson, Cardemil & Adeoye, (2016), Racial Microaggressions (Holder, Jackson, & Ponterotto, 2015), and Dual Roles. I hypothesize that the combination of Narrative Group Therapy and Psychoeducation will assist the experimental Group in decreasing their levels of shame.

Statistical Procedures

The purpose of ANCOVA is to ensure that the randomized sampling has produced accurate results (Van Breukelen, 2006). Some of the testing variables include both internal and external validity, and biases considered by both the tester and participants of the study (Wright, 2006). For this study the dependent variable is the shame felt by the mothers. The independent

variable is the treatment plan. The moderator is the guilt for working. The microaggressions are a second stage moderator.

I homogenized my sample by eliminating single-family households led by mothers, as a participant of the study. This measure was taken to ensure the scales of maternal support are evenly balanced for all who participated. This also was to ensure there were no additional biases on the part of the participants, as it relates to gender roles (Littlefield, 2004), dual roles, SBW, and shame.

Results

This study will examine two main constructs, SBW mindset and Microaggressions and their respective effect on shame. A Type I error in this study will produce a result of having a causal relationship between the dependent and independent variable. Thus, we can reject the Null Hypothesis. This means that the result of the study will prove that my hypothesis that the combination of Narrative Group Therapy and Psychoeducation will assist the experimental Group in decreasing their levels of shame to a greater degree than that of the control group.

A Type II error will fail to reject the null hypothesis. This will mean that the result of the study would not have proven that my hypothesis that the combination of Narrative Group Therapy and Psychoeducation will assist the experimental Group in decreasing their levels of shame to a greater degree than that of the control group.

Internal and External Validity

The following is a list of the threats to the Internal validity, their attributes, and how they were dealt with within my study:

Threats to Internal Validity	What it is	How I handled it in my study
Ambiguous temporal precedence	When the independent variable is altered to control the effect of the dependent variable.	The independent variable of treatment remained unaltered for the control group and was limited to Narrative Group Therapy sessions.
Selection	The differences in groups prior to treatment.	No selection bias problem due to random assignment
History	An event that occurs during the time of treatment.	Both groups are to be assessed on the same days at the same time, to eliminate the risk of local history events.
Maturation	Developmental changes that take place for the participants during pretest and posttest.	Since I am dealing with adults, this won't happen over the span of time I'm working with the two groups.
Regression	The change of test scores (regression toward the average)	Participants are randomly assigned to their groups so regression toward the average should be comparable.
Attrition	Participants dropping out of a study.	Deeply discounted counseling services is offered as a benefit for those who successfully complete the study.
Testing	Change of test scores due to multiple attempts.	This threat is unavoidable, since the participants must do a pre and posttest.
Instrumentation	The changes that occur in a measurement device during the studies testing period.	Test are to be scored electronically to take away the subjectivity.
Additive/ Interactive effects	Various effects combining and impacting participants.	Since participants are randomly assigned to their groups this threat should be comparable evenly amongst both groups.

Within my study the threat of Ambiguous temporal precedence is handled by limiting the independent variable of treatment to Narrative Group Therapy sessions. There is no selection bias problem due to selection of random assignment. To ensure history doesn't influence the study, both groups are to be assessed on the same days, at the same time, to eliminate the risk of local history events. Since I am dealing with adults, Maturation will not be a factor since the developmental level of their life span is unchanged (Hepner, Wampold, Owen, Thompson, & Wang, 2016).

Participants will be randomly assigned to their groups so regression toward the average should be comparable among both groups. To assess for the threat of attrition counseling service discounts will be offered as a benefit for those who successfully complete the study. The threat of testing is unavoidable, since the participants must do a pre and posttest, but instrumentation will be handled by scoring test electronically. Finally, Additive/ Interactive effects will be resolved by randomly assigning participants to their groups (Hepner, Wampold, Owen, Thompson, & Wang, 2016).

Future Research

Surprisingly, there appeared to be a large gap in the research surrounding this population, as it pertained to maternal guilt and the workplace. While a great deal of research has been done on the various constructs to include SBW, microaggressions, and gender roles; there are more research opportunities related to dual roles and the maternal guilt that causes shame for the black working mother.

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