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## A Literature Review of Major Depressive Disorder Among African-American Women Victimized by Sexual Harassment During Career Advancement

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## ABSTRACT

### A Literature Review of Major Depressive Disorder Among African-American Women Victimized by Sexual Harassment During Career Advancement

by

Raven Naquelle Parks

April 18, 2025

Major Depressive Disorder (MDD) is a psychiatric condition that affects mood and behavior because of chemical imbalances in the brain. When studying Major Depressive Disorder's impact on African-American women (AAW), there could be several contributing factors to the onset of symptoms. AAW are members of the American workforce and are expected to excel and advance in their careers due to societal expectations while simultaneously battling race-based and gender-based discrimination, including sexual harassment. Seeking support during victimization and regenerated symptoms of MDD may prove challenging for AAW for varying socio-cultural reasons. This review will discuss the literature examining Major Depressive Disorder, African-American women, sexual harassment, and career advancement. Minimal research surrounding this topic exists and the dynamics between Major Depressive Disorder, African-American Women, sexual harassment, and career advancement have yet to be explored.

**KEYWORDS:** Major Depressive Disorder, African-American Women, Sexual Harassment, Career Advancement, Social Support Theory (Word count: 132)

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Victimized by Sexual Harassment During Career Advancement

by

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School of Public Health

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**APPROVAL PAGE**

A Literature Review of Major Depressive Disorder Among African-American Women  
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Friday, April 18, 2025

10:00 A.M.

## Acknowledgements

*“for colored girls who have considered suicide / when the rainbow is enuf” - Ntozake Shange  
(1976)*

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Finally, I’m dedicating this work to all the *colored* girls who survived sexual violence.

Speak your truth, and exhale.

## **Author's Statement Page**

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**Raven Naquelle Parks**

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## LIST OF ACRONYMS

**AAW** – African-American Women/African-American Woman

**MDD** – Major Depressive Disorder

**SBW** – Strong Black Woman

**ABW** – Angry Black Woman

## INTRODUCTION

African-American women (AAW) are subject to difficult social structures in the workplace (Mays, 1995). These structures cause AAW to feel inferior amongst their white peers while having to navigate the stereotype of being a “Strong Black Woman” (Thomas, 2023). “In this way, the label obscures the reality of the structural forces that keep Black women down—forces that could otherwise be addressed by structural and policy change—and directs attention instead to Black women themselves” (Godbolt et.al, 2022, P. 611). A Strong Black Woman (SBW) is described as one who is resilient despite adversity, even at her own expense (Thomas et. al, 2022). As an inherent, long-standing brand for the Black female (Platt and Fanning, 2022; Oshin and Milan, 2019), being a Strong Black Woman means sacrificing the ability to ask for help. African-American women are more likely to suppress and repress their natural emotional responses to traumatic life events (Stevens-Watkins et. al, 2013). This self-preservatory defense mechanism, which manifests as avoidance, is most prevalent in the workplace where professionalism is a core value in business operations (Buchanan et. al, 2007; Buchanan et. al, 2008).

When AAW report sexual harassment in the workplace, they are often met with dismissive responses from authority figures (Schachtman & Kaiser, 2024). Despite the employer’s obligation to uphold equal employment opportunity law (Burstein and Monaghan, 1986) and ensure the health and safety of all employees (Henshaw et. al, 2007), reports of sexual harassment from African-American women victims are often unsubstantiated at the conclusion of internal investigations (Williams, 2021; Hart, 2023; Jenoff, 2013). After all administrative measures are exhausted, the reported incident of sexual harassment is likely to be further invalidated through the court system (Pappoe, 2019; Dennis, 1996). The invalidation of the

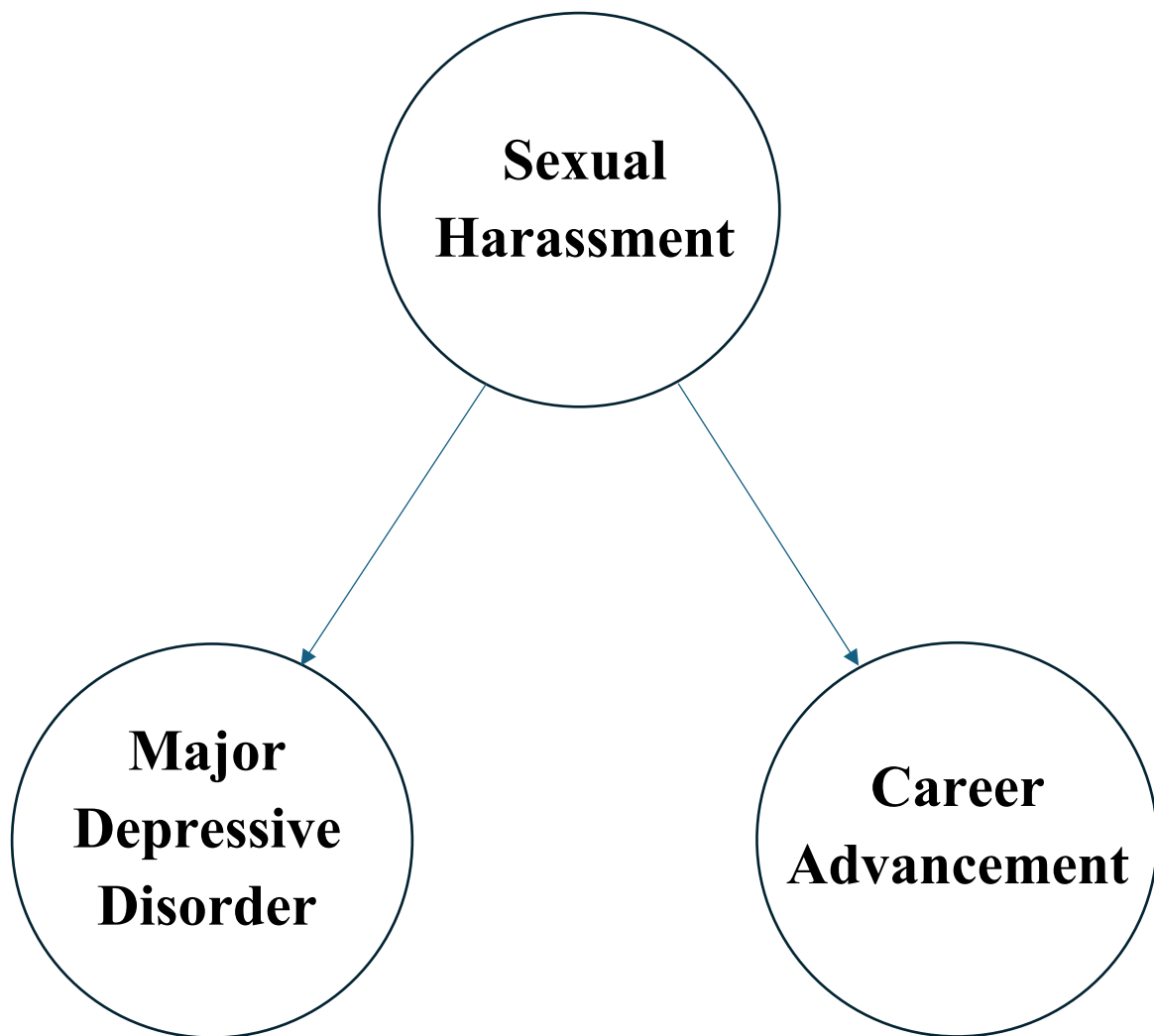
AAW victim's experience could trigger the innate response to internalize the traumatic event. This also triggers masking behaviors where African-American women exhibit signs of "self-silencing." Self-silencing has been defined as "behaviors such as containing one's emotion, thoughts, and desires in order to avoid conflict or damaging a relationship" (Thompson & Dale, 2022, P. 2; Jack, 1991). Essentially, victims pretend as if nothing happened and the violation does not affect them, thus garnering praise for being "strong" (Abrams et. al, 2018).

When AAW victims of sexual harassment choose to mask their emotions around their coworkers and superiors, the effects of internalized trauma are inescapable. As part of her dissertation where she explores sexual harassment among Black women in the workplace, Zonicle (2022) reports that "as an emotional response to their experiences, participants collectively spoke to harboring feelings of shame, humiliation, violation, and embarrassment. Additional shared responses included diminished self-worth and self-esteem, helplessness, frustration, fear, and discomfort" (P. 99). Physical symptoms such as headaches, nausea, vomiting, increased heart rate, high blood pressure, and weight fluctuations are often accompanied by behavioral and psychological symptoms. Loss of interest in life as indicated through withdrawal from social activities and interpersonal relationships can also occur. Additionally, substance use and abuse, mood fluctuations, cognitive impairments, changes in sleep patterns, and changes in appetite are all indicative of Major Depressive Disorder (MDD) (Christensen et al., 2016; Rao et al., 2023).

Major Depressive Disorder among African-American women who report sexual harassment in the workplace can be examined through the presence, or absence, of social support. This review of the literature aims to highlight Major Depressive Disorder in as it relates

to African-American women who experience sexual harassment during career advancement; sexual harassment can be directly tied to Major Depressive Disorder and career advancement.

### **The Connection Between Sexual Harassment and Major Depressive Disorder, and Sexual Harassment and Career Advancement (Figure 1)**



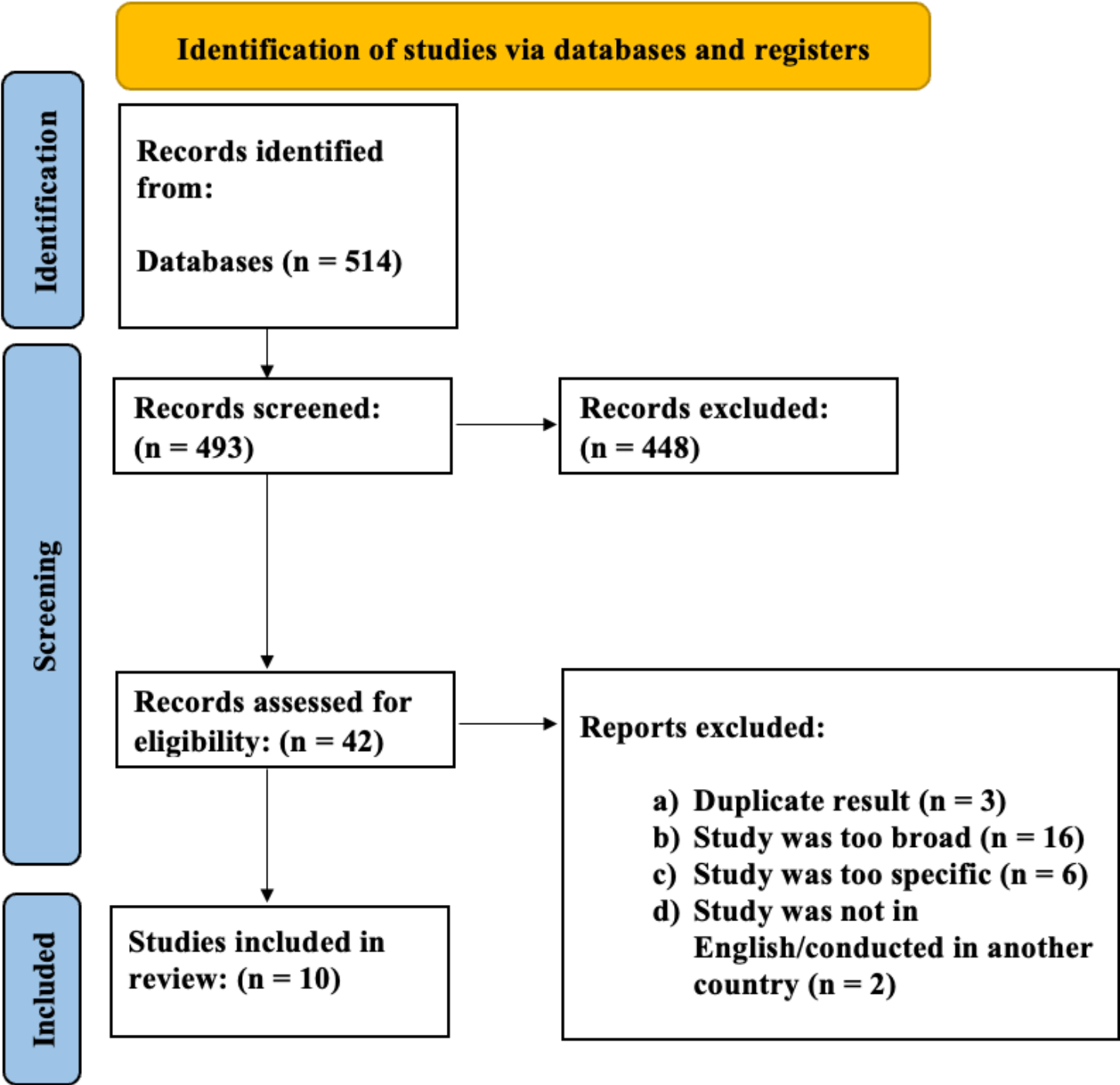
## **METHODOLOGY**

### **Literature Selection Criteria**

To conceptualize Major Depressive Disorder (MDD) among African-American Women (AAW) victimized by sexual harassment during career advancement, the literature selected for review was discovered using a Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) flow chart and matrix. There were four different searches conducted through Google Scholar using the keywords "Major Depressive Disorder", "African-American Women", "sexual harassment", "Career Advancement", Social Support Theory in varying combinations. I searched for articles between 1995 and 2025. The search was limited to articles in the English language.

A total of 514 articles were screened with 448 articles ultimately excluded. Of the remaining 42 articles, three articles were duplicate results, 16 articles published studies that were too broad, six articles published studies that were too specific, and two articles were not in English. Of the two articles found that were not in English, one appears to be written in French and the other appears to be written in Portuguese. The languages were identified from these articles using Google Translate. I do not speak French or Portuguese and I do not know what these articles are communicating beyond what was translated using Google's software. Once these articles were excluded, the result was 10 articles which were used for this review. Of the 10 articles, six are doctoral dissertations and four are published articles in academic journals, two of which were published in *Psychology of Women Quarterly*. The articles are fairly recent with the date of publication for these works ranging between 2002 and 2024.

# Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) Flow Chart (Figure 2)



Supporting literature was retrieved from digital databases including Research Gate, National Institutes of Health, National Library of Medicine (PubMed), JSTOR, APA PsycNet, Elsevier, Sage Journals, Springer, and Digital Commons archives from a host of post-secondary institutions. Additionally, supplemental themes were incorporated into this review to further illustrate perspectives of interconnecting dynamics between AAW, MDD, sexual harassment in the workplace, and Social Support Theory. For instance, while racism is not a focal point of this review, it is an integral factor that influences the responses when AAW experience sexual harassment at work. Because of gender-racist archetypes, individuals who are not AAW are prone to view the victimization of AAW through the lens of their implicit bias (Williams et al., 2020).

### **Exploratory Factors**

Considering the variables, the research question is:

*How does social support for African American women influence their mental health outcomes in managing symptoms of Major Depressive Disorder after reporting sexual harassment in the workplace?*

The null hypothesis is:

*African American women will experience worsening symptoms of Major Depressive Disorder if they do not have a healthy support system.*

The duality of racial-gender discrimination has caused a deficit in social support for AAW. Additionally, because of the pressure to embody the ‘Strong Black Woman’ image, AAW

often deny support or convince themselves that they don't need help. As a result, healthy support systems are seemingly elusive for AAW. For AAW diagnosed with MDD, this presents a significant challenge. According to theory, if social support is believed to be a protective factor from experiencing symptoms of Major Depressive Disorder, AAW may experience a prolonged recovery period. Moreover, for AAW who are experiencing symptoms of MDD while being sexually harassed in the workplace, lack of social support not only prolongs recovery, but also worsens the traumatic experience.

## **AFRICAN-AMERICAN WOMEN**

For the purpose of this literature review, African-American Women (AAW) is defined as a population of women who are descendants of enslaved Africans from the antebellum South and other ethnicities of Black women who identify as American including Afro-Latinas, Afro-Caribbeans, and immigrants from the continent of Africa. Between 1501 and 1867, approximately 12.5 million West African women, men, and children were captured by Europeans and loaded onto ships for transport to "The New World." As reported by Beth Austin, Registrar and Historian under the Hampton History Museum (2019), Portuguese pillagers invaded the West African Kingdom of Ndongo. "Virginia's First Africans endured capture and a forced journey of 200 miles from Ndongo to the Portuguese port of Luanda, where they were loaded onto the slave ship San Juan Bautista. The San Juan Bautista sailed for Vera Cruz, Mexico, with 350 enslaved Africans aboard. They endured extreme conditions during a voyage of several months on a ship packed well beyond its capacity. Before reaching Vera Cruz, the San Juan Bautista was attacked by the English privateer ships White Lion and Treasurer. The two

English ships stole around 60 of the surviving Africans and sailed for Virginia” (Austin, 2018, P. 7).

Although the first enslaved Africans arrived in colonial American in 1619, the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade Database has not documented this. According to the database, the first captives arrived in the United States in 1626 (Mintz, The Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History, 2015; Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade Database, The Slave Voyages Consortium, 2021). The first generation of West African descendants who were born into slavery would inadvertently be the link between Africans and African-Americans. In effect, African would signify their heritage and American represents their place of birth, although those who were enslaved were not classified as human beings, let alone an American.

Present-day, the Black population in the United States encompasses several ethnicities beyond American. Afro-Latinos, Afro-Caribbeans, those who migrated directly from Africa, and a host of other members of the African diaspora who inhabit the United States all fall under the umbrella of the Black community (Pew Research Center, 2021). Oftentimes, the Black population in the United States is monolithically categorized as African-American (Solomon, 2015); however, there is a stark contrast between descendants of enslaved West Africans in North America and Black people of other ethnicities living in the United States. Clarified by the National Archives Catalog, “Black can be used regardless of nationality, while African American [sic] is specific to Americans of African, and especially Black African, descent. Some individuals in the United States self-identify with both terms, while others prefer one term over the other; some may prefer a different but related term (e.g., Afro-Caribbean, Afro-Latino)” (2024).

## **Stereotypes of African-American Women**

Since its inception, slavery, as an institution, was intended to degrade and dehumanize West African people and their descendants. Regarding African-American women, “three prevalent, pernicious, images or archetypes of Black women that have been promulgated dating back to the period of American slavery are the “mammy,” “sapphire,” and “jezebel” (Rosenthal & Lobel, 2016, P. 416). The mammy is the caretaker; she is the loyal and dutiful maid or nanny that tends to the family and satisfies their needs at their beckoned call. “The Mammy refers to a motherly, self-sacrificing Black female servant who is responsible of domestic duties and taking care of those around her” (Reynolds-Dobbs et. al, 2008, P. 136).

The Sapphire is essentially the opposite of a Mammy; she is the untamed “angry Black woman” with volatile tendencies (Ward et. al, 2023). She is depicted as impulsively aggressive. Her personality is perceived to be violent and unhinged. The Angry Black Woman (ABW) is different from the Strong Black Woman (SBW) in that an ABW is perceived to be a rage-filled, hostile caricature (Motro et. al, 2021) whereas the SBW is an indestructible machine of over-achieving, mastering the art of balancing her role as a punching bag and savior without complaint (Liao et. al, 2019).

The Jezebel “characterizes Black women as promiscuous, seductive, and sexually insatiable” (Jerald, 2018, P. xi). She is hypersexual in nature; she has no boundaries and is always in heat. Her body is fair game and is always open for whoever wants access. When this caricature was developed, it was a means to enable sexual violence against enslaved African women; because of their perceived hypersexuality, Black women cannot truly be raped (Kane, 2018; Leath et. al, 2021). The enduring role of the Jezebel stereotype as a sexual script for Black

women is alleged to be perpetuated through AAW clothing choices or sexual behaviors considering their awareness and endorsement of the stereotype (Leath et. al, 2021).

These stereotypes have been long-held depictions of AAW in mass media. Media depictions of these caricatures have influenced society-at-large by leaving the impression that all African-American women can be labeled under one of these categories, or their derivative sub-categories (Lewis, 2019). Therefore, the assumptions of some members of society lead them to predict or explain the conduct of AAW. When some interact with AAW, they apply one of the three labels to them based on their behavior and mannerisms; “today, many of the same stereotypes have been internalized by a large segment of the population and they play a significant role in the persistent microaggressions expressed towards Black women” (Luckoo, 2018, P. 29).

In the workplace, these stereotypes prove harmful, especially when an AAW reports sexual harassment. Researchers from the Trades Union Congress, a council based in the United Kingdom who used research literature published in the United States to organize their study, highlighted that “the sexual harassment that Black women experience may be driven by racialised [sic] gender stereotypes (e.g. hyper-sexual, sexually available, agentic, self-assertive) which vary from the stereotypes attached to white women (e.g. weak, vulnerable, passive)” (Guillaume et al., 2024, P. 9). In summation, if an AAW is labeled as a “sapphire,” her complaints could be dismissed as her being an “angry Black woman.” If she is labeled as a “jezebel,” her employer can dismiss her complaints because “she wanted it” or “she was asking for it.”

## **MAJOR DEPRESSIVE DISORDER**

Major Depressive Disorder (MDD) is a debilitating psychiatric condition that affects mood responses where an individual experiences loss of enjoyment in daily activities and cognitive functions are inhibited (Kennedy, 2008; Delgado, 2000). Those living with MDD may also experience feelings of hopelessness, worthlessness, cynicism, pessimism, guilt, and despair (Wang et. al, 2015). Difficulty with concentrating, remembering, and decision-making can affect their performance at work and in interpersonal settings (Pan et. al, 2019). Fluctuations in sleep patterns and appetite where affected individuals either sleep too much or too little and eat too much or too little contribute to feelings of irritability, anxiety, and extreme weight loss or weight gain (Leonard et. al, 2009; Caroleo et. al, 2019; Mills et. al, 2018). Fatigue is a common symptom along with headaches, digestive issues, and unexplained muscular afflictions (Arnold, 2008; Demyttenaere et. al, 2005; Martin et. al, 2015; Modesto Lowe et. al, 2023; Jaracz et al, 2016). Suicide ideation, another symptom, can culminate into an attempt or series of attempts which can result in hospitalization, coma, or loss of life (Marx et. al, 2023).

### **MDD: Contributing Factors for African-American Women**

#### **Microaggressions**

In social situations at work, comments directed toward AAW by non-AAW individuals, often in condescending jest, erode the self-esteem and confidence of this population in a covert manner (Scott et. al, 2023). Negative remarks uttered by peers and colleagues are derived from stereotypical imaging and assumptions of AAW as a collective (Luckoo, 2018). For instance, if we revisit the Mammy, the Sapphire, and the Jezebel caricatures, there are clues that allude to the

prejudices that non-AAW have against AAW (Lewis, 2019). For instance, AAW are commonly expected to be the loyal helper or “clean up woman” by their colleagues in alignment with being a Mammy (Reynolds-Dobbs et. al, 2008). If a non-AAW calls an AAW “Shaniqua” in the middle of a verbal dispute, they are alluding to the Sapphire trope (Ward et. al, 2023). Finally, AAW have been characterized as hypersexual under the Jezebel archetype (Eck, 2018; Rosenthal & Lobel, 2016; Jerald, 2018). Therefore, an AAW who is advancing in her career may be subject to accusations of procuring job security through transactional means. “Instead of people viewing a professional Black woman as being competent, talented, and business minded, she may be viewed as someone who slept her way to the top—doing anything to achieve career success” (Reynolds-Dobbs et. al, 2008, P. 137).

### **Macroaggressions**

Beyond the Jim Crow era, there seemingly aren’t any legislative measures that expressly oppress AAW. That is, federal civil rights laws prohibit racial discrimination, although AAW still fall victim to institutional injustices based on implicit biases, racial profiling, and gender stereotypes (Skinner-Dorkenoo et. al, 2023; Williams et. al, 2020). For instance, Black women of all ethnicities are given harsher prison sentences compared to white women, and the sentences are even worse if they are dark-skinned (Monk, 2019; Finkeldey & Demuth, 2021). Additionally, Black women of all ethnicities still maintain the record for the highest maternal-infant mortality rates (Njoku et. Al, 2023) perhaps because of the medical myth that Black women have a higher pain tolerance than women of other races, particularly white women (Hoffman et. al, 2016). Therefore, their cries and complaints about complications stemming from childbirth aren’t taken

seriously (Chambers et. al, 2022). From public safety to public health, AAW are subject to disparate treatment even in the absence of laws that do not directly discriminate against them.

## **SEXUAL HARASSMENT**

Sexually harassing behaviors and invalidation of the victim's experience can trigger symptoms of MDD (Houle, et. al, 2011). Sexually harassing behaviors are actions of a sexual nature that are unwelcomed by the target, whether it is a comment, innuendo, gesture, requests for sexual favors, or sharing sexual content such as photos or videos (EEOC, 2024). As reported in a study of the Danish workforce, such behaviors cause an elevated risk of depressive symptoms for the target (Rugulies et. al, 2020). Additionally, in comparison to sexually harassing behaviors from non-workplace personnel, "sexual harassment by colleagues or supervisors may be experienced as particularly adverse as it is often necessary to collaborate with the perpetrator on a daily basis, which may be emotionally taxing" (Rugulies et. al, 2020, P. 26).

Moreover, invalidating the victim's experience "may produce shame through either explicit expression or implicit impression" from the person they choose to disclose the incident to (Catton et. al, 2023, P. 8346). The inability to garner support after being sexually harassed can make targets of these behaviors experience feelings of isolation, shame, and unworthiness which can trigger a depressive episode (Houle, et. al, 2011).

The Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) is "responsible for enforcing federal laws that make it illegal to discriminate against a job applicant or an employee because of the person's race, color, religion, sex (including pregnancy, childbirth, or related conditions,

gender identity, and sexual orientation), national origin, age (40 or older), disability or genetic information” (2024). As defined by the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, sexual harassment, a form of gender-based discrimination, is any unwelcomed or unwanted look, touch, or comment of a sexual nature geared toward an individual or a group of individuals. Behaviors can include obscene gestures, telling offensive jokes, and sexual assault. There are two types of sexual harassment: quid pro quo and hostile work environment.

Quid pro quo is a transactional form of sexual harassment (Lundgren & Wieslander, 2025). In these instances, an employment decision is contingent upon the performance of a sexual favor. This term is a Latin phrase that translates to “something for something.” This dynamic is often seen between a decision-maker and a subordinate. For instance, in order to receive a promotion, the AAW subordinate may be propositioned for sexual favors by her supervisor to secure the opportunity.

In 1991, Anita Hill accused Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas of sexual harassment during a Senate confirmation hearing when he was a nominee (Baker, 2004). Hill gave testimony to an all-male panel from the Senate Judiciary Committee who would eventually decide to confirm Clarence Thomas to hold office in the U.S. Supreme Court in spite of the allegations. Thomas’s (alleged) repeated requests for dates and sexual favors from Hill under the threat of job security is a prime example of quid pro quo. Hill is known as the first woman to disrupt a Senate confirmation with misconduct allegations against a nominee, particularly for sexual harassment.

The Senate confirmation hearing of 1991 was led by Joe Biden, who would go on to become the 46<sup>th</sup> President of the United States in 2020. In 2021, 30 years after the Senate confirmation hearing, Anita Hill publicly reflected on her experience. Several media outlets

published Hill's thoughts about the hearing, and how much progress—if any—society has made in regard to protecting women from gender-motivated violence, including sexual harassment. Hill says that Biden apologized to her during his presidential campaign, but his apology “wasn't enough.” As reported by ABC News, during a conversation with Good Morning America's Robin Roberts, Hill expressed the harm that resulted in Biden's actions, or lack thereof. “What I really wanted was somebody who was going to commit to doing something about this massive problem of gender violence that we have in this country that's hurting everyone” she said (Genet et. al, ABC News, 2021).

Although she is championed for addressing sexual harassment in the workplace, Hill's advocacy has since expanded to victims of intimate partner violence and other forms of sexual violence in addition to sexual harassment. According to ABC News, Hill believes that gender-motivated violence revolves around the same themes and there should be more emphasis on the systems that perpetuate violence against women. “I still am not at the point where I can say I advise everyone to come forward. I don't,” she said. “What I advise people to do is understand the process that you're coming forward into, because we still have processes that are not necessarily meant to solve the problem of sexual harassment, or rape or sexual assault. We've got to change the processes if we in fact want people to feel confident and trust that they are going to be treated fairly when they go into them” (Genet et. al, ABC News, 2021).

Sexual harassment that is categorized under ‘hostile work environment’ involves repeated sexual behavior that is so offensive, it has a negative impact on the targeted individual and affects their work performance (EEOC, 2024). The behaviors can be committed by anyone in the organizational structure including supervisors, lateral coworkers, and direct reports. Assaultants can also be customers, vendors, contractors, and any other party that has a relationship with the

company. According to EEO policy and procedures, victims of sexual harassment must go through a bureaucratic process and exhaust all administrative avenues to resolution before filing a lawsuit in state or federal court.

It is expected that if an AAW is met with sexual harassment and does not tolerate such behaviors, she will forfeit her career (McLaughlin et. al, 2017; National Academies of Science, Engineering, and Medicine, 2018). If an AAW chooses to fight back, she will face retaliatory harassment (Spiliopoulou & Witcomb, 2023) in which she may be attacked, ridiculed, defamed, and discredited with the utilization of stereotypical profiling. Refusing to tolerate sexual harassment will earn an AAW the labels of “angry,” “attention-seeking,” and even derogatory terms such as “bitch.” Accusations of seeking attention implies that an AAW was “asking for it,” as if AAW aren’t true victims of sexual violence due to being characterized as a Jezebel (Eck, 2018). Calling a woman a “bitch” is the patriarchal default for degrading and humiliating women of all races; however, calling an AAW a “bitch,” coupled with the label of “angry,” ties back to the Sapphire caricature (Ward et. al, 2023)..

## **CAREER ADVANCEMENT**

Gainful employment is what many aspire to as a derivative of the American dream; in a capitalistic society, the more wealth an individual acquires, the more personal value the individual achieves. Career advancement is the practice of “moving up” within an organization through promotional opportunities as a means of securing gainful employment. This can be achieved through work experience, seniority, a varying or considerable skill set, and pursuing one or multiple degrees, certifications and/or professional licenses.

The National Employment Law Project published a report about AAW and “occupational segregation” (Role & Thompson, 2024). Occupational segregation describes the phenomenon of 19AAW being over-represented in low-paying jobs and under-presented in high-paying jobs which indicates an economic disadvantage (Role & Thompson, 2024). Data used for reporting and analysis was sourced from the IPUMS, formerly known as Integrated Public Use Microdata Series, American Community Survey dated 2018 through 2022. In 2023, “Black women lost \$42.7 billion in wages compared to white men” (U.S. Department of Labor, 2024) which is a clear demonstration of discrimination through pay disparity. Between 2019 and 2020, of the total bachelor’s degrees earned by American citizens and permanent residents, Black women represented 11.3 percent of degree-earners (National Center for Education Statistics, 2020). As reported by the U.S. Department of Labor, Black women had the highest labor force participation rate of all women in 2020 (2021). Black women also held the highest unemployment rate at 5.3 percent in 2022 (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2023).

Economically, AAW have struggled to obtain an equitable quality of life that affords them the opportunity to support themselves and their families. Women, regardless of race or ethnicity, who are employed in the American workforce collectively make less money than men (Costa, U.S. Government Accountability Office, 2023). When examining this inequity across race, ethnicity, and gender, a 2021 report published by the U.S. Government Accountability Office revealed that for every dollar a Caucasian male manager makes, an AAW makes 59 cents (Costa, 2023). “Although Black women are more likely than White women to be in the labor market, they are more often likely to occupy jobs that are less secure, have fewer benefits, and pay less than those held by White women” (Mays, 1995, P. 2)

AAW are also the most likely to be single mothers and will retain primary and custodial responsibility for their children. The stress of supporting a family can exacerbate pre-existing mental health conditions. “Amid the current focus on wellness in the workplace, policies aimed at reducing the stigma of mental illness at work, and promoting more tolerant and supportive workplace cultures, can improve the probability of gainful employment...” (Baldwin et. al, 2023, P. 2). Margaret C. Simms published a review in which she asserted that “Black families headed by women have much lower incomes and higher poverty rates than almost any other type of family. They are disproportionately dependent on welfare and are less likely to receive support from absent fathers” (1985, P. 1). This assertion is evident present-day through a myriad of examinations into the economical standing of the United States’ populace. In essence, AAW do not make enough money to support a family, a family that they are expected to raise due to their historically communal role as “caretaker.” Career advancement is seemingly the proper solution; however, in their quest to acquire gainful employment, AAW are often met with discriminatory experiences as barriers. “Black women are forced to contend with many negative racial stereotypes, which can obstruct their professional lives and connections with others in the workplace” (Reynolds-Dobbs et. al, 2008, P. 130).

### **Discrimination as an Inhibitor for Career Advancement**

Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) law makes it illegal for employers to discriminate against someone based on a protected characteristic including race, color, religion, sex (including pregnancy, childbirth, and related conditions), national origin, age (if 40 or older), disability, and genetic information (EEOC, 2024). The law also makes it illegal for employers to retaliate against someone who complains about discrimination, files a charge of discrimination, or

participates in an investigation or lawsuit. Despite the law, AAW still challenge workplace policies that have disparate impact on all ethnicities of Black women. One example of these types of policies are workplace grooming requirements that prohibit afro hair and ethnic styles (Henson, 2017). The EEOC filed a lawsuit against a medical testing supply company that fired a Black employee for wearing her natural hair and, later, announced a settlement (2024). In 2013, the EEOC reported a similar case involving a Black woman who had her job offer rescinded because she wore dreadlocks. Workplace policies embolden natural hair bias in a manner that disenfranchises AAW through texturism (Summers et. al, 2022), a derivative of colorism and featurism (Shepherd, 2018). Texturism refers to discrimination that favors straight hair over afro hair, while colorism centers on preference for lighter skin tones among the Black race. Featurism oppresses those with Afrocentric features while praising those with Eurocentric features. All forms of phenotypic biases were born from American racism in which white people were deemed the superior race; the more an African-American person resembles a white person, the more likely they will be positioned in socioeconomic privilege.

The private sector isn't the only employment arena where AAW encounter the hair police. Those employed in the public sector through governmental agencies are also targeted through workplace policies that admonish afro hair. For instance, in 2019, after decades of enforcing strict grooming policies that forbade natural hair styles, the U.S. Department of Defense lifted its ban on braids, twists and dreadlocks; it has since removed words such as "matted" and "unkempt" from its verbiage in outlining its grooming policies to foster inclusivity in all branches of the military (Enokenwa et. al, 2023).

To combat discriminatory grooming workplace policies, a group of U.S. legislators introduced the Creating a Respectful and Open World for Natural Hair Act of 2021, or The

CROWN Act. The CROWN Act of 2021 is a federal bill that, if passed, would “prohibit discrimination based on a person's hair texture or hairstyle if that style or texture is commonly associated with a particular race or national origin. Specifically, the bill prohibits this type of discrimination against those participating in federally assisted programs, housing programs, public accommodations, and employment” (U.S. Congress, 2021). As of 2025, the status of the federal bill is still “introduced;” however, the bill was passed in the U.S. House of Representatives in March 2022 with a vote of 235–189 (U.S. Congress, 2022). All 189 who voted against the CROWN Act were from the Republican Party. On February 26, 2025, U.S. Senators Cory Booker (D-NJ) and Susan Collins (R-ME) re-introduced federal CROWN Act legislation “aimed at combating racial discrimination against natural hair and protective hairstyles traditionally worn by Black people” (U.S. Senate, 2025).

The state of California passed its own version of The CROWN Act as a state law in 2019 (The CROWN Act, 2024) making California the first state to proactively resolve discrimination based on hair. As of 2025, 27 states have passed their own versions of The CROWN Act (The CROWN Act, 2025). Advocacy for federal regulations against workplace policies that have a disparate impact on AAW speak to the persistent problem of institutional racism this population has historically faced. As of 2025, there is no data to measure the impact of state-level legislation against hair discrimination.

Workplace policies that forbid AAW women from wearing their natural hair are widely offensive because they are reminiscent of the varying methods in which AAW, and other women of African descent were psychologically abused into believing their natural hair was a problem. For example, in 1786, Louisiana adopted Tignon Laws which required free women of African descent (commonly referred to as Creole) to wear headscarves to mark their adjacency to

enslaved Black women who tied their hair up in servitude (Jefferson, 2023; National Museum of African American History & Culture (Constellations Virtual Exhibit), 2024). It was thought that by hiding what was considered their most beautiful attribute, it would dissuade white men from building families with free Black women while undermining their social stature against white women. Historically, Black women of all ethnicities have been brought to shame using their hair as the medium; it is the one characteristic that has consistently been attacked on the macro-level throughout history.

Additionally, gender-racial stereotypes about AAW remain at the epicenter of their employment. Irrespective of their rank, AAW are made to feel inferior to their white counterparts. “Black women may [also] face trouble advancing in the workplace because of stereotypes that they are only suited for low-status jobs” (Williams, et. al, 2020, P. 396) Prejudice about work performance, reliability, personality, and character inhibit career growth for AAW due to being seen as “lazy,” “violent,” and “intimidating.” In specificity, if referencing the three primary archetypes, AAW who fit into the “Mammy” role are only seen as appropriate in support roles while the “Jezebel” is an AAW who will “sleep her way to the top” and the “Sapphire” AAW is unemployable due to her volatile behavior.

## **SOCIAL SUPPORT THEORY**

Social Support Theory asserts that the amount and type of social support an individual has access to influences their health outcomes. It is through relationships that individuals can achieve optimum health (Feeny & Collins, 2017). Social Support Theory is illustrated using two models as defined by Jorunn Drageset (2021): “buffering” (Cohen & Wills, 1985) and “main

support” (Eriksson & Lindstrom, 2006). The “buffering” model outlines individuals with a high level of perceived social support will have fewer negative health effects following stressful events than those with a low level of perceived social support, whereas the “main support” model depicts that an individual’s support system will prove beneficial even in the absence of stressors (Drageset, 2021). Social support serves as an immediate factor in how an individual copes with traumatic life events and how soon recovery efforts place symptoms of MDD into remission (Li et. al, 2023). Further research is needed to examine social support and its effects on trauma survivors’ cognitive and behavioral responses (Ullman, 1999).

### **How do AAW seek support?**

Historically, in matters of mental health, AAW are hesitant to seek support from mental health professionals due to the communal stigma of seeing a therapist (Ward et. al, 2010). In lieu of seeking professional help, AAW are taught by their elders to “pray it away” (Woods-Giscombe et. al, 2020). This is based on a traditional reliance on religion in the sense that a higher power is in control of the universe and has healing power that transforms believers from broken to whole (Clements, 2023). Additionally, AAW are encouraged by friends and relatives to uphold the image of being a Strong Black Woman (SBW) (Borum, 2024); “Black girls are socialized to be “strong” under the premise that strength will serve as a means of psychological resistance to oppression prevalent within American society” (Jones, et. al, 2021, P. 347). Moreover, medical mistrust is a resounding concern among AAW; the echo of J. Marion Sims experiments on enslaved African women and the harvesting of Henrietta Lacks’ “immortal” cells triggers skepticism on healthcare providers’ intentions and sincerity in addressing health concerns.

## **DISCUSSION**

The purpose of this literature review is to discuss the connection between African-American Women, Major Depressive Disorder, sexual harassment, and career advancement. This review also presents Social Support Theory as a framework for further research and the development of innovations to support equitable mental health outcomes for African-American women who are living with Major Depressive Disorder, particularly those who are victimized by sexual harassment during career advancement. The review of the literature reveals that most of the research on this topic is still in its infancy. Within the last 20 years, according to the PRISMA flow chart for this review, only 10 articles have been published surrounding this topic, six of which are doctoral dissertations. The literature has yet to explore in any detail the varying dimensions of how AAW are affected by MDD, and how much influence sexual harassment in the workplace is placed on their mental health outcomes. Without more research, much is left to speculation and there are many questions that have yet to receive an answer.

African-American women are met with barriers to seeking treatment and social support when experiencing symptoms of Major Depressive Disorder. This can be attributed to cultural factors such as spirituality, stigma, medical mistrust, and the subliminal obligation to uphold the inherited 'Strong Black Woman' persona (Woods-Giscombe et. al, 2016). The perception is that AAW are strong; therefore, they can withstand anything, including sexual harassment. This dehumanizes AAW in a way that permits violence upon their person and property. Moreover, historical depictions of AAW presents this population as overtly sexual, thus denying the victimhood of AAW who survive sexual violence. When perpetrators of sexual harassment are

not held accountable, it reinforces the notion that AAW are not allowed body autonomy and are merely objects that do not require consent for such interactions.

There is little research on the reactions AAW receive after reporting sexual harassment at work. Legal anecdotes offer insight on the injustices with court rulings; however, it would be more beneficial to have qualitative representations of these experiences. These qualitative reports could eventually be quantified. Once we can pinpoint the types of reactions AAW receive after reporting sexual harassment to their employer, and the EEOC, we can begin to examine the frequency of these reactions. For instance, possible employer reactions could be retaliatory in nature. Retaliation comes in varying forms such as poor performance evaluations, demotions, reassignments, or non-sexual harassment that is intended to force the AAW employee to resign. If by qualitative research, we are able to name these exact responses, quantitative research may be able to uncover how often this happens.

In researching Strong Black Woman schema, the most studied population is college-aged Black women. This excludes Black women who have never been to college; their perspective isn't documented. Also, "college-aged" is too broad. AAW attend college at various stages in life, and while undergraduate students are typically the focus of these studies, graduate students are also college students. In addition, the research is primarily qualitative. There is no account for socioeconomic differences and similarities among the samples. These attributes can provide further insight on the influence and impact of the SBW schema. This is important when studying the relationship between African-American women, Major Depressive Disorder, sexual harassment and career advancement because the SBW schema may be related to how AAW cope with being sexually harassed at work. The SBW schema has not been studied among AAW professionals who are faced with sexual harassment in the workplace.

As mentioned before, stereotypes about AAW can prove harmful in the workplace. However, “there are not many empirical studies of how stereotypes affect Black women in the workplace specifically” (Reynolds-Dobbs et. al, 2008). These stereotypes inadvertently lead to discrimination which can inhibit AAW in their professional pursuits. In her dissertation, *A Phenomenal Exploration of the Leadership Development Experiences of Black Women*, Foster highlights how a lack of critical empirical work on the leadership development of Black women has left a gap in the understanding of how racial and gendered identities influence their development as successful leaders (2021). Could it be possible that leadership development for AAW is non-existent due to discrimination? More information is needed about how AAW have developed and progressed in leadership positions, especially those who have been faced with sexual harassment. Understanding how this subgroup of women emerged as leaders may provide a model to support other Black women as they advance into leadership (Foster, 2021).

Detailed research regarding the economic standing of AAW is limited. There is data compiled from the 1990 Decennial Census and 2019 American Community Survey that depicts AAW as the leading population of women who are the heads of their households with 52 percent of households identified in 1990 and approximately 60 percent of households in 2019. However, there is no context. How are these AAW-headed households classified? Do these classifications account for single mothers, childless AAW, or AAW women who are the sole breadwinners while married or in a domestic partnership? What are the percentages of class structure? How many dependents are they supporting, if any? What is their education level? Why did the number of AAW-headed households increase? Learning the details of the economic standing of AAW could help identify possible inhibitors that could be attributed to the workplace, their mental health, or both.

Regarding Major Depressive Disorder, I found research that outlines biochemistry in reference to neurotransmitters and resulting behaviors from altered brain chemistry. If early traumatic experiences suppress the production of neurotransmitters, this may indicate that a possible change in environment can rehabilitate the nervous system. Treatment plans that include talk therapy, meditation, and group activities can rewire neurological patterns and heal brain chemistry. It's important to note that, in regard to Social Support Theory, having a strong support system may also contribute to improving brain chemistry. Based on the literature and additional research, those with a supportive community have better mental health outcomes.

Alternatively, if the low production of neurotransmitters is primarily genetic, this may signal a biological deficit in which traumatic life events aren't to blame; an African-American woman would have been susceptible to MDD regardless of being sexually harassed. If this is the case, what would be the appropriate steps to ensure psychological safety in the workplace for AAW victims of sexual harassment? Presumably, if an African-American woman has a genetic predisposition to MDD, she could already be experiencing symptoms of MDD without a diagnosis, yet sexually harassing behaviors could intensify her symptoms which could lead to an actual diagnosis by a healthcare professional. Moreover, if there isn't a definitive cause of the low production of neurotransmitters, there exists a cycle of "which came first?" that measures the relationship between low levels of neurotransmitters and health behaviors. For instance, those living with MDD may have a poor diet; do AAW living with MDD have a poor diet because of the low levels of neurotransmitters, or do they have low levels of neurotransmitters because of the poor diet? (Growdon et. al, 1977)

There are complexities with the onset of Major Depressive Disorder. "The disease is multifactorial and can be attributed to genetic causes, various psychosocial and environmental

stressors, and can be an unpleasant accompaniment to a variety of other diseases and disease processes” (Bailey et. al, 2019, P. 603). Additionally, “when exploring disparities in depression across racial and ethnic boundaries, it is important to consider 1) the differences in predisposing factors (i.e., genetic factors and adverse childhood events), 2) the presentation of disease, and 3) boundaries to sustained and successful treatment” (Bailey et. al, 2019, P. 603). Because women of any race or ethnicity are twice as likely to experience symptoms of depression compared to men (Kuehner, 2016) and Black populations experience exposure to more stressors that trigger depression in comparison to their white counterparts, there is an element of intersectionality due to duality of race and gender identity among African-American women. The weight of being African American and a woman simultaneously presents a distinctive socioeconomic burden where racially motivated bigotry and gender-based discrimination plague interpersonal and professional environments.

### **Public Health Implications: Inaction Equals Suffering**

Sexual harassment in the workplace has detrimental effects on AAW, particularly those living with MDD. If left unaddressed, AAW will continue to experience a decline in their mental health while also acquiring subsequent comorbidity (Sherman et. al, 2023). “Evidence continues to suggest that women may experience negative mood, eating disorders, drug and alcohol abuse as well as work turnover intentions, long-term anxiety, job stress, and or burnout” (Quick & McFadyen, 2017, P. 291; Cortina & Berdahl, 2008; Harrington et. al, 2010) There is also research that indicates a link between sexual harassment and hypertension among women, including AAW (Lawn et. al, 2022).

In the absence of social support, AAW are left to cope on their own. According to Social Support Theory, a healthy support system is needed in order for one to successfully mitigate or overcome a traumatic life event. Because of the SBW schema, AAW hold an inherent belief that they must endure their traumas on their own without complaint. This philosophy is harmful to AAW because it inhibits their ability to seek support (White, 2021). Unfortunately, there is not much literature that explicitly states how social support helps AAW survivors of workplace sexual harassment; however, prior research on the effects of sexual violence, narrowly labeled as sexual assault, coercion, and rape (Basile et. al, 2016; Rowland et. al, 2022) suggests that social support, or lack thereof, is a determinant on whether AAW recover from sexual trauma. Prior research also suggests that AAW who survive sexual violence can mitigate the trauma and avoid adverse mental health outcomes if they have an adequate support system. There is also research that examines sexual violence in terms of lifelong abuse, including childhood sexual abuse and subsequent intimate partner violence, that further platforms the necessity of social support for AAW (Ramos et. al, 2004).

Additionally, we cannot ignore the role of discrimination in terms of AAW experiencing sexual harassment in the workplace; AAW caricatures such as the sapphire, the jezebel, and the mammy have indoctrinated Americans with the belief that AAW cannot be true victims of sexual violence (Wallace et. al, 2024; Lewis, 2019), including sexual harassment in the workplace. Stereotypical depictions of AAW that lead to a denial of victimhood may inadvertently reinforce SBW behaviors. In essence, AAW may continue the cycle of masking and self-silencing as a means to cope with sexual harassment which has detrimental health outcomes.

## **CONCLUSION**

Through further research, social support interventions can be developed for African-American women to mitigate the risks associated with acquiring or exacerbating symptoms of Major Depressive Disorder when being victimized by sexual harassment at work. Instead of being “strong” and harboring the trauma of sexual harassment, African-American women would be encouraged to openly speak their truth and lean on their support system. There is also a need to combat stereotyping AAW because it can often lead to discriminatory bias that negates their humanity. To adequately support AAW, they must be recognized as human beings.

Employers are obligated to ensure a safe work environment for their employees. Therefore, education on risk factors for Major Depressive Disorder and mental health outcomes can be beneficial to ensure compliance on this obligation. Moreover, when AAW report sexual harassment, employers can be equipped with the appropriate knowledge to train their employees on how to support victims while also avoiding further damage to the victim’s mental health. Failure to uphold workplace safety obligations presents a liability, not solely for legal action, but for a subsequent psychological injury that affects the victim’s quality of life.

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APPENDIX

## Final PRISMA Matrix (Figure 3)

Key words: "Major Depressive Disorder", "African American Women", "sexual harassment", "Career Advancement", Social Support Theory  
 About 26 results (drops to 16 on second page of results)

Second Search: "Major Depressive Disorder", "African American Women", "Career Advancement", Social Support Theory  
 About 64 results (decreases to approximate count of 54 on search result page 6)

Third Search: "African American women", "major depressive disorder", "sexual harassment" (DATE RANGE 1995 – 2025)  
 About 382 results (decreases to approximate count of 371 on search result page 36)

Fourth Search: "African American women", "major depressive disorder", "career advancement" (1995-2025)  
 About 58 results

Authors	Title	Journal	Year	Abstract
Paula A. Anderson	<i>Psychological Distress, Intersectional Invisibility, and the African American Female Mid-Level Leader: A Qualitative Phenomenological Study.</i>	Doctoral Dissertation, The Chicago School of Professional Psychology	2021	African American female leaders in the workplace face several issues due to the intersection of their race and gender, including psychological distress, intersectional invisibility, and discrimination in their role as a leader. Intersectional invisibility is the tendency to be overlooked or disregarded as a member of two underrepresented groups (i.e., Black and female) (Purdie-Vaughns & Eibach, 2008). The purpose of this qualitative transcendental phenomenological research study was to explore the psychological distress experiences of African American female leaders who encountered intersectional invisibility at the middle management leadership level in large U.S. organizations. This study revealed several psychological distress experiences and revealed the impact their psychological distress experiences had on their health and career decisions. Three theoretical constructs, social stress theory, the model of intersectional invisibility, and role congruity theory, framed and supported this study. One central research question and three sub-questions informed the study design.

				<p>Semistructured interviews with 10 African American female middle-level leaders revealed six themes. These themes are (a) Pervasive Stress, (b) Having Self Doubt, (c) Feelings of Frustration, (d) Not Valued by Colleagues, (e) Emotionally Crushed/Hurt, and (f) Constantly Adjusting to Fit In. This study's findings will be salient to organizations looking to retain their Black female leaders and diversify their mid-level to senior executive leadership pipeline. The results will help organizations consider ways to create a more healthy, equitable, and inclusive environment for Black women in the workplace.</p>
Dianna N. Moses-Nunley	<i>The interactive roles of gender and ethnicity in African American women's mental health</i>	Doctoral Dissertation, University of Missouri-Saint Louis	2005	<p>For African-American women, female gender and African-American (AA) ethnicity combine to create experiences of discrimination, discrimination related stress, and mental health issues that are not encountered by individuals who occupy only one of these status variables. Gender and ethnicity also influence socioeconomic status, an additional variable affecting the experiences and issues that AA women uniquely encounter.</p> <p>The first goal of this study was to examine the ways in which the combined social statuses of gender and ethnicity influence the discriminatory experiences and mental health of AA women. The second goal was to determine the ways in which AA women's self-reported personal experiences with discrimination affect their mental health. The third goal was to examine how these relationships vary between AA women and individuals who share only one of their social status variables: European American (EA) women and AA men. The final goal was to determine the contribution of socioeconomic status to these relationships.</p> <p>A community sample of 358 participants was recruited, consisting of 104 AA women, 82 AA men, 97 EA women, and 75 EA men. Participants completed a composite socioeconomic status measure, The Combined Schedule of Sexist and Racist Events, the Satisfaction with Life Scale, and a Symptom Checklist.</p> <p>Results indicated that AAs report more racism and interactive racism and sexism than EAs; and women reported more sexism than men. AA women did not differ significantly</p>

				from other groups in reported discrimination or mental health. As a group, women reported more psychological distress symptoms than men and AAs reported poorer life satisfaction than EAs. Sexism predicted greater psychological distress symptoms in the total sample, but when AAs and AA women were examined separately, only racism predicted symptoms. SES contributed to life satisfaction but not symptoms, and did not attenuate the roles of sexism and racism in mental health. Preliminary analyses also suggested SES did not contribute to racial and gender group differences in reported discrimination or mental health.
Tanisha K. Pelham	<i>Gendered Racial Microaggressions and Depression Among Professional Black Women: Examining the Role of Ethnic Identity and Coping Self-efficacy</i>	Doctoral Dissertation, University of Georgia	2023	Uniquely positioned at the intersection of race, class, and gender, professional Black women are confronted with the dual challenge of upholding professional and dominant culture standards, while also contending with and transforming stereotypical images of Black women and managing the expectations, values, and roles of the Black community. Without adequate mediation this complex process can trigger psychological distress (Bell, 1990). The current study investigated the relationship between gendered racial microaggression and depression and the role of ethnic identity and coping self-efficacy in this relationship for Black women in professional occupations. Participants were 85 Black women in the United States who completed an online survey. Findings indicating a significant relationship between gendered racial microaggressions and depression. Coping self-efficacy was a significant mediator between gendered racial microaggressions and depression, and ethnic identity was not significant in moderating this relationship among this sample. These findings highlight the role of coping self-efficacy in buffering the negative mental health outcomes of gendered racial microaggressions. Organizations and mental health professionals can use this study to bolster efforts towards an intersectional, culturally responsive framework to support Black professional women's mental health.
Miriam Railey	<i>A phenomenological study of black women with depression, holding senior</i>	Doctoral Dissertation, University of Phoenix	2020	The Black community holds on to stigma and myths surrounding depression and mental illness, which continues to create undue pain and confusion, posing barriers to proper treatment and healing. The purpose of this study was to examine the phenomena of high achieving Black women who were able to

	<i>leadership positions</i>			ascend to the height of their career fields while managing their depressive episodes. The study was conducted in one metropolitan area in the mid-Atlantic part of the United States. The study population included Black women holding senior leadership positions, who acknowledged that they co-exist with depressive episodes. The study was underpinned by multiple frameworks and theories including the contextual depression theory, the SBW schema, the self-efficacy theory, and the John Henryism construct. A qualitative method and phenomenological design using semi-structured open-ended interview questions, was used to collect data for the study. Among their myriad of life experiences, there was found common themes in the form of success strategies that act as catalysts in their career ascension. All the common themes were rooted in strength, perseverance, and resilience. The themes for strength and perseverance presented as extreme focus on tasks, others, and the ability to meditate. Preventative strategies showed through open communication, such as therapy or open dialogue within a support system another strategy was the combination of medication and therapy. The more common themes among participants' personalities were being high functioning, having extreme compassion for others and self-awareness. Findings from this study has implications for the advancement the scholarship on literature concerning the negative stigma of depression in the black community and the value of open dialogue that can come in the form of cognitive therapy, mentorship and sponsorship.
Christy L Erving, Izraelle I McKinnon, Courtney S Thomas Tobin, Miriam E Van Dyke, Raphiel Murden, Reneé H Moore, Bianca Booker, Viola	Black Women as Superwomen? The Mental Health Effects of Superwoman Schema, Socioeconomic Status, and Financial Strain.	Social Problems	2024	Informed by Black feminist thought and intersectionality, Superwoman Schema (SWS) is a construct that captures a collective response of Black women to racial and gender marginalization by highlighting expectations that they exude strength, suppress emotions, resist vulnerability, succeed despite limitations, and help others to their own self-neglect. Using a sample of Black women (N = 390) in early-midlife (between 30 and 46 years old; M = 37.54 years; SD = 4.29), this study integrates the intersectionality framework and the stress process model to examine the independent and interactive effects of SWS endorsement as well as socioeconomic status (SES) and financial strain on Black women's mental

Vaccarino, Tené T Lewis				health. Study results reveal that SWS dimensions “emotion suppression” and “obligation to help others” are associated with elevated depressive symptoms. In addition, net worth and financial strain, but not traditional measures of socioeconomic status such as education and income, moderate the association between SWS endorsement and depressive symptoms. Specifically, the association between SWS and depressive symptoms is strongest among Black women reporting negative net worth or high financial strain (e.g., not being able to make ends meet). Broader implications and future research directions are discussed.
Erika R. Carr, Dawn M. Szymanski, Farah Taha, Lindsey M. West, and Nadine J. Kaslow	Understanding the Link Between Multiple Oppressions and Depression Among African American Women: The Role of Internalization	<i>Psychology of Women Quarterly</i>	2014	The purpose of our study was to examine the multiple oppression experiences of sexual objectification, racism, and gendered racism as predictors of depressive symptoms among a clinical sample of low-income African American women. In addition, we examined coping with oppression via internalization (i.e., the tendency to attribute responsibility or the cause of an oppressive event to oneself) as a mediator between these three intersecting forms of oppression and depressive symptoms. Participants included 144 African American women who sought some type of mental health treatment at a U.S. southeastern, public, urban, university-affiliated hospital that attends to a primarily indigent and underserved population. The results of our mediational analysis using bootstrapping provided support for a theorized model in which coping with oppressive events via internalization mediated the links between sexual objectification and depression and between racist events and depression but not between gendered racism and depression. In addition, a unique and direct effect of racist events on depression was found. Finally, the four variables in the model accounted for 42% of variance in depression scores. The study includes implications for future research and clinical work such as exploration of other mediators and the importance of comprehensive intake assessments and multicultural/feminist coping interventions.
Juliette C. Rederstorff, NiCole T. Buchanan, and Isis H. Settles	The Moderating Roles of Race and Gender-Role Attitudes in the Relationship Between Sexual Harassment and	<i>Psychology of Women Quarterly</i>	2007	Although previous research has linked sexual harassment to negative psychological outcomes, few studies have focused on moderators of these relationships. The present study surveyed Black (n = 88) and White (n = 170) female undergraduates who endorsed experiences of sexual harassment to examine

	Psychological Well-Being			whether traditional gender attitudes differentially moderated the relationship between sexual harassment and three outcomes: posttraumatic stress symptoms, general clinical symptoms, and satisfaction with life. We replicated past findings that sexual harassment is related to negative outcomes. Further, the results supported our hypothesis that less traditional gender attitudes (i.e., more feminist attitudes) would buffer the negative effects of sexual harassment for White women, whereas the same attitudes would exacerbate its negative effects for Black women. We discuss reasons for these differences, including Black women's double consciousness and differences in the meaning of feminist and traditional gender attitudes for Black and White women.
Lyneia E. E. Hawkins	Peeling Back the Layers: Exploring the Impact of Multiple Discrimination on Professional Black Women	Doctoral Dissertation, Howard University	2017	“Middle-class African American career women encounter a curious repackaging of the controlling images generated for poor and working-class Black femininity, now reformulated for middle-class use” (Collins, 2004, p. 139). Despite the inclusion of some Black women in positions of leadership within professional settings, many of these women face ‘gendered racism’ the double jeopardy of being African American and female (Jean-Marie, Williams, & Sherman, 2009, p. 563). Although Black women have been able to achieve success and earn professional degrees for entry into traditionally male professions, women also experience isolation, exclusion, and systemic discrimination (Jean-Marie et al., 2009). This population has traditionally been viewed as either women, compared to White women, or as people of color, studied with Black men and other ethnic groups; their experiences are rarely studied independently of these two distinct populations (Constantine, 2002; Wallace, Townsend, Glasgow, & Ojie, 2011; Miville & Ferguson, 2014). Research on Black women has also focused more on adolescent or college-aged women and older women, and less on those women who fall in between, which has the potential to overlook middle-class (Higginbotham, 1994), early career professionals and/or those who have more established careers. The purpose of this study was to explore factors that may contribute to the deleterious effects of multiple discrimination on health and well-being among professional Black women, using an intersectional framework. This study

				utilized path analysis to examine the relationships among these factors. The results revealed that racism and sexism were significantly related to psychological distress independently, however, when examined simultaneously in the path analysis each variable loss its significance. Self-esteem partially explained the relationship between sexism and psychological distress as well as internalized self-esteem and psychological distress. Lastly, spirituality was not shown to moderate the relationship between self-esteem and experiences of discrimination and internalized discrimination. Implications for research, clinical, and real-world application of results are discussed.
Nicole Therese Buchanan	<i>Examining the impact of racial harassment on sexually harassed African American women</i>	Doctoral Dissertation, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.	2002	<p>Dialogue on the sexual harassment experiences of women of color, specifically African American women, has neglected the reality that, as women and as people of a non-dominant group, they are likely to be targeted for multiple types of intertwined harassment experiences. It has become increasingly recognized that researchers and practitioners must address this “double discriminatory bind of racism and sexism” (Comas-Diaz and Green, 1994, p. 381) to fully understand the experiences of women of color.</p> <p>To address this need, this paper seeks to understand the complexity of the harassment experiences of African American women. Using qualitative and quantitative techniques, their experiences are first more thoroughly defined, and then are used to analyze psychological-, and health-related outcomes.</p> <p>Study 1 utilized focus group methodology to understand the nature of African American women's workplace harassment. Results indicated that participants interpreted sexual and racial harassment as interwoven experiences. A dimension of harassment explicitness emerged, labeled as covert, subtle, and overt, which addressed the extent to which both racial and sexual overtones were explicit in a given interaction. Additionally, the content of the discussions reflected the following six content themes: racially charged comments regarding clothing, presumptions that Black women are incompetent, conflict with Caucasian employees, assumptions concerning the hygiene of African American women, sexualized race-based differential treatment,</p>

				<p>and target responses being mediated by sexualized stereotypes of Black women.</p> <p>Study 2 included ninety-one African American women who were claimants from a class-action lawsuit filed against a large financial institution; all women had been determined to have experienced sexual harassment. Multiple hierarchical linear regressions and dominance analyses were conducted to examine the relative contribution of racial harassment for psychological and health-related outcomes. Regression analyses indicated that racial harassment significantly increased the amount of variance accounted for regarding life satisfaction, clinical symptoms, and PTSD symptoms. Dominance analyses also confirmed that of the variance explained, racial harassment was a strong predictor for these three outcomes.</p>
<p>K. B. Holden, N. D. Hernandez, G. L. Wrenn, A. S. Belton</p>	<p>Resilience: Protective Factors for Depression and Post Traumatic Stress Disorder among African American Women?</p>	<p><i>Health, Culture and Society</i></p>	<p>2017</p>	<p>There is a great need to carefully examine issues that may elevate one’s risk for mental illness and develop strategies to mitigate risk and cultivate resilience. African Americans, specifically African American women (AAW), are disproportionately affected by mental illness, including depression and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Higher rates of PTSD among AAW may be explained by significant rates of trauma exposure. Higher resiliency in individuals with mental illnesses is associated with better treatment response/outcomes. An examination of two (2) promising psycho-educational curricula for AAW at risk for depression and PTSD supports consideration of resilience as a protective factor among this population. Strengthening psychological resilience among diverse AAW at risk for depression and/or PTSD may serve as a protective factor for symptom severity. Multidimensional prevention and intervention strategies should incorporate culturally-centered, gender-specific, and strengths-based (resilience) models of care to help encourage mental health help-seeking and promotion of wellness for AAW.</p>