



Behind the Mask of the Strong Black Woman: Voice and the Embodiment of a Costly Performance

Tamara Beauboeuf-Lafontant

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The defining quality of Black womanhood is strength, states Tamara Beauboeuf-Lafontant in *Behind the Mask of the Strong Black Woman*. But, she argues, the idea of strength undermines its real function: to defend and maintain a stratified social order by obscuring Black women's experiences of suffering, acts of desperation, and anger. This provocative book lays bare the common perception that strength is an exemplary or defining quality of "authentic" Black womanhood.

The author, a noted sociologist, interviews 58 Black women about being strong and proud, to illustrate their "performance" of invulnerability. Beauboeuf-Lafontant explains how such behavior leads to serious symptoms for these women, many of whom suffer from eating disorders and depression.

Drawing on Black feminist scholarship, cultural studies, and women's history, *Behind the Mask of the Strong Black Woman* traces the historical and social influences of normative Black femininity, looking at how notions of self-image and strength create a distraction from broader forces of discrimination and power.

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