Subordinates, Sex Objects, or Sapphires? Investigating Contributions of Media Use to

Black Students' Femininity Ideologies and Stereotypes about Black Women

Morgan C. Jerald, L. Monique Ward, Lolita Moss

University of Michigan

Khia Thomas

Broward College

Kyla Day Fletcher

Kalamazoo College

Morgan C. Jerald, L. Monique Ward, and Lolita Moss, Department of Psychology,

University of Michigan; Khia Thomas, Department of Psychology, Broward College; Kyla Day,

Department of Psychology, Kalamazoo College.

Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Morgan C. Jerald,

Department of Psychology, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, 48104. Electronic mail may be

sent to morgajer@umich.edu

Abstract

Although the media are believed to be instrumental in transmitting messages about both hegemonic femininity and Black femininity to Black youth, there is little empirical evidence documenting this process. Accordingly, this study investigated media contributions to Black college students' endorsement of both traditional gender ideologies and of the Jezebel, Sapphire, and Strong Black woman stereotypes about Black women. The protective nature of ethnic identity was also examined. Participants ($N= 404$) completed measures assessing media consumption and involvement, endorsement of traditional gender ideologies and stereotypes about Black women, and ethnic identity. Regression analyses revealed support for our hypotheses, with consumption of music videos, movies, and Black magazines, and perceived realism contributing most strongly to students' endorsement of traditional gender ideologies and stereotypes about Black women. However, students with a strong sense of ethnic belonging were buffered from many of the negative influences of media use on these gender beliefs. The findings highlight the importance of considering culture-specific ideologies when examining links between Black students' media use and gender beliefs.

Keywords: media, African Americans, gender roles, stereotypes

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Because of their intersectional identity, African American women must negotiate both

mainstream American *and* culture-specific aspects of femininity. In this negotiation Black

women must contend with both traditional femininity ideologies, such as expectations of

passivity and sexiness, as well as gender ideologies specific to Black women, such as

assumptions about the Strong Black woman, and cultural stereotypes of the emasculating

Sapphire and hypersexual Jezebel (West, 2008). Given that the internalization of both traditional

femininity beliefs and stereotypes about Black women are linked to negative psychological

outcomes (Collins, 2000), researchers have begun to examine sources through which these

beliefs are learned and reinforced. The media are instrumental in transmitting messages about

hegemonic femininity and Black feminine ideals to Black youth (Ward, Hansbrough, & Walker,

2005), and thus have strong potential for affecting their acceptance of these beliefs. Drawing on

Black feminist, communication, and social psychology theories, the current study examined the

media's role in promoting Black students' endorsement of traditional gender ideologies and

stereotypes about Black women, and tested the potential protective contribution of ethnic

identity.

Traditional Femininity Ideologies

Traditional gender ideologies outline cultural beliefs about the roles, personality traits,

and behaviors prescribed as normative and expected for women and men. Parent and Moradi

(2010) identified several key components of traditional femininity in mainstream American

culture that women may conform to or resist. These ideologies prescribe that women engage in

behaviors traditionally related to the home, such as child-rearing, cooking, and cleaning, display

modesty regarding their achievements, and downplay their abilities. Interpersonally, women are

expected to excel at and prioritize platonic and romantic relationships. With regards to the body, women are socialized to value investment in physical appearance and to pursue the thin body ideal pervasive in American culture. Repeatedly, women are taught that their worth lies in their physical appearance and sexual appeal (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997). Paradoxically, women are also expected to act as sexual gatekeepers in their sexual relationships and are shamed for having sex outside of committed relationships (Parent & Moradi, 2010).

Although women who conform to these ideals stand to gain higher social status (Collins, 2000), acceptance of these beliefs is linked to several negative outcomes. Because traditional gender scripts emphasize the maintenance of interpersonal relationships and pleasing others (Jack, 1991; Tolman, 1994), behaviors requiring independent, assertive, and self-interested action may suffer. As such, endorsement of traditional femininity has been associated with less sexual assertiveness and sexual self-efficacy (Curtin, Ward, Merriwether, & Caruthers, 2011), and increased sexual risk-taking (Tolman, 1999). Women who endorse traditional gender beliefs also report lower self-esteem and more depressive affect (Tolman, Impett, Tracy, & Michael, 2006). Thus, past research demonstrates that women who strongly endorse traditional gender ideologies tend to have more negative sexual and mental health outcomes.

Culturally Specific Images of Femininity

In addition to contending with traditional femininity narratives, Black women must also negotiate several images specific to Black femininity that have emerged in popular culture. In the current study, we focused on two prominent stereotypes of Black women— the Jezebel and the Sapphire, and one cultural ideal— the Strong Black Woman. Collins (2000) describes the Jezebel and Sapphire stereotypes as pervasive and negative "controlling images" of Black women that have been used historically to justify the many interlocking systems of oppression present in Black women's lives. The Jezebel stereotype characterizes Black women as

hypersexual and insatiable, and originated from slavery as a means to rationalize the pervasive sexual assault of Black slave women by White men. The Sapphire stereotype was popularized through the character of Sapphire Stevens, the overbearing wife of Kingfish on the radio and television sitcom "Amos 'n Andy" during the 1940s and 1950s (West, 1995). In addition to her sassy, overly assertive, and argumentative nature, a defining feature of the Sapphire is the control and emasculation of Black men (West, 2008). The verbally and physically aggressive nature of the Sapphire and sexually aggressive nature of the Jezebel are in stark opposition to the submissive and sexually conservative norms of mainstream femininity (Collins, 2000).

Within the last 40 years, Black feminist scholars have also begun to theorize the Strong Black Woman (SBW) as an additional controlling image of Black women (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2009; hooks, 1981). The SBW prioritizes others' needs over her own and remains emotionally resilient in the face of adversity, all while managing responsibilities from all of life's domains (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2007). Painter (1996) identified Sojourner Truth's 1851 "Ar'n't I a Woman?" speech, in which Truth associates Black womanhood with struggle and survival, as an early source of the SBW image. Contemporarily, the image is reinforced by the lived experiences of Black women, which often necessitate resiliency, and is largely endorsed by Black women as a means of counteracting other stereotypes about Black women perceived as negative (Harris-Lacewell, 2001). Like the Jezebel and Sapphire stereotypes, the SBW counters traditional social constructions of women as weak and overly emotional (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2007).

Theoretical and empirical analyses suggest that internalizing these images has profound implications for Black women's mental health and relationships. It is argued that women who internalize the Jezebel stereotype may come to view their sexuality as a primary source of self-esteem (West, 1995). Indeed, data indicate that endorsing the Jezebel stereotype is linked to risky sexual behaviors in women and girls (Davis & Tucker-Brown, 2013; Townsend, Thomas,

Neilands, & Jackson, 2010). In addition, qualitative research suggests that cultural assumptions of Black women as hypersexual may place them at greater risk for sexual harassment and assault (Buchanan & Ormerod, 2002), and researchers theorize that Black female victims of sexual assault who internalize the Jezebel stereotype may engage in increased victim blaming (West, 1995). Endorsement of Jezebel and Sapphire stereotypes by Black men also contributes to negative interactions between Black women and men. Evidence indicates that Black men who endorse these stereotypes are more likely to engage in intimate partner violence and to justify violence against women (Gillum, 2002).

Although the characteristics of the SBW are often praised by Black women for highlighting positive features of Black womanhood in contrast to those of the Jezebel and Sapphire, the SBW ideal also has detrimental consequences for Black women's health. For example, Black women high in SBW endorsement tend to report more emotional avoidance or suppression and engage in binge eating (Harrington, Crowther, & Shipherd, 2010). Qualitative research also finds that Black women who are more accepting of the SBW ideal are at greater risk for depression (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2007), suffer from role strain, and deny themselves essential forms of self-care (Woods-Giscombé, 2010). Together, these findings provide strong evidence for the negative influence of endorsement of the Jezebel and Sapphire stereotypes and the SBW ideal on Black women's well-being.

Sources of These Ideals: Media Portrayals of Femininity and Black Femininity

Although many forces contribute to young people's awareness of these images, including parental and peer models (Witt, 2000), the mass media are likely to be a prominent contributor for several reasons. First, media consumption levels among Black youth are very high. Data indicate that Black American youth consume an average of 4.5 *more* hours of media daily than do White youth (Rideout, Lauricella, & Wartella, 2011). Second, the mass media are known for

their limited depictions of femininity (for reviews, see Greenwood & Lippman, 2010; Signorielli, 2001). In comparison to male TV characters, female characters are less dominant, more emotional, less technical, more nurturing, and are less often shown engaged in paid labor. Additionally, female appearance is emphasized more than male appearance, and women are often sexually objectified. Together, these portrayals construct a representation of femininity centered on passivity, nurturance, and a sexualized appearance.

Third, the media are known to feature stereotypical portrayals of African Americans. In music videos, for example, Black women are often portrayed as sexual objects (Ward et al., 2012), and especially so in rap and R&B videos (Aubrey & Frisby, 2011). For example, Turner (2011) examined the portrayal of race and gender in 120 music videos on five channels. Although there was a high presentation of sexual content in all videos (58.5%), this prevalence was especially high in mixed rap and R&B videos (82.9%) and R&B videos (79.2%). Stereotypical portrayals of Black women have also been noted on reality TV programs. For example, a recent content analysis of ten reality programs revealed that the "Angry Black Woman/Bitch" stereotype— depicted through argumentative and confrontational behavior as well as angry facial expressions— was particularly prevalent (Tyree, 2011). In her analysis of *College Hill*, a Black-oriented reality TV program, Smith (2013) found similar evidence of overly aggressive and dominant portrayals of Black women. Together, this research demonstrates that the media continue to feature hostile and emasculating representations of Black women that may promote the Sapphire stereotype, and highly sexualized depictions of Black women in music videos that promote the Jezebel stereotype.

These representations extend outside of television to other media, such as Black magazines. Although Black magazines generally feature more positive representations of body image than mainstream magazines (Baker, 2005; Leslie, 1995) and feature content that deviates

from traditional femininity, stereotyped images of Black women — particularly those of the Sapphire and Jezebel— are still present (Hazell & Clarke, 2008; Woodard & Mastin, 2005). For example, Black-oriented magazines are more likely than mainstream magazines to portray Black women as independent, dominant, and having more authority than men (Baker, 2005); although these images counter traditional, submissive gender prescriptions for women, they also hint at characteristics of the Sapphire stereotype and SBW ideal. In addition, Black men's magazines are more likely to portray objectified images of women than are Black women's magazines, and are more likely than White men's magazines to depict women as objects (Baker, 2005).

Mechanisms and Effects of Media Content

How might repeated exposure to this content affect what Black youth come to believe about women generally and about Black women, more specifically? The answer is not straightforward. In speculating about potential mechanisms and pathways, we draw on several relevant communication and social psychology theories. According to cultivation theory (Gerbner et al., 2002), repeated exposure, over time, to a consistent set of media messages gradually leads viewers to accept those messages and portrayals as reality. Therefore, individuals who repeatedly view television content that promotes traditional gender stereotypes are expected to be more inclined to accept these stereotypes as truths and to endorse these beliefs in their own lives. Adding more nuance is social cognitive theory (Bandura, 2002), which argues that several viewer cognitions mediate this process. One cognition that has received much attention is perceived realism — the extent to which a viewer believes media content to be realistic. Here, media content that is perceived as more realistic and as more consistent with real life is associated with a stronger influence on viewers' attitudes and beliefs (e.g., Austin, Pinkleton, & Fujioka, 2000; Huesmann, Moise-Titus, Podolski, & Eron, 2003). Thus, according to these two theories, consuming more media, and attributing greater realism to media content, should each

predict greater acceptance of gender stereotypes among Black viewers.

Whereas these theories might explain how media use contributes to Black viewers' stereotypes about women in general, do they apply to Black women's acceptance of negative stereotypes about their own sub-group? Indeed, one feature not represented by these theories is this self-stereotyping component. Current theories offer different analyses of how this component operates. According to behavioral assimilation approaches, when a stereotype is activated, people often behave in ways that are consistent with the stereotype, either consciously or unconsciously (Burkley & Blanton, 2009; Wheeler & Petty, 2001). Thus, Black women who are regularly exposed to the Jezebel and Sapphire stereotypes may act in ways that confirm schemas of hypersexuality and hostility, respectively, in their everyday interactions. Others argue that stigmatized targets engage in self-protective strategies that buffer them from negative group stereotypes (Crocker & Major, 1989). Indeed, Davis and Gandy (1999) argue that African Americans may employ a cultural lens that permits them to identify with media content that boosts their collective self-esteem and *resist* content that does not. In this way, Black women may reject negative media images of their group.

Regardless of the mechanism, findings have indicated that media exposure is indeed a significant contributor to viewers' gender ideologies. Across both experimental and correlational studies, exposure to media content that featured gender stereotypes was associated with greater endorsement of traditional gender beliefs (e.g., Davies, Spencer, & Steele, 2005; for review, see Signorilli, 2001). However, because most studies used predominately White samples, evidence is limited concerning effects for Black students. In two studies, frequent consumption of music videos among Black adolescents was linked to greater endorsement of stereotypical gender roles and to attributing more importance to physical appearance and sexiness for women (Gordon, 2008; Ward, Hansbrough, & Walker, 2005). Additionally, laboratory exposure to sexist, non-

violent music videos was associated with more acceptance of violence against women (Johnson, Adams, Ashburn, & Reed, 1995). These findings provide foundational examples of how Black youth's media use may contribute to their endorsement of traditional femininity ideologies.

The Moderating Effect of Ethnic Identity

Media consumption does not affect all individuals equally, however, and certain factors may protect specific groups from its effects. Ethnic identity— the value and importance a person places on her/his ethnic group membership (Rotheram & Phinney, 1987)— may be one such factor. Ethnic identity stands in contrast to African American racial identity, a construct that is conceptualized as both the significance and meaning African Americans attach specifically to their racial group membership (Sellers, Smith, Shelton, Rowley, & Chavous, 1998). The current study operationalizes ethnic identity in terms of a person's feelings of belonging to their ethnic group using Phinney's (1992) Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure (MEIM). This construct is similar to the concepts of both racial centrality (the extent to which race is central to a person's self-concept) and racial regard/racial esteem found in the racial identity literature (Sellers et al., 1998). Because the data used in our sample comes from a multi-ethnic sample, we use the MEIM to assess these identity characteristics.

Past research demonstrates that ethnic identity protects African Americans from negative outcomes in a number of domains; more specifically, Blacks who possess a strong ethnic identity are buffered from the negative effects of racial discrimination on psychological well-being (e.g., Sellers, Copeland-Linder, Martin, & Lewis, 2006), on academic achievement (e.g., Miller & MacIntosh, 1999), and on risk behavior (e.g., Brook & Pahl, 2005). Empirical data suggest that ethnic identity may operate in similar ways for media influences. For example, Black women with a stronger ethnic identity who view thin images in rap music videos report less body dissatisfaction, less drive for thinness, and lower levels of bulimic behavior than women with a

weaker ethnic identity (Zhang, Dixon, & Conrad, 2009). In regards to stereotypes about Black women, research finds that both younger and older Black women who feel positively about African Americans as a group endorse the Jezebel stereotype less than women who feel negatively about African Americans (Brown, White-Johnson, & Griffin-Fennel, 2013). Drawing on these findings, it appears likely that ethnic identity could moderate effects of Black students' media use on their endorsement of these negative stereotypes about Black women.

The Present Study

Previous research confirms that mainstream media are laden with content that promotes traditional femininity ideologies and stereotypes about Black women, and past research has demonstrated that exposure to this content can influence Black students' gender beliefs (e.g., Ward et al., 2005). However, few studies have examined contributions of media exposure to the endorsement of femininity ideologies specific to Black culture. Moreover, previous research has not identified individual difference factors that may make certain Black youth more or less vulnerable to the endorsement of these beliefs. This study sought to fill these gaps by examining how diverse forms of media use contribute to Black students' traditional gender beliefs *and* endorsement of stereotypes about Black women, and by testing contributions of ethnic identity as a protective factor. Because identity formation is a central task confronted during adolescence and emerging adulthood (Arnett, 2000), we chose to examine these issues among college students. Although much of this work is formative, we drew on communication and social psychology theories to help formulate the following hypotheses and research questions:

H1. We anticipated that frequent media exposure and higher levels of perceived realism would each be associated with a greater endorsement of traditional gender ideologies.

H2. We anticipated that frequent media exposure and higher levels of perceived realism would each be associated with a greater endorsement of stereotypes about Black women.

RQ1. Which media contribute most to Black students' gender and stereotype beliefs?

H3. We anticipated that ethnic identity would buffer media effects, such that associations between media use and beliefs would be stronger for those with fewer feelings of belongingness to their ethnic group.

Method

Participants

Participants were 404 self-identified Black or African American undergraduates (74% female) aged 17-27 (*M*=20) attending a large Mid-western university. Of the 404 students, 37 (30 women, 7 men) or 9.2% identified as biracial or multiracial. Most participants (98.8%) indicated that they had spent a majority of their formative years (ages 5-15) in the United States, and had been raised by a female *and* male caregiver (68%). Regarding sexual orientation, 78% identified as exclusively heterosexual, 14.1% identified as predominantly heterosexual, and 7.9% identified as gay or bisexual. Socioeconomic status (SES) was examined via maternal and paternal education levels, which fell at 15.78 and 15.31 years of schooling, respectively.

Measures

Media Exposure. Three sets of measures were used to assess participants' regular media exposure. One set of measures assessed the amount of time spent consuming television and music videos. For each medium, participants were asked to indicate how many hours they spent on a typical weekday, Saturday, and Sunday consuming that medium, with response options ranging from 0 hours to 10 hours. Weekly totals were computed for each medium by multiplying the weekday amounts by 5 and adding this product to the Saturday and Sunday amounts.

The second set of media exposure items focused on movie viewing. Via open-ended questions, participants were asked to indicate the number of times they view movies on cable/ satellite in a typical week, at a theater in a typical month, and on video/DVD in a typical month.

To compute a Monthly Movie Sum, we multiplied each participant's response concerning the number of weekly cable movies viewed by 4, and added this product to the scores for monthly DVD viewing and monthly theater viewing.

The final set of media exposure items focused on participants' magazine reading. Participants were presented with a list of 18 popular monthly magazines, and were asked to indicate how many issues (0-12) they read of each magazine in a typical year. Based on the findings of both a principal component factor analysis with a varimax rotation and reliability analyses, variables reflecting the following three sub-types of magazines were created: Women's Magazines (e.g., *Glamour*; 6 items, α=.77); Men's Magazines (e.g., *Maxim, Men's Health*; 5 items, α=.86); and Black-Oriented Magazines (e.g., *Essence, Ebony, Vibe;* 6 items, α=.82).

Perceived Realism. Two measures were used to assess perceptions of media realism. The first measure examined perceived realism of TV content. Using a seven-point scale anchored by 1 (*strongly disagree*) and 7 (*strongly agree*), participants indicated their level of agreement with each of 6 items (α=.84), based on an extended version of Rubin's (1983) three-item scale. A sample item reads: "TV content reflects everyday life." Mean scores were computed, with higher scores reflecting stronger perceptions of realism. The second measure assessed perceived realism of music video imagery. Using a five-point scale anchored by 1 (*strongly disagree*) and 5 (*strongly agree*), participants indicated their level of agreement with each of 6 items created for this study, such as "Music videos present relationships between men and women that are similar to those in real life." A mean score was computed such that higher scores reflect stronger perceptions of video realism (α=.82). Because the TV Realism and Music Video Realism scores were highly correlated, r (387) =.47, p<.000, and produced similar results in the analyses, they were combined via z-scores to create one Perceived TV Realism variable. These scales have all been used successfully with a sample of Black students (Ward, Day, & Thomas, 2010).

Gender Ideology. Three measures assessed participants' endorsement of traditional

gender ideologies. The first measure, the Attitudes Toward Women Scale for Adolescents

(ATWSA; Galambos, Petersen, Richards, & Gitelson, 1985), assessed participants' general

attitudes about the roles and appropriate behaviors of women and men. Respondents rated their

level of agreement with each of twelve statements (e.g., "Boys are better leaders than girls")

using a 4-point scale anchored by "strongly disagree" and "strongly agree." A mean score was

produced across the 12 items such that higher scores reflect more traditional attitudes. The alpha

of .81 obtained for our sample is comparable to the alpha level of .78 reported by the authors.

The ATWSA has been used successfully with Black adolescent samples (Ward et al., 2005).

As a second measure of gender ideology, participants completed the Women are Sexual

Objects subscale from the revised version of the Attitudes toward Dating and Sexual

Relationships Measure (Ward, 2002). Participants used a 4-point scale anchored by "strongly

disagree" at 1 and "strongly agree" at 4 to indicate their level of agreement with each of 6 items

(α=.65; e.g., "Women should be more concerned about their appearance than men"). To obscure

our intentions, these items were integrated into a larger set of 25 items assessing participants'

attitudes toward sexuality, sexual attraction, and sexual roles. The Women are Sexual Objects

subscale has been used successfully among Black youth (Gordon, 2008).

As a third measure of gender ideology, participants completed scales reflecting specific

stereotypes of African American women. To assess notions of Black women as hypersexual or as

sassy and angry, we used the Jezebel and Sapphire subscales of the Stereotypic Roles for Black

Women Scale (A. Thomas, Witherspoon, & Speight, 2004). For these subscales, participants

used a 5-point scale to indicate their level of agreement with each statement. The initial measure

contained an 8-item Jezebel subscale and a 10-item Sapphire subscale. This measure was initially

developed for Black women and included many "I" statements. Because we sought to test both

women and men, we eliminated items that had "I" statements, and replaced some with general

statements. The final variables produced for our analyses included a 7-item Jezebel scale (α=.92;

e.g., "Black women are all about sex") and a 5-item Sapphire scale (α=.79; e.g., "Black women

are usually angry with others"). Finally, we used the Strong Black Woman Scale (K. Thomas,

2006) to assess beliefs that Black women sacrifice their own needs for family and loved ones,

and can withstand hardships without complaint. The 9-items for this subscale (α=.73; e.g.,

"Regardless of how difficult the situation may be, Black women must remain emotionally

strong") were integrated with the above two subscales and were scored using the same anchors.

Though none of these three scales have been previously normed with Black men, their relatively

high Cronbach alphas in our combined sample demonstrate good internal consistency.

Ethnic Identity. Ethnic identity was measured by the Affirmation and Belonging

Subscale of the Multi-group Ethnic Identity Measure (MEIM; Phinney, 1992). Respondents

indicated their level of agreement with each of 5 items using a 4-point scale anchored by 1

(*strongly disagree*) and 4 (*strongly agree*). A sample item is "I have a strong sense of belonging

to my own ethnic group." A mean score was computed across the items (α= .88), such that

higher scores indicated greater affirmation and sense of belonging to one's ethnic group. The

MEIM has been used in samples of Black students (Schooler, Ward, Merriwether, & Caruthers,

2004; Ward et al., 2010).

Religiosity. Religiosity was assessed via 5 items that addressed overall levels of

religiosity and spirituality, importance of religion in one's life, and frequency of prayer and

church attendance. Each item was measured on a 5-point scale, and a mean score was computed

such that higher scores indicated greater religiosity (α=.89).

Procedure

Data were collected for 8 semesters over a 6-year period from 2005-2010 as part of a

larger, ongoing study on the nature of gender and sexual socialization among college students. Two recruitment strategies were used. For the first 4 years of data collection (N=123; 30.4% of the sample), participants were recruited from the university's Introductory Psychology Subject Pool. All students enrolled in these classes could sign up for this study, which was identified by a number, only. Participants completed the study in small groups via a pen-and-paper survey. Administration of the full survey took approximately 45-60 minutes.

Because Black students comprise only 8% of the student population and 8% of students enrolled in psychology classes, we added a second recruitment strategy in years 5 and 6 to recruit greater numbers of Black participants. With permission of the Institutional Review Board, we recruited participants online through the University's Office of the Registrar. Registered students who had identified as Black or African American received an email from the Registrar describing the study and inviting them to participate. Students who were interested in participating were asked to notify the principal investigator in an email. Upon contacting the principal investigator, students were emailed a link to the online, self-administered survey. Participants received a $10.00 or $15.00 iTunes gift card for their participation. The online survey was closed after the first 250 participants.

Because of the long-term nature of the larger survey from which these data were drawn, the variables and approaches changed somewhat over time. First, the format of the survey (paper versus online) changed over time. Second, the level of missing data for several variables increased for the online survey. Third, the Jezebel and Sapphire subscales were ***only*** included in the final waves of data collection as this is a new measure; therefore the N's for these dependent variables are smaller. Finally, the Sex Object subscale, the movie exposure items, and the ethnic identity items were each excluded from one wave of data collection to reduce the survey's length. We therefore examine and control for the contributions of the Wave of data collection in

relevant analyses to address these concerns.

Results

Preliminary Analyses

Descriptive statistics for the media use, gender ideology, and demographic variables are provided in Table 1. Participants reported watching TV for approximately 18 hours a week, watching music videos for nearly 5 hours a week, and watching nearly 12 movies a month across cable, DVD, and theater formats. Yearly magazine reading averages were quite low, with 53% reading any of the women's magazines (M=.98 issues/year), and 50% reading any of the Black magazines (M=.93 issues/year). Participants' support of the SBW notion (M=2.96) was stronger than their acceptance of Black women as Sapphires (M=2.18; $t(123)$=11.173, p<.000), and as Jezebels (M=1.57, $t(123)$=19.856, p<.000), and their endorsement of the Sapphire and Jezebel stereotypes were significantly different from each other, $t(123)$=11.888, p<.000).

To investigate which demographic variables predict students' beliefs, we conducted a series of zero-order correlations between the five outcome variables and the following ten demographic factors: age, gender (being male), being raised in a single-parent family, mother's education level, father's education level, ethnic identity, being of biracial heritage, religiosity, identifying as gay/ bisexual, and wave of data collection. We focused on Wave instead of testing format (online versus paper) because the two were highly correlated (r=.87), and because some measures were included mainly in the online version. Results are presented in Table 2. The most consistent demographic correlates were gender, ethnic identity, and biracial heritage. Here, being male was associated with stronger endorsement of several stereotypes, and having a strong ethnic identity was associated with weaker endorsement of several stereotypes (except SBW). Biracial students offered less support of traditional gender roles, of notions framing women as sexual objects, and of notions of Black women as superwomen. Significant demographic correlates

named in Table 2 (gender, father's education, religiosity, ethnic identity, biracial identity, and

wave) served as controls in subsequent analyses.

Testing the Main Hypotheses and Research Questions

To test the first hypothesis, which focused on whether media use was associated with

traditional gender ideologies, we ran a series of partial correlations between the two gender

ideology variables and the seven media variables, controlling for the significant demographic

correlates noted in Table 2. Analyses were run for all students, Black women, and Black men;

results are provided in Table 3. For the full sample, significant correlations emerged for 6 of the

7 media variables, all in the positive direction, indicating that media use is indeed associated

with traditional gender beliefs among Black youth. Most notably, frequently consuming music

videos and Black magazines, and attributing more realism to media content was each correlated

with stronger support of traditional gender beliefs *and* of notions that women are sexual objects.

When analyses were run separately for Black women and men, it became clear that these results

were driven by findings among women, whose outcomes match the pattern noted above. Among

Black men, the only significant findings were that more frequent consumption of music videos

and men's magazines, and attributing more realism to TV content was each correlated with

holding more traditional gender beliefs.

The second hypothesis predicted that higher levels of media exposure and perceived

realism would be associated with a greater acceptance of stereotypic notions about Black

women. We ran a series of partial correlations between the three stereotypes (Jezebel, Sapphire,

SBW) and the 7 media variables, controlling for the significant demographic correlates indicated

in Table 2. Results are presented in Table 4. Several significant connections emerged, all in the

positive direction, indicating that greater media use is associated with greater support of

stereotypes about Black women. Most notably, among the full sample, more frequent

consumption of music videos, movies, Black magazines, and women's magazines, and

attributing greater realism to media content was each associated with accepting notions of Black

women as hypersexual Jezebels, sassy Sapphires (except for the women's magazines), and

Strong Black Women. These patterns were then examined separately for women and men,

revealing that most of the significant results seemed to be driven by the men. Among Black

women, greater exposure to Black-oriented magazines and attributing more realism to media

content was each associated with greater support of the Jezebel stereotype. Also, greater support

for the notion of the Strong Black Woman was linked with more frequent music video and movie

viewing, and with attributing more realism to media content. However, exposure to mainstream

media was *not* connected to their acceptance of the Sapphire stereotype. Among the men, heavy

media use was a more consistent correlate of their acceptance of Black women as Jezebels and

Sapphires, with significant findings emerging for 6 of the 7 media variables. However, Black

men's media use was *not* connected to their endorsement of the Strong Black Woman stereotype.

Exploring the nuances of media contributions –Which media? The first research

question centered on *which* media use variables contribute most to Black students' gender

ideologies. To test this question, we conducted a series of hierarchical multiple linear regression

analyses among the full sample, with the five gender ideology variables serving as dependent

variables, the significant demographic correlates (gender, father's education, religiosity, ethnic

identity, biracial identity, and wave) entered as controls on the first step, and the *significant*

media correlates from Tables 3 and 4 entered on the second step. Results are provided in Table 5.

For the first equation, the four media variables explained an additional 5.7% of the

variance in Black students' traditional gender attitudes. Emerging as individual significant

predictors were students' consumptions of music videos and men's magazines, and their

perceptions of TV realism. For the second equation, the five media variables explained an

additional 5.5% of the variance in students' acceptance of women as sexual objects. However, no

individual media variable emerged as a significant predictor. For the third equation, the five

media variables explained an additional 16.4% of the variance in students' support of the Jezebel

stereotype. Emerging as significant individual predictors were students' consumption of Black

magazines and their perceptions of TV realism. For the fourth equation, the four media variables

explained an additional 3.3% of the variance in students' endorsement of the Sapphire

stereotype. This was not a significant contribution, and no individual media variable emerged as

a significant predictor. For the final equation, the five media variables explained an additional

4.8% of the variance in students' SBW notions. Here, movie viewing was the only significant

individual predictor. These findings indicate that together, the media variables do explain a

unique and significant portion of Black students' gender beliefs, with several media variables

making significant contributions, including perceived realism and Black magazines.

Exploring the nuances of media contributions – Which students? The third

hypothesis predicted that ethnic identity would serve as a moderator, such that fewer media

correlates would emerge among Black participants with a stronger ethnic identity. Due to the

large number of media variables that could potentially interact with ethnic identity in a

regression equation, we instead chose to do a median split, modeling the approach used in related

media analyses (e.g., Ward, 2004). Thus, we first conducted a median split of the sample,

dividing participants into two groups: low-moderate affirmation/sense of belonging to their

ethnic group (N=173; ethnic identity scores from 1.00-3.5), and high affirmation/sense of

belonging to their ethnic group (N=213; ethnic identity scores from 3.6-4.0). Next, we conducted

a series of partial correlations for each group between the 7 media predictor variables and the

five gender ideology outcome variables, controlling for relevant demographic correlates. Results

are provided in Table 6. Again, all significant correlations were positive, indicating that higher

levels of media use are indeed associated with greater support of femininity stereotypes. However, relations for students with a greater sense of belonging to their ethnic group were sporadic (only 7 of 35), whereas relations for students with a weak to moderate sense of ethnic belonging were more consistent (21 of 35). Among the more consistent correlates for the latter group were students' consumptions of TV, music videos, men's magazines, and Black magazines, which each predicted greater support for most of the stereotypes. Among students with a greater sense of belonging to their ethnic group, only high levels of perceived media realism were consistent contributors to beliefs about women and about Black women.

To investigate the possibility that Black students with low sense of belonging to their ethnic group might simply consume more media, we conducted a series of post-hoc analyses, testing media consumption levels between the two groups via one-way ANOVAs. Significant differences emerged for two of the seven media variables. Students with a lower sense of ethnic belonging consumed more men's magazines (M=.36) than students with more feelings of belonging (M=.13, $F(1, 358) = 4.368$, $p<.05$), and consumed more women's magazines (M=1.21) than students with more feelings of belonging (M=.84, $F(1, 365) = 4.095$, $p<.05$).

Discussion

Contemporary media are riddled with images that reflect traditional gender ideologies and present stereotypical notions of Black women. Due to extensive consumption of this media content, young Black women and men are especially susceptible to adopting attitudes and beliefs in line with these harmful representations. Although psychological theories outline clear expectations about the connections between media use and viewers' stereotypes in general, expectations are less clear concerning negative self-stereotypes. Accordingly, our goal was to investigate contributions of diverse forms of media use to Black students' beliefs about women and about Black women. Nearly all of our expectations were met. Results indicate that media use

is a significant correlate of Black students' endorsement of traditional gender ideologies and stereotypes about Black women, with gender and ethnic identity playing important roles. Music video consumption, Black magazine consumption, and perceived realism were the most consistent media correlates of these beliefs.

Consistent with our first hypothesis, media use was associated with students' endorsement of traditional gender ideologies. Emerging as particularly strong correlates, here, were their consumption of music videos and the level of realism attributed to TV content. As noted earlier, contemporary music videos frequently feature passive and objectifying images of women (Ward et al., 2012) and are known for their rigid gender stereotypes. Our findings are consistent with cultivation theory, which posits that repeated exposure to this media content contributes to viewers' holding comparable beliefs about women (Gerbner et al., 2002). Our findings also indicate that viewer cognitions, such as perceptions of realism, are equally influential mechanisms, consistent with social cognitive theory (Bandura, 2002). These patterns support the work of Ward (2002) in finding that both viewer cognitions and exposure levels are important factors to consider when examining media correlates of gender beliefs.

In support of our second hypothesis, we found that media use is also associated with Black students' stereotypes about Black women. Significant correlations emerged for several individual media variables. In regression analyses, testing the media variables together, Black magazine consumption and perceived realism were both associated with endorsement of the Jezebel stereotype, and monthly movie viewing was associated with endorsement of the SBW ideal. None of the media use variables emerged as an individual predictor of endorsement of the Sapphire stereotype. The finding regarding Black magazine consumption and the Jezebel stereotype is consistent with content analyses finding highly sexualized images of Black women in some Black-oriented magazines, particularly Black men's magazines (Baker, 2005). These

results again highlight the impact of perceived realism on endorsement of media messages.

When the correlations between media use and stereotypes of Black women were examined by gender, it became clear that male students were driving many of the significant relations. The meager results among Black women appear to confirm arguments that sub-groups may actively work to resist endorsing negative stereotypes of their group (e.g., Davis & Gandy, 1999), thus contradicting behavioral assimilation approaches that argue for self-stereotyping. The results about Black men's beliefs may have profound implications for relationships between Black men and women. Past explanations for relationship difficulties and skepticism toward marriage among Black women and men have highlighted economic hardship (Edin, 2000), a poor marriage market (Oppenheimer, 1988), and racial discrimination and race-related adversity (Simons, Simons, Lei, & Landor, 2012). Our results suggest that Black men's media use, which contributes to an endorsement of negative beliefs about women, may also be a contributing factor to the antagonism present in some Black, heterosexual relationships. Future research should also examine media use and the endorsement of stereotypes about Black *men* among Black women and men. Indeed, acceptance of dominant stereotypes about Black men as dangerous, hypersexual, and lazy could play a role in the development of problematic relationship schemas. It is important, however, to keep in mind that stereotypes about African Americans are perpetuated and reinforced by patriarchal and racist structural forces that promote the subjugation of Black women and men; mainstream media are part of this structure. Without attention to the pervasive mechanisms through which these structures systematically disadvantage African Americans, it is easy to engage in racial victim-blaming (Ryan, 1976).

We also tested whether ethnic identity would moderate the associations among media use and gender beliefs; this expectation was partially confirmed. First, as indicated in Table 2, students with a greater sense of belonging to their ethnic group reported weaker endorsement of

notions of women as sexual objects, and of the Jezebel and Sapphire stereotypes. Second, among students with a greater sense of belonging to their ethnic group, the only media variable emerging as a consistent correlate of their gender beliefs was perceived realism. For these students, an association between media use and endorsement of the SBW cultural image persisted, however. Monthly movie consumption, consumption of Black magazines, and perceived realism each correlated with SBW endorsement.

Because adherence to the SBW ideal is often considered a positive coping strategy among Black women (Woods-Giscombé, 2010), students who feel a strong sense of belonging to their ethnic group may laud the SBW image as a historically indispensable tool for survival among Black women in response to perpetual oppression and adversity. Indeed, when faced with negative stereotypes about one's group, people are more likely to disavow characteristics that confirm negative stereotypes and align themselves with characteristics that are considered positive (Pronin, Steele, & Ross, 2004). However, whereas endorsement of the SBW image may provide some benefits, it has also been connected to negative physical and mental health outcomes for Black women (e.g., Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2007). Certainly, no stereotype is truly "positive" because all stereotypes, by definition, present generalized beliefs about diverse and heterogeneous groups of people. Concerning the SBW image, specifically, an inability to show weakness or focus on one's *own* needs also contributes to notions of Black women's diminished humanity, similar to the Jezebel and Sapphire stereotypes.

Although many of our expectations were supported, there were a few surprising findings that warrant further examination. First, we expected men's magazines to be more predictive of our outcomes. However, Black women constituted most of our sample, and it is likely that they do not readily read men's magazines. Second, we were surprised that no individual media variables emerged as significant regression predictors of the notion that women are sexual

objects. It is possible that because this element is a prominent feature of multiple media, this shared variance caused no one medium to stand out. Finally, it was surprising that men's exposure to women's magazines was strongly associated with their endorsement of the Jezebel and Sapphire stereotypes. It is possible that men in our sample actively participate in the "othering" of Black women and look to women's magazines to learn more about a group that they consider alien to them. Further research will need to explore why and how Black men perceive content in women's magazines.

Limitations and Future Directions

Several limitations of the current study should be noted. First, as with all correlational and cross-sectional studies, we were unable to establish a causal relationship between our variables. It is possible, for example, that people who endorse traditional gender stereotypes are drawn to certain types of media, especially media that portray images that reflect and support their existing beliefs. Future research should examine these relations via experiments to help determine causality, and longitudinally, in order to study effects over time.

Second, our findings are drawn from a limited age range. More research is needed to examine these associations in younger populations, such as middle and high school students, to determine *when* the socialization and endorsement of these attitudes and stereotypes begin. It is possible that younger populations may be *more* vulnerable to accepting media stereotypes because of their ongoing gender and ethnic identity development (Harter, 1990); on the other hand, the associations could be *weaker* among teens because their attitudes are still forming (Crouter, Whiteman, McHale, & Osgood, 2007). However, paired with existing experimental data (e.g., Ward et al., 2005), the current findings provide a powerful rationale for the existence of associations between media use and traditional gender ideologies among Black youth.

Third, with only 105 Black men in the full sample, and smaller numbers for most

variables, it was difficult to conduct separate analyses for this group. Relatedly, although we found numerous significant correlations between media use and gender beliefs, most were of a small effect size ($\leq$.20). It is possible that with a larger sample, we may have found stronger associations. It is also important to consider these small effect sizes in context: young people learn gender ideologies not only from the media, but also from parents, peers, and other social forces (e.g., Witt, 2000). It is not surprising, then, that media use, as only one agent, contributes only a portion of the variance. Moreover, the effect sizes reported here are actually *larger* than those reported in meta-analyses testing media use and gender beliefs (Signorielli, 2001).

A fourth limitation is that the Women are Sexual Objects scale had a relatively low alpha (.65). Unfortunately, no other standard scale exists to measure this construct. Future research examining this construct would benefit from the creation of a scale with improved psychometric properties. Finally, although the current study was novel in examining a wide range of media, we did not account for the consumption of newer forms of online media, such as social media, blogs, or YouTube videos, which dominate the media diet of traditional college students (Jones, Johnson-Yale, Millermaier, & Pérez, 2009). Moreover, our study examined non-genre specific, monthly movie viewing. It is possible that certain genres, such as romantic comedies or Black-oriented movies, may be more predictive than others of viewers' traditional gender ideologies.

Conclusion. This study expands our knowledge both of the media's role in shaping Black students' notions of hegemonic and culturally-specific femininity and of ethnic identity's role as a protective factor. Given that Black youth are such heavy media consumers, it is critical that research continues to examine how the media contribute to their learning of these ideologies. Media literacy programs aimed at enabling Black students to critically examine traditional gender ideologies and stereotypes of Black women in the media should also include components that interrogate students' perceived realism of media images and bolster their ethnic identity.

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Table 1

Descriptives of Media Use, Gender Ideology, and Demographic Variables

Media Use	N	M	SD	Range
TV Hrs/Week	399	18.36	14.05	0.00-58.00
Music Video Hrs/Week	397	4.67	6.90	0.00-30.00
Movies/Month	274	11.62	10.54	0.00-62.00
Men's Magazines	378	.22	1.04	0.00-10.75
Women's Magazines	385	.98	1.75	0.00-12.00
Black Magazines	385	.93	1.61	0.00-10.83
Perceived TV Realism	391	2.78	1.05	1.00-6.50
Music Video Realism	397	2.11	.73	1.00-4.67
Gender Ideologies				
Trad. Gend. Att. (ATWSA)	398	1.71	.43	1.00-3.33
Women as Sex Object	183	2.31	.53	1.00-4.00
Jezebel	124	1.57	.66	1.00-4.86
Sapphire	124	2.18	.75	1.00-4.60
Strong Black Woman	400	2.96	.63	1.00-4.67
Demographics				
Age (in months)	403	240.05	18.54	215-330
Mother's Education	402	15.78	2.45	11-22
Father's Education	395	15.31	2.78	11-22
Ethnic Identity	386	3.43	.60	1.00-4.00
Religiosity	396	3.36	1.06	1.00-5.00

Table 2

Significant Demographic Correlates of Gender Ideologies

	Trad. Gend. Attitudes	Women Sex Obj.	Jezebel	Sapphire	SBW
Age	.06	.04	.12	-.04	-.03
Gender (M)	**.34***	-.03	**.46***	**.29***	-.05
Single-Parent Family	.08	.13	.11	.06	.02
Mother's Education	-.09	-.03	-.13	-.00	-.09
Father's Education	**-.10***	.00	-.13	-.00	-.09
Religiosity	**.20***	-.10	-.01	-.09	**.22***
Ethnic Identity	-.04	**-.18***	**-.36***	**-.39***	**.15****
Biracial	**-.15****	**-.18***	.01	.11	**-.14****
Wave	**.14****	.08	-----	-----	.09
Gay/Bisexual	-.04	-.06	.04	-.02	.05

Note. *p≤.05; **p≤.01; ***p≤.001. Sample sizes vary across cells, as indicated in Table 1. 0/1 membership dummy codes were used for single parent family, biracial, and gay/bisexual.

Table 3

Significant Partial Correlations between Media Use and Traditional Gender Ideologies

	BLACK STUDENTS		BLACK WOMEN		BLACK MEN	
	Trad. Gend. Atts.	Women Sex Obj.	Trad. Gend. Atts.	Women Sex Obj.	Trad. Gend. Atts.	Women Sex Obj.
TV Hours	.04	.10	.03	.07	.07	.19
Music Videos	**. 21*****	**.23****	**.20*****	**.22***	**.22***	**.30***
Movies	.08	**.20****	.04	**.21***	.13	.18
Women's Magazines	.03	**.19****	-.04	**.18***	.20	.27
Men's Magazines	**.17*****	.13	**.12***	.09	**.29****	.26
Black Magazines	**.11***	**.22****	.09	**.24****	.15	.26
Combined TV Realism	**.16****	**.22****	**.15***	**.23***	**.21***	.28

Note. *p≤.05; **p≤.01; ***p≤.001. Sample sizes vary across cells, as indicated in Table 1.

Analyses controlled for significant demographic correlates for each dependent variable, as

indicated in Table 2.

Table 4

Significant Partial Correlations between Media Use and Stereotypes about Black Women

	BLACK STUDENTS			BLACK WOMEN			BLACK MEN		
	Jezebel	Sapph.	SBW	Jezebel	Sapph.	SBW	Jezebel	Sapph.	SBW
TV Hours	**.20***	.09	.09	.07	.04	.08	.27	.16	.09
MusicVideos	**.44***	**.30**	**.14**	.12	.14	**.14***	**.60***	**.48**	.09
Movies	**.32***	**.27**	**.18**	.13	.16	**.24***	**.50**	**.50**	.08
WomMags	**.29**	.15	**.14**	-.01	-.01	.12	**.49**	**.38***	.15
Men's Mags.	**.30***	.18	.05	.19	.12	.03	**.43***	.33	.06
Black Mags.	**.46***	**.29**	**.11***	**.28**	.20	.10	**.47**	**.36+**	.09
TV Realism	**.41***	**.26**	**.13**	**.34**	.16	**.16**	**.48**	**.47**	.06

Note. +≤.075 (used for Black men only); *p≤.05; **p≤.01; ***p≤.001. Sample sizes vary

across cells, as indicated in Table 1. Analyses controlled for significant demographic factors

listed in Table 2.

Table 5

Regression Analyses Testing Which Media Variables Best Predict Gender Ideologies

	Trad. Gend. Atts.	Women Sex Obj.	Jezebel	Sapphire	SBW
Step 1. Demographics					
Gender (male)	.32***	------	.29***	.18*	------
Father's education	.00	------	------	------	------
Religiosity	.21***	------	------	------	.16*
Ethnic identity	------	-.19*	-.21**	-.33***	.11
Biracial	-.13**	-.25**	------	------	-.04
Wave	.04	------	------	------	------
Step One Adj. R2	.194	.066	.239	.190	.048
Step 2. Media Use					
TV Hrs/Week	------	------	-.03	------	------
Music Video Hrs	**.15****	.07	.15	.08	.08
Movies/Month	------	.11	.07	.12	**.15***
Men's Magazines	**.12***	------	------	------	------
Women's Magazines	------	.11	------	------	.05
Black Magazines	.01	.07	**.24****	.09	.07
Combined TV Realism	**.13****	.10	**.21****	.09	.08
Step Two Adjusted R2	.251	.121	.403	.223	.096
Change in Adj. R2	+.057***	+.055*	+.164***	+.033^{ns}	+.048**
Final Equation F	14.091***	4.168***	11.810***	6.345***	4.047***

Note. Betas from final equations reported. *$p\leq.05$; **$p\leq.01$; ***$p\leq.001$. Only the *significant* demographic correlates and the *significant* media correlates were entered into each specific equation. Bolded betas indicate that the variable made a significant, individual contribution.

Table 6

Significant Partial Correlations between Media Use and Gender Ideologies of Black Students reporting Low and High Levels of Ethnic Belonging

LOW/MODERATE AFFIRMATION/SENSE OF ETHNIC BELONGING (N=173)					
Media Exposure	Tradit Gend	F/Sex Object	Jezebel	Sapphire	SBW
TV Hrs/Week	.22**	.24*	.27*	.05	.15
Music Video Hrs	.35***	.29**	.47***	.33**	.18*
Movies/Month	.13	.08	.35**	.20	.14
Men's Magazines	.32***	.29*	.50***	.34*	.06
Women's Magazines	.04	.26*	.43*	.24	.13
Black Magazines	.23**	.34**	.54***	.33**	.03
Combined TV Realism	.15	.21	.46***	.35**	.11
HIGH AFFIRMATION/SENSE OF ETHNIC BELONGING (N=213)					
TV Hrs/Week	-.09	-.10	.06	.10	.07
Music Video Hrs	.06	.14	-.05	-.02	.09
Movies/Month	-.01	.22*	-.01	.18	.22**
Men's Magazines	-.03	-.05	-.11	.01	-.01
Women's Magazines	.00	.18	.00	.02	.15*
Black Magazines	.04	.09	.18	.10	.20**
Combined TV Realism	.16*	.23*	.34*	.14	.12

Note. *p≤.05; **p≤.01; ***p≤.001. Analyses control for significant demographic correlates of each dependent variable, as indicated in Table 2.