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Sexy, Thin, and White: The Intersection of Sexualization, Body Type, and Race on Stereotypes about Women and Women's Body Dissatisfaction

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SEXY, THIN, AND WHITE: THE INTERSECTION OF SEXUALIZATION, BODY
TYPE, AND RACE ON STEREOTYPES ABOUT WOMEN AND WOMEN'S BODY
DISSATISFACTION

DISSERTATION

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy in the College of Arts and Sciences at the University of Kentucky

By
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2017
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ABSTRACT OF DISSERTATION

SEXY, THIN, AND WHITE: THE INTERSECTION OF SEXUALIZATION, BODY TYPE, AND RACE ON STEREOTYPES ABOUT WOMEN AND WOMEN'S BODY DISSATISFACTION

The vast majority of media images present one idealized type of woman: she is thin, sexualized, and White. While research has shown that there are stereotypes associated with sexualized women, research has not addressed whether these stereotypes vary based on other characteristics such as body type and race. The current study aimed to examine the stereotypes associated with women who varied in body size, sexualization, and race. Additionally, the current study examined whether exposure to differing portrayals of women was related to endorsement of gender stereotypes and body dissatisfaction. College-aged students ($n = 226$, 161 women) rated four traits of women who varied in sexualization (sexualized clothing vs. non-sexualized clothing), body size (thin vs. plus-sized), and race (Black vs. White). Participants also completed measures of gender stereotype endorsement and body dissatisfaction. Results indicated that the descriptive stereotype about sexualized women is predominantly applied to thin women. However, body size appears to be the most salient characteristic through which women

are stereotyped. Additionally, exposure to depictions of sexualized women was related to greater body dissatisfaction, particularly for women, and greater gender stereotype endorsement. The implications of these findings are discussed.

KEYWORDS: Sexualization, Body Size, Intersectionality, Gender Stereotypes, Body Dissatisfaction

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March 6, 2017
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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

Background & Significance

A vast majority of media images present one idealized type of woman: she is thin, sexualized, and White (APA, 2007). This prototypical woman is portrayed in nearly all forms of media, from television shows to music videos and magazines (Conrad, Dixon, & Zhang, 2009; Daniels, 2009; Downs & Smith, 2010; Ward, 2002). Importantly, this woman is associated with positive characteristics, such as being popular, and is seen as the ultimate model for female attractiveness (APA, 2007; Stone, Brown, & Jewell, 2015). Because this stereotypical portrayal of women is so ubiquitous, women experience a tremendous amount of pressure to be thin (i.e., the thin ideal), are more highly valued when they emphasize sexual body parts (i.e., the sexualized ideal), and are more often perceived as beautiful when they are White (relative to other ethnic groups).

Considerable research has examined how men and women experience specific components of these idealized images of women. Although studies have examined both how individuals perceive these images and how exposure to these images influence individuals, the extant research has mostly focused on one attribute of the women at a time (i.e., either thinness, sexualization, or ethnicity). For example, numerous studies have examined how individuals rate the traits of sexualized women (e.g., Stone et al., 2015). Previous research, however, has consistently conflated the thin and sexualized ideal. In other words, in nearly all of the studies examining sexualized women (e.g., APA, 2007), the women are not only sexualized, but also thin. This is problematic, as a person can be sexualized (i.e., dress in a manner that emphasizes sexual body parts), but

not be thin, and a person can be thin, but not sexualized. Furthermore, research on stereotypes of sexualized women has focused exclusively on White women, even though Black women are often hypersexualized in media compared to White women (Emerson, 2002; Ward, Rivadeneyra, Thomas, Day, & Epstein, 2013). The purpose of the current study is twofold: first, to examine whether stereotypes differ for sexualized women who differ in body type and ethnicity; and second, to examine whether exposure to these stereotypical images of women prompts endorsement of broader stereotypes about women and body dissatisfaction.

Before understanding the importance of sexualized images, it is necessary to define what is meant by the term *sexualization*. According to the American Psychological Association (2007), sexualization has four main components: (1) a person's value comes only from sexual appeal, (2) physical attractiveness is equated with sexiness, (3) a person is made into a sexual object, and (4) sexuality is inappropriately imposed upon a person. Sexualization is different, although related, to appearance orientation. Sexualization refers specifically to the behaviors and dress that emphasizes sexual body parts (such as the buttocks, chest, and breasts). In contrast, appearance orientation reflects a general concern with being well groomed and "natural" (Smolak, Murnen, & Myers, 2014). Thus a person may be appearance oriented but not necessarily sexualized. Further, it is important to note that the definition of sexualization does not specify any particular body type, thus any person can be sexualized. The current literature, however, does not reflect the fact that, in reality, many different body types can be, and are, sexualized in American culture.

Stereotypes of Sexualized Women

Previous research has shown that children and adults hold stereotypes about sexualized women and girls (Daniels & Zurbriggen, 2016; Stone et al., 2015; Ward, 2002). These are defined as *descriptive* stereotypes because they reflect what individuals believe to be the traits that describe sexualized women and girls. In general, the descriptive stereotypes about sexualized women and girls are that they are more popular and attractive (and being attractive necessitates being highly sexualized) than non-sexualized women and girls (Stone et al., 2015). However, despite their greater popularity (which conveys high social status), sexualized women and girls are described as less athletic, less smart, and less nice than non-sexualized women and girls. The endorsement of the descriptive sexualized stereotypes has been shown in samples of children, adolescents, and adults (Daniels & Zurbriggen, 2016; Starr & Ferguson, 2012; Stone et al., 2015). The descriptive stereotype is likely informed by media messages that depict sexualized women in narrowly defined roles (Ward, 2002). Accordingly, research has shown that, at least among children, endorsement of the descriptive stereotype is predicted by the amount of sexualized content in children's media viewing (Stone et al., 2015).

Descriptive stereotypes about sexualized women can be examined through the lens of Fiske and colleagues' (2002) Stereotype Content Model (SCM). SCM states that all perceived trait differences between stereotyped groups can be boiled down to two dimensions – warmth and competence. *Warmth* stereotypes include perceptions of morality, trustworthiness, kindness, and friendliness, whereas *competence* stereotypes include perceptions of efficacy, skill, confidence, and intelligence. Thus, for instance, traditional gender stereotypes about women denote that they are perceived as high in

warmth (i.e., kind and nurturing), but low in competence or intelligence (Fiske et al., 2002). It appears that thin, sexualized, White women are viewed as low in both general warmth and competence. For example, they are perceived as less nice *and* less smart than non-sexualized women. It is important to note, however, that sexualized women are also seen as having high social status via popularity (Stone et al., 2015). This points to the uniqueness of the stereotype about sexualized women. They can be perceived as low in both warmth and competence, but still have high social status (which is counter to all other stereotyped groups, Fiske et al., 2002).

Intersectionality of Sexualized Stereotypes

A limitation of current research on descriptive stereotypes about sexualized women is that it has exclusively used thin, White, sexualized models. However, this ignores the range of women that may be sexualized. To fully understand the stereotypes about sexualized women, it is important to look at how various characteristics intersect in shaping stereotypes. Looking at how multiple groups intersect in shaping stereotypes requires an intersectionality framework.

Intersectionality refers to the multiple simultaneous group identities that a person can have (Crenshaw, 1991). For example, every person has both an ethnic or racial identity and a gender identity, and these identities interactively affect others' perceptions and behaviors towards them. Intersectionality theory was first developed specifically to examine Black women's lived experiences, but has been adopted as a framework of understanding the impact of multiple identities on various social outcomes (Crenshaw, 1991; Ghavami & Peplau, 2012; Hancock, 2007). Importantly, intersectional research has

shown that there are differential effects of having multiple identities, which are not the equivalent of simply adding together the effects of each identity (Hancock, 2007).

Although there is no singular research design used to measure intersectionality, intersectional research does have several core components (Cole, 2009; Hancock, 2007). First, intersectionality theory posits that every individual has multiple identities, thus all research that aims at understanding a phenomenon must take into account all various identities an individual can have. Second, having multiple identities (i.e., being Black and a woman) incurs effects of both being Black and being a woman, but also has unique effects of being *both* Black and a woman that is distinctly different from each individual category alone (Hancock, 2007; Ghavami & Peplau, 2012). Further, the effects of multiple identities may vary in differing social situations (for instance, a person's gender may be important in one social context but less important in others; Hancock, 2007). Lastly, an individual's identity is impacted by the societal culture within which an individual develops (Hancock, 2007). The current study uses an intersectional framework in proposing the differential stereotypes associated with differing subtypes of sexualized women.

Thus, using intersectionality as a framework, it is hypothesized that Black sexualized women will be perceived differently than White sexualized women. This is in part hypothesized because Black women are particularly at risk for being hypersexualized compared to their White counterparts (Ward, Rivadeneyra, Thomas, Day, & Epstein, 2013). Stemming from a long history of racial and sexual oppression, Black women are often portrayed as Jezebels who are overtly sexual, aggressive, promiscuous, and sexualized (Brown, White-Johnson, Griffin-Fennell, 2013; West, 1995). Although the

Jezebel stereotype can be applied to all women seen as sexually permissive, it is most frequently applied to Black women (Donovan & Williams, 2002; Brown, White-Johnson, Griffen-Fennel, 2013). Relatedly, Black female sexual assault victims are perceived as being less trustworthy and more responsible for the assault than White women (Willis, 1992). It seems likely, therefore, that stereotypes that are associated with sexualized White women may differ from the stereotypes associated with sexualized Black women. Specifically, even though sexualized women are perceived as having specific traits relative to non-sexualized women, these stereotypes may be especially pronounced for Black women, as they are frequently perceived as being hypersexualized, relative to White women.

In addition, no known research has examined how sexualized women are perceived when they have different body types. Specifically, research has not examined the content of stereotypes about sexualized women when they are thin versus plus-sized. Research has examined the perceptions of obese versus thin people in general (combining men and women), finding that obese people are viewed as having more negative characteristics than thin people (Vartanian & Silverstein, 2013). Specifically, obese people are perceived as being lazy, sloppy, and having low social status compared to thin people (Grant, Mizzi, & Anglim, 2016; Vartanian & Silverstein, 2013). The negative traits stereotypically associated with obesity are likely due to the fact that thinness is an overwhelmingly preferred trait in Western society (Weeden & Sabini, 2005). Thinness is preferred because it is believed to be a proxy for overall genetic health, thus obesity is seen as a signal of someone's poor genetic health and is therefore seen as negative and unattractive (Weeden & Sabini, 2005).

The thinness ideal is especially prevalent for women relative to men (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997; Polivy, Garner, & Garfinkel, 1986; Silberstein, Striegel-Moore, Timko, & Rodin, 1988). This is because women, more than men, are held to higher standards of attractiveness and women's attractiveness is linked with their value and worth (Polivy, Garner, & Garfinkel, 1986). That thinness ideal, however, may be limited to White women relative to Black women. Black women seem to face differential body image pressures than White women (Evans & McConnell, 2010; Gordon, Castro, Sitnikov, & Holm-Denoma, 2010). As such, Black women are more likely to pick a larger body shape as ideal and are less fearful of gaining weight than White women (Gordon, Castro, Sitnikov, & Holm-Denoma, 2010). Thus, it is likely that the negative trait stereotypes associated with obesity may be solely relevant for White obese women and not relevant for Black obese women. One purpose of the current study is to examine whether descriptive stereotypes about sexualized women are different for women who differ in body type (thin versus plus-sized) and for different ethnicities of women (Black versus White).

Impact of Sexualization on Gender Stereotypes

Not only do people hold stereotypes about sexualized women, but research has also shown that exposure to sexualized images impacts individuals' broader gender stereotypes. According to gender schema theory (Bem, 1981), this is likely due to the fact that gender stereotypes can activate other parts of a broader gender schema. For instance, believing that sexualized women have differing traits than non-sexualized women may relate to and activate broader stereotypes and schemas about women in general.

Specifically, viewing sexualized women may lead individuals to endorse proscriptive sexualized gender stereotypes. The proscriptive sexualized gender stereotype most relevant here includes the belief that women *should* be focused on appearing sexually appealing to boys (i.e., self-objectifying) and flattered by male sexual attention, whereas men *should* be sexually assertive and focused on girls as sexual beings (rather than friends; Ward, 2002). Viewing images of sexualized women and thinking about the descriptive traits of sexualized women may thus bring to mind broader notions of sexualized women and their relation to men. Thus, it is hypothesized that viewing sexualized images of women may make proscriptive sexualized gender stereotypes salient.

Furthermore, some studies suggest that viewing sexualized women increases permissive sexual attitudes and attitudes accepting of violence towards women (Ward, 2002; Ward, Hansbrough, & Walker, 2005). For example, experimental research has causally linked exposure to images of sexualized women with an increased endorsement of rape myths (Fox & Bailenson, 2009; Fox, Ralston, Cooper, & Jones, 2015). Rape myths refer to beliefs that justify rape and rapists, such as the notion that women who dress in a sexualized manner are “asking” to be raped (Burt, 1980). This type of research has been done nearly exclusively with sexualized avatars, wherein participants interact with an avatar that represents themselves that is either sexualized or non-sexualized (Fox & Bailenson, 2009; Fox, Ralston, Cooper, & Jones, 2015). However, it is unclear whether more subtle priming measures of sexualization (e.g., simply seeing pictures of sexualized women) will also prompt the endorsement of rape myths. If so, the impact of

sexualization may have much more serious implications as it would only take brief exposure to prompt endorsement of harmful gender stereotypes.

Impact of Sexualization on Body Dissatisfaction

Viewing sexualized images also seems to influence individuals' attitudes about themselves. Specifically, an abundant amount of research has focused on the impact of viewing sexualized images on body image and dissatisfaction. Body dissatisfaction among women is a persistent ongoing problem in Western society (Groesz, Levine, & Murnen, 2001). This trend for women to have a negative view of their bodies is particularly problematic as body dissatisfaction is a precursor for negative health outcomes, such as eating disorders, depression, and anxiety (Grabe & Hyde, 2006; Weiderman & Pryor, 2000). Research has consistently shown that media portrayals of idealized women plays a significant role in women's negative body image (Grabe & Hyde, 2006; Groesz, Levine, & Murnen, 2001; Tiggemann & Slater, 2003).

First, research has reliably shown that exposure to sexualized images of women prompts body dissatisfaction. Women who incorporate, or internalize, sexualized stereotypes in their sense of self have greater body dissatisfaction and disordered eating (Fredrickson, Roberts, Noll, Quinn, & Twenge, 1998; Impett, Henson, Breines, Schooler, & Tolman, 2011; Gervais, Vescio, & Allen, 2011). However, research has also consistently shown that exposure to thin models prompts greater body dissatisfaction (Tiggemann & Slater, 2003). Findings from meta-analyses also echo these findings, showing small to moderate effect sizes linking exposure to thin ideal media messages predicting and body dissatisfaction (Grabe, Ward, & Hyde, 2008; Groesz, Levine, & Murnen, 2001). While it is clear that media messages impact women's body

dissatisfaction, it is unclear exactly which type of idealized woman prompts dissatisfaction.

Social comparison theory is theorized to be the theoretical mechanism through which exposure to sexualization affects women's perceptions of and dissatisfaction with their own bodies. Social comparison theory (SCT) posits that individuals are driven to compare themselves to others as a means of self-evaluation (Festinger, 1954). These comparisons can serve two main purposes: (1) to boost self-esteem and well being by making downward social comparisons, and (2) to motivate self-improvement by making upward social comparisons to self-relevant and attainable models (Willis, 1981; Lockwood & Kunda, 1997). Within the context of sexualization, for some women, looking sexualized is desirable, as sexualized women have high social status via popularity. These sexualized women are also frequently portrayed as thin, which is a characteristic that is extremely desirable for many women due to thin ideal pressures.

Previous research has consistently shown that social comparison processes mediate the relationship between exposure to the thin ideal and increased body dissatisfaction (Bessenoff, 2006; Fardouly & Vartanian, 2015; Tiggemann & Slater, 2003). This mediation has been shown experimentally, thus there is a causal link between social comparison processes to increased body dissatisfaction (Tiggemann & McGill, 2004; Tiggemann & Slater, 2003). In other words, exposure to thin ideal messages prompts upward social comparisons between the individual and the thin model, which then leads to increased body dissatisfaction. Research has shown that women are more likely to compare themselves to peers than celebrities or family members (Fardouly & Vartanian, 2015). These peer social comparisons are particularly more impactful as they

are more relevant to the individual than family members and are more attainable than celebrities (Fardouly & Vartanian, 2015). Thus social comparisons may be particularly likely when the target comparison is their peer or someone who could be their peer. In the current study, it is hypothesized that women primed with sexualized images of women who match their ethnicity will be more inclined to make social comparisons and, in turn, show greater body dissatisfaction than women primed with images of women who do not match their ethnicity.

Current Study

First, the current study examined the content of descriptive stereotypes about different types of women. These women varied on sexualized clothing (sexualized vs. non-sexualized), ethnicity (White vs. Black), and body type (thin vs. plus-sized). Using a between-subjects design, college students were shown two images of different women and asked to rate each woman on her trait characteristics (as it is between-subjects, participants will see just one of the eight categories of women). Following the images, participants were asked to rate how popular, nice, athletic, and smart each woman is.

It was predicted that sexualized women overall would be rated as being more popular but not athletic, smart, or nice compared to non-sexualized women, thus replicating previous research on the trait stereotypes associated with sexualized women. However, it was predicted that this effect would be nuanced, such that there would be an interaction with race and body type. Specifically, it was hypothesized that Black sexualized women would be rated less positively (i.e., less nice, smart, popular, or athletic) than White sexualized women. It was also hypothesized that plus-sized sexualized women would be viewed the most negatively (i.e., least nice, smart, popular,

or athletic) compared to all other comparison groups, namely because obesity is viewed extremely negatively in society. This effect was hypothesized to be greater for sexualized plus-sized White women than sexualized plus-sized Black women, as cultural thin ideal pressures are predominately targeted towards White women than Black women. Thus, it was predicted that plus-sized sexualized women would be viewed as the least popular, athletic, smart, or nice compared to plus-sized non-sexualized women, and all other comparisons.

Secondly, the current study investigated whether exposure to sexualized images of women would prompt (a) increased endorsement of broader gender stereotypes, specifically endorsement of proscriptive sexualized gender stereotypes and endorsement of rape myths, and (b) increased body dissatisfaction, both general body dissatisfaction and dissatisfaction with specific sexualized body parts. Thus, the first half of the study, during which participants viewed and rated images of women who varied on body type, sexualization, and ethnicity, served as the experimental prime for the second half of the study. After rating images of women, participants were asked a series of measures assessing their endorsement of proscriptive gender stereotypes and rape myths, and measures assessing their general body dissatisfaction and dissatisfaction with specific sexualized body parts. It was hypothesized that participants exposed to sexualized women would more strongly endorse proscriptive sexualized gender stereotypes and rape myths than women exposed to non-sexualized women. Additionally, it was hypothesized that exposure to sexualized women would prompt women's general body dissatisfaction and dissatisfaction with sexual body parts (chest/breasts, stomach, and buttocks) than participants in the non-sexualized condition, and particularly for participants who viewed

thin models rather than plus-sized models. It was hypothesized that men in the sexualized women condition would not experience increased body dissatisfaction, as it is not self-relevant. Lastly, it was hypothesized that these effects would be greater among women who view sexualized targets that match their own ethnicity relative to women who view targets that do not match their ethnicity.

Chapter 2

METHODS

Participants

Initially, 314 students participated in the survey, however, 88 students were dropped because they either did not finish the survey or had taken the survey previously (because the survey took place in the Spring and Winter semester some students participated twice, but only their first attempt was used for the final analyses). The final sample consisted of 226 college students (65 men, 161 women) in introductory psychology courses in the Upper South. All participants were between the ages of 18 and 20 ($M = 18.81$, $SD = .72$). Of the 226 participants, 73% were White, 17% were African-American, 2% were Latino/Hispanic, 2% were Asian, and 3% were multi-racial.

Procedure

Participants were recruited through introductory psychology courses. Students in these courses are required to participate in departmental research and receive points toward their grade for their participation. The study took place online through Survey Gizmo, thus participants completed the surveys wherever and whenever they had an Internet connection. Participants were first presented with a consent form and were prompted if they would like to continue to the study. Only participants who agreed to be in the study viewed the study materials.

A between-subjects 2 (race: Black vs. White) x 2 (sexualized clothing: sexualized vs. non-sexualized) x 2 (body type: thin vs. plus-sized) design was employed.

Participants were randomly sorted into one of eight different conditions. Each participant viewed and rated two different images of women from the same condition (e.g., two

different women who are Black, sexualized, and thin). The images were taken from clothing catalogues but were edited to look as if they were taken from an Instagram account, and participants were explicitly told that the images came from Instagram. Instagram is an online photo and video sharing social networking site. While looking at the image, participants were asked to rate how popular, nice, athletic, and smart they think the woman is. The images were counter-balanced across each participant.

After completing their trait ratings of each woman, participants completed several measures assessing their endorsement of proscriptive sexualized gender stereotypes, rape myth acceptance, general body dissatisfaction, and dissatisfaction with specific body parts. Lastly, participants completed a demographics questionnaire.

Once the online study was completed, participants were read a debriefing page, which included information that the pictures were models and not actually taken from Instagram. Participants then decided if they wanted their responses to be included in the dataset. Only participants who agreed for their data to be used were included in analyses. Once the online survey was completed, participants were given research credit.

Measures

Selection of Stimuli. All of the images were taken from online clothing catalogues. To find images of plus-sized women, Google searches were conducted for stores that specifically sold plus-sized clothing. A total of 20 pictures were initially selected for inclusion in the study. In order to ensure that the stimuli differed from the comparison group on the target characteristic (i.e., that the sexualized images were significantly more sexualized than non-sexualized images) a group of 8 research assistants coded the images for attractiveness and level of sexualization. From these initial ratings, five images were

dropped and four new images were added. The final sample of stimuli, a total of 16 images, was then coded by a group of 25 undergraduate students. These students were not aware of the hypotheses and did not participate in the study. The students rated the images on the level of attractiveness and sexualization on a scale from not at all (1) to very (10). Additionally, the students rated the images on the race of the person on a scale from very white (1) to very black (10), and on the weight of the person on a scale from very thin (1) to very obese (10). The sexualized images were rated as significantly more sexualized than the non-sexualized images (averaged ratings, respectively: $M_s = 7.52$ and 2.82 , $SD_s = 1.70$ and 1.71), $t(398) = 27.53$, $p < .001$, $d = 2.76$. There were no significant differences in ratings of attractiveness between the sexualized and non-sexualized images (averaged ratings, respectively: $M_s = 6.36$ and 6.37 , $SD_s = 1.89$ and 1.66), $t(398) = .06$, $p = .96$, $d = 0$. The images of White women were rated as looking significantly more White than the images of Black women (averaged ratings, respectively: $M_s = 1.68$ and 7.86 , $SD_s = .91$ and 1.50), $t(398) = 49.70$, $p < .001$, $d = 4.98$. There were no significant differences in ratings of attractiveness between White and Black images of women (averaged ratings, respectively: $M_s = 6.34$ and 6.38 , $SD_s = 1.53$ and 2.00), $t(398) = .22$, $p = .82$, $d = .02$. Lastly, the images of thin women were rated as looking significantly thinner than the images of plus-sized women (averaged ratings, respectively: $M_s = 2.39$ and 6.52 , $SD_s = 1.02$ and 1.51), $t(398) = 31.99$, $p < .001$, $d = 3.21$. There were no significant differences in ratings of attractiveness between the thin and plus-sized women (averaged ratings, respectively: $M_s = 6.41$ and 6.31 , $SD_s = 2.03$ and 1.50), $t(398) = .56$, $p = .58$, $d = .06$.

Stereotypic Evaluations of Pictured Women. While viewing the different images of women, participants were asked a series of questions regarding descriptive stereotypes

about the women. Each participant rated two images of women per condition. The items were rated on a Likert scale ranging from not at all (1) to very much (4). The measure consists of four items, including, “How popular do you think she is?” “How nice do you think she is?” “How athletic do you think she is?”, and “How smart do you think she is?”

Proscriptive Sexualized Gender Stereotypes. In order to assess participants’ endorsement of proscriptive sexualized gender stereotypes, Ward’s (2002) Attitudes Toward Dating and Relationship measure was used. The measure consists of 14 items, which were collapsed across subscales. Sample items from the measure include, “Women should be more concerned about their appearance than men”, “Using her body and looks is the best way for a woman to attract a man”, and “There is nothing wrong with men being primarily interested in a woman’s body”. The items were rated on a four-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (4), with higher scores indicating greater endorsement of proscriptive sexualized gender stereotypes. The measure had acceptable psychometric properties ($\alpha = .79$ for men, $\alpha = .82$ for women).

Rape Myth Acceptance. To assess participants’ endorsement of rape myths, McMahon and Farmer’s (2011) modified version of the Illinois Rape Myth Acceptance Scale (Payne, Lonsway, & Fitzgerald, 1999) was used. The modified version consists of 22 total items and has been updated to reflect current rape myths. The items were rated on a five-point Likert scale ranging from strongly (1) to strongly agree (5), with higher scores indicating greater endorsement of rape myths. This measure has been shown to have good psychometric qualities ($\alpha = .92$ for men, $\alpha = .92$ for women).

General Body Dissatisfaction. To assess participants’ general body dissatisfaction, McKinley and Hyde’s (1996) Objectified Body Consciousness measure

was used. The measure consisted of 24 total items split into three subscales: body shame, body surveillance, and body control. Example items include, “During the day I think about how I look many times”, “I often worry about whether the clothes I wear make my body look good”, and “I feel ashamed of myself when I haven’t made the effort to look my best”. The items were rated on a four-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (4), with higher scores indicating greater body dissatisfaction. The body surveillance subscale was shown to have acceptable psychometric properties ($\alpha = .80$ for men, $\alpha = .79$ for women). The body shame subscale was also shown to have acceptable psychometric properties ($\alpha = .77$ for men, $\alpha = .80$ for women). However, the body control subscale was not shown to have acceptable psychometric properties for women ($\alpha = .73$ for men, $\alpha = .69$ for women).

Dissatisfaction with Specific Body Parts. To assess participants’ dissatisfaction with specific body parts, Franzoi and Shields (1984) body esteem scale will be used. The measure consists of 35 items, which are divided into three subscales for women: (1) sexual attractiveness, (2) weight concern, and (3) physical condition; and three subscales for men: (1) physical attractiveness, (2) physical condition, and (3) upper body strength. The measure asks participants to rate their dissatisfaction with specific body parts, such as, “nose”, “sex organs,” and “hips”. The items were rated on a five-point Likert scale ranging from have strong negative feelings (1) to have strong positive feelings (5). The measure will be reversed coded so higher scores will reflect greater dissatisfaction with each body part. This measure was shown to have acceptable psychometric properties ($\alpha = .80$ for women for sexual attractiveness; $\alpha = .89$ for women for weight concern; $\alpha = .88$

for women for physical condition; $\alpha = .76$ for men for physical attractiveness; $\alpha = .90$ for men for physical condition; $\alpha = .87$ for men for upper body strength).

Chapter 3

RESULTS

Research Question 1: Descriptive Stereotypes based on Sexualization, Race, and Size

To test the first hypothesis that sexualized stereotypes would differ based on the target's race and size, a series of 2 (sexualization: sexualized target or non-sexualized target) x 2 (race: Black target or White target) x 2 (body type: thin target or plus-sized target) ANOVAs were conducted separately for both men and women on the following traits: popular, athletic, smart, and nice. The analyses were conducted separately by gender for ease of interpretability. Means are provided in Table 1.

Popular. Among men, there was a significant main effect of sexualization on ratings of popularity, such that sexualized women were seen as more popular by men than non-sexualized women, $F(1, 57) = 4.81, p < .05, \eta^2 = .08$. Women did not differentiate targets' popularity based on sexualization. Additionally, there were no main effects of race, nor were there any interactions between sexualization and race or sexualization and size.

Among both men and women, there was also a significant main effect of body type on ratings of popularity, such that both men and women perceived thin women as more popular than plus-sized women (men: $F[1, 57] = 3.91, p = .05, \eta^2 = .06$; women: $F[1, 153] = 18.09, p < .001, \eta^2 = .11$).

Nice. Among women, there was a significant main effect of sexualization on ratings of niceness, such that sexualized women were seen as less nice by women than non-sexualized women, $F(1, 153) = 4.15, p < .05, \eta^2 = .03$. Among men, there was a

significant interaction between sexualization and body type on ratings of niceness, $F(1, 57) = 4.51, p < .05, \eta^2 = .07$. Tests of simple effects indicated that men only perceived sexualized women to be less nice than non-sexualized women when they were thin, $F(1, 26) = 4.64, p < .05, \eta^2 = .15$. They did not differentiate between the niceness of sexualized and non-sexualized women when they were plus-sized. There were no main effects of race, nor were there any interactions between sexualization and race.

In addition, among women, there was a significant main effect of body type, such that plus-sized women were viewed as nicer than thin women, $F(1, 153) = 33.25, p < .001, \eta^2 = .18$.

Athletic. There were no main effects of or interactions with sexualization on ratings of athleticism. There were also no main effects of race. However, among both men and women, there was a significant main effect of body type on ratings of athleticism, such that both men and women perceived thin women to be more athletic than plus-sized women (men: $F[1, 57] = 21.06, p < .001, \eta^2 = .27$; women: $F[1, 153] = 16.70, p < .001, \eta^2 = .10$).

Smart. There were no main effects of or interactions with sexualization on ratings of intelligence among men. However, among women, there was a significant main effect of body type on ratings of intelligence, such that plus-sized women were viewed as smarter than thin women, $F(1, 153) = 22.30, p < .001, \eta^2 = .13$. There was also a significant interaction between sexualization and body type on ratings of intelligence, $F(1, 153) = 3.78, p = .05, \eta^2 = .02$. Tests of simple effects indicated non-sexualized women were only seen as smarter than sexualized women when they were thin, $F(1, 79) = 5.91, p < .05, \eta^2 = .07$. They did not differentiate between the intelligence of

sexualized and non-sexualized women when they were plus-sized. There were no main effects of race, nor any interactions between sexualization and race.

Research Question 2: Effects of Seeing Subtypes of Sexualized and Non-Sexualized Women

In order to test the remaining hypotheses that being primed with images of sexualized women will lead to greater proscriptive gender stereotype endorsement, rape myth endorsement, general body dissatisfaction, and specific body part dissatisfaction, a series of 2 (condition: sexualized or non-sexualized) x 2 (race: Black or White) x 2 (body type: thin or plus-sized) ANOVAs were conducted separately for men and women for the following measures: proscriptive gender stereotype endorsement, rape myth endorsement, general body dissatisfaction, and specific body part dissatisfaction. The analyses were conducted separately for men and women for ease of interpretability. Means and correlations are provided in Tables 2.1 and 2.2.

Proscriptive Sexualized Gender Stereotype Endorsement. Among men, there were no significant effects of exposure in endorsement of proscriptive sexualized gender stereotypes. However, among women, there was a significant main effect of sexualization, such that women in the sexualized condition endorsed proscriptive sexualized gender stereotypes more than women in the non-sexualized condition, $F(1, 153) = 4.46, p < .05, \eta^2 = .03$. There were no other main effects of body type or race, nor any interactions between sexualization and race or sexualization and body type.

Rape Myth Endorsement. There were no effects of exposure to different subtypes of sexualized women on rape myth endorsement for both men and women.

General Body Dissatisfaction. Among both men and women, there were no effects of exposure to different subtypes of women on body surveillance. For body shame, there were no effects of exposure to different subtypes of women among men. However, among women, there was a significant main effect of sexualization, such that women in the sexualized condition reported greater body shame than women in the non-sexualized condition, $F(1, 153) = 9.91, p < .01, \eta^2 = .06$.

Specific Body Part Dissatisfaction. For the following analyses, separate tests were conducted for each subscale since each subscale is specific to each gender.

Among men, there was a significant main effect of body type of the target on their perceived dissatisfaction with their physical condition (i.e., weight, health, and agility), such that men in the plus-sized condition reported feeling more negative about their body parts related to physical condition than men in the thin condition, $F(1, 57) = 5.01, p < .05, \eta^2 = .08$. Additionally, and unrelated to hypotheses, there was a significant interaction between race and body type for men's ratings of their body parts related to upper body strength (i.e., muscular strength, biceps, and body build), $F(1, 57) = 4.11, p = .05, \eta^2 = .07$. Tests of simple effects indicated that men felt more dissatisfied with their body parts related to upper body strength when shown a plus-size woman than a thin woman, but only when viewing Black targets, $F(1, 37) = 6.92, p < .05, \eta^2 = .16$. There were no differences in their body dissatisfaction with their upper body strength based on body size of the target when shown White women.

Among women, there were no effects of exposure to different subtypes of women on both ratings of body parts related to sexual attractiveness (i.e., nose, lips, and ears) and weight concern (i.e., waist, thighs, and buttocks). However, there was a significant main

effect of race, such that women in the White condition reported feeling more dissatisfied with their body parts related to physical condition (i.e., health, muscular strength, and agility) than women in the Black condition, $F(1, 152) = 3.86, p = .05, \eta^2 = .03$. This main effect was moderated by an interaction between race and body type, $F(1, 152) = 4.59, p < .05, \eta^2 = .03$. Tests of simple effects indicated that women only felt more dissatisfied with their body parts when shown a White woman than when shown a Black woman when in the thin condition, $F(1, 78) = 9.01, p < .01, \eta^2 = .10$. There were no differences in their body dissatisfaction with their body parts when shown plus-sized women.

Chapter 4

DISCUSSION

The current study examined whether descriptive sexualized gender stereotypes varied as a function of the race and weight of an individual, and whether exposure to sexualized images primed endorsement of broader gender stereotypes and body dissatisfaction. In general, this study suggests that the descriptive stereotype about sexualized women is predominantly applied to thin women. For example, sexualized women were perceived as less nice and less smart, consistent with the sexualized girl stereotype (Graff, Murnen, & Smolak, 2012; Starr & Ferguson, 2012; Stone, et al., 2015), but *only* when they are thin. The gender of the participant also seemed to moderate the expression of this descriptive stereotype in that men perceived sexualized women to be more popular than non-sexualized women, whereas women did not.

Overall, however, the current study suggests that stereotypes based on body size are the most highly salient of all characteristics included. Plus-sized women were perceived as less popular and athletic, but nicer and smarter, than thin women. These patterns were strongest among women. Importantly, these are the same pattern of traits that previous research (Graff, Murnen, & Smolak, 2012; Starr & Ferguson, 2012; Stone, et al., 2015) has documented as part of the stereotypes applied to sexualized women. Thus, the stereotype about sexualized women and the traits associated with thin women (regardless of sexualized condition) seem to be highly overlapping with one another.

It is unclear exactly why the sexualized girl stereotype was not as strong in the current study as in previous research (Graff, Murnen, & Smolak, 2012; Starr & Ferguson, 2012; Stone, et al., 2015). It may be based on the targets chosen in the current study. For

example, previous research is often unclear about what constitutes sexualized clothing, often denoting that the clothing is tight, and reveals sexual body parts. However, sexualized clothing varies in the extent of the amount of skin showing (i.e., two shirts can both be seen as revealing in that they emphasize women's breasts, but one shirt could be showing more skin than the other). Future research should examine whether trait descriptions of women change based on the amount of skin being shown, which would also help to further define what could be considered as sexualization. Additionally, the images included facial information, thus participants may have inferred trait information from their facial features instead of their dress. Future research could account for facial information by blurring faces, thereby forcing participants to focus on the dress of the images. The reduced severity of the descriptive sexualized stereotype may also be a reflection of between-subject design of the current study. Perhaps the distinction between sexualized and non-sexualized women is less salient when there is no side-by-side comparison. Additionally, it is important to note that popularity is context specific – thus, what may be perceived as popular in high school may not reflect what is perceived as popular in college samples. Future research should examine the dimension of popularity specifically as it relates to college-aged students and whether what is defined as popular changes over the course of development.

Finally, the stereotype about sexualized women may have been overwhelmed or confounded by the stereotypes about body size. Participants seemed to focus on the size of the women (rather plus-sized or thin) over any other characteristics. This suggests that perhaps the predominant characteristic when stereotyping women is their body type, more so than their level of sexualization. Indeed, because most previous research has

only shown thin sexualized women (Daniels & Zurbriggen, 2016; Starr & Ferguson, 2012; Stone, et al., 2015; Ward, 2002), those studies may have been tapping into the woman's thinness (which is more highlighted in sexualized clothing than non-sexualized clothing), rather than the sexualization per se. Regardless, the current study provides further support for the impact of the thin ideal on stereotypes about women (Bessenoff, 2006; Groesz, Levine, & Murnen, 2001; Polivy, Garner, & Garfinkel, 1986).

Interestingly, ratings of sexualized women did not differ on the basis of race. It is unclear why participants did not seem to attend to the race when making trait ratings. This was counter to predictions and may have been a result of the traits asked about in the current study. For instance, since Black women are often hypersexualized in media, the traits associated with them may not have been captured by the current study. Instead, stereotypes about Black women might focus more on their perceived sexual promiscuity and permissiveness. Additionally, stereotypes about Black sexualized women might also exacerbate stereotypes about Black individuals in general, for instance, a common stereotype about Black individuals is that they are more aggressive than White individuals thus perhaps sexualized Black women are viewed as more aggressive than sexualized White women. In order to more fully examine stereotypes as they relate to subtypes of sexualized women, researchers should examine the traits associated with Black women in more detail. Following research methods used in intersectional stereotypes studies (see Ghavami & Peplau [2012] for an example), future research should have participants list attributes they most associate with sexualized Black women.

The second set of research questions focused on the effects of seeing sexualized images on broader gender stereotypes and body dissatisfaction. The current study

suggests that even brief exposure to sexualized women of any type can lead to negative outcomes, particularly for women. Specifically, brief exposure to any type of sexualized women resulted in increased endorsement of broader sexualized gender stereotypes, and increased body shame for women. Yet there was no evidence to suggest that brief exposure to sexualized women is related to more volatile beliefs, such as rape myths. Additionally, sexualization appears to be unrelated to being dissatisfied with specific body parts. Instead dissatisfaction with specific body parts appears to be related more specifically to exposure to images of women with different body types.

These findings add to the existing literature that viewing sexualized women is associated with greater endorsement of broader stereotypes about women. The process is likely occurring through Bem's (1981) gender schema theory, where viewing sexualized depictions of women activates a broader stereotypes about sexualized women and their interactions with men. Additionally, men may not have been primed to endorse proscriptive sexualized gender stereotypes because the target was less self-relevant or perhaps because sexualization was less salient to them than it was for women (Bem, 1981; Wheeler & Petty, 2001).

However, the current study did not find evidence that exposure to depictions of sexualized women leads to greater endorsement of more volatile gender stereotypes, specifically rape myths. Although previous research has linked sexualization to endorsement of rape myths, these studies were done with prolonged exposure to sexualized women (Fox & Bailenson, 2009; Fox et al., 2015). Additionally, participants in these studies interacted with the sexualized women in a virtual setting (Fox & Bailenson, 2009; Fox et al., 2015). Thus, the results from the current study suggest that

simply viewing a static image of sexualized women may not prompt endorsement of rape myths. Future research should examine whether passively viewing sexualized women (as in the case of watching television shows or movies) or actively interacting with sexualized women prompts greater endorsement of rape myths. Additionally, future research should examine whether there are specific behaviors associated with sexualized women, which prompt greater endorsement of rape myths. Since the stimuli in the current study were static images and did not convey any behavioral information, it is possible that it did not activate broader gender stereotypes related to the (hetero) sexual relationships between men and women.

There were complex effects related to men's and women's body dissatisfaction. As predicted, women who were exposed to depictions of sexualized women felt greater body shame. In other words, women who saw images of sexualized women felt shame that their bodies were not the ideal size and weight that they want. This adds to the existing literature (Daniels, 2009; Fredrickson et al., 1998) that sexualization can have detrimental effects for women's overall body esteem.

In the current study, being exposed to sexualization was unrelated to women's body surveillance and feelings towards specific body parts. Body surveillance refers to repeatedly monitoring one's appearance. Thus, while being exposed to sexualization lead women to feeling more ashamed about their bodies, it did not lead to women monitoring their bodies more often. However, it is also possible that the effects of viewing sexualized women on body dissatisfaction had not yet occurred, since both the exposure to women was brief and the duration of the survey was brief as well. Additionally, women are frequently exposed to many different types of women throughout their lives (and even

throughout their daily lives), so a brief exposure in the study might not have had a lasting effect. Future research should address whether body type leads to more specific forms of body dissatisfaction for women and under what circumstances body dissatisfaction occurs.

On the other hand, the current study suggests that thin ideal pressures can be particularly impactful in relation to satisfaction with specific body parts. For instance, it was found that women who view depictions of thin women reported feeling more negatively about their body parts related to their strength and health (such as stamina, reflexes, and overall health). Women might be more primed to think about their specific body parts only when they view thin women, as it may cause greater social comparisons. This is further evidence that thin ideal pressures are particularly impactful for women. Overall, the current research suggests that media portrayals of women are particularly harmful in women's body satisfaction, and future research must address whether interventions can reduce the impact of narrow portrayals of women on women's body dissatisfaction.

Finally, men's body dissatisfaction also appeared to be impacted by exposure to women with differing body types, which was not hypothesized. It was found that men experienced more specific body part dissatisfaction when viewing plus-sized women than thin women. It is unclear exactly why men may experience increased body dissatisfaction particularly when they viewed plus-sized women. Research has suggested that college-aged men's body dissatisfaction can be split distinctly between their dissatisfaction with their body fat and their dissatisfaction with their muscularity (Frederick et al., 2007). Importantly, a vast majority of college-aged men express dissatisfaction with their body

fat level (Frederick et al., 2007). Therefore perhaps when faced with a plus-sized model (regardless of the gender of the model), body fat became more salient to men and thus they became more dissatisfied with their bodies. However, no known research has examined whether men experience body dissatisfaction when exposed to female models. Thus, future research should examine whether men's body part dissatisfaction is also impacted by media portrayals of women.

Limitations

There are a number of limitations to this study, which merit future research. First, the study only examines college-aged students, thus preventing the generalizability beyond college. Future research should address how sexualized stereotypes vary across development. Additionally, the use of self-report in the study is prone to social desirability biases. More specifically, social desirability biases may have been more prevalent when answering sensitive questions related to rape myths. In order to reduce these biases, future researchers should use implicit measures of rape myth and gender stereotype endorsement. The current study also did not take into account participants' own endorsement of sexualization or background. Future research should examine whether participants' endorsement of sexualization impacts their perceptions of different women. Lastly, the sample of the current study was predominately European American, which prevents the generalizability of the study to other ethnic groups. Future research should examine these relationships among a more ethnically diverse population, especially in understanding the intersectionality of sexualized gender stereotypes among various ethnic groups.

Conclusions

The current study adds the growing literature examining the impact of sexualization. The study indicates that the descriptive sexualized gender stereotype is more nuanced, and highly influenced by body size, than is currently depicted in the extant literature. Future research should address the distinct stereotypes associated with different types of sexualized women, as these women are likely to face differential treatment on the basis of the stereotype. Furthermore, this research suggests that brief exposure to sexualized women can have a detrimental impact on women's body satisfaction, and lead to greater endorsement of broader cultural gender stereotypes. Future research should address whether any interventions can reduce the impact of viewing sexualized women.

Table 1

Means and standard deviations for trait ratings by sexualization and body type.

Traits	Men						Women					
	S		NS		Combined		S		NS		Combined	
	<i>M(SD)</i>	<i>n</i>										
Popular												
Thin	3.25(.69)	18	2.71(1.03)	12	3.03(.87)	30	3.12(.76)	38	3.07(.68)	45	3.09(.71)	83
Plus-Sized	2.75(.55)	16	2.45(.76)	19	2.59(.68)	35	2.55(.60)	34	2.68(.72)	45	2.62(.67)	78
Combined	3.01(.67)	34	2.55(.87)	31	2.79(.80)	65	2.85(.74)	71	2.87(.72)	90	2.86(.73)	161
Nice												
Thin	2.64(.48)	18	3.00(.56)	12	2.78(.54)	30	2.59(.64)	38	2.91(.54)	45	2.77(.60)	83
Plus-Sized	3.09(.46)	16	2.89(.57)	19	2.99(.52)	35	3.24(.52)	34	3.29(.54)	45	3.27(.53)	78
Combined	2.85(.52)	34	2.94(.56)	31	2.89(.53)	65	2.89(.67)	71	3.10(.57)	90	3.01(.62)	161
Athletic												
Thin	2.81(.81)	18	2.75 (.75)	12	2.78(.77)	30	2.46(.81)	38	2.74(.65)	45	2.61(.73)	83

Plus-Sized	1.94(.70)	16	1.89(.61)	19	1.91(.65)	35	2.18(.54)	34	2.13(.64)	45	2.15(.60)	78
Combined	2.40(.87)	34	2.23(.78)	31	2.32(.83)	65	2.33(.71)	71	2.44(.71)	90	2.39(.71)	161
Smart												
Thin	2.67(.59)	18	2.75(.69)	12	2.70(.62)	30	2.57(.79)	38	2.89(.41)	45	2.74(.63)	83
Plus-Sized	2.69(.60)	16	2.74(.54)	19	2.71(.56)	35	3.17(.51)	34	3.14(.53)	45	3.15(.52)	78
Combined	2.68(.59)	34	2.74(.59)	31	2.71(.59)	65	2.85(.73)	71	3.02(.49)	90	2.94(.61)	161

Note: NS refers to traits associated with non-sexualized targets (averaged across two images). S refers to the sexualized targets

(averaged across two images). Means range from 1 to 4, with higher scores indicating greater endorsement of the traits. Since there were no effects of race, it is not included in the table.

Table 2.1

Means, standard deviations, and correlations between the variables for women

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Proscriptive Sexualized Stereotype	-						
2. Rape Myth	.44	-					
3. Body Surveillance	.15	-.03	-				
4. Body Shame	.40	.23	.47	-			
5. Sexual Attractiveness	.09	.12	.13	.30	-		
6. Weight Concern	.14	.11	.26	.56	.55	-	
7. Physical Condition	.15	.02	.17	.34	.59	.64	-
<i>M (SD)</i>	2.07 (.40)	2.04 (.64)	2.78 (.47)	2.31 (.54)	2.46 (.53)	2.88 (.85)	2.61 (.77)

Note: Numbers in bold are $p < .05$.

Table 2.2

Means, standard deviations, and correlations between the variables for men

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Proscriptive Sexualized Stereotype	-						
2. Rape Myth	.29	-					
3. Body Surveillance	.06	-.02	-				
4. Body Shame	.23	.15	.44	-			
5. Physical Attractiveness	.09	.18	.11	.31	-		
6. Physical Condition	-.16	-.08	.13	.22	.66	-	
7. Upper body strength	-.30	-.10	.05	.12	.48	.80	-
<i>M (SD)</i>	2.25 (.38)	2.42 (.63)	2.65 (.47)	2.18 (.46)	2.39 (.48)	2.41 (.66)	2.37 (.67)

Note: Numbers in bold are $p < .05$.

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Appendix

1. How popular do you think she is?
2. How nice do you think she is?
3. How athletic do you think she is?
4. How smart do you think she is?

Measures Not Included in Analyses

5. How attractive do you think she is?
6. How much do you like her clothes?
7. How much do you want to be friends with her?
8. How much do you dress like her? (Women only)
9. How much do you want to look like her? (Women only)
10. How much do you think she is like a typical girl?

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PUBLISHED MANUSCRIPTS

Stone, E.A., Brown, C.S., & Jewell, J.A. (2015). The sexualized girl: A within-gender stereotype among elementary school children. *Child Development, 86*(5), 1604-1622.

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MANUSCRIPTS IN PREPARATION

Stone, E.A. & Brown, C.S. Sexualized stereotype development across the lifespan.

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Brown, C.S., & **Stone, E.A.** (2015). "Gender Stereotypes and Discrimination: How Sexism Impacts Development" in S. Horn, M. Ruck, & L. Liben (Eds.), *Advances*

PRESENTATIONS

- Stone, E.A.** & Brown, C.S. (2016, October). Thin Ideal vs. Sexualized Ideal: College Students' Stereotypes about Plus-Sized Women. *Poster presented at 7th Biennial Gender Development Research Conference*. San Francisco, California.
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- Stone, E.A.**, Brown, C.S., & Jewell, J.A. (2015, March). The Sexualized Girl: A Within-Gender Stereotype Among Elementary School Children. *Poster presented at Biennial Society for Research on Child Development Conference*. Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.
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TEACHING EXPERIENCE

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