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Does the Audience Matter? A Critical Analysis of Black Female Bodies in the Media

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Abstract

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In regards to the ways in which individuals are portrayed in various forms of media, generally, there exists a consensus among sociologists that much of media content is influenced by the demographic characteristics of intended audiences. For instance, representations of women in a magazine geared towards men can be expected to differ from depictions in a magazine intended for women. Building upon existing research, this study examines the extent to which the phenomenon described above is impacted by gender and race, focusing specifically on depictions in magazine advertisements. In order to investigate how target audiences influence ad content, images contained within two magazines- *Ebony* and *Vogue*- were compared. Issues were selected from a time period spanning four years (2004-2007), and four issues were selected from each year (March, June, September, and December) to account for any potential bias linked to the month of publication. In each issue, only those advertisements that featured women were included in the analysis. Once the ads solely featuring men (or other objects) were eliminated, every fourth ad was selected for inclusion in the sample. Advertisements were coded using MAXQDA, and results demonstrated there was, in fact, a difference in the ways in which men and women were portrayed in *Ebony* and *Vogue*. Furthermore, there was also a difference in the depictions of black women between both magazines. As such, the findings of this study align with those obtained by similar studies conducted in the past and further reveal the extent to which the characteristics of intended audiences influence media content. *Ebony*, a magazine geared predominantly towards black audiences was found to be more likely to portray a more diverse array of black women in their magazine advertisements (women with different body types, hair textures, and skin tones) than *Vogue*. The latter publication, which can be said to cater towards a predominantly white audience, was significantly less likely to depict black women in their ads in general, and in the rare instances when black women were featured, the women selected more frequently exhibited Eurocentric features than their counterparts in *Ebony*.

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Introduction

Over the years, numerous researchers have extensively analyzed advertisements in the media, studying the ways in which certain demographic characteristics influence the portrayals of particular individuals. Sociologists have examined, for instance, the impact of gender on advertisements- how are men and women portrayed differently, if at all? Such studies have taken into consideration various aspects of mass media- television, magazines, etc., and almost all have arrived at the consensus that there does, in fact, exist a difference in how the two groups are depicted. This project will attempt to contribute to the existing body of literature surrounding this topic by evaluating the ways in which men and women are portrayed in magazine advertisements. In addition, this project will also examine the ways in which race and gender collectively influence media portrayal by analyzing how the intended magazine audience (whether it is predominantly white or black) influences the depictions of black women in ads. To accomplish this, two specific magazines will be analyzed: *Ebony*, a magazine historically geared towards black audiences, and *Vogue*, a magazine targeted largely towards white audiences.

Ebony, a magazine oriented towards the African American community, was founded in the mid 20th century with the intent of offering a platform for black Americans to discuss issues pertinent to their daily lives. Since 1945, the magazine has consistently published issues that set out to emphasize the importance of self-affirmation by offering positive representations of African Americans. This mission materialized in numerous ways, ranging from cover photography that highlighted prominent figures in the African American community to advertisements predominantly featuring black models. *Vogue*, on the other hand, is a longstanding magazine whose inception dates back to the late 19th century. A staple of American society, the magazine can be described as both a fashion and lifestyle publication whose initial target audience was the

most affluent members of society. Over time, of course, readership expanded to include members of different classes; however, the magazine can still largely be described as being primarily geared towards white audiences.

Based solely upon the history of both magazines, one can expect the former magazine, *Ebony*, to be more inclined to feature a greater number of black women than *Vogue*. However, this study is not solely concerned with analyzing the number of black women depicted in the advertisements in both magazines; rather, it is interested in examining whether the depictions that exist in both magazines diverge from one another as a result of differing target audiences. Of course, it is important to acknowledge dissimilarities, if any, in the frequency with which black women appear in advertisements; however, it is equally as important to take into consideration what sorts of black women are being featured, as this provides valuable insight into societal beauty standards and racial attitudes as a whole. This project will therefore pose questions such as: are the black women featured in *Ebony* significantly different from those who are included in ads in *Vogue*? If so, what are the characteristics that set them apart? The study will analyze such features as the body type, hair texture, and skin tone of the women in the magazine ads, and this comparison will allow for a discussion surrounding the impact, if there is one, of the differences between the two magazines' intended audiences; in other words, how do the intended audiences of media publications influence the types of black women selected for representation in ads?

I begin this project by explicating the theoretical framework and research background that operate as the foundation of this study, citing the work of influential researchers who have investigated similar topics. Building upon existing research, I proceed to describe the methods I relied upon for data collection and analysis, present my results, and discuss the implications of

these findings. Finally, I conclude by suggesting potential avenues for future research that could lead to a more comprehensive understanding of this particular topic.

Research Questions

1. How are women, in general, portrayed in magazine advertisements (in comparison to men)? Are they depicted gender-stereotypically?
2. How are black women, in particular, portrayed in advertisements? Is there a difference in the way they are depicted in *Ebony* versus the way they are depicted in *Vogue*?

Theoretical Framework and Research Background

Goffman and Gender Portrayals

In his book *Gender Advertisements*, Erving Goffman was one of the first sociologists to thoroughly examine the contrasting ways in which men and women are portrayed in various advertisements. While examining the relationships between males and females in these images, Goffman reports on some notable trends, many of which have been subsequently supported by research conducted by other scholars. Comprised of three essays that discuss a myriad of topics related to the social construct of gender, Goffman's book is devoted to debunking the myth that advertisements are a reliable depiction of the true interactions between males and females. Rather, Goffman posits the notion that such ads serve merely as vehicles through which societies attempt to persuade individuals to conduct themselves in a certain manner. In order to adhere to the gender roles considered acceptable within a particular society, ads portray men and women strategically—usually in a manner that establishes the dominance of men over women. For instance, Goffman's analysis of the images included in his study reveals that in most ads, when males and females are both present in the scene, the former group is consistently depicted as taller than the latter (the

only exception to this rule is when the woman portrayed is clearly of a higher social status than the man). While the presumption that males are taller than females can appear to be based solely on biology, Goffman argues that it is a more so a mechanism through which people are socialized into thinking of men as larger, and thus, more powerful than women.

Goffman also highlights how in most of the images, when both hands of the woman are visible, she is more often depicted as caressing an object or another person; whereas when a man's hands are included in the frame, they are more likely to be more actively manipulating someone or something. Women, then, are expected to be more passive, gentle, and temperate than their male counterparts, who are expected to be more forceful. Goffman also reveals how in most of the ads that involved giving instruction, men were also more likely to be depicted as instructing women, once again revealing society's expectations in regards to how men and women ought to interact with one another. Goffman further illustrates an interesting connection between women and children, comparing how depictions of the two groups exhibit some notable similarities. When an image in an ad includes a bed, Goffman reveals how women and children are for more likely to be the persons positioned on the bed, hereby highlighting the ways in which women are repeatedly linked to children. Not only are women expected to be more domestic, subservient, and concerned with the affairs of children than are men, Goffman contends that many ads in fact portray women as children (in terms of their physical appearance, their positioning in the image, etc.). He also explains that women are often illustrated as being mentally distant in many images and in need of guidance from men. This further influences the attire women don in many ads (if they wear any at all)- clothing which is usually skimpy and/or highly sexualized. Goffman then goes on to mark an important difference between the attire of men and women when he discusses how it is easy to

take a man seriously regardless of the clothing he has on; however, when women have on “formal, business, or sports clothes,” he notes how they seem to be role-playing (Goffman 21).

Based on the findings laid out in *Gender Advertisements*, I expect to see similar patterns when analyzing ads found in both *Ebony* and *Vogue*. Though I will be focusing specifically on the portrayals of black women in these magazines, when obtaining my sample, I intend to examine all the advertisements in these magazines that include women. As a result, I will undoubtedly encounter ads depicting both men and women (be they white women or black women), and I intend to take into consideration some of the characteristics Goffman outlines in his piece. Analyzing the ways in which race impacts gender expectations will also be important to this study, and I believe that there might be divergences between the ways in which white women and black women are portrayed in ads (in relation to men). While I suspect much of what Goffman discovered (in terms of which gender maintains authority over the other) will remain true regardless of whether the woman is white or black, it will be interesting to examine the impact of race on this relationship. Is there, for instance, a difference in the ways black women are positioned in relation to men than white women? Does one group of women often appear more highly sexualized than the other group?

Kang: Goffman's Analysis Revisited

Goffman's piece essentially became the foundation for much of the subsequent work that has been done in the field of advertisement analysis; for example, in her article, “The Portrayal of Women's Images in Magazine Advertisements,” researcher Mee-Eun Kang's study builds upon the coding utilized in his book and adds two new coding categories to her analysis: *body display* and *independence/self-assertiveness*. The former category described the degree to which individuals featured in advertisements had their bodies exposed (ex: were naked or wore extremely revealing

clothes) while the latter referred to the level of independence and self-confidence of women apparent in various advertisements. Her study, which was conducted nearly a decade after *Gender Advertisements* was initially published, focused on ads in three magazines (*Vogue*, *Mademoiselle*, and *Mcall's*) spanning from 1979 to approximately 1991. Upon analyzing her data, she came to the same general conclusion as Goffman- that women, over time, were portrayed stereotypically in relation to men.

She did notice, though, a shift from Goffman's findings in regards to two specific categories. Kang found that women, though they were still evidently depicted as subordinate to men, were more likely to be stereotyped in two specific categories: *body display* and *licensed withdrawal*, as opposed to *relative size* and *function ranking* (Kang 982). In other words, while men were no longer necessarily still depicted as being significantly larger (physically) than women and modern ads had begun to feature women in more prestigious positions, gender roles were still enforced in different ways, like through the increased exposure of women's bodies in these ads. While it was not uncommon to see women in the office in modern ads, for instance, Kang noticed that in said scenarios, women were often hyper sexualized, shown wearing scanty and promiscuous clothing. These deliberate choices portrayed women as less suited for carrying out job tasks and more for eliciting male pleasure.

Umiker-Sebeok and Power in Advertisements

In another study published around the same time as Kang's, Jean Umiker-Sebeok also focuses on the depiction of women in magazine ads, further adding onto Goffman's coding schema by introducing three new elements into the analysis process: *location*, *movement*, and *risk-taking*. *Location* described the setting that was portrayed in the ad (domestic or public), *movement* referred to the ability of the subject to move fast and far, while *risk-taking* pointed to the likelihood of the

subject to engage in high risk behavior. Umiker-Sebeok maintained that the degree to which individuals were depicted as being in control, or maintaining power, in various ads hinted at the degree of their social status: subjects that had “control over space, the ability to move freely, and the ability to block and control others’ movements” were believed to have more power/independence (Umiker-Sebeok 393). After conducting an analysis on a multitude of advertisements found in nearly 40 different magazines, the researcher then discussed how women, as was to be expected based on Goffman’s findings, tended to have less control over their environments in various advertisements than did men.

The findings of this study were generally consistent with those posited by Goffman in *Gender Advertisements*, and unlike Kang, Umiker-Sebeok did, in fact, find *relative size* to be significant in the analytical process. According to the author, men were consistently depicted as being taller than women, and for a number of reasons were likely to take up more space in advertisements. In addition to their height, Umiker-Sebeok writes about how men were more likely to be portrayed in postures that allowed them to take up more space, while women were depicted in the opposite manner. Women, who were already physically smaller than their male counterparts, were often shown in “postures that reduced the space their bodies occupied; for example, women were more often shown lying down” (Umiker-Sebeok 397). Women were also more likely to be psychologically withdrawn from their surroundings than were men- “women were shown as uninvolved or withdrawn from the social situation by covering their faces or mouth or gazing at some unidentified object outside the picture frame. All of these behaviors signal vulnerability and need for protection” (Umiker-Sebeok 397). This is further supported by the ways men were shown “taking control over women’s bodies, lifting them up, containing their space by encircling their bodies, or blocking access to their bodies” (Umiker-Sebeok 397).

The author also found women more likely to be portrayed in “decontextualized” settings, than men- settings like the bathroom or the bedroom, where they were hardly ever engaged in an immediately recognizable activity. Contrary to men, who were often depicted as being either at work or otherwise actively completing a certain task, women more more likely to be almost viewed as inactive participants in their environments. They seemed almost to fade into the background when featured in an ad, whereas men were clearly the primary subjects. Ads also often showed men more involved in high-risk behavior than women, and the researcher attributes this to their ability to “break down obstacles and achieve power” (Umiker-Sebeok 400).

Mears and Racialized Bodies

Delving into the lack of representation in the fashion industry, sociologist Ashley Mears examines the ways in which black models are grossly underrepresented in fashion magazines in her piece “Size Zero High-End Ethnic: Cultural Production and the Reproduction of Culture in Fashion Modeling.” Based on her research, she asserts that “producers in the modeling industry weigh their decisions on two publicly polemic issues: slenderness and racial exclusion...producers hire fashion models to articulate market-specific versions of femininity. As cultural producers, agents and clients ultimately reproduce culture by fashioning femininity along race and class lines” (Mears 21). She delineates between two primary fashion markets- the commercial market and the high-end editorial market, discussing how the primary audiences of both markets influences the characteristics of featured models. While the former is slightly more tolerant of racial inclusion, she describes the latter as being marked by “distinction, sexual unavailability, and rarefied beauty” (Mears 21). Not only are the models in this market exceptionally slender (typically a size 0), they are overwhelmingly white. When black models are introduced to this market, Mears notes that they either: 1) possess European features, or 2) look extremely “exotic.”

Conceptualization:

Building upon the existing theories and research outlined above, I conceptualized my dependent variables as follows. In regards to the first research question in which I examine the differences between the ways in which men and women are portrayed in magazine ads (and in conjunction with Goffman's explication), I employ the term gender stereotyping to refer to the ways in which images comment on the nature of the relationship between men and women. When discussing gender stereotyped portrayal, I refer to how ads reinforce notions of the superiority of men (and by extension, the inferiority of women). Stemming from the patriarchal ideals upon which our society operates, the relationship between men and women is one marked by an imbalance of power- where the former is generally perceived as inherently dominant. As such, I am interested both in examining the way this power dynamic is conveyed in *Ebony* and *Vogue* and in evaluating the techniques commonly implemented as a means of reinforcing gender norms. In regards to my second research question, drawing heavily from Mears' work, I conceptualize the relevant dependent variable- in this case, the dominant racial beauty ideal- as one which glorifies Eurocentric features (ex: light skin, straight hair, slender body frame). In a society that equates such characteristics with beauty, it will be helpful to assess the extent to which black and white women are expected to conform to such standards, and whether said standard is reinforced to the same degree by both magazines.

Rationale and Hypotheses:

Based on the findings of such studies as those discussed above, when conducting my analysis, I expect to find trends similar to those obtained by researchers like Goffman, Kang, and Umiker-Sebeok, seeing as there has not been a significant shift in respect to the patriarchal ideals around which much of Western society is organized. While, like Kang discovered when she

conducted her study, there may have been a shift in gender portrayals in the sense that overtly stereotypical depictions of women (in the kitchen, for instance) might no longer be the overwhelming majority of advertisements, I believe ads will still subtly portray men as wielding more power over women when both are featured. I believe advertisements that contain solely women will still generally convey either highly sexualized images of women or will depict women in a position in which they do not have as much agency as men have in ads which feature solely men. I predict that this will be the case across for both black and white women, in both *Ebony* and *Vogue*, however I do think that the former group will be even more marginalized than the latter. While I believe that white women too will be depicted as subordinate to men, I predict black women will be portrayed as subordinate to both men as well as white women. In addition, I predict that *Ebony*, because of the fact that it is a magazine that has been historically concerned with catering to the needs of the African American community, will feature a greater number of black women in their advertisements than will *Vogue*. Though there will certainly be some black models in *Vogue*, I hypothesize that they will be significantly outnumbered by white models, and that the few black models that are featured will share a number of physical characteristics and features with one another. By this, I predict that they will possess a number of similarities in regards to features like their skin tone, body type, and hair texture, and that these features will likely adhere to Eurocentric beauty standards.

Hypotheses	
Hypothesis 1:	When both men and women are featured in an ad, men will be portrayed as wielding more power than women.
Hypothesis 2:	Women will generally be depicted in a highly sexualized manner in both magazines, and this will be the case for both black and white women.
Hypothesis 3:	Because of <i>Ebony</i> 's identity as an African-American magazine, it will feature a greater number of black women in its advertisements than <i>Vogue</i> .
Hypothesis 4:	Black models featured in <i>Vogue</i> will be greatly outnumbered by white models, and most of the black models will adhere to Eurocentric beauty standards.

Methods

Lindner and Depictions of Women in Time and Vogue

The methods implemented in this study were largely influenced by Katharina Lindner's article, "Images of Women in General Interest and Fashion Magazine Advertisements from 1955 to 2002." Similar to this project's examination of the portrayal of black women bodies in the media, Lindner examined the depictions of women in ads featured in two separate magazines: *Time* and *Vogue*. Because the former was a general interest magazine whereas the latter was a fashion magazine, she hypothesized that there would exist a notable difference in the ways in which women were depicted due to the specific target audiences of each magazine. Lindner examined ads over a period of nearly half a century, building upon the coding scheme first utilized by Goffman. According to his scheme, as discussed earlier, Goffman discovered that gender stereotyping in ads occurred "primarily in ways that can be captured by the following categories: *relative size, function ranking, feminine touch, ritualization of subordination, and licensed withdrawal*" (Lindner 411). These categories subsequently pointed towards the degree of social power to which each gender was expected to possess.

In order to ascertain whether or not these ads depicted women in stereotypical gender roles, Lindner analyzed advertisements for the *relative size* of men and women in various advertisements, expressing how men were more likely to be taller and take up more space than women, hereby hinting at the societal belief regarding their superiority as a gender. *Function ranking* described the phenomenon of seeing men more likely to occupy higher level occupations than women, and women more likely to be in situations where the men are in control; *Feminine touch* once again referred to how women were more likely depicted as caressing or cradling objects instead of manipulating them like men did. *Ritualization of subordination* referred to how women

were often shown to be in positions where men were in control, postures in which they often “lowered themselves physically, laid down at inappropriate times, or were embraced by a man” (Linder 411). Men, on the other hand, were hardly ever illustrated in such subordinate positions; rather, they were almost always positioned as standing upright with their head held high- a sign of superiority. The final category, *licensed withdrawal*, described the ways in which many advertisements portrayed women as disoriented, often staring into space and seemingly oblivious to their surroundings. This obliviousness, then, presents them as being incapable of caring for themselves, as such presents them as being dependent on others (most likely men) for protection. Men, on the other hand, were almost always alert in the image, giving off the sense that they would be in a position to adequately respond to any potential threat.

Sampling Technique

While my sample was certainly smaller than hers (572 ads compared with 1,374 ads), I selected ads from two magazines- *Ebony* and *Vogue*- from issues spanning the course of four years (2004-2007). Because the purpose of the study is to analyze the potential ways in which the portrayals of black women in advertisements might be impacted by intended audiences, these two magazines were chosen because the former is geared towards black audiences while the latter is directed predominantly towards white audiences. In terms of selecting which magazine issues would be included in the analysis, I sampled from various months throughout the four-year period to help account for any bias that may occur due to the time of year in which the ads were published. The issues from both magazines were from the same months, and the months sampled each year were: March, June, September, and December. These months, spanning the entire year, ensured that ads from summer as well as winter, for example, would be examined. This approach was employed to verify that the overall ways in which women are portrayed would be taken into

consideration, and not merely present a skewed glimpse (since, for example, one can expect the summer issues of magazines to have a disproportionately larger proportion of women with their bodies exposed). Because there were some ads in both magazines that featured solely men (or only included words and/or objects) and as such, would not contribute to the analysis), these ads were excluded from consideration. Afterwards, the remaining ads were randomly sampled and every fourth ad was selected for examination.

Coding Categories

Like Linder's study, only ads that included one or more women (were analyzed for this research project. Because the vast majority of the ads sampled did not include men at all, the first two categories Goffman examined in his analysis were not highly relevant to this study, and as such, were eliminated from the coding process. The ads were, however, examined based on his remaining categories:

1. *Feminine Touch*. Women will use their hands to caress themselves or another person/object in the image as opposed to firmly touching/manipulating objects.
2. *Ritualization of Subordination*. In ads, when both men and women are depicted, women are likely to be subject to the will of men in terms of how much freedom they have. A woman might be in the arms of a man who controls her degree of movement or might be in a position in which she relies on the man for support. Furthermore, women will be in postures that place themselves physically lower than men, thus indicating submission.
3. *Licensed Withdrawal*. Women appear to be mentally aloof from the situation depicted in the ad, and therefore is reliant upon others to protect her. Linder includes such examples as "an expansive smile or laughter, covering the face or the mouth, or with-drawing her gaze from the scene at large" (Linder 414).
4. *Body Display*. The woman is depicted with the majority of her body exposed or is dressed scantily (which contributes to the hypersexualization of women).
5. *Movement*. Women are less likely to have the ability to freely move in an ad; for instance, they might be depicted, as Linder writes, "in a blanket, which limits the amount of control [they] can exert on the environment" (Linder 414).
6. *Location*. Women might be depicted rather stereotypically, in domestic settings which reveal gender expectations. Such settings include the kitchen or bedroom. They are less likely to be depicted, for instance, in an office where viewers can clearly observe the work they are doing.

7. *Objectification*. Women are portrayed in a manner in which it is clear that the main approach of the advertisement is to draw attention to them and their physical features. Women appear more often as instruments of pleasure.

However, this study is not only interested in examining the gender portrayals of women- it is heavily concerned with analyzing how race influences the portrayal of women in these advertisements. For this reason, in addition to Lindner's coding system, I included three other coding categories relevant to my research question: "skin tone," "hair type," "body type." In regards to "skin tone," I examined the particular skin color of the black women that were featured in ads in both magazines (using the Skin Color Palette previously posited by sociologists Telles and Paschel) to see if there was a diverse array of tones represented or if the black women depicted were overwhelmingly of a lighter (or perhaps even darker complexion?) The "hair type" code was also included to serve a similar purpose- to examine whether or not the black women which were featured in both *Ebony* and *Vogue* were overwhelmingly presented as having straight hair (as opposed to their hair in its natural state- typically curly/kinky). Since straight hair is a prominent characteristic of the Eurocentric standard of beauty, it would be interesting to see how many black women are portrayed deviating from said norms. Finally, the last variable I created took into consideration the "body type" of the black models included in the ads. Once again, because Eurocentric beauty standards tend to glorify thin, slender bodies, it is helpful to examine whether the black models featured adhere to this standard.

Data Analysis

As mentioned earlier, MaxQDA was utilized of data analysis. After sampling the ads, all images were imported into the software and the coding categories aforementioned were created in the system. Then, each image was individually coded using Lindner's definitions. An ad like Figure 1 (on the following page), for instance, was coded as "yes" for *feminine touch*, "no" for

ritualization of subordination, “yes” for *licensed withdrawal*, “no” for *body display*, “N/A” for *movement*, “N/A” for *location*, “no” for *objectification*, “dark” for *skin tone*, “N/A” for *hair type*, and “N/A” for *body type*. An ad like Figure 2- also on the next page- was coded as “no” for *feminine touch*, “no” for *ritualization of subordination*, “yes” for *licensed withdrawal*, “no” for *body display*, “N/A” for *movement*, “N/A” for *location*, “no” for *objectification*, “dark” for *skin tone*, “natural” for *hair type*, and “N/A” for *body type*.

Results

A total of 572 advertisements were coded for this study (278 for *Ebony* and 294 for *Vogue*). The numbers of ads coded for both magazines in each month are shown in Table 1. The percentages of the total number of ads that met the criteria of each of the coding categories are displayed in Table 2. Of the ads sampled from both *Ebony* and *Vogue*, 80% depicted women (both black and white) stereotypically in at least one of the coding categories (*feminine touch*, *ritualization of subordination*, *licensed withdrawal*, *body display*, *movement*, *location*, and *objectification*). The remaining three categories will be discussed later when examining specific differences between *Ebony* and *Vogue*.

Similar to how Lindner conducted the analysis in her own study, in order to calculate the percentages of ads in each coding category according to magazine type, the number of ads in each category in a specific issue was divided by the total number of ads sampled from that issue. This produced 16 percentages for each category per magazine (ex: *Ebony* Mar. 2004, *Ebony* Jun. 2004...) Table 3 compares data from both magazines.

Table 1: Number of Advertisements in *Ebony* and *Vogue* Coded Each Year (N= 572)

	2004				2005				2006				2007			
	Mar.	June	Sept.	Dec.	Mar.	June	Sept.	Dec.	Mar.	June	Sept.	Dec.	Mar.	June	Sept.	Dec.
<i>Ebony</i> (n=278)	15	18	14	21	15	18	16	21	17	16	16	19	16	17	19	20
<i>Vogue</i> (n=294)	18	20	16	19	20	22	18	18	17	18	20	18	17	19	16	18

Table 2: Overall Gender Stereotyping in Each Coding Category	
	% of ads falling into the category
Feminine Touch	24.3
Ritualized of Subordination	31.8
Licensed Withdrawal	41.2
Body Display	15.7
Movement	1.6
Location	17.6
Objectification	53.2

Table 3: Overall Racial Stereotyping in Each Coding Category	
	% of ads falling into the category
Skin Tone (of black women in ads)	
• dark	21.4
• medium	30.8
• light	47.6
Hair Type (of black women in ads)	
• natural	37.6
• straight	62.4
Body Type (of black women in ads)	
• thin/slender	74.7
• fuller figured	25.3

Table 4: Percentages for Each Coding Category by Magazine Type		
	<i>Ebony</i> (n = 278)	<i>Vogue</i> (n = 294)
Feminine Touch	35.9	33.7
Ritualized Subordination	37.2	40.1
Licensed Withdrawal	41.0	44.5
Body Display	16.7	28.3
Movement	1.4	3.6
Location	17.8	26.4
Objectification	57.3	63.8

Table 5: Percentages for Each Coding Coding Category by Magazine Type		
	<i>Ebony</i> (n = 250)	<i>Vogue</i> (n = 5)
Skin Tone (of black women in ads)		
• dark	17.8	2.2
• medium	34.4	14.0
• light	47.8	83.8
Hair Type (of black women in ads)		
• natural	36.9	6.3
• straight	63.1	93.7
Body Type (of black women in ads)		
• thin/slender	72.1	100.0
• fuller figured	27.9	0.0

Feminine Touch

For an image to be coded as “yes” for this category, according to Lindner’s definition, the woman featured would most likely be depicted “touching herself (ex: hair, face, lips) or her clothes in an unnatural way” (Lindner 414). This type of touching was considered “feminine,” since when men were depicted in ads, they were often more likely to be grasping, manipulating, or holding objects (Lindner 414). Of the total 278 advertisements sampled from *Ebony*, 35.9% were coded as “yes” for this category, and of the 294 ads sampled from *Vogue*, 33.7% of the ads were also coded as “yes.” There did not appear to be a significant difference in terms of which magazine was more likely to stereotypically depict women in this manner- across all issues sampled there were numerous ads which reinforced the idea that women were less likely to be actively affecting force on another object.

Ritualization of Subordination

Because the majority of ads analyzed did not include men, there were only a handful which illustrated the relationship between both genders. However, ads were also coded as “yes” for this category based on Lindner’s definition which expressed that when both men and women are depicted, women were likely to be subject to the will of the man. Of the ads sampled from *Ebony*, 37.2% depicted women stereotypically in this category as compared to 40.1% of advertisements sampled from *Vogue*.

Licensed Withdrawal

In a significant percentage of their ads, both magazines were almost equally likely to depict women as mentally withdrawn from the scene (41.0% of *Ebony* ads, 44.5% of *Vogue* ads). Many

(both black and white) were photographed staring off into space- rarely looking directly at the camera as men were- or were shown with expansive smiles.

Body Display

Although neither magazine had models' bodies exposed in a majority of their ads (*Ebony* had 16.7% of the ads sampled coded as "yes" for this category while *Vogue* had 28.3%), a substantial number of women were still dressed scantily/provocatively even when there appeared to be little reason for such. For instance, in the Prada ads displayed below, the models are half naked for the purpose of marketing purses and shoes; however, this technique was not necessarily crucial for the success of the ad- these products could have still been effectively advertised with the women being fully clothed.

Movement

Although Lindner included this coding category in her data analysis, it was not found to be incredibly relevant for this particular study. After analyzing the ways in which women had their degree of freedom limited in an ad (ex: by being physically restrained either by a man or another object), only 1.4% of ads in *Ebony* were coded as "yes" for this category. Similarly, only a handful of ads in *Vogue* (3.6%) were also coded as "yes," hereby revealing that this was not the primary means through which magazine ads tended to engage in the majority of gender stereotyping.

Location

For the ads included in this specific study, there were not a significant number of images that depicted women in domestic settings (ex: kitchen, bedroom, etc.,) however, "location" was still an important platform for stereotypically portraying women. A notable number of images

(17.8% of *Ebony* ads and 26.4% of *Vogue* ads) depicted women in rather ambiguous settings—settings where it was unclear what exact action the woman was performing. On the other hand, when men were included in ads, they were often depicted in immediately decipherable environments, such as in the office or in the gym.

Objectification

More than any other coding category focused on examining the differences between the ways in which men and women were portrayed in magazine ads, this category proved to be the most prevalent in the ads analyzed. An astonishing 57.3% of ads in *Ebony* and 63.8% of ads in *Vogue* likened women to objects by hypersexualizing them, dressing and positioning them in ways that appeared to strip them of their humanity and equate them with objects created for the purpose of pleasing and satisfying men.

Skin Tone

Creating a coding category that analyzed the skin tone of the black women in *Ebony* and *Vogue* allowed for a comparison of the levels of diversity portrayed in both magazines. As was to be expected, *Ebony* was more likely to include black women of differing skin tones, though there did still appear to be a slight preference for models of a lighter complexion (47.8% of black models were light skinned, 34.4% were of a medium skin tone, and 17.8% were dark skinned.) *Vogue*, on the other hand, had significantly less diversity among the few black models featured, and the magazine had a clear favoritism for light skinned models (83.8% of all models compared to 2.2% who were dark skinned).

Hair Type

Like the variable that examined the hair texture of featured black models in both magazines, this category sought to further analyze the characteristics of the women who obtained representation in *Ebony* and *Vogue*. Unsurprisingly, yet again, the former magazine was found to be more representative of a variety of hair types among black women- it included models with straight hair (63.1%) as well as models with their natural hair texture (36.9%). *Vogue* continued its streak of glorifying Eurocentric beauty standards by significantly favoring models with sleek, straight hair (93.7% of the black women depicted) over those with curly/kinky hair (only 6.3% of models).

Body Type

Serving a similar purpose as the two variables aforementioned, the category examining the body type of the black women depicted in *Ebony* and *Vogue* ads allows for a comparison between the two magazines and offers valuable insight regarding what sorts of black women tended to receive representation. Overwhelmingly, in both magazines, the majority of black models tended to be extremely thin (72.1% of black women in *Ebony* and 100% of black women in *Vogue*.) However, as the data (and one of the ads included below) reveals, the former magazine attempted to offer some representation for women with larger body statures. Interestingly, these women tended to have similar body types- most of them were fuller figured in terms of the size of their arms and legs, yet the models depicted almost always had relatively flat stomachs. This pattern evokes an interesting question regarding perhaps what is deemed “acceptable” fat and what is not.

Gender Portrayals of Women in Ebony and Vogue

Analysis of the advertisements sampled from both magazines yielded interesting findings consistent with many of the results previously obtained by other researchers. Similar to Goffman, Kang, and Lindner's discoveries, the majority of ads analyzed in both *Ebony* and *Vogue* were still found to overwhelmingly portray women (both black and white) stereotypically. More than 80% of ads sampled were coded as "yes" to at least one of the categories analyzing gender portrayals- feminine touch, ritualized subordination, licensed withdrawal, body display, movement, location, and objectification. While modern ads, in general, were less likely- than those Goffman encountered, for instance- to portray women in overtly subjugated positions, depictions of female models still tended to reinforce the overall superiority of men and the pervasiveness of the patriarchy.

For instance, as discussed earlier in the paper, many women were often shown caressing their faces, bodies, and/or the faces/bodies of other persons (typically children) in the ads. Even when women were depicted gripping objects, they rarely appeared to be seriously manipulating said objects, and were almost always portrayed in a way that exuded licensed withdrawal.

Women were also typically portrayed as being more passive than their male counterparts, often depicted as the "softer" gender- more friendly and more hospitable. Whether they were advertising hair care products, skin care products, food items, or even home appliances, models in both *Ebony* and *Vogue* were consistently pictured with wide smiles and inviting grins (with the exception of certain ads in *Vogue* where the aesthetic required models to be overtly serious). While at first glance this trend may not appear noteworthy, there are important societal implications of such portrayals. Perhaps most importantly, these depictions possess the potential to create and sustain expectations that suggest that women (disproportionately to men) ought to go about their

daily lives with a never-ending concern for the ways in which their actions and emotions impact others. By encouraging women to smile at all times, in all situations (often with little attention given to the personal preferences of the women themselves), magazine ads can play a role in the continuation of the subjugation of women.

Take for instance, what could potentially occur in a workplace when such gender expectations are internalized. Unlike men, who are very rarely criticized for the frequency with which they smile and appear welcoming to their co-workers, a woman's character often comes under attack when she fails to perform the duties outlined above. When a woman, for example, does not make it a point to appear "approachable"- that is, to smile often and take the emotions of others into consideration at all times- she risks being branded as "standoffish," "cold," or "arrogant." As such, constant depictions of women in ads where licensed withdrawal is prevalent run the risk of further subjugating women to have to perform exorbitant amounts of emotional labor not only for themselves, but for those around them. Consequently, women find themselves subject to a greater number of societal restraints than their male counterparts, even when both occupy the same position.

In the ads sampled, women were also more likely to be stereotypically placed in situations where they assumed the responsibility of caring for children, thus feeding into the expectation that women are naturally or biologically more domestic than men. Very few ads in either *Ebony* or *Vogue* portrayed men and children alone in an image; however, nearly every time a child was present, a woman too was in the scene. Whether she was directly involved with the child or simply watching from a distance, the magazines reinforced gender norms supporting the notion that it is a woman's obligation to take care of the family, thus correlating a woman's worth with her ability to be an effective mother/caretaker. Whereas there is a consensus within society that the value of

a man is not solely based on whether or not he wishes to be a father, women are typically not afforded the same luxury. Though it is certainly more common today than in years past for a woman to decide not to marry and/or have children, there still remains a certain stigma surrounding such a decision. The idea that a woman's purpose is inexorably linked to her ability to care for others is yet another means through which society limits the autonomy and agency of women.

Furthermore, in both magazines, the overwhelming majority of models were women who could easily be described as being "conventionally beautiful." Regardless of whether they were white or black, almost all the models in *Ebony* and *Vogue* were slender and possessed physical features that would generally be considered visually appealing to many individuals, and these features were consistently highlighted even when it was not entirely necessary for the success of the ad. Generally, when men were included in ads, it was usually evident that their presence in the scene was for a specific purpose; women, on the other hand, were more likely to be portrayed in scenes where their presence did not appear to be absolutely vital. Women's bodies were often exploited as a means through which to grasp the audience's attention. Frequently, such exposure had little connection to the products being featured; for instance, in one ad, it was unnecessary for the model to be scantily clothed in order to promote Louis Vuitton purses. However, modern advertisers continue to reinforce the idea that the visual attractiveness of models are directly correlated to the mass appeal of their products. This association feeds into the heightened objectification of women, reducing them to units desired only for their bodies.

Differences in the Dominant Beauty Ideals

Not surprisingly, in the ads sampled from both magazines, there were a greater number of black women featured in *Ebony* than in *Vogue*. Due in large part to the fact that the former magazine, from its inception, was geared towards African Americans (while the latter was not), it

is to be expected that *Ebony* would attempt to be more deliberate in selecting black models than their counterparts at *Vogue*. However, the sheer disparity in regards to the number of black women included in the latter magazine was surprising nonetheless. Of a total of 280 ads sampled from issues from 2004-2007, only five of them portrayed black women). In addition to the sheer inequality between both magazines in the number of black women included in ads, *Ebony* had an increased propensity to include a more diverse array of black models than did *Vogue*. Of the extremely small sample of black women in the latter magazine, four out of five of the black women pictured were light skinned. In one ad, Halle Berry, a popular African-American celebrity, was even portrayed as being lighter than she really is. Although the change in skin color is not incredibly dramatic in the sense that Berry becomes unrecognizable, it is important to consider how through this decision, *Vogue* reinforces the linkage between white (or lighter skin in general) and added beauty.

This Eurocentric beauty standard is also reiterated in a Lancôme ad, which features both a white and black woman. While there is evidently a difference in the skin tone of both women, the black woman is not exceptionally dark; in fact, she only appears to be just dark enough for audiences to acknowledge the intent of the ad- that the makeup company produces foundation in multiple shades. However, aside from the difference in skin tone, both women appear to share much in common in regards to their facial features, and the black woman seems to adhere otherwise to prevailing societal norms regarding what it means to be beautiful. Many of her facial features appear quite European- slender nose, sleek, straight hair- and as such, she seems to more readily fit in with the overall aesthetic of the magazine than, for instance, another dark-skinned black woman photographed does.

Ebony, on the other hand, included black women in their ads who were more diverse in terms of skin color, hair texture, and body type (with an important caveat.) In terms of skin color, *Ebony* made a concerted effort to feature black models whose skin complexion ranged from light to dark; there did not appear to be a specific skin tone that was favored over the other. There were also models who were pictured wearing their hair in its natural state as well as models who had their hair straightened. Unlike *Vogue*, *Ebony* also featured some fuller figured models in their ads. However, as mentioned above, there was a notable caveat. Generally, a majority of the models in *Ebony* still tended to be exceptionally slender regardless of the product being promoted. Whether the models were advertising clothes, shoes, or even body lotion, the women depicted were often quite thin; however, there were a few exceptions. While it is commendable that the magazine attempted to represent all body types, it is important to consider the kinds of ads in which these women were featured. The inclusion of bigger women in ads appeared to be deliberate- they were not featured in a wide array of ads for various products; rather, when they were depicted, such models were usually defined explicitly as “plus-size” models and typically promoted products exclusively intended for bigger women. The inclusion of these models and their strategic placement in a particular “genre” of ads helped to define fuller-figured models as necessarily “different” from other (slender) women.

As such, albeit discreetly, *Ebony*, like *Vogue*, also contributed to the perpetuation of Eurocentric beauty standards. The body type of models was not the only avenue through which such perpetuation took place within the magazine. Interestingly, in spite of the fact that *Ebony*'s primary goal has often been expressed as being committed to uplifting and affirming black identities, the content of certain ads- one type in particular- can be said to serve a contrary purpose. Among the issues sampled for inclusion within this study, a significant number of ads were geared

towards marketing makeup, clothes, and other personal hygiene products. However, overwhelmingly, the type of ads that appeared most frequently in *Ebony* were ads for hair products- and almost always, hair relaxers. A relaxer, typically a lotion or cream, is used often by persons with tightly curled hair (which many blacks have) to chemically “relax” their hair, making it straight and more easy to manipulate. While, as mentioned above, there were some models in *Ebony* photographed with their hair in its natural state, the sheer volume of ads promoting hair relaxers- in addition to the limited way in which fuller figured women were included in ads- prompts some questions regarding the extent to which *Ebony* succeeds affirming all black identities and black features/characteristics.

Discussion/Conclusion

In large part, this study’s findings support those previously obtained by researchers who examined the differences between the ways in which men and women are portrayed in ads. Near the beginning of this paper, four hypotheses were presented (listed below), and upon data collection and analysis, support was found for each:

1. When both men and women are featured in an advertisement, men will be portrayed as wielding more power than women.
2. Women will generally be depicted in a highly sexualized manner in both *Ebony* and *Vogue*, and this will be the case for both black and white women.
3. Because of *Ebony*’s identity as an African-American magazine, it will feature a greater number of black women in its advertisements than *Vogue*.
4. Black models featured in *Vogue* will be greatly outnumbered by white models, and most of the black models featured will adhere to Eurocentric beauty standards.

As Goffman described in his book, *Gender Advertisements*, the majority of ads analyzed were also found to reinforce stereotypical gender roles and depict women in a manner that characterized them as inferior to men (Goffman 18). Though this project was not specifically focused on comparing the ways men were depicted in *Ebony* and *Vogue* to the ways women were depicted in these same magazines, it examined the illustrations of women (both white and black) to ascertain whether the types of stereotypical depictions discussed in Goffman's book and Lindner's article, *Images of Women in General Interest and Fashion Magazine Advertisements*, held true. As evidenced by the results described in the previous section, the majority of coding categories created by these researchers are still highly relevant today, hereby pointing to the limited ways in which gender roles have actually changed over the past two to three decades. For one, women are still generally expected to be far more docile than men; in addition, they are both overtly and covertly coerced into adopting a mentality that correlates their worth as individuals to their status as mothers and/or caretakers (Goffman 54).

The degree to which women's bodies were exposed in ads was also highly pertinent to the ads included in both *Ebony* and *Vogue*, as excessive body display tended to correlate with the increased objectification of women. As Kang discovered, over time, two of Goffman's coding categories (*relative size* and *function ranking*) had become less important in terms of the overall stereotyping of women in advertisements. Instead, a significant number of ads now opted for the hypersexualization of women, presenting them as objects that exist solely for the purpose of male gratification (Kang 980). Although women today were more likely to be depicted in settings that suggest an increased degree of agency than in the past (ex: by being portrayed in the office), they were typically dressed and/or positioned in a manner that diminished their authority. Women, even when they appeared in the same settings as men, were less likely to be taken seriously in these

environments. They often seemed as though they were “role-playing,” in the same way children would (Goffman 21).

As very little has changed in terms of the pervasiveness of patriarchal beliefs within society, it is not surprising that magazine advertisements today still generally perpetuate the same notion of male superiority Goffman and Kang discovered in their individual studies near the end of the 20th century. While it has become somewhat taboo to explicitly describe women as inferior to men, many of the advertisements examined still disseminated such beliefs, though perhaps more covertly than may have been done in the past. Both *Ebony* and *Vogue* stereotypically depicted women in their ads, and across most coding categories, there did not appear to be a significant difference between magazines in regards to gender stereotyping.

Ebony, as expected, did however feature a greater number of black women in their advertisements than did *Vogue*. While almost every ad that included female models in the former magazine depicted at least one black woman, only five black women in total were included in all ads sampled from the latter magazine. The black women in *Ebony* also tended to be more diverse in terms of skin tone, hair texture, and body type. In accordance with prevalent Eurocentric beauty standards (which tend to equate whiteness with beauty), there were still slightly more black women in *Ebony* of a lighter skin complexion. However, the magazine made it a point to also include those of more medium as well as dark skin tones. Likewise, while still slightly favoring women with straight hair, *Ebony* still strove to include black models wearing their hair in its natural state. On the other hand, *Vogue*- which was far less likely to include black models in their magazine in general- also tended to depict only those black women who exhibited certain features (ex: slender body frame, straight hair, and light skin.) Once again, this pattern is rather predictable, considering

the magazine caters to a predominantly white audience in a society where such European features are glorified.

Limitations

This study, due to the time constraint under which it was conducted, was only able to examine ads sampled from *Ebony* and *Vogue* issues from a period of four years (2004-2007). Due to this limited sample size (made even smaller since not every single ad from the issues sampled were coded), it is difficult to definitively generalize to both magazines based solely on a handful of advertisements. Additionally, this project, though it took into consideration the differences between the ways men and women were portrayed in both magazines, heavily focused on the ads which depicted solely women (or at least included one woman). In order to obtain a more conclusively investigate differences between the portrayals of the two groups, it would be necessary to also examine a number of ads which depict solely men.

Areas for Further Research

In the future, it may be useful to expand this study by increasing the sample size of ads. This could be done in various ways- for instance, the study could sample from issues spanning over the course of a wider range of years. Not only would this allow for more in-depth analysis, it would help account for shifts linked to particular years and/or time periods. For instance, with the election of President Obama in 2008 and the frequency with which the Former First Lady, Michelle Obama, was featured in stories in a wide array of magazines since, it is possible that her identity as a black woman had some impact on the frequency with which black women were included in magazine ads. Especially because the *Vogue* sample analyzed for this study only included a total of 5 black women, another benefit to increasing the sample size would involve being able to

ascertain whether this pattern is a typical feature of the magazine itself or perhaps a trend only relevant to the handful of years examined.

In respect to assessing the influence of the specific year in which the magazine ads were printed, an additional avenue for future research would be to introduce another variable to this study- one which accounts for the publication year of issues. Similar to the way in which Lindner conducted her research in “Images of Women in General Interest and Fashion Magazine Advertisements from 1955 to 2002,” this would allow for an examination of any changes that have taken place over time. Such an analysis would thus help answer questions regarding whether the stereotypical depictions of black women in either *Ebony* or *Vogue* have shifted over the years, and whether such stereotyping has generally increased or decreased.

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