

Respectable Women: Exploring the Influence of the Jezebel Stereotype on Black Women's Sexual Well-Being

by

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## **Dedication**

To my late grandmother, Marjorie Wilson Chambers, my first educator.

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## Abstract

The Jezebel stereotype characterizes Black women as promiscuous, seductive, and sexually insatiable. Evidence indicates that Black women's *endorsement* of the Jezebel stereotype has detrimental consequences for their sexual health and relationships. However, simply being *aware* that the Jezebel stereotype exists and that others may judge Black women's behavior based on the stereotype may be sufficient to impact their sexual attitudes and behavior. My dissertation explores how Black women's awareness of the Jezebel stereotype is associated with poorer sexual well-being.

Study 1 used structural equation modeling to test associations between Jezebel metastereotype awareness (awareness that others hold the Jezebel stereotype) and sexual monitoring, agency, inhibition, and risk. I also examined the moderating role of racial centrality in these relations. Young Black women ( $N= 575$ ) completed measures of Jezebel metastereotype awareness, sexual monitoring, sexual assertiveness, sexual self-efficacy, sexual self-consciousness, sexual guilt and shame, drug and alcohol use, and condom use. Women who reported higher levels of Jezebel metastereotype awareness engaged in more sexual monitoring, which in turn was associated with less sexual agency, more inhibition, and more risk. Racial centrality was not a significant moderator. These findings confirm that Black women's awareness of the Jezebel stereotype negatively influences their sexual well-being.

Study 2 used structural equation modeling to test associations among enjoyment of sexualization, body surveillance, body shame, and sexual agency. I also examined the moderating role of Jezebel metastereotype awareness in the relations between enjoyment of

sexualization, body surveillance, body shame, and sexual agency. Young Black women ( $N= 569$ ) completed measures of enjoyment of sexualization, Jezebel metastereotype awareness, body surveillance, body shame, sexual assertiveness, and sexual self-efficacy. As hypothesized, enjoyment of sexualization was *indirectly* associated with *less* sexual agency via body shame. However, it was *directly* associated with *more* sexual agency. Jezebel metastereotype awareness was not a significant moderator, suggesting that Black women's enjoyment of sexualization did not depend on their awareness of negative stereotypes of their sexuality. The findings indicate that enjoyment of sexualization may have both positive and negative consequences for Black women's sexual agency, regardless of their awareness of the Jezebel stereotype.

In Study 3, I drew on stereotype threat theory to test how Black women's sexual attitudes and behavior are affected when the Jezebel stereotype is made salient. Black and White women ( $N= 95$ ) were randomly assigned to complete one of two health questionnaires. In the threat condition, participants responded to questions assessing their sexual history, sexual health, and sexual behavior. In the control condition, the questions pertained to participants' general hygiene habits. Outcome variables were assessed using a health product selection task, responses to a hypothetical vignette, and survey measures of sexual attitudes and behavior. When the sexuality threat was made salient, Black (but not White) participants were less likely to report that they would have sexual intercourse in the vignette than when the threat was not salient. There were no differences in the number of sex-related health products selected by participants or in their sexual attitudes. These findings expand stereotype threat theory by examining a gendered racial stereotype within a non-academic domain and in relation to non-performance-related outcomes.

Together, findings generally highlight Black women's awareness of the Jezebel stereotype as negatively impacting their sexual attitudes and behaviors. Future research should

account for Black women's unique, racialized experiences when examining sexual well-being and self-sexualization.

## Chapter 1

### Introduction

*Growing up I kept hearing how virginity was this sacred thing that should be kept and guarded. It was constantly implied that my virginity belonged to the world—not to me. I owed it to God, my family, my community. I was to be judged by others based on how I touched my own body, how I felt about being touched by others and by when I chose to explore the blurred lines of adolescence. I was to look closely at the girls around me who had babies and had—at one time or another—contracted diseases and remember that those were the consequences when girls had sex... No one ever told me that my body belonged to me and that I could do with it what I pleased. And so within the act of feeling liberated and stirred after my first few sexual encounters, I also felt dirty, disrespectful, deceitful and disappointing. No one tells young girls to do what they want with their bodies because they know that at some point young girls are going to want to have sex. And God forbid a girl should open her legs and explore her sexuality.*

In a personal essay reflecting on her first sexual experience as a 15-year-old Black girl, writer Ashley Simpo (2015) articulates the constraints that young Black girls and women must navigate as they explore what it means to be a sexual being. Her awareness of how others might judge her behavior significantly shaped her early sexual encounters, inhibiting her feelings of sexual agency and sexual freedom. The stigma and shame she describes is characteristic of many women's sexual experiences, regardless of racial background. Black women's sexuality, specifically, is suppressed by several forces— such as religious, familial, and societal expectations— that limit expressions of sexual agency in response to myths of Black women as hypersexual and sexually immoral. My dissertation aims to examine how awareness of these myths, known as the Jezebel stereotype, impacts the sexual well-being of Black women.

### **The Jezebel Stereotype**

Patricia Hill Collins (2000) outlined four “controlling images” of Black women in her seminal work, *Black Feminist Thought*: the domestic Mammy, the hypersexual Jezebel, the emasculating Matriarch/Sapphire, and the fraudulent Welfare Mother. Collins argues that each of these stereotypical images is employed to justify the multiple systems of oppression that differentially impact Black women. The historical image of the Jezebel— described as light-skinned, promiscuous, seductive, manipulative, and possessing an insatiable sex drive— was used as justification for the pervasive sexual assault of enslaved Black women by White men (West, 2008).

Though rooted in slavery, the Jezebel stereotype continued to have economic, social, and political consequences for Black women long after emancipation. For example, historian Hannah Rosen (2009) documents the sexual violence that Black women endured during Reconstruction. She describes how, during the Memphis Riot in 1866, seven White men arrived at the home shared by Frances Thompson, an older Black woman, and Lucy Smith, a teenage Black girl. The group of men, which included two police officers, demanded that the women prepare them dinner and later requested “some woman to sleep with.” After Thompson informed them that they “were not that sort of women,” the men violently sexually assaulted both Thompson and Smith. Both women’s testimonies at a congressional investigation were eventually dismissed, with a local newspaper asserting that Smith “did not possess the virtue needed for a woman to protest rape” (p. 236). As historian E. Frances White (2001) elaborates:

Virtually no legal protection was provided for women portrayed as loose and licentious. Under such conditions, Black women— promiscuous by definition— found it nearly impossible to convince the legal establishment that men of any



race should be prosecuted for sexually assaulting them. *The rape of Black women was simply no crime at all* [emphasis added]. (p. 34)

Black women were also exposed to this vulnerability to sexual assault while working as domestic workers in the homes of White families during the Civil Rights Movement (McGuire, 2011), and this threat of sexual violence continues for Black domestic workers today (Nilliasca, 2010).

In addition, recent qualitative research suggests that notions of Black women as hypersexual may place them at greater risk for sexual harassment and assault (Buchanan & Ormerod, 2002), and researchers theorize that Black female victims of sexual assault who internalize the Jezebel stereotype may engage in increased victim-blaming (West, 1995). Quantitative research also supports the enduring nature of these notions (Donovan, 2007). Willis (1992) varied the race of a rape victim in a hypothetical vignette. When the victim was a Black woman, participants rated the rape as being more acceptable. In another study using a hypothetical rape vignette where the race of the perpetrator and victim were varied, participants assigned less blame to the perpetrator and more blame to the victim when the perpetrator was White and when the victim was Black (George & Martínez, 2002). In addition, White participants primed with the “promiscuous Black female” stereotype of Black women through rap music showed less empathy towards a Black pregnant woman-in-need and were more likely to make attributions about her sexual history as promiscuous than for a White pregnant woman-in-need (Johnson, Bushman, & Dovidio, 2008). Clearly, the myth of the Jezebel is one Black women must confront, as it persists in shaping Americans’ contemporary perceptions of Black women’s sexuality.

Theoretical analyses also suggest that Black women's *own* endorsement of the Jezebel stereotype has profound implications for their mental and physical health and interpersonal relationships. For example, it is argued that women who internalize the Jezebel stereotype may begin to view their sexuality as a primary source of self-esteem (West, 1995). Indeed, evidence indicates that endorsement of the Jezebel stereotype is linked to risky sexual behaviors in Black women and girls (Davis & Tucker-Brown, 2013; Hall & Witherspoon, 2015; Peterson, Wingood, DiClemente, Harrington, & Davies, 2007; Townsend, Thomas, Neilands, & Jackson, 2010). Endorsement of the Jezebel stereotype by Black women and men also contributes to negative interpersonal interactions between Black women and men and lower levels of relationship satisfaction (Fisher & Coleman, 2017; Gillum, 2002; Gillum, 2007). Together, these findings provide strong evidence for the potential negative influences of endorsement of the Jezebel stereotype on Black women's physical and mental well-being. Additionally, in a sample of younger and older Black women, young Black women reported higher levels of endorsement of the Jezebel stereotype than older Black women (55 and older) (Brown, White-Johnson, & Griffin-Fennell, 2013), indicating that young Black women may be particularly vulnerable to the negative influence of Jezebel stereotype endorsement.

However, I argue that Black women do not have to internalize these stereotypes for them to be damaging. Indeed, level of stereotype endorsement is often quite low among Black women in many studies (e.g., Brown, White-Johnson, & Griffin-Fennell, 2013; Jerald, Ward, Moss, Thomas, & Fletcher 2017; Townsend, Thomas, & Jackson, 2010). Simply being aware that stereotypes about Black women exist and that others may consequently judge their behavior against them may be sufficient to generate negative outcomes. Since Collins theorized about the cultural image of the Jezebel, however, relatively little work has been done to empirically test its

impact in the lives of Black women. Accordingly, my dissertation endeavors to systematically investigate the consequences of awareness of the Jezebel stereotype for Black women's sexual attitudes and behaviors.

### **Theoretical Rationale**

**Black Feminist Thought.** Black feminist scholars first began to critically analyze the ways in which Black women's sexuality has been historically tied to stigma in U.S. culture through an examination of the historical image of the Jezebel (Collins, 2000; West, 2008). A principal tenet of Black feminist thought is an emphasis on intersecting systems of oppression, including gender, race, and social class as constructing distinctive experiences and perspectives for Black women (Cole, 2009; Collins, 2000; Crenshaw, 1989). Instead of viewing these identities as additive, intersectionality considers the interdependent and mutually constitutive nature of these social identities as essential to fully understanding the meaning they have in the lives of women (Cole, 2009). These systems of oppression create unique social locations for Black women, often on the margins of society, from which they experience the world (Collins, 2000). Black feminist thought centers the unique viewpoints and lived experiences of Black women with the goal of empowering them and creating avenues for social resistance (Collins, 2000).

Hegemonic femininity dictates that all women perceived to be sexually permissive, regardless of cultural background, are subject to stigma when norms of sexual fidelity and sexual conservatism are violated (Collins, 2005). However, there also exist specific racialized myths about different groups of women, including Asian women as submissive (Pyke & Johnson, 2003) and Latinas as especially sexually aggressive (Guzmán & Valdivia, 2004). Specific negative stereotypes related to sexual deviance are often associated with Black women (Donovan &

Williams, 2002). Group-based stereotypes have thus emerged regarding the sexuality of Black women and other women of color; in contrast, judgment of White women's sexual behavior reflects negatively only on themselves as individuals. Furthermore, juxtapositions of Black women's sexuality with mainstream gender norms that uphold White women as models of self-control, purity, and modesty aid in solidifying Black women's positions on the margins of society (Collins, 2000). Indeed, maintenance of social constructions of Black female sexuality are dependent on the reinforcement of longstanding racist and sexist myths that Black women lack the capacity to be sexually innocent (Collins, 2000; hooks, 1981). It is from these myths that Black women may come to understand the value of their sexuality within the dominant culture (Stephens & Few, 2007). Thus, although displays of sexuality are stigmatized for all women, Black women experience unique consequences as the targets of negative, sexual stereotypes specific to the intersection of their racial and gender identities.

**Stereotype Threat Theory and Metastereotyping.** Stereotype threat theory provides another framework through which to examine potential effects of dominant narratives about Black women's sexuality in the lives of Black women. Steele and Aronson (1995) originally developed stereotype threat theory to help explain deficits in African American students' academic performance. Stereotype threat is "the social-psychological threat that arises when one is in a situation or doing something for which a negative stereotype about one's group applies. This predicament threatens one with being negatively stereotyped, with being judged or treated stereotypically, or with the prospect of conforming to the stereotype... it is a situational threat—a threat in the air—that, in general form, can affect the members of any group about whom a negative stereotype exists" (Steele, 1997, p. 614). When a person is faced with a negative stereotype about his or her group, stereotype threat theory posits that people act in ways to

disconfirm the stereotype. To illustrate this mechanism, Steele (2011) often uses the example of Brent Staples, a Black male writer for the *New York Times*, who began whistling Vivaldi as he walked through his neighborhood in an effort to counter the stereotype of Black men as violent. Paradoxically, stereotype threat theory explains that fear of validating the negative stereotype impairs cognitive functioning and ultimately results in confirmation of the stereotype through poor task performance (Steele, 1997). It is not necessary, however, for the person to endorse or believe the stereotype in order for threat to be enacted.

In order for stereotype threat to occur, a target must first be aware that the stereotype exists. Metastereotypes refer to an individual's beliefs about the stereotypes out-groups hold of the individual's in-group (Vorauer, Main, & O'Connell, 1998). Endorsing metastereotypes or being aware that others hold negative stereotypes of one's group, thus, is a necessary precursor to experiencing stereotype threat. In order for threat to be induced, however, a person must not only be aware of the stereotype, but the stereotype must also be made salient through an environmental or external cue.

An impressive program of research validates the framework laid out by stereotype threat theory [for a comprehensive review, see Wheeler and Petty (2001) and Smith (2004)]. Support for stereotype threat has been demonstrated with a variety of stereotypes (e.g., those associated with race, gender, class, and age), with a wide range of tasks (e.g., verbal tasks, memory tests, performance tests), and with participants at a number of developmental stages (e.g., elementary school students, middle school students, high school students, college students).

Though research has yet to examine the Jezebel stereotype as eliciting a form of stereotype threat, some past research suggests that Black women may act in ways consistent with stereotype threat theory in situations in which stereotypes about their sexuality are made salient.

For example, some Black women are hesitant to report instances of sexual harassment, fearing that it will bring unwarranted attention to themselves in relation to dominant stereotypes of Black women as promiscuous (Kalof, Eby, Matheson, & Kroska, 2001). This fear may also exist for Black female sexual assault victims. Because the Jezebel stereotype also functions to justify rape myths, Black women who are victims of sexual assault and internalize the Jezebel stereotype may engage in increased victim-blaming (Donovan & Williams, 2002). In addition, qualitative analyses indicated that Black women are highly critical of hypersexualized depictions of Black women in media. Though they reported feeling little personal connection to these media images, Black women expressed concern for how they might reflect on Black women as a group (Coleman, Butler, Long, & Fisher, 2016). Taken together, these studies provide a basis from which to examine the Jezebel stereotype as presenting stereotype threat for Black women.

My proposed research on Jezebel stereotype threat represents a departure from performance-based outcomes traditionally examined in the stereotype threat literature. In addition, past studies have examined the effects of stereotype threat related to race and gender stereotypes, but none have investigated the stereotype threat related to the intersection of these two identities for Black women. I intend to examine behavioral outcomes related to Black women's display of sexual agency. Following this behavioral framework for stereotype threat theory, I argue that when the Jezebel stereotype is made salient and a Black woman fears that she will confirm this negative stereotype about her group, she will engage in behaviors that refute the stereotype. For example, if Black women are aware of the stereotypes of themselves as sexually aggressive, they may display less sexual assertiveness and less sexual self-efficacy. Thus, my dissertation proposes to fill these gaps in the literature by examining the Jezebel stereotype as

providing the basis of one form of stereotype threat and its subsequent consequences for Black women's sexual well-being, utilizing a three-study design.

### **The Current Studies**

Black women interact and engage daily in a world where others may hold negative stereotypes of their sexuality. Although past research has outlined the negative consequences of *endorsing* the Jezebel stereotype, it is less clear how awareness that others hold this stereotype affects Black women's sexual well-being. The following three studies take advantage of survey and experimental methods to examine this overarching question: When Black women are aware that others hold negative beliefs about their sexuality as hypersexual and promiscuous, what are the consequences for their sexual attitudes, behavior, and experiences of sexualization? Study 1 tests a structural equation model exploring the relations between Jezebel stereotype awareness, sexual monitoring, sexual inhibition, sexual risk, and sexual agency. I also examine how racial identity may moderate the relations among Jezebel stereotype awareness and the outcome variables. Study 2 examines how awareness of the Jezebel stereotype influences Black women's experiences of sexualization and sexual agency by testing a structural equation model investigating associations among enjoyment of sexualization, body surveillance, body shame, and sexual agency. Because I expect the degree to which Black women report enjoying sexualized attention will depend on their level of awareness of the Jezebel stereotype, the moderating role of Jezebel stereotype awareness is examined. Finally, Study 3 extends Study 1 by testing an inference about causality and examining *exposure* to the Jezebel stereotype as opposed to awareness. Here, I use an experimental design to test how Black women's sexual attitudes and behavior are affected when they are under Jezebel stereotype-related threat. Together, the three studies aim to elucidate how awareness of and exposure to the Jezebel

stereotype may diminish Black women's sexual well-being and shape their experiences of sexualization.



## Chapter 2

### **Study 1: The Association between Awareness of the Jezebel Stereotype and Black Women's Sexual Well-Being**

Much of the cultural, public health, and political discourse surrounding Black women's sexuality has focused solely on sexual risk. Certainly, Black women in the United States experience significant sexual health disparities. For example, Black women are more likely than are White women to contract several types of STIs and account for a disproportionate percentage of HIV diagnoses among women (CDC, 2014). Although sexual risk behaviors have important implications for physical, mental, and sexual health, scholars have recently called for a more comprehensive and sex-positive examination of sexual self-concept among Black women (e.g., Fletcher et al., 2015; Harden, 2014; Hargons et al., 2018). Other dimensions of sexual well-being, such as sexual agency and sexual inhibition, impact women's sexual functioning, as well as their ability to avoid engaging in risky sexual behaviors (Fetterolf & Sanchez, 2015).

Black women also must negotiate gendered racial stereotypes of their sexuality. Specifically, the Jezebel stereotype characterizes Black women as sexually immoral, promiscuous, and manipulative. Though some past research indicates that Black women's endorsement of the Jezebel stereotype is detrimental for their sexual well-being (e.g., Townsend, Thomas, Neilands, & Jackson, 2010), no research has examined how Black women's awareness of the stereotype might similarly negatively influence sexual attitudes and behavior. The purpose of Study 1 was to examine how awareness of the Jezebel stereotype relates to several dimensions

of Black women's sexual well-being, including sexual agency, sexual inhibition, and sexual risk, also taking into account the moderating role of racial identity.

### **Sexual Well-Being**

Sexual well-being refers to the cognitive and affective appraisal of one's sexuality (Byers & Rehman, 2014). The construct of sexual well-being closely aligns with the World Health Organization's definition of sexual health—"it is not merely the absence of disease, dysfunction or infirmity," but also concerns "the possibility of having pleasurable and safe sexual experiences, free of coercion, discrimination and violence" (WHO, 2006, p. 5). Individuals with a more positive sense of their sexual self and sexual experiences are more likely to report more favorable romantic relationship outcomes (Christopher & Sprecher, 2000; Karney & Bradbury, 1995), as well as higher life satisfaction and general psychological well-being (Apt, Hurlbert, Pierce, & White, 1996; Davison, Bell, LaChina, Holden, & Davis, 2009). Sexual well-being is a multidimensional construct, comprised of aspects of an individual's sexual identity, sexual relationships, and sexual functioning (Byers & Rehman, 2014). In the present study, I examine three dimensions of sexual well-being: sexual agency, sexual inhibition, and sexual risk-taking.

First, sexual agency refers to the ability to identify, negotiate, communicate, and act on one's sexual needs and desires (Fetterolf & Sanchez, 2015; Deutsch, Hoffman, & Wilcox, 2014). Sexual agency is an important predictor of sexual functioning and sexual satisfaction for both men and women (see Sanchez, Fetterolf, & Rudman, 2012 for review). However, qualitative interviews with Black women reveal a general lack of sexual agency in their sexual decision-making (Bowleg, Lucas, & Tschann, 2004). For example, many Black women reported waiting for their male partners to initiate sex even when they desired sex or using nonverbal cues to communicate their sexual needs instead of voicing them more directly (Bowleg, Lucas, &

Tschann, 2004). Sexual agency is also intimately tied to women's sexual health, particularly their ability to participate in safe sexual practices (Crosby et al., 2006; Wingood, Hunter-Gamble, & DiClemente, 1993). For example, Black women's fear of negotiating condom use with male partners is linked to less condom use in their romantic relationships (Bowleg, Lucas, & Tschann, 2004; Crosby et al., 2006). Thus, exercising sexual agency is instrumental for fulfilling women's sexual needs and desires and for initiating safe sex behavior.

A second dimension of sexual well-being is sexual inhibition, which reflects feelings of self-consciousness or embarrassment regarding sex. In line with traditional sexual scripts that socialize women to value sexual conservatism (Parent & Moradi, 2010), women are more likely to feel self-conscious, embarrassed, and shameful about sex than men (Andersen & Cyranowski, 1994). Specific social institutions, such as religion, are particularly important for understanding Black women's sexual inhibition (Rouse-Arnett, Dilworth, & Stephens, 2006; Moultrie, 2017). African-Americans are one of the most religious subpopulations in the United States (Taylor, Mattis, & Chatters, 1999), and religious teachings associating premarital sex with sin may exacerbate women's feelings of guilt, shame, and self-consciousness about sex (McCree, Wingood, DiClemente, Davies, & Harrington, 2003; Rouse-Arnett, Dilworth, & Stephens, 2006). More research is needed to identify other sociocultural factors shaping Black women's feelings of sexual inhibition.

Third, sexual risk encompasses behaviors that put an individual's sexual health in jeopardy. This includes behaviors that increase the likelihood of contracting a sexually transmitted disease, such as having unprotected oral, vaginal, or anal sexual contact, or using drugs and alcohol before having sex (CDC, 2010). Black women in the United States are more likely to experience a variety of health disparities compared to women of other races and

ethnicities, including those related to sexual health. For example, Black women suffer from higher rates of HIV/AIDS and sexually transmitted diseases, such as chlamydia, gonorrhea, and syphilis (CDC, 2014). Past research finds that both sexual agency and sexual inhibition are linked to women's participation in risky sexual behaviors. For example, less sexual self-efficacy, a dimension of sexual agency, is associated with less intention to use condoms and less actual use of condoms during sex (Wingood & Diclemente, 1998). Thus, Study 1 aims to measure sexual well-being multidimensionally, examining both sexual agency and sexual inhibition in addition to sexual risk as outcome variables.

### **Jezebel Stereotype Endorsement and Sexual Well-Being**

Much of the empirical and theoretical work on the Jezebel stereotype has focused on how endorsement of or agreement with the stereotype relates to sexual risk. For example, Jezebel stereotype endorsement among African American adolescents is related both to beliefs that risky sexual behaviors are less harmful (Townsend, Thomas, Neilands, & Jackson, 2010) and to greater participation in unprotected sex (Hall & Witherspoon, 2015). In addition, in a focus group study, Black college women made explicit connections between maltreatment of enslaved Black women, current portrayals of Black female sexuality in the media, and risky sexual decision-making (Davis & Tucker-Brown, 2013). The mass media, laden with stereotypical portrayals of Black women's sexuality (Ward, Thomas, Day, Rivadeneyra, & Epstein, 2012), has also been identified as a primary contributor to Black students' Jezebel stereotype endorsement (Jerald, Ward, Moss, Thomas, & Fletcher, 2017). Indeed, Black adolescents who perceive more stereotypical portrayals of Black female sexuality in music videos are more likely to have multiple partners, use more drugs and alcohol, and report more negative body attitudes (Peterson, Wingood, DiClemente, Harrington, & Davies, 2007). In another study, exposure to rap music

videos among African American adolescents was associated with a greater likelihood of contracting a sexually transmitted disease, having multiple sexual partners, and using drugs and alcohol at a 12-month follow-up (Wingood et al., 2003). Taken together, this research highlights the negative consequences for Black women's sexual health of internalizing the Jezebel stereotype.

### **Metastereotyping**

Although Jezebel stereotype endorsement is an important predictor of Black women's sexual risk-taking, past studies have reported low levels of stereotype endorsement among Black women (e.g., Brown, White-Johnson, & Griffin-Fennell, 2013; Jerald, Ward, Moss, Thomas, & Fletcher 2017; Townsend et al., 2010). Instead, it may be more meaningful to examine Black women's awareness of group stereotypes. I argue that Black women do not have to internalize the Jezebel stereotype to experience negative sexual well-being. Simply being aware that stereotypes about their sexuality exist and that others may consequently judge their behavior against them may be sufficient to generate adverse outcomes.

We can think of Black women's awareness that others hold negative beliefs about their sexuality as a type of metastereotype. In the current study, I call this awareness Jezebel metastereotype awareness. Vorauer, Main, and O'Connell (1998) introduced the term metastereotype to refer to an individual's beliefs about the stereotypes out-groups hold of their own group. An important tenet of metastereotypes is that they are relational in nature and can change depending on the in-group and out-group under observation. For example, older adults' metastereotypes of younger adults (older adults' beliefs about the stereotypes young people have about older adults) differ from older adults' metastereotypes of middle-aged adults (older adults'

beliefs about the stereotypes middle-aged people have about older adults) (Finkelstein, Ryan, & King, 2013).

Voyles, Finkelstein, and King (2014) note that the concepts of stereotype threat and metastereotyping are easily confused. Stereotype threat (Aronson & Steele, 1995; Steele, 1997) is a situational experience of anxiety associated with the prospect of being judged as a result of one's membership in a group about whom a negative stereotype exists. In many ways, holding metastereotypes can be thought of as an essential precursor to stereotype threat. In order to feel threatened by a stereotype, one must first experience the cognition that an out-group holds a negative stereotype about one's group. Stereotype threat is then induced when a stereotype is made salient through an environmental or external cue. The current study aims to examine the correlational nature of the relation between Jezebel metastereotype awareness and sexual well-being. Because Study 1 uses metastereotyping as its primary theoretical frame, I am not experimentally manipulating exposure to Jezebel stereotype threat.

The extant research on metastereotyping has largely focused on its implications for intergroup relations. We know that people use metastereotypes to guide their interactions with out-groups and that metastereotypes significantly influence people's feelings towards other groups (Vorauer, Main, & O'Connell, 1998; Vorauer, Hunter, Main, & Roy, 2000). For example, in a study examining Japanese people's metastereotypes regarding the way they are viewed by Koreans, the more negatively Japanese participants felt they were stereotyped by Koreans, the more dislike the Japanese expressed towards Koreans (Kim & Oe, 2009).

In addition, many of the previous studies on metastereotypes have examined only dominant group members' concern with being stereotyped by subordinate group members. For example, initial research heavily focused on White Canadians' metastereotypes regarding how

they were viewed by Aboriginal Canadians (Vorauer, Main, & O'Connell, 1998; Vorauer, Hunter, Main, & Roy, 2000). Some subsequent studies have adjusted the focus to study lower status groups, such as older adults (Finkelstein, Ryan, & King, 2013), obese people (Neel, Neufeld, & Neuberg, 2013), Dutch Moroccans (Kamans, Gordijn, Oldenhuis, & Otten, 2009), and incarcerated adolescents (Issmer, Stellmacher, & Gollwitzer, 2013).

However, focusing on the metastereotypes that dominant group members hold of subordinate group members ignores the important role of power. Lammers, Gordijn, and Otten (2008) demonstrated the key role that power status plays in metastereotype activation. Across four experiments, they consistently found that individuals with low power are more likely to use metastereotypes. They reasoned that because those with low power seek to curb potential losses by anticipating threats to their status, “in an intergroup setting in which one is faced with a powerful out-group member who can influence and control one’s outcomes, a good way to predict threats is to try and predict how that powerful out-group member sees one, based on the social groups that one belongs to. That is, one way to reach this goal in such situations is to activate and use metastereotypes” (p. 1230). More research is needed to understand how metastereotypes operate distinctly within marginalized groups. In addition, very few studies have examined metastereotypes in samples with intersectional identities, such as Black women whose attitudes and behavior are characterized by gendered racial stereotypes.

### **Jezebel Metastereotype Awareness and Sexual Well-Being**

No research studies, to my knowledge, have investigated whether Black women’s awareness of the stereotypes that out-groups hold regarding their sexuality has implications for their sexual attitudes and behavior. One existing study on Black women’s general metastereotype awareness indicates significant, negative consequences for their mental and physical health.

Jerald and colleagues (2017) examined links between Black women's metastereotype awareness, mental health, self-care, and substance use for coping. Black women who reported being more aware that others hold negative stereotypes of their group (including the Jezebel and Sapphire stereotypes and the Strong Black Woman ideal) were likely to report more negative mental health symptoms, which, in turn, was associated with lower levels of self-care and high levels of substance use for coping. This research establishes that metastereotype awareness may be damaging for Black women's health.

Research on metastereotypes with other marginalized groups indicate that when metastereotypes are activated, individuals act in stereotype-consistent ways. For example, when the metastereotype that West Germans think East Germans are lazy was activated, East Germans were more likely to endorse a lazier work-related attitude (Oldenhuis, Gordjin, & Otten, 2007). In a sample of incarcerated adolescents and educationally disadvantaged adolescents, Issmer, Stellmacher, and Gollwitzer (2013) demonstrated a positive association between activation of negative metastereotypes and delinquent beliefs and behaviors. Participants' awareness of societal stereotypes of incarcerated youth as incorrigible, undisciplined, and aggressive predicted more negative attitudes towards the law and more aggression. The researchers theorized that the participants perceived their marginalized status to be stable and inescapable; feeling that they had "nothing to lose" may have prompted their stereotype-consistent responses to the outcome measures. Taken together, this research shows how metastereotype activation is related to assimilative behaviors.

However, I argue that the opposite may occur when Black women are made aware of metastereotypes of their sexuality, based on Black feminist theories that predict Black women's negative and avoidant responses to dominant cultural narratives that stigmatize their sexuality. In



her book, *Righteous Discontent: The Women's Movement in the Black Baptist Church, 1880–1920*, Higginbotham (1993) coined the term “politics of respectability” to describe the deeply ingrained tenets within the Black community developed to combat negative stereotypes regarding Black people’s moral character during this time. The politics of respectability are a set of rules outlining how Black people should live in order to gain respect from mainstream society. They are thought to be a middle-class imperative, hierarchically imposed on the poor and working-class with the goal of uplifting the Black race. The politics of respectability would dictate that Black women distance themselves from the Jezebel stereotype as a means of self-preservation and meeting these middle-class ideals. For example, Black women often report receiving the message “to keep their legs closed” from their parents (Lee, 2010), reflecting an expectation to display self-control over their sexual desires. A qualitative analysis among a sample of young African-Caribbean women living in the UK also reveals some Black women’s desire to align themselves with ideals of purity and respectability more often associated with mainstream, White femininity (Weekes, 2002). Similarly, Hine (1995) also proposes that Black women have created a “culture of dissemblance” to conceal and suppress their sexuality in response to stigmatizing cultural narratives about their sexuality. While all women likely receive these messages to some degree, Black women and other women of color are exposed to a specific set of racial socialization messages informed by an awareness of stereotypes of their sexuality. Thus, Black women may be motivated to distance themselves from negative stereotypes as a means of meeting social expectations; this distancing may be reflected in their reporting of less sexual agency and more sexual inhibition, for example.

### **The Mediating Role of Sexual Monitoring**

Sexual monitoring may be an important mediator to examine in the relations between Jezebel metastereotype awareness and sexual well-being. Sexual monitoring refers to a concern with how others evaluate one's sexuality (Snell, Fisher, & Walters, 1993). Very limited past research has examined the construct of sexual monitoring and, more specifically, its relation to sexual well-being. Snell, Fisher, and Miller (1991) found that women who engaged in sexual monitoring reported more caution and concern regarding sexual encounters. More recently, Smolak, Murnen, and Myers (2014) examined sexual monitoring as a part of a study designed to validate a measure of self-sexualizing behaviors. Within a predominately White sample, sexual monitoring was significantly associated with both positive and negative aspects of women's sexual well-being. For example, women who reported engaging in more sexual monitoring were more likely to report greater sexual assertiveness and sexual consciousness (defined as an individual's awareness of internal bodily states related to sexual arousal), suggesting that sexual monitoring may promote women's command of their own sexual needs and preferences. However, higher levels of sexual monitoring were also associated with participating in more self-sexualizing behaviors, placing more importance on looking sexy, more body surveillance, more body shame, and less body appreciation; these findings suggest that sexual monitoring is also linked to attitudes and behaviors that encourage women to regard their bodies and sex appeal in service of others and not of themselves. Taken together, these findings imply that engaging in sexual monitoring may serve to both enhance and diminish aspects of women's sexual agency.

To my knowledge, no past research has examined sexual monitoring with Black women, specifically; however, the construct of sexual monitoring is closely tied to the politics of respectability (Higginbotham, 1993). Indeed, a concern with the public perception of one's sexual attitudes and behavior is central to the social agenda of the politics of respectability.

Public displays of sexual respectability were thought to counter existing stereotypical notions of Black women's promiscuity (Harris-Perry, 2011). Thus, this perspective would predict that among Black women, an increased awareness that others hold the Jezebel stereotype would be associated with more monitoring of one's own sexual attitudes and behavior.

### **The Moderating Role of Racial Identity**

Acknowledging the role of individual differences, I also explore the contribution of racial identity to Black women's stereotype awareness and sexual well-being. Racial identity is conceptualized as both the significance and meaning African Americans attach to their racial group membership (Sellers, Smith, Shelton, Rowley, & Chavous, 1998). In the current study, I focus on racial centrality— one dimension of racial identity— which assesses the extent to which African Americans consider race to be a central part of their self-definition. The little past research on the role of racial identity for sexual well-being among Black women has focused on stereotype endorsement. For example, both younger and older Black women who report feeling good about being African American are less likely to endorse stereotypical notions of African American women's sexuality than those who report lower racial-ethnic esteem (Brown, White-Johnson, & Griffin-Fennell, 2013). Jerald and colleagues (2017) also examined ethnic identity as a buffer for African American college students against the impact of media use on endorsement of traditional gender ideologies and stereotypes about Black women, including stereotypes portraying Black women as promiscuous and hypersexual. For students who felt *less* belonging to their ethnic group, higher levels of media use were consistently associated with more endorsement of traditional gender attitudes, beliefs about women as sexual objects, and endorsement of stereotypes about Black women. For students who felt *more* belonging to their ethnic group, however, only one media variable emerged as a consistent correlate of their gender

beliefs and stereotype endorsement. Taken together, this research suggests that racial centrality may buffer against the negative influence of stereotype endorsement on sexual well-being.

The function of racial centrality for metastereotyping and sexual well-being is less clear. Whereas it may serve as a protective factor similar to its function for stereotype endorsement, it is also possible that Black women who strongly identify with their racial group may be *more* aware of stereotypes of their group and report *higher* levels of metastereotyping, thus exacerbating its negative influence on their sexual well-being. It may be helpful to turn to literature on racial identity and perceived discrimination to make sense of these potential consequences. Indeed, past research highlights the function of racial identity as both a risk factor *and* protective factor in regard to experiences of perceived discrimination and well-being (e.g., Sellers, Caldwell, Schmeelk-Cone, & Zimmerman, 2003). On the one hand, African Americans who consider their racial identity to be fundamental to their identity are more likely to report perceived discrimination (Sellers et al., 2003) and are more likely to interpret ambiguous events as discriminatory (Shelton & Sellers, 2000). At the same time, these individuals may be equipped with more effective coping skills for managing discriminatory experiences (Sellers et al., 2003) and may hold positive racial identity beliefs that may buffer them from the negative impact of perceived discrimination on well-being. Similarly, high racial centrality may both heighten the negative effects of metastereotyping for Black women and provide them with vital knowledge for successfully negotiating with them.

Jerald and colleagues (2017) found support for the former, examining the moderating role of racial centrality in the association between Black women's general metastereotype awareness and self-care behavior. For women whose race was more central to their self-definition, the negative relation between metastereotype awareness and self-care was stronger; that is, high

racial centrality exacerbated this negative association. These findings support past research that has established racial centrality as a risk factor in the relation between perceived discrimination and health. Thus, I investigate whether racial centrality moderates the association between Jezebel metastereotype awareness and sexual well-being and expect it to similarly strengthen negative relations among Jezebel metastereotype awareness and the sexual well-being outcomes.

### **Summary and Purpose of Study 1**

Much of the extant literature on the Jezebel stereotype has focused on how endorsing or internalizing the stereotype influences sexual well-being. This research has tended to focus on only sexual risk, ignoring other dimensions of sexual well-being important for sexual functioning. The present study seeks to address these limitations by investigating the impact of Black women's awareness of negative stereotypes of their sexuality, or their Jezebel metastereotype awareness, on their engagement in sexual monitoring, sexual agency, sexual inhibition, and sexual risk. In addition, Study 1 aims to extend the literature on metastereotyping in several important ways. Past research on metastereotyping has largely focused on dominant groups' metastereotypes and their implications for improving intergroup relations. Alternatively, the current study aims to examine how Black women's awareness of stereotypes about Black sexuality influence their sexual well-being and experiences as a marginalized group.

Thus, Study 1 will test a structural equation model exploring relations between Black women's metastereotypes related to the Jezebel stereotype and their sexual inhibition, sexual risk, and sexual agency (see Figure 2.1). I aim to examine two primary research questions: (1) What are the associations between Jezebel metastereotype awareness, sexual risk, sexual agency, and sexual inhibition? (2) Does sexual monitoring mediate associations between Jezebel metastereotype awareness and the sexual well-being outcomes? (3) Does racial centrality

moderate the relation between Jezebel metastereotype awareness and these outcomes? I propose the following hypotheses:

H1. Jezebel metastereotype awareness will be directly linked to more sexual monitoring, less sexual agency, more sexual inhibition, and more sexual risk.

H2. Sexual monitoring will mediate the associations between Jezebel metastereotype awareness and the sexual well-being outcomes, such that higher levels of Jezebel metastereotype awareness will predict higher levels of sexual monitoring, which in turn, will predict less sexual agency, more sexual inhibition, and more sexual risk.

H3. Racial centrality will exacerbate the impact of Jezebel metastereotype awareness on sexual well-being, such that the direct and indirect associations between Jezebel metastereotype awareness, sexual monitoring, sexual agency, sexual inhibition, and sexual risk will be stronger for women whose racial identity is more central to their self-concept.

## **Method**

### **Participants and Procedure**

Participants were 575 African American women ( $M = 22.21$ ;  $SD = 5.46$ ) who were recruited from two college campuses in the United States. University 1 ( $n = 345$ ) is a large, predominately White public university located in the Midwest. University 2 ( $n = 230$ ) is a small, historically Black public university located in the Southeast. Recruiting from a historically Black university in addition to the predominately White university enabled me to obtain a more demographically diverse sample of Black women, particularly in terms of age and socioeconomic status.

Students at both sites were selected to participate in the study using demographic information provided by each university's Office of the Registrar. The study inclusion criteria

required that participants be a self-identified Black/African-American woman between the ages of 18-30 and currently enrolled. At University 1, the Office of the Registrar sent recruitment emails directly to a random sample of currently enrolled Black/African American students. At University 2, the researchers sent recruitment emails to a random sample of currently enrolled students provided by the Office of the Registrar. The recruitment email invited students to participate in a study that examined the health and well-being of Black women by taking an hour-long, anonymous, online Qualtrics survey. Participants at both sites were compensated with a \$25 VISA gift card. In total, 932 women from University 1 and 2,238 from University 2 were invited to participate in the survey. Enrollment was closed once a cap of approximately 550 students from University 1 and approximately 400 students from University 2 had been reached. The response rate across the two schools was approximately 31%. Because Mplus only includes cases with complete data on the exogenous variables, the sample size for the current study is smaller than the total N of the larger dataset.

Although the majority of the sample identified as Black/African American (81.3%), another 10.7% identified as Bi/Multi-racial, 2.7% as African, 1.9% as West Indian/Caribbean, 1.4% as Afro-Latina (e.g., South or Central American, Dominican, Puerto Rican), and 1.9% as other. The young women sampled came from relatively well-educated backgrounds. On average, 23.2% of their mothers had completed Bachelor's degrees, and another 20.9% had some graduate school experience or had earned a graduate or professional degree. Additionally, 16.5% of their fathers had earned a Bachelor's degree, and 16.8% of their fathers had some graduate school experience or had earned graduate or professional degrees. Inclusion criteria did not require that women have sexual experience in order to participate in the study, and as such, 26.7% of the women indicated that they had never had vaginal intercourse. Participants indicated their sexual

orientation on a scale from 1 = exclusively heterosexual to 5 = exclusively gay/lesbian. Twelve participants identified as exclusively gay/lesbian. Because the study examines efficacy concerning male condom use, these participants were excluded from the study. The majority of the sample identified as exclusively or predominately heterosexual (95.5%). Respondents were also asked to describe their sexual attraction and behavior using a similar rubric, and 92.40% described their sexual attraction as exclusively or predominately heterosexual, and 95.10% of the sample described their sexual experiences as exclusively or predominately heterosexual. In regard to relationship status, almost half of the participants indicated that they were single (49.5%), 40.5% were in a committed sexual relationship, and 8% were casually dating.

## **Measures**

**Jezebel Metastereotype Awareness.** A scale was created for the study to measure the extent to which participants believe that other people endorse the Jezebel stereotype of Black women (see Appendix). To create the measure, I used four items from the 7-item revised Stereotypic Roles of Black Women Scale (Townsend, Thomas, Neilands, & Jackson, 2010). I then drew on theoretical and empirical research examining the stereotype (Brown Givens & Monahan, 2005; Ladson-Billings, 2009; Stephens & Philips, 2003) to create eight additional items. The resulting measure consisted of 12 items reflecting the hypersexual, manipulative, and promiscuous nature of the Jezebel stereotype. The scale began with the following prompt: “Now we’re going to ask you some questions about what society believes about Black women. You may or may not agree with a statement; we only want to know what you believe society thinks. How much do you think people believe that Black women. . .” Sample items include: “always want to have sex” and “use sex to get what they want.” Participants were asked to indicate their level of agreement with the statements on a 5-point scale (1 = not at all; 5 = almost always).



Items were averaged to create a scale score, and the scale was reliable ( $\alpha = .95$ ). Higher scores indicate greater awareness of the Jezebel stereotype. These 12 items were mixed in with other statements about Black women to mask the purpose of the assessment. This measure has been used successfully in a sample of African American women (Jerald, Cole, Ward, & Avery, 2017).

**Sexual Monitoring.** I used the 5-item Sexual Monitoring subscale of the Multidimensional Sexual Self-Concept Questionnaire (MSSCQ; Snell, Fischer, Walters, 1993) to assess participants' tendency to be aware of the public impression their sexuality makes on others. A sample item is, "I'm concerned with how others evaluate my own sexual beliefs and behaviors." Participants recorded their responses on a 5-point scale (1 = not at all characteristic of me; 5 = very characteristic of me), and the items were averaged to create a scale score ( $\alpha = .90$ ); higher scores indicate engagement in more sexual monitoring. Snell (2003) validated the MSSCQ with a multi-ethnic sample (4.8% African American).

**Sexual Agency.** Two indicators were used to examine sexual agency. First, the Hurlbert Index of Sexual Assertiveness (HISA; Hurlbert, 1991) was included as a measure of sexual assertiveness. This measure assesses feelings of assertiveness in the sexual context with a typical partner (short- or long-term). Participants respond on a 5-point scale (0 = never; 4 = all of the time) to indicate their level of agreement with 25 items. A sample item is "I think I am open with my partner about my sexual needs." The items are averaged to create a scale score ( $\alpha = .90$ ), and higher scores indicate more sexual assertiveness. Hurlbert (1991) validated this measure in a nonclinical sample of sexually assertive and sexually nonassertive women, and Fletcher et al. (2015) found an alpha score of .91 in a sample of African American college students.

Second, the Precautions subscale of the Sexual Self-Efficacy scale (SS-ES; Rosenthal, Moore, & Flynn, 1991) examines participants' confidence in their ability to engage in safe sex

precautions (e.g., “Carry condoms around with you “in case”). Participants rated five items on a 5-point scale (1 = very uncertain; 5 = very certain). The items were averaged to create a scale score, and the scale was reliable ( $\alpha = .92$ ). Higher scores reflect participants’ higher level of certainty of being able to engage in safe sex behavior. The scale has been validated in an ethnically mixed sample of college students (13% African American; Rosenthal, Levy, & Earnshaw, 2012), and Fletcher et al. (2014) found an alpha score of .85 in a sample of African American college students.

**Sexual Inhibition.** Sexual inhibition was operationalized with two indicators. First, the 6-item Embarrassment subscale of the Sexual Self-Consciousness Scale (van Lankveld, Geijen, & Sykora, 2008) assesses feelings of self-consciousness that individuals attach to sexual behavior. A sample item is “When I see myself during sex, I am irritatingly aware of myself.” Participants responded on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree, and items were averaged to create a scale score. The scale was reliable ( $\alpha = .91$ ). Higher scores indicated more sexual self-consciousness. To my knowledge, this scale has not yet been validated in a sample of Black women.

Second, the 6-item Guilt and Shame subscale of the Women’s Sexual Working Models Scale (WSWMS; Birnbaum & Reis, 2006) was also used to capture sexual inhibition. Participants responded to each item using a 10-point scale (0 = very uncharacteristic of me; 9 = very characteristic of me). A sample item is, “Sexual activity makes me feel sinful.” Mean scores formed a scale score for each subscale, with higher scores indicating more guilt and shame. The scale was reliable ( $\alpha = .94$ ). Birnbaum and Reis (2006) validated the scale in an ethnically mixed sample of women with a small percentage of African American women (7.7%).

**Sexual Risk.** Two indicators were used to operationalize sexual risk. First, the social expressiveness subscale of the revised 40-item Alcohol Expectancy Questionnaire (George et al., 1995) was used to measure sex-related drug and alcohol use. This subscale addresses use of alcohol as a social lubricant (e.g., “I have sex with people whom I wouldn’t have had sex with if I were sober”). The scale has demonstrated good internal consistency and validity in samples of African American college students (McCarthy, Miller, Smith, & Smith, 2001). Although the scale was originally developed to solely examine how alcohol use influences sexual behavior and attitudes, I modified the items to assess both sex-related marijuana and alcohol use. Participants used the prompt, “Some people drink alcohol or smoke weed to relieve stress. How does drinking or smoking marijuana/weed make YOU feel?” to respond to six items. Participants recorded their responses on a 6-point scale (1 = strongly disagree; 6 = strongly agree). I also added one general item: “It helps me forget about my problems.” The items were averaged to create a scale score ( $\alpha = .94$ ). Higher scores indicate greater use of drugs and alcohol to relieve sex-related stress.

Second, I created a single item to measure participants’ condom use with casual sexual partners which read, “How frequently do you engage in vaginal intercourse with a casual partner without using condoms?” Responses were indicated on a 6-point scale (1 = never; 6 = always). Higher scores indicated less frequent condom use with casual partners, reflecting more sexual risk.

**Racial Identity.** The Racial Centrality subscale of the Multidimensional Inventory of Black Identity Short (MIBI-S; Martin, Wout, Nguyen, Gonzalez, & Sellers, 2010) assesses the extent to which a person considers race a central aspect of their self-concept. A sample item is “Being Black is an important reflection of who I am.” Participants indicated their level of

agreement with four items on a 7-point scale (1 = strongly disagree; 7 = strongly agree). Items were averaged to create a scale score ( $\alpha = .92$ ). Higher scores reflect that participants consider race to be more central to their self-definition.

**Religiosity.** To assess the role of religion and spirituality in the lives of the participants, women were asked to indicate their organizational religious involvement via 3 items that have been used in previous studies (e.g., Fletcher et al., 2015; Stanton, Jerald, Ward & Avery, 2017; Trinh, 2016). Items included: “How religious are you?”, “How often do you attend religious services?”, and “How important is your religious training to your beliefs about sexuality?” Each item was measured on a 5-point scale (0 = never or not at all; 4 = very or very regularly), and a mean score was taken across the items such that higher scores indicated a higher level of religiosity ( $\alpha = .78$ ). On average, participants were somewhat religious ( $M = 3.06$ ;  $SD = 1.06$ ).

### **Data Analysis Plan**

I used structural equation modeling with Mplus (Muthén, & Muthén, 2010) to test the hypothesized direct and indirect associations among Jezebel metastereotype awareness, sexual monitoring, sexual agency, sexual inhibition, and sexual risk, depicted in Figure 2.1. I used a three-step approach to SEM (Kline, 2010; Maslowsky, Jager, & Hemken, 2015), first examining the association of indicators to their specified latent constructs (measurement model), then examining relations between the latent constructs (structural model), and finally examining the structural model with the interaction term between Jezebel metastereotype awareness and racial centrality to test moderation.

I used the item-to-construct balance technique to create three parcels for the indicators for Jezebel metastereotype awareness and sexual monitoring (Little, Cunningham, Shahar, & Widaman, 2002). This method creates factor loadings for each item using a one-factor model,

and items are distributed across three parcels in order of their factor loadings (e.g., the highest loading item goes on Parcel 1, the second highest on Parcel 2, the third highest on Parcel 3, the fourth highest on Parcel 1, etc.) until all items are distributed. A mean score for each parcel is then calculated, and the three parcels are used as the indicators for the latent construct.

For the sexual agency latent variable, scores on the sexual assertiveness and sexual self-efficacy scales were used as indicators. For the sexual inhibition latent variable, scores on the sexual self-consciousness and sexual guilt and shame scales were used as indicators. For the sexual risk latent variable, scores on the drug and alcohol use scale and the item regarding condom use with casual partners were used as indicators.

## **Results**

Descriptive statistics for the variables of interest, including school-type differences, are provided in Table 2.1. Bivariate correlations are presented in Table 2.2. I began by checking indicators for nonnormality. No variables were highly skewed or kurtotic, so I proceeded to test the measurement model. Because all of the variables were normal and continuous, I used the ML estimator.

### **Measurement Model**

The measurement model was tested by loading the indicators onto their respective latent constructs using CFA. The measurement model fit very well,  $\chi^2(44) = 76.56, p < .01$ , RMSEA = .03 with 90% CI [.02, .04], CFI = .99, TLI = .99, SRMR = .03. Each indicator loaded significantly onto its specified latent construct ( $\beta = .37$  to  $.97$ ). The model fit and significant loadings demonstrate construct validity for the operationalization of the latent constructs with these indicators (MacCallum & Austin, 2000). Zero-order latent variable correlations indicated that Jezebel metastereotype awareness was significantly correlated with sexual monitoring ( $r =$

.14,  $p < .01$ ), but not significantly correlated with sexual agency ( $r = .02$ ,  $p = ns$ ), sexual inhibition ( $r = .10$ ,  $p = ns$ ), or sexual risk ( $r = .17$ ,  $p = ns$ ). Sexual monitoring was significantly correlated with sexual agency ( $r = -.17$ ,  $p < .001$ ), sexual inhibition ( $r = .51$ ,  $p < .001$ ), and sexual risk ( $r = .37$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Sexual agency was significantly correlated with sexual inhibition ( $r = -.77$ ,  $p < .001$ ) and sexual risk ( $r = -.18$ ,  $p < .05$ ). Sexual inhibition was significantly correlated with sexual risk ( $r = .26$ ,  $p < .05$ ).

### **Structural Model**

I proceeded to examine the proposed structural relationships between the latent constructs in the model (Figure 2.2). I allowed the latent constructs sexual agency, sexual inhibition, and sexual risk to correlate, expecting these latent constructs to be associated with each other.

The data were collected from two different school sites, and some women in the sample had not had vaginal intercourse (26.6%). In addition, religiosity often impedes Black women's sense of sexual agency (Rouse-Arnett, Dilworth, & Stephens, 2006). Finally, participants' relationship status varied (49.5% = single, 40.5% = in a committed sexual relationship, and 8% = casually dating), and relationship status is significantly associated with sexual function for women (e.g., Shifren, Monz, Russo, Segreti, & Johannes, 2008). Therefore, I controlled for school, sexual experience, religiosity, and relationship status by regressing Jezebel metastereotype awareness on school, sexual experience, religiosity, and relationship status. School (1 = Predominately White Institution; 2 = Historically Black College or University), sexual experience (0 = no sexual experience; 1 = some sexual experience), and relationship status (0 = not currently in a committed, romantic relationship and 1 = in a committed, romantic relationship) were dichotomous variables. In my model, school site significantly predicted sexual monitoring ( $\beta = -.09$ ,  $p = .042$ ), such that women attending the PWI were more likely to engage

in sexual monitoring. School site also significantly predicted sexual risk ( $\beta = .50, p < .001$ ), such that women attending the HBCU reported engaging in riskier sexual behaviors. Religiosity was also a significant predictor; more religious women engaged in more sexual monitoring ( $\beta = .14, p = .004$ ), and reported less sexual agency ( $\beta = -.12, p = .01$ ), more sexual inhibition ( $\beta = .33, p < .001$ ), and fewer risky sexual behaviors ( $\beta = -.21, p = .01$ ). Women with more sexual experience reported being more aware that others endorsed the Jezebel stereotype ( $\beta = .19, p < .001$ ), more sexual agency ( $\beta = .30, p < .001$ ), and less sexual inhibition ( $\beta = -.34, p < .001$ ). Finally, women in a committed relationship reported less sexual monitoring ( $\beta = -.09, p = .049$ ), less sexual inhibition ( $\beta = -.11, p = .02$ ), less sexual risk ( $\beta = .35, p < .001$ ) and more sexual agency ( $\beta = .19, p < .001$ ).

The structural model fit well,  $X^2(80) = 181.20, p < .001$ , RMSEA = .047 with 90% CI [.038, .056], CFI = .97, TLI = .96, SRMR = .04. In line with the second hypothesis, higher levels of Jezebel metastereotype awareness were associated with more sexual monitoring, which, in turn, was related to less sexual agency, more sexual inhibition, and more sexual risk. Contrary to the first hypotheses, Jezebel metastereotype awareness was not significantly, directly related to sexual agency, sexual inhibition, and sexual risk. Table 2.3 summarizes the results of the bootstrapping procedures used to examine the indirect associations. Results from the 1,000 bootstrap samples indicated that the mean indirect associations among Jezebel metastereotype awareness and sexual agency, sexual inhibition, and sexual risk were significant. The model explained 4.6% of the variance in sexual monitoring, 21.3% of the variance in sexual agency, 53.6% of the variance in sexual inhibition, and 61.1% of the variance in sexual risk.

### **Racial Centrality as a Moderator**

I used the latent moderated structural equations method (LMS) (Maslowsky, Jager, &

Hemken, 2015) to test the hypothesis regarding racial centrality as a moderator. Because Mplus does not provide model fit indices when assessing latent variable interactions, Maslowsky, Jager, and Hemken (2015) suggest first testing the main effects of the predictors, without considering relevant interactions to obtain fit indices, and then testing the interaction in a separate step. Regression coefficients for main effects and the latent interaction are obtained from the model that includes the interaction term. Though I did not propose specific hypotheses regarding the main effect of racial centrality on sexual monitoring, sexual agency, sexual inhibition, or sexual risk, the first-order relations of racial centrality on the endogenous variables were included in the structural model to interpret the interaction correctly. Racial centrality was not significantly associated with sexual monitoring, sexual agency, sexual inhibition, or sexual risk.

Because the structural model demonstrated an adequate fit, I proceeded by adding the interaction term between Jezebel metastereotype awareness and racial centrality to the model, with paths from the interaction term to sexual monitoring, sexual agency, sexual inhibition, or sexual risk. Contrary to hypothesis 3, the Jezebel metastereotype awareness x racial centrality interaction term did not significantly predict any of these outcome variables.

## **Discussion**

Black women are stigmatized by the Jezebel stereotype, which characterizes them as hypersexual, promiscuous, and manipulative. Limited past research has examined how Black women's endorsement or internalization of the Jezebel stereotype may shape their sexual attitudes and behavior. In contrast, the current study was concerned with the consequences of Black women's awareness of the Jezebel stereotype for their sexual well-being. I investigated sexual well-being multidimensionally, examining Black women's reported levels of sexual



agency, sexual inhibition, and sexual risk. I found support for my central hypothesis; Jezebel metastereotype awareness was associated with lower sexual well-being outcomes.

Though Jezebel metastereotype awareness was not directly related to sexual agency, sexual inhibition, or sexual risk (Hypothesis 1), I did find significant, indirect associations. In line with Hypothesis 2, sexual monitoring did mediate the associations between Jezebel metastereotype awareness and the sexual well-being outcomes. Women who reported higher levels of Jezebel metastereotype awareness reported participating in higher levels of sexual monitoring, which in turn, was associated with less sexual agency, more sexual inhibition, and more sexual risk. The finding regarding the link between sexual monitoring and sexual agency counters limited past research on sexual monitoring that found a positive association between sexual monitoring and sexual assertiveness (Smolak, Murnen, & Myers, 2014). Instead, my study suggests that sexual monitoring is associated with diminished sexual agency.

These findings are consistent with Higginbotham's (1993) notion of the "politics of respectability," which would predict Black women's concern with others' perception of their sexuality and women's subsequent attempts to distance themselves from the hypersexual Jezebel stereotype. This distancing is evidenced in their endorsement of less agentic and more inhibited sexual attitudes. Awareness of the Jezebel stereotype similarly negatively influenced Black women's safe sex behavior. I conceptualized sexual risk as using drugs and alcohol to feel more comfortable in sexual situations and as infrequently using condoms with a casual sexual partner. In line with my theoretical framing, Black women who reported greater awareness that others endorsed the Jezebel stereotype reported more sexual risk; they reported consuming more drugs and alcohol to feel at ease during sex and reported using condoms less frequently with casual partners, perhaps in an effort to appear less sexually agentic or aggressive.

Sexual monitoring may be used by Black women as a part of a larger impression management strategy. Targets of stigma adopt impression management strategies specific to salient metastereotypes of their group (Neel, Neufeld, & Neuberg, 2013). For example, when metastereotypes of their group as a disease threat were activated, obese people prioritized wearing clean clothes as an impression management strategy when presented with a list of possible strategies; similarly, when metastereotypes of their group as violent were activated, Black men prioritized smiling as an impression management strategy (Neel, Neufeld, & Neuberg, 2013). Like Steele (2011)'s example of Brent Staples whistling Vivaldi in public to refute the stereotype of Black men as violent, Black women may use similar strategies to manage the public impression of their sexual selves. Thus, my first hypothesis that Jezebel metastereotype awareness would have significant, direct relations with the sexual well-being outcomes was not supported, whereas my second hypothesis that it would have indirect associations through sexual monitoring was fully supported.

The third and final hypothesis concerned the moderating role of racial centrality with these associations. Past research (Jerald, Cole, Ward, & Avery, 2017) indicated that women who reported their racial identity as being more central to their self-concept might show a stronger association between metastereotype awareness and negative outcomes. In the current study, racial centrality did not significantly moderate the associations between Jezebel metastereotype awareness and the sexual well-being outcomes. It may have been more relevant to instead examine *gendered* racial identity centrality; however, there were no existing measures of this construct at the time the study was conducted. Recently, psychologists have offered suggestions for how to assess gendered racial identity (Jones & Day, 2017), using intersectionality theory (Crenshaw, 1989; Cole, 2009) to examine how both gender and racial oppression shape identity

development. In addition, researchers may find two recent measures designed specifically for Black women— one measuring gendered racial microaggressions for Black women (Lewis & Neville, 2015) and another assessing gendered-racial socialization in African American college women (Brown, Blackmon, Rosnick, Griffin-Fennell, & White-Johnson, 2017)— useful in the future research. Future studies may benefit from including a measure that better captures the salience and significance of both gender and racial identity in Black women’s lives.

### **Limitations and Future Directions**

This study has several limitations that should be noted. First, I need longitudinal data to confirm the directionality of these relations, to establish the mediating role of sexual monitoring, and to make inferences regarding causality. For example, though I have strong theoretical support for the proposed directionality of these relations, the cross-sectional data do not permit me to examine whether sexual monitoring instead predicts greater Jezebel metastereotype awareness. Future studies should test this model longitudinally to address these concerns.

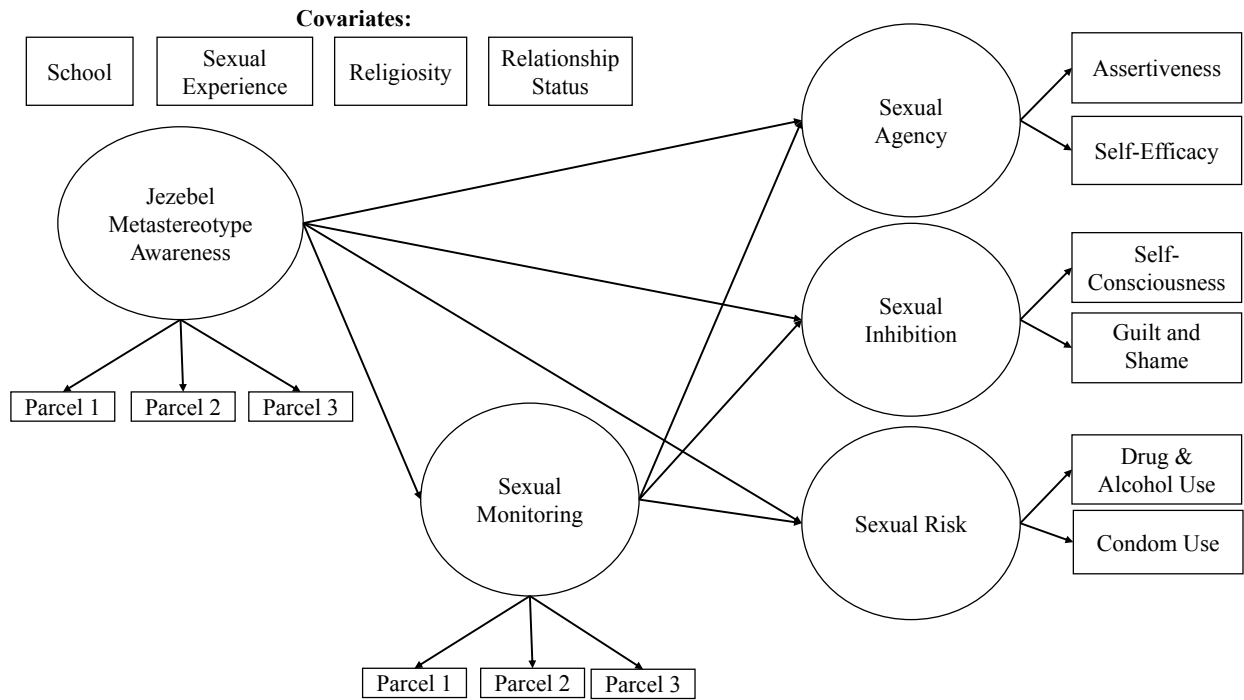
Second, a necessary future direction of this research is experimentally testing these associations. My study examined how *awareness* of the Jezebel stereotype is associated with women’s *attitudes*. In contrast, an experimental design would allow me to test *exposure* to the stereotype and its consequences for *behavior*. Past research finds both consistencies and discrepancies between adolescents’ and adults’ reported sexual attitudes and their actual behavior (e.g., Zabin, Hirsch, Smith, & Hardy, 1984). Whereas the current study provides initial evidence for a link between negative sexual stereotypes and Black women’s reporting of sexual attitudes, it is important to extend this work in order to understand how it may influence real-world, behavioral outcomes.

Third, my measure of Jezebel metastereotype awareness did not specify which outgroup participants should reference when assessing how much they believe others hold the Jezebel stereotype. An important tenet of metastereotypes are that they change in relation to the ingroup and outgroup under observation (Vorauer, Main, & O'Connell, 1998). Future research should investigate which outgroup members Black women believe to most hold the Jezebel stereotype and whether the relations between Jezebel metastereotype awareness and sexual well-being differ, depending on the outgroup being referenced. For example, do these relations vary depending on whether women imagine Black men or White men to hold the Jezebel stereotype? A more precise measurement of Jezebel metastereotype awareness may contribute to a more nuanced understanding of how Black women negotiate different outgroups' expectations about their sexuality in making decisions about their sexual attitudes and behavior.

## **Conclusion**

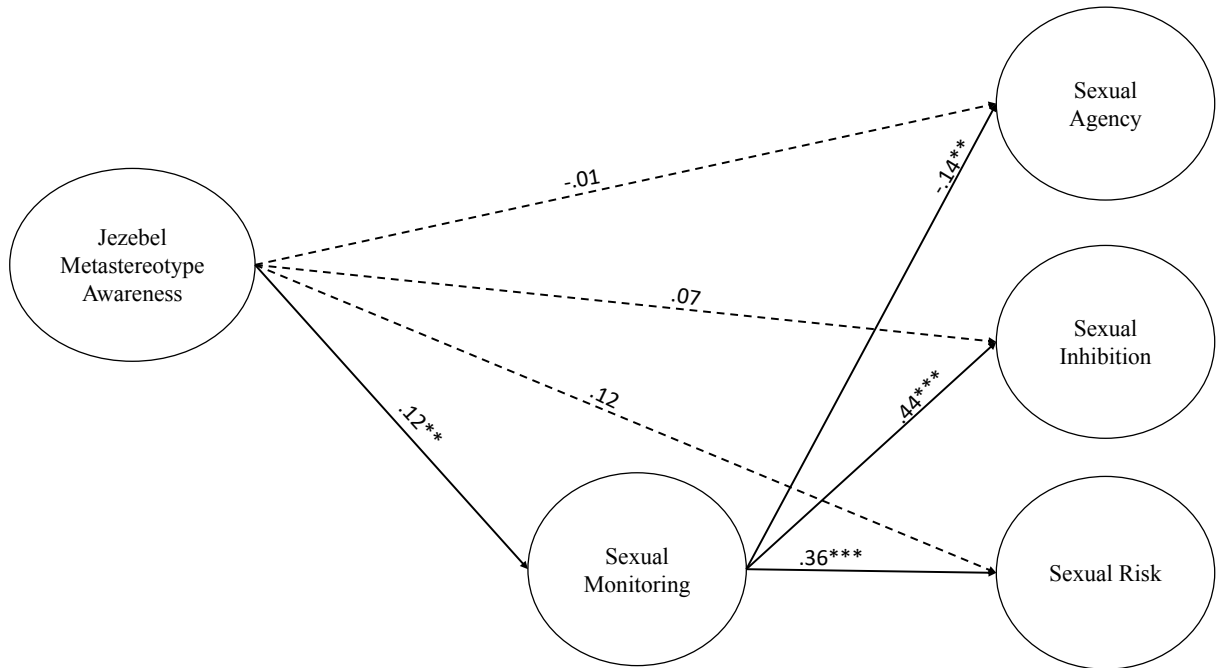
The current study establishes that, regardless of racial centrality, Black women who believe others hold negative stereotypes of their sexuality are more likely to monitor their sexual behavior, which is linked to less sexual agency, more sexual inhibition, and riskier sexual behavior. In examining stereotype awareness, it makes an important case for examining the significance of the Jezebel stereotype in Black women's lives beyond endorsement or internalization. This study also extends the literature on Black women's sexuality, by examining sexual well-being multidimensionally and not solely centered on risk. Taken together, these findings identify awareness of the Jezebel stereotype as an important sociocultural factor that adversely influences Black women's ability to fully participate in, enjoy, and have safe sex.

Figure 2.1. Conceptual Model.



Note. All latent constructs regressed on school, sexual experience, religiosity, and relationship status covariates; not depicted for clarity. Paths from the Jezebel Metastereotype Awareness x Racial Centrality interaction term not depicted for clarity.

Figure 2.2. Proposed Structural Model.



Note.  $N = 575$ . Standardized regression coefficients are noted for each path.  $**p < .01$ ;  $***p < .001$ . Dashed lines indicate nonsignificant paths. All latent constructs regressed on school, sexual experience, religiosity, and relationship status covariates; not depicted for clarity. Paths from the Jezebel Metastereotype Awareness x Racial Centrality interaction term not depicted for clarity.

Table 2.1

## Descriptive Statistics for Variables of Interest

Latent variables	Full Sample <i>M(SD)</i>	PWI <i>M(SD)</i>	HBCU <i>M(SD)</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>d</i>
Jezebel metastereotype awareness					
Parcel 1	3.17 (1.09)	3.19 (1.08)	3.13 (1.10)	.74	.06
Parcel 2	3.16 (1.08)	3.20 (1.05)	3.08 (1.12)	1.37	.11
Parcel 3	3.24 (1.09)	3.28 (1.06)	3.17 (1.12)	1.11	.10
Sexual monitoring					
Parcel 1	2.44 (1.32)	2.50 (1.36)	2.35 (1.25)	1.34	.11
Parcel 2	2.21 (1.19)	2.28 (1.24)	2.10 (1.11)	1.92	.15
Parcel 3	2.09 (1.35)	2.15 (1.41)	2.01 (1.25)	1.36	.11
Sexual agency					
Sexual assertiveness	3.62 (.74)	3.57 (.77)	3.69 (.68)	-1.95	.07
Sexual self-efficacy	4.33 (1.44)	4.32 (1.42)	4.34 (1.46)	-0.20	.01
Sexual inhibition					
Sexual self-consciousness	2.78 (1.20)	2.81 (1.21)	2.72 (1.17)	.90	.08
Sexual guilt and shame	3.09 (2.32)	2.08 (2.37)	3.10 (2.24)	-.12	.44
Sexual risk					
Sex-related drug and alcohol use	2.90 (1.41)	2.69 (1.39)	3.20 (1.40)	-3.85***	.37
No condom use	1.87 (1.29)	1.49 (.96)	2.29 (1.47)	-6.52***	.64

$p < .05$ ; \*\* $p < .01$ ; \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

Table 2.2

## Bivariate Correlations among Manifest Variables

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
1. JMA1	—											
2. JMA2	.89**	—										
3. JMA3	.88**	.88**	—									
4. SM1	.14**	.13**	.11**	—								
5. SM2	.15**	.11**	.12**	.81**	—							
6. SM3	.13**	.12**	.09*	.68**	.72**	—						
7. Sexual Assertiveness	-.01	.02	.00	-.13**	-.16**	-.22**	—					
8. Sexual self-efficacy	.03	.06	.06	-.02	-.03	-.07	.39**	—				
9. Sexual Self-consciousness	.09*	.06	.06	.28**	.31**	.29**	-.54**	-.19**	—			
10. Sexual Guilt & Shame	.10*	.06	.06	.24**	.32**	.35**	-.46**	-.21**	.43**	—		
11. Drug & Alcohol Use	.11*	.11*	.15*	.18**	.17**	.20**	-.11*	-.07	.04	.11*	—	
12. No Condom	.05	.03	.03	.17**	.14**	.09	-.05	-.15**	-.14**	.04	.21**	—

\*  $p < .05$ . \*\*  $p < .01$ . JMA = Jezebel metastereotype awareness parcels; SM = sexual monitoring parcels.



Table 2.3

## Bootstrap Analysis of Magnitude and Statistical Significance of Indirect Relations

Indirect Effect	$\beta$ (standardized indirect effect)	Mean indirect effect ( $B$ ) <sup>a</sup>	<i>SE</i> of mean <sup>a</sup>	95% CI for mean indirect effect <sup>a</sup>
Jezebel metastereotype awareness → Sexual monitoring → Sexual agency	-0.02	-0.017	0.008	-.043, -.005*
Jezebel metastereotype awareness → Sexual monitoring → Sexual inhibition	0.05	0.055	0.021	.019, .144*
Jezebel metastereotype awareness → Sexual monitoring → Sexual risk	0.04	0.055	0.020	.014, .254*

<sup>a</sup> These values are based on the unstandardized path coefficients. \* $p < .05$ .

### Chapter 3

#### **Study 2: “I’m Sexy, and I Know It”: The Association between Enjoyment of Sexualization and Body Image Attitudes in Black Women**

The sexualization of girls and women is rampant in American culture, reflected most keenly in the portrayals of women in the mass media that emphasize physical appearance, beauty, and sexual appeal (Ward, 2016). Consequently, there has been increasing concern regarding sexualization and its influence in the lives of girls and women by child advocacy organizations, parents, and psychologists (APA, 2007). Indeed, APA (2007) established a *Task Force on the Sexualization of Girls* to address these concerns. In their initial report, the task force defined sexualization as including sexual objectification, imposing sexuality on individuals, and defining a person’s value only in terms of their sexuality. Sexualization has wide-reaching, negative consequences for women’s mental health, physical health, sexuality and sexual health, and beliefs about gender and femininity (APA, 2007). For Black women, for example, experiences of sexualization are associated with an internalization of one’s self as a sexual object, disordered eating behavior, and interpersonal and romantic relationship concerns (Watson, Robinson, Dispenza, & Nazari, 2012).

Despite these negative outcomes, women often report enjoying sexualization (Gregus, Rummell, Rankin, & Levant, 2014; Liss, Erchull, & Ramsey, 2011). Enjoyment of sexualization occurs when women find appearance-related sexual attention from men to be gratifying. Traditional femininity norms prescribe that women define their worth in terms of their physical appearance, beauty, and sexual appeal. Thus, women stand to receive a number of societal

benefits if they are perceived as sexy and attractive (Dion, Berscheid, & Walster, 1972). Liss, Erchull, and Ramsey (2011) argue that women are aware of these benefits and may participate in self-sexualizing behaviors, such as wearing tight-fitting clothing and piercing sexual body parts (Smolak, Murnen, & Myers, 2014), as a means of affirming their sex appeal. Indeed, qualitative findings confirm that women believe sexual attention can be pleasurable when it validates their physical attractiveness, provides a self-esteem boost, and bolsters confidence (Gregus, Rummell, Rankin, & Levant, 2014; Thompson & Donaghue, 2014). This finding may be especially relevant for Black women, whose attractiveness and femininity are devalued within mainstream American culture (Cole & Zucker, 2007). Indeed, Black women are perceived as more masculine and less attractive than White women (Goff, Thomas, & Jackson, 2008), and their physical features do not fit within the constraints of hegemonic femininity that privilege traditionally European features, such as light skin and long, straight hair (Collins, 2000). Because Black women have been historically excluded from hegemonic femininity and find difficulty achieving its ideal, enjoying sexualization and viewing it as affirming of one's attractiveness may be particularly salient for them.

Thus far, enjoyment of sexualization has primarily been examined within predominately White samples. The current study explores the influence of enjoyment of sexualization on Black women's sexual agency, taking into account stereotypical narratives depicting Black women as hypersexual and promiscuous (i.e., the Jezebel stereotype). I expect the degree to which Black women report enjoying sexualization to be dependent on their level of awareness of the Jezebel stereotype. For instance, a woman who is highly aware of this stereotype may be less prone to report enjoying sexualization for fear of confirming the stereotype. The current study analyzes survey data using a structural equation model to examine how enjoyment of sexualization is

associated with sexual agency. Specifically, I explore how that association is mediated by body surveillance and body shame, and whether that mediation is moderated by awareness of the Jezebel stereotype.

### **Objectification Theory**

Both qualitative and quantitative analyses evidence the widespread sexualization of Black women in U.S. culture (Watson, Robinson, Dispenza, & Nazari, 2012), with one recent study finding that they report more experiences of sexualization than White women (Watson, Marszalek, Dispenza, & Davids, 2015). Objectification theory provides a lens through which to understand Black women's experiences of sexualization in U.S. culture. Fredrickson and Roberts (1997) explain that, "sexual objectification occurs whenever a woman's body, body parts, or sexual functions are separated out from her functions, reduced to the status of mere instruments, or regarded as if they were capable of representing her" (p. 175). Objectification theory (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997) was developed to describe how women's experiences of sexual objectification within a patriarchal societal structure negatively impact their mental health. According to objectification theory, women are socialized to believe that the primary function of their bodies is not in service of themselves, but rather to exist for the pleasure of others. Repeatedly, women are taught that their worth lies in their physical appearance and as a sexual object for others (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997).

Self-objectification occurs when a woman assumes an observer's perspective of her body (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997), which results in continual surveillance and monitoring of the body and physical appearance. Thus, self-objectification can be thought of as a product of our cultural focus on sexualization (APA, 2007). This body surveillance, in turn, leads to increased body shame, appearance anxiety, and poorer awareness of internal bodily states. Each of these

outcomes is then theorized to have concomitant, adverse consequences for women's well-being, including eating disorders, sexual dysfunction, and depression (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997). Since the initial development of objectification theory, empirical research has largely confirmed its theoretical premises (for review, see Moradi & Huang, 2008), significantly enhancing our understanding of women's mental health and well-being.

Self-objectification is often measured using the Objectified Body Consciousness Scale (McKinley & Hyde, 1996), though it is important to note that the two constructs are distinct. Self-objectification denotes valuing body appearance over body competence. In contrast, objectified body consciousness, defined as the "experience of the body as an object and the beliefs that support this experience" (McKinley & Hyde, 1996, p. 183), has three components: body surveillance, body shame, and beliefs about appearance control. In the current study, I examine self-objectification by examining Black women's body surveillance, which refers to the monitoring of their body from a third-person perspective, and body shame, the extent to which individuals feel shame about their body when they are unable to meet cultural standards of beauty.

Fredrickson and Roberts (1997) recognize that, because women's experiences of sexual objectification intersect with their multiple social locations, objectification does not affect all women in the same way. Still, most research examining sexual objectification has done so using primarily White samples (Moradi & Huang, 2008), and Black women's experiences of sexual objectification have mainly been examined in comparison to those of White women. For example, some past studies find that Black women report lower levels of body surveillance (e.g., Breitkopf, Littleton, & Berenson, 2007; Moradi & Huang, 2008; Schaefer et al., 2018) and body shame (e.g., Higgins, Lin, Alvarez, & Bardone-Cone, 2015) than White women; whereas, other

studies find no significant differences in reported levels of body surveillance (e.g., Fitzsimmons & Bardone-Cone, 2011; Watson, Matheny, Gagné, Brack, & Ancis, 2013) and body shame (e.g., Breitkopf, Littleton, & Berenson, 2007; Schaefer et al., 2018) between Black and White women.

For Black women, however, sexually objectifying experiences intersect with their identities in ways that cannot be ignored. Sexual exploitation of Black women during U.S. slavery and afterward has contributed to contemporary representations of Black women as sexually aggressive and deviant (Thomas, Witherspoon, & Speight, 2004), in line with the Jezebel stereotype. Occupying multiple marginalized identities, together with the stigmatized notions of Black women's sexuality, may subject Black women to more negative consequences of sexual objectification (Buchanan, Settles, & Woods, 2008). Utilizing this framework, some researchers have begun to explore Black women's unique experiences of sexual objectification (Watson, Robinson, Dispenza, & Nazari, 2012). This research has identified several sociocultural influences on Black women's sexual objectification, including the dehumanization of Black women during U.S. slavery, which reinforced the notion that Black women's bodies were not their own. More intersectional research on objectification theory is needed, however, to reveal other ways in which multiple interlocking systems of oppression faced by Black women have come to create distinctive sexually objectifying experiences for them.

### **Enjoyment of Sexualization and Self-Objectification**

Enjoyment of sexualization occurs when women find appearance-related sexual attention from men to be gratifying, operationalized via the Enjoyment of Sexualization Scale (Liss, Erchull, & Ramsey, 2011). A woman who reports enjoying sexualization may engage in more self-objectification. For example, she may engage in more frequent body surveillance, in order to confirm that she appears sexy to others. Enjoyment of sexualization may also be associated with

more body shame. Indeed, adolescent girls with high levels of internalized sexualization are more likely to wear revealing clothing (McKenney & Bigler, 2016). McKenney and Bigler (2016) speculate that because this clothing is more likely to reveal rather than hide flawed aspects of women's bodies, internalized sexualization is associated with more body shame. Body shame may operate similarly in relation to women's enjoyment of sexualization. In fact, one item from the Enjoyment of Sexualization Scale prompts participants to rate how sexy they feel when wearing revealing clothing. In addition, for women who particularly enjoy the male gaze, it may be even more important to conform to societal standards of beauty, which could result in more body shame.

Several studies have found associations between enjoyment of sexualization and more body surveillance and more body shame among predominately White samples (Liss, Erchull, & Ramsey, 2011; Tiggemann, Coutts, & Clark, 2014). Women who report enjoying sexualization are also more likely to report valuing thinness (Liss, Erchull, & Ramsey, 2011), have negative eating attitudes (Liss, Erchull, & Ramsey, 2011), and report more body dissatisfaction (Tiggemann, Coutts, & Clark, 2014). Furthermore, Liss and colleagues (2011) found that enjoyment of sexualization exacerbated the negative influence of body shame on eating attitudes. Women who both enjoyed sexualization and felt more body shame reported unhealthier eating attitudes. Though no research has examined the relations between enjoyment of sexualization, body surveillance, and body shame with Black women, one study conducted in a sample of Black and White women found that women whose self-worth was dependent on appearance and approval from others reported increased body surveillance (Overstreet & Quinn, 2012). Taken together, each of these negative outcomes are aligned with traditional gender ideologies that prioritize a focus on women's bodies, celebrate thinness, and socialize women to believe that

their primary value is rooted in their physical appearance. The links between enjoyment of sexualization and body surveillance and body shame are plausible, then, considering its link to traditional gender beliefs (Liss, Erchull, & Ramsey, 2011). Thus, like many prescriptive gender norms, it has been suggested that enjoyment of sexualization puts women in a double bind (Ramsey, Marotta, & Hoyt, 2016). Although women feel as if they reap benefits from presenting themselves in a sexualized manner, they also stand to experience several negative consequences, particularly in relation to body image attitudes, for doing so.

Some researchers have recently suggested that the construct of enjoyment of sexualization is multidimensional, however, and propose mechanisms through which enjoyment of sexualization might have both benefits and disadvantages for women's body image. For example, Pellizzer, Tiggemann, and Clark (2016) examined enjoyment of sexualization in a sample of undergraduate students and recreational pole dancers. They replicated past research that enjoyment of sexualization is associated with more body surveillance, which in turn, was associated with less positive body image within the sample of pole dancers. However, they also found that enjoyment of sexualization is associated with greater feelings of embodiment (which provides women with an increased awareness of body functionality), which in turn, predicted more positive body image in both samples of women. This research suggests, then, that enjoyment of sexualization encompasses components of both self-objectification and embodiment that have opposing consequences for positive body image. Although enjoyment of sexualization promotes body surveillance, women may also derive some positive benefits, such as embodiment, from enjoyment of sexualization, as well.

### **Enjoyment of Sexualization and Sexual Agency**

Although third-wave feminists have identified sexuality as a domain that women can



embrace as a form of empowerment (Levy, 2006), Erchull and Liss (2013) conclude that enjoying sexualization represents a sort of “false empowerment.” Similar to constructs such as benevolent sexism, which women report enjoying and benefiting from, they argue that enjoying sexualization functions to maintain sexist norms by reaffirming sex and the body as the primary source of power for women. Gregus et al. (2014) agree, suggesting that women who find sexual attention pleasurable “have internalized society’s objectification of their bodies to such an extent that they actually do feel valued when they are objectified” (p. 253). In the feminist literature, there is a heated debate surrounding the meaning of sexual empowerment for women (e.g., Gill, 2009; Lamb, 2010; Lamb & Peterson, 2012; Lerum & Dworkin, 2009; Peterson, 2010; Tolman, 2012). Scholars disagree about whether research should privilege internal, subjective feelings of sexual agency when conceptualizing sexual empowerment or whether it should be judged more objectively. Much of the extant research on enjoyment of sexualization takes the latter perspective, questioning the extent to which enjoyment of sexualization can actually be empowering and suggesting that it simply reinforces traditional gender ideologies that reduce women’s self-worth to their physical appearance.

If enjoyment of sexualization is linked to a sense of sexual empowerment (Peterson, 2010), I would expect it to be reflected in women’s sexual attitudes and behavior related to sexual agency. Findings from a few studies indicate connections to some sexual cognitions and behaviors. Enjoyment of sexualization is associated with less traditional beliefs about sexual fidelity (Liss, Erchull, & Ramsey, 2011). That is, women who reported enjoying sexualization were less likely to believe it is necessary to be in a committed relationship to have sex. Enjoyment of sexualization is also related to having more permissive attitudes about sex and having a higher number of sexual partners (Erchull & Liss, 2014). In addition, enjoyment of

sexualization is associated with a sexual self-schema in which women described themselves as more open to unconventional sex acts (Barnett, Maciel, & Gerner, 2018). From this perspective, enjoyment of sexualization may promote less traditional attitudes towards sex, which may promote more sexual agency. Indeed, enjoyment of sexualization is positively related to the belief that women can use their sexuality to gain power over men (Erchull & Liss, 2013; Erchull & Liss, 2014).

Some previous research supports the notion that enjoyment of sexualization may be associated with sexual well-being. Ward and colleagues (2018) examined the link between self-sexualization and sexual well-being, using enjoyment of sexualization as one indicator of self-sexualization. They found that higher levels of self-sexualization were associated with more negative feelings about one's level of sexual experience, less sexual self-efficacy, and greater use of alcohol to feel more comfortable being sexual; however, they did not find a significant association between self-sexualization and sexual assertiveness. Additionally, Erchull and Liss (2014) investigated the extent to which women's sense of empowered sexuality— examining enjoyment of sexualization as one component— is associated with positive sexual behavior and attitudes. Here, enjoyment of sexualization was related to more sexual esteem or the extent to which women feel they are a good sexual partner. More recent research also found a positive association between enjoyment of sexualization and sexual esteem (Barnett, Maciel, & Gerner, 2018). However, it was also positively related to having ever faked an orgasm and frequency of faking an orgasm. The accumulated findings present a complex assessment of the function of enjoyment of sexualization for women's sexual outcomes. For example, whereas sexual esteem might be thought to be empowering, feelings about oneself as a good sexual partner ultimately reinforce the notion of women's sexuality being in service of someone else's pleasure.

Additionally, faking an orgasm could be conceptualized as disempowering, again orienting the focus of women's sexual pleasure to their partner. On the other hand, it could be empowering if used as a method to stop unpleasant or unwanted sexual activity (Fahs, 2011). It is possible, then, that enjoyment of sexualization is associated with both empowering and disempowering sexual outcomes.

### **Examining the Mediating Roles of Body Surveillance and Body Shame**

One potentially important mechanism to examine within this association is women's level of objectified body consciousness. Enjoyment of sexualization may be indirectly related to less sexual agency via body surveillance and body shame. Objectification theory predicts that constant body surveillance promotes poorer awareness of internal bodily states, including awareness of their sexual needs (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997). Similarly, women who report body shame may fear negative evaluations of their bodies by others and, during sexual encounters, may focus more on their partner's evaluations of their body than their own sexual desires (Schooler, Ward, Merriwether, & Caruthers, 2005). Thus, both body surveillance and body shame may inhibit women's ability to communicate and prioritize their sexual needs and desires.

No existing research has examined the associations between body surveillance, body shame, and sexual agency in samples of Black women. Indeed, most research on Black women's self-objectification has only examined body image and disordered eating outcomes (e.g., Buchanan, Fischer, Tokar, & Yoder, 2016; Fitzsimmons & Bardone-Cone, 2011; Gordon, 2008; Hebl, King, & Lin, 2004; Mitchell & Mazzeo, 2009). However, past research with predominately White samples does find negative associations between body surveillance and sexual agency and body shame and sexual agency. For example, women who frequently survey their bodies are

more likely to report less sexual agency, including less body acceptance, less ability to refuse unwanted sexual advances, less ability to communicate sexual desires to a partner, and less sexual interest or desire (Ramsey & Hoyt, 2015). Though Steer and Tiggemann (2008) did not find a significant relation between body surveillance and sexual function (examined in terms of desire/arousal, orgasm, and satisfaction), Tiggemann and Williams (2012) found a significant indirect relation between body surveillance and less sexual functioning through appearance anxiety. Some studies indicate that higher levels of body shame are also associated with reduced feelings of sexual agency (Schooler, Ward, Merriwether, & Caruthers, 2005). Body shame was both directly and indirectly associated with less sexual functioning in one study (Steer & Tiggemann, 2008). However, Tiggemann and Williams (2012) did not find a significant association between body shame and sexual functioning. Regarding other aspects of negative sexual well-being, body surveillance and body shame are associated with more self-consciousness during sexual activity (Claudat, Warren, & Durette, 2012; Steer & Tiggemann, 2008), less sexual self-esteem (Calogero & Thompson, 2009), less sexual satisfaction (Calogero & Thompson, 2009), less sexual self-efficacy (Impett, Schooler, & Tolman, 2006), and less frequent condom use (Impett et al., 2006). Taken together, these findings indicate that both body surveillance and body shame are associated with less sexual agency.

Though no extant research has examined the meditational role of body surveillance or body shame in the relationship between enjoyment of sexualization and sexual agency directly, some research on relationship satisfaction may shed some light on this process, given that sex and sexualized attention from partners are important components of romantic relationships (Gonzaga, Turner, Keltner, Campos, & Altemus, 2006). Among two predominately White samples recruited from Amazon's Mechanical Turk, women who reported enjoying sexualization

were more likely to feel that their partner objectified them and, in turn, reported decreased relationship satisfaction (Ramsey, Marotta, & Hoyt, 2016). A modified version of the body surveillance subscale of the Objectified Body Consciousness Scale (McKinley & Hyde, 1996) was used to measure perceived partner-objectification. Body surveillance and body shame may operate similar to partner objectification in this study, mediating the association between enjoyment of sexualization and sexual agency.

### **Jezebel Metastereotype Awareness and Enjoyment of Sexualization**

Since the Enjoyment of Sexualization Scale was developed and validated in 2011, the measure has been shown to be reliable in a variety of different samples, including with a general U.S. sample (Ramsey, Marotta, & Hoyt, 2016), with Australian adults and undergraduates (Pellizzer, Tiggemann, Clark, 2016; Tiggemann, Coutts, Clark, 2014), with American undergraduate students (Erchull & Liss, 2013), with feminists (Erchull & Liss, 2013), with lesbians (Erchull & Liss, 2015), with recreational pole dancers (Pellizzer, Tiggemann, Clark, 2016), with belly dancers (Tiggemann, Coutts, Clark, 2014), and with men (Visser, Sultani, Choma, & Pozzebon, 2014). However, each of these studies examined samples of predominately White participants. Enjoyment of sexualization has yet to be examined within a sample of women of color and more specifically with Black women. More research is needed in racially diverse samples in order to examine whether enjoyment of sexualization might function differently.

Study 1, which found that Jezebel metastereotype awareness was associated with lower sexual well-being outcomes, highlights the role that politics of respectability (Higginbotham, 1993) may play in Black women's response to metastereotypes of their sexuality (p. 17-18); endorsement of politics of respectability (Higginbotham, 1993) may similarly predict Black

women's negative and avoidant responses to enjoyment of sexualization, which may make salient dominant cultural narratives that stigmatize their sexuality. Indeed, efforts to distance themselves from the Jezebel stereotype and suppress their sexuality likely significantly influence Black women's appraisal of experiences of sexualization (Watson, Robinson, Dispenza, & Nazari, 2012).

Accordingly, I would expect the extent to which Black women enjoy sexualization to be dependent on their awareness of the negative stereotypes about Black women's sexuality. For instance, a woman who is highly aware of stereotypical narratives of Black women as hypersexual may be less prone to report enjoying sexualization for fear of confirming the stereotype. Study 2 examines relations among enjoyment of sexualization, self-objectification, and sexual agency and also tests the role of Jezebel metastereotype awareness as a potential moderator of the relation between enjoyment of sexualization and self-objectification.

### **The Current Study**

Findings are mixed about whether and how enjoyment of sexualization is linked to women's attitudes and behavior related to sexual agency. The studies that have examined the association between enjoyment of sexualization and sexual outcomes present complex and mixed results, suggesting both positive and negative associations between enjoyment of sexualization and sexual agency (e.g., Erchull & Liss, 2014; Ward, Seabrook, Grower, Giaccardi, & Lippman, 2018). Additional research is needed to more clearly delineate how enjoyment of sexualization is linked to sexual agency.

Furthermore, researchers have yet to identify a mechanism through which this relation might occur. Enjoyment of sexualization has been consistently linked to higher levels of body surveillance and body shame. Because body surveillance and body shame are associated with

decreased sexual functioning and less sexual agency (e.g., Moradi & Huang, 2008; Schooler, Ward, Merriwether, & Caruthers, 2005), they may serve as the link between enjoyment of sexualization and lower sexual agency.

In addition, although enjoyment of sexualization has been studied in a variety of samples, it has not yet been examined in Black women. Due to dominant cultural narratives depicting Black women's sexuality as hypersexual and promiscuous, the relations between enjoyment of sexualization, body surveillance, body shame, and sexual agency may not be as strong in samples of Black women (Watson, Ancis, White, & Nazari, 2012). On the other hand, some previous research suggests that Black women might evaluate experiences of sexualization more positively—perceiving them as positive affirmations of Black beauty, which is often denigrated in mainstream American culture (Cole & Zucker, 2007); from this perspective, Black women may reap positive benefits from enjoyment of sexualization for their sexual well-being. The current study proposes a moderated mediation model that tests body surveillance and body shame as mediators of the relation between enjoyment of sexualization and sexual agency in Black women, examining Jezebel metastereotype awareness as a moderator. I propose the following hypotheses:

H1. Women who report enjoying sexualization will be more likely to report lower levels of sexual agency.

H2. Body surveillance and body shame will each mediate the associations between enjoyment of sexualization and sexual agency, such that more enjoyment of sexualization will predict more body surveillance and more body shame, which in turn, will predict less sexual agency.

H3. Jezebel metastereotype awareness will moderate the associations between enjoyment

of sexualization and body surveillance and body shame, such that the associations will be weaker for women who believe that others hold the Jezebel stereotype of Black women.

## **Method**

### **Participants and Procedure**

The dataset used for the present study is identical to the dataset used in Study 1. Participants were 569 Black/African American women ( $M = 22.21$ ;  $SD = 5.48$ ) recruited from two college campuses in the United States. University 1 ( $n = 340$ ) is a large, predominately White public university located in the Midwest. University 2 ( $n = 229$ ) is a small, historically Black public university located in the Southeast. Recruiting from a historically Black university in addition to the predominately White university enabled me to obtain a more demographically diverse sample of Black women, particularly in terms of age and socioeconomic status.

Students at both sites were selected to participate in the study using demographic information provided by each university's Office of the Registrar. The study inclusion criteria required that participants be a self-identified Black/African-American woman between the ages of 18-30 and currently enrolled. At University 1, the Office of the Registrar sent recruitment emails directly to a random sample of currently enrolled Black/African American students. At University 2, the researchers sent recruitment emails to participants using a list, provided by the Office of the Registrar, of a random sample of currently enrolled students. The recruitment email invited students to participate in a study that examined the health and well-being of Black women by taking an hour-long, anonymous, online Qualtrics survey. Participants at both sites were compensated with a \$25 VISA gift card. In total, 932 women from University 1 and 2,238 from University 2 were invited to participate in the survey. Enrollment was closed once a cap of approximately 550 students from University 1 and approximately 400 students from University 2



had been reached. The response rate across the two schools was approximately 31%. Because Mplus only includes cases with complete data on the exogenous variables, the sample size for the current study is smaller than the total N of the larger dataset.

Although the majority of the sample identified as Black/African American (81.3%), another 10.7% identified as Bi/Multi-racial, 2.7% as African, 1.9% as West Indian/Caribbean, and 1.4% as Afro-Latina (e.g., South or Central American, Dominican, Puerto Rican). The young women sampled came from relatively well-educated backgrounds. On average, 23.2% of their mothers had completed Bachelor's degrees, and another 20.9% had some graduate school experience or had earned a graduate or professional degree. Additionally, 16.5% of their fathers earned a Bachelor's degree, and 16.8% of their fathers had some graduate school experience or had earned graduate or professional degrees. Inclusion criteria did not require that women have sexual experience in order to participate in the study, and as such, 26.7% of the women indicated that they had never had vaginal intercourse. Participants indicated their sexual orientation on a scale from 1 = exclusively heterosexual to 5 = exclusively gay/lesbian. Twelve participants identified as exclusively gay/lesbian. Because the study examines efficacy concerning male condom use, these participants were excluded from the analyses. The majority of the sample identified as exclusively or predominately heterosexual (93.8%). They were also asked to describe their sexual attraction and behavior using a similar rubric, and 90.6% described their sexual *attraction* as exclusively or predominately heterosexual, and 93.2% of the sample described their sexual *experiences* as exclusively or predominately heterosexual. In regard to relationship status, 38.1% of participants indicated that they were single, 38.9% were in a committed relationship, and 19% were casually dating.

## **Measures**

**Enjoyment of Sexualization.** I used the Enjoyment of Sexualization Scale (ESS; Liss, Erchull, & Ramsey, 2011) to measure enjoyment of sexualization, the extent to which women report enjoying receiving positive sexual attention. A sample item is “I like showing off my body.” In the current study, I modified the scale to be more inclusive of non-heterosexual participants. The prompt read: “Please answer each item based on the gender you’re most attracted to,” and I changed any items containing male pronouns to gender-neutral pronouns. For example, I modified an item from the original scale that read “I feel complimented when men whistle at me” to read “I feel complimented when they whistle at me.” Participants responded to eight items on a 6-point scale (1 = strongly disagree to 6 = strongly agree), and responses were averaged to create a scale score ( $\alpha = .82$ ). Higher scores reflect greater enjoyment of sexualization. No known assessment of the scale’s validity or reliability has been conducted in a sample of African American women.

**Jezebel Metastereotype Awareness.** A scale was created for the study to measure the extent to which participants believe that other people endorse the Jezebel stereotype of Black women (see Appendix). To create the measure, I started with four items from the 7-item revised Stereotypic Roles of Black Women Scale (Townsend, Thomas, Neilands, & Jackson, 2010). I then drew on theoretical and empirical research examining the stereotype (Brown Givens & Monahan, 2005; Ladson-Billings, 2009; Stephens & Philips, 2003) to create eight additional items. The resulting measure consisted of 12 items reflecting the hypersexual, manipulative, and promiscuous nature of the Jezebel stereotype. The scale began with the following prompt: “Now we’re going to ask you some questions about what society believes about Black women. You may or may not agree with a statement; we only want to know what you believe society thinks. How much do you think people believe that Black women. . .” Sample items include: “always

want to have sex” and “use sex to get what they want.” Participants were asked to indicate their level of agreement with the statements on a 5-point scale (1 = not at all; 5 = almost always). Items were averaged to create a scale score, and the scale was reliable ( $\alpha = .95$ ). Higher scores indicate greater awareness of the Jezebel stereotype. This measure has been used successfully in a sample of African American women (Jerald, Cole, Ward, & Avery, 2017).

**Objectified Body Consciousness Scale.** The Objectified Body Consciousness Scale (OBCS; McKinley & Hyde, 1996) assesses the degree to which women engage in self-objectification. I used the Body Surveillance (e.g., “During the day, I think about how I look many times”) and Body Shame (e.g., “I feel like I must be a bad person when I don’t look as good as I could”) subscales of the OBCS to operationalize self-objectification. Both subscales are measured on a 6-point scale ranging from 1 = strongly disagree to 6 = strongly agree, and responses were averaged to create a scale score for each subscale ( $\alpha_{\text{bodysurveillance}} = .75$ ;  $\alpha_{\text{bodyshame}} = .81$ ). High scores indicate greater body shame and body surveillance. The scale has been demonstrated to be reliable and valid in African American women samples (e.g., Buchanan, Fischer, Tokar, & Yoder, 2008; Kelly et al., 2012).

**Sexual Agency.** Two indicators were used to examine sexual agency. First, the Hurlbert Index of Sexual Assertiveness (HISA; Hurlbert, 1991) was included as a measure of sexual assertiveness. This measure assesses feelings of assertiveness in the sexual context with a typical partner (short- or long-term). Participants respond on a 5-point scale (0 = never; 4 = all of the time) to indicate their level of agreement with 25 items. A sample item is “I think I am open with my partner about my sexual needs.” The items are averaged to create scale score ( $\alpha = .90$ ), and higher scores indicate more sexual assertiveness. Hurlbert (1991) validated this measure in a nonclinical sample of sexually assertive and sexually nonassertive women and in a sample of

African American college students (Fletcher et al., 2015).

Second, the Precautions subscale of Sexual Self-Efficacy scale (SS-ES; Rosenthal, Moore, & Flynn, 1991) examines confidence in participants' ability to engage in safe sex precautions (e.g., "Carry condoms around with you "in case""). Participants rated five items on a 5-point scale (1 = very uncertain; 5 = very certain). The items were averaged to create a scale score, and the scale was reliable ( $\alpha = .92$ ). Higher scores reflect participants' higher level of certainty of being able to engage in safe sex behavior. The scale has been validated in an ethnically mixed sample of college students (13% African American; Rosenthal, Levy, & Earnshaw, 2012) and in a sample of African American college students (Fletcher et al., 2015).

### **Data Analysis Plan**

I used structural equation modeling with Mplus (Muthén, & Muthén, 2010) to test the hypothesized direct and indirect associations among enjoyment of sexualization, body surveillance, body shame, and sexual agency, depicted in Figure 3.1. I used a three-step approach to SEM (Kline, 2010; Maslowsky, Jager, & Hemken, 2015), first examining the association of indicators to their specified latent constructs (measurement model), second examining relations between the latent constructs (structural model), and finally examining the structural model with the interaction term between enjoyment of sexualization and Jezebel metastereotype awareness.

I used the item-to-construct balance technique to create three parcels for the indicators for enjoyment of sexualization, body surveillance, and body shame (Little, Cunningham, Shahar, & Widaman, 2002). This method creates factor loadings for each item using a one-factor model, and items are distributed across three parcels in order of their factor loadings (e.g., the highest loading item goes on Parcel 1, the second highest on Parcel 2, the third highest on Parcel 3, the fourth highest on Parcel 1, etc.) until all items are distributed. A mean score for each parcel is

then calculated, and the three parcels are used as the indicators for the latent construct. For the sexual agency latent variable, scores on the sexual assertiveness and sexual self-efficacy scales were used as indicators.

## Results

Descriptive statistics for the variables of interest, including school-type differences, are provided in Table 3.1. Bivariate correlations are presented in Table 3.2. Enjoyment of sexualization was significantly positively correlated with body surveillance, body shame, sexual assertiveness, and Jezebel metastereotype awareness; there was no significant association between enjoyment of sexualization and sexual self-efficacy.

### Measurement Model

I began by checking indicators for nonnormality. No variables were highly skewed or kurtotic, so I proceeded to test the measurement model. Because all of my variables were normal and continuous, I used the ML estimator.

The measurement model was tested by loading the indicators onto their respective latent constructs using CFA. The measurement model fit well,  $\chi^2(36) = 116.76, p < .05$ , RMSEA = .05 with 90% CI [.04, .67], CFI = .97, TLI = .96, SRMR = .05. Each indicator loaded significantly onto its specified latent construct ( $\beta = .49$  to  $.92$ ). The model fit and significant loadings demonstrate construct validity for the operationalization of the latent constructs with these indicators (MacCallum & Austin, 2000). Zero-order latent variable correlations indicated that enjoyment of sexualization was significantly correlated with body surveillance ( $r = .32, p < .001$ ), body shame ( $r = .17, p < .01$ ), and sexual agency ( $r = .15, p < .01$ ). Body surveillance was significantly correlated with body shame ( $r = .60, p < .001$ ) and sexual agency ( $r = -0.17, p < .01$ ). Body shame was significantly correlated with sexual agency ( $r = -0.35, p < .001$ ).

## Structural Model

I proceeded to examine the proposed structural relationships between the latent constructs in the model (Figure 3.2). I allowed the latent constructs body surveillance and body shame to correlate, expecting these latent constructs to be associated with each other. Modification indices also indicated that the first and second enjoyment of sexualization parcels should be correlated as well as the second and third body shame parcels.

The data were collected from two different school sites. Some women in the sample had not had vaginal intercourse (26.6%), and women who have not had sexual intercourse are more likely to have lower sexual self-concepts (such as, reporting less sexual esteem and less sexual assertiveness; e.g., Aubrey, 2007). In addition, religiosity often impedes Black women's sense of sexual agency (Rouse-Arnett, Dilworth, & Stephens, 2006). In addition, participants' relationship status varied (38.1% = single, 38.9% = in a committed relationship, and 19% = casually dating), and relationship status is significantly associated with sexual function for women (e.g., Shifren et al., 2008). Finally, women with higher BMI indexes are more likely to report self-sexualizing behavior (e.g., Erchull & Liss, 2014). Therefore, I controlled for these variables by regressing enjoyment of sexualization, body surveillance, body shame, and sexual agency on school, sexual experience, religion, relationship status, and BMI. School (1 = Predominately White Institution; 2 = Historically Black College or University), sexual experience (0 = no sexual experience; 1 = some sexual experience), and relationship status (0 = not currently in a committed, romantic relationship and 1 = in a committed, romantic relationship) were dichotomous variables. In my model, school site significantly predicted body surveillance ( $\beta = -.23, p < .05$ ), such that women attending the PWI reported higher levels of body surveillance. Women with more sexual experience were more likely to report significantly

more enjoyment of sexualization ( $\beta = .20, p < .05$ ) and more sexual agency ( $\beta = .35, p < .05$ ). More religious women reported more enjoyment of sexualization ( $\beta = .09, p < .05$ ) and less sexual agency ( $\beta = -.12, p < .05$ ). Women in committed relationships reported less body shame ( $\beta = -.10, p < .05$ ) and more sexual agency ( $\beta = .18, p < .05$ ). Finally, women with higher BMIs reported significantly more body shame ( $\beta = .34, p < .05$ ) and more sexual agency ( $\beta = .20, p < .05$ ).

The structural model fit well,  $X^2(79) = 163.60, p < .05$ , RMSEA = .043 with 90% CI [.034, .053], CFI = .97, TLI = .95, SRMR = .04. In line with the second hypothesis, women who reported more enjoyment of sexualization reported more body surveillance and more body shame; higher levels of body shame, in turn, were associated with less sexual agency. Body surveillance, however, did not significantly predict sexual agency. Enjoyment of sexualization was also significantly, directly associated with sexual agency. Contrary to hypothesis 1, higher levels of enjoyment of sexualization were associated with *more* sexual agency. Table 3.3 summarizes the results of the bootstrapping procedures used to examine the indirect association. Results from the 1,000 bootstrap samples indicated that the mean indirect association between enjoyment of sexualization and sexual agency, mediated by body shame, was significant. However, the mean indirect association between enjoyment of sexualization and sexual agency, mediated by body surveillance, was not significant. The model explained 28.4% of the variance in sexual agency. Thus, the results for hypothesis 1 countered my expectations, and hypothesis 2 was partially supported.

### **Jezebel Metastereotype Awareness as a Moderator**

I used the latent moderated structural equations method (LMS) (Maslowsky, Jager, & Hemken, 2015) to test the third hypothesis regarding Jezebel metastereotype awareness as a

moderator. Because Mplus does not provide model fit indices when assessing latent variable interactions, Maslowsky, Jager, and Hemken (2015) suggest first testing the main effects of the predictors, without considering relevant interactions to obtain fit indices, and then testing the interaction in a separate step. Regression coefficients for main effects and the latent interaction are obtained from the model that includes the interaction term. Though I did not propose specific hypotheses regarding the main effect of Jezebel metastereotype awareness on body surveillance, body shame, or sexual agency, the first-order relations of Jezebel metastereotype awareness on these variables were included in the structural model to interpret the interaction correctly. Jezebel metastereotype awareness was not significantly associated with body surveillance, body shame, or sexual agency.

Because my structural model demonstrated an adequate fit, I proceeded by adding the interaction term between enjoyment of sexualization and Jezebel metastereotype awareness to the model, with paths from the interaction term to body surveillance, body shame, and sexual agency. Contrary to hypothesis 3, the enjoyment of sexualization x Jezebel metastereotype awareness interaction term did not significantly predict either of these variables.

### **Discussion**

Despite its negative consequences, many young women report that they enjoy receiving sexualized attention from others. Since its introduction to the literature by Liss, Erchull, and Ramsey (2011), the construct of enjoyment of sexualization has been debated as challenging or reifying sexual inequality for women. This past research has not included the experiences of Black women, who have been historically stereotyped simultaneously as hypersexual, seductive, and manipulative and also as unattractive, masculine, and unfeminine. The goal of the current study was to examine the link between enjoyment of sexualization and sexual agency in Black



women, examining the mediational roles of body surveillance and body shame and the moderating role of Jezebel metastereotype awareness.

My findings revealed opposing results. First, in contrast to my first hypothesis but in support of my second hypothesis, enjoyment of sexualization was *directly* associated with *more* sexual agency but *indirectly* associated with *less* sexual agency. The direct association supports past research that finds a positive relation between enjoyment of sexualization and several indicators of more liberal sexual attitudes, such as less traditional beliefs about sexual fidelity (Liss, Erchull, & Ramsey, 2011), more permissive attitudes about sex and having a higher number of sexual partners (Erchull & Liss, 2014), greater endorsement of the belief that women can use their sexuality to gain power over men (Erchull & Liss, 2013; Erchull & Liss, 2014), and more sexual esteem (Barnett, Maciel, & Gerner, 2018; Erchull & Liss, 2014), and more open to unconventional sex acts (Barnett, Maciel, & Gerner, 2018).

Further, the direct relation between enjoyment of sexualization and sexual agency suggests that there may be another mediator, unaccounted for in my model, that explains the relation. It is possible that enjoyment of sexualization may foster a boost in appearance-related self-esteem (Breines, Crocker, & Garcia, 2008). Accordingly, Black women may feel sexualization functions to validate their beauty, which is often devalued in larger society (Cole & Zucker, 2007). In a post-hoc analysis, I tested self-esteem as a possible mediator of the association between enjoyment of sexualization and sexual agency. Enjoyment of sexualization was significantly associated with self-esteem, but it did not emerge as a significant mediator. Future research should continue to examine other, potential mediators as well as more appearance-related self-esteem, instead of general self-esteem.

Regarding the indirect association, I expected that enjoyment of sexualization would be

related to more body surveillance and body shame which, in turn, would predict diminished sexual agency. Consistent with past research, enjoyment of sexualization was associated with more body surveillance and more body shame (Liss, Erchull, & Ramsey, 2011; Tiggemann, Coutts, & Clark, 2014). It is likely that women who enjoy sexualization engage in self-objectification as a means of ensuring they appear sexy and attractive to others. Body shame was then associated with less sexual agency; however, body surveillance was not significantly associated with sexual agency. Thus, body shame, but not body surveillance, emerged as a significant mediator of the association between enjoyment of sexualization and sexual agency. This outcome supports past research that finds a negative relation between body shame and sexual agency (Schooler et al., 2005). It is possible that shame is a more salient aspect of women's ability to enact agentic behaviors during sex than body surveillance.

Counter to my final hypothesis, Jezebel metastereotype awareness did not significantly moderate associations between enjoyment of sexualization and body surveillance or enjoyment of sexualization and body shame. In a post-hoc analysis, I also examined mean levels of enjoyment of sexualization at high and low levels of Jezebel metastereotype awareness. There was no significant difference between the groups,  $t(609) = .12, p = .909$ . Thus, in my sample, Black women's enjoyment of sexualization did not depend on their awareness of negative stereotypes of their sexuality. For these women, experiences of sexualization may be associated with less stigma than other aspects of sexuality, and thus less influenced by their awareness of the Jezebel stereotype. For example, Black women may be more likely to use their awareness of the Jezebel stereotype to guide their behavior during actual sexual encounters. For experiences of sexualization, other dominant cultural narratives about Black women's unattractiveness, for example, may be more relevant. Future research should examine whether there are other, more

relevant cultural stereotypes that significantly moderate these associations.

### **Limitations and Future Directions**

I note several limitations of the current study. First, I used cross-sectional data to examine the hypotheses. Future research would benefit from using longitudinal data to confirm the directionality of these relations. Longitudinal data are also needed to establish the mediating role of body shame and to make causal inferences.

Second, I modified the enjoyment of sexualization scale so that participants could indicate the extent to which they enjoy receiving sexual attention from whichever gender they are most attracted to. This modification allowed participants to more precisely respond to each item; future research should investigate whether enjoyment of sexualization holds different meanings for participants, however, depending on the gender of the sexual objectifier. It would have also been beneficial to account for the perceived race of the sexual objectifier. Although research has explored the cognitions of women who are targets of sexual objectification, little is known about how these women perceive the men who are objectifying them. Future research could observe whether reported levels of enjoyment of sexualization are influenced when the race of the sexual objectifier is varied. In addition, future research could re-examine the moderating role of Jezebel metastereotype awareness to discern whether it functions differently when Black women perceive a Black man, for example, perpetrating the sexualization versus a White man. It would also be interesting to examine the assumptions women make about sexual objectifiers' racial and gender ideologies.

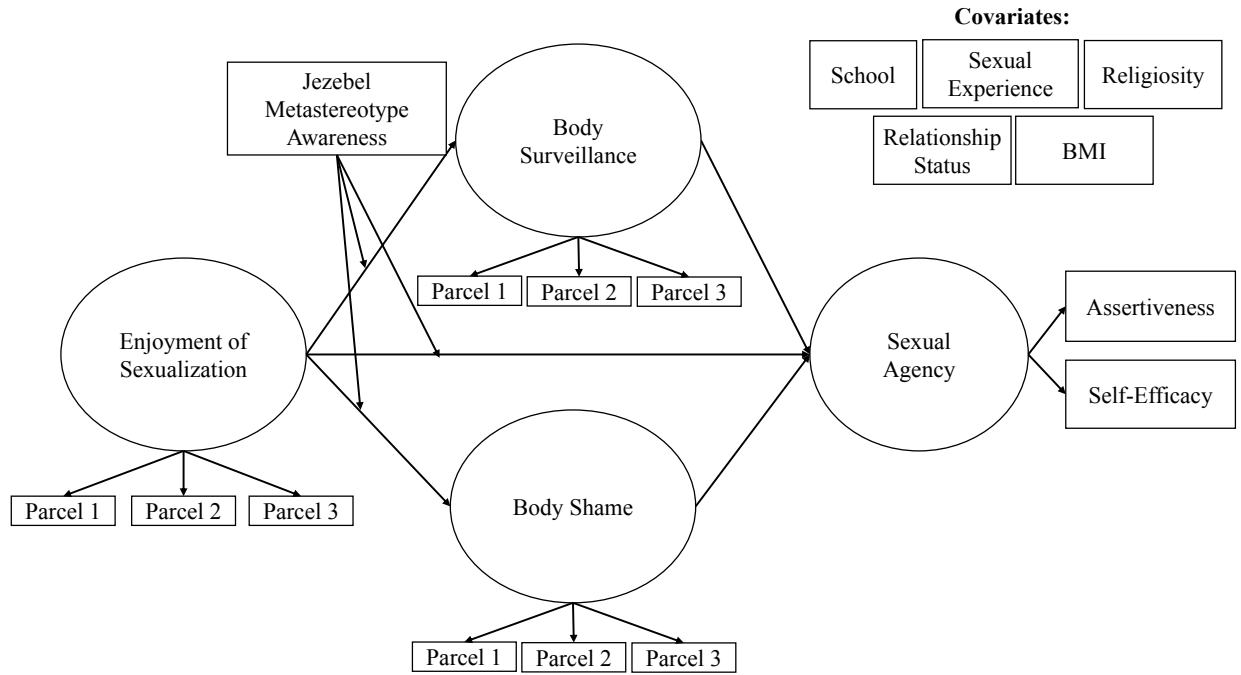
Third, because enjoyment of sexualization is a relatively new construct, qualitative research may be useful in furthering our knowledge of the meaning of enjoyment of sexualization in Black women's lives. This research would also be helpful for fleshing out the

seemingly conflicting findings regarding the direct and indirect associations between enjoyment of sexualization and sexual agency as well as understanding why body shame, but not body surveillance, significantly relates to sexual agency.

### **Conclusion**

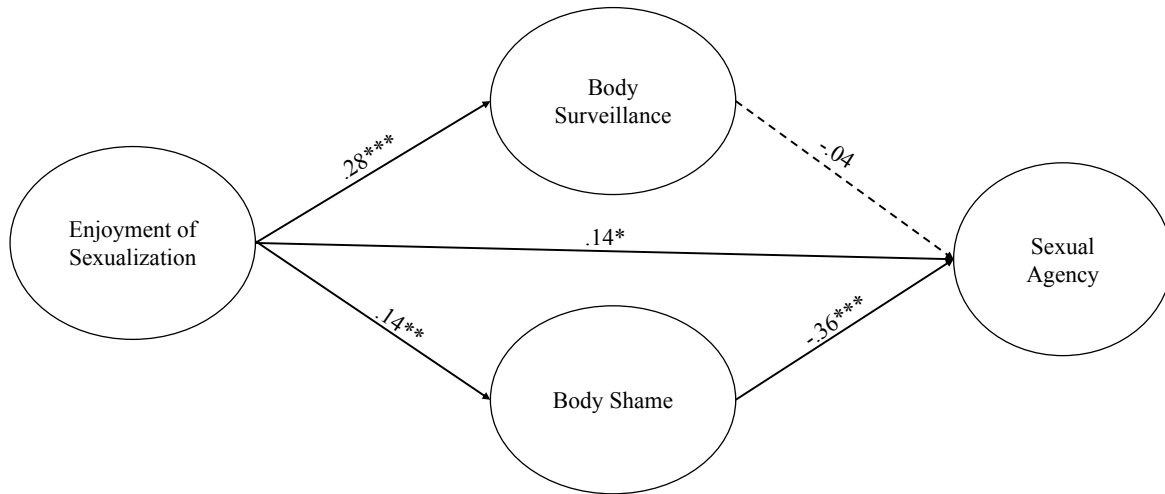
This study demonstrates that enjoyment of sexualization has negative consequences for Black women's sexual agency. Body shame is a particularly important mechanism for explaining this relation. The current research represents one of the first studies to examine the construct of enjoyment of sexualization within a population of Black women, taking into account the influence of a relevant gendered, racial stereotype (i.e. the Jezebel stereotype). It is also one of the first to examine the relation between enjoyment of sexualization and sexual agency. Researchers and practitioners interested in examining young women's experiences of sexualization should account for the unique racialized experiences of Black women.

Figure 3.1. Conceptual Model.



Note. All latent constructs regressed on school, sexual experience, religiosity, relationship status, and BMI covariates; not depicted for clarity.

Figure 3.2. Proposed Structural Model.



Note.  $N = 569$ . Standardized regression coefficients are noted for each path.  $**p < .01$ ;  $***p < .001$ . Dashed lines indicate nonsignificant paths. All latent constructs regressed on school, sexual experience, religiosity, relationship status, and BMI covariates; not depicted for clarity. Paths from the Enjoyment of Sexualization x Jezebel Metastereotype Awareness interaction term not depicted for clarity.

Table 3.1

## Descriptive Statistics for Variables of Interest

Latent variables	Full Sample	PWI	HBCU	<i>t</i>	<i>d</i>
	<i>M(SD)</i>	<i>M(SD)</i>	<i>M(SD)</i>		
Enjoyment of sexualization					
Parcel 1	3.77 (1.02)	3.78 (1.01)	3.75 (1.04)	.37	.03
Parcel 2	3.39 (.95)	3.39 (.95)	3.39 (.95)	.06	0.0
Parcel 3	4.75 (1.08)	4.79 (1.02)	4.68 (1.17)	1.36	.10
Body surveillance					
Parcel 1	3.54 (1.03)	3.59 (1.05)	3.48 (1.00)	1.41	.11
Parcel 2	3.78 (1.00)	3.81 (1.01)	3.74 (.98)	.90	.07
Parcel 3	3.83 (1.09)	3.90 (1.09)	3.73 (1.07)	2.05	.17
Body shame					
Parcel 1	2.82 (1.18)	2.84 (1.23)	2.79 (1.12)	.61	.04
Parcel 2	2.94 (1.03)	2.95 (1.08)	2.94 (.96)	.20	.01
Parcel 3	2.74 (1.20)	2.70 (1.15)	2.79 (1.27)	-.92*	.07
Sexual agency					
Sexual assertiveness	3.62 (.74)	3.57 (.77)	3.69 (.68)	-1.95	.07
Sexual self-efficacy	4.33 (1.44)	4.32 (1.42)	4.34 (1.46)	-0.20	.01
Jezebel Metastereotype Awareness	3.19 (1.04)	3.22 (1.02)	3.13 (1.07)	1.14	.09

$p \leq .05$ ; \*\* $p \leq .01$ ; \*\*\* $p \leq .00$

Table 3.2

## Bivariate Correlations among Manifest Variables

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
1. EOS1	—											
2. EOS2	.77**	—										
3. EOS3	.60**	.48**	—									
4. BSurv1	.18**	.12**	.25**	—								
5. BSurv2	.13**	.07	.24**	.67**	—							
6. BSurv3	.06	.03	.16*	.51**	.46**	—						
7. BShame1	.12**	.09*	.11**	.47**	.46**	.18**	—					
8. BShame2	.12**	.12**	.11**	.37**	.36**	.15**	.66**	—				
9. BShame3	.23**	.21**	.17**	.32**	.27**	.07	.55**	.61**	—			
10. Sexual Assertiveness	.09*	.10*	.10*	-.13**	-.08*	.03	-.24*	-.23**	-.22**	—		
11. Sexual self-efficacy	.05	.03	.06	-.13**	-.16**	-.05	-.15**	-.16**	-.12**	.39**	—	
12. JMA	.08*	.02	.13**	.03	.02	-.00	.00	.05	.10*	.00	.06	—

\*  $p < .05$ . \*\*  $p < .01$ .

Note. EOS = enjoyment of sexualization parcels; BSurv = body surveillance parcels; BShame = body shame parcels. JMA = Jezebel Metastereotype Awareness manifest variable.



Table 3.3  
 Bootstrap Analysis of Magnitude and Statistical Significance of Indirect Relations

Indirect Effect	$\beta$ (standardized indirect effect)	Mean indirect effect ( $B$ ) <sup>a</sup>	<i>SE</i> of mean <sup>a</sup>	95% CI for mean indirect effect <sup>a</sup>
Enjoyment of sexualization → Body surveillance → Sexual agency	-0.01	-0.01	0.03	-.074, .037
Enjoyment of sexualization → Body shame → Sexual agency	-0.05	-0.05	0.02	-0.114, -.016*

<sup>a</sup> These values are based on the unstandardized path coefficients. \* $p < .01$ .

## Chapter 4

### **Study 3: A Threat in the Bedroom? Examining the Jezebel Stereotype as a Form of Stereotype Threat for Black Women's Sexual Attitudes and Behavior**

Stereotype threat is a situational experience of anxiety associated with the prospect of being judged as a result of one's membership in a group about whom a negative stereotype exists (Steele, 1997; Steele & Aronson, 1995). Although stereotype threat was originally conceptualized to "affect the members of any group about whom a negative stereotype exists (e.g., skateboarders, older adults, White men, gang members)" (Steele, 1997, p. 614), much of the existing work has narrowly focused on how stereotype threat hampers the test performance of racial/ethnic minorities and women in male-dominated fields (for review, see Nguyen & Ryan, 2008; Pennington, Heim, Levy, & Larkin, 2016). The few studies that have moved beyond test performance still examine some form of performance as the outcome variable. Few studies have examined the influence of stereotype threat on non-performance behavioral outcomes, such as sexual behavior. In addition, past studies have examined the effects of stereotype threat related to race *or* gender stereotypes, but few have investigated the stereotype threat related to Black women's intersectional identities. Thus, the current study proposes to fill these gaps by examining the Jezebel stereotype (a racialized and gendered stereotype) regarding Black women's sexuality as providing the basis of one form of stereotype threat and its subsequent consequences for Black women's sexual well-being. I expect that if a Black woman fears confirming the Jezebel stereotype, she will engage in behaviors that refute the stereotype, such as displaying less sexual assertiveness, less sexual self-efficacy, and more sexual guilt and shame.

## **The Jezebel Stereotype**

Black women's sexuality has been stigmatized by the Jezebel stereotype that depicts them as hypersexual, promiscuous, and manipulative (Collins, 2002). The Jezebel stereotype was historically used to justify the widespread rape of enslaved women by White men, and there is evidence that the stereotype continues to influence the way that people appraise Black women and to hold social and political meaning (e.g., Johnson, Bushman, & Dovidio, 2008).

Past research indicates that Black women who endorse the Jezebel stereotype are more likely to report poorer sexual health and relationship outcomes. For example, endorsement of the Jezebel stereotype has been associated with risky sexual behaviors among adolescents and women (Davis & Tucker-Brown, 2013; Townsend, Thomas, Neilands, & Jackson, 2010). In addition, theoretical analyses suggest that, for Black female victims of sexual assault, endorsement of the Jezebel stereotype may be linked to increased victim-blaming (West, 1995). Internalization of the Jezebel stereotype by Black women and men also contributes to negative interpersonal dynamics with their romantic relationships and lower levels of relationship satisfaction (Fisher & Coleman, 2017; Gillum, 2002). Together, these findings establish endorsement of the Jezebel stereotype as detrimental for Black women's safe-sex practices, well-being, and romantic relationships.

However, I argue that Black women do not have to internalize these stereotypes for them to be damaging; indeed, this is a premise of stereotype threat literature in general (Steele, 1997). Exposure to the stereotype in the presence of others may be sufficient to provoke behavior change. The current study tests whether Black women exposed to Jezebel stereotype threat are more likely to exhibit more conservative sexual attitudes and behavior.

## **Examining Stereotype Threat in Non-Academic Domains**

Recently, researchers have called for a broadening of the scope of stereotype threat research beyond test performance (Lewis & Sekaquaptewa, 2016). Lewis and Sekaquaptewa (2016) outline three criteria necessary for stereotype threat to occur: stereotype awareness, domain identification, and task difficulty. First, individuals must be aware that a negative stereotype about their group exists. Second, the domain under study must be personally relevant to the individual. For domains in which individuals are highly identified, stereotype threat is heightened. Third, the task under study must be difficult for individuals to feel threatened. Once these conditions have been established, the effort and energy put forth to cope with the stress triggered by being under threat is thought to deplete individuals' executive control, which leads to performance deficits.

Using these criteria as guidelines, stereotype threat effects can be extended to a variety of non-academic domains. For example, stereotype threat has been shown to impair women's driving performance (Yeung & von Hippel, 2008) and women's performance in negotiations (Kray, Galinsky, & Thompson, 2001). With Black participants, stereotype threat has been shown to impair interracial interaction between Blacks and Whites (Goff, Steele, & Davies, 2008) and Blacks' encounters with the police (Najdowski, Bottoms, & Goff, 2015). For example, in the latter study, Black men reported feeling stereotype threat in response to a hypothetical encounter with a police officer due to dominant stereotypes that describe Black men as violent and as criminals. Black men were also more likely than White men to anticipate feeling anxious and more vigilant about their behavior and about the police encounter. The authors note that, ironically, in an effort to disconfirm the stereotype, Black men may display behaviors, such as decreased eye contact or appearing nervous, that prompt police to perceive them as guilty or suspicious. The current study proposes to extend these principles to the study of Black women's

sexuality, focusing on the Jezebel stereotype.

### **Factors Affecting the Reporting of Sexual Attitudes and Behavior**

Although no experimental studies have tested attitudinal and behavioral effects of priming the Jezebel stereotype, previous work on mostly White samples has shown that manipulating social context and testing conditions can significantly affect women's self-report of sexual attitudes and behavior (e.g., Alexander & Fisher, 2003; Fisher, 2007; Fisher, 2009; Fisher, 2013). Adherence to traditional gender ideologies that prescribe female submissiveness and gatekeeping can have detrimental consequences for women's sexual relationships (Sanchez, Fetterolf, & Rudman, 2012). One set of studies has examined women's awareness of gender norms about sex as one aspect of social context that may be influential. When these norms are communicated to women, they are more likely to report socially desirable and conservative sexual behaviors. For example, in one study (Fisher, 2009), prior to completing a questionnaire on self-reported sexual attitudes and behavior, participants overheard a staged conversation that either reinforced conservative sexual norms that criticized casually dating more than one partner or a conversation that endorsed more permissive norms. Both men and women in the permissive condition reported more cheating behavior than participants in the sexually conservative condition. This research indicates that making women aware of social norms about sex can shape their reporting of sexual behavior. In an earlier study, Fisher (2007) examined the influence of written statements that reported research findings asserting that (1) men are more sexually experienced and permissive than women, (2) women are more sexually experienced and permissive than men, or (3) there are no gender differences in sexual behavior. Here, Fisher (2007) found differences only in the reporting of behavior by male participants, however, suggesting that it may be important to verbally communicate gender norms for them to impact

women's self-report.

Further, Alexander and Fisher (2003) examined self-reported sexual behavior using a bogus pipeline methodology, in which participants in one condition completed a questionnaire on their sexual behavior and attitudes while attached to a nonfunctioning polygraph machine and were under the impression that the machine could detect dishonest answers. In the exposure threat condition, students were told that they would have to give their survey responses to the experimenter upon completion, potentially giving the experimenter an opportunity to view their responses. In addition, the door to the study room remained open and the experimenter was visibly sitting outside while they completed the experiment. When participants completed the study, they were actually instructed to put the survey in a locked box. Women in the exposure threat condition underreported their sexual behavior (e.g., masturbation and consumption of hardcore and soft-core erotica) in comparison to women in the bogus pipeline condition, who were presumably compelled to be more honest about their sexual behavior while connected to a polygraph machine. Women in the exposure threat condition, in contrast, were likely motivated to report more sexually conservative behavior due to normative gender beliefs and social desirability.

It is important to note that across each of these studies, only the reporting of sexual behavior, not sexual attitudes, was affected by the manipulation of threat. This difference suggests that changes in the reporting of sexual behavior is more susceptible to changes in the social context than sexual attitudes, which may be more stable and not as influenced by making normative gender expectations salient. In addition, follow-up studies (e.g., Fisher, 2013) have replicated these findings and extended them to show that manipulating the awareness of traditional gender beliefs impacts self-reported sexual behavior, but not other, non-sexual gender

stereotyped behavior, such as wearing dirty clothes (a male-typed behavior) or lying about one's weight (a female-typed behavior).

### **The Moderating Role of Race**

Another set of studies has focused on how aspects of the testing environment may influence women's reporting of sexual attitudes and behaviors. For example, McCallum and Peterson (2015) manipulated level of experimenter contact (high vs. low contact), setting (in lab vs. out of lab), and inquiry mode (pencil-and-paper vs. computer) in a sample of White women and women of color. They hypothesized that women tested under low-contact, out-of-lab, computer survey conditions would report more liberal sexual attitudes and more sexual behaviors than women tested under high-contact, in-lab, and paper-and-pencil survey conditions.

Significant results in the hypothesized direction were only found for women of color, however. For example, women of color were more likely to report more permissive sexual attitudes, such as acceptance of casual sex, in the low-contact condition than the high-contact condition. The opposite was found for White women, who reported more liberal attitudes in the high-contact condition than the low-contact condition (McCallum & Peterson, 2015). The researchers speculated that this difference emerged due to women of color's worry about confirming racial stereotypes, though they do not specify which stereotypes and do not test this assumption directly.

### **The Current Study**

Black women's sexual behavior is often characterized in line with the Jezebel stereotype, which describes them as hypersexual and manipulative. Past research finds that endorsement of this race-specific stereotype of their sexuality has a detrimental influence on their safe-sex practices, experiences of sexual harassment and assault, and romantic relationships (Buchanan &

Ormerod, 2002; Fisher & Coleman, 2017; Hall & Witherspoon, 2015; Peterson, Wingood, DiClemente, Harrington, & Davies, 2007; Townsend, Neilands, Thomas, & Jackson, 2010; West, 1995). However, less is known about how feelings of threat as a result of others' perceived endorsement of the Jezebel stereotype affect Black women's sexual attitudes and behavior.

With the exception of a small number of studies, research on stereotype threat among Africans Americans and women has largely been focused on examining academic test performance as an outcome. Further, other experiments investigating how prescriptive gender norms about sex and testing conditions may influence women's self-report of sexual attitudes and behaviors has not taken into account race-specific notions of femininity, such as the Jezebel stereotype.

In Study 3, I aim to bridge these two literatures and extend stereotype threat theory to the domain of sexuality. The current study examined whether Black women who are under Jezebel stereotype-related threat display more conservative sexual attitudes and behavior. Participants completed health questionnaires used to manipulate the salience of the sexuality threat, and their race and gender identity was primed by comments made to them by an experimenter.

I hypothesize that, in comparison to Black women who are not primed with the Jezebel stereotype, Black women who are primed with the Jezebel stereotype will: (1) take fewer complimentary sexual health-related products when presented with a product selection task, (2) report more conservative sexual decision-making in response to a hypothetical hook-up scenario, and (3) report more conservative sexual attitudes. Because all women are stigmatized for engaging in sexual activity, White women were included as a comparison group. I do not expect a significant difference between White women in the sexuality threat condition and White women in the control condition on the outcomes variables.



## Method

### Participants

A total of 99 Black and White women were recruited from the Office of the Registrar at the University of Michigan to participate in exchange for a \$15 Mastercard gift card. The Office of the Registrar sent recruitment emails directly to a random sample of currently enrolled juniors, seniors, and graduate/professional school students that self-identified as a Black/African American or White woman. The inclusion criteria required that the participants identify as a Black or White woman and as heterosexual. Four participants did not complete the study procedure in the correct order. After removing these participants, I had a final sample of 95 women (49.5% Black, 50.5% White; age:  $M = 22.94$ ;  $SD = 3.44$ , range = 18-38).

Most of the sample had had at least one sexual relationship previously (77.7%), while 22.3% were virgins. Seventy percent of the sample indicated that they were currently sexually active. Almost half the sample (46.3%) was in a committed, sexual relationship. Mother's education was used as a proxy for socioeconomic status. Overall, the sample came from a very well-educated background, with 26.3% of their mothers having earned a Bachelor's degree and 38% attending some graduate school or having earned a graduate/professional degree. Racial differences in demographic variables are presented in Table 4.1. In my sample, Black participants were significantly older and more religious than White participants, and White participants reported significantly higher levels of mother's education than Black participants. The demographic variables were, otherwise, equally distributed across conditions.

### Pre-testing effects of experimenter characteristics

To assist in determining the most optimal race/gender identity of the experimenter used in the main study, I conducted a pre-test to examine Black women's evaluations of which groups

endorse the Jezebel stereotype, comparing their perceptions of White men's, White women's, Black men's, and Black women's Jezebel stereotype endorsement. Participants were 148 self-identified African-American/Black women aged 18-30 ( $M = 24.23$ ;  $SD = 3.76$ ) recruited from TurkPrime's Prime Panels service. TurkPrime is a crowdsourcing site that connects with Amazon Mechanical Turk (MTurk) and several other participant recruitment platforms (e.g., SurveyMonkey, Crowdfunder). The panel service provides researchers with access to hard-to-reach populations for an additional per participant fee. This recruitment technique allowed me to obtain a larger and more diverse pool of Black participants than I would be able to secure if I had recruited from a university population.

Participants were randomly assigned to one of four conditions and instructed to rate their perceptions of either White men's, White women's, Black men's, or Black women's Jezebel stereotype endorsement. To measure Black women's perception of each group's Jezebel stereotype endorsement, I modified the prompt for the Jezebel Metastereotype Scale as follows: "Now, we're going to ask you some questions about the beliefs that [*White men, White women, Black men, or Black women*] might have about Black women. You may or may not personally agree with a statement; we only want to know what you believe [*White men, White women, Black men, or Black women*] think. How much do you think [*White men, White women, Black men, or Black women*] believe that Black women..." Sample items include: "always want to have sex" and "use sex to get what they want." Participants were asked to indicate their level of agreement with the statements on a 5-point scale (1 = not at all; 5 = almost always). Items were averaged to create a scale score. The scale was reliable in each condition ( $\alpha_{\text{White Men}} = .95$ ,  $\alpha_{\text{White Women}} = .94$ ,  $\alpha_{\text{Black Men}} = .94$ ,  $\alpha_{\text{Black Women}} = .95$ ). Higher scores indicate a greater belief that that group endorses the Jezebel stereotype.

A one-way ANOVA showed a significant difference between groups,  $F(3, 144) = 3.62, p < .05, \eta_p^2 = .07$ . Tukey post-hoc tests revealed that participants believed White ( $M=3.25; SD=1.00$ ) and Black men ( $M=3.23; SD=.94$ ) endorsed the Jezebel stereotype significantly more than Black Women ( $M= 2.62; SD=.89$ ),  $p < .05$ . There were no significant differences between perceptions about White men and White women's ( $M=3.13; SD=.97$ ) beliefs,  $p = ns$ , White men's and Black men's beliefs,  $p = ns$ , White women's and Black men's beliefs,  $p = ns$ , or White women's and Black women's beliefs,  $p = ns$ . These data are presented graphically in Figure 4.1. Based on these findings, I selected two White male experimenters for the main study.

### **Procedure and Measures**

Participants were recruited for a study about “health and well-being.” After completing an eligibility questionnaire to ensure that they met the inclusion criteria for the study, they used an online scheduling system to sign up for a half-hour lab session. Participants were tested one at a time. When they arrived for the study, they were greeted by a White male experimenter who said, “Hi. Thank you agreeing to participate in our study. We really needed more: [*White women participants or Black women participants*], so we appreciate you coming in.” This comment was intended to make the race and gender identity of participants salient. The experimenter then explained that the participant would be participating in two research studies— the first a study about promoting healthy behaviors and the second about attitudes towards dating and relationships. Both questionnaires were completed through an online, Qualtrics survey provided on a Kindle tablet.

To manipulate the salience of the sexuality threat, participants were randomly assigned to take one of two health questionnaires in the first part of the study. Both questionnaires were designed to resemble questionnaires participants might fill out at a doctor/dentist visit, and both

included questions developed to make participants feel embarrassed or judged for not carrying out healthy practices. In the threat condition, participants responded to questions assessing their sexual history, sexual health, and sexual behavior. Sample questions include: “Have you ever lied to someone about the number of partners you’ve been with?”; “Have you ever engaged in vaginal intercourse with a casual partner without using condoms?”; and “Have you ever become sexually aroused in an inappropriate context?” In the control condition, the questions pertained to participants’ general health habits, including oral and hand hygiene (i.e., regular hand-washing and hand sanitizer use), intended to also be shaming but not sexual. Sample questions include: “Because of the state of your teeth and mouth, have you had difficulty biting hard foods during the past year?” and “Have you ever not washed your hands after using a public bathroom?” Participants were left alone to complete the questionnaire while the experimenter waited in an adjacent study room.

After completing the first questionnaire, participants were presented with a screen that instructed them to stop and take the tablet to the experimenter. While the experimenter purportedly prepared the tablet for the next study, he let the participant know that the University Health Service heard about the study and donated several health products for the participants to take. Participants were instructed to take as many products as they desired.

The health products were located in bowls on a table in an adjacent study room in the following order, from left to right: assorted condoms (i.e., Lifestyles, Trojan Magnum, Komono), assorted sexual lubricant (i.e., assorted CVS brand lubricant samples), Tampax regular and super tampons, Always pantliners, Oral-B dental floss, and Purell hand sanitizer. I anticipated that participants might take fewer of the sexual-health related products because of the stigma attached to being seen with condoms and sexual lubricant in public. Menstruation, like sexuality, is

stigmatized for all women; however, menstruation is not attached to a group-based stereotype. Thus, I included the feminine hygiene products as a comparison because their use might be stigmatized for all women, whereas sexual products may be especially stigmatizing for Black women. Brown paper bags were also provided on the table for participants to place their product selections in; this ensured that all participants would have a discreet means of transporting their product selections back to the study room and that they would be able to take a relatively large number of products if desired.

After selecting their preferred products, participants returned to the original study room and left the products there. They then went to the experimenter to retrieve the tablet for the second questionnaire. Participants were reminded that the second questionnaire examines attitudes about dating and relationships. Again, the experimenter left the room while participants took the survey. The questionnaire began with a vignette assessing their hypothetical sexual decision-making. Participants read the vignette (adopted from Ross & Bowen, 2010) and then responded to questions regarding their sexual decision-making. The vignette read as follows:

You are at a party with your friends when you see Anthony, a guy from one of your classes whom you find very attractive. In the past, you've only had a few brief conversations with him during class, so you're excited to see him at the party. The two of you get to talking and are having a great time together. When all of your friends are ready to leave the two of you want to keep hanging out, so you decide to go back to Anthony's place to watch a movie. While at Anthony's place, you and Anthony start making out. You continue kissing while you move into Anthony's bedroom.

Participants rated the likelihood that they would make out with Anthony, take their clothes off, engage in oral sex, and engage in sexual intercourse with Anthony on a five-point

scale (1 = not at all likely to 5 = extremely likely). They also responded to the following questions regarding their perception of how difficult it would be to implement condom use (taken from Woolf & Maisto, 2008): “How difficult would it be for you to initiate a conversation with Anthony about using a condom?”; “How difficult would it be for you to negotiate condom use with Anthony?”; and “How difficult would it be for you to actually use a condom?” Participants responded on a four-point scale (1 = not difficult at all to 4 = very difficult). The condom use difficulty items were averaged to create a scale score ( $\alpha = .69$ ), and higher scores indicate higher levels of perceived condom use difficulty.

Central measures from Studies 1 and 2 were also assessed as outcomes in this study, including: The 25-item Hurlbert Index of Sexual Assertiveness ( $\alpha = .87$ ), the 5-item measure of Sexual Self-Monitoring ( $\alpha = .86$ ), the 6-item measure of Sexual Self-Consciousness ( $\alpha = .88$ ), the 6-item measure of Sexual Guilt and Shame ( $\alpha = .95$ ), the 8-item Enjoyment of Sexualization Scale ( $\alpha = .79$ ), and 7-item measure of Drug and Alcohol Use for Sex ( $\alpha = .75$ ). Additional sex/dating demographic questions were included after these measures, including questions assessing whether participants were currently using any form of hormonal birth control and whether they were allergic to latex condoms.

Two questions were included as manipulation checks— “Think back to the questions you were asked to answer in Study 1, as a part of the health questionnaire.”: (1) “In general, how uncomfortable/embarrassed did you feel answering those questions?” and (2) “In general, how much did you feel like someone reading your answers to those questions would judge you?” Participants responded on a scale ranging from 0 (not at all) to 100 (a great deal). Participants also completed the Jezebel Metastereotype Awareness Scale from Studies 1 and 2 as an additional manipulation check. For White participants, the instructions for the scale were

modified to use “White women” as the anchor: “Now, we're going to ask you some questions about the beliefs that **other people** might have about White women. You may or may not personally agree with a statement; we only want to know what you believe **other people** think. How much do you think **other people** believe that White women...”

After completing the second questionnaire, participants returned to the experimenter to be debriefed. Once the participant left, the experimenter counted the number of health products left in each bowl to determine how many the participant took. Based on my research questions, I was most interested in the number of condoms and lubricant taken. A version of this task has been used successfully in previous studies assessing college students' condom use (e.g., Ellis, Homish, Parks, Collins, & Kiviniemi, 2015).

## Results

I conducted a series of 2 (participant race: Black or White) x 2 (condition: threat or control) ANOVAs to test my main research questions. My outcomes of interest were the number of condoms and lubricant samples taken, responses to the hypothetical sexual decision-making scenario, and scores on the sexual well-being measures (sexual assertiveness, sexual monitoring, sexual self-consciousness, sexual guilt and shame, enjoyment of sexualization, and drug and alcohol use for sex).

### Manipulation Check

Independent samples *t* tests revealed that participants did not feel significantly more uncomfortable/embarrassed,  $t(92) = 1.21, p = .228$ , or judged,  $t(92) = .72, p = .472$ , when responding to the questions used for the questionnaire in the threat condition ( $M_{embarrassed} = 19.35, SD_{embarrassed} = 20.98; M_{judged} = 30.91, SD_{judged} = 26.62$ ) than the questionnaire used in the control condition ( $M_{embarrassed} = 13.88, SD_{embarrassed} = 22.66; M_{judged} = 26.48, SD_{judged} = 32.44$ ).

Thus, the manipulation checks failed.

I also conducted a 2 (participant race: Black or White) x 2 (condition: threat or control) ANOVA with Jezebel metastereotype awareness as the outcome variable. There was no main effect of condition,  $F(1, 90) = 1.05, p = .309$ , an additional indicator that the manipulation was unsuccessful. Participants in the threat condition ( $M = 3.43; SD = .75$ ) were not significantly more aware of the Jezebel stereotype than participants in the control condition ( $M = 3.59; SD = 1.07$ ). However, there was a significant main effect of race,  $F(1, 90) = 35.61, p < .001$ . Black participants ( $M = 3.99; SD = 1.00$ ) were significantly more aware that others held the Jezebel stereotype of their group than White participants ( $M = 3.03; SD = .51$ ). The condition x race interaction effect was not significant,  $F(1, 90) = 2.62, p = .109$ .

### **Testing the Main Research Questions and Hypotheses**

Descriptive statistics and results are displayed in Tables 4.2 and 4.3, respectively. Counter to the first hypothesis, there were no main effects of condition or race or a significant interaction effect for the number of condoms and lubricant samples taken.

Regarding the responses to the hypothetical vignette (Hypothesis 2), there was a significant main effect of race for the questions pertaining to the likelihood that participants would make out with Anthony, take their clothes off, and engage in oral sex. Black participants rated themselves as less likely to continue making out with Anthony, take their clothes off, and have oral sex with Anthony than White participants. There was no significant main effect of condition or a significant interaction effect for these questions. For the final question regarding sexual intercourse, there were no significant main effects of condition or race; however, there was a significant condition x race interaction effect (Figure 4.2). In line with my hypothesis, simple effects analyses revealed that Black participants in the threat condition ( $M = 1.39; SD =$



.72) rated themselves as significantly less likely to have sexual intercourse with Anthony than Black participants in the control condition ( $M = 2.23$ ;  $SD = 1.27$ ),  $F(1, 43) = 7.45$ ,  $p = .009$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .15$ . In contrast, White participants in the threat condition ( $M = 2.43$ ;  $SD = 1.27$ ) did not significantly differ from White participants in the control condition ( $M = 1.92$ ;  $SD = 1.04$ ) in their response,  $F(1, 46) = 2.38$ ,  $p = .130$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .05$ . There were no significant main effects of condition or race or a significant interaction effect for condom use difficulty. Thus, Hypothesis 2 was partially supported.

Counter to Hypothesis 3, there was also no main effect of condition or race or a significant interaction effect for sexual assertiveness, sexual monitoring, sexual self-consciousness, enjoyment of sexualization, or drug and alcohol use for sex. There was a significant main effect of race for sexual guilt and shame, with Black participants reporting significantly more guilt and shame than White participants. There was no significant main effect of condition or a significant interaction effect for this variable.

### **Post-Hoc Analyses**

The sexuality threat manipulation may have been especially influential for women who were more aware that others hold the Jezebel stereotype. In post-hoc analyses, I used a 2 (participant race: Black or White) x 2 (condition: threat or control) x 2 (Jezebel metastereotype awareness: low or high) ANOVA to further examine the moderating role of Jezebel metastereotype awareness for each of the outcome variables of interest. There was no significant Condition x Jezebel Metastereotype Awareness interaction effect or Race x Condition x Jezebel Metastereotype Awareness interaction effect for any of the outcome variables of interest ( $p > .05$ ). These analyses were likely underpowered, given the small sample size for this study.

## Discussion

In their dating and sexual encounters, Black women must negotiate the Jezebel stereotype, which characterizes them as promiscuous and hypersexual. Although past studies have outlined the negative consequences for Black women of endorsing this stereotype, less research has examined how Black women's exposure to the stereotype in the presence of others affects their sexual attitudes and behavior. Framed by stereotype threat theory, the current study used an experimental design to test whether Black women under sexual stereotype threat exhibited more conservative sexual attitudes and behavior than Black women not under threat.

Counter to the first hypothesis, there were no significant differences in the number of sex-related health products taken by participants for whom the Jezebel stereotype was made salient and those in the control condition. I used a health product selection task to test this hypothesis, modeled after previous research (Ellis, Homish, Parks, Collins, & Kiviniemi, 2015). In this prior study, 40 condoms were available for participants to take. In my study, I made 10 items available for each product, which allowed the experimenter to have sufficient time to count the products in between participants' sessions. The mean levels of products taken by participants were fairly low, however, with most participants only taking an average of one condom or lubricant sample with them. I may have observed more variance for this variable if a larger number of products were made available. Future research could also consider including other sex-related products or items as outcomes in a similar task. Researchers could also test other relevant behavioral outcomes, such as clothing choice or sexual self-presentation.

In line with the second hypothesis, Black participants in the threat condition were less likely to report that they would have sexual intercourse with a man in a hypothetical scenario than Black participants in the control condition. This outcome is consistent with past studies that

have successfully manipulated the reporting of sexual behavior in a laboratory setting (Alexander & Fisher, 2003; Fisher, 2007; Fisher, 2009; Fisher, 2013). A similar interaction effect was not found for White participants, suggesting that these responses were due to the unique stereotype threat that concerns Black women during sexual encounters. Due to the difficulty of directly studying behavioral outcomes in sex research, researchers should continue examining how findings from hypothetical vignettes can be used to provide more insight into Black women's actual sexual decision-making.

With respect to the third hypothesis, I also did not find a significant difference in sexual attitudes between women in the threat condition and women in the control condition. This outcome is consistent with previous research (Alexander & Fisher, 2003; Fisher, 2007; Fisher, 2009; Fisher, 2013) that failed to successfully experimentally manipulate the reporting of sexual attitudes.

Though most of the hypothesized interaction effects did not emerge, many of the significant racial differences warrant consideration. First, Black participants reported being significantly more aware of the sexual stereotype about women of their racial group than White participants. One counterpoint to my theoretical framework and hypotheses could be that hegemonic femininity dictates that all women perceived to be sexually permissive, regardless of cultural background, are subject to stigma when norms of sexual fidelity and sexual conservatism are violated (Collins, 2006). The findings regarding both groups' awareness of a sexual stereotype of their racial group demonstrate that Black women are more aware that this stigma is grounded in a group-based stereotype. Though the findings from the hypothetical vignette need to be replicated in future research, they provide initial evidence that specific mechanisms are at play regarding Black women's reporting of sexual behavior in comparison to those of White

women, likely due to stereotype threat.

The results also indicated that Black women were more likely to report conservative sexual attitudes and behavior in comparison to White women overall. Black women reported having more guilt and shame regarding sex. In the hypothetical scenario, they reported less intention to continue making out, take their clothes off, and engage in oral sex. These findings are in line with qualitative research indicating that Black women report more conservative sexual attitudes and behavior than White women. For example, Wyatt (1997) found that Black women were more likely to report fewer sexual relationships during adolescence, less likely to initiate sex with their partner, less likely to engage in oral sex and anal sex, and less likely to have more than one sexual partner at the same time. More recent analyses also indicate more restrictive sexual attitudes and behavior in samples of Black Americans compared to White Americans (Twenge, Sherman, & Wells, 2015). This difference may be due to higher levels of engagement with religious institutions within the Black community (Taylor, Mattis, & Chatters, 1999) that promote sexual stigma and shame. Future research should take Black women's generally conservative sexual attitudes into account when examining sexual well-being in multi-ethnic samples.

Further, these findings serve to uphold the Jezebel stereotype as a myth of Black women's sexuality (Jones & Shorter-Gooden, 2003). Counter to notions of Black women as lascivious and promiscuous in comparison to pious and pure White women, my findings bolster theoretical and empirical assertions that the Jezebel stereotype is a fallacy.

### **Limitations and Future Directions**

I acknowledge several limitations of the current study. First, the health questionnaire manipulation used to make the sexual stereotype salient in the threat condition was not

successful and is likely the source of the mostly nonsignificant findings. Future research should seek to identify more effective manipulations. For example, past research has been more successful when the manipulation was verbally communicated to participants (e.g., Fisher, 2009) than when it was written (e.g., Fisher 2013). It is also possible that participants did not have enough interaction with the White male experimenter to generate stereotype threat. The experimenter greeted participants upon arrival and provided instructions for completing the study but otherwise had little contact with participants. Past research has been more successful when participants had high contact with the experimenter (e.g., McCallum & Peterson, 2015) and when the experimenter has been visible while participants complete the study (e.g., Alexander & Fisher, 2003). It may have also been helpful if participants believed that they would have to share the responses with others, such as the experimenter or a focus group (Alexander & Fisher, 2003).

Second, pre-testing indicated that Black women believe White men and Black men to have the highest levels of Jezebel stereotype endorsement, in comparison to White women and Black women. Future studies should vary the race/gender identity of the experimenter to examine potential differential effects. Further, the experimenter in the present study was unknown to the participants. It would be interesting to examine my hypotheses within Black women's own intimate relationships with men. Future research could examine the function of the Jezebel stereotype for Black women's sexual well-being in both same-race and interracial romantic, heterosexual relationships.

Third, the current study was statistically underpowered. A post-hoc power analysis revealed that power for the present study's analyses ranged from 0% to 19%; in contrast, 80% power is optimal (Cohen, 1988). Recent research stresses the important role that statistical power

plays in psychological research (e.g., Vankov, Bowers, & Munafò, 2014). My predominately white, university setting increased the difficulty of recruiting hard-to-reach populations, such as Black women; however, a larger sample size would have provided the ability to detect smaller effect sizes for the significant findings. Future research may benefit from designing studies that make use of online samples of Black women, rather than requiring them to complete the study in-person.

### **Conclusion**

This study furthers our understanding of the consequences of exposure to the Jezebel stereotype for Black women's sexual decision-making. Importantly, this study expands the literature on stereotype threat by examining the theory within a non-academic domain, in relation to non-performance related outcomes, and with both a racialized and gendered stereotype. These findings would be useful for sexual education programs using hypothetical scenarios to teach Black adolescents and young women about sexual health, reproductive justice, and positive sexual experiences.

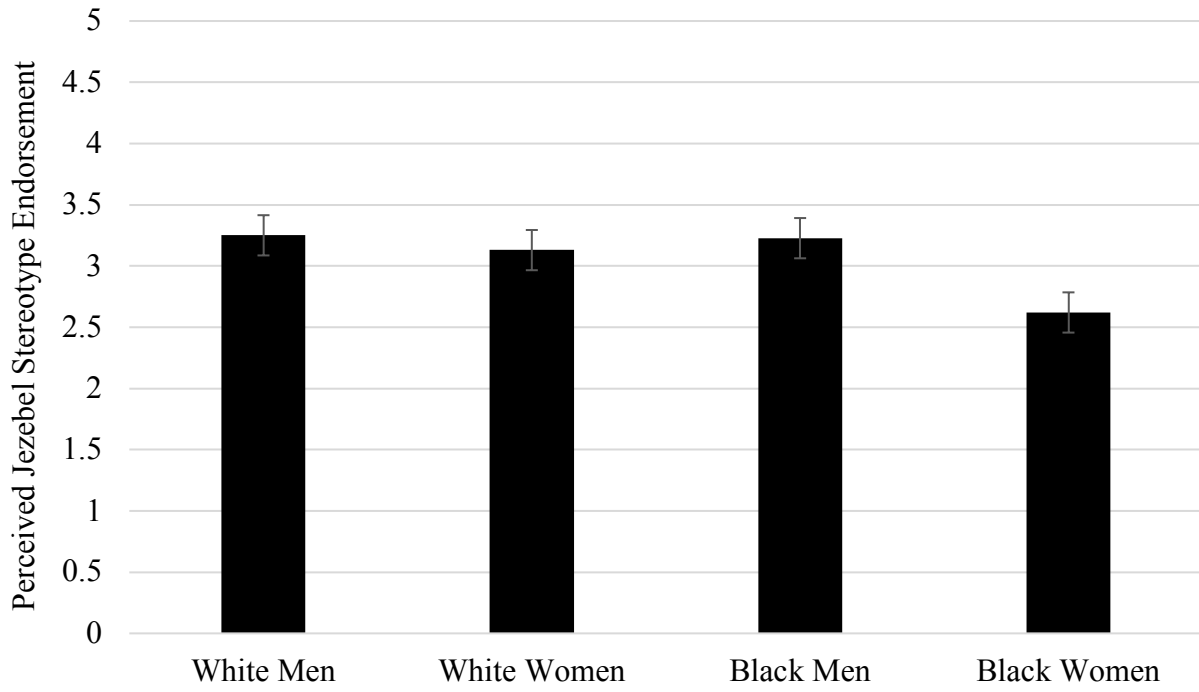


Figure 4.1. Results of the pre-test. Black women's mean evaluations of each group's Jezebel stereotype endorsement. Scores could range from 1 to 5. Error bars display standard errors.

Table 4.1

## Demographic Variables by Participant Race

Variable	Race	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>t</i>
Age	Black	47	23.62	3.67	<b>1.94<sup>†</sup></b>
	White	48	22.27	3.09	
Mother's Education	Black	47	4.60	1.94	<b>-2.38*</b>
	White	48	5.56	2.02	
Religiosity	Black	47	3.40	1.06	<b>4.34***</b>
	White	48	2.42	1.15	
Sexual Experience	Black	47	3.55	1.76	-.27
	White	47	3.64	1.33	
Relationship Status	Black	47	4.15	2.49	-1.82
	White	48	5.04	2.31	
Birth Control	Black	47	1.57	.50	1.33
	White	48	1.44	.50	
Latex Allergy	Black	43	1.91	.29	-1.46
	White	48	1.98	.14	

Note. <sup>†</sup> $p=.056$ ; \* $p<.05$ ; \*\*\* $p<.001$ .



Table 4.2

## Descriptive Statistics for Dependent Variables

DV	Threat Condition <i>M(SD)</i>		Control Condition <i>M(SD)</i>	
	Black	White	Black	White
Condoms	.57(1.04)	.96(1.19)	.43(.79)	.56(.92)
Lubricant	.57(.90)	1.00(1.38)	.74(.92)	.4(.65)
Make Out	3.26(1.36)	4.22(.85)	3.68(1.46)	4.08(1.15)
Take Clothes Off	2.04(1.02)	2.91(1.24)	2.59(1.37)	2.76(1.27)
Oral Sex	1.48(.59)	2.17(1.11)	1.95(1.33)	2.12(1.09)
Sexual Intercourse	1.39(.72)	2.43(1.27)	2.23(1.27)	1.92(1.04)
Condom Use Difficulty	1.33(.55)	1.48(.53)	1.38(.58)	1.52(.64)
Sexual Assertiveness	3.76(.54)	3.65(.56)	3.67(.72)	3.62(.50)
Sexual Monitoring	3.00(1.24)	2.89(1.17)	2.85(1.14)	2.72(1.10)
Sexual Self-Consciousness	3.06(1.19)	2.90(1.02)	3.10(.94)	2.82(1.13)
Sexual Guilt and Shame	2.94(2.21)	1.63(.88)	3.48(2.39)	2.21(1.85)
Enjoyment of Sexualization	4.43(.98)	4.41(.78)	4.36(.74)	4.21(.65)
Drug and Alcohol Use for Sex	4.12(.89)	4.16(.86)	3.87(1.45)	4.28(.89)

Table 4.3

ANOVA Summary Table

DV	Condition			Race			Condition x Race Interaction		
	<i>F</i> (df)	<i>p</i>	$\eta_p^2$	<i>F</i> (df)	<i>p</i>	$\eta_p^2$	<i>F</i> (df)	<i>p</i>	$\eta_p^2$
Condoms	1.66(1,90)	.201	.02	1.59(1,90)	.210	.02	.42(1,90)	.517	.01
Lubricant	1.09(1,90)	.300	.01	.06(1,90)	.815	.00	3.59(1,90)	.061	.04
Make Out	.31(1,89)	.578	.00	<b>7.13(1,89)**</b>	<b>.009</b>	<b>.08</b>	1.21(1,89)	.274	.01
Take Clothes Off	.60(1,89)	.442	.01	<b>4.14(1,89)*</b>	<b>.045</b>	<b>.04</b>	1.88(1,89)	.174	.02
Oral Sex	.92(1,89)	.341	.01	<b>3.80(1,89)†</b>	<b>.054</b>	<b>.04</b>	1.44(1,89)	.233	.02
Sexual Intercourse	.50(1,89)	.482	.01	2.62(1,89)	.109	.03	<b>8.82(1,89)**</b>	<b>.004</b>	<b>.09</b>
Condom Use Difficulty	.13(1,81)	.719	.00	1.24(1,81)	.270	.02	.00(1,81)	.988	.00
Sexual Assertiveness	.23(1,89)	.633	.00	.42(1,89)	.517	.00	.08(1,89)	.781	.00
Sexual Monitoring	.43(1,90)	.513	.01	.26(1,90)	.610	.00	.00(1,90)	.968	.00
Sexual Self-Consciousness	.01(1,89)	.932	.00	.98(1,89)	.324	.01	.07(1,89)	.791	.00
Sexual Guilt and Shame	1.99(1,89)	.162	.02	<b>10.54(1,89)**</b>	<b>.002</b>	<b>.11</b>	.00(1,89)	.950	.00
Enjoyment of Sexualization	.70(1,90)	.407	.01	.31(1,90)	.581	.00	.17(1,90)	.678	.00
Drug and Alcohol Use for Sex	.06(1,68)	.807	.00	.83(1,68)	.367	.01	.57(1,68)	.454	.01

Note. † $p$ =.054; \* $p$ <.05; \*\* $p$ <.01; \*\*\* $p$ <.001.

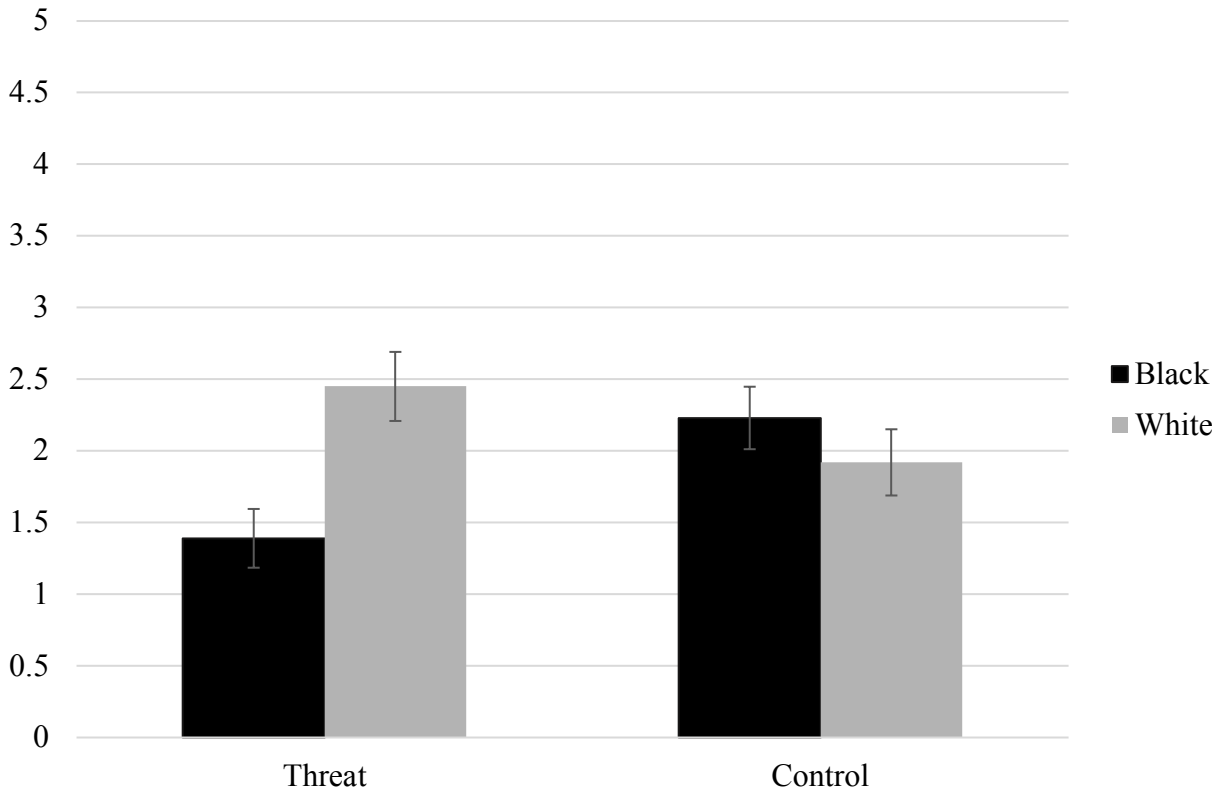


Figure 4.2. Mean response scores to the hypothetical vignette question, “How likely would you be to engage in sexual intercourse?”, of Black and White women across conditions. Scores could range from 1 to 5. Error bars display standard errors.

## **Chapter 5**

### **General Discussion**

My dissertation had three aims: 1) to explore how awareness of the Jezebel stereotype is linked to Black women's sexual well-being, 2) to examine how enjoyment of sexualization influences Black women's sexual agency and to test whether their awareness of the Jezebel stereotype makes a difference in their enjoyment of sexualization, and 3) to examine the Jezebel stereotype as a form of stereotype threat for Black women's sexual self-presentation. In Study 1, I found that Black women who were more aware of the Jezebel stereotype were more likely to engage in sexual monitoring and, in turn, more likely to report less sexual agency, more sexual inhibition, and more sexual risk. In the second study, I found that enjoyment of sexualization has simultaneous positive and negative influences on sexual agency. Enjoyment of sexualization is directly associated with higher levels of sexual agency, but indirectly associated with lower levels of sexual agency, through body shame. Additionally, Black women's enjoyment of sexualization does not depend on their awareness of the Jezebel stereotype. In Study 3, I found some evidence that supports that Black women under threat from the Jezebel stereotype report more conservative sexual attitudes and behavior. These findings have several important theoretical and real-world implications

#### **Examining the Role of the Jezebel Stereotype across the Three Studies**

First, Jezebel metastereotype awareness played the most significant role in Study 1, indirectly predicting several dimensions of sexual well-being. It was less influential in Study 2, failing to emerge as a significant moderator of the associations between enjoyment of

sexualization and body surveillance, body shame, and sexual agency. In Study 3, the manipulation of exposure to the Jezebel stereotype also failed to significantly affect many of the hypothesized outcomes; however, it did predict Black women's hypothetical sexual decision-making. The Jezebel Metastereotype Awareness Scale used in Study 1 likely provided the best operationalization of the construct in comparison to the manipulation used to examine exposure in Study 3. Study 2's findings suggest that awareness of the Jezebel stereotype may be less critical to understanding Black women's attitudes towards self-sexualization, as examined here. Jezebel metastereotype awareness may be more relevant for other measures of self-sexualization, such as sexual appeal self-worth (Gordon & Ward, 2000) or self-sexualizing behaviors (Nowatzki & Morry, 2009; Smolak, Murnen, & Myers, 2014). Other moderators, such as traditional gender beliefs or feminist ideology, should also be examined.

Second, the three studies differ in the framing of the Jezebel stereotype. Study 3 aimed to replicate Study 1's findings within a laboratory setting, experimentally manipulating exposure to a sexuality threat and examining its effect on Black women's sexual attitudes and behavior. Both Study 1 and Study 3 examine the Jezebel stereotype as a negative influence on Black women's sexual well-being; however, they differ in the perceivers under observation. Study 1 examines the stereotype in relation to measures that assess Black women's sexual attitudes and behaviors within personal relationships; whereas, Study 3 examines how the stereotype operates in the context of a stranger (the experimenter) generating threat. Both studies make the assumption that Black women view being sexualized by others, whether from a partner or stranger, negatively. Study 2 considers a different perspective, that perhaps Black women enjoy receiving the sexual attention that likely stems from the Jezebel stereotype. Across the three studies, the findings

generally support the notion of the Jezebel stereotype as negatively impacting Black women's sexual well-being.

Finally, in Studies 1 and 2, I measured whether Black women were *aware* of the Jezebel stereotype and whether this awareness influences sexual well-being outcomes. In contrast, in Study 3, I attempted to measure *exposure* to the stereotype. All three studies demonstrate that Black women need not personally endorse the Jezebel stereotype to experience its consequences for their sexual well-being. Further, the significant findings from Study 3 suggest that it is also not necessary for Black women to believe that others hold the Jezebel stereotype; simply being exposed to “a threat in the air” (Steele, 1997) can significantly impact Black women's sexual decision-making. Some contemporary research indicates that the Jezebel stereotype may be perceived less negatively by young Black women today than by Black women in the past (e.g., Brown, White-Johnson, & Griffin-Fennell, 2013). Findings from all three studies suggest that, regardless of Black women's personal perception of the Jezebel stereotype or their beliefs regarding others' endorsement of the stereotype, the mere existence of the Jezebel stereotype can affect their sexual attitudes and behaviors.

### **Implications for Theory and Methods**

Because of the disparities in Black women's sexual health (CDC, 2014), most of the research on Black women's sexuality tends to focus on sexual risk-taking. Popular media also center on maladaptive aspects of Black women's reproductive health, such as teen pregnancy, even though teen birth rates have been steadily declining for all racial/ethnic groups in the United States (Martin, Hamilton, Osterman, Driscoll, & Mathews, 2017). My dissertation highlights the value of examining sexual well-being with a broader lens, taking into account factors influencing women's ability to feel positively and confident about their sexual decisions

and their ability to effectively communicate their sexual desires. I hope my findings compel researchers examining Black women's romantic relationships and sexuality to consider the cost to Black women when we fail to consider their sexual pleasure and desires as outcomes. Solely focusing on risk-taking serves to dehumanize Black women, narrowly characterizing them as carriers of disease, breeders, and as sexually immoral; more broadly, this perspective implies that Black women are undeserving of positive and pleasurable experiences. My findings demonstrate that Black women's effort to refute these stereotypical notions directs their attention away from their sexual desires and feelings.

These findings also suggest that examining awareness or exposure to the Jezebel stereotype may be more meaningful than examining endorsement. The mean levels of Jezebel metastereotype awareness were relatively high across all three studies, ranging from 3.18 to 3.25 on the 5-point scale, in comparison to lower levels of Jezebel stereotype endorsement found in past research. For example, participants reported a mean endorsement score of 1.57 on a 5-point scale in Jerald et al.'s (2017) study. Further, examining exposure to the Jezebel stereotype importantly extends stereotype threat theory, by examining a gendered racial stereotype in a non-academic domain with non-performance related outcomes.

### **Real-World Implications**

These findings may have important implications for Black women's romantic relationships. For example, Black women's level of Jezebel metastereotype awareness may influence the selection of potential dating partners. Black women may be less likely to date men that they perceive to hold the Jezebel stereotype. In addition, Black women may fear being fetishized based on the Jezebel stereotype within dating contexts by both non-Black and Black men. Indeed, on online dating sites, Black women are rated least attractive in comparison to

women of other racial/ethnic groups by non-Black men, and Black men show little preference for Black women (OkCupid, 2014); when Black women do receive messages, they are often racist, sexist, and based in stereotypes. If Black women believe their romantic partner endorses the Jezebel stereotype, they may experience more negative trust and intimacy outcomes in their relationship.

Finally, awareness of the Jezebel stereotype may also influence Black women's behavior during sexual encounters. For example, women may be exposed to Jezebel-related stereotype threat via stereotypical comments made by their partner during sex. This threat may provoke negative affective responses. For example, Black women may choose to end the sexual interaction; chronic exposure to this type of threat may also lead to domain disengagement (Woodcock, Hernandez, Estrada, & Schultz, 2012), perhaps reflected in a desire to have fewer sexual relations in the future. In line with my dissertation findings, this sexuality threat may also generally result in a less agentic and pleasurable experience for Black women during sexual encounters.

### **Strengths of the Sample**

A significant strength of the dissertation is the sample used in Studies 1 and 2. I collected a large sample of Black women and data that included measures assessing many different dimensions of their sexual well-being. In contrast to some past studies (e.g., Spitalnick et al., 2007; Wingood & DiClemente, 1998), the data were not collected in a clinical setting and were not solely focused on measures of sexual risk-taking. Additionally, much of the past research on Black women's sexual attitudes and behavior and the Jezebel stereotype has been theoretical or based on qualitative data (e.g., Collins, 2004; Davis & Tucker-Brown, 2013; Wingood, Hunter-Gamble, & DiClemente, 1993). This work has been critical for generating foundational



knowledge on Black women's sexuality. The quantitative data presented in my dissertation serve to bolster and expand this body of literature.

The sample was also regionally diverse. Often studies using college student samples are limited to the university setting in which the research is being conducted. I was able to sample Black women at both a predominately White institution and a historically Black university, in the Midwest and in the South. While the inferences I can make regarding the findings are still limited to university students, the diversity in geographical region and university context increase the generalizability of my results and discourage notions of young Black women as a monolith.

Finally, much of the research on Black women's sexual well-being tends to examine low-income communities (e.g., Raiford et al., 2014; Wingood & DiClemente, 1998). The current sample allowed me to investigate sexual outcomes within a relatively understudied population of Black women from high education and socioeconomic backgrounds. Some research examining Black participants from lower socioeconomic backgrounds tends to conflate the effects of race and class on outcome variables. Importantly, the current sample allows us to think more critically about the unique contributions of race and gender to Black women's sexual well-being as well as the role of respectability politics. Respectability politics have been used historically by middle-class Black Americans to regulate the behavior of poor and working-class Black women (Higginbotham, 1993). Today, Black elites similarly use respectability politics to promote the ideals of middle-class Black women. The current sample allows for a more precise examination of how these respectability politics limit sexual expression within this particular socioeconomic group.

### **Future Directions for The Field**

My dissertation findings propose several important future directions. First, although the sample offers a number of strengths, this research should be extended to other samples of Black women. For example, future research should examine these relations developmentally, investigating cohort differences and changes across the lifespan. Women in later life stages increasingly value their bodies for what they can do, rather than how they look (Sabik & Cole, 2017), and also uniquely conceptualize sexual desire (Thorpe, Fileborn, Hawkes, Pitts, & Minichiello, 2015). In addition, one study found that older Black women report lower levels of endorsement of the Jezebel stereotype than younger Black women (Brown, White-Johnson, & Griffin-Fennell, 2013). Thus, it would be beneficial to examine these relations in an older sample of women. Additionally, because at least one of the outcome variables in each study centered on male condom use, I excluded lesbian women from each study. Future research should examine the significance of the Jezebel stereotype in the intimate relationships and sexualization experiences of queer women. The results of the pre-test— which examined (mostly heterosexual) Black women’s evaluations of which groups endorse the Jezebel stereotype— indicated that Black women perceive White women and other Black women to endorse the Jezebel stereotype, to some degree. Additionally, recent research indicates that women who report higher levels of enjoyment of sexualization perceive themselves as more heterosexual (Barnett, Maciel, & Gerner, 2018). Future research should examine whether the findings of the three studies hold for queer Black women, and subsequently how their awareness of the Jezebel stereotype may influence their sexual well-being and enjoyment of sexualization.

Second, Study 2’s findings suggest a need for future research to continue examining enjoyment of sexualization, and sexualization in general, in samples of Black women. Study 2 revealed a positive, direct relation between enjoyment of sexualization and sexual agency, but a

negative, indirect relation between the same variables. Future studies should test other mediators to help clarify the association between enjoyment of sexualization and sexual agency. In addition, researchers should more deeply explore how Black women evaluate sexualized images of other Black women. Past research with predominately White samples demonstrates that women are evaluated harshly by other women for displays of sexuality (e.g., Gurung & Chrouser, 2007); however, no existing research indicates whether this pattern holds for Black women. Subsequent studies could examine in which contexts and conditions Black women might perceive sexualization and displays of sexuality as more or less positive.

Third, the Jezebel stereotype does not operate within a vacuum. Black women also negotiate other controlling images in their romantic relationships, such as the sassy and emasculating Sapphire stereotype and the Strong Black Woman cultural ideal. Indeed, the Jezebel and Sapphire subscales of the Stereotypic Roles for Black women scale are highly correlated (Thomas, Witherspoon, & Speight, 2004; Townsend, Thomas, Neilands, & Jackson, 2010). In addition, endorsement of Jezebel and Sapphire stereotypes by Black men is linked to negative interpersonal dynamics between Black men and women (Fisher & Coleman, 2017; Gillum, 2002). Future research should examine the consequences of awareness of these stereotypes for Black women's sexual well-being. For example, awareness of the Sapphire stereotype and Strong Black woman ideal may be associated with more submissive behavior and less sexual agency in order to counter the emasculating, physically aggressive, and dominant nature of these images.

Fourth, future research should consider examining the Jezebel stereotype in relation to sexual dysfunction. My dissertation was not able to assess whether Black women may actually feel pressure to conform to the Jezebel stereotype during sexual encounters. If women feel

pressure to live up to cultural beliefs of their group as hypersexual and sexually assertive during sex, they may experience performance anxiety and lower sexual esteem. Future studies should investigate how the Jezebel stereotype may create a specific sexual script for Black women regarding expectations for pleasing their partner.

### **Conclusion: Transcending the Jezebel Stereotype**

I began my dissertation with the following quote from writer Ashley Simpo (2015), reflecting on her first sexual experience:

Growing up I kept hearing how virginity was this sacred thing that should be kept and guarded. It was constantly implied that my virginity belonged to the world—not to me. I owed it to God, my family, my community. I was to be judged by others based on how I touched my own body, how I felt about being touched by others and by when I chose to explore the blurred lines of adolescence. I was to look closely at the girls around me who had babies and had—at one time or another—contracted diseases and remember that those were the consequences when girls had sex... *No one ever told me that my body belonged to me and that I could do with it what I pleased* [emphasis added]. And so within the act of feeling liberated and stirred after my first few sexual encounters, I also felt dirty, disrespectful, deceitful and disappointing. No one tells young girls to do what they want with their bodies because they know that at some point young girls are going to want to have sex. And God forbid a girl should open her legs and explore her sexuality.

Across three studies, my dissertation examines the Jezebel stereotype as one sociocultural factor that impedes young Black women's ability to have pleasurable and positive sexual experiences and safely explore their sexuality. As Simpo (2015) contemplates, Black women are presented with multiple factors that constrain their ability to safely and confidently explore their sexuality, including group stereotypes and pressure to conform to the politics of respectability. What would it look like for Black women to transcend and free themselves from these cultural forces? What conditions would be needed for Black women to be able to reclaim ownership of their bodies and sexual expression?

Parents and sexual education programs that value Black girls' and women's empowerment should consider these questions and endeavor to create a context in which young Black women feel liberated to explore their sexuality, free of judgment, stigma, and shame. Importantly, these programs should also include boys and men, placing the onus on them to challenge potential stereotypical beliefs about Black women's sexual behavior. This change must also occur at a structural level and aim at changing societal attitudes regarding stereotypical notions of Black women's sexuality. Ultimately, women should feel empowered to make autonomous decisions about their bodies and sexuality without having to account for the beliefs of others.

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## Appendix

### Jezebel Metastereotype Awareness Scale

**Now, we're going to ask you some questions about what society believes about Black women. You may or may not agree with a statement; we only want to know what you believe society thinks.**

How much do you think people believe that Black women...

Item	Not at all	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Almost Always
1. always want to have sex.	1	2	3	4	5
2. use sex to get what they want.	1	2	3	4	5
3. will steal your man.	1	2	3	4	5
4. are gold-diggers.	1	2	3	4	5
5. can be calculating and manipulative.	1	2	3	4	5
6. tend to be vain.	1	2	3	4	5
7. are more seductive than other women.	1	2	3	4	5
8. are willing to trade sex for money and material comforts.	1	2	3	4	5
9. are open to using men sexually to meet their short-term needs.	1	2	3	4	5
10. are more promiscuous than other groups of women.	1	2	3	4	5
11. tend to be sexually wild and uninhibited.	1	2	3	4	5
12. will have sex with almost anyone who asks.	1	2	3	4	5