ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Unmarried Black Women's Sexual Socialization: The Role of Dating, Motherhood, and Intimate Partner Violence Across Media Types

Jessica D. Moorman[1]

Abstract

The terms single and singlehood conflate marital (e.g. divorced, widowed, and never married) and relationship (e.g. partnered or not) statuses, complicating researchers' understandings of their unique impact on women's lives. Despite qualitative research demonstrating unmarried and unpartnered statuses have distinct implications for women's sexual socialization, little quantitative research has explored these differences. To address this gap, the current project surveyed 506 unmarried Black women ($M_{age} = 33.02$) to explore how common singlehood experiences (dating, motherhood, and intimate partner violence [IPV]) moderated associations between respondents' media use (television, social media, movies, and magazines) and relationship beliefs. This project focused on Black women because of their high rates of unmarried status and the pervasiveness of media stereotypes of their singlehood. Hierarchical linear regressions and the PROCESS model were used to test two-way interactions of media and singlehood experiences. Ecological systems and cultivation theories guided analyses. Across the dependent variables, media types were differentially associated with measures of relationship beliefs and these associations were differentially moderated by singlehood experiences. Weekly television was the most consistent predictor of relationship beliefs and experience with IPV was the most consistent moderator of associations. Women without partners, children, or experiences of IPV exhibited significant associations between media and relationship beliefs while their more experienced peers did not, suggesting singlehood experiences and media work together to shape unmarried Black women's sexual socialization, though more work is needed to determine how. Results illuminated key differences between groups of unmarried Black women, complicating current understandings of single status and challenging how singlehood is conceptualized in sexual socialization research.

Keywords Sexual socialization · Media · Singlehood · Motherhood · Intimate partner violence · Black women · Ecological systems theory · Cultivation theory

Sexual socialization research explores how tiers of social factors work together to shape how women acquire their beliefs about relationships, providing a framework to study unmarried and unpartnered women's lives (Moorman, 2020; Ward, 2016). Prior quantitative studies have established associations between media consumption and relationship beliefs, yet still unknown is how interpersonal factors like dating, motherhood, and intimate partner violence, experiences common to unmarried life, are associated with relationship beliefs (Jerald et al., 2017a, b; Ward et al., 2019). Black women's experiences provide an entry point into this inquiry, because of pervasive stereotyping of their singlehood and their high rates of unmarried status. To explore relations between media, singlehood experiences, and relationship beliefs, a survey of 506 unmarried Black women was conducted. This study explored how the interaction of Black women's media use and singlehood experiences were associated with their relationship beliefs.

Sexual Socialization and Relationship Beliefs

Sexual socialization is the process by which attitudes towards, beliefs about, and approaches to relationships are acquired (Ward, 2016). Relationship beliefs, one key element of sexual socialization, help to guide behavior and shape our self-concept in relationships, making the study

✉ Jessica D. Moorman
jdmoorman@wayne.edu

1 Department of Communication, Wayne State University, Detroit, MI 48201, USA

of factors associated with them an important area of inquiry. A dynamic and socially bounded process, sexual socialization is shaped by tiers of factors working simultaneously to guide development (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Ward, 2016). Reflecting this complexity, ecological systems theory (EST) was used as an overarching framework to guide the current project. EST has been used to explore how interpersonal relationships and social institutions shape socialization outcomes (e.g., Landor et al., 2017), accounting for a broad array of structural, sociocultural, interpersonal, individual, and temporal factors shaping development by positing a hierarchy of influence among these social features (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). EST conceptualizes interpersonal factors as more direct contexts for socialization. Media, a sociocultural factor, are theorized as an indirect context for socialization, an incomplete construction of the media given communication research that has established direct relations between media consumption and beliefs about the world (Morgan & Shanahan, 2010; Ward, 2016). Accordingly, cultivation theory was used to hypothesize relations between respondents' media and relationship beliefs. Cultivation theory asserts greater media use is associated with greater conformity of one's beliefs to the most recurrent media messages, a positive association between media and beliefs (Morgan & Shanahan, 2010). Numerous studies have relied on EST and cultivation theories to explore the social factors associated with Black women's relationship beliefs.

Media's Association with Relationship Beliefs

Researchers have tackled the study of romantic, relationship, and partner beliefs from numerous perspectives, but most relevant to the current project are studies testing associations between media and Black women's beliefs about the gendered nature of relationships, violence in relationships, and single status. Mainstream television, social media, movies, and magazines are primarily studied in this work. Researchers have established consistent associations between overall weekly quantities of television, movie, social media, and magazine consumption with relationship beliefs (Ward, 2016). The nexus between gender norms and relationships comprises an important area of this research, with studies exploring investment in feminine ideals, gendered roles in relationships, and investment in relationship scripts (Jerald et al., 2017b; Seabrook et al., 2016). For example, Seabrook et al. (2016) surveyed 625 adolescent men and women ages 17 – 23 to assess how family, peers, and media relate to heterosexual script endorsement. Heterosexual scripts are commonly shared cultural norms guiding men and women's gendered behavior in relationships, theorized to contribute to diminished sexual agency and sexual assertiveness among women. Seabrook et al. (2016)

established positive associations between overall mainstream television consumption and heterosexual script endorsement, suggesting media are an important conduit shaping women's beliefs about relationships.

Other researchers have explored how Black women's endorsement of gendered, antagonistic, and adversarial relationship beliefs impact beliefs about partnership. Comprised of beliefs related to gendered dynamics in Black relationships, economic conflicts between men and women, and the impact of cultural stereotypes on partner beliefs, studies have explored how stereotypic portrayals of Black Americans are related to these beliefs (Avery, 2016; West & Rose, 2000). Jerald et al. (2017b) surveyed 404 college-age Black women to explore media's contribution to traditional gender attitudes and endorsement of three stereotypes of Black women: the Jezebel, a hyper-sexualized Black woman; the Sapphire, an overly aggressive Black woman; and the strong Black woman, a Black woman who does it all to the point of exhaustion. Researchers found movie consumption was associated with greater endorsement of the strong Black woman ideal and music video consumption was associated with greater endorsement of traditional gender attitudes; attitudes found to diminish sexual agency among Black women in subsequent analyses (Ward et al., 2019). Researchers have theorized that investment in gendered, adversarial, and antagonistic beliefs about Black relationships would be linked to beliefs about and experiences of IPV.

Picking up this thread, other research has explored media's association with IPV related relationship beliefs. Women's beliefs about IPV and its role in relationships have been explored. Numerous cross-sectional survey studies conducted with young adult women found greater mainstream media and pornography consumption was associated with greater endorsement of rape myths (Kahlor & Eastin, 2011), the use of stalking in relationships (Lippman, 2018), and the use of deception in sexual encounters (Seabrook et al., 2019). Although important, extant media research has not tested media's association with one's personal tolerance for physical violence in relationships, but many studies have explored the impact of ideas about Black relationships commonly featured in the media. For example, Vanterpool et al. (2022) surveyed 1162 Black women ages 18 – 72 to explore how investment in the idea that Black women face limited partner options due to an unfavorable sex ratio imbalance such that there are not enough single Black men available for Black women to partner with, a message commonly featured in mainstream media (e.g., The Economist, 2015), is associated with their greater tolerance of violence in relationships. Researchers found that greater investment in the belief that there are too few men for Black women was associated with an experience of IPV and greater tolerance for violence in relationships. This study suggests that media, which commonly feature narratives advancing an imbalanced sex ratio

between Black men and women, could potentially be related to tolerance of violence in relationships as well. The current study tests this assertion.

While valuable, the extant quantitative social science research exploring media's associations with relationship beliefs is incomplete, largely overlooking beliefs about singlehood. Romantic partnership comprises just one facet of intimacy and relationships, with unmarried and unpartnered statuses playing an increasingly important role. The terms single and singlehood are used interchangeably to refer to unmarried (e.g., divorced, widowed, and never married) and unpartnered (e.g. dating or not) women. The conflation of these two distinct experiences of partnership complicates research into the unique implications of marital and partnership statuses for women's lives. Rates of marriage are decreasing for all adults. As of 2021, 50.1% of all women were unmarried, the highest rate of single status observed, and the first time more than half of all U.S. women were unmarried (United States Census Bureau, 2022). Among Black women the marriage rates were lower, just under a third of Black women are married. Media have noted this trend, often featuring messages about singlehood, representing it as something undesirable and stigmatized (Charleston, 2014; Wanzo, 2011). Messages about single status are reinforced by messages from friends, family, coworkers, and peers who have been shown to mock and judge unmarried and unpartnered women (Clarke, 2011; Moorman, 2020). Given the increasingly important role single status plays in the social, cultural, and personal lives of women; the presence of media messages about single status; and a lack of understanding about how single status beliefs are formed, some investigation of media's relations to beliefs about single status is warranted. The current project addressed this gap by assessing women's beliefs about single status. Media associations are conditional, shaped by characteristics of the individual, their context, beliefs, and interactions with others (Holbert & Park, 2020). Accordingly, this project explored how three common singlehood experience (dating, motherhood, and IPV) moderated relations between media and relationship beliefs.

The Moderating Potential of Dating, Motherhood, and Intimate Partner Violence

Dating, motherhood, and intimate partner violence (IPV) have each been studied for their contributions to Black women's beliefs about relationships. Primarily examined in qualitative work, each of these singlehood experiences has been shown to shape development in intimate and direct ways. Dating and unpartnered statuses contribute to sexual socialization processes by providing contexts in which

unique messages about relationships are transmitted (Simon & Gagnon, 1986). Bowleg et al. (2004), an interview research conducted with 14 Black women aged 22 – 39, found Black women's dating relationships provided a unique source of messages upholding male control in relationships, normalizing IPV, and upholding hegemonic constructions of gender; findings reinforced by more recent work (Landor et al., 2017). Moorman (2020), an interview study of 24 unmarried Black women ages 25 – 46, found unmarried and unpartnered statuses had their own implications for Black women's relationship beliefs. Moorman's participants identified mocking of their single status by male dating partners and media stereotypes of single Black women as two key factors shaping their beliefs about partnership, with many of these experiences reinforcing their decisions to remain single.

Media researchers have considered, albeit in a limited way, the role of relationship status in sexual socialization processes. For example, Lippman et al. (2014) surveyed 625 college-aged students to test associations between media consumption and commonly held idealized romantic beliefs like an investment in love at first sight. In their cross-sectional study, Lippman et al. (2014) analyses found relationship status, which was dichotomized and defined as being in a relationship at the time of the study, was not significantly related to idealized relationship beliefs. Singlehood and dating both have implications for Black women's beliefs about partnership, but still unknown is whether dating status is associated with Black women's beliefs about relationships or circumscribes media's associations with relationship beliefs in quantifiably distinct ways. The current study addresses these gaps.

Additionally, research suggests motherhood and childlessness may also impact Black women's socialization. Motherhood and childlessness both have the potential to shape Black women's sexual socialization. Qualitative research suggests, motherhood functions as its own context for the dissemination of messages about relationships. Thomas and King (2007) conducted an interview study with 36 Black mother-daughter dyads to explore the messages Black mothers and their daughters share with one another about being a Black woman. Thomas and King (2007) found daughters and mothers shared numerous messages with one another about self-pride and preparation for partnership, although information about the messages shared from daughters to mothers was limited. Like romantic relationships, Thomas and King's (2007) project suggests, a mother's relationship with her child provides its own unique context for socialization, although it is unclear just how motherhood shapes adult women's outcomes. Media scholars take a different approach, studying televised portrayals of teen-pregnancy in research conducted with samples of childless adolescent girls (Aubrey et al., 2014; Behm-Morawitz et al., 2019). While valuable, this work overlooks how media and

motherhood are associated with relationship beliefs among women ages 25 and older, a group of women the current project surveyed. The limited research suggests associations between media and relationship beliefs would likely differ between mothers and childless women, an assumption tested in the current study.

Finally, IPV has been examined for its impact on beliefs about relationships. IPV functions as a context for and consequence of sexual socialization, shaped by social cognitive processes that rely on observation and imitation of key role models to guide development (Bandura, 2001). IPV includes physical and sexual violence, emotional abuse, and controlling behaviors such as interfering with employment or education (Breiding et al., 2014). Nearly 44% of all Black women will experience some form of IPV in their lifetimes, which has broader consequences for women's beliefs about partnership (Breiding et al., 2014). Landor et al. (2017) conducted an interview study with a mixed gender group of 22 Black adolescents aged 12–21 to explore IPV's role in shaping adolescents' expectations of relationships. Landor et al. found witnessing and experiencing IPV contributed to the normalization of violence as a tool for conflict resolution in relationships, a finding reinforced in other studies (Bowleg et al., 2004). When addressed in media research, scholars explore associations between mainstream or sexually explicit media use and beliefs about stalking and rape myth endorsement, important areas of inquiry, but not the focus of the current study. Collectively, prior research suggests dating, motherhood, and IPV may moderate media associations with relationship beliefs among Black women, but more work is needed to test just how singlehood experience shapes media relations. The current study takes up this work.

Current Study

Given the prior literature, in the current study average weekly quantities of television, social media, movie, and magazine consumption were tested for their association with participants' antagonistic beliefs about Black relationships, heterosexual script endorsement, tolerance for violence in relationships, single stigma, and perceived pressure for romantic relationships. In line with EST and cultivation theories, the following hypotheses for the predictor and moderating variables were posed:

Hypotheses for Antagonistic Beliefs About Black Relationships

H1a: Greater (i) television, (ii) social media, (iii) movie, and (iv) magazine consumption will be associated with greater antagonistic beliefs about Black relationships.

H1b: Dating will moderate relations between (i) television, (ii) social media, (iii) movie, and (iv) magazine consumption and antagonistic beliefs about Black relationships such that significant positive associations will be observed among unpartnered women, but not dating women.

H1c: Motherhood will moderate relations between (i) television, (ii) social media, (iii) movie, and (iv) magazine consumption and antagonistic beliefs about Black relationships such that significant positive associations will be observed among childless women, but not moms.

H1d: IPV will moderate relations between (i) television, (ii) social media, (iii) movie, and (iv) magazine consumption and antagonistic beliefs about Black relationships such that significant positive associations will be observed among women without histories of IPV, but not women who experienced it.

Hypotheses for Heterosexual Script Endorsement

H2a: Greater (i) television, (ii) social media, (iii) movie, and (iv) magazine consumption will be associated with greater heterosexual script endorsement.

H2b: Dating will moderate relations between (i) television, (ii) social media, (iii) movie, and (iv) magazine consumption and heterosexual script endorsement such that significant positive associations will be observed among unpartnered women, but not dating women.

H2c: Motherhood will moderate relations between (i) television, (ii) social media, (iii) movie, and (iv) magazine consumption and heterosexual script endorsement such that significant positive associations will be observed among childless women, but not moms.

H2d: IPV will moderate relations between (i) television, (ii) social media, (iii) movie, and (iv) magazine consumption and heterosexual script endorsement such that significant positive associations will be observed among women without histories of IPV, but not women who experienced it.

Hypotheses for Tolerance of Violence in Relationships

H3a: Greater (i) television, (ii) social media, (iii) movie, and (iv) magazine consumption will be associated with greater tolerance of violence in relationships.

H3b: Dating will moderate relations between (i) television, (ii) social media, (iii) movie, and (iv) magazine consumption and tolerance of violence in relationships such that significant positive associations will be observed among unpartnered women, but not dating women.

H3c: Motherhood will moderate relations between (i) television, (ii) social media, (iii) movie, and (iv) magazine consumption and tolerance of violence in relationships such that significant positive associations will be observed among childless women, but not moms.

H3d: IPV will moderate relations between (i) television, (ii) social media, (iii) movie, and (iv) magazine consumption and tolerance of violence in relationships such that significant positive associations will be observed among women without histories of IPV, but not women who experienced it.

Hypotheses for Singlehood Stigma

H4a: Greater (i) television, (ii) social media, (iii) movie, and (iv) magazine consumption will be associated with greater singlehood stigma.

H4b: Dating will moderate relations between (i) television, (ii) social media, (iii) movie, and (iv) magazine consumption and single stigma such that significant positive associations will be observed among unpartnered women, but not dating women.

H4c: Motherhood will moderate relations between (i) television, (ii) social media, (iii) movie, and (iv) magazine consumption and single stigma such that significant positive associations will be observed among childless women, but not moms.

H4d: IPV will moderate relations between (i) television, (ii) social media, (iii) movie, and (iv) magazine consumption and single stigma such that significant positive associations will be observed among women without histories of IPV, but not women who experienced it.

Hypotheses for Perceived Pressure for Relationships

H5a: Greater (i) television, (ii) social media, (iii) movie, and (iv) magazine consumption will be associated with greater perceived pressure for relationships.

H5b: Dating will moderate relations between (i) television, (ii) social media, (iii) movie, and (iv) magazine consumption and perceived pressure for relationships such that significant positive associations will be observed among unpartnered women, but not dating women.

H5c: Motherhood will moderate relations between (i) television, (ii) social media, (iii) movie, and (iv) magazine consumption and perceived pressure for relationships such that significant positive associations will be observed among childless women, but not mothers.

H5d: IPV will moderate relations between (i) television, (ii) social media, (iii) movie, and (iv) magazine consumption and perceived pressure for relationships such that significant positive associations will be observed among women without histories of IPV, but not women who experienced it.

Method

Participants and Procedure

This cross-sectional survey study was reviewed and approved by the University of Michigan Health and Behavioral Sciences Institutional Review Board prior to data collection. Data were collected in August of 2017. The survey took approximately 25 min to complete and was administered online. Qualtrics online survey firm was used for participant recruitment and data collection. Qualtrics secures survey respondents from nationally available survey panels. Researchers specify their populations of interest and Qualtrics surveys participants who meet these criteria. In the current study, participants were identified based on their age, race, gender, sexual orientation, and relationship status. The total sample consisted of 506 divorced ($n = 51$, 10.1%), widowed ($n = 8$, 1.6%), and never-married ($n = 447$, 88.3%) heterosexual Black women, ages 25–45 ($M_{age} = 33.02$), living in the United States at the time of the survey. Of participants, 290 (57.3%) were in a relationship, 215 (42.5%) were not, and 1 (0.2%) chose not to respond. In total there were 292 (57.7%) mothers, 208 (41.1%) childless women, and 6 (1.2%) chose not to respond. In all, 201 (39.7%) participants experienced IPV, while 292 (57.7%) respondents did not, and 13 (2.6%) chose not to respond.

Measures

Dependent Variables Assessing Relationship Beliefs

Five measures assessed participants' relationship beliefs. *Antagonistic beliefs about Black relationships* were assessed using Avery's (2016) adaptation of the Oppressive Images Subscale of West and Rose's (2000) *Antagonistic Beliefs about Black Relationships Scale*. Twelve items were assessed. Respondents used a Likert-type scale to express their agreement with items like: "Too many Black men date and marry outside the race." Response options ranged from *strongly disagree* (1) to *strongly agree* (6). A mean score for all items was calculated and included for analysis ($\alpha = .81$). Higher scores indicated more antagonistic views of Black relationships.

Heterosexual script endorsement was assessed using the *Heterosexual Script Scale* (Seabrook et al., 2016). Twenty-two items were included (e.g., "men are always ready for sex" and "a woman wants a man because she wants someone to protect her"). Responses were reported using a Likert-type scale ranging from *strongly disagree* (1) to *strongly agree* (6). A mean score for all items was used for analysis ($\alpha = .88$). Higher scores indicated greater endorsement of the heterosexual script.

Respondent's *tolerance of violence in relationships* was assessed using an adapted version of the *Spouse Abuse Scale* (Hudson & McIntosh, 1981). Thirty items were included in the full scale, but only 10 items representing the most

violent acts were included in the current study. Participants were asked: "Would it be a deal breaker (a quality or trait so undesirable that you would end the relationship if your partner possessed that quality or trait) in your relationship if your partner…" Example items included, "punched you with his fists." Potential responses included *yes* (1), *maybe* (3), and *no* (5). A mean score of all 10 items was included for analysis ($\alpha = .97$). A higher score indicated greater tolerance of violence in relationships.

Singlehood stigma was assessed using an adapted version of King et al.'s (2007) 26-item *Mental Health Stigma Scale*, which measured the extent to which respondents felt stigmatized because of their single status. Items included: "I worry about telling people I am single." Possible responses ranged from *strongly disagree* (1) to *strongly agree* (5). A mean score of all items was included for analysis ($\alpha = .84$). A higher score indicates a more stigmatized view of single status.

The *Sociocultural Attitudes Towards Appearance Questionnaire* (Schaefer et al., 2015) was adapted to assess *perceived pressure for relationships*. Fifteen items were included, 5 each for family, peers, and the media. Examples included: "I feel pressure from my peers/family/media to fall in love." Possible responses ranged from *definitely disagree* (1) to *definitely agree* (5). A mean of all items was included for analysis ($\alpha = .83$). A higher score indicated greater perceived pressure to be in a romantic relationship.

Independent Variables Assessing Media Use and Singlehood Experience Moderators

Frequency of weekly media use was assessed separately for television, social media, movies, and magazines. Harrison et al.'s (2017) weekly assessment of media consumption measure was used. Weekly television and social media use were measured separately for typical weekday and weekend days using a slider tool. Response options ranged from 0–12 h a day, capped to eliminate extreme responses. Weekly media use was calculated by multiplying weekday media use by five, weekend media day use by two, and summing the products. For weekly magazines and movies, respondents reported the number of movies and magazines they watched in a typical month using categorical response options labeled 0–20 capped to remove extreme response options. Data were converted to whole numbers for analysis and weekly totals were calculated for each medium by dividing participants' responses by four.

One moderator, *dating, sexual, and romantic relationships* was assessed with two items: "How many people are you currently romantically involved with?" and "How many sexual partners do you currently have?" Respondents answered each item using a categorical measure ranging from 0–5 or more. For analysis, the items were combined to

create a single variable coded not dating, no partners (0) or dating, one or more partners (1).

A second moderator, *motherhood status,* was assessed using the following question: "How many children do you currently have?" Participants reported their total number of children using a categorical, single response variable ranging from 0–5 or more, capped to limit extreme responses. Pregnant women without children were instructed to select 0, as they were not categorized as mothers in the current study. Motherhood status was coded childless (0) or mother (1).

A third moderator, *past experience of IPV,* was assessed with two items: "Have you ever experienced dating violence, domestic violence, intimate partner violence, or any other form of physical violence in the context of a romantic or sexual relationship?" and "Have you ever experienced sexual assault, date rape, or any other form of sexual violence or non-consensual sex in the context of a romantic or sexual relationship?" Response options for both questions included *yes* (1), *no* (2), or *prefer not to answer* (3). Responses to *yes* or *no* were combined and recoded as no experience of IPV (0) or experience of IPV (1).

Covariate Measures—Age, Education, Religiosity

Age, education, and religiosity were included as covariates in the current study. Participants reported their age using a categorical variable, assessed 25–45 years, inclusive. Responses were transformed into ordinal measures for analysis. Respondents reported their educational attainment using one of 10 potential response options: (1) *none*, (2) *grade school*, (3) *some high school*, (4) *high school*, (5) *certificate program (e.g., HVAC training)*, (6) *associate's degree*, (7) *some 4-year college*, (8) *4-year college degree*, (9) *master's degree (e.g., MBA, MPH)*, or (10) *doctoral degree (e.g., MD, JD, PhD)*. Three measures from the organizational religiosity subscale of the National Survey of American Life (Taylor et al., 2007) were used to assess religiosity. Participants were asked about their frequency of prayer, attendance at worship service, and participation in additional activities like bible study. Possible responses to all questions included: (5) *Nearly every day*; (4) *At least once a week*; (3) *A few times a month*; (2) *A few times a year*; (1) *Never*. Measures were combined for analysis ($\alpha = .73$).

Statistical Analyses

Data were analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Science Version 27 (IBM Corporation, 2021). Prior to hypothesis testing, data were inspected for skew, kurtosis, and the presence of extreme values (Field, 2013). All measures were within acceptable limits. First, means, standard deviations, and inter-correlations were computed

among the study variables. Next, three hierarchical linear regression models were run to test the study's main hypotheses and separately explore the impact of each moderator. Mean-centered interaction terms were calculated for all two-way interactions between the media measures and moderators (Hayes, 2018). Study covariates and non-focal moderators were entered in Step 1 of models. Media measures and the focal moderator were entered in Step 2. Mean-centered interaction terms were entered in Step 3. Finally, significant interactions were decomposed using version 4.0 of the PROCESS model for SPSS (Hayes, 2021). Model 1 was tested at 95% confidence interval using 1000 bootstrap iterations. As with the previous analyses, age, education, and religiosity were entered as study covariates; singlehood experiences were moderators; mean centered media variables entered as predictors; and beliefs about relationships and singlehood were criterion measures.

Results

Table 1 presents inter-correlations for the study variables. Weekly television and social media use were both positively correlated with antagonistic beliefs about Black relationships and heterosexual script endorsement. Social media use was positively correlated with dating status and tolerance of violence in relationships. Movie viewing was positively correlated with experience of IPV. Magazine consumption

was positively correlated with tolerance of violence in relationships and singlehood stigma. Dating status, motherhood, and experience of IPV were positively correlated with one another. Dating status and motherhood were positively correlated with heterosexual script endorsement. Motherhood and IPV statuses were positively correlated with antagonistic beliefs about Black relationships and negatively correlated with perceived pressure for romantic relationships. Tables 2, 3, and 4 report the results of the hierarchical linear regression analyses testing the effects of the predictors and moderating variables on the dependent variables. Figures 1, 2, and 3 illustrate the simple slopes analyses across the three moderators.

Hypothesis Tests for Antagonistic Beliefs about Black Relationships

In the model testing dating as the moderator (see Table 2), television (H1a$_i$) and social media (H1a$_{ii}$) were significantly positively associated with antagonistic beliefs about Black relationships as predicted, whereas movies were significantly negatively associated (H1a$_{iii}$), and magazines were not significantly associated (H1a$_{iv}$). Dating status did not significantly moderate the associations between media and antagonistic beliefs about Black relationships (H1b$_{i-iv}$).

In the model testing motherhood as the moderator (see Table 3), movies (H1a$_{iii}$) significantly predicted antagonistic beliefs about Black relationships but negatively and thus not as expected, whereas television (H1a$_i$), social

Table 1 Descriptive Statistics and Inter-Correlations for All Study Variables

Variable	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.	8.	9.	10.	11.	12.	13.	14.	15.
M	33.02	6.06	3.09	0.57	0.58	0.41	40.22	41.63	1.70	0.46	3.63	3.50	2.02	2.58	2.82
SD	5.91	1.86	1.12	0.49	0.49	0.49	20.91	24.80	1.45	0.54	0.85	0.80	1.11	0.55	0.72
Range	25–45	2–10	1–6	0–1	0–1	0–1	0–84	0–84	0–5	0–5	1–6	1–6	1–5	1–5	1–5
1. Age	--	.12**	–.01	–.14**	.16**	.04	.06	–.14**	–.13**	.16**	–.04	–.04	–.07	–.04	–.20**
2. Education		--	.01	-.09	–.23**	–.09*	–.16**	–.19**	–.14**	–.02	–.13**	–.12**	–.25**	–.07	.22**
3. Religiosity			--	.05	.04	-.01	–.06	.09	.02	.05	.03	–.02	.14**	.10*	.06
4. Dating				--	.13**	.11*	.01	.11*	.04	–.07	.04	.02	.03	–.06	–.05
5. Motherhood					--	30**	–.04	.06	.04	.05	.15**	.10*	.03	–.08	–.18**
6. IPV						--	.00	.05	.12**	.00	.11*	.06	–.04	–.06	–.10*
7. Weekly TV							--	31**	.23**	.16**	.14**	.16**	.09	.07	–.04
8. Weekly Social Media								--	.15**	.04	.19**	.10*	.09*	.04	.06
9. Weekly Movies									--	.22**	–.01	.02	.02	–.08	.06
10. Weekly Magazines										--	.04	.03	.10*	.10*	.04
11. Antagonistic Beliefs about Black Relationships											--	.62**	.09	.24**	.11*
12. Heterosexual Script Endorsement												--	.02	.36**	.18**
13. Tolerance for Violence in Relationships													--	.19**	–.06
14. Single Stigma														--	.41**
15. Perceived Pressure for Relationships															--

$^{*}p < .05$; $^{**}p < .01$

Table 2 Hierarchical Linear Regression Analyses with Dating Status as the Moderator of Relationship Beliefs

Variable	Antagonistic Beliefs about Black Relationships		Heterosexual Script Endorsement		Tolerance for Violence in Relationships		Singlehood Stigma		Perceived Pressure for Relationships	
	R^2	β	R^2	β	R^2	β	R^2	β	R^2	β
Step 1	.04**		.03*		.08**		.02		.10**	
Age		−.07		−.08		−.08		−.08		−.18**
Education		−.07		−.08		−.22**		−.10		.23**
Religiosity		.01		−.03		.11*		.08		.05
Motherhood		.12*		−.09		.01		−.08		−.10
IPV		.08		.05		−.04		.01		−.01
Step 2	.09**		.06*		.10		.06**		.11	
Dating		−.01		−.03		.02		−.07		−.04
Weekly TV		.10*		.12*		.03		.09		−.03
Weekly Social Media		.14**		.05		.05		.01		.07
Weekly Movies		−.11*		−.05		−.04		−.16**		.04
Weekly Magazines		.08		.06		.11*		.13**		.07
Step 3	.09		.06		.10		.05		.13	
Dating x TV		.02		−.02		−.05		−.02		.00
Dating x Social		−.06		.06		.02		−.04		−.01
Dating x Movies		−.03		−.09		.00		−.08		−.14**
Dating x Magazines		.02		.02		.07		.12*		.06

Betas reported from the last block of the regression model. Relationship status coded 0 = not dating, no partners, 1 = dating, one or more partners. Motherhood coded 0 = childless, 1 = mother. Past IPV coded 0 = no IPV, 1 = IPV. Education coded 1 = none, 4 = high school, 6 = associate's degree, 8 = 4-year college degree, or 10 = doctoral degree

* = $p < .05$; ** = $p < .01$

media (H1a_{ii}), and magazines (H1a_{iv}) were not significant predictors. Motherhood significantly moderated the association between social media and antagonistic beliefs about Black relationships (H1c_{ii}), but not the other associations (H1c_{i,iii, iv}). Simple slope analyses indicated a significant association between weekly social media consumption and antagonistic beliefs about Black relationships for childless women ($b_0 = .01$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [.01, .01]), but not for mothers ($b_1 = .00$, $p = .34$, 95% CI [.00, .01]) (see Fig. 2).

In the model testing IPV as the moderator (see Table 4), none of the media variables directly predicted antagonistic beliefs about Black relationships (H1a_{i-iv}). IPV significantly moderated the association between weekly social media and antagonistic beliefs about Black relationships (H1d_{ii}) and weekly movies and antagonistic beliefs about Black relationships (H1d_{iii}), but not for television (H1d_i) or magazines (H1d_{iv}). As expected, simple slope analyses indicated that the association with social media was significant for women without histories of IPV ($b_0 = .01$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [.00, .01]), but not for women with histories of IPV ($b_1 = .00$, $p = .46$, 95% CI [.00, .01]), and the association with movies, IPV was significant for women with an experience of IPV ($b_1 = -.10$, $p = .01$, 95% CI [-.17, -.02]) but not significant for women without an experience of IPV ($b_0 = .04$, $p = .31$, 95% CI [-.04, .11]) (see Fig. 3).

In sum, engagement with media was not directly related to antagonistic beliefs about Black relationships but there were a few moderating effects observed. Dating did not moderate any of the associations between media engagement and antagonistic beliefs about Black relationships. However, motherhood status and experience with IPV were significant moderators, though these effects were limited to the association between weekly social media engagement and antagonistic beliefs about Black relationships. That is, it was only for women without children or experience of IPV that social media engagement was significantly positively associated with more antagonistic beliefs. IPV also moderated the association between weekly movies and antagonistic beliefs about Black relationships; however, the direction of this effect was not as predicted and thus warrants further scrutiny.

Hypothesis Tests for Heterosexual Script Endorsement

In the model with dating as a moderator (see Table 2), television was significantly positively associated with heterosexual script endorsement (H2a_i), whereas the other media

Table 3 Hierarchical Linear Regression Analyses with Motherhood Status as the Moderator of Relationship Beliefs

Variable	Antagonistic Beliefs about Black Relationships		Heterosexual Script Endorsement		Tolerance for Violence in Relationships		Singlehood Stigma		Perceived Pressure for Relationships	
	R^2	β	R^2	β	R^2	β	R^2	β	R^2	β
Step 1	.03[*]		.02		.08[**]		.02		.10[**]	
Age		−.07		−.09		−.09		−.08		−.19[**]
Education		−.08		−.09		−.22[**]		−.11[*]		.23[**]
Religiosity		.01		−.03		.12[**]		.08		.04
Dating		.00		−.03		.03		−.07		−.03
IPV		.08		.05		−.05		.00		−.02
Step 2	.09[**]		.06[*]		.10		.07[**]		.11	
Motherhood		.11[*]		.10		.01		−.09		−.10[*]
Weekly TV		.09		.13[*]		.03		.08		−.02
Weekly Social Media		.14[**]		.04		.04		.01		.07
Weekly Movies		−.11**		−.07		−.03		−.16[**]		.04
Weekly Magazines		.08		.06		.11[*]		.12[*]		.06
Step 3	.11[*]		.08[*]		.10		.08		.14[*]	
Motherhood x TV		.02		.06		−.04		.09		.14[**]
Motherhood x Social		−.14[**]		−.15[**]		−.01		−.09		.00
Motherhood x Movies		−.02		−.05		.06		−.05		−.11[*]
Motherhood x Magazines		.07		.00		.02		−.03		.03

Betas reported from the last block of the regression model. Relationship status coded 0 = not dating, no partners, 1 = dating, one or more partners. Motherhood coded 0 = childless, 1 = mother. Past IPV coded 0 = no IPV, 1 = IPV. Education coded 1 = none, 4 = high school, 6 = associate's degree, 8 = 4-year college degree, or 10 = doctoral degree

[*] = $p < .05$; [**] = $p < .01$

variables were not (H2a$_{ii-iv}$). Further, dating status did not significantly moderate the associations between media and heterosexual script endorsement (H2b$_{i-iv}$).

In the model testing motherhood as the moderator (see Table 3), television was again the only media variable significantly associated with heterosexual script endorsement (H2a$_i$), whereas the other media variables were not (H2a$_{ii-iv}$). Motherhood significantly moderated the association between weekly social media and heterosexual script endorsement (H2c$_{ii}$), but not the other associations (H2c$_{i,iii,iv}$). As expected, simple slope analyses indicated a significant association among childless women ($b_0 = .01$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [.00, .01]), but not among mothers ($b_1 = .00$, $p = .78$, 95% CI [.00, .00]) (see Fig. 2).

In the model testing IPV as the moderator (see Table 4), television was again the only media variable significantly associated with heterosexual script endorsement (H2a$_i$), whereas other media variables were not (H2a$_{ii-iv}$). A significant moderating effect of IPV on the association between weekly movies and heterosexual script endorsement was observed (H2d$_{iii}$) but not the other associations (H2d$_{i,ii,iv}$); however, simple slope analyses indicated that the

association was not significant for women with a history of IPV ($b_1 = -.07$, $p = .06$, 95% CI [−.13, .00]) or without a history of IPV ($b_0 = .04$, $p = .18$, 95% CI [−2.00, .11]) (see Fig. 3).

In sum, television was the only form of media consistently associated with heterosexual script endorsement. In addition, the only moderating effect observed was for motherhood—for women without children, more weekly social media engagement was significantly associated with greater endorsement of the heterosexual script. Neither dating nor IPV status moderated these associations.

Hypothesis Tests for Tolerance of Violence in Relationships

In the model with dating as a moderator (see Table 2), magazine consumption was the only media variable significantly associated with tolerance of violence in relationships (H3a$_{iv}$), whereas the other media variables were not (H3a$_{i-iii}$). Further, dating status did not significantly moderate the associations between media and tolerance of violence in relationships (H3b$_{i-iv}$).

Table 4 Hierarchical Linear Regression Analyses with Experience of Intimate Partner Violence as the Moderator of Relationship Beliefs

Variable	Antagonistic Beliefs about Black Relationships		Heterosexual Script Endorsement		Tolerance for Violence in Relationships		Singlehood Stigma		Perceived Pressure for Relationships	
	R^2	β	R^2	β	R^2	β	R^2	β	R^2	β
Step 1	.04**		.03*		.08**		.03*		.09*	
Age		−.06		−.08		−.08		−.07		−.18**
Education		−.08		−.08		−.21**		−.10		.22**
Religiosity		.00		−.03		.13**		.08		.05
Dating		.00		−.02		.02		−.06		−.02
Motherhood		.11*		.09		.01		−.09		−.10
Step 2	.09		.06*		.10		.06**		.09	
IPV		.08		.05		−.05		−.01		−.02
Weekly TV		.09		.12*		.02		.09		−.02
Weekly Social Media		.15**		.04		.04		.02		.07
Weekly Movies		−.08		−.05		−.02		−.15**		.04
Weekly Magazines		.07		−.05		.09		.11*		.05
Step 3	.11*		.07		.12*		.09		.13*	
IPV x TV		.04		.03		.04		−.06		−.04
IPV x Social		−.10*		−.09		.07		−.11*		−.12*
IPV x Movies		−.10*		−.10*		−.10*		−.02		−.02
IPV x Magazines		.03		.03		−.10*		−.02		.02

Betas reported from the last block of the regression model. Relationship status coded 0 = not dating, no partners, 1 = dating, one or more partners. Motherhood coded 0 = childless, 1 = mother. Past IPV coded 0 = no IPV, 1 = IPV. Education coded 1 = none, 4 = high school, 6 = associate's degree, 8 = 4-year college degree, or 10 = doctoral degree

$^*p < .05$; $^{**}p < .01$

In the model with motherhood as a moderator (see Table 3), magazine consumption was again the only media variable significantly associated with tolerance of violence in relationships (H3a$_{iv}$), whereas the other media variables were not (H3a$_{i-iii}$). Motherhood status also did not significantly moderate the associations between media and tolerance of violence in relationships (H3c$_{i-iv}$).
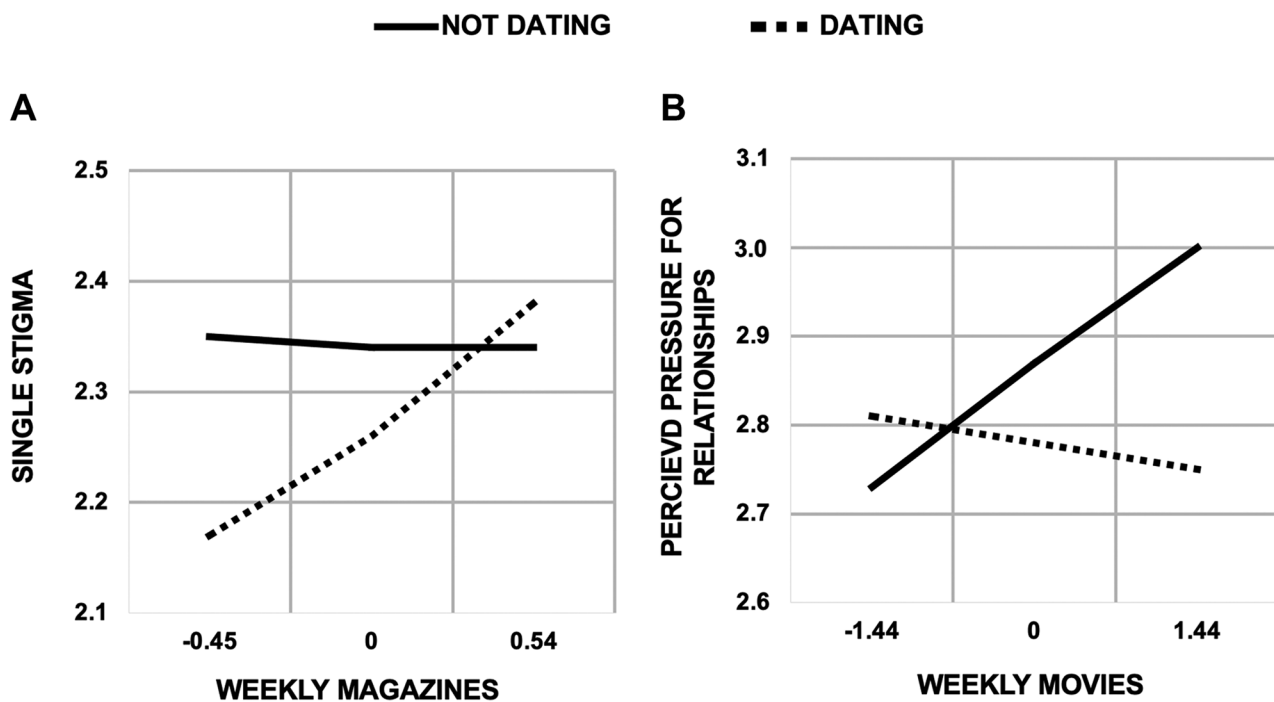
In the model testing IPV as the moderator (see Table 4), none of the media variables directly predicted tolerance of violence in relationships (H3a$_{i-iv}$). A significant moderating effect of IPV was observed for the association between weekly movies and tolerance of violence in relationships (H3d$_{iii}$) and weekly magazine consumption and tolerance of violence in relationships (H3d$_{iv}$), but not for the other associations (H3d$_{i,ii}$). However, simple slope analyses indicated no differential association between movies and tolerance of violence among women with an experience of IPV ($b_1 = −.08$, $p = .08$, 95% CI [−.18, .01]) or without an experience of IPV ($b_0 = .06$, $p = .20$, 95% CI [−.03, .15]), whereas a significant association between magazine consumption and tolerance of violence was observed for women without an experience of IPV ($b_0 = .35$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [.12, .59]) but not for

women with an experience of IPV ($b_1 = −.05$, $p = .71$, 95% CI [−.34, .23]) (see Fig. 3).

In sum, weekly television consumption and magazine consumption were the only media variables associated with tolerance of violence in relationships. Neither dating or motherhood statuses moderated the associations between media and tolerance of violence in relationships, and IPV moderated one association—weekly magazine consumption was significantly associated with tolerance of violence in relationships among women without an experience of IPV but not among women with an experience of IPV.

Hypothesis Tests for Singlehood Stigma

In the model with dating as a moderator (see Table 2), movies (H4a$_{iii}$) and magazine consumption (H4a$_{iv}$) were significantly associated with singlehood stigma, whereas the other media variables were not (H4a$_{i,ii}$). Further, dating status moderated the association between magazine consumption and singlehood stigma (H4b$_{iv}$), but not the other associations (H4b$_{i-iii}$), with simple slope analyses revealing a significant association for women in relationships ($b_1 = .21$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [.07, .35]) but not for single women ($b_0 = −.01$, $p = .90$, 95% CI [−.15, .13]) (see Fig. 1).

NOT DATING ■■■ **DATING**

A

(Panel A: x-axis WEEKLY MAGAZINES, values −0.45, 0, 0.54; y-axis SINGLE STIGMA, values 2.1–2.5)

B

(Panel B: x-axis WEEKLY MOVIES, values −1.44, 0, 1.44; y-axis PERCIEVD PRESSURE FOR RELATIONSHIPS, values 2.6–3.1)

Note. *$p < .05$, **$p < .01$. Panel A: Weekly magazines predicting single stigma. Panel B: Weekly movies predicting pressure to partner. Media measures are mean centered and presented at 1 SD above and below the mean.

Fig. 1 Plots of Simple Slopes for Dating Status as Moderator

In the model with motherhood as a moderator (see Table 3), movies (H4a$_{iii}$) and magazine consumption (H4a$_{iv}$) were again significantly associated with singlehood stigma, whereas the other media variables were not (H4a$_{i,ii}$). Motherhood status did not moderate any of these associations (H4c$_{i-iv}$).

In the model with IPV as a moderator (see Table 4), movies (H4a$_{iii}$) and magazine consumption (H4a$_{iv}$) were again significantly associated with singlehood stigma, whereas the other media variables were not (H4a$_{i,ii}$). Further, experiences of IPV moderated the association between weekly social media engagement and singlehood stigma (H4d$_{ii}$) but not the other associations (H4d$_{i,iii,iv}$). Simple slope analyses revealed a significant association between social media and singlehood stigma for women without an experience of IPV ($b_0 = .00$, $p = .04$, 95% CI [.00, .01]) but not for women with an experience of IPV ($b_1 = .00$, $p = .15$, 95% CI [−.01, .00]) (see Fig. 3).

In sum, magazine consumption was consistently associated with singlehood stigma, followed by weekly movies. Motherhood did not moderate associations between the media variables and singlehood stigma. Dating status moderated one association—weekly magazine consumption was significantly associated with singlehood stigma only among women in relationships. IPV status also moderated

one association—weekly social media engagement was significantly associated with singlehood stigma only among women without experience of IPV.

Hypothesis Tests for Perceived Pressure for Relationships

In the model testing dating status as the moderator (see Table 2), none of the media variables directly predicted perceived pressure for relationships (H5a$_{i-iv}$). Dating status significantly moderated the association between weekly movies and perceived pressure for relationships (H5b$_{iii}$), with simple slope analyses indicating a significant association for single women ($b_0 = .09$, $p = .01$, 95% CI [.02, .16]), but not for women in relationships ($b_1 = −.02$, $p = .45$, 95% CI [−.08, .03]) (see Fig. 1).

In the model testing motherhood as the moderator (see Table 3), none of the media variables directly predicted perceived pressure for relationships (H5a$_{i-iv}$). Motherhood status significantly moderated the association between weekly television and perceived pressure for relationships (H5c$_i$); however simple slope analyses did not reveal a significant association for women without children ($b_0 = .00$, $p = .03$, 95% CI [−.01, .00]) or mothers ($b_1 = .00$, $p = .05$, 95% CI [.00, .01]). Motherhood
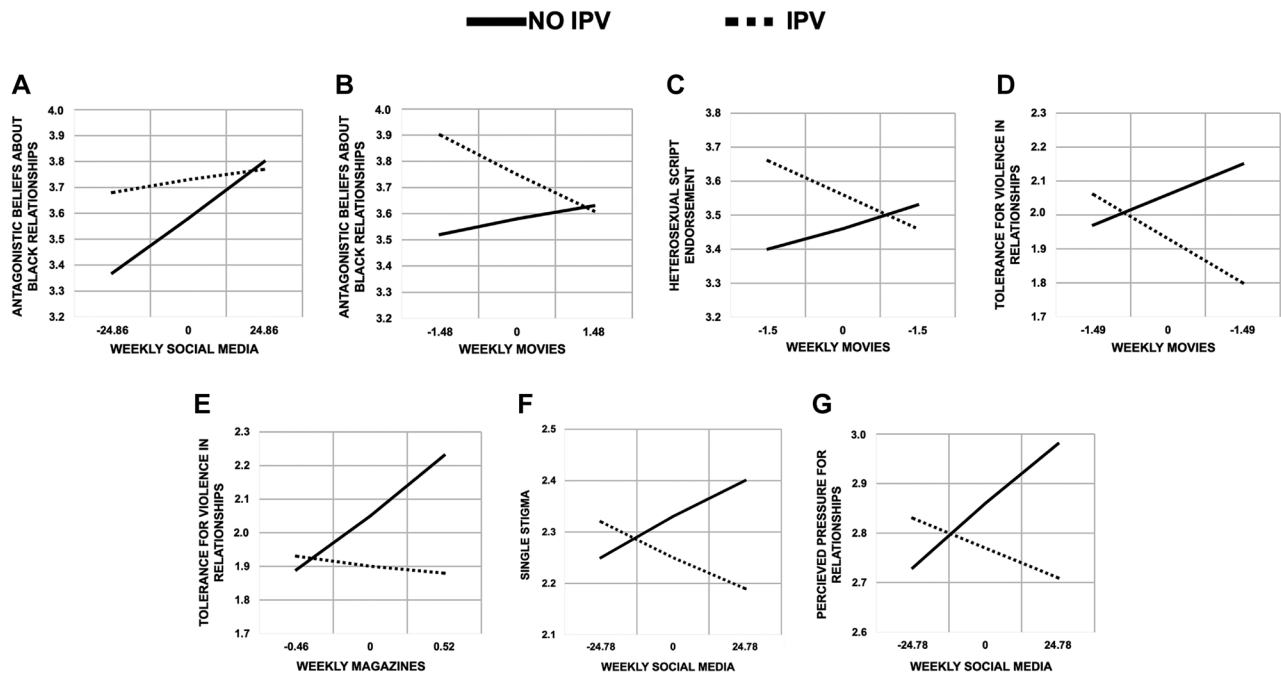
─── CHILDLESS   ▪ ▪ ▪ MOTHER
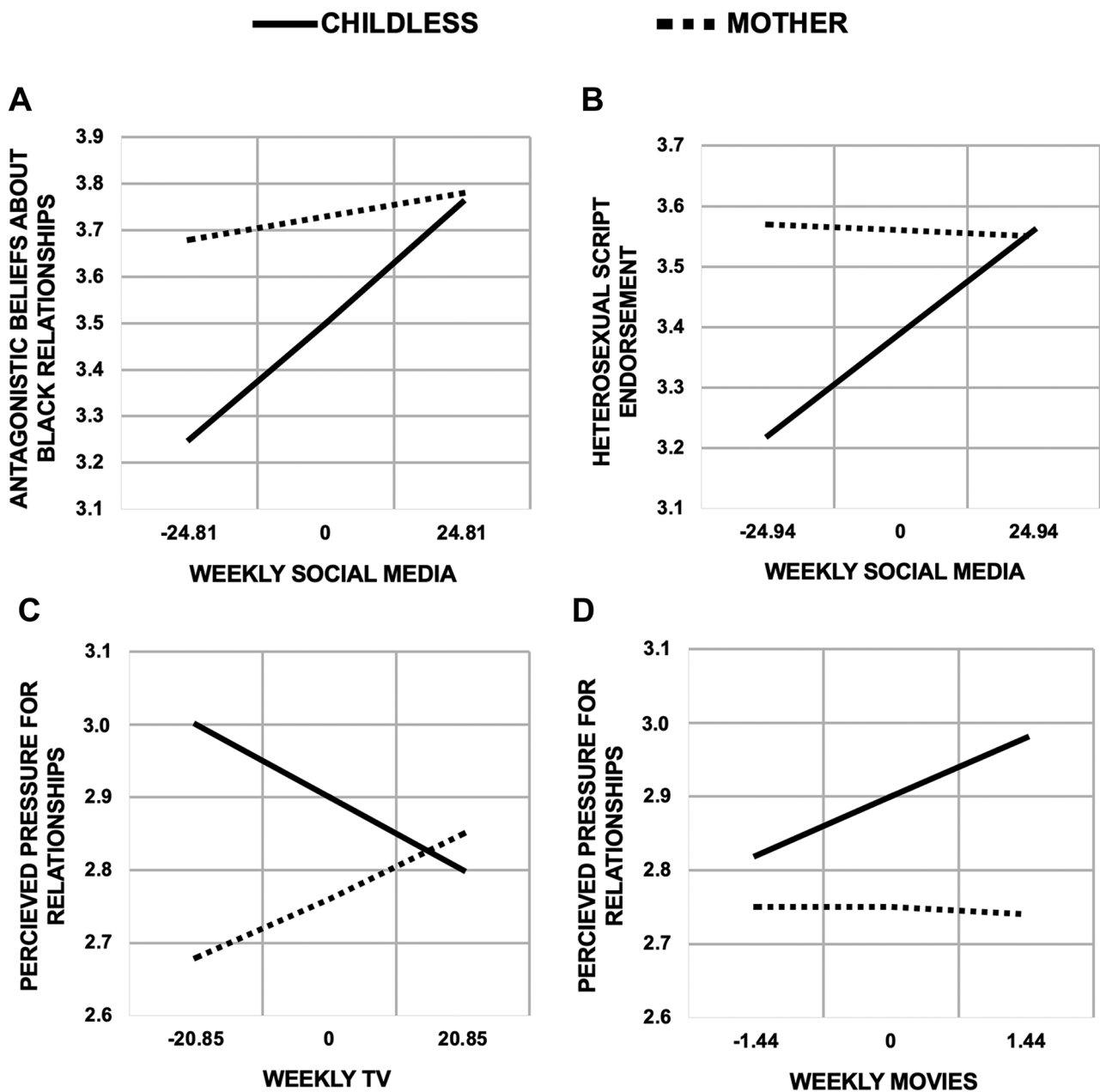
Note. *$p < .05$, **$p < .01$. Panel A: Weekly social media use predicting antagonistic beliefs about Black Americans. Panel B: Weekly social media use predicting heterosexual script. Panel C: Weekly TV predicting perceived pressure to partner. Panel D: Weekly movies predicting perceived pressure to partner. Media measures are mean centered and presented at and 1 SD above and below the mean.

Fig. 2 Plots of Simple Slopes for Motherhood Status as Moderator

status also moderated the association between weekly movies and perceived pressure for relationships (H5c$_{iii}$); however, again, simple slope analyses did not reveal a significant association for childless women ($b_0 = .06$, $p = .09$, 95% CI [−.01, .12]) or mothers ($b_1 = .00$, $p = .93$, 95% CI [−.06, .06]) (see Fig. 2).

Note. *p < .05, **p < .01. Panel A: Weekly social media use predicting antagonistic beliefs about Black relationships. Panel B: Weekly movie viewing predicting antagonistic beliefs about Black relationships. Panel C: Weekly movie viewing predicting endorsement of the heterosexual script. Panel D: Weekly movie viewing predicting tolerance for violence in relationships. Panel E: weekly magazine consumption predicting tolerance for violence in relationships. Panel F: Weekly social media use predicting single stigma. Panel G: Weekly social media use predicting perceived pressure for relationships. Mean centered media are presented at 1 SD above and below the mean.

Fig. 3 Plots of Simple Slopes for Intimate Partner Violence Status as Moderator

Discussion

In the model testing IPV as a moderator (see Table 4), none of the media variables directly predicted perceived pressure for relationships (H5a$_{i-iv}$). Experiences of IPV significantly moderated the association between weekly social media and perceived pressure for romantic relationships (H5dii). Simple slope analyses revealed a significant association for women without experiences of IPV ($b_0 = .00$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [.00, .01]) but not for women with experiences of IPV ($b_1 = .00$, $p = .28$, 95% CI [–.01, .00]) (see Fig. 3).

In sum, none of the media variables directly predicted perceived pressure for romantic relationships. Further, dating and motherhood status did not reliably moderate the associations between the media variables and perceived pressure for romantic relationships; however IPV status moderated one association—weekly social media was significantly associated with perceived pressure for romantic relationships only among women without experience of IPV.

Discussion

The current project complicated the concept of single status in quantitative sexual socialization research by highlighting unique ways media and singlehood experiences are

associated with beliefs about single status, gendered roles in relationships, and the role of violence in relationships. As described below, the current study has several implications for scholarly understandings of unmarried and unpartnered statuses.

Dating and Beliefs About Single Status

The current study is one of the first to establish associations between overall media consumption and beliefs about singlehood, demonstrating that the medium mattered, as associations for movies and magazines were most frequently observed with singlehood stigma and perceived pressure for relationships. The direction of significant relations was different for movies and magazines, suggesting content differences between these media. Movies, particularly romantic comedies and dramas, often feature plot lines that follow the process of a woman meeting, falling in love, and eventually marrying a husband. Most romantic plot lines center a single woman's experience, arguably normalizing and destigmatizing singlehood for women (Hefner & Wilson, 2013). On the other hand, magazines feature messages like dating advice, which portrays singlehood as undesirable and evidence of

a woman's dysfunction (Charleston, 2014; Jagesic, 2014). These two distinct messages may be driving the associations between media and singlehood beliefs in this study, but more research is needed to better understand the nature of those relations.

Moderation analyses for singlehood stigma yielded other important findings. Decomposition of the significant interactions for singlehood stigma were conducted for dating and IPV moderators, which demonstrated that being in a relationship did not consistently moderate associations between media and the criterion. Again, this is likely shaped by medium, as magazines and social media feature different kinds of messages and require different kinds of engagement. Findings for perceived pressure for relationships were more nuanced, observed solely in moderation analyses.

Perceived pressure for relationships exhibited a relatively consistent pattern of association observed across models. Among women without singlehood experience (e.g., not dating women, childless women, and women with and without experience of IPV) perceived pressure for relationships was significantly positively associated with media, except for television viewing among childless women which was inversely associated with the criterion. Among women with singlehood experiences (e.g., dating women, mothers, and women with histories of IPV) patterns of association were less consistent in their direction and for the most part not significant. The structure of these relations, where media consumption, which provides models and scripts for relationships, is associated with beliefs in the absence of actual relationship experience—a pattern of association theoretically supported by ecological systems and cultivation theories (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Morgan & Shanahan, 2010). Overall, findings for singlehood stigma, perceived pressure to partner, and the dating moderator expand scholarly understandings of sexual socialization processes among single women, although more work is needed to fully understand the nature of these associations and their broader implications for women's sexual socialization.

Motherhood and Gendered Relationship Beliefs

A second important group of novel findings concerns motherhood and gendered relationship beliefs. Antagonistic beliefs about Black relationships and heterosexual script endorsement were consistently related to motherhood. In the omnibus dating and IPV models, motherhood was positively associated with antagonistic beliefs about Black relationships, suggesting motherhood is in and of itself an experience related to gendered relationship beliefs for Black women. In many ways this is logical. Motherhood is a gendered and inequitable experience in the United States. The majority of Black mothers are unwed, a highly vilified

and stereotyped experience (Collins, 2009). Because prior research has identified romantic relationships as a context for sexual socialization (Bowleg et al., 2004), these data suggest coparenting relationships may offer a distinct context for socialization, although more research is needed to understand this finding. As for media predictors, in omnibus models, antagonistic beliefs about Black relationships and heterosexual script endorsement performed as predicted, being consistently and positively associated with television viewing, reinforcing cultivation theory and replicating findings from prior research (Avery, 2016; Morgan & Shanahan, 2010; Seabrook et al., 2016). Analyses decomposing significant interactions of gendered relationship beliefs offer further insights.

For antagonistic beliefs about Black relationships and endorsement of the heterosexual script, analyses for motherhood and IPV moderators exhibited similar patterns of association, where significant associations were observed for women without singlehood experience, but not for women with singlehood experience, a finding reinforced by ecological systems theory and other analyses in this study. Findings for omnibus analyses implicate motherhood as a context for socialization, while decomposition analyses found the opposite. More work will be needed to understand the contradictory nature of these findings, but analyses for motherhood and gendered relationships belief highlight the importance of motherhood and childlessness in socialization. Finally, analyses for IPV and tolerance for violence in relationships revealed novel findings about IPV's role in media's association with relationship beliefs.

Intimate Partner Violence and Tolerance for Violence in Relationships

The current study was also one the first to establish significant positive associations between media consumption and women's tolerance for violence in relationships. Again, magazines were the sole media predictor associated with tolerance for violence in omnibus analyses. These findings further reinforce the idea of content differences between magazines and other media. Magazines are wide ranging in their scope but many have featured stories describing Black American's sex ratio imbalance (e.g., The Economist, 2015). Prior research has found that greater investment in the idea of a sex ratio imbalance between Black men and women was associated with greater tolerance for violence in relationships (Vanterpool et al., 2022). The current study suggests magazines may contain messages about sex ratio imbalances, explaining their unique associations with tolerance for violence in relationships in this study.

Analyses for the IPV moderator yielded their own rich findings. Moderation analyses for IPV revealed a distinct pattern of association, one that suggests singlehood experience attenuates media's associations with relationship beliefs, including tolerance for violence in relationships, a trend observed across the moderators. IPV is an extreme experience, one with long lasting implications, known to contribute to sexual socialization processes (Landor et al., 2017). It is logical that an experience of IPV would delimit associations from more tangential factors like the media, but it is unclear just how that occurred. Collectively, findings for tolerance for violence in relationships and the IPV moderator established important relations between media, tolerance for violence in relationships, and an experience of IPV. While more work is needed to better understand the nature of these associations, findings reveal the important role of violence in sexual socialization processes.

Limitations and Future Directions

Like all studies, the current project had limitations. First, this project relied on cross-sectional data and therefore was not able to assess the causal effects of the media. One of the five stages of development outlined by EST describes the role of time in shaping development (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Future work could use longitudinal studies to determine the effects of the media and interpersonal experiences on sexual socialization over time, which would provide causal data through a more thorough test of EST. Second, this project used adapted scales to assess tolerance of violence in relationships, singlehood stigma, and perceived pressure for relationships. The inclusion of adapted measures calls into the question the reliability and validity of study findings. With that said, I was unable to find validated measures of singlehood stigma, perceived pressure for relationships, or tolerance for violence in relationships at the time of conducting this study, highlighting the important role these adapted measures played. As research continues, validated measures of singlehood stigma, pressure to partner, and tolerance for IPV in relationships will be needed.

Finally, data for this project were collected before the emergence of COVID-19 and the overturn of federal protections for abortion. The pandemic had implications for all women, many of whom were unable to date due to social distancing mandates or who found themselves at home with children or partners in increasingly high stress conditions. As researchers work to understand the lasting impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and the reversal of Roe v. Wade, sexual socialization researchers will have a critical role to play as the social norms and potential risks around sexual and romantic relationships have been remade.

Practice Implications

Despite its limitations, the current study has numerous practical implications for single Black women, policy makers, and social workers. First, single Black women stand to gain from this study. The current study offers descriptive information about some of the factors shaping singlehood for Black women, which they can use to better understand their own experiences. Second, this study has implications for mothers and the care providers who serve them. The supreme court's recent role back of federal abortion rights presumably will contribute to increased numbers of first time and unwilling mothers despite an absence of affordable childcare, healthcare, or living costs. While the impact of Roe v. Wade's reversal has yet to be fully seen, a better understanding of how motherhood, situated in this new context for rights, contributes to sexual socialization processes is needed. Finally, this project has implications for policy makers and social service providers working with IPV survivors. This study suggests that media literacy campaigns may be an important service to add to the compliment of resources serving survivors.

Conclusion

The current study found nuanced moderating effects for dating, motherhood, and IPV on the associations between specific media and relationship beliefs. The current study demonstrated the importance of exploring singlehood as part of sexual socialization processes, a category of experience and identity that is unique and worthy of study. While more work will be needed to understand sexual socialization and the mechanisms shaping these processes for single adult women, the current study demonstrated the value of this work. Now that the United States is a country populated by mostly unmarried women (United States Census Bureau, 2022), studies like the current one will be needed as the world acclimates to new norms around courtship, intimacy, and family in an increasingly single world.

Compliance with Ethical Standards

Ethics Approval This study was granted exempt status by University of Michigan's IRB prior to data collection.

Conflicts of Interest The author has no relevant financial or non-financial interests to disclose.

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