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So says the stars:
A textual analysis of *Glamour, Essence and Teen Vogue* horoscopes

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ABSTRACT:

This study examines horoscopes published in three women's magazines: *Essence*, *Glamour*, and *Teen Vogue*, a magazine for teenage girls. Leaving out race and age, the target demographics of all three magazines are very similar. In this textual analysis of more than 400 individual horoscope entries, three dominant themes emerged: love, money and work. Stereotypes associated with race and age—more than zodiac signs—shape the fate of those who read and believe in what horoscopes predict.

KEYWORDS:

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Introduction

Horoscopes can be found almost anywhere in the media. Open a daily newspaper and, invariably, a short snippet about what can be expected of the day will be present. Astrology has become a staple in all kinds of newspapers, magazines and on the Internet. In short, horoscopes have embedded themselves in popular culture (Evans, 1996).

Previous research concerning astrology has predominantly featured content analyses that examined and identified consistent themes (Adorno, 1994; Evans, 1996; Svensen & White, 1995). Evans (1996) found that while people with differing socioeconomic statuses receive horoscopes pertaining to the same themes, the type of advice is markedly different based on class. But despite this interesting discovery and the ongoing prevalence of astrology in the media, no study has been conducted on how horoscopes differ based on the race and age of their target readers. This is a valuable examination considering that people generate opinions about themselves and the world around them based partly on media depictions (Hall, 1975). To the sizable number of people who read and believe in horoscopes, the content of these astrological messages partly determine how they view themselves (Evans, 1996). Previous research found that some people make decisions based on their horoscopes (Snyder, 1974). If these horoscopes present advice to people dependent on their age and race, it stands to reason that they assist in creating cultural division between groups. It is therefore important for research to examine how these horoscopes differ.

This study employed textual analysis to examine the differences in horoscopes between *Glamour, Essence* and *Teen Vogue* magazines. Textual analysis has become an important methodology over the last few decades, especially in cultural studies (Fursich, 2009), as "text-based methods continue to make contributions to the understanding of media and culture"

(Phillipov, 2013, p. 211). The periodicals selected for this study claim roughly the same target demographics in terms of socioeconomic status (McCleneghan, 2003; Reid-Brinkley, 2008), but differ in age (*Glamour* and *Essence* versus *Teen Vogue*) and race (*Glamour* and *Teen Vogue* versus *Essence*). Through the lens of cultural studies, this paper will find common themes inherent in the horoscopes of the magazines and assess the similarities and differences in how those themes are presented.

Literature Review

It is easy for nonbelievers to dismiss zodiac signs as baseless. But those who believe in them see a sophisticated system that employs not only faith, but also principles of astronomy and mathematics that date back to the third millennium BC (North, 1986; Ovason, 2005; Svensen & White, 1995). Early on, astrology was frowned upon by church and science. But over time, astrology's most well-known application, horoscopes, became more mainstream (Snyder, 1974; Svensen & White, 1995). To read a horoscope, people must determine their astrological sign. Based on the day they were born, people fall under one of the 12 zodiac signs. For instance, those born between January 20 and February 18 are under the sign of Aquarius.

The Sunday London Express published in 1930 one of the earliest horoscope columns that was met with an enthusiastic public response and shot astrologer R.H. Naylor to stardom (Svensen & White, 1995). Soon, horoscopes became staples of newspapers and women's magazines (Evans, 1996). They have become so popular that in 1984, American newspapers were urged to carry a disclaimer alongside horoscope columns to claim they were unscientific (Blackmore & Seebold, 2001). This popularity has persisted in the digital age as online fortune telling sites also became popular (Kuo, 2009). Horoscopes have embedded themselves as a widespread feature in media of all forms (Kuo, 2009).

Scholars have sought to explain what makes certain people drawn to astrology (Bauer & Durant, 1997). Some people believe the descriptions and predictions in their horoscopes are accurate (Snyder, 1974). Fichten and Sunerton (1983) found that forecasts by different astrologers had little reliability. This lack of agreement, they argued, showed that astrologers could not have been using the same star patterns and zodiac charts to produce horoscopes.

Mayo, White, and Eysenck (1978) found that people under odd-numbered signs, such as Aquarius, Aries and Gemini, tended to be extroverts, while those from the even-numbered signs, such as Taurus, Virgo and Pisces, tended to be introverts. Study participants agreed with these assessments. However, the same study acknowledged that the survey participants had requested astrological predictions from one of the authors (Mayo, et al., 1978). This is consistent with what Fichten and Sunerton (1983) described as horoscopes' self-fulfilling prophecy: Believing in horoscopes affects people's self-assessment of whether or not horoscope predictions apply to their respective experiences. For instance, an experiment involving 46 female undergraduates concluded that those who knew more about astrology tended to get more affected by what their horoscopes said (Blackmore & Seebold, 2001). Another experiment found that those who endorse astrological beliefs judge their horoscopes as useful, even if these were actually just Barnum profiles, the same profile description that fits everyone (Rogers & Soule, 2009). Not everyone believes in horoscopes. However, the people who read horoscopes are more likely to believe in their accuracy, so it is important to analyze what messages are embedded in these horoscopes they are reading.

Critical Theory

This study takes a cultural studies approach to examining horoscopes. Fiske (1987) contended that a cultural studies theoretical framework allows researchers to find latent

meanings in messages. Fiske (1987) argued that messages from popular culture shape how people view the world. Cultural studies are based around critical theory, which should help improve our understanding of society by examining artifacts and interpreting meanings (Horkheimer, 1982). Scholars employing this approach have often studied women's magazines and other entertainment-based texts (Zelizer, 2004). These studies identified the use of various myths that propagated stereotypes about women.

By examining horoscopes, one can begin to see what problems and appropriate solutions are being communicated to the horoscope-reading public (Schudson, 2005). In his critical examination of primetime television, Gitlin (1983) argued that while audience members have some skepticism regarding popular messages, they believe what they consume because these messages reinforce previously held attitudes. Popular culture maintains the status quo by supporting the dominant ideology. In this study of horoscopes, it is important to note whether or not the messages contribute to the status quo. Murphy (1998a) posited that people do not view the world neutrally, but use other information, such as what they read in magazines, to form their views of the world.

Horoscope Content

In an analysis of three months of horoscopes from *The Los Angeles Times*, Adorno (1994) found four main characteristics of horoscopes: they feed on narcissism by appealing to readers' outstanding qualities; they rely on threat-help by calling attention to a threat and giving advice that there is a way out; they make readers feel dependent; and they promote social conformity, stressing that the blame is on the individual and not on given conditions (Adorno, 1994). Thus, Adorno (1994) concluded that:

> astrology cannot be simply interpreted as an expression of dependence, but must be also considered as an ideology for dependence, as an attempt to strengthen and somehow

> justify painful conditions that seem to be more tolerable if an affirmative attitude is taken towards them (pp. 114-115).

A study that examined relationship advice, including horoscopes, over a one-year period in *Cosmopolitan,* also found that women consistently received stereotypical advice from the magazine (Gupta, Zimmerman, & Fruhauf, 2008). The researchers' analysis discovered that the theme of "women needing to change for their men" repeatedly occurred.

Still, horoscopes are an understudied subject (Evans, 1996). Only two studies have replicated and built upon Adorno's work (Evans, 1996; Svensen & White, 1995). Svensen and White (1995) composed and tested 17 hypotheses from Adorno's study using a content analysis of the Australian newspaper *The Brisbane Sun.* Svensen and White (1995) found some differences from what Adorno (1994) earlier found, as the Australian horoscopes shunned astrological jargon, did not emphasize religion, and did not mention traffic as a recurring threat. This could be due to cultural differences between the United States and Australia: Adorno (1994) studied *The Los Angeles Times*, a newspaper covering an area of the United States with a significant traffic problem. But consistent with Adorno's (1994) findings, Svensen and White (1995) found that, among other things, the horoscopes maximized the use of *pseudo-individualization* (addressing the reader in the second person, as if they are acquainted); catered to readers' narcissism by referring to positive qualities; suggested anxiety and threats; and pointed to the importance of accepted values, stressing the importance of success (Svensen & White, 1995).

Instead of looking at general circulation newspapers, Evans (1996) compared horoscopes from women's magazines targeting the middle class and those targeting the working class. Evans (1996) found the pattern Adorno (1994) uncovered earlier, that horoscopes help maintain the status quo, including the representation of women as the subordinate gender. But Evans' (1996)

study also concluded that *social class* was a predictor of horoscope advice. "This class-appropriate advice no doubt reflects astrologers' awareness of their readers' lifestyles, but such advice perhaps also serves to legitimize the presence or absence of disposable income" (p. 396). This current study builds on what these studies have established but also extends our understanding of the role of horoscopes in the propagation of the status quo by also studying horoscope advice that magazines offer depending on the *race* and *age* of their target markets.

Women's Magazines

Women's magazines are unique for targeting readers solely based on their gender (Roy, 2008). Thus, they provide a perfect platform to examine how, as McQuail (2010) suggested, messages directed at women either liberate them from or perpetuate gender stereotypes. Content analyses of women's magazines have found how they have focused on the superficial: for example, that the ideal woman is beautiful and skinny (Davalos, Davalos, & Layton, 2007).

Indeed, magazine texts are sites "for the struggle over defining women and their role" (Prusank, 2007, p. 162). For instance, the popular *Seventeen*, a magazine for teenage girls, has been studied in terms of the myths it propagates about girlhood (Durham, 2007; Moe-Lunger, Kloosterheis, & Crumley, 2008). Young women's magazines influence the development of teenage girls who read them (Carpenter, 1998; Davalos et al., 2007). This is especially so considering that teenage girls are at an important stage of identity and social development (Firminger, 2006). The messages about femininity that young women's magazines carry indeed influence the socialization of these young women, helping shape decisions both trivial and important (Rosenholtz & Simpson, 1984; van Zoonen, 1994). Specifically, Jacques (2004) stressed the importance of examining horoscopes in girls' magazines: "In teen magazines, horoscopes are among the most blatantly instructive content on girlness, and their astrological

advice does promote a superficial, mainstream kind of girl power" (p. 46). In an analysis of horoscopes from six girls' magazines, Jacques (2004) found that "girl power" was reduced into "consumer choices and appropriate behavior."

But magazines also differ in terms of the racial profiles of their target readers, and numerous studies have shown that the media do not cover Blacks and Whites in the same manner or with the same frequency (e.g. Covert & Dixon, 2008; Heider, 2000; Woodard & Mastin, 2005). This discrepancy has existed for centuries (Cottle, 2000). A content analysis of a group of magazines found that the depictions of Blacks in both editorial content and advertisements rose between 1950 and 1982, but Blacks remained under-depicted (Humphrey & Schuman, 1984). Jewell (1993) argued that Black women have been stereotyped and underrepresented in the media, including in magazines. A study of horoscope content should, therefore, be mindful of the potential differences based on the *age* and *race* of the products' target consumers. Thus, we ask the following research questions:

RQ1. What themes are present in the horoscope entries found in magazines for females?

RQ2. How similar or different are the themes present in the horoscope entries found in magazines targeting different target markets based on age and race?

Method

This examination employs textual analysis—consistent with critical theory—to uncover the latent meanings embedded in the horoscopes analyzed in this study. Language is what people use to describe the world, and that language can affect how people view the world (Hudson, 1984). In textual analysis, researchers attempt to make sense of the language used in a text; they do this to make an educated guess as to some of the most likely interpretations that might be made (McKee, 2003). Hall (1975) developed textual analysis as an alternative to the commonly

used quantitative method of content analysis. Unlike content analysis, textual analysis is an interpretative method that allows the researcher to explore all aspects of content, both the admitted and the omitted.

Scholars argue that textual analysis can work as a stand-alone method, one that allows a deeper level of understanding than the surface-level findings of context analysis and self-report limitations of interview-based studies (A.A. Berger, 1998; H. M. Berger, 1999). Both content analysis and interviews frequently get paired with textual analysis and while the results are sometimes robust, doing this often privileges the positivist findings of content analysis or the more grounded findings of interview, allowing for less emphasis on the strong, nuanced meanings uncovered simply through textual analysis alone (Schroder, 2002). Indeed, several studies have used textual analysis as an adequate method by itself (see for example Musto, 2009; Yoshino, 2008; Yuen, 2013).

By utilizing textual analysis, this study provides the researchers with a long soak in the material, one that should help bring to the surface all possible meanings of the text, not just manifest meaning (Hall, 1975). Thus, the researchers are able to view all the text in totality and surmise the complex layers of meanings embedded in text (Barthes, 1972). Textual analysis gives insight into "the narrative character of media content, its potential as a site of ideological negotiation, and its impact as mediated 'reality' necessities interpretation in its own right" (Fursich, 2009, p. 238).

In order to address the research questions posed in the previous section that seek to explore not only the themes that abound in horoscope entries in women's magazines but also to compare the themes from magazines targeting females of varying age and race, we selected three magazines targeted at females that are similar in many ways but different in terms of the age and

race of their target demographics. In this study, we examined a year's worth of horoscopes from *Essence, Glamour* and *Teen Vogue* magazines. Both *Essence* and *Glamour* target the same demographic of women, except that the former is predominantly read by White women, and the latter by Black women. The same demographic of women reads both *Glamour* and *Teen Vogue*, except in the case of age. We included all horoscopes published in these three magazines from January 2010 to December 2010, or 12 magazine issues for each of the three titles. The unit of analysis was the individual horoscope and a total of 432 horoscope entries were included. We examined copies of the individual pages from the actual magazines. We first examined the artifacts individually and then noted the themes that emerged during our independent readings. Themes observed were then discussed. Our discussions encouraged more readings of the horoscopes to further examine the themes we had found.

Essence

The first issue of *Essence* hit the newsstands in May 1970. For its first 30 years, the magazine was run by a small group of founders. However, in 2000, Time Inc. purchased 49% of the magazine and, less than two years later, bought the remaining stock (Woodard & Mastin, 2005). According to the 2011 *Essence* Media Kit, the magazine's target audience is women between the ages of 18-49 with an average of age of 39 (EC, 2011). Roughly one-third of the magazine's total paid readers (1,050,000) earn over $75,000 annually. More than 90% of subscribers are Black women, and the magazine claims it reaches 40% of all American Black women per month.

Glamour

Originally titled *Glamour of Hollywood*, *Glamour* magazine was founded in 1939 and is owned by Conde Nast Publications. According to the 2011 *Glamour* Media Kit, the magazine

reaches 2.3 million per year, with a target audience of women between the ages of 18-49 (CNP, 2011). The median age of the readers of *Glamour* is 35, while more than 90% of the readers are women. Sources vary, but based on previous research, at least 80% of the readers are White women (Cruz, 2010; McCleneghan, 2003). According to the Media Kit, about 40% of *Glamour* readers earn more than $75,000 per year.

Teen Vogue

Also published by the Conde' Nast company, *Teen Vogue* is a fashion and entertainment magazine for teenage girls. It began in February 2003 (Carr, 2003). Conde' Nast bought teen magazine *YM* in 2004, only to shut it down later, and sent subscribers to *Teen Vogue* instead (Prusank, 2007). The monthly circulation of *Teen Vogue* is slightly over one million as of June 2011 (CNP, 2011b). Though it caters to teenage girls, the magazine reports that the median age of its readers is 22 (CNP, 2011b). More than one-third of the magazine's audience comes from a family earning more than $75,000 per year (CNP, 2011b).

Findings

The vast majority of the advice provided through the horoscopes in the magazines we analyzed focused on these three dominant themes: love, money and career. The magazines dealt with these themes in similar ways, but we also found interesting contrasts. These similarities and contrasts are discussed in detail in the following sections.

Ideology of Dependence

Life is better with a man, or so did the three magazines stress. Throughout each month and each astrological sign, and across the three different magazines, women are told to put up with negative traits of men, all in the name of love. Men are not only necessary, but they transform lives.

If you are a Taurus reading *Glamour* in November, you can look forward to this: "Early this month, thanks to a new love-focused moon, a guy will transform your life" (Lynch, 2010a). In *Glamour*, love is a passive exercise. You don't need to do much to get it, but when it comes, you should do everything in your power to keep it. If you have a man and you're a Pisces in March, you're told to "put up with your man getting upset, that's what he does. *Your job* is to calm him down because it's better for both of you" (Lynch, 2010b; emphasis ours). Throughout *Glamour*'s love advice, there's a clear message: Men are great and you want them in your life. Most of the time, this message is implied, but other times it is quite overt. For instance, "Make sure you let your man know that you need him and care by saying I love you" (Lynch, 2010c).

Horoscopes also urge women not to simply be on the lookout for potential dates, but that a wedding is something to aspire for. A women's place is in a marriage, and ladies should "always be on the lookout for potential wedding prospects" (Lynch, 2010a). Also, if a man might not like the real you, then you should change because "guys seek mates who are similar" (Lynch, 2010d). It is also a woman's responsibility to please her mate during sex. Here's an advice: "Don't be afraid to play to please your mate, like the sexy librarian role play. Hair up? Check. Pumps? Check. Thick glasses? Oops – it's all on the floor" (Lynch, 2010e). Lastly, women should always put their needs second. In time for Christmas, Pisces were told no matter what their plans were, "If he asks you to go *with him* to Christmas Eve Mass, do it" (Lynch, 2010f).

While *Essence* also placed a strong emphasis on the benefits of having a man in your life, the magazine advised women to be more independent. But while *Glamour* presented a view of romantic love, *Essence's* depiction was far more sexual. There were references to "mind blowing sex" (Balfour, 2010c), about sating yourself since "your libido is high" (Balfour, 2010b), about having "an insatiable sexual appetite" (Balfour, 2010a), and about not being afraid to "turn to

toys" to satisfy needs (Balfour, 2010d). Unlike the White woman, the Black woman, according to *Essence*, should always be on the lookout for her man, and also be a lot more open about her sexual needs. Also, while *Glamour* presented conflict in love, the problems mostly came from him wanting to do "guy stuff" and her not. But in *Essence*, the woman is far more likely to be the cause of conflict. This is congruous to the stereotype of a headstrong Black female who emasculates men. For instance, *Essence* readers are told to "avoid drama" and that "tirades don't bode well" (Balfour, 2010e), and to "seek counseling to handle issues of distrust" (Balfour, 2010f).

In *Teen Vogue*, girls are encouraged to be assertive in their love life. Go confront your boyfriend for his immature behavior or about your suspicions. It is fine to make the first move. Scorpions got this advice in October: "Passionate Mars is in Scorpio, testing your patience with a shy crush. If you want to score a date with him anytime soon, you'll have to ask him out first" (Tom, 2010d). In contrast to both *Glamour* and *Essence*, readers of *Teen Vogue* are not given physical descriptions of the ideal guy. Instead, there are references to having a deeper connection. "Love at first sight" is bliss. There are references to "a boyfriend that surprises you with an unexpected gift;" or that "a guy who shares your unique interest may come along soon." Those under the sign of Sagittarius got this advice in September: "Follow your heart and get to know the quirky guy outside your social circle. A deep connection could lead to lasting love" (Tom, 2010e). Teens are also told that having a relationship will make them popular: "An unexpected romance will gain you *It girl status* on June 15th" (Tom, 2010a; emphasis ours). They are also reminded that boys can get in between BFFs. For example, they are warned that, "when you meet your pal's new boyfriend and instantly click with him, she'll feel jealous" (Tom, 2010d). Girls fight over guys, and that's normal: "With Mars and Venus in your house of love

and a full moon in your friendship sector, you and your bestie may be destined to *compete* for the same guy" (Tom, 2010d; emphasis ours). These examples imply the stereotype that girls' lives and conflicts revolve around guys, a manifestation of the ideology of dependence.

Consumerism and Social Life

While money emerged as a recurring theme in all three publications, financial advice was noticeably different in each. Women reading *Glamour* are consistently told to spend. Spending on beauty, which will entice men or please the one you are with, is a common advice. For readers of *Glamour,* spending money is equated to happiness. Capitalism and patriarchy are celebrated. For example, in September, Leos are told to "splurge on something that will pay off long-term—'a classic suit' that will let a woman be more attractive" (Lynch, 2010g).

For readers of *Essence*, the opposite advice was prevalent. Women are told to save money constantly. For example, Black women are told to "conserve cash" (Balfour, 2010f), "continue your frugal ways" (Balfour, 2010c), "start saving" (Balfour, 2010g), "seek expert advice to correct lack of discipline" with money (Balfour, 2010f). They are told that "frugal is the new rich" (Balfour, 2010g). *Essence* readers are also warned about the potential dangers of lending money to family or friends. Not once in the full year of *Glamour* or *Teen Vogue* horoscopes was this potential conflict mentioned, but *Essence* noted the possible hazards of this more than once per month. Readers are told to "avoid lending to family and friends" (Balfour, 2010e), to "press pause on relatives' money management schemes" (Balfour, 2010e), to "say no to borrowers" (Balfour, 2010d), and that "saving is easy as long as you say no to family" (Balfour, 2010h). The implied message is that Black women surround themselves with untrustworthy friends and family and that Black people in general are less honest and honorable.

For readers of *Teen Vogue*, shopping and travel are essential. Both *Teen Vogue* and *Glamour* equate happiness with disposable income and spending. The ideal life revolves around materialism. Readers are encouraged to spend on accessories and dresses. For instance, Aries girls were told: "Wisely invest in terms that are practical for winter, like cozy leg warmers or rugged boots" (Tom, 2010c). Travel is almost always linked to family in *Teen Vogue*, an apparent recognition that teens do not earn enough to shoulder their own travels. However, the expectation contained in horoscopes is that a fun and loving family would have the resources to spend on travels. Teen Aquarians, for example, were told in October: "The next family vacay could be confirmed as early as the 7th, and it may involve a tropical locale. Live healthier today so you'll look and feel your best for the beach" (Tom, 2010d).

Another way that teens are encouraged to spend is through parties with friends. *Teen Vogue* readers are bombarded with images of partying. Teens are encouraged to join "end-of-summer BBQs and pool parties," or plan "a weekend sleepover," or organize a "weekend picnic." Teens under the sign of Pisces got this advice in July: "Feeling run-down? Pack your bags and take a weekend camping trip around July 11th. Basking in nature's beauty will recharge your batteries and maybe even your love life" (Tom, 2010a).

Finally, technology plays a large role in a teen's life. *Teen Vogue* reminds readers to prioritize social relationships by participating in public life through the help of technology. Teens were reminded to "upload a new profile picture" in their social network pages; plan "regular Skype dates" with their boyfriends when they travel; or free up their phone memory "to make room for future texts." Virgos were reminded never to miss important calls from their boyfriends by making sure "your phone is charged at all times." Here is an example of an entry for Libras in May, focusing more on technology rather than individual agency: "You've been gossiping so

much lately that you may want to up the minutes on your cellphone plan. Just remember to think before you speak, or you'll find yourself needing to do some damage control" (Tom, 2010b).

The Ideal Woman

A woman should aspire to be part of a team. In all three magazines, women are advised to play by the rules of the workplace or the school, impress their bosses or teachers and be content as a subservient worker, implying that women live in a patriarchy where men are the bosses. According to *Essence*, *Glamour* and *Teen Vogue*, a woman's priority is her home life, and balancing that with their work is not always easy. For *Glamour* readers, work is something women do, but keeping their man happy is more important. They are told that "you're probably struggling at work, but still try and be prepared for work" (Lynch, 2010a). Again, horoscopes for *Essence* readers were very similar, but conflict was present more frequently. "Drama is a distraction, get back to the grind," *Essence* told Scorpios in August (Balfour, 2010d).

Teen Vogue readers were advised to be bold. It is okay to confront slacker classmates or ignore a BFF with an ego trip. For example, Librans got this advice: "When your BFF goes on a total ego trip and gets too controlling, go MIA and hit the beach with your boyfriend. Spending time with him will de-stress you in a snap" (Tom, 2010a). Faced with a lot of school work? Those born under the sign of Taurus were told they have persuasive powers. In October, about midterms, they were given this specific advice: "If you have multiple papers due on the same day, ask one of your teachers for an extension" (Tom, 2010d). It appears that girls are encouraged to be assertive, something that did not stand out in the horoscopes for *Glamour* readers.

All three magazines provide a very similar message: work (or school) is important, but a woman's main priority lies in the home, tending to her man, her children or her friends. But

while girls were advised to be daring and adventurous, women are told to keep away from causing trouble. The readers of *Essence* are warned over and over again against creating drama at work. The educated and strongly middle-class Black women reading *Essence* need to be told that acting immaturely and "creating any drama" is bad for their professional life and will also negatively influence their personal life. For *Glamour* readers, the message is communicated through constant reminders that a woman must now focus strongly on her work life because it will negatively impact her relationship with her man. The woman must delicately balance success in both venues, but always aim for the most success in the home.

Discussion

The explicit and implicit patterns found in all three magazines make three things clear: Women need men, spending money can make them happy, and that they have specific roles to play, mostly in the home and with their men. Women are told that it is their duty to put up with the faults of men because that is better than losing them. Life would not be complete without a man. These implicit patterns and dominant themes are consistent with the main assumption about the world that Adorno (1994) identified: We live in a capitalistic, patriarchal world. The horoscopes we examined also suggest that the media generally portray women as passive, overemotional and dependent upon men, echoing what Murphy (1998b) discovered.

These dominant themes were consistent across the three magazines, but there were some nuanced differences as well. For example, while teen readers of *Teen Vogue* were encouraged to be assertive, the older readers of *Glamour* and *Essence* were reminded to stay away from drama. What could explain this difference? Why are career women, supposedly independent, advised to control their emotions, while girls, still going through identity-formation, encouraged to be daring and assertive? A possible explanation could be what Adorno (1994) had argued as

horoscopes' attempt to feed on readers' narcissism by appealing to their outstanding qualities. When girls read horoscopes and see some references to their own habits and experiences, they relate better and believe more. They also begin to see these as positive. Teenage girls are stereotyped as adventurous and risk-takers. The horoscopes in *Teen Vogue* clearly reflect these stereotypes. There were constant mentions of new technology and going to parties. These entries provide girls with the belief that what they desire and aspire for are normal, that they are not alone, and that their common ways are acceptable, if not celebrated. The same can be argued with women who read *Glamour*. For a career woman, a lot is at stake. You have to balance your personal and professional life. A common dilemma for women is boredom. The routine of work is boring. But boring is okay. Work is important. Love is important. The less drama you create, the better. You just have to conform.

The magazines also dealt with the theme of money differently. Feminist theory predicts that women would be advised to spend and keep the status quo of capitalism alive and well (McQuail, 2010). But while this is exactly what *Glamour* and *Teen Vogue* do, *Essence* does not equate spending to happiness. Instead, readers of *Essence* were constantly reminded to save money and to be careful about lending money to friends and relatives. This is consistent with the stereotypical Black woman faced with financial constraints while being surrounded by untrustworthy people (Jewell, 1993).

It appears then that the depictions of females in these horoscope entries are not entirely idealized—they are not always about what women ought to be. The entries also reflect the existing stereotypical belief-systems about women. Indeed, Evans (1996) found that horoscopes are determined not based on the movement of the stars or astrological patterns, but rather based on the composition of a magazine's readership. For example, if the typical magazine reader

enjoys a high socio-economic class, she will be advised to spend more than someone from a more decidedly middle-class background. This is exactly what emerged from this textual analysis of three women's magazines. Like Evans (1996), this study found that horoscopes are less likely to be determined by the movement of the stars. Our contribution in this study is that we found that aside from class, racial stereotypes and assumptions related to age also shape the messages found in horoscopes. Stereotypes, more than the stars, seem to be deciding the fate of those who read and believe the horoscopes in these magazines.

The horoscopes we examined are governed not by the motions of planets and stars, but by astrologers' keen awareness of their readers' lifestyles and aspirations (Evans, 1996). For example, the horoscopes displayed keen awareness of particular seasons that provide opportunity and motivation to spend, and so pieces of advice offered are particularly in sync with activities associated with summer, Thanksgiving, Christmas or other holidays. In doing so, the entries also legitimize these constructed wants and stereotypes. This is consistent with what Adorno (1994) argued, that astrology was not only an expression of dependence but also "an ideology for dependence."

The media have the power to shape public agenda. They also have the power to break the unfortunate cycle of stereotypes that sustain the status quo. The media are far from innocent passive transmitters of meanings (Gitlin, 1983). But there is a reason the media propagate stereotypes: They help sustain the status quo that also benefits media businesses' commercial aspirations (Adorno, 1994). In this study, we have seen how horoscopes echo stereotypes of women being dependent on their men. But we have also seen how horoscopes can single out a sub-group of women. When offering women financial advice, horoscopes bifurcate based on

racial stereotypes. These predictions and pieces of advice illuminate how media stereotypes about gender and race intersect.

Future research on horoscopes as part of popular culture should examine whether the patterns and dominant themes found here exist across time periods. This study looked at only 12 months of horoscopes in each magazine, a clear limitation to what we found. The current economic state of magazines could exert influence over content choices. The horoscopes were also examined after publication. This raises the question of whether the themes were shaped by an organizational philosophy. It would be interesting to see if different authors' works exhibit the same patterns and dominant themes. The vast majority of the work pertaining to horoscopes examines content (Adorno, 1994; Evans, 1996; Jacques, 2004; Svensen & White, 1995), and since studies have shown that horoscopes affect the beliefs of those who consume them (Blackmore & Seebold, 2001; Fichten & Sunerton, 1983), it is also important to study if horoscopes affect not only those beliefs, but also the actions of astrology followers.

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