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ABSTRACT

For decades African-American women and Latinas have lamented the abundance of negative and unrealistic images of them reflected on television. Such images appear to be pervasive today on reality television shows, the most popular television show genre, where many historic negative stereotypes of women of color are conveyed. Social television, the practice of watching television and simultaneously commenting on social media, is now common among viewers. The aim of this research is to determine if the same old stereotypes of women of color on television are finding their way to the new medium of Twitter. This study is a textual analysis of tweets from viewers who watched episodes of seasons one and three one of the Vh1 reality show *Basketball Wives LA* and the WE TV reality program *Mary Mary*. Both shows feature women of color in the cast. This study found that the social television conversation among viewers of these shows detected racial and gendered stereotypes.

Key words: Twitter, reality television, social television, stereotypes, black women, Latinas, Basketball Wives LA, Mary Mary.

SCREENS AND STEREOTYPES:
THE TRANSMISSION OF IMAGES OF WOMEN OF COLOR ON TWITTER AND
TELEVISION

by
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B.A., Jackson State University, 2000
M.A., Syracuse University, 2010

Dissertation
Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy in Mass Communication.

Syracuse University
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This work is dedicated to black women who struggle to exist outside of ugly stereotypes that conflate their experiences and diminish their humanity. This work is dedicated to black women who are often overlooked, ignored and dismissed daily in stores, at work, at school and even at home. This work is dedicated to the bodies of black women that have been invisible and hypervisible at the same time desired and degraded since colonizers set eyes on them.

This work is dedicated to little black girls who don't feel affirmed or celebrated and don't yet realize there are forces at play that are designed to make them feel that way.

This work is dedicated to black women revolutionaries who fight to show the world that black lives matter, especially the lives of black women and girls including those who are transgender and queer.

This work is dedicated to my black Southern grandmothers, Ida Bea Williams and Celestine Marie Burnside, who poured their wit, wisdom and prayers all over me so that I would have a chance to absorb all of the knowledge and opportunities that were not extended to them.

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This work is dedicated to and possible because of the black social television audience that has decimated shows before they hit the screen and resuscitated others and brought them back to the air. The work of the black social television audience is important because it has shown that just as black lives matter so do black images.

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CHAPTER 1

Click, watch, tweet: The emerging second screen

Every Monday night when the *Love & Hip Hop* reality show airs on the cable network Vh1 the show's name and cast members dominate Twitter trending topics. The show, starring black and Latino men and women who work in the hip-hop music industry, follows the drama and conflict among a cast of performers struggling to make it in entertainment. The New York City-based show, which has been renewed for five seasons and has a successful spin-off show *Love & Hip Hop Atlanta*, which has also been renewed for four seasons, is a television ratings success. The show has grown into a franchise with casts based in three cities including the new *Love & Hip Hop Hollywood* based in Los Angeles. But the series is also a hit on laptop, tablet and smart phone screens because viewers tweet about the show at high volumes when it airs during its first run. When a cast member insulted another woman on the show by saying she looked like the drag queen RuPaul, #RuPaul trended. When singer and cast member K. Michelle's song *Can't Raise a Man* played during the final episode of the season three #CantRaiseAMan was a national top 10 trending topic. Urban model Erica Mena was caught in a love triangle and viewers tweeted, prompted by the show's producers, who they wanted her to choose, her girlfriend Cyn (#TeamCyn) or ex-boyfriend Rich Dollaz (#TeamDollaz) and both hashtags became national Top 10 trending topics. These examples all illustrate that the practice of updating on social media while watching television is changing the way television is watched, produced and interpreted. Social television, the practice of updating on social media while watching television, is changing the television landscape and it is the core of this dissertation. The social television success that shows have on mobile screens helps to determine television

shows' success on the air. The purpose of this dissertation is to analyze the content of the conversations among viewers while they watch television shows. This study examines this new emerging practice of watching while tweeting and the role social TV plays in helping old stereotypes of women of color travel from television screens onto computers screens and into popular culture and society.

As technology advanced viewers started to shift their viewing habits and appointment television was threatened. Television recording devices such as VCRs and the more dynamic DVR and Tivo almost killed appointment television. The television recording technology freed viewers to watch television on their own schedules and no longer kept them chained to their television sets. Experts said appointment television was dead. The days of all of Americans watching all of their favorite shows at the same time was over. A tradition was lost.

But the rise of the new medium of social media helped revived the old medium of television. Television networks have experienced a decline in viewership and ratings for years (Stelter, 2012). Viewers' use of DVRs contributed to the slump in network television ratings (Carter, 2012). However, television remains one of Americans' most used mediums. On average, Americans watch television 35.1 hours a week compared with 5.1 hours of Internet computer use (Nielsen, 2013). Americans have also become avid social media users with 73% of adults who are online having social networking accounts (Brenner, 2013). As Americans adopted the use of social networks they began to update their social media profiles about the television shows they watch and the characters they love. A 2012 TV Guide study found that 17 percent of people began watching a show because of on updates they saw on social media, 31 percent of viewers continued to watch a show because of a post they saw on social networks and 27 percent said they watched more live television to avoid show spoilers revealed through other viewers' social

media updates (Bergman, 2012). This practice of updating one's status on social networks is known as social TV or the second screen, when viewers watch programs on the television and simultaneously watch and engage in conversations about the program on an additional screen including a smart phone, tablet computer or laptop. Nielsen found that among people who own tablet computers 45 percent visited a social media website while watching a television show on a daily basis and 69 percent watched television and visited social networking sites while watching television several times a week. Television producers have learned the importance of social television and have incorporated the practice into the shows. The producers and casts of television programs often join the live conversation while viewers watch the plot on the small screen and view actors' comments about their characters on the second screen. Television networks are now injecting social media clauses in contracts with on-air talent and claiming ownership of the talent's social media accounts (Chariton, 2014).

The social media buzz around shows is becoming just as important as ratings for television programs and the amount of social media talk about television programs is now quantified. Companies such as Trendrr, Blue Fin Labs and the company formerly known as Social Guide measure the volume of social networking chatter about television shows. Quantifying the social media buzz of television shows has become an important measurement of a show's success. The Nielsen Company, in fact, purchased social TV measurement pioneer Social Guide proving that the second screen phenomenon and social TV practices have become an important player in traditional television. The new company is Nielsen Social. Indeed, researchers have found that social TV buzz leads to higher television ratings. A 2013 Nielsen social television study found that in an analysis of 200 prime-time shows, that as social media buzz about shows increased so did the ratings among a third of the shows and the more

frequently people watch a show the more they talk about it on Twitter (Lee, 2013). That same study found that of all genres of television shows reality shows are influenced by social media the most. Almost half of reality shows in the Nielsen study, 44 percent, showed a difference in ratings because of social media chatter (Lee, 2013). During the 2010-2011 television season Nielsen found that 76 percent of Twitter users and 50 percent of Facebook users visited TV network websites (Nielsen, 2011). Online media and social media have helped to give birth to more engaged viewers who focus more on television programs while they watch (Russell, 2012). Viewers balance watching plot twists and character development along with a complex national social media conversation about television programs.

Interestingly, social media, especially Twitter, has revived appointment television. Viewers are now watching television shows at their scheduled time during their first run so they can view the show and the Twitter stream about the show at the same time. Social TV has taken covieing to another level and enables fans from across the country who don't even know one another to converse about and bond over their favorite television show through social media as they watch their beloved shows. The fusion of new media and old media has created a new audience-driven practice that is changing the way Americans watch television and the way that television is produced. This is significant because the way that viewers discuss television shows on social networks and the volume of the audience's engagement has become an important factor in determining if shows get to air and remain there (Williams & Williams, 2014; Goel, 2015).

It is clear that viewers talk a lot about television programs and characters on social media when the shows air. But what do they say? The practice of social television is new and so is scholarship on it. This study aims to fill a gap in the literature and examine the discourse that takes place while television viewers watch shows and post updates about the shows on social

media simultaneously. This study is a textual analysis of tweets captured during the first-run of *Basketball Wives LA* and *Mary Mary*, reality shows with casts that are primarily women of color. I am choosing the genre of reality television because it dominates the television landscape. Just as social media has grown in popularity so has reality television, unscripted television programming based around people's lives including the drama and conflict they experience as they live life or participate in a competition. During the 2009-2010 season reality shows often cracked the top ten most-watched programs and were viewed by 48 percent the audience that watched top-rated shows (Nielsen, 2011).

Many reality television shows, such as the *Real Housewives of Atlanta*, *Basketball Wives* and *Love & Hip-Hop*, feature stereotypical portrayals of black women and Latinas and they are marketed to viewers of color. The black presence on reality shows has grown exponentially and most television shows with black women are reality programs. The popularity of reality shows, the practice of social television and the number of television hours African-Americans watch leads to a lot of potential for the black television audience to be engaged in the second screen phenomenon. African-Americans watch more television than any other group in the United States. In November 2010 Nielsen reported that African-Americans watch television about seven hours and 12 minutes of television a day, higher than the national average television viewing of five hours and 11 minutes Nielsen (2010). African-Americans are also heavy Twitter users, making up 25 percent of the social network's users (Pew, 2011). Women are 69 percent of the social media users (Pew, 2011). African-Americans and women both are significant social media users. The two groups' pronounced use of social media shows that they are an audience ripe for social media television engagement; moreover, the shows that have the most social media buzz (reality television) are marketed toward African-American women.

Television roles of women of color continue to be mired in stereotypes. Since the early days of television black women have been trapped in roles that depict them as overbearing, domineering and unruly (Smith-Shomade, 2002). The *Amos 'n' Andy Show* and *The Beulah Show* were both condemned by the NAACP in 1951 for broadcasting ugly images of black women: “Negro women are shown as cackling, screaming shrews, in big-mouth close ups using street slang, just short of vulgarity” (Smith-Shomade, 2002). More than 60 years later some of the same imagery of black women on television remains. Many of those stereotypes are on reality television. Because there are so few scripted television shows with people of color, reality programs have become a significant platform on which people of color are viewed (Deggans, 2012). Reality television programs that feature women of color tend to lock them in negative portrayals and construct those racial and gender stereotypes around cast members (Pozner, 2010). Reality television images of battling black women and Latinas on the television screen also play out on social media and can cement stereotypes of black women as angry, domineering and difficult to get along with and likewise Latinas are shown to be erratic and fiery. The fact that the shows are unscripted and people are cast to represent themselves and their real life positions reality television to “gauge others in society” (Tyree, 2011). Because reality television “plays a major role in shaping pop culture” (Tyree, 2011) these stereotypical roles of women of color on the shows are problematic because others believe there is some truth to them; consequently, what is perceived as the truth is cloaked in stereotypes and is tweeted to and by millions of Twitter users in cyberspace. Although audiences may recognize the framing that happens in reality shows, the shows are intended to offer a real glimpse into the real lives of the characters (Boylorn, 2008). However, images of black women on reality shows are often perceived as authentically black (Boylorn, 2008). And women overall are often cast as the

central characters on reality shows because they are perceived as occupying the “excessively emotional” roles on such programs (Dubrofsky, 2009). It is clear that stereotypical images of women of color on television have long been negative and damaging.

This study examines this new emerging practice of watching television while tweeting and the role social TV plays in helping stereotypes of women of color travel from television screens and onto computer screens and into popular culture and society. I also gauge if the audience detects stereotypes and if they accept or resist them.

This is a significant study because it shows how old stereotypes are being transmitted through new media and to a new generation. This study is a feminist analysis. A women-of-color feminist lens is critical to this study in order to explore the ways in which television portrayals and social systems malign women of color and their images in popular culture. Mass communications theories such as uses and gratifications, which addresses why people seek out the media they use and how it serves their needs, help to illustrate why audiences choose to watch these shows and engage with them on social media at the same time.

This study analyzes the social media images produced from reality programs that feature women of color. Analyzing the text, photos and videos that the social television audience creates about women of color on television will provide insight into what viewers say about the women, how viewers interpret the women’s presence on television and translate it on social media and how viewers resist and critique what they see as stereotypical images of women of color on television. Moreover, this analysis aims to understand how social TV viewers’ constructions of women of color align with or deviate from mainstream television images of them.

The important areas at the core of this analysis center around how images of women of color are constructed and how social television amplifies those stereotypical images. Gendered

and racialized social constructions of women of color in society lead to incomplete portrayals (Harris-Perry, 2011). Black women are perhaps the only women whose bodies have been pathologized through multiple eras in time (Guy-Sheftall, 2002). Media and popular culture images of black women have been reduced to stereotypes that demean their character, flatten their experience and exert control over their lives (Collins, 1999). Stereotypes convey black women's worth to the rest of the country and they say that black women don't have the same values and virtues as other Americans; therefore, they're not legitimate Americans and they are not deserving of the resources this country has to offer (Jewell, 1992). It is clear that the media images of women of color are problematic and stereotypical. The practices of reality television cause all stereotypes to thrive, including those about women of color. Producers seek to cast people who are not critical thinkers and those who are apt to react to situations in an explosive and stereotypical manner to become apart of reality show casts (Pozner, 2010). Moreover, reality television shows are “intentionally cast, edited and framed to amplify regressive values around gender, race and class” (Pozner, 2010). And when those frames don't emerge in the narrative of the show strategic editing creates a desired outcome. Reality shows often engage in frankenbiting, the practice of slicing and omitting words and sequences to create conflict or an alternative meaning of a cast member's words or deeds (Deggans, 2012).

Social television adoption helps social media carry television images into social networks online, especially with shows featuring African-Americans. Many shows featuring African-Americans become social television ratings leaders. The ABC drama *Scandal*, which stars the African-American actress Kerry Washington as a crisis manager, garners 2,200 tweets per minute when episodes of the show air on television (Acuna, 2013). In 2013 the Black Entertainment Television Network's annual BET Awards show, which honors African-

Americans in entertainment, performed better on Twitter than other major awards shows including the 70th Annual Golden Globe Awards and the Academy of Country Music Awards (Edelsburg, 2013). But social TV users don't just use Twitter as their primary social network when they update about TV shows they watch. During the 2013 BET Awards viewers posted more than a 100,000 posts on Instagram with the #BETAwards hashtag (Edelsburg, 2013). The 2015 BET Awards show garnered 7.3 million tweets and it was the top rated show social television show for the week on the Nielsen Social rankings (Fratti, 2015). It is clear that when reality, scripted and awards shows air starring African-Americans on television the social television audience engages with those shows in a massive way. But it is not just text the audience is posting. They also post pictures and create their own memes that are also sometimes embedded with gendered and racial stereotypes. African-Americans use Twitter often when shows featuring other African-Americans are broadcast, and their conversations are robust and sometimes influential.

Social television is a relatively new media practice and there are few studies that have been produced about it. In a study about television fans' use of Twitter researchers found that European television stations encouraged fans to use the network's official show hashtag during the live taping of a reality competition show for singers and posted those tweets tailored to local markets during the second run of the program (Highfield, Harrington & Bruns, 2013). A recent study explored how fans of the television show *Glee* interacted with "role play" Twitter accounts based on show characters' personalities and how those tweets were used as marketing tools (Wood & Baughman, 2012). The practice of social media has also helped create new televisions equipped with preinstalled applications to make updating on social networks easier for users and those users are influenced by the new televisions' capabilities to continue to engage on social

media while watching television (Shin, 2013). However, there are no known studies that explore the content of viewers' social television conversations about women of color on television. The purpose of this proposed study is to fill a gap in the literature, explain an emerging media practice and how that practice is changing the way audiences engage with images on television and how those images are transmitted into social media.

Research Questions

RQ1: How do Twitter representations of women of color in the social television stream resist stereotypes?

RQ2: How does the conversation among social television viewers reflect negative and positive sentiments on reality shows featuring women of color?

This study is significant to several audiences. The entertainment industry can gain insight into the images they produce for television and how those images have a different life on social media. Moreover, they can learn how those images resonate with their target audiences. Television viewers and social media users can learn about the practice they generated which has enabled them to have more power with Hollywood than they ever have before. Media scholars can also become more aware of the role that social media plays in shaping television programming, advertising and technology.

Studying social television and how black women are represented on television and on social networks is an important area of study that is deserving of deep critical analysis. The insight gained from this practice can help television broadcasters recognize the far reach of the stereotypes they reproduce. Social television participants can better grasp the power of the practice and the new direct communication they have with media content producers, actors and reality show cast members; moreover, social media users can understand the historic tradition of

the stereotypes they recycle through social television engagement. The entertainment industry can learn more about what viewers say about shows, plots and characters through the practice of social television.

The next four chapters will help inform the purpose of this study and where it is situated in the literature and the entertainment industry. Chapter two, Social television: The connected viewing party, will give background on the birth and evolution of the social television industry, the role of the viewers in the industry and especially the black social television audience. Chapter three, Relaying realness? Reality television's constructed images, explores the fabricated nature of reality television, portrayals of people of color and women on reality television. Chapter four, Twisted sisters: Distorted images of women of color, gives a historical, global and social account of the origins of stereotypes of women of color and how those skewed images and dominant white standards of womanhood affect how nonwhite women are perceived in society and depicted in the media. Chapter five details the methods used to collect and analyze data in this study. Chapter six details major themes that emerged in this study. Chapter seven explains themes that emerged from specific shows and chapter eight is the discussion section of this study.

CHAPTER 2:

Social television: The connected viewing party

The impact that social media has on many industries extends to television. Television audiences have long communicated with one another about their favorite programs. Whether people gathered together to have viewing parties or spoke on the phone while watching television shows, communicating about the plot, characters and storyline has been a key component to the television watching process. Social media's capability to directly communicate with several people at the same time about one topic, especially through the use of hashtags, and mobile devices such as smartphones and tablet computers enables television viewers to communicate with one another about television in a way they were unable to before.

Social television has emerged as an important component of modern television viewing and quantifying the online television conversation is now a significant measure of a television show's success. The volume of viewers' social media updates about television has grown exponentially. More than 36 million social TV users sent more than 990 million tweets in 2013, according to Nielsen's website. Between 2012 and 2013 there was a 38 percent increase in tweets about television and a 24 percent increase in the number of people tweeting about television (Nielsen, 2013). Social television is truly a part of the ritual of watching television for some of the viewing audience. "Social TV is transforming TV from something we watch to something we do," said Graeme Hutton, senior vice president of research, Universal McCann (Nielsen, 2013). In October 2013 the Nielsen Twitter TV Ratings were launched and these ratings are the first time the entire social television conversation could be measured (Nielsen, 2013), previously only the number of tweets about a television show and the authors of those tweets could be quantified (Nielsen, 2013).

The Nielsen Twitter TV Ratings also measure the number of people who see those tweets. An early Nielsen Twitter TV Ratings analysis found that the audience that views the social TV conversation is about 50 times larger than the number of people writing the updates on Twitter (Nielsen, 2013). For instance, 2,000 people may write tweets about a television show but 100,000 people may actually see the tweets on the second screen (Nielsen, 2013). A more comprehensive measurement of the conversation of television shows enables television networks and advertisers to understand the extension and the effectiveness of their social television strategies (Nielsen, 2013). Comprehensive social TV ratings are really important because they show a connection between social media buzz and ratings. Nielsen's Twitter Causation Study, released in August 2013, analyzed 221 television shows airing live in primetime and found that 48 percent of the programs experienced a ratings hike and tweets influenced ratings 29 percent of the time (Nielsen, 2013). Competitive reality television programs experienced the highest increase in ratings with 44 percent, followed by comedies with 37 percent, sports with 29 percent and dramas with 18 percent (Nielsen, 2013). Social television engagement is most impressive around live television, when shows air for the first time. From 2011 to 2013 social TV conversations of live television shows increased substantially with 19 million unique users in the United States writing 263 million tweets about live television shows in the second quarter of 2013, that is a 24 percent increase in viewers who watch and tweet and a 38 percent increase in the volume of tweets about television shows, according to SocialGuide (Nielsen, 2013).

Network executives realize the power of social television and the importance of it. The hashtags of shows and viewers' comments are fused into the programming of shows and are often displayed on the television screen during the telecast, according to the Nielsen website. Nielsen is a primary source of information in this study because the research and ratings giant is

a leading resource for documenting trends in social television. Social television has also given television network executives direct and immediate feedback on their shows from a variety of voices from the audience. David Poltrack, CBS chief research officer, said: "The emergence of social media, such as Facebook and Twitter, has already had a profound impact on the culture, both within the U.S. and worldwide. For the first time, we now have direct access to some of the conversations of the population" (Owen & Sciullo, 2014).

Television producers also understand the power of social media and they've adopted it on their own without prodding from the networks. Simon Cowell's reality singing competition show *American Idol* always prompted the audience to get involved with the show by calling to vote to keep their favorite singers on the program since the show aired in 2002. Cowell originally dismissed Twitter as an outlet for misfits but when he started another singing competition reality show, *X Factor*, he started to pay attention to viewers' comments on Twitter and made changes to the show, including allowing them to vote for contestants on Twitter, based on what viewers said (Selter, 2011). "It's like having millions of producers working with you," Cowell told *The New York Times* in 2011 (Selter, 2011).

ABC's political drama *Scandal* is among the most popular social television shows in the United States. When the show airs weekly on Thursdays it has more than 12 million viewers that send more than 700,000 tweets during the telecast, according to ABC. *Scandal* came in at number four of the top 10 series of fall 2013 regularly scheduled shows on the Nielsen Twitter TV ratings list with 375,000 tweets gaining more than 20 million impressions (Nielsen, 2013). When *Scandal*'s season three finale aired in April 2014 it was the second most social TV show of the day with 697,000 tweets and 37 million impressions (Chariton, 2014). Shonda Rhimes, *Scandal*'s creator and producer, said she believes the show's social media buzz has helped its

ratings: "A lot of fans have been amazing, getting others to watch and there's all this energy on Twitter. It makes people go, what is this about? So it makes them watch, but it sort of makes you feel like you have to watch it live because you want to be part of the Twitter experience" (Owen & Sciuillo, 2014). Rhimes and *Scandal*'s star, Kerry Washington, encouraged the cast to promote the show on Twitter and the entire cast live tweets the show when it airs on the East and West coast along with the fans (Bazilian, 2013). The official *Scandal* Twitter account has more than 855,000 followers; Rhimes has more than 980,000 followers and Washington has more than 2.19 million followers as of July 2015. Tony Goldwyn, who portrays President Fitzgerald Grant on *Scandal*, said the actors' engagement with viewers while fans simultaneously watch the show has created an enhanced experience for the audience: "It has become an event for *Scandal* fans. It's brought them back to appointment viewing for network television at a time when most people are moving away from it" (Bazilian, 2013).

While social television has made watching television an event for one show, the practice is also being adopted into the programs of fledgling cable networks. The Oprah Winfrey Network struggled with ratings in the early days after the network premiered in January 2011 but OWN TV has been a strong leader in social television. *Oprah's Life Class*, one of the network's early ratings leaders, had a uniquely interactive experience. When the live telecast cut to commercial the conversation on the show continued and viewers were able to watch it on Facebook. Winfrey and her self-help guru guests also took questions from the audience in real time from Facebook and Twitter and the viewing audience members often became part of the show and appeared on air via Skype. *Oprah's Life Class* is taped in a traditional studio with an in-person audience but there are also several television screens throughout the studio that Winfrey views during the telecast and a bevy of monitors that producers view backstage (Kelly,

2012). The multimedia and multi-social networking approach to the show is extremely interactive and: "It allows Oprah to truly interact with her audience in new ways, and makes her feel that much closer to her audience — and they feel the same way. It creates for a much deeper on-air discussion, too" an OWNTV spokesman said (Kelly, 2012). Television and entertainment analysts have noted that the Oprah Winfrey Network pulled out of its ratings slump because of the network's programming targeted toward black women and its strategic social television engagement (Witherspoon, 2014; Elligson, 2013). Erik Logan, co-president of OWNTV and Harpo Studios, said the combination of Oprah Winfrey's popularity, direct and authentic social media engagement and the network's overall social media practices have had a positive impact on ratings. Logan said:

We feel that there is a correlation between the activity that you see on Twitter, the authenticity of the conversations about the content and the impact on the ratings that we see the next day... We just have the fundamental belief that deeper engagement is going to drive a deeper connection to the brand, and all of that is going to manifest itself into something that is more positive than negative (Elligson, 2013).

Oprah Winfrey had almost 28.2 million Twitter followers, 10.6 million followers on Facebook and 3.9 million followers on Instagram, as of July 2015. Winfrey, realizing the power of social television, sent a tweet in 2012 asking viewers with Nielsen boxes to tune into her network to drive up OWNTV's television ratings. Nielsen forbids networks from soliciting viewers with Nielsen boxes and the ratings company asked her to remove the tweet (Hibberd, 2012).

Twitter has remained a leader in social television because of its ability to connect users around a single topic through hashtags. The nature of Twitter is open and allows users to be connected with one another without following one another, unlike Facebook. However,

Facebook's structure is less open than Twitter with users only having access to the posts from users that they friend or follow. Facebook users' privacy settings also keep them and their posts from being visible. However, Facebook introduced hashtags in October 2013 and a trending unit in 2014 that tracks the most talked about topics on Facebook, including television shows. Those two new features added to Facebook position the social network to be a bigger player in social television. In December 2013 Facebook announced an international team committed to focus on social television efforts (Chariton, 2013). Twitter wants to keep its position as the dominant social network in social television and it has instructed companies that work with networks to only work with Twitter on social television efforts or risk losing access to Twitter's social television data (Kafka, 2014).

Social television's international impact

The impact of the practice of social television and the importance of quantifying it has become of global importance. Social television is not just popular in the United States, the practice is emerging across the globe. Nielsen's expansion into international markets is proof of social television's global reach. Nielsen plans to make its social television data available in Australia by the middle of 2014 (Wall Street Journal, 2014). Almost half of the Australian population, 44 percent, engages in the practice of social television (Wall Street Journal, 2014). The number of people who viewed a television program based on a recommendation they saw on social media increased from 16 percent in 2011 to 42 percent in 2013 in Australia (B&T Weekly, 2013). Social television has helped revive appointment TV in Australia with 72 percent of viewers watching programs when they air for the first time (B&T Weekly, 2013). In Australia reality television programs garner more social media buzz than other types of programs (B&T

Weekly, 2013). Nielsen also started measuring the social television conversation in Italy (Nielsen, 2013).

Social television is also popular throughout Europe. Twitter is attempting to solidify its position as a solid force in social television by acquiring a French startup, Mesagraph, and a British company, SecondSync, both measure social television data (Fiegerman, 2014). The second-screen phenomenon also extends to India. In 2013 Viacom partnered with Twitter Amplify in India to offer exclusive content to viewers of some its networks including MTV, Nickelodeon and Comedy Central (IndianTelevision.com, 2013). The partnership was launched during the 2013 European Music Awards and in 2012 the MTV EMAs sparked 5.7 million tweets, garnered 32 worldwide trending topics and sometimes held eight of the top 10 trending topics while the show aired on television (IndianTelevision.com, 2013).

Technology and hardware

The practice of social television has sparked a new crop of software and hardware that makes the social television experience seamless for the audience. Many of the television networks have their own apps, which offer viewers exclusive content about the network's television shows. Other apps help users to connect with one another. Viggle rewards viewers for watching television by giving them a point for every minute of a television program they watch and viewers can use those points to purchase items from department store gift cards to tablet computers. Social television apps are accessed through smartphones and tablet computers. SmartTVs are now on the market and they incorporate the social media capabilities of the smartphone interface into television. Top television manufacturers including Panasonic, Samsung and Sony create televisions that enable viewers to watch their favorite television shows

and post on social media directly through the television using a remote control with features that resemble a smartphone (TechRadar, 2014).

The engaged and diverse audience

Viewers are multitasking and engaging with social media while they're still engrossed in television programs. A 2013 Nielsen study found that among mobile device owners, 46 percent of smartphone owners and 43 percent of tablet owners use their mobile devices daily while they watch television and two-thirds of them reported using their devices while watching television multiple times throughout the week during the first quarter of 2013 (Nielsen, 2013). The coveted younger demographic is engaged in social television, 29 percent of 18-34 year olds researched a deal on their tablet computers they saw while watching television, according to the Nielsen website. Social television viewers do not just tweet during commercials. In a 2013 study of 59 television shows, Social Guide found that 70 percent of viewers sent tweets about television shows during the actual program while 30 percent of viewers sent them during commercial breaks (Nielsen, 2013). The proliferation of mobile devices has helped the practice of social television flourish. Americans possess about four digital media devices and spend about 60 hours per week viewing media content on them (Nielsen, 2014). Nearly half of smartphone owners, 47 percent, visit social networking sites daily (Nielsen, 2014). It is clear that Americans' possession of mobile devices and their affinity for television enable social television to grow.

The accelerated use of the second screen phenomenon has altered the way that audiences watch television with viewers using their smartphones and tablets as a habitual component of their television viewing experience (Nielsen, 2014). The majority of owners of mobile devices engage on their second screen while viewing televised programs, 53 percent of tablet owners and

52 percent of smartphone owners visited a social networking site while they watched television (Nielsen, 2013).

Specific audiences, particularly African-Americans and women, use social media at higher rates and own more mobile devices. Black viewers watch more television than any other racial group at 7.12 hours a day, and they watch more live television than any other group (Nielsen, 2011). Twitter is a popular social media outlet among black Americans. In December 2013 more than half of African-Americans used Twitter either through the Internet or the mobile phone application and African-Americans were 30 percent more likely to use the Twitter app than others (Nielsen, 2014). Mobile phone ownership among African-Americans is higher than the national average with 72 percent of black households owning smartphones compared with 67 percent of all Americans (Nielsen, 2014).

Black Twitter: An influential force

Black Americans' high social media engagement is recognized through the presence and influence of Black Twitter. Black Twitter is a solid network of black people who discuss social realities online, collectively share interests and experiences and influence complex cultural conversations (Clark, 2014), and is a powerful force that has influenced political and social change. Black Americans' use of Twitter brings attention to social justice issues and inequities, and leads cultural conversations about art, entertainment and representation. Black people also use Twitter as a site of resistance and revolution.

Black Twitter has a history of negating stereotypical mainstream media portrayals of African-Americans. In August 2014 after unarmed black teenager Mike Brown was killed by a white police officer in Ferguson, Missouri, and media outlets broadcast a picture of Brown that some in the black community believed was more menacing than a photo of the recent high

school graduate in his graduation cap and gown, Black Twitter critiqued media bias of black people and questioned the portrayals of black crime victims and asked what picture would the media use of them if they were killed with the hashtag #IfTheyGunnedMeDown and tweeted respectable pictures of themselves next to photos that could be perceived as negative. The hashtag was used more than 168,000 times in just a few days (Vega, 2014). In the days after Brown's death when authorities confronted protestors with tear gas and tanks, black activists in Ferguson used Twitter to resist the excessive police force inflicted on Brown and themselves. Black activists use of social media, Twitter in particular, in Ferguson and across the nation with the Black Lives Matter movement is credited for constructing America's 21st century civil-rights movement (Kang, 2015). Black feminists also use Twitter to combat stereotypical images of black women and to bring awareness to black women's issues that are often overlooked by mainstream media (Williams, 2015). The influence of Black Twitter is clear and strong and black people use its power on the social network to close the gap in social inequality and demand realistic media representations.

Black social television

African-Americans are entertainment tastemakers who lead entertainment trends (Nielsen, 2014). African-Americans' social television engagement is important and influential. More than half of whites, 73 percent, and 67 percent of Latinos said they believe "African-Americans influence mainstream culture" including music listening and television viewing and their selections are "are affecting the whole entertainment industry" (Nielsen, 2014). So the entertainment choices and the social television practices of the African-American television audience are important. Black television viewers' adoption of mobile devices and social television engagement has helped to propel the second screen phenomenon (Williams &

Williams, 2014). Shows targeted toward black viewers often become Twitter's top 10 trending topics when they air (Williams & Williams, 2014). Black social TV is social media engagement by mostly black audiences about scripted and unscripted shows with blacks as the primary characters or target audience (Williams & Williams, 2014). The engagement of the black social television audience helps propel television shows' profiles on social networks. For example, during the 2014-2015 television season, *Empire*, the FOX drama about the family and musical dynasty of a black record producer and former hip-hop artist, broke social television records. Viewers sent 2.4 million tweets during *Empire's* season finale on March 18, 2015 and the show became the most tweeted episode of the season and in the history of Nielsen Social, which began quantifying tweets about television, shows in October 2011 (Nielsen, 2015). Black social TV viewers often express their thoughts and humor about black shows and characters through text and photos and their memes have changed the way television shows are marketed (Williams & Williams, 2014). The networks have adopted the social television practices generated by black social TV users and now they are using photo memes to promote their shows (Williams & Williams, 2014). The black social TV audience also uses social media to lament stereotypical shows on the air. The direction of shows has been changed and some were never broadcast because of the black social TV audiences' strong and active voice (Williams & Williams, 2014). The black social TV audience actively resists stereotypes both as individual viewers and through strategic digital activism campaigns (Williams, 2013). As Facebook moves into social television, ethnic social television viewers are showing a significant amount of activity. In March 2014 *Nuestra Belleza Latina*, Univision's reality beauty competition show, became the first show to top Facebook's weekly buzz ratings; a fight between two *Basketball Wives LA* cast members ranked at number eight that week (Flomenbaum, 2014). As emerging technology continues to

affect the entertainment industry it will be increasingly important for media content producers to understand the nuances of the African-American audience because they are “vital and influential” media consumers (Nielsen, 2014).

Women also outnumber men in social media and social television practices. Women are more avid social media users than men. More women, 28 percent, use social media creatively including for blogging and sharing pictures than men who do such at 23 percent; more women, 48 percent, use social media for entertainment more than 45 percent of men who do so (Nielsen, 2013).

Black women on reality television + social media = ratings success

Networks realize the power of Black Twitter and how it can affect entertainment, especially television. The networks that broadcast *Basketball Wives LA* and *Mary Mary*, Vh1 and WE TV respectively, were struggling with programming and ratings until they found success with the formula of reality television shows starring black women and significant social television presence and engagement. These networks recognize the dearth of black women’s images on television and the power of the black social television audience, and they are responding. The WE TV network started to find success with *Braxton Family Values*, a show that debuted in 2011 that is about Grammy award winner Toni Braxton and her four sisters. The show became an instant hit and several series starring black women followed such as the spin-off *Tamar & Vince* and other shows including *Mary Mary*, *SWV Reunited*, *L.A. Hair* and *Cutting it in the ATL*. The show *Mary Mary* was advanced partially because the Campbell sisters already had high social media engagement with their fans, said Crista Scibelli Finocchio, former manager of social media & digital & emerging media at WE TV. Kim Martin, former president and general manager of WE TV, noted how reality shows featuring black women and social

media engagement are a recipe for ratings victory: “WE TV has experienced incredible success with *Braxton Family Values*, especially among African-American women. By developing more shows for this underserved audience, we are super serving a valuable fan base that consumes more television than any other audience and is highly engaged with their favorite shows on social media platforms” (Goldman, 2014). This statement by Martin is proof that television executives recognize the profitability of black women’s images and the importance of the black social television audience. During the 2010-2011 television season the WE TV network saw the fusion of social activity about *Braxton Family Values* pay off when the network posted live tweets real-time on screen during the show and ratings jumped about 30 percent, Finocchio said.

The shows in this study ranked highly on television and on Twitter. During season two the *Mary Mary* show experienced a 16 percent spike in viewership (Goldman, 2014). The show’s television and social media rankings increased for season three with ratings 62 percent higher from season two to the season three premiere and the show’s Twitter conversation rose 20 percent from the pervious season and *Mary Mary* ranked second on Social Guide among cable reality shows on the night of the third season debut (theB3.net, 2014). The show’s popularity continued to rise during season four, the most current season. During the debut of the fourth season *Mary Mary* had 1.3 million viewers, its highest ratings debut, it was the top rated cable show among African-Americans that night and #MaryMary was a trending topic on Twitter (Kondolojy, 2015). *Basketball Wives LA* has been a television and social television ratings since it hit the air in 2011. At the end of its season one finale the show had a total 3.8 million viewers for the 8 p.m. airing and the 10 p.m. encore combined and the show garnered Twitter trending topics every week during the 12-week season-one run (Black, 2011). When season three of *Basketball Wives LA* premiered 3.2 million people watched the first episode at 8 p.m. and 10

p.m. (theb3.net, 2014). #BBWLA, the hashtag the audience uses on Twitter while discussing the show, was the number three Twitter trending topic early in the hour during the season three premiere (BlackSocialTV, 2014). The television networks recognize the social television success of reality shows featuring black women and they are capitalizing off of it.

Social television is a new practice that is having a profound impact on the way that television is developed, produced, watched and interpreted. Social media enables the audience to communicate with one another about television programs, connect with stars, producers and directors of television shows and have an impact on the program itself. The entertainment media industry is noticing the volume of the social television conversation and what viewers are saying about programs. Television network executives and content producers realize the power of the second screen and they are using it as a way to extend storytelling for their programs. The audience-generated practice of social television is now a formidable industry that is worthy of analysis and examination.

CHAPTER 3:

Relaying realness? Reality television's constructed images

Twenty-five years ago reality shows were new and attempting to gain the eyes of viewers but now the genre is a staple in American television (Tyree, 2011). Reality television programs feature regular people living their lives in unscripted scenarios but the shows have a structure as producers attempt to create a narrative out of cast members' lives and create a series of episodes (Dubrofsky, 2009). Reality television thrives on the real people performing real actions to create real emotions to be caught on camera (Dubrofsky, 2009). Reality television show producers transform real-life cast members' lives into characters for the shows (Edwards, 2013). There are several types of reality television shows: game competition shows in which contestants battle for a cash prize; music/entertainment competition shows where contestants perform for a record or modeling contract and a large sum of money; celeb-reality shows that feature famous people living their lives, medical spectacle shows that psychologize habitual problems such as drug addiction and hoarding as a spectacle for the public, makeover shows that renovate the physical appearance or the homes of contestants; dating shows where several contestants (often women) compete for the affection of one suitor (often a man) and soap opera-type shows which feature a cast of previously unknown people who are loosely connected and engage in dramatic interactions with one another.

Producers choose narratives to portray in reality television programs and casting is key to crafting those narratives (Pozner, 2010). In this sense, reality television shows are "constructed fiction" (Dubrofsky, 2009). While reality television narratives are constructed, there is little background information injected into the shows to provide context for viewers. Reality television producers invest little or no research into the programs because it is not necessary on reality

television to give viewers insight (Deery, 2004). The absence of context on reality shows makes it easier for producers to rely on stereotypes more.

Embarrassment and humiliation are central to the plot in almost every reality television show; indeed, the use of humiliation is at the core of reality television programs and viewers glean pleasure from viewing the humiliation of others (Mendible, 2007). Some reality shows have an embarrassing premise and they still can cast shows with contestants who are not celebrities yet they have the desire to gain 15 minutes of fame through reality shows even if their fame is closely associated with shame (Stanley, 2002). Reality television symbolizes the prevalence of capitalism in popular culture and the idea that almost everyone has a price and will do almost anything for money (Deery, 2004).

Reality television program cast members realize the role of shame and humiliation on the shows and they know that the lack of morality, bodily perfection and relationship stability on shows gives viewers proof that there is an aspect of realness on reality shows (Mendible, 2007). But that humiliation that reality television stars experience comes with a relative degree of power. Even though reality television show contestants and cast members may be humiliated on reality shows, they still occupy an enviable position – they are on television and they are watched by millions of people (Mendible, 2007). Many reality television stars have leveraged their mass audience into lucrative endorsement deals, profitable live appearances and even their own spin-off shows. Reality shows are a genre ripe for duplication and syndication, and reality television is a global commodity that can be cheaply produced and effortlessly understood across nations (Deery, 2004). The cost to create a reality show is between 50 to 75 percent less than the production costs for a scripted television show (Pozner, 2010). Reality programs operate on very

fast production schedules (Edwards, 2013) making it possible to create a commercially successful show in a short time period.

The processes of reality television, especially editing, help to create constructed storylines. The image that viewers see of reality television show cast members is based on footage chosen by reality show producers. Reality television show producers capture several hours of footage of cast members but only a fraction of what the tape that is recorded ends up on television (Dubrofsky, 2009). The selection of scenes, the way scenes are shot and the music that is selected to accompany the scenes all seek to heighten drama, chaos and tension in reality television shows, especially when there is racial tension in scenes (Pardo, 2013).

Reaction shots, which switch the gaze from the speaker to others who are reacting to their words, also play an important part of reality show drama. Reaction shots are sometimes edited out of sequence (Pardo, 2013) and can be strategically placed in an episode in order to align with a producer's constructed narrative. Even though emotions are visible on a reality television program, that doesn't mean the emotion is related to the act that is shown on screen (Dubrofsky, 2009). Careful editing along with contrived scenarios is established on reality television shows to create conflict. Scenes and people are manipulated in reality television to manufacture chaos. Reality show cast members with opposing values and beliefs are frequently placed in one another's company (Tyree, 2011). Editing in reality television shows can be done to evoke an emotional reaction from the audience. Emotional images are "marked with the editing and production process" (Dubrofsky, 2009). Interviews with the mostly women contestants on makeover reality shows are edited to connect women's problems to their bodies; moreover, reality television editing processes are styled to create segments to draw sympathy from viewers (Marwick, 2010).

People of color and reality television

The black presence on cable television is most prominent on reality television shows (Fuller, 2010). The scarcity of scripted television shows with people of color as featured cast members makes reality shows a prominent platform for images of people of color (Deggans, 2012). Reality television is a force that influences popular culture (Tyree, 2011), and the genre helps to shape how people view certain groups, including women of color. Simply being represented in the media is a type of power (Lind, 2010). However, it is troubling that the most prominent representation of women of color on television is on reality programming, a genre that is cheap to produce and leans on racial and gendered stereotypes. Wide representation of women of color on reality programs helps to uphold and reinforce logics about the value of women of color in society. When many shows become popular, especially those with casts comprised of mostly women of color, they are not only renewed for several seasons but some cast members end up becoming the stars of their own spin-off reality television shows. Moreover, black women and Latina reality stars often appear on the covers of national ethnic magazines and they are paid thousands of dollars to appear at nightclubs and special events and their television audience pays to see them live in person. Indeed, some black women reality television stars have become entrenched in popular culture. NeNe Leakes of the *Real Housewives of Atlanta*, for example, landed a recurring role on the popular television show *Glee*, a role as a series regular on the short-lived NBC sitcom *The New Normal*, a stint in a Las Vegas Cirque du Soleil show and a run on Broadway as the evil stepmother in the fall 2014 production of *Cinderella*. The huge space that women of color reality stars occupy in popular culture helps make stereotypes about women of color appear true.

Stereotypes have long been important in media portrayals, especially in the portrayals of marginalized groups. Stereotypes are cognitive mental shortcuts the brain reverts to in order to allow a person to tap into previously held knowledge and relate it to new incoming information (Hilton & von Hippel, 1996). Stereotypes are also beliefs about social groups learned from society and constructed by the dominant elite that yields the power to spread those beliefs and make them appear to be normal (Gorham, 1999). Writer Walter Lippmann explained that the nature of stereotypes is to affect the ways in which people view others before they actually see them: “For the most part we do not first see, and then define, we define first and then see... We are told about the world before we see it” (Lippmann, 1921). Stereotypes can affect the way that people view others even when people don’t approve of the ideas embedded in stereotypes (Gorham, 2010). Reality television shows rely on racial stereotypes and stereotypes of people of color on reality television are more salient than stereotypes of whites because there are a variety of images of whites on television while people of color still have mostly stereotypical portrayals on television. Stereotypes of African-Americans on reality television are perceived as “real elements” of the show by viewers (Tyree, 2011). This suggests to viewers that people of color will always be the center of conflict and this taps into stereotypes of innate aggression and anger among people of color.

When African-Americans are members of mostly white reality show casts they are apt to be shown in a stereotypical light more so than if they were not on a program with a mostly white cast (Tyree, 2011). African-Americans are often the source of problems in the plot on reality television shows. In a study of African-American reality show cast members Tyree found that African-Americans on reality shows were often the genesis of verbal and physical fights with both white and black cast members; moreover, in the ten shows in the study more than half of the

black casts members on reality shows fit stereotypes illustrating that the genre of reality television perpetuates racial tropes (Tyree, 2011). In the same study African-Americans embodied three historic stereotypes (Sambo, Uncle Tom and coon) and seven contemporary stereotypes including the angry black woman/bitch, hoochie, chicken head, angry black man, homo thug, clown and the oreo (Tyree, 2011).

The use of racial stereotypes in reality television are not coincidental, they are intentional and strategic. Shows that are offensive to marginalized groups including people of color, women and gays are viewed as shows that reality television show executives believe will generate hype and high viewership (Pozner, 2010). *Survivor*, one of the longest-running reality competition shows on television, divided contestants based on race in 2006 during the show's 13th season. In a study on *Survivor: Cook Islands* researchers also found that when viewers saw reality show contestants split into groups along racial lines, racial stereotypes were activated and viewers accepted racial stereotypes and ideas of diminished capability and competency of racial groups because of the racial separation they saw (Bresnahan & Lee, 2011). The same study also found Latinos to be less capable and black contestants were seen as the least sociable group (Bresnahan & Lee, 2011). The results of the *Survivor: Cook Islands* study shows that reality television show producers have a duty to consider the potential social implications of their work and think twice about manipulating racial stereotypes to boost ratings (Bresnahan & Lee, 2011). *Survivor: Cook Islands*, in fact, lost advertising after a considerable amount of sponsors removed their ads from the show (Bresnahan & Lee, 2011). The decision by the *Survivor: Cook Islands* producers to divide contestants based on race created a disturbing scenario for a global mass media audience (Bresnahan & Lee, 2011). The reality in reality television programming isn't reflected in the lack of professional thespians or a developed script, it is in the social hierarchy reflected in the shows

(Mendible, 2007). Stereotypical reality television images can be dangerous for marginalized groups that are the subject of stereotyping (Tyree, 2011). The presence of racial stereotypes of African-Americans on reality television can affect black viewers and others (Tyree, 2011). Stereotypes that appear on reality shows remain popular because stereotypes still circulate in society. Reality programs maintain their influence and control because they project untruths that viewers want to believe (Deggans, 2012). Reality shows have the power to reaffirm and reinforce social stereotypes of racial groups. Television, including reality programs, can be an important instrument through which viewers judge others' place in society and what is acceptable in society (Tyree, 2011).

Women and reality television

Women are often the focus of reality television shows because women are perceived as extremely emotional (Dubrofsky, 2009). Reality shows often play up negative stereotypes of women and sexism is “thoroughly infused in the DNA of reality TV” (Deggans, 2012; Pozner, 2010). Women’s emotions are set up as spectacle in the reality television genre and reality television shows portray women’s emotions, which are often extreme or constructed, through what Dubrofsky calls the “money shot” in which women’s feelings are out of control and violate socially acceptable reactions (Dubrofsky, 2009). Melodrama is at the core of reality television programming and it is highly visual, especially when it comes to women’s bodies (Dubrofsky, 2009). The media (including magazines, films, marketing, books, music, television and advertising) is one of the layers in a social shame web that tells women what they should be, how they should be and who they should be, according to shame resilience theory. This theory illuminates the ways in which society projects traditional gendered expectations on women and how women internalize shame for not embodying normative and often oppressive traditional

gender roles and identities (Brown, 2006). Reality television shows, with their exaggerated emotional and traditional gender portrayals, are another medium that places social expectations on women and boxes them into gendered stereotypes.

There has been an increase of reality television shows that center around heterosexual marriage, relationships and sex (Fairclough, 2004). In the past decade shows such as *Wife Swap*, the *Real Housewives*, *Basketball Wives* and the *Love & Hip Hop* franchises have all anchored their storylines around traditional heteronormative and patriarchal relationships. Class, consumption and socially gendered expectations are central elements to those shows. Shows such as *Wife Swap* position women to be in opposition of one another based on their parenting, occupations, housekeeping habits and even their looks (Fairclough, 2004). Conflicts based on class are at the center of *Wife Swap*'s success (Fairclough, 2004). Working class and middle class mothers are often at odds on the show. Stay-at-home mothers are valued for adhering to traditional gender roles but also condemned for not contributing more to society and their families' income; moreover, mothers who work outside the home are criticized for not spending enough time in their homes or the domestic sphere. However, on the *Real Housewives* franchise, where all of the women are affluent and many do not work outside of the home, there is no criticism of their consumption and lives of leisure. Their maintenance of wealth and traditional gender roles are celebrated.

Reality television show contestants are frequently portrayed in an adverse manner (Mendible, 2007). For women that includes unflattering portrayals of their character and their bodies. Women's emotional and physical insecurities are the foundation of makeover reality shows. Such reality shows seek to improve contestants' lives, especially women, by improving their looks with drastic changes including plastic surgery.

Shows such as *The Swan* are part of “body culture media” which situate the flawed body as a source of personal problems that are only solved by altering the body, most often through surgery (Marwick, 2010). Surgeons “liberate” women from their flawed bodies on these makeover reality shows (Marwick, 2010). The Bravo cable network’s *Real Housewives* franchise of reality television shows follows in the tradition of body culture media. The *Real Housewives* is a series of reality shows based on networks of affluent women living lives of luxury and engaging in conflict with one another. There have been shows in Orange County, New York, New Jersey, Miami, Washington DC, Beverly Hills and Atlanta, the only all-black cast and the highest-rated show in the franchise. *The Real Housewives* franchise promotes personal improvement through commercial consumption especially through plastic surgery (Marwick, 2010).

Several of the cast members from the various *Real Housewives* series have had plastic surgery including NeNe Leakes, the only original cast member of the all-black cast the *Real Housewives of Atlanta*. In 2010 Leakes had breast augmentation, liposuction and rhinoplasty to narrow her nose and the process was documented on the show (Ho, 2012). This is particularly troubling because black women’s looks have historically been degraded and devalued in American society and across the globe. The surgical body alterations of this black woman on this reality show franchise, especially slimming her wide nose to a less ethnic shape, signifies conformity to a white beauty aesthetic for commercial and social acceptance. As Leakes has remained on reality television she has become an entrepreneur, actress and author. Leakes’ presence on the *Real Housewives of Atlanta* has helped her become a major pop culture figure; moreover, she is now a commodity available for public consumption in her surgically altered body. All of the *Real Housewives* shows transform their formerly unknown cast members into

commodified reality television celebrities. But this fact is particularly troubling for the all-black cast of the *Real Housewives of Atlanta* and other reality programs that feature mostly black women. From the time black women arrived in the United States their bodies have been sites of both pleasure and profit (Davis, 1981). In American slavery black women played a pivotal role in the labor force both as workers and as mothers who physically produced more workers for the slave system operated by wealthy white men (Davis, 1981).

In reality television the black women cast members themselves are the commodity for the television audience and their subsequent economic ventures including erotic toys, fitness videos, clothing and hairpieces are associated with the body. The commodification of reality show cast members makes black women's bodies, once again, a central site of profit within a commercial American system. Black women's worth, as workers and sexual objects, has often been associated with their bodies (Davis, 1981; Collins, 1989). Reality television carries forward the American tradition of exploiting black women's bodies and images for profit. The use of black women's bodies for profit in the reality television show genre is an extension of a long history in the United States of capitalizing off of social constructions that have historically framed black women as expendable commodities because they are black, female and do not embody traditional and acceptable womanhood because they are not truly women.

When it comes to women of color, reality shows showcase some of the worst historic stereotypes. Whether black women appear on an all-black reality show or as a racial token among a majority white cast, stereotypes are attached to them even if they don't fit. Women of color can be successful on reality television as long as they portray their ethnicity in a way that the dominant group in society understands or if their ethnicity is expressed in resemblance and in association with whiteness (Thompson, 2010). Simply put, women of color, especially black

women, thrive on reality television when they embody stereotypes that white viewers and mass audiences can recognize. When many reality shows display African-American women as overly emotional it is often as the stereotypical angry black woman (Dubrofsky, 2009).

The angry black woman is a common stereotype used in contemporary media (Krestedemas, 2010) and the reality contest show is one of the major platforms on which the angry black woman stereotype has been disseminated on television (Krestedemas, 2010). That stereotype is related to black professional women. The black professional on television has gone from being a symbol of assimilation to an aggressive and flashy figure whose actions highlight their otherness as a racial minority (Krestedemas, 2010). Omarosa Manigault's presence on the Donald Trump white-collar corporate job contest show *The Apprentice* is a high-profile reality television example of the sapphire (Krestedemas, 2010). Omarosa Manigault, an African-American woman who worked in the White House during the Clinton administration, was voted the most hated reality show contestant in a 2005 *TV Guide* poll (Fisher, 2012). She was portrayed on the show as an uppity, abrasive, angry black woman on *The Apprentice*. Omarosa Manigault's status as the most hated reality television star helped boost the ratings of *The Apprentice* so much so that Trump invited her to appear on his spin-off show *Celebrity Apprentice*. She continued to be a controversial figure on the first season of that show. The angry black woman trope was employed again when attorney and talk show host Star Jones and reality show star NeNe Leakes, two black women, appeared together on a separate season of *Celebrity Apprentice*. The conflict between the two black women was vile and volatile. Their clashes fit with what writer Allison Samuels calls a new disturbing template for reality television "put two or more headstrong African-American women in the same room, and let the fireworks begin" (Samuels, 2011).

Even when women of color are the producers of reality shows, problematic images of nonwhite women emerge. The *Love & Hip Hop* franchise produced by former hip-hop music executive Mona Scott Young, a Haitian American, is notorious for the hypersexual stereotypes it showcases of black and Latina women. On African-American model Tyra Banks' long-time running modeling competition show *America's Next Top Model* women of color are told to embrace their ethnicity but when they embrace their ethnicity too much or in a way that judges don't agree with they are punished, often by being eliminated from the show (Thompson, 2010). It is clear that reality television shows manipulate stereotypes. But when it comes to women of color they are almost always on the losing end of stereotypes that play on race and gender. American society constructs racialized, gendered stereotypes of women of color that do not reflect who they truly are. Reality television shows mirror those stereotypes that are pushed onto women of color. Women are susceptible to shame when "unwanted identities" are forced upon them (Brown, 2006). The proliferation of stereotypes on reality television can cause the genre to be a source of shame and humiliation for black women.

CHAPTER 4:

Twisted sisters: Distorted images of women of color

Others who have little or no knowledge of them since the early days of European exploration have falsely constructed black women's images. In the 1500s, affluent, white male travelers portrayed African women's bodies as subhuman, unfeminine and hypersexual all at the same time. Jennifer Morgan provides a chronological summary of travelogues written by white male European travelers from the 1500s to the 1700s in her journal article *Some Could Suckle Over Their Shoulder*. Morgan notes how these travelers depicted African women's bodies as monstrous and improper compared with white European women's bodies (Morgan, 1997). Traveler Richard Ligon described nonwhite women as beautiful, exotic, with bodies ripe for sexual pleasure but he also equated their bodies to animals; William Towrson depicted African women's bodies as beast-like and masculine, almost undistinguishable from African men's; John Atkins believed African women, because of their perceived hypersexual bodies, engaged in bestiality and he wrote that their breasts were so long they could suckle children carried on their backs over their shoulder (Morgan, 1997).

These early social constructions of the bodies and images of women of color were very important because those hypersexual perceptions of African women were used to justify slavery and govern nonwhite women's sexuality; moreover, these travelogues were for many people the first and only introduction they had to people from other countries and they were written by elite white men with power and social standing enabling their thoughts to be easily believed as truths (Morgan, 1997). Still today in contemporary times whites create the prevailing and influential images in the world, yet they don't realize that they essentially produce constructions of the world based on their own perceptions (Dyer, 1997).

Perceptions of black female hypersexuality, the fascination with African women's bodies and the fetishizing of them is an international phenomenon. Sarah Baartman, a South African woman who was enslaved, became a global symbol of black female body objectification. Not only was Baartman's body exploited economically as a slave, her body was objectified and displayed throughout Europe for profit. Her naked body was caged and displayed like a sideshow oddity as she was instructed to stand, dance, walk and sit like an animal (Tillet, 2009). The viewing of her body was prime entertainment for spectators throughout Europe including in France where that society often used scientific racism as the justification for colonialism and other forces to oppress Africans (Tillet, 2009). Sarah Baartman's body, with its dark skin, large buttocks and large breasts, was for Europeans, proof of black inferiority. Even after she died at age 25 in 1816, a plaster of Sarah Baartman's was made and her brain and genitals were pickled in a jar and remained on display in a French museum until 1974; her body was finally returned to South Africa and she was buried there in a national ceremony in 2002 (Zilwa, 2002).

Some of those ideas about black women's inferiority were also reflected in fine art and literature. Edouard Manet's 1863 painting *Olympia* is a classic example. In it a white woman, Olympia, lies naked on a chaise longue chair with her alabaster body fully exposed as she gazes directly at the viewer. A black woman with a dark brown complexion wearing a white head wrap and plain white dress, who appears to be a maid, stands behind Olympia holding a floral pillow leaning toward Olympia and looking at her. Olympia's servant is so dark she literally blends in with the background she almost disappears. Lorraine O'Grady writes that the painting sends the message that white is what a woman should be and nonwhite is what a woman should not be. The white woman is the object of the gaze in the painting because her body and femininity deserve attention while the body of a black woman does not (O'Grady, 2010). Dutch painter

Christiaan van Couwenbergh's 1632 painting *Rape of a Negro Girl* (also known as *Three Young White Men and a Black Woman*) of a naked white man holding a naked black woman on his lap while she struggles to break free as two other white men look, point and laugh in a bedroom has been interpreted both as justification of Dutch colonialism and a criticism of the sexual terrorism colonized women faced (Moorti, 2002). The transference of negative social constructions of women of color from social and political discourse into art and literature has occurred over time. The evolution of new versions of these images is what feminist scholar Deborah McDowell calls the changing same. As society undergoes transformative notable changes images of black women remain the same. While there may be some differences reflected there are some "repeating central images" that occur and they continue to recycle stereotypical images of black women (McDowell, 1995). The circulation of these images of black women are rooted in social, political and economic forces to keep black women powerless. The ideas and images also circulated during the era of the Age of Enlightenment as people gathered information learned more, reading became more accessible and scientific thought including scientific racism spread.

American stereotypes of black women

The construction of the bodies of women of African descent as both desirable and disdainful was a worldwide idea that traveled across the globe including to the United States. There were similar ideas developed and constructed about black women during the economic institution of slavery in the United States. In her book *Women, Race and Class* Angela Davis explains how the construction of black womanhood in the United States was crafted to fit the economic and social needs of the time. In the 19th century a new femininity or new womanhood was constructed to keep white women in their proper place in a patriarchal society. While notions of white womanhood were constructed they were done so in direct opposition to black

womanhood. Black women were property, white women were wives; black women were breeders, white women were mothers; white women were the epitome of femininity and black women were genderless because of their work as laborers as slaves and a dangerous fusion of perceived lack of femininity and hypersexuality that rendered black women inherently rapable (Davis, 1981). Black women recognized these dangerous social constructions of their images and they resisted them. One of the most important examples was Sojourner Truth's *Ain't I a Woman* speech, which she delivered in 1851 in Akron, Ohio:

“That man over there says that women need to be helped into carriages, and lifted over ditches, and to have the best place everywhere. Nobody ever helps me into carriages, or over mud-puddles, or gives me any best place! And ain't I a woman?...I have ploughed and planted, and gathered into barns, and no man could head me! And ain't I a woman?...I have borne thirteen children, and seen most all sold off to slavery, and when I cried out with my mother's grief, none but Jesus heard me! And ain't I a woman? (Truth, 1851).”

Here Sojourner Truth is contesting the ideas of hollow black womanhood, sexism and racism. Black women continued to resist such portrayals and reclaim their images for centuries.

These slavery-era constructions of black women in the United States have sustained over time. The images of black women are so distorted and slanted that when black women walk into a room the room is figuratively crooked because the impressions that circulate about black women are crafted by others and are not close to the truth (Perry, 2011). These stereotypes of black women are what Patricia Hill Collins calls controlling images, which are designed to make racism, sexism, poverty and other injustices seem like natural and inevitable parts of life (Collins, 1999). Those stereotypes include:

- Mammy – the obese, asexual, maternal figure that is more concerned about taking care of white people and their needs than she is of herself and her family. Mammy knows her place in society and she does not deviate from it or challenge the power structure.
- Matriarch – is the maternal figure who is controlling and domineering. She is the reason why black men do not remain in the home with their families and she is the reason why her children are unruly.
- Jezebel/hoochie mama – is the oversexed, hypersexual black woman who cannot control her sexuality. This image is an updated version of the unrapable black woman slave who is not seen as a woman or a human so it is impossible to sexually assault her because she is inherently hypersexual.
- Welfare mother – is the updated version of the black woman breeder from slavery. She is sexually out of control. Her body and her ability to reproduce are in need of government intervention.
- The lady – is a combination of the mammy and the matriarch. She is hardworking, most often middle class and accomplished. She knows her place in society and plays by the rules to progress. But she invests too much time in work outside of the home and that potentially makes her an unfit partner for men. Her work outside of the home is used as a patriarchal weapon against her because she deviates from traditional gender roles by working and excelling. Whites resent her middle class success (Collins, 1999).

Those images are pervasive in American society and media. The crooked images black women have had to fight against are connected to black women's struggle to be recognized as citizens in the United States (Perry, 2011). Media stereotypes carry messages of black women's worth to the rest of the country. These stereotypes say that black women do not hold the same

values and virtues as other Americans; therefore, they do not deserve the resources this country has to offer or any part of the American dream because images of them do not reflect American values (Jewell, 1993). The warped images that black women see of themselves have an impact on black women's politics (Perry, 2011). These controlling images of black women endure and continue to be recycled because they serve a purpose. Controlling images are strong tools of oppression that both help to spread ideas about black women's perceived inferiority and these images also influence the internalization of self-hate among women of color. Black women are "bombarded with warped images of their humanity, some black women tilt and bend themselves to fit the distortion" (Perry, 2011).

Not beautiful, not feminine, not real women

The beauty of women of color, especially women of African descent, has been disparaged historically and globally. Beauty standards are set by the dominant class and push hegemonic ideals (Patton, 2006). The concept of beauty is complicated with a racial hierarchy (Hunter, 2002). African-American women and their beauty both have been compared with white beauty standards especially when it comes to their hair texture and length and skin color (Patton, 2006). Throughout historic and contemporary eras African-American beauty has been belittled, mocked, discredited and devalued (Patton, 2006). The black woman's "physical image has been maliciously maligned" (Guy-Sheftall, 2002). Early social constructions of black people projected them as hypersexual, unattractive and repugnant; moreover, those attributes eclipsed any traits of black womanhood including beauty and integrity (Guy-Sheftall, 2002).

Those perceptions about black women's unattractiveness have carried through to contemporary times. Japanese psychologist and researcher Satoshi Kanazawa's work on perceptions of black women's perceived unattractiveness is an extension of the scientific racism

that was used throughout history and across the globe to justify racial oppression and legitimize racism, colonialism and imperialism. In 2011 Kanazawa published a scientific study, based on answers from respondents, which found that all women are more attractive than the men in their racial group except for black women. Black women were the least attractive of all racial demographics of women and Kanazawa attributed the results to higher levels of testosterone resulting in more masculine features as the reason for black women's unattractiveness making black women more masculine than other women; moreover, he noted that black women have a higher body mass index than other groups of women (Kanazawa, 2011). Parts of the perceptions of black inferiority are rooted in black women's bodies. Negrophobia, the disgust and disdain for black people, is entrenched in perceptions of the intellectual inferiority and physical unattractiveness of black women including their noses, lips, hair and skin tone which are very different from white women's (Guy-Sheftall, 2002). Racism positions the beauty of women of color to be devalued and the skin tone of nonwhite women and its proximity to whiteness is connected to their attractiveness.

Colorism

Colorism is the practice of privileging people with lighter skin over people with dark skin in communities or color (Hunter, 2002). However, colorism and racism often collide to create a distinct form of racism especially for a black woman with dark brown skin who may be subjected to prejudice from racism for being black and a layered form of racial injustice for being dark (Jones, 2000). Without racism, which sets whites at the top of a top of a racialized hierarchy, there could not be colorism (Hunter, 2002). Colorism is inseparably entwined with racism (Harris, 2008). Ideas and images from the media as well as social networks including friends and family all convey a preference for light skin (Thompson & Keith, 2001). Black

women whose beauty is celebrated in mainstream media are often light-skinned African-American women with long hair (Patton, 2006).

Colorism also helped to create a class hierarchy based on aesthetics. During the slavery era in the United States black women with lighter skin (often the offspring of white masters and black slaves) and long straight or wavy hair worked in the master's house as servants while dark-skinned black women with kinky hair toiled in fields; moreover, that white supremacist racial hierarchy of beauty and worth established by whites was internalized by black Americans (Patton, 2006). Imitating whiteness, during the slavery era in the United States, meant gaining the kind of protection that was associated with being a free person; moreover, straight hair was connected to people who were free and not living in bondage (Patton, 2006). Among African-Americans skin color has been a trait that helps to denote status and class along with the attributes that come with it such as long straight hair and light eyes (Thompson & Keith, 2001). Women of color with lighter skin have social capital that is not extended to women of color with darker skin (Hunter, 2002).

Black Americans whose skin is lighter are perceived as having the "halo effect," favorable perceptions based on perceived attractiveness (Wade & Bielitz, 2005). But that halo effect from colorism comes at serious social cost that is often unknown and unaddressed. However, researchers have found that people of color with light skin have had advantages in the criminal justice system and employment. African-American women with a light complexion served 12 percent less time in prison than women with dark skin and light-skinned women prisoners' total time spent incarcerated is almost 11 percent less than darker-skinned women (Viglione, Hannon & DeFina, 2011). Capability and competency are associated with whiteness; therefore, nonwhite job candidates with lighter skin are preferred in the

workplace by employers (Hunter, 2002). Black Americans with light skin note experiencing less discrimination than black Americans with darker skin (Hersch, 2011).

Colorism and perceptions of worth based on skin tone have had a devastating impact on black women whose physical features are not associated with whiteness. African-American women anticipate being evaluated based on their skin tone (Thompson & Keith, 2001). Black women's self-efficacy and self-esteem are affected by colorism. Women's self-esteem is connected to recognition from others but the media has projected negative portrayals of black women with dark skin making acceptance harder to achieve (Thompson & Keith, 2001). Colorism, however, is not just an issue in the United States. Colorism is a global problem that affects nonwhite people in many nations (Harris, 2008). The entertainment industry creates a homogenous Latin look (Aparicio, 2003) and that stereotypical Latina look overshadows the diversity among Latinas. Limited media representations of the ethnic diversity among Latinas also leave AfroLatinas, women of Latin and African descent with African features, in a media and social purgatory. Personifying the ideal look of a Latin beauty means to not have skin that is too light or too dark, for Latina actresses with darker skin their aesthetics leave them in limbo and in an uncertain position in white media (Negron-Muntaner, 1997). While the identity of Latina is a constructed one in the United States, women of Latin descent all share the practice of having their bodies be the object of patriarchal, gendered and racial gazes (Aparicio, 2003).

Complicated constructions: the dominant gaze and the male gaze

Media portrayals of people of color are created by white people who heavily influence the creation of images of people of color (Dyer, 1997). The images of people of color are formed through the dominant gaze, "the tendency of mainstream culture to replicate, through narrative and imagery, racial inequalities and biases which exist throughout society" (Russell, 1995).

Media control is still concentrated among powerful white elites and their messages are projected as messages speaking for all of humanity (Dyer, 1997). The dominant gaze is the mass media's inclination to portray the experiences and identities of nonwhite people in a superficial and trivial way (Russell, 1995). Therefore, portrayals of people of color are often misrepresented. The images of women of color are further skewed because men, white men, create most images of them. Many media images of women are crafted through the male gaze, a male point of view in which stories are written, characters are developed and scenes are shot through the view or gaze of men; moreover, women are objects to be viewed by men and images of women are created for and by men from their own imagination (Mulvey, 1975). The dominant gaze and the male gaze collude to distort and hijack the images of black women in media and popular culture. It is also important to explore the role of the white gaze as a source of power in the media that seeks to control blackness as it intersects with gender and class (Griffin, 2014).

The black body has been confiscated (Yancy, 2008). There is the original literal, physical and brutal confiscation of black bodies through the Atlantic slave trade. In contemporary times this confiscation of black bodies continues through the social constructions of black images through white racist and supremacist ideals and knowledge (Yancy, 2008). Through history and media black women's bodies have been degraded. Black feminist scholar Beverly Guy-Sheftall best described the physical and social brutalization of black women in the United States and across the globe: "There is nothing sacred about black women's bodies" (Guy-Sheftall, 2002).

The physical and social mistreatment of black women continues. Black women are othered in society and in the media (Collins, 1999). Representations of black women are complex. Black women experience invisibility and hypervisibility at the same time with their images being erased and almost nonexistent or having negative and historically stereotypical

images being hypervisible (Collins, 2005). In 2011 researchers found that black women are socially invisible and their faces were more likely to not be remembered in a crowd and their voices are more likely to have been unnoticed, unheard and misattributed in conversations (Sesko & Biernat, 2011).

Such social stigmatization of black women is reflected in contemporary media images. African-American women are still mostly typecast (Havens, 2013). Researchers have found that images of black women on reality television shows are laced with stereotypes and anger is a common theme among black women on various types of reality shows (Goldman, 2013). The casting on reality television shows upholds the type of racism held by rural conservatives (Pardo, 2013). Reality television show producers use racial stereotypes that already exist in society and which audiences are familiar (Pardo, 2013). Some of black women reality show cast members have admitted that editors have constructed them to fit their idea of who they want the cast members to be and not who they truly are (Goldman, 2013). Black women audience members have been so concerned about the images of black women on reality television that they've circulated petitions calling for viewers to boycott reality television shows with black women that are riddled with violence; at least one petition was started to boycott *Love & Hip Hop Atlanta* and at least 12 petitions called for viewers to stop watching *Basketball Wives* (Goldman, 2013). Some of these viewers' petitions have worked to prevent what they perceive as negative images of African-American mothers on reality television. Viewers' activism killed the show *All My Babies' Mamas*, about black rapper Shawty Lo and his 11 children and their 10 mothers, before it hit the airwaves on the Oxygen cable network (Demby, 2013). Most recently viewers' protests against *Sorority Sisters*, the Vh1 program which debuted in December 2014 and featured black women who belong to black sororities, resulted in major companies including Carmex,

Hallmark, Honda and Crayola pulling advertising from the show after viewers' online petitions and protests demanded that the companies not support negative images of black women (Callahan, 2014).

The stereotypical images of black women on reality television are a result of selective editing and strategic editing (Goldman, 2013) which often involves a reliance on old gendered and racialized stereotypes. When racial conflicts arise in reality television programs, those interpersonal conflicts illustrate racism as an individual problem and not a systemic one (Pardo, 2013). Conflicts between reality cast show members, especially racial ones, are dramatized with music that is played during the scene (Pardo, 2013). The racial caricatures and conflicts that reality television show producers use mirror societal beliefs about racism and the shows end up being an extension of such beliefs (Pardo, 2013). In a study about black women reality show cast members, Goldman found that half of the 20 cast members in her study exhibited stereotypical characteristics of the sapphire and the contemporary black bitch by engaging in violence or manipulative behavior (Goldman, 2013).

The black female audience is aware of the stereotypes that circulate in media and reflect incomplete and damaging images of them. In 2010 Essence magazine commissioned a study and found that 93 percent of the study's respondents believed the media does an "okay" or "poor" job of representing the range of images of black women (Walton, 2013). In 2013 Essence magazine conducted a second study on black women's perceptions of their images in the media and 1,200 black women participated. For almost two weeks the women maintained visual journals from images they viewed on television, the Internet and other mediums and they found traditional stereotypes of black women to be pervasive and new ones emerged: "Gold diggers, modern

jezebels, baby mamas, uneducated sisters, ratchet women, angry black women, mean black girls, unhealthy black women and black Barbies” (Walton, 2013).

Black women can overlook and not absorb the negative images of them that circulate in society but sometimes they are beaten by them or they simply choose not to combat them (Perry, 2011). Black women’s humanity is not reflected in the media. Yet, white representation is everywhere and those representations are not raced and are normalized; whites are not white people they are simply viewed as people who are part of the human race (Dyer, 1997). But skewed images of black women remain the norm. Illuminating the abnormality of those images is essential to equality. The process of media globalization has led to flat portrayals of black women or images of them have been completely removed from some media narratives (Havens, 2013). It is important to illuminate and make visible the crooked images of black women that are too often invisible (Perry, 2011).

CHAPTER 5

Methods

In this chapter I discuss the research methods that were employed in this dissertation, how the method textual analysis was used and why it is the best way to extract rich results from this data set.

This study uses the method of textual analysis to evaluate the data collected for this dissertation. Textual analysis is a research method that examines the “content and meaning of texts of their structure and discourse” (Lockyer, 2008). Scholars have determined that textual analysis is an optimal research method to illuminate hegemonic portrayals of race, gender, class and sexuality and “subversive messages embedded in dominant texts” (Duval, 2012). Textual analysis requires the researcher to identify categories from the text, choose examples for more intense analysis and then perform a deep reading to examine and determine meanings in the texts (Brennen, 2012). In textual analysis the text is deconstructed and there is evaluation of the way the text functions, how it is constructed, how the content is and produced, and what it means (Lockyer, 2008). Textual analysis evaluates the meanings embedded in the text to comprehend the ways in which spoken and written words as well as visual images assist in the creation of social reality (Brennen, 2012). As a method textual analysis seeks to find potential interpretations of text, not a right or wrong evaluation of text (Lockyer, 2008). Textual analysis is used to “expose power dynamics in media representation, reception, and production” (Duval, 2012). Textual analysis views text as an essential aspect of the culture that helps people understand their lives (Brennen, 2012). Textual analysis has the ability to unearth nuances that would otherwise go unnoticed (Lockyer, 2008). In this study I explain the storylines and events of the television shows and examine the associated text that viewers produce, through words and

pictures. Those related texts, intertexts, give an understanding of the audiences' analysis of the principal text (Duval, 2012). The tweets that viewers created about television programs are the central focus of analysis in this study; however, the sequence of events in the shows are explained and connected to the tweets that are the primary data in this study.

In this textual analysis the messages communicated on social media and the images of women of color were analyzed; therefore, detecting patriarchal and racist messages was key in this analysis. The method of textual analysis calls for an assessment of inequities that are unquestioned and perceived as invisible and how they are produced in a hegemonic society (Duval, 2012). Some researchers evaluate text to examine ways that it reinforces cultural stereotypes (Lockyer, 2008). Language helps us create our social realities (Brennen, 2012). So examining the language that social television audiences use in their interactive experience can give researchers insight into how viewers interpret what they watch, how they express their interpretations and what those interpretations mean in a societal context. Moreover, researchers conducting textual analysis should pay special attention to the “theoretical underpinnings of the text” (Brennen, 2012). Therefore, a textual analysis is appropriate for this study because theories such as political economy, black feminism, and uses and gratifications (including the concept of parasocial interaction) all can help illuminate the ways in which social television conversations reveal and address stereotypes and issues related to social inequality. Feminist researchers have highlighted the importance of analyzing the discourse that influences the structure of gender, race class and sexuality identity by revealing binaries in text (Duval, 2012). Researchers should also consider important insight in which the text was created including “historical, cultural and economic relationships that exist between a text and a specific society at a particular place in

time” (Brennen, 2012). Social constructions of gender, race and class were apart of the analysis of this study that underscores the significance of the importance of textual analysis as a method.

Textual analysis gives researchers a deeper understanding into cultural norms and beliefs (Duval, 2012). The method of textual analysis frequently includes elaboration on the way media is produced and how the audience understands the text (Duval, 2012). Therefore, the systems of power involved in television production that mirror systems of power in society were also examined. For example, this analysis includes the way that the hegemonic social structure is also reflected in Hollywood with the high concentration of white men in control of television networks and production companies. Therefore, textual analysis is an appropriate method for this study because the structure and production of the media, and traditional portrayals of marginalized groups in the media will also be examined. Texts are diverse and the way that they are constructed and produced is diverse; therefore, the various meanings different genres of text can produce should be considered in a textual analysis (Lockyer, 2008).

Researchers who use qualitative methods use them to comprehend how people interpret messages and how those messages relate to their lives, not to predict or manage how people act on those messages (Brennen, 2012). However, researchers should also recognize how context and connotation circulate from the person who created the content to the readers and how they will engage with the content (Brennen, 2012). This study analyzed the themes that appeared in the tweets in relation to television shows. While this is not a textual analysis of reality television shows, I performed a validity check to connect the results of the data to the television programs. Essentially, what viewers discussed in the tweets was related to the action in the television shows.

Social television viewers often create their own texts while they engage with the television shows on social media networks, and viewers often create memes about the television shows they watch. The combination of photos, videos, animation and text created by the viewers that are associated to the shows become a large part of the social media conversation. Therefore, textual analysis is the appropriate method to use to evaluate the data collected for this study. Intertextual media produced by the television viewing audience can best be analyzed using textual analysis. Intertextuality is a manner in which one text alludes to a prior text and calls for the audience to tap into cultural knowledge to understand messages (Duval, 2012). When using textual analysis researchers often explore connections between meanings embedded in the text and meanings outside of it (Lockyer, 2008). The meanings embedded in intertexts can also be examined and intertextuality can highlight how texts are culturally connected and convey social norms in societies (Duval, 2012).

Textual analysis can produce a bevy of potential analyses; therefore, the role the researcher plays in interpreting the text is essential along with self-reflexivity (Duval, 2012). I, the researcher, describe myself as a black feminist who grew up in poverty, still maintains a working class identity and is also a member of the Hip-Hop Generation and Generation X. As a black woman I bring a distinct view of how women, people of color and women of color are represented on television. Moreover, as an avid social media user I also understand the ways in which the general social media audience and specifically the black social media audience uses social networks. I am especially familiar with the ways that black people use Twitter. African-Americans' collective use of Twitter, known as Black Twitter, sometimes reflects the community's interest in a topic, issue or idea through the use of hashtags. Black Twitter's use of hashtags pushes the community to take note of an issue and reply to the issue; hashtags reflect

Black Twitter's viewpoint of social issues (Brock, 2012). My previous research on the ways in which people of color use social media and how they are represented on it will help to inform this research.

Theoretical lens

This study is a textual analysis of the content in the data set using an intersectional and black feminist theory lens. Intersectionality theory encourages researchers to consider the ways in which social identities such as race, gender and class create a distinct social experience for people, especially black women (Crenshaw, 1991). Intersectionality theory was an important one to use in this study because images about race and gender are central to the data set. Examining the text from an intersectional perspective helped illuminate ways in which viewers spoke about women of color. The use of black feminist theory also helped contextualize black women's social location, social experience, how they are perceived in society and how those perceptions affect imbalances of power. Black feminist theory explains the ways in which power supports and reinforces ideologies about race, gender and class oppression (Collins, 1991). The power that supports negative ideologies of black women also supports negative images of them. Black feminist theory has always challenged the existence and the circulation of negative images of women of color (Collins, 1991). Using black feminist theory in communications research is important because the social and daily experiences that black women share can affect how they communicate (Bell, et al 2000).

The shows in the study

The reality television programs included in this study are shows that have black women and Latinas as central characters and shows that appeal to those demographics.

Mary Mary is a reality show on the WE TV network, which is geared toward women, and features the African-American gospel duo of the same name. Sisters Erica and Tina Campbell comprise the Grammy-award winning group that released their first album in 2000. The sisters are famous for their contemporary and upbeat brand of inspirational gospel music that is often played in nightclubs and geared toward listeners across generations, especially younger people. *Mary Mary* the reality show debuted on WE, a network geared toward women, in March 2012. The program has been hailed as the anti-reality show because of its portrayal of the Campbell sisters as working mothers who balance their careers with their families and husbands while keeping Christ central in their lives. This show was selected to be included in the study because it is unlike most reality shows featuring women of color. Violence, bickering and sabotage among black women commonly seen on other reality television shows featuring black women are virtually absent in this show which is why this show was chosen to be included in this study. This show is also part of the family genre of reality television shows and it promotes family and Christian values. Seasons one (March 2012-May 2013) and three (February 2014-May 2014) are analyzed in this study. Data collection for this series began as soon as the show debuted to be able to capture and compare any possible changes in the social media conversation around the show.

Basketball Wives LA features the wives, ex-wives, former girlfriends and the mothers of the children of NBA players. It is a spin-off show of the ratings champion *Basketball Wives* that aired for five seasons. Shaunie O'Neal, former wife of NBA legend Shaquille O'Neal, serves as an executive producer of the *Basketball Wives* franchise. *Basketball Wives LA*, featuring a cast of Latinas and black women, debuted in August 2011. Vh1 describes the show this way: "Elbow throwing, trash talking and in-your-face action: forget the NBA, we're talking about their wives!"

The debut episode of *Basketball Wives LA* included a shouting match that escalated into a fist fight between two cast members, including one who had a baby weeks prior to the physical melee. Such incidents, including boisterous arguments and martini-swirling bouts, are common on the show. This show was chosen because it is a spin-off a popular similar show aimed at a younger, urban black and Latina audience. While this show is also part of the ensemble cast, soap opera genre of reality shows, it features and appeals to women whose economic class roots are blue collar. The researcher wanted to start collecting data at the beginning of the series in order to gauge changes in representations as the series progressed. Seasons one (August 2011-November 2011) and three (February 2014-April 2014) are included in this study.

Sample and Data Collection

Nonprobability sampling was employed in this study to select the tweets that were sent by viewers as they watched television programs. Nonprobability sampling is when a researcher chooses her data not based on predetermined probability (Hussey, 2010). Sometimes nonprobability sampling is used when the researcher is unable to capture the complete sample because of the unique area being studied (Hussey, 2010). Tweets sent about television shows appear rapidly and in real time. It is difficult to capture all of the tweets during a show because of the volume of them. Nonprobability sampling is an efficient way to collect data in the midst of the rapid growth of the Internet and the expansive reach of other technologies (Hussey, 2010). The textual analysis research method offers a detailed evaluation of the text; therefore, a small amount of text is sufficient to establish an acceptable data set (Lockyer, 2008). The principal goal of nonprobability purposive sampling is to create a sample that can provide a look at the phenomenon being studied (Battaglia, 2008). Probability data sampling enables a researcher to be confident that their data is factual (Hussey, 2010). The data and participants chosen to

participate in a nonprobability sampling study are chosen based on criteria previously established by the researcher and that criteria is directly related to the research question (Given, 2008).

Nonprobability sampling is an effective method that can empower researchers to design a sample that enables them to study specific traits of distinct groups (Given, 2008). The social television audience is a distinct group that has emerged in this new media landscape. The nonprobability sampling method is conducted without the researcher knowing if the data chosen to be in the sample represents the entire data population (Hussey, 2010). Subjective methods are used to determine which data is included in the sample (Battaglia, 2008). The sample is selected using “expert knowledge” of the population to choose elements that will be representative of the population (Battaglia, 2008). That expert knowledge is applied to the population to determine which traits are important to be included in the sample (Battaglia, 2008). Sometimes nonprobability purposive sampling includes two-stage sampling. Two-stage sampling is a process of selecting key units to be studied then expert knowledge is used to distinguish the elements to be included in the sample (Battaglia, 2008). In this study two-stage sampling was used to select the television shows that were included in the study, then to choose the tweets from the Twitter streams from the shows to be analyzed in the study.

Coding and Analysis

A coding scheme that notes the existence and the frequency of text in a data set enables the researcher to determine if and when meanings are prominent and how much importance is placed on them (Carley, 1993). The data was analyzed from a semantic approach, the meanings between different texts were evaluated (Ifversen, 2003). The study was conducted with the goal of determining the relationship between the text (the data in the tweets created by television

viewers), context (the situation to which the text refer) and supra-text (the ideology associated with production of the text) (Ifversen, 2003). The text was analyzed in the following steps: searching for relevant text that is germane to the study, detecting repeating ideas (including but not limited to words) that appear in the data, narrowing those ideas into common themes, working those themes into theoretical frameworks and lastly arranging the data into a theoretical narrative that elaborates on the results and connects the data to the theoretical lens (Auerbach & Silverstein, 2003).

Nvivo, the qualitative research software, was used to analyze the data in this study. Nodes, themes, were created based on the research questions in this project. Some other themes emerged, some were particular to specific shows during data analysis and nodes were created to code those tweets. Themes were determined based on their frequency and repetition in the data set and their relation to the research questions. The data were collected by taking photos of the tweets that appeared in the Twitter social media stream indexed with the show's hashtag during the first run of new episodes. The text of the tweets was then transcribed and entered into Nvivo to be analyzed. A total of 1,586 tweets were analyzed for season one of *Mary Mary* and 804 for season three of the show. There were 1,023 tweets from season one of *Basketball Wives LA* that were analyzed and 746 tweets from season three of the show. The tweets that were analyzed in the study are a subset chosen from the entire season of each show. Tweets sent during every other episode were selected. The tweets that are included in this study were collected from each minute of the hour the show aired to capture data throughout the entire episode. Nearly all of the tweets in the data set were coded into a theme (node) in Nvivo. The few that were not coded were not included into the analysis because they were very generic statements such as a tweet with just the hashtag only of the show (#MaryMary or #BBWLA). The number of tweets

collected from each episode of a show throughout the season is an adequate amount of data from which to draw themes and extract trends. The tweets were not edited for grammar, punctuation, spelling and spacing to maintain the authenticity of the audience's messages.

CHAPTER 6: RESULTS

The results in the study revealed that black social television viewers experienced strong negative and positive sentiments from *Mary Mary* and *Basketball Wives LA* as well as a strong presence of family; moreover, distinct themes emerged from the social television data from specific shows. A theme of Christianity and morality emerged from the religious foundation in the lives of the stars of *Mary Mary* that viewers discussed online. The themes guerrilla girlfriends, fake and fleeting friendships among women on reality television, and violence emerged from the tweets about *Basketball Wives LA*. The themes that are specific to individual shows will be addressed in the following chapter. These findings are put forth to address the research questions about stereotypical representations of women of color in the social television arena and to gauge how the social television conversation about black social television shows changes over time. The chapters about the results are descriptive. Tables one and two at the end of this chapter provide a breakdown of all of the themes that emerged in this study. Analysis of the results will be provided in the discussion chapter.

During seasons one and three, tweeters expressed an overwhelming negative sentiment for both shows toward both the shows and the cast members; however, the black social television audience discussed more negative views toward the individual cast members and their actions that were perceived as disloyal or disrespectful. The *Basketball Wives LA* and *Mary Mary* casts, consisting primarily of women, faced a fair amount of criticism for their physical appearance.

Positive sentiments that viewers discussed about the shows were also prevalent. Individuals on the shows and how viewers perceived the cast members received the most praise. Black social television viewers also praised individuals on the shows because they identified with them. Sometimes the viewers saw their lives, their struggles and their plight as similar to the

cast members of the shows, women of color, and the audience. The audience sometimes viewed the shows positively for providing a realistic image of black women on television or for simply being entertaining.

Family, motherhood, marriage and relationships were also heavily discussed among the social television audience members. Viewers praised images of the black nuclear family, mostly seen on *Mary Mary*, while they stigmatized women who were not married with children. Moreover, any person or action that seem to threaten the black nuclear family was criticized.

Finally, stereotypes of black women were both detected by the black social television audience and reinforced by them. Viewers also sometimes offered critical analysis of the shows and how they fit into the television landscape of overall images of black women. Other viewers saw some of the women as reflecting negative gendered and racialized stereotypes. In other instances the representations of stereotypes of women of color were present but less direct, yet still reinforced ideas about perceptions of black women's anger and propensity for violence.

Negative sentiment

When it came to *Mary Mary*, many of the negative sentiments that the audience expressed were about the cast. The tweets with negative sentiments expressed about the show comprised 5 percent of the data coded for the show in season one and 17 percent of the data coded in season three. Some season one viewers even seemed to dislike the Campbell sisters after gaining more insight into their lives and their personalities. For example: “watching #MaryMary & the drama between Erica& Tina. Tina is so difficult omg who knew....she cuts every1 off in convo.” Other viewers saw one sister as the reason for discord between the duo: “Tina gets on my nerves even more now since this show. #MaryMary.” Another viewer said, “I love their music but I don't like @tinacampbell #MaryMary. ”

Some viewers who appeared to be fans of the singing sisters had criticism of the sisters for a potential break up of the group. As one sister wanted to continue performing as the gospel duo gained more popularity the other wanted to decrease her schedule to spend more time with her family. The television audience negatively responded to the potential of a breakup and to the sisters for considering one. One viewer said: “Tina doesn't take business serious. She loves her sister, she loves music, but she is lazy as hell when it comes to business.” Another frustrated viewer spoke directly to one of the sisters and said: “Erica won't you just shut up and go solo like you been saying for the longest #MaryMary.” Another viewer suggested that the disharmony between the two wouldn't last because they perform so well together: “Erica and Tina aren't breaking up the duo. They need each other like peanut butter and jelly. This is just for the cameras.”

The criticism of the show came from ideas that producers and editors contrived the show. One viewer believed that the discord between the sisters was manufactured to create a storyline for the show: “I like #MaryMary I love some of dey music nd their show is good/entertaining but dey need 2 stop frontin 4 da camera Get it #MaryMary.” Others criticized the authenticity of the show, from the dialogue among the cast to the sequence of the scenes. One viewer tweeted: “the show sounding REAL SCRIPTED right now. #marymary O_o.” And another one tweeted: “I don't like the editing for this show... Story line seems forced #ijs #MaryMary.” Another viewer expressed the strongest negative sentiment, disappointment about the show's renewal: “Yea so um #MaryMary show got renewed!?! for a second season! UGH!”

During season three a lot of the negative sentiment expressed by viewers was for individual cast members who were perceived to be disloyal or untrustworthy. There were two major events during season three that generated negative sentiments about the cast: marital

infidelity and the potential breakup of the group. During season three Teddy Campbell revealed that he had a string of affairs while married to his wife Tina Campbell. Viewers expressed disappointment in him: “Raise your hand if you still give the side eye when they show Teddy on camera #MaryMary.” Another viewer tweeted, “I see lightning and thunder behind Teddy after he just lied to Tina again about not being interested in anyone.” As Tina grappled with marital problems, her sister Erica contemplated leaving the group and viewers believed her husband only cared to advance his wife’s career without considering his sister-in-law’s pain: “Warren only wants to use #MaryMary for his agenda for Erica. How u want her done w/it but mad Tina ain't falling in line.” Another viewer suggested his actions were causing a rift between the duo: “Ike...I mean Warryn is #shady as hell and he's messing up this sisterhood. #MaryMary.” Viewers perceived his lack of empathy for Tina as a negative force in the family and for the family business: “Warren is so unprofessional. I hope they are putting on for the camera bc this is not ok. #marymary.” Viewers perceived the Campbell sisters’ professional attitudes as negative. The duo ended up firing their manager Mitchell Solarek after having clashes with him during the previous seasons. Viewers complained about the way in which the sisters and their producer treated the manager: “I'm wondering if Mitch was really the problem or was it Warren? #MaryMary.” One viewer surmised the sisters’ disposition is the reason they’ve changed management so much: “Erica and Tina had 4 managers in their career but Mitch is the problem... #MaryMary.” Another viewer thought the sisters needed a divine adjustment attitude: “Don't really think anyone but their mama and Jesus could manage #marymary. too much family drama to navigate.”

Viewers also expressed negative sentiment about the appearance of the cast. During season one both sisters were pregnant, Erica was when the season started and Tina learned she

was at the end of the season. The sisters naturally gained weight during their pregnancies and the audience criticized them: “o_O yaasss even Goo RT @callherkking: They are huge. Figuratively. Literally. #MaryMary.” Another viewer said the sisters’ size was an inspiration for weight loss, “They are making me want to go to the gym RIGHT NOW!!! #marymary.” Another viewer criticized the clothing the sisters wore as they carried pregnancy weight: “They clearly have body dysmorphia, there is no reason for such ill fitted clothing #MaryMary.” Viewers also sometimes made negative comments about the sisters' hair. One viewer believed Erica Campbell’s hairline was thinning and said: “Erica's edges need some prayer oil and baptism. #MaryMary.” Another viewer made a negative comment about Tina’s signature up-do style: “TINA and this unicorn at the top of her head <<<<< #MaryMary.” The negative sentiment about the cast’s looks even extended to people who weren’t principal cast members. Warryn Campbell, Mary Mary’s producer and Tina Campbell’s husband, was criticized for his appearance: “Warren is just...so... darn. #blueblack. In every scene, he looks, darker than the next. #MaryMary.” Warryn Campbell and his sister, singer Joi Campbell also known as Joi StaRR, both appeared on the show together didn’t escape criticism: “Im sorry but Warryn & Joi are a lil scary lookin #MaryMary.”

Negative sentiment *Basketball Wives LA*

Viewers articulated negative sentiments about *Basketball Wives LA* regarding the show, the casts’ looks and perceptions about their socioeconomic class. This theme garnered the highest number of tweets for the show for both seasons. During season one 53 percent of the tweets in the social television conversation about the show were negative and for season three 48 percent were negative. The show was highly criticized by viewers during season one who found no redeeming value in the show. The catty behavior on the show led one viewer to say:

“#BasketballWivesLA = InstigatorWivesLA aka Shit Keepers.” Other viewers disapproved of the women’s behavior on the show: “Grown women acting like kids. #bbwla.” And another viewer said: “None of those women on #bbwla are true friends to each other. #TheEnd.” Other viewers rejected the show during the first season. One said: “This is the last time I watch #bbwla its horrible.” And another viewer said: “After this episode I will never watch #BasketBallWivesLA they are too grown for this messiness .” One viewer simply dismissed the show, “#BasketballWivesLA .. its corny.” Others compared the show to the original *Basketball Wives* and the Los Angeles show didn’t measure up. One viewer tweeted: “#BasketballwivesLA is awful. STOP IT *Evelyn voice*” mimicking the voice of *Basketball Wives* star Evelyn Lozada. Other viewers believed the Los Angeles spin-off cast was a less sophisticated version of the Miami cast: “They need actual FAB wives RT @ImaCum_N_UrFace: this should be the only season of #BBWLA.” Criticism of the show extended into the third season including calls to pull the plug on the show: “Okay #BBWLA is boring as ALL HELL! Cancel this show please!!” One of the harshest comments about the show during the third season was: “Feel like my TV screen needs a Pap smear after every episode of Basketball Wives #BBWLA.” Some viewers believed some cast members’ aggressive behavior was a strategy to gain more camera time. During season one cast members were especially rude to Draya Michele and one viewer, Bucky Buckwild who also appeared on the reality show *Flavor of Love* which also aired on the Vh1 network, noted that by bullying and ostracizing Draya Michele, the other cast members ended up making her the focus of the show: “Lmfao these girls on #BBWLA, are not smart. They hate @drayaface but they r just making themselves look bitter n she get more camera time ;)” In season three, Britnish Williams joined the cast and she was almost immediately involved in conflict and one viewer thought she was purposely clashing with her cast mates to angle for more

camera time: “#BBWLA the are the women so aggressive & insecure!!! All this fighting & hating & maliciousness for no reason. British just wants tv time.”

Negative impressions of appearance and class

The social television audience also criticized the women’s appearance from the size of their bodies to their hairstyles. One viewer criticized the entire cast’s appearance by tweeting:

“#BBWLA, looks like they should be BBW of louisiana. Big busted Buffy old ass whores.”

Another viewer said: “I’m not a #Draya fan per se but that was as wrong as Malaysia’s two front teeth.” A lot of the criticism about looks was projected toward Jackie Christie, the oldest member

of the cast. One viewer had overall condemnation of her body: “Jackie Christie, @vh1 forgot to photoshop your whole body on camera - loose skin trollop ##BasketBallWivesLA.” Most of the

negative comments about hair were also directed toward Jackie Christie. One viewer said:

“Every episode Jackie Christie is at war with her weave and it irritates me #basketballwivesla.”

Others said: “why is Jackie’ss weave so bad? she’s rich like wtf #basketballwivesla” and “Jackie can never get a hair together! A damn shame! #basketballwivesLA.” In season three the audience

continued its assaults on Christie’s appearance: “The fat under Jackie arm look like a hammock #bbwla.” And one viewer tweeted: “Jackie’s hair looks like one of those computer programs

where you can place different hairstyles on the persons head. #bbwla.”

Some viewers perceived the cast to be lacking in socioeconomic class and the perceived social graces that come with wealth. Viewers often made comparisons between the Los Angeles and Miami casts during season one and the audience almost always made disparaging remarks about the Los Angeles show: “These #BBWLA have no class at all...hell atleast Shaunie & her crew looked like \$\$\$\$\$\$.” One viewer alluded to the show being lowbrow: “These hoes must be broke..and VH1 must have ran out of intelligent ideas because #basketballwivesLA is the

worst show ever.” Another viewer noted the lack of money that was invested into the production of the show: “You can tell this is season 1 for #basketballwivesla because their trip is to Hawaii. Miami cast be doing countries.” During season three viewers made negative comments that gauged the class status of the *Basketball Wives LA* cast. Before the cast took a trip to Paris together one audience member was shocked that one cast member never traveled abroad: “You are a basketball wife and you never traveled out of the country Jackie? Doug knew better than to take your foolishness abroad lol #BBWLA.” Viewers also sometimes made comments about the cast’s grammar as a mark of diminished class status. When Jackie Christie’s subject and verb agreement was off viewers often made note of that: “This bitch.. "Where me and my family is." Umm don't you mean "are"? #BBWLA #draya #jackie.”

Negative sentiment summary

While viewers expressed negative sentiments about both *Mary Mary* and *Basketball Wives LA*, the tone of the negativity detected by viewers was different. Viewers of *Mary Mary* made negative remarks about the cast when they felt cast members’ actions seemed to threaten the gospel duo. Also, some viewers who were fans of the gospel singers and had liked them developed a negative perception of them after watching them on the show. On *Basketball Wives LA* the audience condemned the bullying behavior of the cast members toward one another. Viewers criticized the constant chaos among the cast and they perceived the Los Angeles show and cast as a cheap knock-off of the original Miami-based show. However, viewers found fault with the appearance of the women on both television shows. Whether it was the fluctuating weight of the new mothers on *Mary Mary* or the hairstyles of the women on *Basketball Wives LA*, the physical appearances of all of the women were important to viewers.

Positive sentiment

Black social television viewers also expressed a significant degree of positive sentiment toward the duo Mary Mary during season one because they appeared to be genuine women who lead lives that are similar to their own. For season one 13 percent of the tweets sent by viewers were coded as positive and 12 percent of the tweets in season three were coded under this theme. One viewer said: “#MaryMary has to be my FAVORITE show hands DOWN these chicks are HILARIOUS /REAL/RELATABLE.” Another viewer indicated that she felt some of the same struggles in her life as one of the principal cast members: "I feel like I'm keepin up with life, not livin it," Tina- #MaryMary *in the amen corner*” Some of the audience members discussed positive feelings toward the duo because the Campbell sisters seemed to provide accessibility to their fans that made them more endearing: “#marymary i meet tina and Erica about 4 years ago and the act the same in person as on tv so thumbs up to them for being real.” One viewer appreciated communicating with the duo on Twitter when the show aired: “Mary Mary is my new favorite show! I love these ladies. When I reached out to them on twitter they answered back.” Some of the viewers felt a strong parasocial connection to Mary Mary, like they had gotten to know them well enough through the show to want to a friendship with them: “#NW #MaryMary. I want y'all to know that I love that Tina Campbell. She is my good girlfriend in my head. Lol.” Another viewer echoed that sentiment: “Tina and Erica are my new BFFs (in my head). LOL. Loving the realness of this show! #MaryMary.”

During season three of *Mary Mary*, viewers reacted positively toward Tina and Teddy Campbell sharing the infidelity and heartache they experienced in their marriage. One viewer tweeted: “The realness in this show cannot be denied , so raw. This is real life going on right now . #MaryMary.” Other viewers applauded Tina Campbell for displaying her pain and

depression to her fans: “MaryMary is the realist thing on TV right now. I have so much respect for Tina for being so open this season.” Another viewer found inspiration in the way Tina Campbell handled the infidelity and tweeted: “Tina has REALLY poured into me and encouraged me this season in more ways than one. THANK YOU #MaryMary.” One viewer appreciated the way Teddy Campbell worked to earn his wife’s trust again: “I really like Teddy. He's a man. He owns up to his mistakes. He doesn't point fingers #marymary.” Viewers also identified with Tina’s dilemma and felt like they went through the experience with her: “Seeing Tina break down like that really breaks my heart! I swear u would think I knew this woman my whole life. #MaryMary.” Another audience member said viewers of the show and fans of the group valued Tina Campbell more after being invited to experience the intimate details of her life with her: “When u can express ur feelings to ur fans that makes them love/like u even more cause u r being real n not fake love Tina for that #MaryMary.” Viewers also directed positive comments toward Tina when she was reluctant to pursue her own career as a solo artist when her sister leaned toward recording solo music. Viewers praised her powerhouse voice: “Tina got them vocals doe!!!! #marymary.” They also encouraged her to have confidence in her talent and potential to become a successful solo artist: “Tina needs to have faith and understand that she as well can go solo!!! Her career doesn't end with #MaryMary.”

Positive sentiment *Basketball Wives LA*

When viewers expressed positive sentiments about *Basketball Wives LA* they spoke about the cast members, the show and the cast’s appearance in affirmative ways. During the first season 14 percent of the tweets were coded as containing positive sentiment and during season three it was 11 percent. The first episode of the first season started with a fistfight between two cast members. As some tried to break up the fight, Tanya Young Williams, ex-wife of former

NBA star Jayson Williams, didn't engage in the fight or any subsequent arguments with cast members. She even left a gathering when she felt an argument brewing. One viewer said: "No Tanya is a grown woman who wants No parts of drama!!! #basketballwivesLA #grownwoman tweet." Doug Christie, one of a few former NBA players who was married to a woman in the season one cast, was also admired by some viewers for being a good spouse and father. Viewers said: "Doug Christie is a good husband #BBWLa;" "Jackie's husband is so supportive and comforting just like a man should be!! #BbwLa" and "Doug Christie seems so cool #BBWLA." The cast members who seemed to be the most authentic were the ones that were praised by the audience: "draya and malasia are the only two i like on this show..not afraid to be themselves #basketballwivesla." When viewers identified with cast members they also spoke positively about them. In one scene during season three Draya Michele was at a photo shoot and a budding model in the social television audience saw Draya Michele's career as an aspirational one: "Iwanna be a model like that #BasketballWivesLA." Another viewer identified with Laura Govan's humorous demeanor: "Laura is too funny. #friendinmyhead #basketballwivesLA."

Viewers also expressed overwhelming positive sentiment for Draya Michele, an urban model and actress. Other cast members often ridiculed her and viewers ended up having empathy for her. The alienation she experienced from her cast members ended up making her the breakout star of the show during the first season. One viewer said: "Who would watch this bs without @DrayaFace! This chicks are in the way!!!! #BasketballWivesLA." Another echoed the same idea: "If @Drayaface stop bein on #BASKETBALLWIVESLA I'M NOT WATCHN NO MORE." Since Draya Michele was often the topic of conversation, some viewers thought she should be the focus of her own show: "RT "@tattoo_beauty: Why didn't they just give Draya her own show?? That's basically all this show is about. #basketballwivesLA." Another viewer

agreed, retweeted a tweet from another viewer with the same idea and tagged Draya Michele:

“.@dayaface you hear that! I agree RT @_AmberNoROSE: #basketballwivesla should be called "The Draya Show.”

Praise for the pretty

Viewers also praised the physical appearance of some cast members, especially Draya Michele. During season one, viewers often glorified her looks, especially her body: “Draya from #BasketballWivesLA has a BODY!!! Tht’s my new wife :).” Another viewer assumed that cast members were mean to Draya Michele because she is attractive: “They all hating on @DrayaFace because she’s the finest one on the show #BasketballWivesLA.” Other viewers applauded Malaysia Pargo’s style: “I Am Sorry But Maylaysia Looks Casket Sharp!!!!!!!!!! #basketballwivesla.” Most of the positive remarks about appearance were about Malaysia Pargo and Draya Michele: “Draya and Malaysia are phyne as hell! but the rest of em can go take several seats! #BasketBallWivesLA.” During season three of the show some of the positive comments about the cast were about their character and not about their looks. Viewers admired Malaysia Pargo for being a good person and a good friend. One viewer said: “So much respect for @MalaysiaPargo she is truly a good, loyal friend!” Another viewer appreciated that she attempted to avoid arguments and fights on the show: “Dangg I love @MalaysiaPargo Voice And How She Carry HerSelf As A Women.” Viewers also appreciated cast members who stood up for other women who were bullied on the show: “The Protectors @BrandiMaxiell and @MalaysiaPargo <3.” Praise for Draya Michele continued in season three by viewers who recognized that she was still central to the show: “It's draya Mondays bitches lol @DrayaFace #BBWLA.”

Some season three viewers also expressed an overall appreciation for the show. For some viewers *Basketball Wives LA* was a television event. One viewer said “i live for Mondays chile #BBWLA” and another said “Watching #BBWLA the highlight of my television week).” Another viewer recognized how reality shows focusing on women and their social circles dominated the airwaves on the same night: “I love my Monday night tv marathons ! #bgc #BasketballWivesLA #therealhousewives.” One viewer expressed how watching the show and tweeting about it at the same time were important parts of their television watching experience: “~* Yes its Monday night Im watching #BasketBallWivesLA then #BadGirlsClub & Yes I will not answer any of your calls texts only Tweets! *~.” Another viewer welcomed the chaos among the cast on the show: “Bring on the DRAMA!! #BBWLA Woot! (via @SexxxyTempress).”

Positive sentiment summary

The black social television audience noted positive aspects of *Mary Mary* and *Basketball Wives LA* as they watched and tweeted about the shows. The *Mary Mary* audience found the cast of that show to be a source of inspiration and aspiration. As the cast opened their lives to their struggles, their fans found their endurance through hard times to be encouraging. Others in the audience appreciated the show for what they perceived as positive portrayals of black women and black families. Viewers of *Basketball Wives LA* expressed an appreciation of cast members who were authentic and attractive. They also found the show to be entertaining and they looked forward to it. While *Mary Mary* and *Basketball Wives LA* are two different types of shows, the audiences of both found value in the cast and the shows.

Family

Family, motherhood, relationships, marriage and romantic connections were a strong theme on both shows for both seasons. However, the tone of the social television conversation

for each show was markedly different. Viewers on *Mary, Mary* applauded Tina and Erica Campbell for being close sisters, good daughters, attentive wives and loving mothers who balanced work and family. However, on *Basketball Wives LA* viewers condemned the women on the show for not being married, for not being custodial parents, and for allegations of infidelity, and the women were judged on their fitness as mothers by their children's behavior.

Aspirational relationships

Many viewers saw the marriages on *Mary Mary* as aspirational unions that mirrored the relationships they want for themselves. The audience's tweets about family during season one of the show was 12 percent and 8 percent for season three. Viewers appreciated seeing an image that is rare in contemporary American television – loving black couples. One viewer tweeted: “#MaryMary Erica and warren relationship that's black love right there lol.” Another said: “Black love is AWESOME!! #MaryMary.” One viewer valued that the successful sisters are married to black men: “I ain't mad at Erica & Tina getting them some chocolate brothas! Yes lawd! #MaryMary.” The affection between the sisters and their husbands felt authentic to some in the social television audience: “Erica has a very very awesome husband! I can feel her & Warren's love through the tv! #MaryMary.” Tina Campbell tenderly refers to her spouse as “husband” and viewers found that endearing: “When I get married I want to call my husband....HUSBAND. #marymary.” Other women viewers respected seeing Warryn Campbell's love toward his wife Erica Campbell. One viewer tweeted: “Warryn is the perfect example of my dream husband #MaryMary.” Another viewer one said: “Aww Erica's husband! Yes God! I'll wait for one like that #MaryMary.” A male viewer also praised the Campbells' marriages and said he wanted a wife like the Campbell sisters: “And again I say. In my eyes #MaryMary can't do NO wrong. they love God, & their families. I want my wife to take notes.”

Some of the social television audience mentioned that they wanted the love among their spouses and children to mirror the Campbells': "Omgggggg, I want a family like y'all!

@therealmarymary :) it is so! :D #MaryMary." Other viewers appreciated *Mary Mary*'s portrayal of black men loving black women respectfully and tenderly and on television: "This show validates that there are indeed some good, faithful, loving God fearing men out here!

#MaryMary. Another viewer said: "I must say Teddy and Warryn are the epitome of romantic dudes...yall did good for yoself Erica and Tina....lol #marymary."

Working mothers

Another family-related theme that viewers discussed was the challenges of working mothers. The reality program shows the Campbell sisters immersed in activities related to their gospel music career such as recording songs in the music studio, performing at concerts, attending high-profile awards shows including the Grammys and doing media interviews. During the first season of the show both sisters were pregnant. The show revealed how the Campbell sisters' hectic career took a toll on the women, their children and their husbands. One constant theme throughout the first season was Tina's frequent suggestion to decrease the duo's demanding schedule to spend more time with her family while her sister Erica wanted to continue to ride the wave of success and cross-over appeal the group was building. When Tina's absence from her family put a strain on her and her children she said: "Quote of the day #Tina #MaryMary " I can do with no sleep but my babies can't live without no love." Viewers agreed with her choices to put her family first: "That's right!! "I'ma mommy first and everything else afterwards!!!" #MaryMary." Others empathized with her and tweeted words of encouragement: "Tina it will all be okay. You can accept help and still be a "super mommy". God bless you. I love your heart. #MaryMary." Her sister Erica continued to perform at major venues late into her

pregnancy. A viewer commented: “Lord one of em bout to perform while having labor contractions #marymary.” Tina’s work ethic while pregnant was criticized by some viewers and seen as aspirational for others: “Could I continue at full throttle while pregnant? I don’t know, but #marymary is definitely inspiration!” Viewers of the show who were used to seeing Mary Mary as performers were glad to see them be mothers: “Watching #MaryMary I love watching them be mommies! Tina I love ur dedication to ur babies!” Other viewers related to the Campbell sisters’ challenges as working mothers and appreciated the sisters showing the audience how they balanced their roles as mothers and working women: “@therealmarymary thanks for sharing your mommy struggle. Working moms unite #MaryMary. Another viewer said: “Watching #MaryMary. I love seeing career-driven women who make time for their families!”

Disdain for pregnancy

While some viewers enjoyed seeing Erica and Tina in their role as mothers and wives, others showed disdain for their pregnancies. Erica has three children and her last daughter, Zaya, was born at the end of the first season while Tina has four children. The respectability of marriage didn’t protect the sisters from criticism because of their pregnancies: “Welp... Its clear that Erica & Tina have NO problems in the bedroom! Them two STAY pregnant! The bed of marriage is undefiled tho.” Another viewer said: “#MaryMary and it seems that even when women are married pregnancy is always the big o oh...lol.” The scorn for the Campbell sisters’ pregnancies was reserved for them, not their husbands who also obviously played a significant role in conception: “They always getting pregnant; Always ! #MaryMary.” Another viewer said: “RT @Rachel_Retro: #MaryMary needs to just get a couple of IUDs or something! Fertile asses...” The sisters’ pregnancies sometimes affected their ability to work and that fact seemed to

frustrate their manager and the audience: “That white man gave the look like these heffas can't keep they legs closed #MaryMary.” When Tina had a conversation with her mother about her fears of having the energy to raise another child and balance marriage and her career, some of the audience criticized her mother, Honey Atkins, who raised 14 children and gave birth to nine, for having so many children, as she attempted to give her daughter encouragement and advice. They also criticized Tina for asking for advice: “Tina is complaining to her mother like someone forced her on her back. You decided to have a Brady Bunch on your own.” As the sisters’ bodies transformed through their pregnancies some viewers still expected them to maintain red carpet-ready bodies: “I hope Mary Mary is watching #MaryMary & realize they need to be up in the gym workin' on they #fitness. Preggo or no.” Viewers saw Erica pregnant throughout the season and that fact in her life that seemed to bore some viewers: “I'm ready for Erica to have this baby! I'm so tired of seeing her pregnant. #MaryMary.” The audience appreciated seeing loving images of black nuclear families but some viewers held misogynistic views about pregnancy being a burden to families for which women are solely responsible.

Love for family

The data shows that the audience admired the kindness and compassion shown throughout the Campbell sisters’ nuclear and extended families. The program reveals three generations of the family interacting lovingly among one another from the sisters’ strong bond, the sisters’ friendship with their parents, and the sisters’ relationship with their children. One viewer praised the intergenerational love in the family: “I love their family dynamic #marymary.” Another viewer appreciated the way the family portrayed the realities of family life: “Loving #MaryMary Real women, real family, real issues, and REALLY serving GOD! #LOVEBUTTON.” Erica and Tina work together as Mary Mary but they are also close with

their other sisters, who viewers saw them interact with at family functions. One of their sisters, Goo Goo, is their stylist and other sisters sometimes perform with them as background singers. One viewer tweeted: “I love the bond between the #marymary sisters @therealmarymary.” Another wished she could have sisters to have such a close relationship with them: “I love watching #marymary makes me wish I had sisters! :(” The same strong bond that exists among the sisters extends to their children who are growing up together and are extremely close: “u can tell tina and Erica's kids are really close as cousins...they screamin when they see each other #marymary : -).” The sisters also have a great relationship with their parents who provide their daughters with advice and encouragement: “Yall have the best parents! #MaryMary.” Another viewer found their father Eddie Atkins’ comments on marriage and sex to be: “Hilarious!!!! @therealmarymary Dad is hilarious so funny! #marymary.” When Tina talked to her mother about the pressures of motherhood, viewers were touched: “watching #marymary that scene with Tina and her mom made me tear up!!” and “Momma Atkins is a great source of strength for her girls. #MaryMary @WEtv.” Viewers got to see Tina have the same kind of relationship with her own daughter: “awwhhh i love the lil talk Tina just had with her big gurl(: #MaryMary.” Viewers particularly enjoyed seeing the Campbell sisters share heartwarming moments with their children, including bedtime rituals: “ That was great watching the family have prayer before bedtime.” WE TV already had a successful reality show starring black women sisters who are singers, *Braxton Family Values* featuring Grammy award winner Toni Braxton and her sisters, and viewers made comparisons between the relationships of the two families: “#marymary trumps braxton family values ... because they actually have family values [0.7.8].” Another viewer said: “The #marymary momma has so much more sense than Evelyn

#bfv.” Another viewer tweeted: “#marymary Wow a reality show mom who's NOT nuts! Refreshing! Thats Honey!”

Infidelity and disloyalty

During season three of *Mary Mary* the audience’s conversation about family turned to infidelity, loyalty in business, and sympathy for the family after the death of their father. Tina’s husband Teddy Campbell admitted to having several affairs while he was married. Viewers found his infidelity reprehensible and especially the details. There were multiple affairs and one was with a close family friend: “Teddy could've kept that to himself... Or just tell your wife in private not on tv bruh #MaryMary.” Another viewer said: “How does one have "countless" affairs? At what point do you stop counting? #MaryMary.” Tina wondered if her demanding schedule as a singer and her frequent travel across the country and sometimes the globe caused her husband to cheat on her, but some viewers wouldn’t allow her to blame herself for his actions: “Idk why these black women are blaming their self and careers for their man cheating.Same with Gabrielle Union.” Around the same time actress Gabrielle Union and her then-boyfriend NBA player Dwayne Wade broke up briefly and he fathered a child during the weeks the couple was apart. Another viewer said: “Teddy would be cheating whether Tina's in the country or out of the country. Girl, live you life, let that fool go.” Teddy Campbell worked on winning his wife back and he eventually did: “Thank you for accepting me back & for allowing me to prove to you that you can trust me again” @TeddyCampbell #MaryMary.” Some viewers applauded the couple’s decision to stay together after Teddy’s multiple affairs: “Alright ninja don't mess up again!!!!!! Lol praise the Lord saints! #restoration #marriagerocks #MaryMary.” As Tina coped with her husband’s infidelity, her sister Erica admitted that her husband was also unfaithful. One viewer lamented the difficulties the sisters experienced in their relationships:

“Goo's ex used her. Alana's wasn't ready. Tina's cheating & Erica's husband is controlling & ugly. No hope. #MaryMary.”

As Tina struggled with the pain of her husband's affairs, her sister Erica wanted to continue to perform. Erica is married to Warryn Campbell, the owner of the record label that Mary Mary is signed to and he is the group's producer. Warryn wants to push Mary Mary outside of the genre of gospel and more toward mainstream audiences. He wanted the group to continue to play music festivals and venues that gospel artists ordinarily didn't, even as Tina dealt with troubles in her marriage. When Tina wanted to decrease working, Warryn suggested that his wife record a single and continue to perform as a solo artist. Because the sisters are so close, viewers saw the discord between the two as a lack of loyalty at a vulnerable time. “I think Erica's husband doesn't care much about Tina or her situation. He's trying to help Erica win at all costs.” Another viewer said: “Erica Husband speaks out of both sides of his mouth. He's throwing the rock and hiding his hand.” While Erica expressed a desire to keep working she also expressed a reluctance to disappoint her sister and viewers noticed that: “Erica doesn't wanna leave the group, it's husband and manager :-(#MaryMary.” One viewer believed Warryn cared more about his wife's career than his sister-in-law's pain: “so warren cheated on erica too!! well goddamn and all you worried about is erica brand #marymary.” Some viewers believed Tina's marital problems seemed to affect her business relationships: “Tina seems like she is taking out all of her marital problems on Mitchel... You should be more upset with no good Teddy! #MaryMary.” When Erica mentioned that their manager didn't attend an event, viewers turned the tables on her and her babies: “Erica yall get pregnant every week dont act like yall show up for everything #marymary.” The theme of negativity toward the women's pregnancy resurfaced

with another viewer, “Wait. This the first season that neither Tina or Erica is pregnant #MaryMary.”

During season three the sisters’ father Eddie Atkins died. The cameras were at his funeral, which was a traditional black church homegoing service with music and happy tributes about his life. Viewers empathized with the Atkins and Campbell families: “Not easy to see the pain in everyone's faces. A celebration of life can still be heartbreaking. #MaryMary.” The audience also expressed their sympathy to the family after their significant loss: “We want to give our condolences to the entire family of @therealmariymary. #MaryMary.”

Viewers are thankful for the realistic and nonstereotypical image of black families that *Mary Mary* provides. However, they seem to want portrayals of black families to remain traditional and almost perfect. The audience welcomes images of the black nuclear family but it is also protective of them.

Basketball Wives LA

Family was also a theme on *Basketball Wives LA* and viewers expressed a lot of judgment toward women for being unmarried, unfaithful and what they perceived to be as unfit mothers. During season one 8 percent of the tweets were related to family issues and 15 percent were in season three. Even though the show is named *Basketball Wives LA*, only a few of the women on the show were married to current or former NBA players. The other women on the show are former current or former girlfriends of NBA players and some of the men have fathered children with them. One viewer noted that the one of the few married women on the show is an instigator of guerrilla girlfriends behavior: “I hate jackie I hope they do kick her off the show #BBWLA even tho she is the only wife.” Jackie and Doug Christie have been married for about 20 years and they’ve renewed their vows every year, a tradition that many viewers found

annoying: “fuck this wedding shit yo! @VH1 y’all are killing #BBWLA with this fucking wedding!!!!!! We don't care, show us something else!” Another viewer wondered why her husband continued to go through the pomp and circumstance of a wedding every year: “..why Is Doug Christie allowing this #BBWLA.” When women were in long-term relationships with basketball players and they weren’t married, they were criticized. Imani Showalter was judged by viewers for having an almost 10-year engagement to a basketball player that didn’t result in marriage: “Imani needs to atop talking. You were a jumpoff and then a fiancee for 9 years. WTH? #bbwla.” Another viewer had scathing criticism for her: “How the Fuck @lamMelissalmani gon call @DrayaFace “Worthless” and a Nigga left her at the ALTAR? Bitch Please! #basketballwivesla.” Viewers questioned why Gloria Govan and Matt Barnes (who was playing for the Los Angeles Lakers during season one of the show), who have been a couple for several years and have two sons together, aren’t married: “Yall love each other so much but aint married #LyingAss #BBWLA.” Another viewer said: “Gloria, that’s a bunch of bull. You are ready to have kids but not ready for marriage? Chile boo... #bbwla.” One viewer suggested that the decision to marry was not Gloria’s at all and Matt didn’t find her worthy of marriage: “Girl Boo! You're not "ready” to get married, b/c he doesn't wanna marry your ass! #SitYoAssDown.” Season one viewers of the show seemed to apply respectability to relationships that were legalized through marriage and when women weren’t married, viewers saw that as a character flaw.

Similarly, when viewers believed cast members of *Basketball Wives LA* were unfit mothers they made it clear with harsh critiques of the women. A major part of the season one storyline was allegations of child neglect involving Draya Michele and her 7-year-old son. The story that circulated within their social circle was that Draya Michele allegedly left her son at

home alone in a messy house with microwave meals and he allegedly called 911 because he was hungry. Draya Michele maintained that the allegations were false and when her son is not with her he is with his grandmother. But the damage was done. The allegations tainted her reputation among the cast and viewers: “Now Draya...if u did this u need ur ass beat! Kids come first! #basketballwivesla.” Another viewer said: “#BasketballwivesLA I cant even be cool with a deadbeat mom... We pride ourself in too many ways to be alright with them! #disgusting.” One viewer said: “Its a shame that the most likeable person on #bbwla is the child neglecting stripper/groupie.” Imani Showalter was the cast member that was most critical of Draya Michele. But viewers also criticized her for allegedly not being the custodial parent of one of her children: “They feeding Imani this BS and she left her first child with his grandparents just to get a NBA player #BasketballWivesLA.” One viewer tweeted: “Imani act like she don’t have one of her kids!!! They bitch not raising her oldest son #BasketballWivesLA.” Another viewer found Imani Showalter’s criticism of Draya Michele’s parenting to be ironic: “Imani’s got some nerve judging someone about their parenting when she's got skeletons in her own closet. #baskethallwivesla.” After Laura Govan’s relationship ended with NBA star Gilbert Arenas during season one (the couple later reconciled), she moved to Los Angeles and had to make the adjustment to single parenthood and a diminished standard of living. Some in the social television audience condemned her for not being able to maintain the aesthetics of an NBA lifestyle: “4 Kids . . 2 Bedrooms ? We Gotta Do Better Laura ! QUICK ! #BasketBallWivesLA.” She was also rumored to have had an affair with Shaquille O’Neal when he was still married. Viewers criticized her for allegedly being involved with a married man but a specific stigma was placed on her for being a mother and being sexual: “LAURA GOT 4 KIDS?! WTF?! SO SHE

HAD 3 AND STILL SLEPT AROUND WITH SOMEBODY HUSBAND?! SMH

#BasketballWivesLA.”

Respectable relationships, moral mothers

The topics of motherhood and the legitimacy of relationships were again discussed by viewers during season three of *Basketball Wives LA*. In season one Draya Michele was judged for her mothering but during season three, criticism turned to new cast member Sundry Carter, former girlfriend of NBA player Larry Hughes. Pictures of Carter’s teenaged daughter performing oral sex circulated on the Internet. Early in the season cast members questioned Carter about it and viewers questioned her parenting: “I just turned to #BBWLA to hear some woman talking about a picture of her daughter's face next to some man's penis? That's enough. Already.” Later in the season during an argument Carter talked about Draya Michele’s old child neglect allegations and viewers thought that was ironic because they felt Carter was neglectful in her parenting because of the sexual act daughter performed: “Sundy had no right to talk about Draya's son. But what has your daughter been up to lately? #BBWLA.” Another viewer tweeted: “Bitches are foul, Sundry wants to be front and center to someone else's pain but get mad when someone asks about ur hoe ass daughter #BBWLA.” Viewers didn’t have any criticism for the boy Carter’s daughter was intimate with or even her father and his parenting; all of their criticism was reserved for the girl and her mother for what was perceived as lewd behavior. When Jackie Christie’s daughter, Chantel, was rumored to be dating a couple of men, including Draya Michele’s then-boyfriend NFL player Orlando Scandrick, viewers saw this as promiscuity, a flaw, a disappointment to her mother and a failure of her mothering: “Every mothers worst fear is hearing that their daughter is getting passed around but Jackie has to accept that. #BBWLA.” But Draya Michele was applauded as a mother during season three as producers gave her more

airtime with her son: “I like seeing Draya in mommy mode. It's endearing. #BBWLA.” Another viewer was happy to see Draya Michele nurturing her son: “now y'all can stop talking about Draya & her son...looks like she got it on lock #BBWLa.” But she still faced some criticism: “Draya is not only having a 6 MONTH anniversary but she moved her son into her boyfriend's house. Y'all hoes are crazy. #BBWLA.”

Baby mama versus wife

Viewers lashed out at season three newcomer Ariane Williams, the former fiancée of NBA player DeShawn Stevenson who has two children with him, when she resisted Draya Michele calling her Stevenson’s “baby mama,” a term that is sometimes a pejorative used for black mothers who are unmarried and is sometimes applied to black married mothers. One viewer tweeted: "I CONSIDER MYSELF THE MOTHER OF HIS KIDS... AIN'T THAT THE SAME THING AS A BABY MAMA? GURL STOP SUGAR COATING #BBWLA.” Another viewer used the term to diminish Williams’ relationship with Stevenson because they weren’t married: “Baby mama Mother of his kids #BitchThatsTheSameDamnThang #YouNotAWife I can't with these new chicks SMDH #BBWLA.” The idea of marriage as a barometer of legitimacy carried throughout season three. During that season, three new cast members were added to the show and only one, Brandi Maxiell, was married. Viewers again complained that women were cast on a show called *Basketball Wives LA* when they are not actually married to basketball players but they were delighted when a married woman joined the program: “Yes another actual basketball wife and not a girlfriend, ex-fiancé, or ex-girlfriend #BBWLA.” The women’s relationship status was stigmatized as well as their daughters’ sexual choices; moreover, the women faced criticism for not heavily policing their daughters’ sexual activities.

In summary, during seasons one and three of *Mary Mary* and *Basketball Wives LA* viewers had a lot to say about the way that black families were portrayed. There was gratitude for seeing all members of black families present in one another's lives loving one another and interacting with one another with affection on *Mary Mary*. But there was also disapproval among viewers when members of those families seemed to threaten the family structure with actions of disloyalty. Viewers also expressed disdain for families that did not fit into the traditional nuclear family structure. The single and unmarried mothers on *Basketball Wives LA* were criticized for heading their households and for any perceived indiscretions from their children. But the fathers of their children escaped criticism and were almost never mentioned. Black social television viewers of both shows seem to want to safeguard the image of the nuclear black family and shield it from negativity.

Table 1. Tweets and themes from *Mary Mary* seasons one and three

Themes	MARYMARY3		MARYMARY 1	
Negative sentiment	279	17%	147	4.91%
Mary Mary songs	94	6.07%	55	
Christ morality gospel music	53	3.93%	160	6.22%
Family/motherhood/ Marriage	104	7.5%	352	12.35%
Positive sentiment	204	11.87%	467	13.12%
Cast	119	7.14%	231	6.73%
Show	85	5.1%	230	7.10%
Looks	10	.64%	5	.12%
Social celebrity gratification interaction	112	7.61%	101	3.92%
Reality show production conventions	13	.79%	15	.71%
Other reality show mentions	22	1.61%	18	.86%
Stereotypes	0	0	8	.28%
Hair	6	.24%	34	1.10%
Age	0	0	0	0
Resistance to stereotypes	0	0	24	1.07%
Size	1	.05%	30	1.02%
Ads/brands/events	11	.91%	2	.09%
Social TV mentions	50	3.64%	174	6.96%
Identification	44	2.85%	35	1.41%

Note. Some tweets were coded in multiple themes.

Table 2. Tweets and themes from *Basketball Wives LA* seasons one and three

Themes	BBWLA3		BBWLA1	
Negative sentiment	352	47.8%	1021	52.5%
Guerrilla girlfriends	160	21.45%	204	19.9%
Disparaging sexuality	137	18.3%	49	4.79%
Family/motherhood/ Marriage	110	14.75%	86	8.41%
Positive sentiment	81	10.86%	267	13.69%
Violence	76	10.19%	25	2.44%
Looks	56	7.51	93	9.09%
Social celebrity gratification interaction	52	6.97%	107	10.46%
Reality show production conventions	52	6.97%	87	8.5%
Intelligence/grammar/class	32	4.29%	29	2.83%
Other reality show mentions	32	4.29%	78	2.83%
Stereotypes	28	3.75%	26	2.54%
Hair	25	3.35%		
Age	23	3.08%	80	7.82%
Resistance to stereotypes	4	.54%	7	.68%
Size	3	.4%	15	1.47%
Ads/brands/events	12	1.61%	2	.2%

Note. Some tweets were coded in multiple themes.

CHAPTER 7: FRIENDSHIP AND FAITH

In this study specific themes emerged from the social television conversation that were unique to each show's viewers. *Basketball Wives LA* revolves around the friendships of women who consistently bicker and fight with one another. Those frequent clashes and the violence that results from them were discussed among the social television audience. *Mary Mary* follows the lives of the gospel singings sisters and their lives on and off stage. Their faith and morality play a significant role in their lives and the way that viewers perceive them. This chapter will explore the ways that viewers discussed friendships and faith on both shows.

Guerrilla girlfriends

The constant bickering and backstabbing that occurs among women cast members of *Basketball Wives LA* is a theme that viewers discussed often with disapproval and disappointment. This common occurrence of phony friendships among women on reality television shows is a social connection I call guerrilla girlfriends – fragile, fleeting, fake and feud-filled relationships among women on reality television that are maintained through manufactured social gatherings and gossip, and result in chaos and sometimes physical violence. During season one 20 percent of the tweets were related to guerrilla girlfriends behavior and 21 percent in season three. Viewers of the show often criticized the lack of genuine, supportive friendships among the women. Their relationships mirrored other volatile and combative relationships among women on reality television shows. This middle-aged mean girls formula for female relationships with women who have loose social circle connections, appear to friends and enemies at the same time and verbally (and sometimes physically) annihilate one another is common across many reality television shows. The verbal and physical altercations on *Basketball Wives LA* illustrate this guerrilla-like behavior. The tweets show the audience's

disdain of pitting women against one another, although some delight in consuming entertaining and voyeuristic violence. A season one viewer noted the high volume of menacing behavior and aggression on the show and equated it to another reality show, *Bad Girls Club*, which debuted in 2008 and features “tough girls” who live in a house together and regularly engage in fist fights and profanity-laced shouting matches on camera: “#BasketballWivesLA is the ADULT version of #BadGirlsClub =).” The viewer’s statement about *Basketball Wives LA* and *Bad Girls Club* illustrates the audience’s recognition of and producers’ reliance on the guerrilla girlfriends concept in reality television.

Viewers recognized that part of the reality show production process is creating and maintaining tension among women. *Basketball Wives LA* is a spin-off show of the Vh1 reality program *Basketball Wives* produced by and starring Shaunie O’Neal, the former wife of NBA great Shaquille O’Neal. *Basketball Wives*, which was set in Miami and aired for five seasons from April 2010 to October 2013, was highly criticized for portraying bullying and violence among women of color. The Los Angeles version of the show, which starred Gloria Govan who appeared on the original show and is the girlfriend of NBA player Matt Barnes and the mother of his two sons, followed the frenemies formula of *Basketball Wives*. Viewers of the original *Basketball Wives* who also watched the first season on *Basketball Wives LA* immediately noticed the format of jealousy and sabotage during the first season of the new show. One viewer said during season one of *Basketball Wives LA*: “#Draya just won’t mix well with these chics. Period. They just threw her in there for the drama Just like Royce.” Draya Michele became an original cast member of *Basketball Wives LA* partially because she had high-profile relationships with some celebrities including an NBA player. She quickly became the subject of ridicule and criticism by the women on the show just as Royce Reed, the former girlfriend of NBA stars

Dwight Howard and the mother of his son, was on *Basketball Wives*. Reed, also a former dancer for the Miami and Orlando NBA teams, was among the youngest, most attractive and physically fit members of the Miami cast, as is Draya Michele on the Los Angeles show. Reed was a popular character because she was often at the center of disputes, she strongly defended herself and she is attractive. Producers found similar qualities in Draya Michelle and the audience noticed the similarities in casting and conflict. One *Basketball Wives LA* viewer said during season one: “Draya on #basketballwivesla is gorgeous. I really like her. She must be to La what Royce is to Miami. The gurls stay hatin LOL.” Another viewer of the first season of the show noticed how Draya Michele’s past romantic and family relationships were judged just as Reed’s were: “@MmmKay_OhhKay” @RomanSlayys #Draya Is The Royce This Season She’s Getting Judged Off Her Past.” Viewers noticed a pattern across the *Basketball Wives* franchise of casting a young, attractive woman, parading her vulnerabilities and placing her in a situation to be attacked by other women in social situations.

The similarities of the guerrilla girlfriends' behavior on *Basketball Wives LA* appeared to the viewers to be manufactured through producer’s attempts to make associations between the spin-off and original shows. Producers seemed to duplicate the social structure from *Basketball Wives*, extended a storyline from the original show and even had a member of the original show appear on the spin-off show. On the original *Basketball Wives* the show’s producer Shaunie O’Neal was the ringmaster among the circle of wives and girlfriends of NBA players. She was rarely the subject of criticism and often sat in judgment of other women on the show, sitting in silence as they were berated and even participating in the berating, especially of Gloria Govan who she aggressively questioned about rumors of Govan’s sister being sexually involved with O’Neal’s husband while they were married. The Miami cast treated Govan rudely. When

Basketball Wives LA launched, she seemed to be framed in the ringmaster role of that cast and in turn was judgmental toward others. Season one viewers noticed this and criticized her: “Gloria On #BasketballWivesLA Need 2 Stay In Ha LANE! She Wasn't Ish On #BasketballWives Nw She On Da West Coast & Thank She Runnin Thangs!”

Suzie Ketcham, the ex-wife of former NBA player Michael Olowokandi, is a cast member of the original *Basketball Wives* show and she often repeated statements to other cast members that frequently started verbal and physical fights. Ketcham was known as an instigator on her show and when she appeared on the first season of *Basketball Wives LA* viewers condemned her appearance because they believed she was deliberately put on the show to cause confusion among the members. One viewer said: “Right! Her ass n this crossover episode about to start some shit SAM RT @MissterRay: Suzie -_0 #BBWLA.” Another viewer said: “Wtf is Suzie doing... Probably spreading lies #basketballwivesla.” Noticing a theme of gossip on both shows, a season one viewer questioned if Ketcham’s appearance on the Los Angeles show was simply for later fodder for the Miami show: “#BasketballWivesLA why is blabber mouth Suzie on here? She just need somethin 2 gossip about when she get back to the crew of #BBWmiami.” One viewer, knowing that Ketcham’s chatter was sometimes the source of arguments on the Miami show, knew that her appearance on the Los Angeles spin-off show was not a positive thing for the women and their social circle: “WAIT! They have loose lips Suzie on #BasketBallWivesLA OH HELL NO!”

Viewers also believed that some of the friction among the women on *Basketball Wives LA* was based on their appearance and judgments about their past. Draya Michele suffered a lot of criticism from the cast and she was a target for a lot of guerrilla girlfriends antics from the cast during the first season. Viewers believed that was because other women were jealous of her.

Early in the season one viewer stated: “these hoes are automatically gonna hate on Draya because she's pretty.” Later in the season as Draya Michele began to be criticized by more and more by cast members, one viewer surmised that the growing tide of hatred toward her was because of her perceived attractiveness: “RT @Mz_Lashayla: All dem ugly ass bitches hatin on #draya cus she look better than em...#jealousyGetsUNoWhere.” Another viewer suggested that two women who were at the center of verbal melees and physical altercations, Draya Michele and Malaysia Pargo the ex-wife of NBA star Jannero Pargo, were targeted because they are perceived as attractive: “Draya & Mylaysia are the most hated on, but both are the prettiest!! #BasketballWivesLA.”

Viewers also recognized the guerrilla girlfriends' behavior among the cast in terms of the extreme judgment that cast members thrust on one another. After cast members learned that Draya Michele used to be a stripper she was highly criticized. The seemingly endless negative conversations about her stripping, behind her back and in her presence, wore thin on some audience members: “Who gives a damn if Draya was a stripper!! Let her make her paper dammit!! #BasketballWivesLA.” Some cast members became more intrigued by Draya Michele’s past, searched for information about her on Google and found that she was suspected of neglecting her young son. Later at a session with a life coach, each woman was asked to write an adjective to describe others in the group and they discussed why they perceived that quality in that person. Imani Showalter wrote that Draya Michele was “worthless” because of her stripper past and accusations of neglectful motherhood. Draya Michele was hurt by that description. Showalter experienced a lot of backlash online on black entertainment blogs and from viewers on Twitter: “Omg! (o_0) Who the hell called this girl worthless? *points* IMANI #BBWLA.” Another viewer lamented how vicious and hurtful the “worthless” description was along with the

other negative adjectives the cast member used to describe her: “These females are nothing but piranhas!! #BasketballWivesLA.” Several members of the cast talked about Draya Michele in hurtful ways so often that viewers noted how central that criticizing her became to the plot of the show: “Without Draya, obviously, their would be no show because she is always the topic of discussion #BBWLA!” Although Draya Michele was the target of the guerilla girlfriends behavior she never engaged in it with others and a viewer noticed that: “I don't understand y they are even mad at her...she really has been nothing but nice and respectful to them smh #BBWLA.” One viewer felt sorry for her and spoke to her directly and offered a Bible scripture for encouragement: “.@DrayaFace its fuckd up how the other #bbwla cast hate on u despite ur constant efforts 2 get along. blessed r the persecuted matthew 5:10.” One viewer summed it up saying: “These women are so superficial and judgmental! #BasketballwivesLA.”

A couple of cast members explained what it felt like to be at the focus of guerilla girlfriends attacks. Even though the episodes of the show that air on television are taped several months before they are broadcast, when cast members viewed episodes and tweeted about the show along with the audience they revealed how hurtful it was to be in those combative situations. Draya Michelle saw early in the season that she was an outcast. During one episode the audience saw Gloria Govan introduce Draya Michele to others in the cast (Laura Govan, Imani Showalter and Jackie Christie) at a paintball game park. At the park the women talked about Draya Michele as she walked toward them and in their confessionals they discussed their initial impressions of her, which were negative, just after they saw her for a few moments. Before Draya Michele arrived Imani Showalter said, “This is a good thing to invite her to because if we don’t like her we can just blast on her ass.” Showalter proceeded to ask her if she used to be a stripper and judged her in front of the other women. Jackie Christie asked Draya

Michele if she was a “jump-off,” a woman who may have a sexual relationship with men who are married or in a committed relationship. During the same Sept. 5, 2011 episode Draya Michele was called “worthless” and when it broadcast she tweeted: “This must be the “everybody hates Draya episode”.... Hope it gets better.” Malaysia Pargo also gave the show’s social television audience some insight into how she felt about the ways in which cast members treated her friend Draya Michele. Later in the season some cast members got together, Googled her and found a report about her allegedly neglecting her son and leaving him home alone with microwave dinners. All of the women, except Pargo, knew that they were meeting for drinks to confront Draya Michele about the allegations. The cast members ambushed her, hurled profane insults and accusations at her as she struggled to explain, through tears, that the police report and the allegations were fabricated and the journalist who reported the story was fired. Draya Michele cried as Pargo comforted her. On Oct. 3, 2011 Pargo felt her friend’s pain and tweeted: “Wow!!!It’s funny how you think you know but when u see it .it hurt more... :o(“ While many aspects of reality television are constructed and contrived, the fallout of some of the guerrilla girlfriends behavior on the shows is really real and really hurtful.

During season three of the show the guerrilla girlfriends behavior continued to have a strong presence on the show and viewers continued to condemn it. Once again Jackie Christie was a chief instigator behind a number of the conflicts with the women and during season three she confronted Draya Michele about her new boyfriend who was rumored to be dating Christie’s daughter at the same time. Viewers blasted Christie for blowing the rumor out of proportion and for being so confrontational with Draya Michele who she once tried to mentor: “Jackie shld be ashamed of herself. In the middle of an argument with her daughter and another woman 50 yrs younger. Something's off. #BBWLA.” Some viewers wondered if Christie’s constant

confrontations with Draya Michele, in which Christie's daughter Chantel accompanied her, were an effort to not only bully Draya Michele but also to gain more camera time for her daughter: "@JackieChristie got her daughter caught up in all this dumb ish just for another five min #BBWLA." Another viewer wondered if Chantel Christie was being combative with Draya Michele to angle for a position on the show: "I take it Chantel is trying to make a name for herself so she can be asked back for next season... Oh. #BBWLA." Viewers surmised the Jackie Christie made guerilla girlfriends behavior a family affair for spectacle.

During season three there were new cast members added to the show but there was the same old guerilla girlfriends behavior among the women. Sundy Carter, who had a child with NBA star Larry Hughes, knew that Brandi Maxiell, wife of NBA star Jason Maxiell, had cancer and was struggling with infertility. During an argument Maxiell called Carter stupid and Carter yelled, "Go try and make a baby, I have three." Viewers were livid about the infertility insult and tweeted about it in high volume: "#ByeSundy trending #9 as viewers dismiss her infertility comment to Brandi on #BBWLA #BlackSocialTV." One viewer tweeted: "Callin someone Stupid is not ah low blow, but tellin someone go make babies when they had Cancer is ah Low Blow #BBWLA." Another viewer said: "@SUNDYCARTER is nothing but trash for bringing up that girls cancer smh. That's so childish and ugly smh. Disappointment #BBWLA."

During season three Draya Michele continued to be the focus of insults and anger. New cast member Sundy Carter brought up an old and hurtful subject for Draya Michele during an argument, the welfare of her young son, and Carter dared her to hit her and Draya Michele punched her in the face. Viewers felt that Carter provoked Draya Michele: "Everybody really be coming for Draya & she don't be saying shit at all lol #BBWLA." Another viewer believed the

violence that Draya Michele committed on Carter was justified: “See what happens who you throw drinks...your eye gets blackened #bbwla.”

Over time viewers of *Basketball Wives LA* not only noticed the negative guerrilla girlfriends behavior cast members exhibited toward one another during seasons one and three of the show, they also condemned it. Starting in season one viewers noticed that many of the arguments among the women were trite and could have been avoided: “Bunch of unnecessary misunderstandings #BasketballWivesLA.” A season three viewer noticed that the verbal and physical conflicts became excessive over time: “OMG this is just ridiculous how many times y'all gone fight? #BBWLA.” Another viewer, who seemed to be a fan of the drama of reality shows, even seemed to grow tired of the conflict by the third season of the show: “It done got harder for me to watch #BBWLA this season. The show got all these women acting so messy...even for me.” Guerrilla girlfriends is a friendship structure that is pervasive throughout reality television programming and it is a plot device with which television viewers in this study appear to be fed up and frustrated.

Violence

While social television viewers of *Basketball Wives LA* in this study denounced the guerrilla girlfriends behavior, they often rationalized the violence that resulted from it and perceived the women as defending themselves against attacks. Only two percent of the tweets in season one were coded under the violence theme but in season three 10 percent of the tweets were coded in that category. The first episode of the first season of the show began with a fight. While out with other cast members, Laura Govan and Malaysia Pargo started to argue on the rooftop of a restaurant and the heated discussion quickly turned violent. Viewers saw Govan push Pargo, then Pargo punched Govan in the face, hit her with her shoe and the two women

rolled on the floor and fought as some cast members and producers rushed to break up the fight. Govan, who gave birth three weeks earlier, exhibited aggression toward Pargo and viewers didn't have much sympathy for her: "Laura talked all that shit and got her mouth busted lmao! Malaysia ain't no punk. I like her. #bbw LA." Another viewer connected her aggression to her size: "Laura is mean. Just because your hefty doesn't mean u can have fantasies of beating on small women." Govan later revealed to cast members that she was struggling with adjusting to single motherhood and a breakup after giving birth. Later in the season when the cast went on a fitness outing at a mixed martial arts gym, Govan said in a confessional interview that she heard Draya Michelle talked about her and her children. When the two got into the boxing cage together to learn and practice techniques, Govan aggressively pounded on Draya Michelle as cast members stood outside of the cage with shocked looks on their faces. A viewer believed the best punishment for Govan's violence against cast members was more violence:

"#BasketballWivesLA is so weak. I wanna cut Laura from ear to ear. That bish needs a beatdown. Nobody likes a bully you fat hoe." Season one viewers also believed that Jackie Christie should be punished with violence for being the source of gossip that led to arguments and confrontations: "Jackie deserves a beat down. Turned every single one of them girls on each other. #BBWLA." Another viewer noted the violence that occurs across reality television shows that feature women of color on the Vh1 network and alluded to a vicious brawl between two *Love & Hip Hop* stars: "Jackie need a chrissy beat down #basketballwivesLa #Love&Hip Hop."

During season three of *Basketball Wives LA* the theme of violence and retribution continued among viewers. Arguments and physical violence were again a part of the show and the result from guerrilla girlfriends interactions. Draya Michele got into a fight with new cast member Sundry Carter after Carter made a negative remark about Draya Michele's son and dared

Draya Michele to hit her. Carter suffered a swollen black eye. Some viewers believe Draya Michele was justified for hitting Carter because Carter crossed the line by talking about children. One viewer wrote: “U can't talk about somebody's kid in their face and expect them not to hit you. You just can't. #BBWLA.” Another said: “Sundy disrespected Draya son she better beat her face in!!!! #BBWLA.” One viewer spoke directly to Draya Michele saying: “I'm sorry but she deserved that black eye; @DrayaFace I'm sorry you have so many haters BUT your strong & gorgeous . #BBWLA #ThatCounts.” However, some viewers seemed to exhibit some sympathy toward Carter whose eye was blackened and swollen. One viewer noted: “That black eye on Sunday keeps getting worse. #BBWLA #bballwivesla” and another said: “I can't even watch #BBWLA without looking at Sundy eye like OMG.” As Carter’s injury became more visible one viewer said: “Sundy's eye is the 8th Member of the #BBWLA cast right now.” Some viewers put the brawl between Carter and Draya Michele in context of the violence in the reality show genre. *The Basketball Wives* franchise has been criticized for guerilla girlfriends behavior and for broadcasting violence as spectacle. There was even a petition circulated in 2012 to take the original *Basketball Wives* off the air because of violent outbursts. One of the franchise producers and stars, Shaunie O’Neal, said efforts would be made to curb violence in the franchise. Viewers noticed that the entire fight between Draya Michele and Carter was not broadcast: “Malaysia jumped in that fight. Idc. They edited it out #BBWLA.” Another viewer who wanted to see the fight tweeted: “Vh1 betta show this damn fight #bbwla.” Another mentioned how such violence is shown on other reality programs: “Ugh I wish they would of showed the actual punch. Now if that was BGC, they would have. #BBWLA.” That fight had a lasting impact long after it aired on Vh1. Two years after the July 2013 fight, Carter said she has permanent eye damage, blurred

vision she now has to wear glasses and she filed a police report against Draya Michele and Malaysia Pargo, but it appeared that the one-year statute of limitations expired (TMZ, 2015).

Some of the arguments during these guerrilla girlfriends clashes include insults that are so malicious and hurtful that viewers understood why cast members reacted violently. When Carter made fun of Maxiell's infertility while she had cancer, viewers found that comment despicable and reprehensible and believed a violent reaction from Maxiell would be justified: "Sundy deserves to have another black eye.. #BBWLA." One viewer said: "I hope she gets to at least punch sundy #BBWLA or kick maybe even spit cause that comment was beyond mean." Another said: "So. We make fun of ppl with Cancer now? @BrandiMaxiell i would have stabbed that heaux @SUNDYCARTER #BBWLA." There was no violence between the women, just a heated argument. Viewers in this study seemed to criticize the behavior that provoked the violence among the women more than the actual violence itself. During seasons one and three of *Basketball Wives LA* viewers appear to have real disdain for cruel behavior that could have been prevented before it led to violence.

Christ/morality/gospel music

Viewers of *Mary Mary* often discussed online issues of Christianity, ministry, morality and gospel music while watching the show. The gospel-singing sisters often say on the show, at their concerts and in media interviews that they consider their music a ministry and viewers of their reality television program see the show as an extension of that ministry. The show was anticipated by their gospel music fans and church-going viewers and that was apparent in the social television conversation about the show: "Dat #MaryMary show is about to get in folks spirit. I'm wit it praise God." When the show aired viewers said they felt the sisters' spirituality through the television: "Almost caught the Holy Ghost listening to #marymary sing on their new

show! Lord hammercy! Yes I meant to type ham.” Another viewer was pleased to have portrayals of Christians on television: “Watched #MaryMary. Happy they have actually gave a christian show.” One viewer applauded the specific portrayal of an especially holy black church denomination: “Luvs #MaryMary ... Sanctified TV at its best!!!!” Another viewer felt inspired by the show and wanted to share it with others: “hope y'all tuned into @WEtv to see @therealmariymary new show it's a blessing.support my girls Please RT #teammariymary.” During the first season of the show the sisters discussed putting the group on hiatus and not performing as Mary Mary for a while. Many viewers, who see them as a source of inspiration, expressed sadness at the potential end of their encouraging music and messages: “#MaryMary ur ministry is on the forefront, no break up!!” Another viewer spoke directly to the sisters and urged them to lean on the power of prayer when they disagreed about the direction of their career: “Oh my Gosh ladies yall njust need to pray about it and let go and let God @TheRealMaryMary #MaryMary.”

Viewers also appreciated the Campbell sisters’ portrayal of Christians who are not perfect or seeking perfection. On the show the sisters and their families are often seen praying, singing and playing together: “Mary Mary shows everyone that Christians like to have fun, laugh, be sexy, etc. #MaryMary.” Erica and Tina Campbell have romantic interludes with their husbands and tender moments with their children, as well as difficult times with both: “I love the #marymary show. They are so real and don't put on a front. They're Christians that have real issues.” Viewers also seemed to appreciate the fact that balancing faith and fame can be difficult: “I love the #marymary show! They really show that Christianity and being famous is hard. But with God..all things are possible.”

While the Campbell sisters aim to use their lives and their music as an example of people who can love God, be involved with church and still live fulfilled lives, they are still held to extreme judgments. Some of the viewers, especially those who are born-again Christians, seemed to criticize the women for not being what they perceive as appropriate Christians. When Erica suggested having her sisters participate in what she thought was a fun aerobic workout of pole dancing, some of the show's social television viewers disapproved, and even Tina, the other sister who is the other half of the gospel duo, declined to participate in the pole dancing exercise because she believed she shouldn't because of her identity of a Christian woman and her position as a gospel singer. One viewer said: "Pole dancing #Marymary can bring bad connotations. It can make people question themselves. Tina and Erica love eachother but they can fuss!" Another viewer was disappointed that a reality show featuring Christians would even approach the topic of sex on the show: "Seems to me they need more ratings by adding sexual connotation. Tsk Tsk! @GetGlue #MaryMary." One viewer believed that because both sisters are married they could do things like pole dancing, but only within the respectable perimeters of marriage: "The bedroom is undefiled when ur married.....so some pole dancing is ok behind closed doors #marymary." Another viewer mirrored the respectability of marriage and pole dancing: "What wrong w/ them stripping or taking stripper classes? They married; Get freaky in Jesus #MaryMary." Other viewers believed that the judgment rooted in Christian beliefs was unfounded and not related to the women's salvation: "What does being saved have to do with pole exercising #MaryMary." Another viewer said: "Interesting debate on #MaryMary - to take a pole class or not?? I did - twice - and I'm still saved. Lol!!" Other viewers believed that the criticism that the sisters faced from Christian viewers reflected stereotypes of them being too critical: "that's what wrong.. so called CHRISTIANS pass so much dang on judgment on

people... #maryMARY.” Another viewer said the judgment the sisters experienced from social television viewers throughout the first season was unkind and unfounded: “I was reading some of these tweets off the #MaryMary TT. Dang! The Saints can be mean sometimes.” But even when the social television audience is critical of the gospel-singing sisters they use church references. One viewer who criticized Erica’s hairline said: “@DollarMenuTweet: Erica's edges need some prayer oil and baptism. #MaryMary #Chuuxh.”

During season three of the show many of the viewers’ responses related to Christ and Christianity were prayers and messages of empathy and compassion for Tina Campbell as she coped with the pain of her husband’s multiple affairs. Tina often discussed how deeply she was wounded by the infidelity of her husband Teddy Campbell, who is the father of her four children. Tina frequently mentioned on season three (and four) that she was extremely depressed, angry and even had thoughts of committing violence. Viewers tapped into their faith and shared it with Tina:

“Tina, those are some really deep thoughts, very sad, praying for you #MaryMary.” Another viewer sent a digital prayer to God for her: “#MaryMary Lord touch her tina

..#leanontheLord...In the name of Jesus heal her spirit Lord @WEtv @therealmarymary.” The compassion for Tina continued from a viewer who tweeted:

“You never know how much pain someone is in when they are ministering. However GOD's got you, and he helps you press through #MaryMary.” While viewers believed prayers and faith would help her through, one viewer believed the heartache would help her be a stronger woman and musician: “tina said one of the affairs was with a family friend...one of...damn thats a good gospel album in the making #marymary.” Those faith-filled messages from the social television

audience provided a spiritual boost: “God finds new ways to bring us through the tough times every day! He’s lifting us through all of your tweets right now! #MaryMary.”

Viewers criticized the husbands on the show when they didn’t live up to expectations for Christian men during season three. Teddy Campbell, who cheated on his wife with multiple partners and is in a gospel group of his own, was chastised by viewers for being a Christian man who broke his vows: “ No man is perfect! But Teddy has been on stage singing about Jesus and cheating on his wife its crazy! #MaryMary.” Viewers also characterized Warryn Campbell’s actions as unbecoming of a Christian man because pushed for his wife to be a solo artist and leave the group while his wife’s sister struggled with balancing family life and a fractured marriage. One viewer believed he had been corrupted by the dark side of the music industry and tweeted a photo of him on his wedding day and compared it to his appearance today: “Warryn at one time was a handsome human.....see what happens when these folks sell they souls... Pic.twitter.com/UQNjOv7U6P.” Another believed that he was a heavy-handed producer and husband: “Warren is a Christian mix of Ike, Joe Jackson and Matthew Knowles. Writ that down #MaryMary.” One viewer lamented that Warryn wanted to move his wife’s career in too much of a worldly and less Christian direction: “Waryn REALLY wants Erica to be the gospel Beyonce! She gonna "surfboard" on the communion table? #BYE #MaryMary.”

Overall, viewers of *Mary Mary* seem to hold all of the cast members to a higher standard of morality than people who appear on other reality shows. The viewers’ responses show an appreciation of reflections of real Christians living their complicated and complex lives on television but they still want portrayals of Christians to maintain a wholesome image that aligns with the morality of Christianity.

Stereotypes

Reality television programs are often criticized for projecting stereotypes, particularly of women of color, and viewers in this study discussed reflections of flat images of the cast members of *Basketball Wives LA*, applauded the antithesis of stereotypes on *Mary Mary* and resisted social constructions of black women on both programs. While viewers' direct references to stereotypes in the data were infrequent, less than one percent for both seasons of *Mary Mary* and about 3 percent for both seasons of *Basketball Wives LA*, they still detected and discussed stereotypical images of women of color. In their social television conversations about both shows viewers discussed the presence and absence of stereotypes of women of color on these two reality shows and across television in general.

Basketball Wives LA: Seasons of stereotypes

On *Basketball Wives LA* some audience members rejected images that reflected black women as stereotypes. A season one viewer noted the criticism that surrounded the original *Basketball Wives* for projecting what many called negative images of black women and condemned the Los Angeles spin-off for doing the same: “#BasketballWivesLA is a disgrace after the bullshit from #basketballwivesmiami 4 more women 2 sign up is crazy.” Another viewer applauded cast members who ended up leaving before season one was completed for not being on a show that projected stereotypes of black women: “Anybody else notice that Kimsha and Tanya are no longer on Basketball Wives LA...not even in the credits...they the smart ones.” Another viewer urged others to boycott the show and opt for scripted television shows featuring African-Americans: “black people stop watching #basketballwivesla and watch #lovethatgirl on #tvone.” *Love That Girl* is a sitcom with a diverse cast that revolves around a young black woman and it airs on the black-owned cable television network TV One.

One viewer said they rejected *Basketball Wives LA*: "@SexyMeetsClassy: I refuse to watch #BBWLA! Does nothing for my life! #NEXT"exactly!" During season three of *Basketball Wives LA* some viewers noted what they saw as negative and stereotypical portrayals of women of color on the show and used those images as legitimate reasons to reject nonwhite women as romantic partners. One viewer said: "Women should GirlCott #BBW.. Reality TV & the Media Exposes Black Women and y'all SUPPORT the shit.. #ExactlyWhyImGoingRightIMeanWhite." Another viewer said: "If #BLACKWOMEN & #HISPANICWOMEN really acted like what's on #BASKETBALLWIVESLA I'd go get a White Woman too #LOL Yall got us looking bad man." In the social television conversation about *Basketball Wives LA* viewers identified stereotypes on the show, discussed them on Twitter and recognized how damaging those images are to women of color.

Black social television viewers detected stereotypical images of women of color during both seasons of *Basketball Wives LA*. Viewers, especially during season three, sometimes referred to the cast and the show with words such as ghetto, hood, ratchet and hoodrat; language that negatively refers to the intersection of gender, race and class in black women in a degrading way. One viewer said: "This season finna be so ghetto! #BBWLA." Another viewer mirrored that sentiment and tweeted: "These hoes straight hood! This season will be drama, drama, drama.. #BBWLA." The idea that the season three cast was uncouth and improper continued with one viewer who tweeted: "lol. THis season is full of immature minded hoodlums. smh. Their "men" are definitely babysitting their women. #BBWLA." Another referred to the show as "Ratchet tv #BBWLA." One viewer recognized that *Basketball Wives LA* was one of a plethora of shows starring black women that utilized gendered and racialized stereotypes: "I don't know which hoodrats I wanna watch tonight.. the #BGC or #BasketballWivesLA #CoonDecisions."

Other viewers made specific references to cast members and stereotypes they believed they embodied. Laura Govan is a Latina and an unmarried mother of four children. One viewer applied the stereotype of Latinas having multiple children to Laura and referred to her as: “A true Mexican 4kids Laura #BasketballWivesLA.” The idea that poor, working class and undereducated women are negative and have a specific look was applied to the wife of Metta World Peace (formerly known as Ron Artest) Kimsha Artest: “Ron Artest wife look like she makes the best Kool-Aid in the world... #basketballwivesla.” Specific stereotypes about class, race and gender of women of color were present on *Basketball Wives LA* and viewers noted them and mirrored them when they discussed the show.

Historically, stereotypes about the sexuality of women of color have been negative and the social television audience’s discourse about the *Basketball Wives LA* cast reflected some of those ideas. Thoughts about black women bartering their bodies for financial gain and of them lacking sexual morality were discussed among the black social television audience. The stereotype of the black woman gold digger is present in society and it was present in viewers’ conversations about the women on *Basketball Wives LA*. Some of the viewers referred to the women as groupies who transformed their relationships with basketball players purely for financial gain. During season one a viewer tweeted: “Lol women kill me with that groupie crap, how did you meet your husband?! Don't he play ball to? Lol #BasketballwivesLA.” Another viewer said: “#BasketballWivesLA IF u intimidated by so called "groupies" or "jumpoffs" u either was one or played the game to get where u are.” During season three new cast member Brittish Williams mentioned the stereotype that all men are cheaters, she accepted that but she didn’t want to know about any infidelity committed by her basketball player fiancée. A viewer believed Williams would overlook infidelity to maintain a financially beneficial relationship, not

because men could not resist sexual urges: “Brittish just loves the monetary benefits of dating a pro-athlete. That's why she don't care if her man cheats #BBWLA.”

Black women are viewed as having no control over their sexuality and perceived as exercising sexual control primarily for profit. That stereotype was discussed among black social television viewers of *Basketball Wives LA*. Viewers often referred to all of the women on the show with derogatory sexual terms; however, there was distinct criticism from the social television audience and the cast for Draya Michele who is single and associated with dating several celebrities and athletes. Strippers are stigmatized as being promiscuous and so was Draya Michele when the cast and the audience learned during season one that she used to be a stripper: “Those heffas called #Draya “worthless”? Because she slides on a pole? Again...THEY are groupies. #GlassHouses #BBWLA.” Another viewer tweeted: “they sluts... but draya gets called one cause she was on a pole #BasketballWivesLA.” In one viewer’s opinion the fact the she dated a lot of men and that was publicly known made her a whore: “Smh, like they don’t, even know Draya. All they know is her hoe game, WHICH she admitted.” During season three of the show Draya Michele still faced criticism for having a sexual history that was public. One viewer tweeted: “Draya used to be hoe . It's her past but she can't escape it . BTFOLLL #bbwla.” Another viewer indicated that she deserved to be disrespected for having a sexual history and told her so directly through Twitter: “Draya if yu didnt hoe yo self off maybe people would have respect for yu #BBWLA.” Draya Michele was perceived by viewers and the cast as the type of woman that other women should watch around their men. When rumors spread that Draya Michele’s boyfriend was unfaithful one viewer suggested the potential infidelity was deserved: “Draya got her eye on that man cause she used to be the hoe everybody else man was creeping with. The karma is coming back girl. #BBWLA.” An audience member also believed that Draya

Michele used sex to advance her career and financial status and condemned her for it: “Draya be acting like her Carside-To-Go coochie didn't get her where she is today #BBWLA.” Another viewer noted a societal double standard for black women who are stigmatized if they attempt to capitalize off of their sexuality and used Kim Kardashian, a reality television star who became known through sex tape with R&B singer Ray J., as an example of a woman who isn't black and built a career on sex and is able to be profitable and celebrated: “They keep bringing up @DrayaFacexo past life. They mad, shit kim K made whoring a life style. #BBWLA>.”

Stereotypes surrounding black women's sexuality are so complex and conflicting that they do not allow for much sexual autonomy among black women. Any sexual liberty that black women express is labeled and punished in society just as it was by the viewers of *Basketball Wives LA*.

While viewers of *Basketball Wives LA* watched the show they saw stereotypes of women being portrayed as catty and spiteful and they applied them to the cast. Stereotypes of women as disagreeable, gossipy and jealous that exist in society were portrayed on the show and the social media streams about the show. Multiple viewers tweeted that there was discord among the women because women cannot get along. During season three one viewer said: “This why I don't do a lotta females Way too much drama #BBWLA.” Another viewer tweeted: “That's the problem... Too many females around bring unnecessary drama! #BBWLA.” One viewer tweeted that the cast was portrayed as adult mean girls: “Lol these are some catty ass women! Everybody just stfu and drink damn it! #BBWLA.” One viewer believed that gossiping is an inherent trait among women: “#bbwla shows that females and gossiping still goes hand in hand even at age 60 thanks to Jackie ass.” Another viewer believed that women are jealous of one another's appearance and that was reflected in the cast's actions on the show: “RT @Ladysaboss: They jealous of the cute ones... Lol, just like some bishes. #BBWLA.” Stereotypes of women's

inability to get along with one another and support one another that were reflected on the show were also recycled among the social television audience.

Through the themes that are specific to *Basketball Wives LA* that emerged in this study, guerrilla girlfriends and violence, the black social television audience indirectly talked about stereotypes associated with women of color. The angry black woman who is prone to lashing out at people is a stereotype that is often used in mass media to portray black women (Ashley, 2014). The fiery Latina who is quick-tempered and exhibits erratic behavior is also common in mainstream media (Roman, 2000). These two racialized and gendered stereotypes of women of color are clearly shown through the incidents of the sabotaging guerrilla girlfriends behavior on the show that sometimes result in violence. Throughout the two seasons of *Basketball Wives LA* that were examined in this study, viewers discussed stereotypes about class, race, gender, sexuality and violence associated with women of color that they saw on the television screen on social media streams.

Mary Mary: The anti-reality show

During season one of *Mary Mary* viewers praised the show for presenting an image of black women that was contrary to the portrayals broadcast of women of color on other reality television programs. *Mary Mary* debuted in March 2012 when the television terrain included many shows such as the *Real Housewives of Atlanta*, *Love & Hip Hop* and *Basketball Wives* that were criticized for depicting black women as angry, violent, unintelligent and hypersexual. Viewers in this study found *Mary Mary* to be the opposite of those shows. One viewer welcomed *Mary Mary* to the television landscape because it deviated from the formula of black women, violence and anger: “This Positive Reality show is refreshing!!! I love #MARYMARY.” Another viewer said: “I hope We support #MaryMary as much as that other reality garbage

everyone always talks about. I'll be tuned in! #fb.” Another viewer hoped that others would vote to keep the show on the air by watching it: “#MaryMary all of these sisters are hilarious! I hope @therealmariemary continue with more seasons! Real people!” Viewers also noted the abundance of reality television shows with black cast members that also reflect a lot of stereotypical images: “Loving #mariemary!!! So nice to see a reality show that shows black ppl n a positive light.” One viewer recognized the dearth of reality shows that were without black women fighting one another and sabotaging one another: “Lovin' the positive image that shows like #mariemary and #braxtons are putting out about black women!” A season one viewer noted how chaos is a consistent force on reality shows and how that was absent on *Mary Mary*: “Finally a positive Reality Show without all that drama..two women walking in Christ #MaryMary.” Another viewer said that a reality show such as *Mary Mary* can attract an audience without using drama as a plot device to maintain viewers: “I love watching #MaryMary! It's entertaining without all the foolishness we usually see in other reality shows!!!!!!” Another viewer suggested that there is an audience for more shows like *Mary Mary* that are without bickering and backstabbing: “Luv luv #MaryMary - each Ep gets btr & btr! #morepositiverealitytvplease! (& trash the negative shows-realtalk!” When viewers saw black people on *Mary Mary* not living their lives in extremes they appreciated those images of black people on a reality show because they appear to be absent on other television programs in the genre.

On some of the other reality television programs with primarily black casts, couples and relatives are often engaged in physical and verbal fights, reflecting stereotypes of African-Americans as violent; however, on *Mary Mary* the audience saw different images that they applauded. Throughout season one of the show, Teddy and Tina Campbell confronted emerging

challenges in their marriage without aggression and viewers praised that: “#NW #MaryMary...love the way they show Tina and Teddy talking through their issues CALMLY ...not perpetuating stereotypes.” Other viewers echoed an appreciation for seeing black people debate with one another without viciously attacking one another: “black people disagreeing without cursing and violence! luv it #marymary.” Another viewer said: “Reality tv is the best without the profanity love #marymary.” Clashes among cast members are often present on reality shows with black casts but those images were not prominent on *Mary Mary*. During season one the baby shower for Erica and Warryn Campell’s daughter Zaya was a loving gathering with close family and friends in attendance showing affection toward one another and honoring the new life that was to come. One viewer noted how such a scenario on black reality television programs is not typical: “That was a nice baby shower. I like seeing black folks congregate like they have sense. #MaryMary.” Conflict resolution on reality shows with black people is often achieved through shouting matches and fistfights. Black social television viewers believed *Mary Mary*’s portrayals of black people solving conflicts amicably shattered stereotypes of black people being inherently aggressive and violent.

Audience detects direct and indirect stereotypes

The black social television audience’s online conversations about *Basketball Wives LA* and *Mary Mary* recognize stereotypes of black women in reality television. Viewers in this study acknowledge the stereotypes that are present of black women on *Basketball Wives LA* and across the reality television genre. Reality programs tend to portray women of color living their lives in extremes that exploit social constructions about their gender, race and class. The Twitter conversation about *Basketball Wives LA* in particular reflects stereotypical representations of women of color on social networks with the audience’s recognition of those images on that show

and the condemnation of them. Moreover, viewers of *Mary Mary* recognized the absence of stereotypes on that show and a more complex and multidimensional image of black women. Viewers noted the abundance of images on reality television programs, including *Basketball Wives LA*, that reinforce stereotypes of black women on television; moreover, those images find their way to social media streams through social television discussions. Interestingly, however, direct references to stereotypes did not emerge explicitly. However, the overall conversation the audience had about *Basketball Wives LA* in particular demonstrates that the audience saw stereotypical images in the guerilla girlfriends scenarios on the show as well as through violence.

Memes

A major difference in the results for both shows between seasons is the audience's creation of memes. During season three of *Mary Mary* and *Basketball Wives LA* the data showed that the black social television audience took their conversation beyond text and incorporated images to express their thoughts about the shows that they watched. The memes created by the audience included their interpretations of the actions on the show, allusions to other multicultural shows and films, and recitations of the events on the programs. There were no memes or photos present in the season one data for either of the shows. But those that were present in the season three data were diverse and reflected the viewers' impressions of events on the show.

The brawl between Draya Michelle and Sundry Carter spawned the highest volume of user-generated memes and the ones with the most creativity among the audience that watched season three of *Basketball Wives LA*. The two women engaged in a fistfight on the television screen and the audience discussed it in social television streams. Viewers created several memes featuring Sundry Carter's black eye. Some of the memes featured still photos from the fight but in most of them they mocked her for berating Draya Michele's son and for suffering a beating as

punishment. One meme featured a cartoon from *Dora the Explorer* with a black eye with the tweet: “Lmaoooooooo Sundy was like #BBWLA.” Another viewer tweeted a still photo of actress Angela Bassett playing singer Tina Turner with a bloody and swollen face in the film *What Love Got to Do With It* in a scene after Turner was beaten by her husband Ike Turner the words “Sundy be like” on the meme. Viewers used still photos from the classic 1990s film *Friday* to illustrate the Sundy and Draya fight. They posted one photo of DJ Pooh playing Red in *Friday* with a swollen eye after a bully pummeled him in the film. The words: “ Draya got Sundy lookin like...” Cast members and event planners also used the Twitter stream about the show to promote events as viewers watched the show. *Basketball Wives LA* season three newcomer Brandi Maxiell tweeted a flier of an event she was scheduled to host in Dallas, Texas.

Vh1’s official Twitter account for the show also tweeted memes. Many of them were one-liners from the cast either during conversations with one another or during their confessionals. The memes included Draya commenting discord in the group – “We can’t get along because we drink too much”; Brittish complaining about women in Russia approaching her finance – “I don’t like those b*tches in Russia...’Cause they was real bold”; and Draya explaining what would happen if her boyfriend was unfaithful – “That beautiful house is going to be a pile of ashes when I’m done.” A still photo with recurring cast member Chantel Christie taking off her earring, as if she was preparing to fight, was circulated with the official Vh1 graphics. Cast member Draya Michele tweeted that photo with “Wtf!?” (what the fuck). Both of the women were involved in a disagreement about dating the same man during season three. The network also produced memes to promote the show on social networks.

Viewers also looked to other shows to express their interpretations of *Basketball Wives LA*. One viewer compared Sundy Carter and Brittish Williams to two cartoon characters on *The Proud Family*, a Disney cartoon about a black family that ran from 2001-2005, and sent a meme with photos of the women next to cartoons. Another viewer, frustrated with the actions of Jackie Christie, tweeted a photo of *Love & Hip Hop Atlanta* star Joseline Hernandez rolling her eyes and the words “When Jackie starts talking I’m just like #BBWLA.” *Love & Hip Hop Atlanta* also airs on Vh1.

The data from season three of *Mary Mary* also contained a variety of photo memes sent by the viewers and the cast. Many of the photos that appeared in the data promoted the Campbell sisters’ appearances on magazine covers, television shows and at events. The group Mary Mary tweeted photos from their official Twitter account to announce their appearance on the *Wendy Williams Show* and *JET* magazine. Supporters in the music industry and fans also tweeted photos of Erica Campbell’s first solo single.

Viewers of *Mary Mary* also tapped well-known African-American figures, television shows and films to express their thoughts about the program. When Warryn Campbell, Tina Campbell’s husband and the group’s producer, disapproved of the direction of the group, one viewer tweeted a photo of writer and educator Maya Angelou wearing a pair of sunglasses and a disapproving look on her face with the caption “Warryn like” indicating that he was not pleased. When the duo’s manager Mitchell Solarek was upset because the group was making moves without him one viewer tweeted a photo of actress Tichina Arnold looked dejected as Rochelle from the popular television sitcom *Everybody Hates Chris* based on the childhood of comedian Chris Rock. During season three some viewers criticized Warryn for creating a chasm between the sisters for encouraging his wife to pursue a solo career as his sister-in-law struggled through

marital problems. One viewer tweeted a photo of his wedding photo and the tweet: “Warryn at one time was a handsome human.....see what happens when these folks sell they souls...”

Another viewer, noting that a sizeable amount of fans of the show and Christians and fans of the gospel duo, likened watching episodes of the show to having Bible study at home.

The memes created by the networks and the viewers demonstrate how visuals became apart of the social television conversation. With memes viewers interpreted what they saw and sometimes related it to other popular television shows and movies that the audience would be familiar. The Vh1 network also transmitted photo memes into the social television conversation that highlighted stereotypes of women of color.

Unique discourse is also present in the data in this study. On the surface the dialogue about the shows and the cast seems cruel. Viewers often used profanity in the conversation. Cast members were called names including derogatory gendered terms like bitch and ho. Viewers spoke about the cast and scenarios on the shows sometimes in hyperbolic terms. The discourse was unfiltered and uncensored. Viewers conversed about these shows on social media much like the ways that friends talk to one another, freely. The audience also appeared to communicate about the shows without concern of being judged by others on Twitter who may have seen their tweets. The language that the black social television audience used resembled in-person conversations that people sometimes have with one another. The language in the tweets throughout the results is discourse that appears to be unrestricted dialogue among people who are engaging with an understanding about cultural context in which they are communicating.

CHAPTER 8: DISCUSSION

The two previous chapters outlined the results from the data and this chapter will situate the results in mass communications scholarship and the entertainment industry. First, I will discuss the black social television audience's interpretation of television images on social media using Stuart Hall's theories on decoding as a guide. Second, I will explore how the mass communications theory uses and gratifications and the concept of parasocial interaction both illustrate viewers' motivations in this study. Third, I offer insight into the language the black social television audience uses. Then I outline how black women use Twitter as a site of resistance to debate their images and lastly I underscore how the practices of the black social television audience have revolutionized contemporary television.

Decoding on digital

The data show that television viewers engaged in a decoding process of images within their social television conversations. Media studies scholar Stuart Hall's model of communication explains the ways in which each stage affects messages, especially in television production: 1) Production, the message is encoded with hegemonic ideology and is influenced by societal standards; 2) Circulation, how messages travel affect how they are perceived 3) Use, the distribution and consumption when the interpretation and decoding of messages takes place and 4) Reproduction, how the audience acts on the message it interprets (Hall, 1993). As the results of this study indicate, the social television conversation of online audiences is an important new form of reproduction in this process. As the social television audience acts on the messages it interprets, it discusses the content created for television and viewers' mediate those messages through perspectives that Hall outlined that recognize the ways in which power lies within the production process and the positions in which that power can be accepted or refuted. The

dominant/hegemonic position is one in which the receiver takes the message “full and straight;” the negotiated position accepts some dominant ideas and rejects some others; with the oppositional position the social location of the receiver affects the way the receiver interprets the message and a more critical coding of dominant ideas are rejected (Hall, 1993). Negotiated and oppositional coding among viewers of color is important in the interpretation process. Many black people in the United States view television and film knowing that mainstream mass media is a system embedded with power and ideologies that reinforce white supremacy (hooks, 1992). The intersection of race and gender equips black women with a distinct critical perspective when viewing media images. Black women viewers approach Hollywood images already knowing that race and racism affect the way in which gender is portrayed (hooks, 1992). The social experiences and the social location of viewers affect how they will comprehend television images and how they discuss them on social media networks.

The engagement of viewers in this study fused Hall’s fourth step in the model of communication, reproduction, with their decoding of the television messages to create what may be a new area of study in media effects – the social television conversation. Reception is part of the television production process and there is an integration of “feedbacks” (Hall, 1993). One of these new feedbacks, I deduce, is the social television conversation. It is a moment in which the audience reacts to the television content that is produced and in turn produces its own content. The content produced by the audience is diverse and complex because it is content that offers preferred, negotiated and oppositional readings of television programs; moreover, the social television conversation not only analyzes what is there on the screen but also what is not there and why it is absent. The black social television audience sometimes acknowledged that episodes of *Basketball Wives LA* were rarely without verbal conflict or physical violence. Viewers

commented on how black women on that show were portrayed as overly aggressive, reflecting the angry black woman stereotypes; moreover, the audience applauded black people resolving conflicts without violence on *Mary Mary*. Content creators tap into existing portrayals of the audience within a broad social, cultural and political context to produce television content (Hall, 1993). Through social television engagement audience members can offer their own coding and critique of onscreen images and exchange those ideas with one another and even the cast, producers and network executives of television shows. Black people across the globe have learned to reject the dominant gaze, develop an oppositional gaze and employ it as an act of resistance (hooks, 1992). The technology of social media and mobile devices empower black audiences to decode television messages through the practice of social television. Whether the social media conversation offers a critical reading of television content or if it simply reflects the events on the show, the viewers' feedback can offer insight into how the audience interprets programs, making the social television conversation a ripe area to study for media effects, especially reception studies. In this study viewers did both. They generically discussed events on the shows and they expressed clear disapproval for anti-social behavior that led to violence; moreover, the black social television audience appreciated images that did not reinforce racial stereotypes. The high volume of negative sentiment as well as stereotypes that some viewers perceived illustrates that the audience is going beyond watching, they are analyzing what they see and posting their interpretations on Twitter.

Social media images are an important area to study for media effects because they have already been shown to have an impact on users. In a 2013 study on black women's media images commissioned by *Essence* magazine, the nation's top magazine for black women, respondents said social media and reality television are among the top mediums that circulate negative

images that cause pain (Walton, 2013). The memes created by the Vh1 network about *Basketball Wives LA* are embedded with racial and gendered stereotypes that move from the television screen and into the social media space. Through their social media conversation viewers in this study revealed that they are uncomfortable with some of the images they see on reality television programs. As social television becomes more integrated into the online storytelling of shows it will be necessary to examine the effects that such images have on the audience.

Uses and gratifications theory and parasocial interaction

The black social television audience in this study sought two forms of media to engage, television and social media. Uses and gratifications theory explores why audience members seek the distinct forms of media they use and the needs media consumption may fulfill. Uses and gratifications theory helps to explain the practices of the audience in this study. Viewers of *Mary Mary* and *Basketball Wives LA* regularly watched the show and engaged on social media simultaneously. Ritualized users use a medium habitually (Rubin, 2009). The uses and gratifications concept parasocial interaction helps to explain why the audience members in this study regularly watch television and tweet about shows at the same time. Parasocial interaction is actual and imaginary relationships that audience members have with celebrities, essentially “a sense of friendship” among the audience and entertainment personalities (Rubin, 2009). The audience frequently views celebrities as relatable and unpretentious, like their own friends (Rubin, 2009). The audience’s need for identification and engagement can result in varying levels of media involvement; moreover, the audience’s choice to seek certain media can be related to desires to reinforce social and cultural ties (Rubin, 2009). The television viewing audience in this study was active, engaged and made deliberate choices about the media they used and how they used it – including connecting with celebrities. Some of the viewers’

responses expressing happiness about the cast responding to their tweets, indicating that the social television audience desires to do more than just make one-way comments about the shows; they want to engage with the people they watch as indicated by some of the viewers' exchanges with celebrities.

Basketball Wives LA and *Mary Mary* are both shows that feature women of color and they are targeted toward nonwhite women. Viewers' motivations to watch the shows may be associated with a sense of identification with the cast members. The black social television audience often directed statements to cast members of the shows casts members' names with a hashtag and the celebrities' Twitter names. Moreover, their incentive to tweet while they watch the shows could be a way to strengthen parasocial interaction. Although there are now scripted shows with black women protagonists such as *Scandal* and *Empire*, there is still a dearth of black women on television and those that are on the small screen are mostly on reality programs. Part of the audience's driving force to engage on social media while watching television is a uses and gratifications-related concept I call *social celebrity interaction gratification* – viewers' motivation to communicate on social media while watching television to engage directly with the cast members to receive a response and achieve a closer connection; moreover, it is the social media engagement of a television show actor or cast member with the viewers to build an audience and keep them interested, engaged and updated about a program and its stars to establish and solidify loyalty. Uses and gratifications theory states that audience members initiate action and engagement with media and they have expectations from that engagement based on their selections (Rubin, 2009). The social television engagement of the audience in this study suggests that one of those expectations may be direct interaction with cast members.

Social television is an audience-generated practice and it can offer insight into media reception studies. Media reception studies provide insight into the meanings that viewers take from television programs and they offer political and social understanding that viewers have (Staiger, 2005). Media reception studies aren't only concerned about viewers' media intake; the audience's access to producing media images is also important (Staiger, 2005). The social media conversation of the audience in this study shows that the audience is not passive, it not only consumes media images but it also interprets what is on the television screen and creates its own text and images based on what viewers see. The audience's social television conversation offers immediate feedback on how television programs are received by audiences.

Black women as spectator and subject

In this study black women served important roles as both spectator and subject. *Mary Mary* and *Basketball Wives LA* both have women of color, mostly black women, as the cast members and the shows are targeted toward young black women viewers. In many comments in the data set viewers referred to "we" and "us" when they discussed the black women cast members on both shows, underscoring the presence of black women in the black social television audience. When it came to reality show representations of black women, the viewers in this study hold a high degree of negative sentiments, but also some positive. The research question that sought to find viewers' impressions of positive and negative sentiments on the shows yielded a volume of related data. The black social television audience in this study also found family, faith and stereotypes to have a presence on these shows. The negative media imagery found of black women should be no surprise. The presence of black women in a white supremacist culture complicates women's identity, representation and viewership (hooks, 1992). Media is one of many American institutions that recycle stereotypical images of black women

(Collins, 2000). So the way that black social television audience will view black women on reality television and discuss those shows on social media will be different than other groups. Moreover, the intersection of race and gender in black women's lives create a distinct social experience and a distinct way of viewing media. Black women viewers split the binary of the male gaze, they do not identify with the objectified white woman who is the subject of the male gaze nor do they apply a heteropatriarchal lens to white women; in fact, black women create a space for critical spectatorship that interrogates the presence and absence of their images (hooks, 1992).

The results in this study show that viewers' online discussions about these reality television shows reveal complex negotiations of the images. The negative sentiment discussed by viewers garnered the most discussion across all of the data. Viewers commented that the overall premise of these reality shows starring black women was negative and they believed that some of the actions of the individual cast members were also negative and anti-social. The negative sentiment from *Basketball Wives LA* was so strong that a specific theme of guerrilla girlfriends emerged from the tweets. In this theme viewers noted the ways in which women on the show seemed to sabotage one another, and verbally and physically harm one another. This portrayal of the cast of mostly black women reflects the stereotype of black women as angry. The angry black woman stereotype maintains black women are aggressive, antagonistic, ignorant, domineering, crass and likely to act in a harsh or violent way without being provoked (Ashley, 2014). Viewers noted similar behavior on *Basketball Wives LA*. The angry black woman stereotype that the black social television audience saw on *Basketball Wives LA* is a negative stereotype of black women that is often recycled in mainstream media. Negative stereotypes of the black female image are appropriated to control representations of black women's images and

profit from them (hooks, 1992). The networks reproduce these reality show images and duplicate them by renewing the programs season after season and by creating spin-off shows. Some in the audience called for other viewers to tune out shows with negative portrayals and support others. The results in this study, particularly the negative sentiment and guerrilla girlfriends themes, show that the black social television audience detected and commented on stereotypical behavior black women exhibited on television. Producers' and the network's reliance on an old, ugly stereotype to attract viewers demonstrates that black women's images are popular when they appeal to the lowest common denominator. When it comes to women's images in contemporary media, feminist author Naomi Wolf notes that "the marketplace is not open to consciousness-raising" (Wolf, 2002). That is a particularly troubling notion for the images of black women that are shrouded in stereotypes; moreover, the data in this study reveals that black social television viewers see these stereotypes, discusses them and disapproves of them. That oppositional reading of the television programs puts the networks on notice of how the audience receives programs.

Some viewers admonished black single mothers in this study but they also seemed to be protective of the image of the black family on *Mary Mary*. Perhaps that is because there are so few images of black families on television that are not mired in misery. Throughout history black families, specifically black mothers and black motherhood, have been stigmatized. The stereotype of the black matriarch is of a black mother who is overbearing, emasculating and unable to adhere to traditional gender roles and keep a man in her household (Collins, 2000). This image was even reflected in a government report in 1965 in which the late Sen. Daniel Moynihan placed what he saw as the demise of the black family at the feet of single black mothers in what he described as a matriarchal structure that was "out of line with the rest of the American society" and "seriously retards the progress of the group as a whole" (Moynihan,

1965). Television portrayals of black families in the United States mirrored images of the emasculating black matriarch, the mammy taking care of white people's children and absent black fathers (Cummings, 1988). The findings in this study show that viewers held some of the societal myths about black motherhood. Some of the tweets criticized the unmarried mothers of color on *Basketball Wives LA* and blamed the children's problems on the mothers. This finding reflects societal ideas about black single motherhood as the sole source of problems within the black community. This finding also demonstrates that the genre of reality television has room for improvement when it comes to portrayals of black single mothers. The black social television audience applauded images of the black nuclear family on *Mary Mary*. The viewers spoke of the marriages of the Campbell sisters with aspiration, they were delighted to see black marriages reflected positively on television and wanted to have relationships like that of their own. When the cast members' actions seemed to threaten the stability of the family structure in any way viewers condemned their actions because they seemed to want the nuclear family to remain intact along with the image of a black traditional family. Viewers in this study seemed to safeguard images of the black family and admonish black single mothers whose very existence appeared to be punished.

Viewers see stereotypes

Stereotypes that reflected gendered, racial and class constructions were also present in the data. This research sought to determine the presence of stereotypes in the social media conversations about reality shows featuring women of color, as guided by one of the primary research questions, and the data shows that viewers discussed the presence of stereotypes in direct and indirect ways. Black women find joy in media when they approach media portrayals with the "pleasure of interrogation," consuming media images with a critical perspective (hooks,

1992). bell hooks describes the complex analysis and acceptance that some black women applied to Sapphire in the old 1950s sitcom *Amos 'n' Andy*. Some identified with her irritation, they disliked the ways she was judged and the way that this image was used to attack black womanhood and apply angry attributes to it (hooks, 1992). However, some black women claimed Sapphire “as that symbol of that angry part of themselves white folks and black men could not even begin to understand” (hooks, 1992). Perhaps a similar rationale explains why some viewers found guerrilla girlfriends behavior and violence amusing or at least excusable. Perhaps these acts of aggression may have reflected some of the rare occasions in media when black women are the victors and not the victims. While viewers disapproved of the guerrilla girlfriends behavior that led to violence, they applauded cast members for defending themselves. When the honor or children of black women on these reality shows were attacked they didn't cower or look to someone else for protection, they defended themselves. Viewers, in their feedback as illustrated in the data, seemed to rationalize incidents of violence as acts of self-defense that black women committed to protect themselves. Viewers also appeared to hold the women who instigate violence to be accountable for it, but not the network and production companies for constantly relying on violence to tell stories. The concocted scenarios that the producers construct did not receive as much criticism as the women who acted within the scenarios in which they were placed that were ripe for violence. Perhaps some viewers in this study have become desensitized to images of physical violence involving black women and the assault on black women's images that they overlooked large hegemonic and power structures at play. Dominant representations of black women have committed violence on images of them and in response to this violence some black women simply abandoned media, erased it from their lives to avoid ugly representations of themselves others simply watched with no analytical view

of race, gender, class or any other critical lens (hooks, 1992). hooks contends that in order for black women to enjoy Hollywood images some had to leave behind their critical lens and ignore racism and sexism and seek affirming images outside Hollywood and black women “come home to see ourselves” (hooks, 1992); however, the abundance of images of black women on reality television is truly bringing more images of everyday black women in their homes. And it is those real-life moments the cast experiences that are similar to those of the viewers’ experience that the social television audience appears to enjoy most. In the social media conversation, viewers seemed to appreciate images of black women simply existing, not living their lives in extremes, as was the case in the black social television audience’s comments about the Campbell sisters on *Mary Mary*. In the tweets viewers applauded the images of black women as professionals, wives, mothers and engaged members of their families. Viewers found the Campbell sisters’ everyday lives to be interesting without violence and back-biting. Cultural experience and power relations influence viewers’ decoding practices (Hall, 1993) and in this data helped viewers see images that were more true to their racial group than they typically see on television.

Viewer’s also noted the ways in which reality shows sometimes objectify black women’s bodies. One viewer made note of a conspicuous close-up of Draya Michele whose body parts were often isolated by camera: “Did they have to do a close up on Draya's butt lol #BBWLA.” The obsession of the black butt is still present in contemporary times and “the protruding butt is seen as an indication of heightened sexuality” (hooks, 1992). The idea that black women’s bodies are expendable is one that is present in numerous media images and black women either accept or reject this notion (hooks, 1992). Some viewers also spoke about the cast’s looks in disparaging ways. The size of the women’s bodies, their clothes and hair were criticized. This finding shows that women of color, like all women in American media, are still judged based on

their looks in American society. Women's worthiness continues to be evaluated by their beauty and perceptions of their lack of it (Wolf, 2002). And for women of color, especially black women, that is troubling because their beauty has been nonexistent in American culture or marginalized or stigmatized. African-American women cannot achieve American beauty standards that privilege whiteness (Collins, 2000). Black viewers have long recognized that Hollywood almost erases black womanhood and always put the white woman as the central female figure (hooks, 1992). On *Basketball Wives LA* the person that viewers found to be most attractive was Draya Michele, a young biracial model. Her close proximity to whiteness including her European features such as her straight long hair and light skin combined to create an overall look that many viewers praised as they compared her to other women of color in the cast whose looks always fell short. In American media depictions it is common to have one woman positioned as the beauty and the other as the unattractive loser (Wolf, 2002). Moreover, colorism, light-skinned privilege that is an offshoot of racism, rejects and even punishes black images of blackness that are far from whiteness, especially among women (Collins, 2000). The viewers' responses in this data that often praised Draya Michele reveal the presence of colorism among the viewing audience and raises questions about how light-skin privilege operates among reality television show producers when they cast women of color on the shows. The social television conversation in this study shows that viewers are still affected by dominant beauty ideals and imposed them on the women of color they saw on these reality television shows.

One of the most direct examples of stereotypes in the data is the memes distributed by Vh1. The network, through the official *Basketball Wives* Twitter account, published memes that were embedded with stereotypes about women in general and black women specifically. The networks memes extended the show's storytelling online and those memes also took stereotypes

from the television screen to social media streams. The meme about British Williams commenting on women approaching her fiancée recycled ideas about women being in constant competition for men. The meme with Draya Michele saying she would burn her man's house down if he cheated on her upholds ideas about crazy girlfriends and angry black women. The meme with Draya Michele saying the group cannot get along because they drink too much also reinforces the stereotype that women are catty and can't get along. The network also seemed to instigate discord between the women by creating memes that put them in opposition of one another such as the meme below featuring Draya Michele saying that she is more attractive than other cast members. Even though the women did actually say the things that appear on the memes, the network made decisions about the things the women said that would be recycled on social media. The network chose to repeat the comments that put women in competition with one another. While viewers in this study spoke about the negative sentiment in the show in the data, there were also positive sentiments the viewers talked about including some of the friendships that appeared to be supportive. Those instances of friendship and sisterhood and that dialogue were not chosen for memes. The social television memes produced by the network is an expansion of storytelling of the show online. The data in this study revealed that the Vh1 network chose to repeat the negative actions on the show and reproduce stereotypes online through its memes. These memes produced and distributed by the network gives insight into the types of images of women of color that Vh1 desires to promote and believes will get viewers' attention; moreover, through these images the network helps to spread flat images of women of color through social media. Social media memes created by networks are an extension of the storytelling of television shows online. The data in this study show that the Vh1 network is making choices to extend contentious storyline featuring women of color and essentially

spreading stereotypical images of them in social media. This is particularly troubling because Vh1 airs several reality shows featuring women of color and the network is distinguishing itself as an innovator in social television engagement.

Loving blackness is an act of political resistance (hooks, 1992). It can be difficult or find black images to love or even like in a media landscape that is dominated by white control and where dominant ideas about blackness and black womanhood are constructed and circulated. But the social media viewers in this study negotiated their feelings about the women of color they saw on television by viewing the women through a different lens than other viewers and by putting the cast's actions in context.

The language of the people

As mentioned in the results section, the discourse among the black social television audience, essentially Black Twitter users, is ethnic language laced with historical knowledge, cultural linguistic patterns and shared experiences. So it is important to understand the practice of black discourse and how it operates online. Some of the language in this study may on the surface appear to be harsh it must be placed within a cultural context. Scholarship about digital media often overlooks people of color who use digital media and the forces that shape race online (Florini, 2014). However, culture influences online conversations (Brock, 2012). The ways in which black people use language and interact with one another on Twitter is key to how blackness functions on the social networking site (Florini, 2014). Black Twitter users are indifferent to the dominant gaze that could be applied to black people's use of language on the social network (Brock, 2012). Dr. Meredith Clark, whose doctoral dissertation focused on Black Twitter, contends that the language used on Black Twitter is a complex mix of metaphor and knowledge based on lived experience that requires insider knowledge of black culture to

understand the conversation (Ramsey, 2015). The Black Twitter and black social television conversations reflect signifying, which is black rhetoric that can be playfully insulting like “playing the dozens” (yo’ mama jokes), a way for the oppressed to use the language of the dominant culture to express independence. It is a methodological choice among black speakers to strategically deploy linguistic strategies that others may not understand (Jaynes, 2005).

According to black linguistics and culture scholar Henry Louis Gates, signifying is the “difference between the literal and the metaphorical, between surface and latent meaning” (Gates, 1988). Signifying has long been a way for black people to refute the status quo and express thoughts in coded, cultural language (Florini, 2014). Black people engage in signifying by employing current popular terms as well as the morals and knowledge of their community (Knight, 2010). Signifying allows Black Twitter users to utilize black oral tradition and engage with one another using shared histories and experiences (Florini, 2014). Viewers sometimes made cultural references using words that only they would understand. For example, there were references to “edges,” the hairline especially around the temples, an expression used commonly among black people. The *Mary Mary* viewers often used religious terms that black church parishioners use in specific ways. The tweets demonstrated hyperbole and off-color remarks which are sometimes rhetorical devices that are at play within a group of black speakers. So understanding black oral practices that are at play on Twitter also help to understand the tone of the language that is reflected in the data of this study. While some criticism of the cast and the shows on the surface appear to be extremely negative and critical, those comments circulate within a group that understands the nuances of the language and the context in which it is used.

Moreover, as Brock states, Black Twitter uses the language of its choice openly and deliberately without worry of how outsiders may critique the language, making Black Twitter

discourse digital in-group communication. Black Twitter discourse also mirrors the traditional black oral practice of call and response (Brock, 2012). Call and response is the historic black vocal practice, rooted in the black church, of making a statement to a public group with the expectation of receiving a communal response and a retelling of the entire story (Sale, 1992). The success in the call and response method is not in having the original message repeated precisely, it is in its ability to get others involved in the storytelling (Sale, 1992). On Twitter, black stories are retold, retweeted and recycled throughout social circles on the social network while maintaining the message and group solidarity. Black Americans' use of cultural language practices on Twitter call for a closer read of the discourse used to be able to gain a deeper understanding of the conversation. Humor, metaphor and hyperbole employed by the black social television audience is communication among in-group users, although public, in a familiar network where users sometimes don't offer a literal meaning in their messages.

Twitter as a site of resistance for black women's images

The volume and content of the tweets in this study indicate that social media, particularly Twitter, is a place black women's reality television show images are discussed. Black feminists recognize the power of Black Twitter, and essentially the black social television audience, and they've used social networks to attempt to reclaim black women's images. Just as television shows starring women of color gain wide audiences, so do the social television conversations about those shows. Sil Lai Abrams, an activist concerned about black women's images especially on reality television and the founder of Truth in Reality, regularly holds tweet chats on Mondays when many of the Vh1 reality programs starring black women air. Abrams and others engaged in those Twitter conversations use the hashtag #RealityTVCheck and they often use the official hashtag of the shows that are on the air at the same time. Abrams and others concerned

about black women's reality television images analyze media processes and choices while also disrupting the social television conversations of the shows. Abrams' digital activism often included disrupting the social television conversation during *Basketball Wives LA*. While some viewers simply described the events on the show, Abrams and her followers discussed the social meanings of the events and portrayals of women of color on *Basketball Wives LA*. The work of Truth in Reality was extended during the 2014-2015 academic school year with the Redefining HERStory campaign which engaged college-aged women, the target audience for these reality programs, at historically black colleges and other campuses in conversations in person and online to combat stereotypical portrayals of black women on television which lead to images on social networks.

The idea of ratchedness, uncouth and undesirable behavior and actions associated with black women, especially those who are poor and working class, has become synonymous with black women's representations on reality television and one woman used social media to minimize that image. Michaela Angela Davis, an image activist and former editor of national multicultural magazines, launched the Bury the Ratchet campaign to address what she felt were negative images of black women on reality television shows, especially the numerous programs based in Atlanta. Davis launched the campaign of critical conversations, digital activism and leadership among black women in December 2012. Davis held a symposium at Spelman College, a historically black college for women, in Atlanta in April 2013 at which she and academics and experts discussed the ways in which reality television images affect representations of black women in the United States and across the globe. Bury the Ratchet also aimed to "change the mind of young women who absorb these images" (Rogers, 2012). The #BuryTheRatchet hashtag was used in early 2015 on social networks including Twitter when

black social television viewers circulated calls and petitions to cancel the Vh1 show *Sorority Sisters*. After an online, mostly Twitter, campaign targeted the companies that advertised on the show, several companies cancelled ads for the show and the season ended early. Black Twitter users utilize the social network to discuss reality television shows but the audience also used the social media platform to resist and eliminate images believed to be damaging to the representation of black people, especially black women. Twitter has become a space where black women specifically discuss media representations, especially those on reality television.

While users often tweet into cyberspace about a television show as they watch a program, there is both one-way communicate that simply adds to the volume of tweets about a show and there is communication among viewers about one another's comments. Black people interrogate the dominant gaze and also engage with one another and identify what they see (hooks, 1992). For example, Jill Scott, a black woman singer and actress, praised the *Mary Mary* show on Twitter in May 2012 when she tweeted the following message to her more than 250,000 followers: "Please watch Mary Mary on WE tv. Finally a real representation. Yay!!!!!!!!!!!" (NecoleBitchie.com, 2012). Scott sent the tweet during the first season of *Mary Mary* and she appeared on one episode of the show when she attended Erica Campbell's baby shower and sang a song to unborn baby Zaya. Scott didn't direct the comment to anyone on Twitter but it got a reaction. Tamar Braxton, a singer who appears on the *Braxton Family Values* reality show on WE TV network, was offended by the tweet Scott sent and assumed it was a criticism of her show with her sisters and tweeted that *Mary Mary* was a real representation "Of freakin what?" Scott never directly referred to *Braxton Family Values*, she appeared to make a comment about overall representations of black women on reality television shows. Scott, who is also an actress who has appeared in a number of scripted television shows and major motion pictures, responded

to Braxton and others who got into the conversation and tweeted: “Ok grow all the way up people. Just because I love oranges doesn’t mean I HATE apples.” This statement by Scott reveals that black women’s representations on reality television can be complex, and so can the conversations about them on social media as demonstrated in the data in this study. Black women do not have to exist in extreme negative stereotypes or be shrouded in respectability; moreover, black social television discussions can simply reflect what is on the television screen and also critique it. The results in the negative sentiment and stereotype sections in this study demonstrate a critical reading of the shows in the social media space. The viewers’ tweets in this study often mirrored the plot on these shows with neutral comments about events from the episodes. But they also detected the presence of stereotypes directly and indirectly. The overwhelming negative sentiment that viewers detected in the programs that they discussed on Twitter shows that social media is also a site of resistance for the black social media audience. By critiquing the shows and acting on those images some viewers are doing what black feminist scholar Dr. Gwendolyn Pough calls “bringing wreck” to black women’s reality show images through their social media conversations – they are talking back, offering a critical critique and challenging the status quo (Pough, 2004). Young black women engage in hip-hop culture while still participating in it and analyzing it and they offer important critiques about the genre and important insight that is useful to hip-hop and society but people must willing and ready to listen to them (Pough, 2004). bell hooks mirrors a similar sentiment with the lack of black women’s critical analysis of media representations and why they have been slow to elevate to the level of theory and remained at conversations: “It is difficult to talk when you feel no one is listening, when you feel as though as special jargon or narrative has been created that only the chosen can understand” (hooks, 1992). Black women have critical and important insight into their images

that are both present and absent on television. The social television conversation is a place where others can hear from them. Twitter has emerged to be a space where black women can discuss media images, contest them and even create narratives that reflect portrayals that are connected to their authenticity.

Future research

Further study about black social television may move toward documenting the power and influence of this group and historicizing it. Examining the social television conversation from a show over a season or several seasons to observe changes that producers made and comparing those adjustments to the audience's feedback could be an interesting study that could help to determine how much producers use the audience's comments to make changes in shows. In this data, viewers of *Basketball Wives LA* season three expressed a dislike of new cast members Sundy Carter and Brittish Williams. Those two women did not return for season four of the show that returned to television in July 2015. Television show creators, including Shonda Rhimes and Simon Cowell, have often said in popular press interviews that the social television audience's conversation is like having input of the several producers at the same time. Analyzing the social television conversation of a show and later viewing the program and searching for connections between adjustments in the show and the audience's dialogue could demonstrate the ways in which Hollywood is paying attention to the audience and taking their lead to alter programs.

Future research on the black social television audience could also include a historic chronology of black viewers' contributions to the practice of social television. Current social media scholarship does little to capture the early engagement of black viewers on social networks, especially Twitter. Popular press articles and blogs have documented black America's social media activity about television shows that have led to ratings success and several Twitter

trending topics such as the ABC drama *Scandal* and the cable network Black Entertainment Television's special events including the BET Awards. A scholarly and chronological account of the early adoption of the social television of black television viewers would be a useful addition to social media scholarship that can not only explain the genesis of the practice but also give insight into where social television is headed in the future.

Limitations

The greatest limitation in this study was perhaps in the collection of the data. When I started collecting data for this study in 2011 some of the technology used now to conduct research on social networks did not exist. Collecting screenshots of tweets published by viewers as the television shows aired at the same time appeared to be the best way to gather data for this study. However, because of the volume of tweets sent during a show it was unlikely to capture all them. I believe enough tweets were captured to make the data robust enough for this study. However, technology has evolved into more sophisticated methods of data collection that would have been useful in this study. Now Nvivo, the qualitative research software used in the coding and data analysis stages in this study, has the ability to capture tweets directly from into the program using a hashtag. Also, NodeXL is a software program that enables users to import social media data into Excel spreadsheets and visualize the data and conduct queries. The method that was used to collect data was sufficient, however utilizing updated methods of social media data collection could have perhaps gathered more of the social television conversation and it would have definitely been less time consuming.

Role of the researcher

I believe my prior research on how black people use social media and how they're represented on it, my identity and interest in social media all aided in this research. A pilot study

I conducted on the first season of *Basketball Wives LA* helped to inform this expanded project. I also consider myself to be a part of both the Black Twitter community and the black social television audience. This research was born out of my interaction with and observation of Black Twitter's television conversations. I am an avid watcher of reality shows that feature African-Americans as well as classic black television shows and movies. Seeing black reality television shows become multiple trending topics as they aired on television sparked my interest in study. Engaging in the practice of social television also helped me to understand how the practice operates in real time as viewers watch and tweet simultaneously.

As a black woman I've found it very difficult to conduct this research. It has honestly fractured my spirit and my emotional and mental wellbeing. First, conducting the research for this study has been distressing. Reading through several popular press and journal articles and books about black women's images broke my heart. Learning that black women's bodies have been despised for more than 500 years, from the time European travelers set eyes on them to contemporary degrading mass media images, crushed my soul in a way that is difficult to explain. I live in a black female body. Learning that mine is a body that was hated hundreds of years before I was even born is a fact that literally took me out of this research for a while. I simply could not read another academic or popular culture account documenting the disdain for black women's bodies or any scholarly explanations of it. So, for my own mental health, I had to distance myself from this project in various ways to maintain my own mental wellbeing. Throughout this process I continued to watch every season of the reality shows in this study and others that feature black women in the cast to stay abreast of images and trends in black women's portrayals in reality programming. That was also mentally taxing.

I found myself exhausted and emotionally depleted at the end of almost every season of every show after watching black women sabotage and berate one another for weeks, all while knowing that profit was an underlying motive for these shows while black women's images were sacrificed in the name of capitalism. I do not believe, like some, that reality television shows are all bad and should be cancelled. Black women's images should not be cloaked in respectability politics. All black women of every socioeconomic, education and age level deserve to have their stories told. All black women also deserve to have their stories told with the full humanity they possess and not simply with parts of themselves that fit into stereotypes that audiences can identify quickly and networks can profit.

Analyzing the results of this study was also an emotional task. Reading thousands of tweets, a good number of which contained cruel and hurtful discourse, about the black women on these shows was also painful. While I understand black language practices and the ways in which black people communicate especially on Black Twitter, some of the thoughts expressed by viewers were vile and mirrored some of the ugly discourse European travelers used to describe the bodies of women of color hundreds of years earlier. I am a black woman scholar who is acutely aware of the racial, social, political and commercial forces that are at play with black women's images in mass media. But even with all of my knowledge of media theories and how corporate media operates I was still negatively affected by being immersed in black women's images on reality television and how they were discussed among the black social television audience. I worry that black women, especially black girls, without the same media literacy can be harmed by these images in ways that can be permanent and irreversible. Television has long been a force that influences how black women view themselves, now social media is emerging to

be a space that can also affect black women's self-perceptions. I believe that my identity and my role as the researcher in this project helped to express that.

Conclusion

The technology of today is allowing for audiences to disrupt dominant narratives about marginalized groups and the ways in which audiences are using mobile technology to discuss television online is generating and revealing power that lies within the audience. Television scholar Robert J. Thompson noted how the emerging technology of the 1980s, particularly VCRs and cable networks, made it so that television shows did not disappear once they were cancelled (Thompson, 1990). The emergence of mobile technology, social networks, social television and the power of Black Twitter, specifically the black social television audience, extends the lives of old shows. Cancelled but beloved sitcoms and classic films with mostly black casts often trend on Twitter (Williams & Williams, 2015). Moreover, not only does the black social television extend the life of shows it sometimes brings them back to life. Television creation is about power, intellectual and creative power as well as the power to create entrepreneurial and employment opportunities in television (Thompson, 1990). Through social television, black viewers are now exerting power to contest the Hollywood power system. Mara Brock Akil, a film director and producer who also created several television shows starring black women, said after her sitcom *The Game* was cancelled on the CW network, out cry from the black social television audience brought the show back from the dead and led to getting it back on the air on the Black Entertainment Television network and 7.7 million people watched the first episode. Akil said social television is proving the presence and power of black audiences and is putting "food on people's tables" by helping to put black people in Hollywood to work. "Social media has been a huge factor for studios to value," Akil said in a speech Syracuse University in April

2015. “It is a clear tool of how you can mark the success of a show...It certainly has changed the dynamic in television.” Akil, the creator of top television shows starring black women including *Girlfriends*, *Being Mary Jane* and *The Game*, which aired for five more seasons after the black social television audience revived it, affirms that television producers and directors as well as the networks are listening to the black social television audience. The black social television audience also protests shows in development and prevented one from ever making it to the air. The black social television audience also has an activism component that reflects the political power of Black Twitter. The audience has direct access to networks, advertisers and other viewers and the conversation they have about television on Twitter is a public one that has the potential to gain support and create change.

It is important to recognize the importance of black women’s social television conversations about black images, including the ones about reality television shows in this study. Reality television shows, especially those starring women of color, are easily dismissed as lowbrow entertainment with no value. It would be easy to dismiss social television conversations about these images also. To do so would continue a tradition of discounting black women and their images; moreover, ignoring the black social television conversation would mean dismissing black viewers’ contributions to profound changes in contemporary television. Black viewers’ creativity and activity related to television on Twitter has gone unrecognized. Giving black viewers formal credit for their contributions to the practice of social television could also help bring attention to real and tangible ways that black people have revolutionized television. Black people’s creative and innovative social media practices and labor online have changed the way the world watches television but black people have not benefitted from their brilliance. White people remain to be social media editors and strategists and television networks. African-

Americans are practically nonexistent at major social media networks. Black people dominate Twitter as users but only 49 black people worked there in 2014 out of almost 3,000 employees (Silverstein, 2015). In 2014 Facebook had 81 black employees out of a total of 5,479 (Neate, 2015). The power of Black Twitter and black social television is clear but it has not translated into the formal use of black people's intelligence in social media. The black audience helped bolster social television but black people are not being hired by networks to execute their knowledge. Academically and theoretically, the black social television conversation must find its way from online chatter to legitimate scholarship. And the labor of the black social television audience should move from being exploited on the fringes to gaining formal autonomous control over a practice that it helped create.

This study shows that the black social television conversation, much like the black community, is diverse. The social media dialogue among viewers ranged from identification with and admiration of the cast members, criticism of the cast and shows for containing negativity and discussion about stereotypes and some opposition to them. The overwhelming negative sentiment viewers discussed shows that they notice anti-social behavior that is common on reality television. This audience also understands the consequences for such images for black women in popular culture. Social media gives the audience a place to discuss the images they see, the events on the screen and the meanings they carry out into society.

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- Williams, S., & Williams, L. (2014, March). *Black social TV: How black programming, viewers and social networks are changing television*. Paper presented at the annual South by Southwest Interactive conference in Austin, TX.
- Williams, S. (2013). Screens and stereotypes: A pilot study on the transmission of negative images of women of color on Twitter and television. Paper presented at the annual Popular Culture Association Conference in Washington D.C.
- Williams, S., & Williams, L. (2015, March). *Screens and stereotypes: How social TV amplifies images*. Paper presented at the annual South by Southwest Interactive conference in Austin, TX.
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EDUCATION

- **Ph.D.** student in Mass Communications, Syracuse University, S.I. Newhouse School of Public Communications, Syracuse, NY. August 2015. Syracuse University fellow, fall 2010-spring 2011
Dissertation: Screens and stereotypes: The transmission of images of women of color on Twitter and television
- **Certificate of advanced study** in Women's & Gender Studies, Department of Women's & Gender Studies, Syracuse University. May 2014
- **Master's degree**, Magazine, newspaper and online journalism, Syracuse University, S.I. Newhouse School of Public Communications, Syracuse, NY. May 2010
- **Bachelor's degree**, English/journalism, Jackson State University, Jackson, MS. August, 2000

TEACHING EXPERIENCE

Adjunct faculty, Syracuse University

WGS 101 Introduction to women's studies (spring 2015 and summer 2014):

I was solely responsible for the curriculum, teaching, assignments and exams for the class. I helped students understand social forces such as patriarchy, sexism, heterosexism, intersectionality, hegemony and institutional racism and how those issues are related to gender inequity in society.

Teaching assistant, Syracuse University

WGS 101 Introduction to women's studies (fall 2014)

WGS 201 Transnational feminism (spring 2014)

WGS 101 Introduction to women's studies (fall 2013):

Assisted the professor with class maintenance on the days of her lecture. One day a week I taught the concepts and led the classroom discussions about the material covered in lecture and in the assigned readings. I devised the lesson plans for the weekly discussion sections of the class. Helped students understand social forces such as patriarchy, sexism, heterosexism, intersectionality, hegemony and institutional racism and how those issues are related to gender inequity in society. I led two sections of the class and taught about 50 students. I graded all of their assignments and exams

Adjunct faculty, Syracuse University

COM 246 Race, gender and media (fall 2012, spring 2012 and spring 2013): Taught about 30 undergraduate students about how different groups of people are portrayed in the media. Taught students media theories and concepts such as agenda setting, framing, cultivation, stereotyping, intersectionality, spiral of silence and political economy so they would understand the forces that lead to absences and silences in media portrayals. Groups and

issues taught include African-Americans, Latinos, Asians, Native Americans, Indians (Southeast Asia), religion, women, the LGBT community, people with disabilities and class. Also invited expert speakers into the class including Neal Powless, co-producer of *Crooked Arrows*, a major motion picture about Native American lacrosse players. Incorporated Twitter into the class discussion, students participated verbally and by using the #RGMSU (race, gender, media, Syracuse University) Twitter hashtag I created. Also encouraged students to share their final projects on social media. Projects were seen far beyond our classroom because of social media.

Adjunct faculty, Syracuse University

NEW 205 News writing (fall 2011): Taught 16 undergraduate students the required news writing class for newspaper and online journalism majors. Taught students the fundamentals of news writing including AP style, newsgathering, fact-checking skills and story arrangement. Devised lesson plans, writing exercises and in-class press conferences with real political activists. Taught students how to produce different types of stories including profiles, spot news, enterprise and multimedia stories. Also incorporated social media into reporting.

- Guest lecturer on social media and journalism (September 2014) in undergraduate mass communications class, Dr. KyuJin Shim, instructor, Singapore Management University
- Guest lecturer on black images in social television (spring 2014) in undergraduate introduction to mass communications class, Jaime Riccio, instructor, Syracuse University
- Guest lecturer on diversity issues (spring 2011) in master's level broadcast ethics class, Donald Torrance, instructor, Syracuse University
- Guest lecturer on diversity issues (fall 2010) in master's level print journalism ethics class, Walter Wasilewski, instructor, Syracuse University
- Teaching interests: Journalism, social media, media and diversity and media theory

RESEARCH APPOINTMENTS

Research assistant, Newhouse Center for Global Storytelling, Syracuse University, 2013
Principal investigator: Ken Harper, assistant professor multimedia photography and design, S.I. Newhouse School of Public Communications
Research related to the development of the Newhouse Center for Global Storytelling

Research assistant, Department of Public Relations, Syracuse University, 2013
Principal investigator: Guy Golan, associate professor public relations and public diplomacy, S.I. Newhouse School of Public Communications
Research related to the principal investigator's book project

Research assistant, Corporation for Public Broadcasting/Newhouse School Professional Graduate Studies, Syracuse University, 2012
Principal investigator: Joel Kaplan, ombudsman, Corporation for Public Broadcasting and associate dean, Professional Graduate Studies S.I. Newhouse School of Public Communications

Research related to National Public Radio and Public Broadcasting Service operations

Research assistant, Department of Broadcast and Digital Journalism, Syracuse University, 2011
Principal investigator: Suzanne Lysak, assistant professor

Research related to how local news stations used social media to engage with viewers

PEER-REVIEWED PUBLICATIONS

Williams, S. (2015). Digital defense: Black feminists resist violence with hashtag activism. *Feminist Media Studies*.

Chen, G.M., **Williams, S.**, Hendrickson, N., & Chen, L. (2012). Male mummies: A social comparison perspective on how exaggeratedly overweight media portrayals of Madea, Rasputia, and Big Momma affect how black women feel about themselves. *Mass Communication and Society*

INDUSTRY CONFERENCE PRESENTATIONS

Williams, S. & Williams, L. (March 2015). Screens and stereotypes: How social TV amplifies images. South by Southwest Interactive in Austin, Texas

Williams, S. & Williams, L. (March 2014). Black social TV: How programming, viewers and social networks are changing television. South by Southwest Interactive in Austin, Texas

PEER-REVIEWED CONFERENCE PAPERS

Williams, S. (September 2014). Clicks for the cause, links for justice: Social media and its role in the Trayvon Martin case. Paper presented at the Social Media Technology Conference and Workshop Howard University. Washington D.C.

Williams, S. (October 2013). #TeamLightSkin -vs- #TeamDarkSkin: Colorism on Twitter. Paper presented at the Cornell University Magazine and New Media Conference in Ithaca, New York

Williams, S. (March 2013). Screens and stereotypes: A pilot study on the transmission of negative images of women of color on Twitter and television. Paper presented at the National Popular Culture Association Conference in Washington, D.C.

Williams, S. (March 2012). More than numbers: An intersectional examination of media portrayals of Gladys and Jamie Scott. Paper presented at the University of Akron Graduate Gender Symposium in Akron, Ohio

Williams, S. (September 2011). Picture perfect? Latinas' impressions of media of images of themselves in print media. Paper presented at the Second International Conference on the Image in San Sebastian, Spain

Williams, S. Weaver, C. & Williams, L. (August 2011). Americans misbehaving: Anti- and prosocial behaviors on minority vs. mainstream television networks. Paper presented at Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication in St. Louis, Missouri

Williams, S. (July 2011). Reading for realness: Race and weight on RuPaul's Drag Race season 3. Paper presented at the International Popular Culture Association Conference in San Jose, Costa Rica

Chen, G.M., **Williams, S.**, Hendrickson, N., & Chen, L., (August 2010). Mammy revisited: How media portrayals of overweight black women affect how black women feel about themselves. Paper presented at the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication. This paper was awarded the top student paper award in the Commission on the Status of Women division in Denver, Colorado

RESEARCH INTERESTS

Social media (how people of color use it and how they're portrayed on it), social media and activism, media portrayals of women of color, people of color (including immigrants and refugees and queers of color), journalism practices and reality television

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

Full-time reporting/media positions

- Reporter, *The Columbus Dispatch*, OH, May 2003 to April 2009
Covered neighborhoods, census/demographics and immigrant/refugees/ communities of color. Broke the story about the state fair director's ethics violations and resignation. Enterprise stories: Hurricane Katrina evacuees in Ohio and Money, Miss. 50 years after Emmett Till's death. Produced multimedia projects for the web
- Education/federal courts/social services/pop culture reporter/columnist, *The Clarion-Ledger*, Jackson, MS, January 2000 to May 2003
Stories included the federal trials of corrupt police officers and the state's first execution in 13 years and enterprise pieces about slave sites and Freedmen's Banks. Broke the story about the Justice Department's investigation of the state's juvenile jails
- Writer, *The Associated Press*, Jackson, MS, January 1999 to October 1999 Spot news coverage included the federal corruption trial of a city official, a Ku Klux Klan rally and two local hostage standoffs. Ran the bureau during weekends
- On-air announcer, *Arrow 94*, Jackson, MS, August 1994 to December 1998 Announced songs, news and weather and cut and produced spots

Freelance journalism positions

- Contributing writer, *The Li.st/Medium* news website, New York, NY, May 2014
Co-wrote a story about how black television audiences' social television practices are changing the way that television is watched, developed, marketed and produced
- Contributing writer, *BLAC Detroit* magazine, Detroit, MI, August 2013
Wrote a story about M. Roy Wilson, the new president of Wayne State University, and the challenges he faced as the head of Detroit's urban university

- Contributing writer, *The Quill* magazine, Indianapolis, IN, March 2013
Wrote a story about how reporters can add diverse lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender sources into their news stories
- Contributing writer, *BLAC Detroit* magazine, Detroit, MI, March 2013
Wrote a story about Detroit's emergence as a sneaker capital with its upscale boutiques where customers can purchase high-end, custom-made athletic shoes
- Contributing writer, *Upscale* magazine, Atlanta, GA, March 2013
Wrote a story about how workers can prepare for employment opportunities when new companies relocate to their city
- Contributing writer, *The Quill* magazine, Indianapolis, IN, February 2013
Wrote a story about how the increase of African immigrants is changing the perception of who is an African-American and how reporters can cover African immigrant communities
- Contributing writer, *Upscale* magazine, Atlanta, GA, February 2013
Wrote a story about how workers can determine if the culture of a corporation is the right workplace atmosphere for them
- Contributing writer, *Upscale* magazine, Atlanta, GA, February 2012
Wrote a story about modern matchmaker Paul Carrick Brunson
- Freelance writer, *Heart & Soul* magazine, Baltimore, MD 2010 to 2012
Wrote stories about the BP Oil Spill's impact on the health of communities of color in the Gulf Coast, the recession's impact on women's physical and mental health, social networking sites' impact on relationships, electronic readers and ebooks and HIV testing for the nation's leading health magazine for black women (bimonthly circulation more than 300,000)
- Contributing writer, *The Source* magazine, New York, NY August 2011
Wrote a story about the trend of extreme weight loss and improved health among rappers Fat Joe, Paul Wall, Nore and David Banner
- Freelance writer, *Essence* magazine, New York, NY, August 2010
Wrote a story about how women's social circles affect their health for the nation's leading magazine for black women (monthly circulation more than 1 million)
- Contributing writer, *Ebony* magazine, Chicago, IL, July 2008
Wrote stories about AfroCubans and the conflict between Africans and African-Americans for the nation's leading magazine for African-Americans (monthly circulation 1.3 million)
- Freelance writer, *Essence.com*, New York, NY, November 2005
Provided the only live coverage of Rosa Parks' funeral for the website of the nation's leading black women's magazine

AWARDS/HONORS

- 2014 New York Association of Black Journalists, runner-up, online commentary on social justice issues related to women of color and people of color
- 2014 Detroit Society of Professional Journalists, second place award, personality profile on Wayne State University President M. Roy Wilson
- 2010 Ohio Society of Professional Journalists, first place award, minority issues reporting, a body of work
- 2009 Ohio Society of Professional Journalists first place award, minority issues reporting, Iraqi refugees resettle in Columbus and the impact of homicide on a black family amid high rates of killings of young black men in Ohio's capital city
- 2009 National Association of Black Journalists (NABJ) Salute to Excellence Awards finalist, international magazine-reporting category for story about AfroCubans (*Ebony* magazine)
- 2007 Institute for Advanced Journalism Studies Fellow - Havana, Cuba delegation
- 2006 Council on American-Islamic Relations (Ohio) I-CAIR Award for Fair Media
- 2004 NABJ Ethel Payne Africa Reporting Fellow (AIDS orphans in South Africa)
- 2003 Associated Press (Mississippi), first place, best planned series of stories award, "Sugar Ditch to Casino Rich" about Tunica County's evolution from the poorest county in the nation to a casino capital
- 2003 Gannett Great Effort Award, local coverage of the Iraq War
- 2001 Associated Press, first place, continuing coverage award, coverage of the state's controversial Confederate flag vote. My story explored low voting rates in mostly black counties

PROFESSIONAL ASSOCIATIONS

- National Association of Black Journalists

PROFESSIONAL AND ACADEMIC SERVICE

- 2015 Dark Girls after school program mentor
Helped mentor young black women in middle school and taught them how to use social media as a storytelling and activism tool. Syracuse, NY
- 2014 NABJ Student Multimedia Projects mentor
Helped develop and edit stories for The Monitor, the daily newspaper at the National Association of Black Journalists Convention and Job Fair. Boston, MA

- 2013 NABJ Student Multimedia Projects mentor
Helped develop and edit stories for The Monitor, the daily newspaper at the National Association of Black Journalists Convention and Job Fair. Orlando, FL
- 2013 FREE Writing for Empowerment & Liberation: A Read In/Write Out Event (Writing Our Lives Youth Writing Workshop). Writing/media literacy workshop facilitator, devised and led a workshop on writing personal histories and served as the social media editor, Danforth Magnet School. Syracuse, NY
- 2012-2015 Women's Leadership Initiative Syracuse University steering committee member, helped devise a program to foster leadership, combat sexism and provide mentoring to undergraduate female students. Syracuse, NY
- 2012-2013 Diversity committee member at the S.I. Newhouse School of Publications at Syracuse University. Worked with students and faculty to improve diversity in the communications school. Syracuse, NY
- 2012 Doctoral Program Task Force at the S.I. Newhouse School of Public Communications at Syracuse University. Appointed by Dean Lorraine Branham to help evaluate, evolve and update the program with faculty members. Syracuse, NY
- 2012 International AIDS Conference, social media editor for the Black AIDS Institute, coordinated the social media efforts for 30 reporters covering the conference, held in the United States for the first time in 22 years, for the black American think tank on AIDS policy and health care. Washington, DC
- 2012-2013 Society of Professional Journalists Diversity Leadership Fellow, working with the national journalism organization to help develop diversity training programs for chapters across the country that will expand the depth and quality of news reporting through better sourcing
- 2012 Third Annual Writing Our Lives Urban Youth Writing, writing/media literacy workshop facilitator, devised and led a workshop on writing and representation, and served as the social media editor, Nottingham High School. Syracuse, NY
- 2012 Ed Smith Middle School Media Day, media literacy day volunteer. Led a session on body image and Photoshop in magazines, *Magazine images: Is what you see real?* Syracuse, NY
- 2011-2012 Faculty search committee member for professor or practice and visiting professor positions at the S.I. Newhouse School of Public Communications. Syracuse, NY
- 2011-2012 Newhouse Doctoral Student Organization, secretary, created monthly working lunch sessions on academic topics for graduate students. Syracuse, NY

- 2011 member of the Status on the Commission of Women at the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication annual conference in St. Louis, MO. Launched and maintained the Twitter account for the group
- 2011 National Association of Black Journalists Convention and Job Fair, panel moderator (making the transition from the newsroom to the classroom), panel moderator (men as partners in women's health). Philadelphia, PA
- 2011 National Association of Black Journalists Conference on Health Disparities, panel moderator (social determinants of health) and panelist/presenter (multimedia tools to use now), Kaiser Family Foundation. Washington DC
- 2011 Girls Inc. of Central New York media literacy volunteer, led a discussion group on sexualized images of teen girls in magazines, Girls Inc. Syracuse, NY
- 2010 Second Annual Writing Our Lives Urban Youth Writing, writing/media literacy workshop facilitator, devised and led a workshop on writing and representation, Percy Hughes Magnet School. Syracuse, NY
- 2010, Syracuse University National Association of Black Journalists Centennial Celebration of *The Crisis* (NAACP) magazine, panelist, discussed stories that need to be told about African-Americans today, Syracuse University. Syracuse, NY
- 2010 S.I. Newhouse School of Public Communications convocation speaker. Chosen by graduate student colleagues to represent the voice of master's students at convocation during graduation weekend. Shared the stage with Donnie Deutsch, former CNBC talk show host, Syracuse University. Syracuse, NY
- 2010 National Association of Black Journalists Conference on Health Disparities panel moderator (AIDS in black America), Kaiser Family Foundation. Washington DC
- 2009 National Association of Black Journalists Conference on Health Disparities panel moderator (AIDS in black America), Morehouse School of Medicine. Atlanta, GA
- 2009 Minorities in the Media panelist (part of the Free Your Mind Campaign), discussed media representations and pressures of journalists of color. Ohio State University, Columbus, OH
- 2007 Associated Press Managing Editors and UNITY Journalists of Color participant in research focus groups/roundtables on retaining print journalists of color in newsrooms. Lancaster, OH
- 2007 National Association of Black Journalists national convention planning committee. Las Vegas, NV

- 2007 World AIDS Day Town Hall Meeting on AIDS in the Black Community, organized the first-known town hall event on the epidemic's impact on black Americans in the city, Columbus AIDS Task Force. Columbus, Ohio
- 2007-2009 President, Columbus Association of Black Journalists, developed workshops for student journalists, established a scholarship fund to honor two deceased colleagues and helped organize the chapter's 20th anniversary celebration. Columbus, OH
- 2005-2006 Vice president, Columbus Association of Black Journalists, conducted and organized a college writing workshop, conducted outreach to journalism departments at local colleges and universities including historically black colleges. Columbus, OH
- 2005-2009, Central Ohio Society of Professional Journalists board member, organized diversity programming for the chapter including an ethnic media managers dinner and discussion and religious reporting event, also helped develop a multimedia training session for professional journalists. Columbus, OH
- 2005-2008, Guest speaker in journalism classes at Ohio State University (Columbus, OH), Otterbein College (Westerville, OH) and Wilberforce University (Wilberforce, OH)
- 2005 Columbus Association of Black Journalists College Writing Workshop, Central State University. Wilberforce, OH
- 2004-2008, Annual Columbus Association of Black Journalists College Internship Workshop, founder, organizer and moderator, the event helped college students prepare for and obtain media internships, *The Columbus Dispatch* newspaper. Columbus, OH
- 2003 Black College Communication Association National HBCU Student News Media Conference, judge for student media awards contest. Jackson, MS
- 2001-2002, Annual Jackson Association of Black Journalists College Internship Workshop, founder, organizer and moderator, the event helped college students prepare for and obtain media internships, *Clarion-Ledger* newspaper. Jackson, MS
- 2002-2003, Jackson Association of Black Journalists president, Jackson, MS
- 2001-2002, Jackson Association of Black Journalists vice president, Jackson, MS
- 2001-2002 *Clarion-Ledger* diversity committee
- 2001 *Clarion-Ledger* young reader development committee