

University of Louisville

ThinkIR: The University of Louisville's Institutional Repository

Electronic Theses and Dissertations

5-2022

Authentically (un)real assessing VH!'s basketball wives and its violent & colorist portrayals of black women.

Wilma Denae Powell
University of Louisville

Follow this and additional works at: <https://ir.library.louisville.edu/etd>



Part of the [African American Studies Commons](#), [Africana Studies Commons](#), [Gender, Race, Sexuality, and Ethnicity in Communication Commons](#), [Television Commons](#), and the [Women's Studies Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Powell, Wilma Denae, "Authentically (un)real assessing VH!'s basketball wives and its violent & colorist portrayals of black women." (2022). *Electronic Theses and Dissertations*. Paper 3862.
Retrieved from <https://ir.library.louisville.edu/etd/3862>

This Doctoral Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by ThinkIR: The University of Louisville's Institutional Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in Electronic Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of ThinkIR: The University of Louisville's Institutional Repository. This title appears here courtesy of the author, who has retained all other copyrights. For more information, please contact thinkir@louisville.edu.

AUTHENTICALLY (UN)REAL
ASSESSING VH1'S *BASKETBALL WIVES* AND ITS VIOLENT & COLORIST
PORTRAYALS OF BLACK WOMEN

By
Wilma Denae Powell
B.A., Tougaloo College, 2015
M.A., University of Houston, 2017

A Dissertation
Submitted to the Faculty of the
College of Arts and Sciences of the University of Louisville
In Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements
For the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy
In Pan-African Studies

Department of Pan-African Studies
University of Louisville
Louisville, KY

May 2022

Copyright 2022 by Wilma Denae Powell

All rights reserved

AUTHENTICALLY (UN)REAL
ASSESSING VH1'S *BASKETBALL WIVES* AND ITS VIOLENT & COLORIST
PORTRAYALS OF BLACK WOMEN

By
Wilma Denae Powell
B.A., Tougaloo College, 2015
M.A., University of Houston, 2017

A Dissertation Approved on

April 1, 2022

by the following Dissertation Committee:

Dr. Kaila Story

Dr. W. S. Tkweme

Dr. Tyler Fleming

Dr. Soibhan Smith-Jones

DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to my grandparents and parents. I am grateful for your lessons and guidance.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

THANK GOD I'M FINALLY DONE!

To PAS

The Pan-African Studies Department became my second home. PAS was my safe space, my community, my support system. Thank you to the faculty, staff, and students who became my second family.

To my committee

Many thanks to my committee: Dr. Kaila Story, Dr. Siobhan Smith-Jones, Dr. W. S. Tkweme, and Dr. Tyler Fleming. I came into PAS unsure of myself and each of them, in their own way, has giving me space to grow and the guidance I needed to stand firm on whom I've chosen to be as a scholar. I cannot express enough how grateful I am to Dr. Story and Dr. Smith-Jones for the many times they've had to "gather me together" and remind me that I'm qualified and capable. I couldn't have asked for better mentors.

To my family and friends

Thank you for all of the love and support you've given me on this journey. From your prayers, motivational calls and text messages, to the many care packages that you all sent, I've appreciated every single one of them. The prayers of my aunts and uncles kept me lifted. The early morning and late night pep-talks from my best friends kept me motivated. I couldn't have done this without y'all. To my parents, Leon and Vanneta Powell, I pray I've made you proud. This is OUR final "piece of paper"!

To my fiancé

Thank you for your love, understanding, patience, and support. I started this journey without a partner, and I was certain that that's how I would finish. Your patience and understanding changed my mind and your love and support sealed the deal. You've allowed me to cry and vent, often times out of sheer tiredness and frustration. Thank you for your constant encouragement and for believing in me even when I doubted myself. I can't wait to spend the rest of my life with you.

ABSTRACT

AUTHENTICALLY (UN)REAL ASSESSING VH1'S *BASKETBALL WIVES* AND ITS VIOLENT & COLORIST PORTRAYALS OF BLACK WOMEN

Wilma Denae Powell

April 1, 2022

Does reality television serve as solely a form of entertainment, or could reality television also be maintaining hegemonic beliefs and reinforcing biased views of Black women? Since 2010, Vh1's *Basketball Wives* has given audiences the opportunities to entertain themselves by watching women who are/were married to, dating, or are the mothers of children fathered by professional basketball players. Despite the show's name, few members of the cast are currently married and audiences only get mere glimpses of the cast in motherly or marital interactions. So, what does *Basketball Wives* offer audiences who tune in to watch Black women for entertainment? The answer is negative stereotypical representations.

This study uses season eight of *Basketball Wives* as a case study for assessing elements of violent behavior and colorism. The angry Black woman stereotype is one of the most prominent stereotypes represented in media, and reality television specifically. Dramatic build-ups, verbal degradation, and physical altercations are three of the primary elements that makes shows such as *Basketball Wives* so popular and entertaining. The constant visual display of Black women in stereotypical and degrading manners

maintains white hegemonic beliefs of allegedly inferior Black womanhood, and therefore the passive acceptance of Black women continuing to be depicted in such a manner.

Further, this research focuses on issues of colorism and utilizes cast member OG's assertions that her mistreatment by other cast members was a result, at least in part, of her fellow cast members' colorist bias towards her darker skin.

KEYWORDS: Black reality television, Stereotypes, Black women, *Basketball Wives*, Black feminist theory, Cultivation theory

TABLE OF CONTENTS

DEDICATION	iii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	iv
ABSTRACT	v
CHAPTER 1 – INTRODUCTION	1
Purpose	7
CHAPTER 2 –THE SCRIPTING – REVIEWING THE LITERATURE	10
Media Studies	10
Reality TV Past and Present	13
Black Reality TV	22
Historical & Contemporary Anti-Black Women Stereotypes.....	29
Mammy	30
Jezebel.....	31
Sapphire	34
CHAPTER 3 – METHODOLOGY	42
Research Questions.....	43
Theoretical Framework.....	44
Black Feminist Theory	44
Cultivation Theory.....	45
Case Study Method.....	46
Textual Analysis.....	49
Data Collection and Analysis.....	50
Definition of Themes.....	51
CHAPTER 4— THEY DID WHAT?!: DISCUSSING DRAMA, VERBAL ATTACKS, AND PHYSICAL ALTERCATIONS.....	53
What’s the Deal with All of the Drama?	57
The Verbal Assaults.....	60
Victimization	65
The Physical Altercations	68

CHAPTER 5 – UNDERSTANDING OG’S COLORISM ACCUSATIONS	74
OG’s Articulation of Mistreatment During Episodes 1-16	75
Other Cast Member’s Treatment of OG During Episodes 1-16	80
Episodes 17-18 (Season Finale Episodes)	85
CHAPTER 6—CONCLUSION.....	91
What Exactly Do We Get from All of the Drama and Altercations?	92
Colorism?	93
The Finale.....	94
My Final Thoughts as a Misrepresented Black Woman.....	96
Limitations	98
Suggestions for Future Application.....	99
REFERENCES	102
CURRICULUM VITA	111

CHAPTER 1 – INTRODUCTION

I begin writing this dissertation with the words anger and violence in mind and how I may redirect the implications of those words in reference to discussions of Black women. Anger is a single emotion that can be brought on by a plethora of lived experiences. Anger may result in a multitude of conceivable, and unconceivable outcomes, unless you are a Black woman. As a Black woman, others often view you as just angry, always angry, and that your anger is directly related to your race. As a Black woman, that is not always angry, I live as a testament, and in fact I know many Black women outside of myself who are also not always angry. Even when we have been angered, often there are a multitude of reasons for that anger. The angry, aggressive, violent, hot-tempered stereotype of Black women is a stereotype that is steeped within an anti-Black and white hegemonic politic. A politic that has a longstanding history within our country, and it is this politic, which has made Black women confront their intersectional oppressions daily.

Black women's experiences with anti-Black oppression are fueled by racism and sexism simultaneously. When Kimberlé Crenshaw coined the term intersectionality, she was referring to the overlapping and multiple forms of oppression that are projected onto a particular individual routinely. Crenshaw argues that Black women who exist within the intersections of race and gender, often bear the brunt of this lived burden (Crenshaw,

1989); experiencing discrimination because they identify as women as well as discrimination based on the color of their skin.

Therefore, even though there are some instances in which Black women may express our anger, and it be deemed acceptable, in many instances when a Black woman expresses any form of unhappy, unsatisfied, or uncomfortable emotions, it is often and frequently designated as unprovoked anger. This immediately reduces her actual emotions or feelings into a moment of overreaction. Further, this also puts Black women in the position to rush through emotions in order to not make others around them feel uncomfortable (Jones & Norwood, 2017). Black women make the decision every day, sometimes multiple times a day, deciding whether to speak up when unhappy, unsatisfied, or uncomfortable and risk being labeled as angry, or to grit their teeth through each instance and carry on as if they are okay.

Growing up, I was consistently told “You’re so pretty for a Black/dark skinned girl.” This was a statement I most frequently heard during my pageant competitions. I started competing at the age of nine and continued for another thirteen years. Whether it was someone else’s random parent or one of my so called pageant sisters, there wasn’t a single competition that I competed in where someone didn’t tell me I was pretty for a “dark skin” girl, or that I had very exotic looks for someone so dark. I was also told by others that they didn’t know Black people could grow their hair long, making the misguided assumption that Black people couldn’t have naturally long hair. I would routinely smile, say thank you, or awkwardly laugh, and turn away. In my head, however, I was enraged whenever someone said those kinds of things to me. It bewildered and upset me that so many people genuinely believed that I was not supposed

to be “that pretty” just because I had darker skin than them. Despite my frustration and irritation, I would continue competing in pageants until I was 22. My last pageant was also the first all-Black pageant I’d ever competed in. I went into the competition assuming that my experience would be drastically different from other pageants where most of the contestants were white. I was wrong.

Being surrounded by so many beautiful Black women and girls was awesome. We shared our stories from previous pageants, talked about how much of a relief it was to be in a space that we knew we were welcomed, and not just tolerated; that is, until it was prelims night. Prelims was our first time not having to do our own hair and makeup during the weeklong competition. Our hair and make-up were sponsored and staffed by all Black-owned companies with Black women. Yet, a few contestants, including myself, got into arguments with the make-up artists who insisted on putting us in extremely lighter make up as to not appear too dark. While I understood the concept of proper stage makeup, I couldn’t understand why these make-up artists found it necessary to make me three shades lighter than my hand, which was also about five shades lighter on stage.

After my own argument with the make-up artist that had been assigned to me, I decided to leave her room, go wash the almost yellow makeup off my face, and do my own makeup that night. These makeup artists were presented to us as if they were professional, seasoned, and knew how to do proper stage make-up, which they had done for other Black women. Some of the contestants chose to quietly endure, and later cry about how un-beautiful they felt in their make-up. We later found out that some of the make-up artist complained to our director that we, the contestants, were unprofessional and had bad attitudes. It became apparent to me that those makeup artists, who were all

Black women, only knew how to do proper stage make-up for light skinned Black women, and not medium to darker skinned Black women. It would be years later that I would finally make the connection that their insistence on making us appear lighter, coupled with their complaints of us being unprofessional and having attitudes, was a manifestation of colorism.

While I have never considered myself dark skinned, I've always been very clear that I am not light skinned either. I have always considered myself to be somewhere in the middle. However, friends of mine who are lighter than me have often had their friends refer to me as their darker skinned friend. On the other hand, I have always wished that my skin be as dark and rich as my mother's, grandmother's, father's, and grandfather's. On several occasions, I have broken what I call one of the Black community's commandments and stayed out of the sun to intentionally get darker. I grew up in a family of darker-skinned people who never made an issue out of having darker skin nor did they make it seem as if having darker skin was an inherently bad thing. From a young age I was taught that being Black or having darker skin does not make someone an ugly person, an undesirable person, nor a person that should be looked down upon or ridiculed. I also recognize, however, that is not the case in all households, Black or otherwise.

Perhaps it is because I was raised in a family full of deeply melanated people that I've always understood that having darker skin doesn't inherently make someone a bad person; another stereotype associated with having darker skin (i.e., dark/black=bad therefore darker skin/black person=a bad person). Perhaps it is because I grew up in Mississippi that when I think of someone exhibiting unprovoked aggressive behavior,

Black people are rarely the first people that come to mind. Yet, when one lives within an anti-Black society, these derogatory messages about dark skin are often internalized by Black people and others, making dark skinned Black people the butt of harmful and stereotypical jokes.

Media often replicates this kind of sentiment. More specifically, the televised media that we consume daily has an overabundance of stereotypical portrayals and whether intentional or unintentional, these stereotypes continue to solidify negative beliefs about Black people. The media assists in reinforcing stereotypes that Black people are violent, criminal, less attractive yet hyper-sexual, and unintelligent. While I recognize that there are other forms of media that contradict negative stereotypes and offer alternative views of Black people, I have come to believe that most people are more likely to consume forms of media that negatively stereotype Black people than portrayals of us in positive or alternative lights, even when given the opportunity.

In thinking about this work, I've asked myself why Black people, specifically Black women, continue to indulge in entertainment that is filled with stereotypes. Why don't they just stop and find another show? This query is then intensified when I consider who's writing and producing and heading the networks behind these television shows. Researchers Hunt and Ramón conducted a study in 2020 and found that 92% of all network heads are white and 68% of them are male. Their research also states that only 10.7% of broadcast scripted shows are written by people of color and only 22% of all streamed and aired episodes are directed by people of color (Hunt & Ramón, 2020). According to the aforementioned statistics, it can be inferred that there are limited

opportunities in the industry that allow for alternative and more positive roles for Black people, and Black women specifically.

I have recently begun to watch reality television, something I have attempted to avoid due to my personal belief that reality television does not in fact portray reality. However, after immense coaxing from friends, sisters, and even my former students, I finally relented and began to watch. What I thought would be one quick episode, turned into a full Saturday of binge watching a previous season to get caught up on the drama and arguments of the current season. I video called my best friend throughout that day with question after question of why this woman was so upset with that woman? I also asked her, do they ever just hang out without arguing or bringing up drama? If they're friends, why do they gang up on each other? None of her answers satisfied my questions. My friend finally got fed up with my questions, and to silence me, she finally told me: "Denaë, that's just how the shows are made, and maybe they are really good friends off camera, but it's more entertaining to watch them argue". She went on to say, "besides, if I wanted to watch them be all friendly and stuff, I'd watch a Disney movie or something." After our conversation, I immediately began watching reality television through a different lens. I watched these shows, with new realizations that Black women were the butts of the majority of the jokes; that the darker skinned Black women on these shows received a lot more criticism and hateful remarks made towards them in comparison to their lighter skinned cast members; that the women on these shows seemed to be trapped in never ending cycles of arguments and confrontations.

Purpose

This dissertation is a cumulative work that stems from my newfound habit of binge-watching reality television, and simultaneously feeling fed up with all of the misrepresentations of Black women; specifically, the angry tropes of Black women and the effects of colorism stereotypes of Black women. This created an intellectual desire for me to offer my words and experiences as experiential evidence that Black women are not inherently aggressive and combative and skin color for sure, shouldn't be a qualifier in assessing someone's aggression. I seek to draw attention to how one of my favorite reality television shows continues to miss the mark when it comes to portraying Black women in accurate, three-dimensional, and robust ways. I argue throughout this work that all for the sake of airing drama, altercations, and the like, *Basketball Wives* continues to posit Black women's identities in harmful and stereotypical ways.

While I recognize that Black women's (and anyone else's for that matter) lives can involve drama and altercations, I am also asserting that drama and altercations should not be considered a norm and overarching theme of folk's lives. Therefore, this work contends that *Basketball Wives* on *VH1* is designed to entertain people with non-stop drama, arguments, physical altercations, and embarrassment, all to the detriment of authentic lived experiences of other Black women. Further, this work argues that this show and other reality television shows that center around Black women only showcase new versions of old stereotypes, and in doing so continue to replicate old racist and sexist tropes of Black womanhood. Consequently, *Basketball Wives* on *VH1* continues to negatively effect, not only the reality television stars themselves, but also non-celebrity

Black women who still have to navigate a racist and sexist society that often only views them through the distorted lens of reality television and media.

Most people living in the United States and the world (Fujioka, 1999) learn about each other not from actual interactions, but from television, even though some if not most of these depictions can be grossly exaggerated or completely inaccurate (Colleluori & Angster, 2015). It is suggested throughout this work that when it comes to television in general, and reality television specifically, portrayals of Black women are often grossly exaggerated or completely inaccurate depictions that work against the authentic humanity of Black women. Allegedly, reality television (RTV) depicts the real, unscripted, everyday lives of other people, typically celebrities (Miller, 2011). Shows such as *Basketball Wives*, *Love & Hip Hop (NY)*, and the *Real Housewives of Atlanta* have become media pillars for Black households and others. These shows are filled with drama, cattiness, and a whole lot of Black girl attitude.

The purpose of this study is to examine RTV and how Black reality shows specifically, continue to perpetuate stereotypical and anti-Black depictions of Black women. Black reality television (BRT) in this study is understood to be any reality television show that has a majority Black cast (Scales, 2013). Often, producers segment their target audiences in racial groups and generally develop their shows content around stereotypical notions of race (Gandy, 2001). Many of these BRT shows are created by people who are not black. Further, even those BRT shows that are created/produced by Black people (*College Hill* by Tracey Edmonds, *Basketball Wives* by Shaunie O'Neal, and *Love & Hip Hop* by Mona Scott-Young, et.al) are still overwhelmingly produced and scripted by white men. I argue in this study that it is these sociopolitical circumstances in

tandem with white supremacist notions of Blackness that are the driving forces behind these shows' overall production.

With less than 20 years in the media game, BRT is a relatively new genre of media. As such, so is the research on the subject. There are very few studies that discuss the full nature and effect of BRT on society and the long-term effects on Black women. Although these shows offer some alternative lenses through which to view Black women, they still do very little to directly confront and alter the negative stereotypes that are also portrayed by the shows' cast members.

As more research is conducted, it will be imperative that scholars explicitly identify and analyze these negative stereotypical representations as well as fully explore their relationship to society's views of Black women. Idealistically, this type of shift towards a critical view may lead producers and media companies to alter their representations of Black women's lives that is less stereotypical and truer to the multi-layered lives of Black women; we may only see this shift if that critical lens leads to a loss in viewership and profit, though. Considering that television is still the most dominant form of watched media and that most adults spend an average of thirty-five hours a week watching television (Nielsen, 2019), it behooves scholars to dive deeper into its potential effects on societal interactions. Overall, studies such as this are extremely important as they move the conversations forward with regard to how we think of ourselves, how others perceive their peers, and what influences these views and thoughts.

CHAPTER 2 –THE SCRIPTING – REVIEWING THE LITERATURE

We currently live within a media driven and media saturated society. We get information about our communities and the world from our news media. Children are currently being taught to learn how to use educational media, and we keep in touch with distant family and friends through our social media. Media has the power to create, alter, and heavily influence the various ways in which people interact and understand each other. For decades, television has captivated masses and has played a substantial role in how people learn about each other. It has also played a role in what assumptions we make about one another. Cultural and communications studies are two academic disciplines which often intersect and produce an additional field of inquiry called media studies.

Media Studies

My research revolves around media studies, and Black studies specifically, because both allow me to explore anti-Black women stereotypes within media with the intention to strategically analyze the content presented in a specific form of media while also assessing the presence of anti-black stereotypical portrayals. Our society functions within a set of social norms that are partially influenced by the various messages that are sent and received through media. This is applicable to studying Black people being depicted in media because for decades, media companies have been depicting Black

people as simple minded, inferior, and counterproductive in comparison to our white counterparts. Many of the original anti-black depictions of Black people are still present in media because society still accepts these depictions as accurate.

Media Studies, as a discipline began its earliest stages of development during the 1920's. The field focused on the history, content, and various effects of media on society. Some of the first courses which studied film were offered at The New School in 1926 (About Media Studies, n.d.) and took its roots from both the academic disciplines of Sociology and English respectively. Sociology utilized media studies to identify and study patterns of social production and consumption, as well as their relationship to power and control. In this way, analyzing media can chart the habits of the masses due to it being used as tools within the socialization process. Media studies utilizes textual analysis, which it borrowed from the discipline of English because it uses both visual and verbal cues to present messages, and it also has the power to effect change on the ways in which masses communicate (Thornham & O'sullivan, 2004). Thus, within academia, media studies began to grow exponentially as a field during the 1960's as the discipline of English began to dive further into textual-linguistic studies.

Scholars within the field of media studies have tended to focus on the narratives presented and observe the impact of cultural codes and their impact on the constructions of social reality (Kafle, 2010). Media Studies scholars argue that it is these cultural codes that inform citizens about what is perceived and recognizable as appropriate and acceptable. This is key to understanding the validity of media studies as an academic discipline because according to Hall (2002), media's communication of ideas and concepts are constantly encoded (the process of sending messages) and decoded (the

process by which society receives those messages) (Hall, 2002) by Americans, which allows for a constant flux in social norms. Today, media studies should be understood as an interdisciplinary field consisting of the disciplines of anthropology, race, gender, and communication. Because the media consumed is virtually all inclusive, it has the power to alter the ways in which people interpret other people, their well-being, their status, and even their acceptability within the larger society.

Media, in the form of film and television, provides a focus for both visual and textual analysis of cultural codes and constructions of social realities. Film and television are forms of mediated communication which enable participants to “encounter” diverse populations of various social, ethnic, and religious backgrounds (Gergen, 1991).

Mediated communication can be used to challenge or reinforce singular perspectives of societal norms and their rationale of truth. Considering that adults ages 18-34 (the critical identify formation ages for young adults) (Klimstra & van Doeselaar, 2017) watch television on a regular basis (Watson, 2020), it can be argued that mediated communication can be used to shape one’s perceptions of self and societal standing.

For the past several decades, televised media has grown to be more than an outlet of entertainment. Television informs the public during an election, it shapes people's values and views, and it also helps us understand how people learn (Severin & Tankard Jr, 2014). However, it is not solely the power of a presented message nor the power of the gaze of the viewer that makes mediated communication so critical, rather, it is the active engagement between the two that has facilitated the societal shift from media being perceived as just sheer entertainment (Lewis, 2013). For that reason, it is imperative that

scholarship also focus on the ways in which Black Americans have been depicted in the media, and what messages may be being portrayed about Black people in that media.

Reality TV Past and Present

Television has roughly seven primary genres; Docu (documentary) Series, News, Sports, Drama, Sitcom, Cartoon, and Participatory. Reality Television (RTV) is a subgenre of televised media and can be found throughout several of the primary genres. It is a subgenre of television shows which allegedly depicts true everyday events, rather than fiction or scripted events (Miller, 2011). According to current scholars, there are five key elements that specifically define RTV: “(a) people portraying themselves (i.e., not actors or public figures performing roles), (b) filmed at least in part in their living or working environment rather than on a set, (c) without a script, (d) with events placed in a narrative context, (e) for the primary purpose of viewer entertainment (Nabi, Biely, Morgan, & Stitt, 2003). These characteristics technically encompass a wide variety of other shows that fall under other genres such as drama and docu-series. In order to fully understand the premise of RTV, one must understand where this concept of people watching for pure entertainment stems from.

It may come to a surprise to some that RTV as a subgenre takes root from the show *Candid Camera*. Originally created by Allen Funt as *Candid Microphone* in 1947, *Candid Camera* debuted in 1948 as a tv show depicting real people’s reactions to practical jokes. Funt got his idea about creating the show from his time in the army during WWII (Clissold, 2004). Funt’s *Candid Microphone* was somewhat of an experiment in which he would record other service members as they vented about their

time in the military. Funt realized that as soon as the men saw the red recording light their conversation shifted from being open and candid, to being reserved and more restrictive in their choices of words. He soon changed his method to one with more covert tactics, hiding his recording light as well as recording his sessions earlier into the conversation as to ascertain more honest and robust conversations from his participants.

Funt would begin his interviews, by disguising them as just casual conversations with the service men to gather more candid information later, all of which was being recorded. Funt took his idea for *Candid Microphone* and created *Candid Camera* using this structure. Funt would hide cameras in public places while recording people's interactions with each other. He soon discovered that gathering interesting conversations and encounters from everyday people was harder than he thought. He later began staging various scenarios in order to record people's reactions, some favorable, some not so favorable (Clissold, 2004). With this act of staged recording of everyday people's lives, Funt successfully created the first RTV show which would remain on the air from 1984-2014.

Funt's show was immensely popular as it played on American fear of surveillance. *Candid Camera* came on the heels of WWII, and at that time, American people were terrified of being watched, and/or having the government invade their privacy through various surveying tactics. Citizens were on high alert as to whether or not the government, or even their own neighbors, may be spying on them, suspecting them of "un-American behavior". *Candid Camera* played on these fears, making it a television show that almost every and any American citizen saw as their worst nightmare.

It was only on rare occasions that guests of the show were filmed, and the resulting outcome was positive. More often, the participants' filming resulted in portraying them in a negative light. Upon participants discovering that their actions, conversations, and interactions with others had been secretly filmed, participants wondered how their recorded behavior may be perceived. Would it be seen as good, or bad by audiences? Would their interactions be viewed as American or un-American? Would they be caught in a compromising situation? These along with many other questions fueled the anxieties behind the show. Yet, the show's catch phrase, "Smile, you're on *Candid Camera*" gave the show a lighthearted feeling. This was not the government, fellow neighbors, nor an international threat. Being caught on *Candid Camera* was just another form of entertainment and one should smile if they were ever caught.

Candid Camera made watching people fun and entertaining. Invasions of privacy became a normal thing that was "ok" so long as it was for entertainment purposes. Since *Candid Camera*, the world has seen a surge in RTV shows with their own subgenres. In the 1990's, we saw such shows as *Cops*, *America's Dumbest Criminals*, and *America's Most Wanted*; shows that specifically followed the criminal actions of the American people. In the early 2000's came shows such as *Flavor of Love*, *The Bachelor*, and *Next*; shows that focused on dating, love, and romance. Since 2010, RTV has pushed further into the lives of others with shows like *Catfish*, *Naked and Afraid*, and *Life Below Zero*. These shows cross the lines of drama and documentary as they focus on people in sometimes compromising and even life-threatening situations. RTV shows have taken on

many other forms ranging from game shows (*Fear Factor*), talent competitions (*America's Got Talent*), and cooking shows (*Cake Wars*).

To date, contemporary scholars are in constant debate about RTV's many issues and contributions to society and the ways in which we view and understand each other. True authenticity is one of the primary issues with RTV. The word *reality* has the potential to lead viewers to believe that everything they see is true and accurate, also leading to contradictory and complex views of society (Tyree, 2011). Regardless of perception, many of these shows are scripted, they have writing teams which are a part of unions. Further, another issue that arises with RTV and viewers' perceptions is whether it is actually real, seeing as how the average person will probably never experience such scenarios in their everyday lives. The filming of people being humiliated, consumed with constant drama and hostility, and what seems to be a never-ending stream of meanness should not be labeled as authentic for most people's everyday lives. Therefore, it is problematic and deeply troubling that these sorts of behaviors make up such large amounts of RTV's content.

The Real World (1992) is another classic RTV show which helped lay the bedrock for how we view RTV today. The show was instrumental in teaching viewers what to expect when they watched people of various walks of life living together. They weren't family members, friends, or old acquaintances, rather *The Real World* put complete strangers together and facilitated a living arrangement which encouraged confrontation and gossip with a splash of friendship.

Casting young adults in a manner intended to ignite conflict and dramatic narrative development, placing the cast in a house filled with cameras and

microphones, and employing rapid editing techniques in an overall serial structure, the producers created a text that would prefigure programs such as *Survivor* and *Big Brother*. It could be argued that *The Real World* trained a generation of young viewers in the language of reality television (Ouellette & Murray, 2004, pp. 4-5).

Irene McGee, former star of *The Real World (2013)*, informed the world that the producers dictated and orchestrated virtually every part of the show. They controlled what they ate and drank, and even what they wore. In addition, producers were also known to monitor where they went, and what they could talk about in their sessions with producers. The cast was forbidden from talking to each other about the process of the show, breaking the fourth wall ¹, or even speaking to each other about what was really being discussed in the private confessionals with directors (McGee, 2013). Their privacy was always being invaded, even in the bathrooms which had no real doors. This type of filmed and restricted living is not authentic for larger society. Yet, because most people are not aware of the many rules which the cast must abide, they do not consider how scripted RTV actually is.

Racial conflict has been another serious critique when it comes to discussing *The Real World*. During season eighteen, two of the housemates, Davis and Tyrie, were involved in an altercation which led Davis, a white man, to call Tyrie, a Black man, the n-word. During this particular episode, Tyrie had already been angered by the accusation that a white male bartender had called Stephen, another Black man, the n-word, and Davis presumably left Stephen without defending him or confronting the bartender. Both

¹ Breaking the fourth wall was originally a term used in theatre but is now applicable for television and it is understood that the screen is the fourth wall of any set. Breaking the fourth wall means that a character speaks directly to the screen or audience opposed to only speaking with fellow cast members (Lannom, 2020).

Davis and Tyrie were drunk that night and had to be physically separated from each other. The producer's choice to air this confrontation without offering some sort of resolution or message of disapproval is indicative of their inherent desire to create content that is controversial and draws viewers in for drama-filled interactions.

Perhaps an even more illuminating example of how producers of RTV are more invested in their show's high ratings than they are with favorable outcomes between cast members can be found if we look to *Survivor: Cook Islands*, which has also been referred to as the "race wars" (Drew, 2011). This season was unique in that it broke the contestants into tribes based on race. Greater lies were never told when *Survivor*'s executive producers claimed that "people would never judge each other by skin color" (Carter, 2006, p. 2). These people literally and metaphorically had to compete against another race for resources and survival. The season stayed true to RTV's racial rules, which emphasize "conflict and division by positioning race as a point of contention among cast members" (Bell-Jordan, 2008, p. 353). For the first time, in the show's history, an Asian American won the finale competition. Due to the historical representation on the show, and the season's premise, it can be argued that the producers facilitated a win for a person of color based on racial minority hierarchy ².

RTV shows that showcase people living together thrive off controversy and conflict, especially when it comes to RTV shows that are centered around women. Oxygen's *Bad Girls Club* (BGC) puts a few "bad girls" in a house together and let

² Within white American racial minority hierarchy, Asian Americans are considered the model minority. The model minority myth implies that Asian Americans are successful academically, occupationally, economically, and in other various avenues when compared to their other minority counterparts (Yi & Museus, 2015).

viewers witness their interactions. These women weren't celebrities, although some have gone on to become popular media personalities. In an interview, BGC executive producer Jon Murray properly explained the show's overall goal and excitement behind watching women party, drink, bond, and fight. "In all the reality shows we've done; we've found that our most interesting characters are the bad girls. So, we thought, 'Wow, wouldn't it be fun if we had a show that was entirely cast with these kinds of women who play by their own rules?'" (Murray, 2006).

Over the course of BGC's existence, we've seen the cast become more diverse, but that also led to more physical altercations. This casting decision may lead viewers to believe that minority women are more violent and fame hungry than white women (Mercer, 2007). This has been long echoed by Black feminist and cultural critic bell hooks (1992) who asserted that images of minorities on television have historically been manipulated in a negative manner with the express purpose of creating a more favorable image of white women. The continuous casting of minority women in negative and stereotypical roles simply leads to the viscous cycle of younger women and girls believing that they must immitate this behavior to be successful on the screen. Thus, when Black and other minoritized women audition, hoping to obtain a role on television, they often imitate these negative and racialized stereotypes, continuing and repeating the cycle of problematic representation of Black women on RTV.

It can be argued then, that the largest issue with RTV are the stereotypes that are constantly being acted out. Stereotypes are generalized and imagined realities, which are based on little to no facts. The problem with stereotypes is that they, "essentialize differences within individuals and groups, reinforce imbalances of power, and help

maintain both the social and symbolic order” (Hall, 1997). Negative stereotypes are so incredibly pervasive across all forms of media that oftentimes the stereotyped groups become so accustomed to seeing these portrayals that they begin to incorporate these stereotypes into their real lives (Smith, 201eight).

Although viewers may state that RTV is more about entertainment than it is about information, this does not mean they are not receiving information from these shows. Viewers are watching these casts made up of everyday people live their lives in a very public way through RTV. This opens audiences up to then critique various casts on various shows about how they are living their lives. Therefore, when viewers are watching these shows they are simultaneously learning (Hill, 2005). They are watching the cast members and they are observing, processing, and that is a form of learning. This learning then provides audiences with examples of social behavior and expectations, and even if viewers speculate that the premise of some RTV shows are fictional, they believe the moments are real.

Although RTV shows do feature real people, being friends, having families, and some of the scenarios can be seen as authentic, the shows themselves are still heavily scripted, and they often rely heavily on the acting talents of the cast members. In Michelle Crouch’s “13 Secrets Reality TV Show Producers Won’t Tell You,” Crouch outlines some startling and disturbing facts about RTV. For example, Crouch discusses Frankenbiting in her article and says that it is a common practice within RTV. Frankenbiting is when show editors take clips and splice them together, often times creating entirely new sentences and/or entirely new conversations.

In addition, Crouch also asserts that if producers deem it necessary, they will demand that cast members change their entire personalities for the marketability of the shows and threaten the cast with being fired if they do not comply. Producers of RTV have also done extensive background checks on prospective new cast members, searching for flaws or other controversial information, which they try and obtain from the family and friends of prospective cast members. Further, Crouch also contends that producers have also been known to conduct drug and STD/I tests and have even gone so far as to having certain prospects sit through psychological and physical exams (Crouch, 2018). Consequently, any legible “realness,” and/or “authenticity,” of these shows and/or their cast members is often stripped away before filming even begins.

The word “reality” in RTV is perhaps the greatest deceiver to the public. When something is stated to be real, the public may not consider its authenticity and take it at face value. While this is not an uncommon assumption, it does however, provide the intellectual reason and the scholarly rationale for the study of RTV. If such an artificial production can engender real and actual negative outcomes for our society especially its effects on social norms (Girl Scout Research Institute & TRU, 2011; StudyCorgi, 2020; (Zeta Phi Beta Sorority, Inc. & American Advertising Federation, 2015), then it is critical to investigate, using the methods of encoding and decoding to study the long-term effects of such contrived programming, and currently there are very few qualitative and quantitative studies that address these effects.

The previous studies that have been conducted on RTV have only sought to address early 21st century data on RTV’s popularity (Nielsen, 2011) and/or people's favorite types of RTV shows (Statista, 2016). While these studies have provided

scholarly audiences with valuable information, these studies have all lacked the critical attention and insight to the harmful effects of RTV consumption on audiences' understanding and thinking about social and racialized cultural mores or behaviors. This scholarly gap in the research about RTV offers an opportunity for other schools of thought to intersect with existing studies, and adding to the scholarly literature, by providing insight on the effects of RTV on the masses. This is especially important, I think, when it comes to studying the negative outcomes of RTV consumption on populations that are considered "vulnerable," namely Black Americans. While RTV in general and BRT specifically, is produced and marketed in similar ways, BRT, in the years since its emergence, has created much more offensive and negatively constructed stereotypes about Black personhood than RTV has ever been able to, as Black cast members have tended to be anomalies on RTV shows, and in BRT they are center stage.

Black Reality TV

It is the contention of this study, that Black reality television (BRT) should be understood as any reality tv show that has had a majority Black cast (Scales, 2013) . The first show of its kind was *College Hill* which first aired in January of 2004 and focused on the lives of eight students attending an Historically Black College or University (HBCU). Despite any diversifying efforts that may have come from it, *College Hill*, and the participating HBCUs, received a great deal of criticism for allowing such negative and stereotypical portrayals of Black people and Black life (Smith S. , 2010). And yet, this didn't stop this new wave of RTV shows that featured predominantly Black casts.

Since the introduction of *College Hill*, we have seen a plethora of BRT shows depicting some variations of real Black life. The various story-arcs for these for shows have ranged from being centered on finding love (*Flavor of Love* in 2006), to parenting (*Snoop Dogg's Father Hood* in 2007), and to even shows that focused on Black home and life (*Real Housewives of Atlanta* in 2008). Others have centered Black artistic expression and entrepreneurship (*Black Ink Crew* in 2013) and dating while Black in the music industry (*Love & Hip-Hop Miami* in 2018). However, regardless of these show's focal areas, one thing remains consistent and congruent throughout all of them, and that has been how all of these shows center and highlight anti-Black stereotypes.

The Colorism Behind Casting

The persistence of these stereotypical portrayals is due in part to skin color stratification, or what's commonly referred to as colorism. The term was originally coined by womanist scholar Alice Walker in 1983. Walker defines colorism as the “prejudicial or preferential treatment of same-race people based solely on their color” (Walker, 2003, p. 290). Further, colorism is enforced when Black people impose anti-Black attitudes onto other Black people and specifically refers to a set of systems that privileges lighter skin over darker skin within society (Hunter, 2002) . Issues of colorism are attached to the controlling images that degrade Black women, as well.

These images are rooted in Black and white oppositional differences, in which Blackness is understood as simultaneously an un-American racial identity, therefore tethering whiteness and Americanness together, inevitably centering white identity as the more acceptable and appropriate racial identity to inhabit while living within an American cultural milieu (Hill-Collins, 2002, p. 90). For example, if a light skinned

Black woman assumes that a dark-skinned Black woman doesn't have good hair ³, she is exhibiting an anti-Black and oppressive belief about hair texture and skin color which is rooted in white hegemonic ideals of beauty. When Black people present uncomfortable and premeditated feelings about other Black people based on how dark or light their skin is, that is a form of colorism.

American culture's elevation of white racial identity through the praxis of white supremacy and white racism, and the simultaneous dehumanization of Black racial identity has not only been harmful to Black Americans racial identity formation, but this longstanding praxis has also created a predilection within both white and Black Americans to prefer and exalt light skinned Black Americans to the exclusion of brown to dark skinned Black Americans. Further, this has also created a white racist idea about American beauty standards in that a consummate example of American idealized beauty has typically been thought of as a person who has a white racial identity wherein other people of color, and specifically Black people, only view white and/or light skinned Black Americans as beautiful. This has had the potential to harm Black people in their love lives, platonic relationships with other Black people, and the ways they must navigate society.

There have been several studies that have addressed the effects of colorism on Black people's lives, but for the purpose of this study, I will be specifically focusing on the studies that have discussed how colorism shows up in the lives of Black women.

³ Within the Black community, good hair is the total opposite of nappy hair. Nappy hair is understood as thick course hair which requires lots of detangling and manipulating in order to be maintained. Good hair on the other hand requires little work. It's usually identified as straight hair, hair with soft curls and texture. Good hair is closely associated with straight European hair (Golden, 2015).

Some such studies focus on the relationship between Black women's skin complexion and self-esteem (Coard, Breland, & Raskin, 2001), while other scholars have centered their research on whether colorism was still an issue in the 21st century (Mathews & Johnson, 2015). Not so surprisingly perhaps, Mathews and Johnson's (2015) study found that darker-complected Black women experienced a disproportionate amount of social and cultural pressure and prejudice due to colorism, and that colorism is still very much so an issue in Black women's lives in the 21st century.

Other research has been done that speaks to the harsh reality that colorism does more than just create ideas of color hierarchy, but that it can have genuine effects on women's educational attainments, financial stability, and marital status. In 2002, Margaret Hunter conducted a study on the effects of skin color on the life outcomes for Black American and Mexican American women. The 1980 National Survey of Black Americans and the 1980 National Chicano Survey were used to collect data on education, income, and spousal status. Colorism, in reference to beauty, was specifically assessed as a concept of social capital. Social capital is defined as "a form of prestige related to things such as social status, reputation, and social network" (Hunter, 2002, p. 177) and beauty is understood in this article as a tool of white supremacy, and therefore positively benefits those with Eurocentric features. The data collected indicated that lighter skinned women were more privileged than darker skinned women, and that they also tended to be more educated, they were able to marry higher status men, and they were also more successful at negotiating larger salaries than darker skinned women.

Skin bleaching is also associated with issues of colorism. Bleaching, as it's commonly called, reduces the melanin in the skin, effectively making the skin

significantly lighter or white. There have been several reported reasons for people bleaching their skin such as their skin simply being too dark, to attract partners, to have more opportunities for advancement in their careers, or even to make friends or be fashionable (Charles, 2010; Hope, 2009). Regardless, of the reason, the underlying tone of bleaching is usually coupled with a degradation felt from having darker skin.

Although these studies do not directly correlate with studies that are specifically related to RTV, I am utilizing them in this work as foundational pieces which I will use to assess how cast members are selected and presented on these shows. Since the aforementioned research contends that darker skin is viewed more negatively, less attractive, and un-American within our society in comparison to lighter skin, it can be inferred that colorism is also playing a role behind the scenes and on-air within the world of reality television. Issues of colorism have been expressed by various folks on reality television shows (Weiss, 2020; Iiams, 2021). An illuminating example of such can be found in the various interviews by *Love & Hip-Hop* star, Amara La Negra.

On multiple occasions, La Negra has explained the many issues she has faced as an Afro-Latina singer. Producers have critiqued her dark skinned appearance, insisting that it reduces the exoticist potential of her Latina identity. Even fellow Latinx people have encouraged her to change her appearance in order to look more like Beyonce' and less like Macy Gray (Negra, 2018). La Negra has also detailed through her interviews with show producers that she battled throughout her childhood to embrace her identity and skin tone so that she could be proud of both her Afro-Caribbean and Latinx heritage. This was always a struggle until La Negra eventually decided to change this narrative, by becoming a popular singer, reality TV star, and a skin color politics activist (Alfonseca,

2019). Through her activism she hopes to be a role model for Afro-Latinx youth, encouraging them to not be ashamed of their African heritage, and urging them to continue to fight against the white supremacist ideas that deem lighter skin as more beautiful and more valuable.

La Negra isn't the only *Love & Hip-Hop* star who has used her fame to bring attention to issues of colorism. Jamaican dancehall artist, Spice, shook her fan base in 2018 when she posted a picture on her Instagram page, looking as if she had bleached her skin. The comments that followed her post were a mix of support and outrage. While some fans appeared to be in support of her new lighter skin, citing the reality that everyone should feel comfortable in their own skin, others criticized her and accused her of self-hatred. A week later she posted another picture with her deeply melanated skin, sitting on a throne, with a crown on her head. In that photo's caption, Spice explains that her previous post was a precursor for the release of her song "Black Hypocrisy". Her long, very explicit, and detailed post read,

On October 22nd I posted a picture of myself where i looked like I altered my appearance and metamorphosis to match the "Eurocentric beauty standards". I fearlessly addressed an issue that has been swept under the rug and boldly took the stance in bringing a taboo topic to the fore front. I chose to do this in the manner I did because I believe Colorism is plagiarizing our black community. While It appeared as if I had "bleached" my skin, causing a world wide debate, and even though the picture was obviously birthed around my single titled Black Hypocrisy and my mixtape Captured. I want to openly say it was not a "publicity stunt". I wanted to create awareness to "Colorism" and it was more so done intentionally to create shock value so that I could have the worlds undivided attention to deliver the message in my music. There are dark skin women across the world complaining every day that they are being downplayed and degraded, but the raw truth is it is us "black women" and "black men" that are fighting against each other and tearing down our own race. It's evident in the social media comments every day, I myself have lived through it all being downgraded by my dark complexion. Would the message in my song have been received as well as it did world wide if I didn't go to the extreme with the picture? The truth is no it would have probably been just

another Spice hit song; so yes I had to go the extra mile to ensure my message be heard. Most people got a misconception that I was boosting “Skin bleaching” but ironically it was the opposite. I used myself as an example of what people from the black community is causing other women to do because of how society makes them feel. Yes “Black is beautiful” we say it every day but are we showing love to our black women? This topic is long and I could spread it so far but mi tired fi type Lol. The fact is Colorism is happening in the homes ,school and businesses but I’ll leave it till my next post." To put a end to the debate “I DID NOT BLEACH MY SKIN” and I quote “Proud a mi color, love mi pretty black skin, respect due to mi strong melanin” words from my Black Hypocrisy song that I wrote from my heart." (Spice, 2018)



Picture 1 - Pictures from Spice's Instagram Page

In the song, Spice sings about the issues she and many other darker skinned Black women have faced and also encourages darker skinned Black women to love their skin despite what others may say. In many of her other music videos, Spice usually dons sexy outfits, stylish heels, and colorful wigs. Yet, the video for “Black Hypocrisy” is drastically different. For the majority of the video, she dons Black hair, subtle makeup, and wears tee-shirt and jeans, a full length dress, or long sleeve jump suit. Also, her video

is full of protest signs and other darker skinned Black women. Their signs either denounce colorism or speak to the beauty of darker skin.

This is significantly different than the content of Spice's other videos. Instead of rap lyrics which usually center sexual content and outfits that show off her nice physique, this video has a gentle, yet powerful tone and message. Her video serves as an amazing compliment to the lyrics showcasing the beauty of darker skinned women outside the norms of degradation fueled by colorism.

Historical & Contemporary Anti-Black Women Stereotypes

Historically, images of Black women throughout the media have rarely been flattering. These anti-Black controlling images, which were created during enslavement and used to justify the racial, sexual, economic, and social justice related oppressions that Black women experience, continue to be used today in similar and startling ways (Hill-Collins, 2002). The three most enduring anti-Black stereotypes of Black women within media today are the controlling archetypes of the mammy, jezebel, and sapphire. In comparison to their white counterparts, Black women have commonly been stereotyped as sexually deviant, morally deficient, and intellectually inferior (Willis & Williams, 2002). Despite the many counter narratives that can be called upon to refute these inaccurate stereotypes, the media consumed by masses of Americans rarely highlights these counternarratives. Instead, the media, which is invested in maintaining these racist, hegemonic, and misogynistic views about Black women, have routinely further pushed the narrative that Black women are just mouthy, aggressive, hypersexual, materialistic, and self-serving human beings.

Mammy

The mammy caricature in media has been portrayed as a loyal servant, typically obese and completely desexualized. She is quite happy with her life of servitude, often grinning and laughing no matter her situation. However, this mediated portrayal of the mammy directly contradicts the historical record of who house servants were during enslavement, and how house servants functioned within the enslaver's household. Historical records indicate that only a handful of enslavers were able to utilize Black women as house servants as opposed to field hands. In addition, these Black women who were domestic servants during enslavement were typically mixed/light skinned Black women, who were also usually thin, and almost always under the age of 50 (Turner, 1994). The mammy stereotype was created to maintain an established perception of heteronormativity for white Southerners during and post Reconstruction. The stereotype created a portrait of Black women taking care of white families, and the interests of white society in general. This behavior was the ideal personification of white imagination that continued the narrative of Blacks being less dignified, refined, and respectable in comparison to their white counterparts.

One of the most recognized portrayals of the mammy stereotype was the iconic character, Mammy, from Victor Fleming's (1940) *Gone with the Wind*. Mammy was played by Hattie McDaniel, and Fleming's film advanced the perception of good ole Southern culture. It consisted of white feminine standards of daintiness, with just enough fiery female spirit to keep viewers captivated with Scarlett O'Hara. The film depicted the struggle of the South during the Civil War and Reconstruction. To tie everything together and make it highly convincing, Hattie McDaniel played the doting Mammy, the

trademark of any true Southern white plantation family. The Mammy stereotype is key to the Southern aesthetic. The portrayal was used to illustrate how Black women loved to take care of white families and the white community to the exclusion and detriment of their own families and children. The mammy caricature has been a figure that has not only endured within the white supremacist imagination, but as a stereotype has also endured within the American imagination in general as an accurate and real portrayal of Black women due to its consistent and ubiquitous use throughout popular media.

Jezebel

The jezebel stereotype has been frequently used to describe a Black woman's perceived hypersexual nature. Many historians contend that the jezebel caricature was actually established on the back of Sara "Saartjie" Baartman, also known as the Hottentot Venus. Baartman was a Khoikhoi woman who lived along the Gamtoos River in South Africa. Baartman was taken from her home at the age of 21 and forced to become a circus exhibit in London and France. Due to Baartman's popularity with European audiences, who could pay 3 piccadillies to fondle her nude body while she was locked in a cage, in the latter years of her life she was used in various science experiments to not only "prove" the intellectual inferiority of Africans and their descendants, but these white supremacist experiments that were conducted by racist European naturalists, zoologists, physiologists, and anatomists, also sought to establish Africans as the missing link between human and animals (Crais & Scully, 2010).

George Cuvier, the lead naturalist scientist, eventually concluded that Baartman was in fact the missing link between humans and primates, and concurrently inferred that

those who shared similarities with Baartman must also be linked to primates as well. Cuvier also argued that due to Baartman's and other Khoikho women's secondary sex characteristics, namely their breasts and buttocks, that Cuvier considered too large in comparison to that of European women, Cuvier contended that Khoikho women, and all women that were of African descent were hypersexual, sexually irreverent, and naturally immoral (Guy-Sheftall, 2002). After Baartman's death, Cuvier obtained her body from the police and created a plaster mold of her figure, while putting her genitalia in a formaldehyde jar, and Baartman's remains continued to be on display at the Musee de L'homme in France until the year 1974. Her body was not returned to South Africa until 2002, after immense activist demands made by South African women (Daley, 2002).

While Baartman's exhibitions were happening during a time when enslavement had already been outlawed in Europe, rumors about her and Black women's imagined sexuality and prowess began to abound in the U.S. In fact, these beliefs were amplified and used to justify the routine raping and sexual assault of enslaved Black women. Since, enslaved Black women were considered property, and therefore could not legally be raped, they were also often made to strip nude while on display on auction blocks, as a means to display their alleged healthiness (Pilgrim, 2002). Even though their nudity on the auction block was a forced demand by enslavers, their Black and female nudity further exacerbated the already established anti-Black and hypersexual stereotypes that inhabited the white racist imagination. Thus, Black women's coerced nudity translated to the white racist imagination as evidence that enslaved Black women lacked sexual restraint, civility, and morality. Enslaved Black women were literally stripped of their

decency and, yet the dominant narrative would have audiences believe it was in Black women's nature to be indecent.

By the 1970's the portrayal of Black women as hypersexual became much more commonplace, and it also inevitably aided in the creation of a new genre of media known as Blaxploitation. Melvin Van Peeble's (1971) *Sweet Sweetback's Baadasssss Song* is considered the first Blaxploitation film. Junius Griffin is credited with coining the term Blaxploitation in his protest against the release of Gordan Parks Jr. 's *SuperFly* (1972). Griffin makes the public claim that films exploiting negative tropes of Blackness were "proliferating offenses" to the Black community as many of these films often associated Blacks with criminal and unbecoming behaviors (Anderson, 2018). The actresses who were selected to play the jezebel caricatures in these films were thought to be too conventionally pretty to play any other role but one of a jezebel, as film producers and directors only selected actresses that they deemed as sexy.

This new representation of Black women as jezebels became a solid and continuous staple within Blaxploitation. While the jezebel's depiction in these films made her a sex symbol that was seen as feminine and desirable, the jezebel's stereotypical portrayal also contended that her crime fighting abilities were useful to society, as the jezebel's take-charge, and take-no-crap attitude, upgraded her from just being seen as inferior and subservient. Despite her crime fighting antics, the jezebel character still does little to elevate Black women from being regarded as sexual objects.

Sapphire

The sapphire stereotype portrays Black women as loud, aggressive, rude, stubborn, and malicious when it comes to the way they relate to Black men, or anyone else for that matter. Black men provide a target for the sapphire figure to direct her anger and aggressive behavior toward. The sapphire caricature dictates that Black women are verbally and physically emasculating in their relationships with Black men, and consequently these emasculated Black men are also portrayed as incompetent, and incredibly deserving of a good tongue lashing, as they are often characterized as lacking integrity with some trickery up their sleeves (Jewell, 1993). *Amos 'n' Andy* (1928-1966), which began as a radio show, and which was later produced into a television comedy is the first time that American audiences are introduced to the sapphire figure with the character, Sapphire Stevens.

The Sapphire Stevens character on *Amos 'n' Andy*, can often be seen as hyper critical and harsh to her husband George "Kingfish" Stevens, as he was depicted as nothing more than a charlatan. Kingfish was characterized as lazy, conniving, and was always looking for a quick hustle rather than a good job. Needless to say, he wasn't very successful with any of his tricks and Sapphire always ripped into him for his failures. As a mockery of typical Black behavior, *Amos 'n' Andy* successfully solidified for the rest of society that Black men were inherently lazy and unintelligent, and that Black women were inherently emasculating and angry.

The sapphire stereotype has been employed within various sitcoms and dramas as well. Such examples include Aunt Ester from *Sanford and Son* whose most memorable

phrase was “watch it sucka” before she threatened Fred; Willona Woods from *Good Times* who criticized practically every man on the cast; and Florence Johnston from *The Jeffersons* who often ridiculed Mr. Jefferson for his short stature and balding head. These women were domineering, quick with their tongues, and almost always kept others in line.

The Lady of the Hour – The Angry Black Woman

The sapphire stereotype serves as the historical precursor to the more modern and current controlling image, the Angry Black Woman (ABW). The ABW caricature has primarily been used within media to discourage and chastise Black women who express any type of dissatisfaction with societal norms (Pilgrim, 2008). Due to the pervasiveness of the ABW caricature within popular media, when Black women express unhappiness in their intimate partnerships, or when they expose neglect at a doctor’s visit, or even when Black women express their displeasure from being followed in a store, they are often told that they are overreacting or that they are being too angry. Therefore, anytime women display any emotion that is outside of the realm of white docility, they are often accused of being an ABW. The historical and contemporary stereotyping of Black women serve as reminders to society that Black women should remain invisible, passive, and nonthreatening, regardless of any threatening or hostile situation she may be facing.

The ABW depicted on RTV is potentially one of the most damaging contemporary stereotypes on reality television. Many of us can’t help but remember Omarosa from her appearance on the first season of NBC’s *The Apprentice* in 2004. The first season of the show was a mediated representation of mainstream pop culture in that its casting represented America as Black and white with little racial diversity. The show

was also packed with lots of drama, and profound amounts of white hegemonic ideals of race, gender, and class (Larson, 2006). Although competing on behalf of a charity, Omarosa got a bad rap for being manipulative, hard to work with, conniving, and untrustworthy. Omarosa was then caught up in controversy after accusing another cast member of calling her the “n word,” and because those accusations were “proven” to have no bases, Omarosa’s fate was further sealed as a “bad Black” that white people and “good Black” people needed to be leery of. Her actions on the show have been ridiculed for reviving the sapphire stereotype and solidifying the ABW stereotype, making it commodifiable for RTV.

In addition, they were also frequent scenes in which she appeared to get into confrontations with her team and other cast members. The consequential discussion between cast members and producers on the show regarding these various often pointed out how unfavorable Omarosa was, and how her aggressive “my way or the highway” attitude made it hard to be around her, let alone work with her. The cast members also characterized Omarosa’s behavior as unhinged, asserting that she would often lash out even though they felt that her behavior was unprovoked. At no point during her time on the show was Omarosa seen as a successful businesswoman who had advanced in her career and personal life because she was smart, capable, and well equipped for the job.

Omarosa, however, was not the only Black woman who would come to be regarded as an ABW. Seeing the potential for exploitation, ratings, and money, RTV producers began to find other ways to implement the ABW stereotype within other RTV shows. Tiffany Pollard, also known as New York, was also portrayed as a quintessential ABW caricature on season one and season two of *The Flavor of Love* (2006). There are

multiple scenes throughout those two seasons in which Pollard was depicted as irate and downright mean. One could argue that Pollard's most memorable scenes on the show were the ones when she exhibited justifiable rage, i.e., when she attacked Pumpkin, after Pumpkin spat on her, or the scene where Pollard is sitting angry and contemplative on the bed ⁴. These moments have now been converted into gif files where social media users, regardless of race, employ the files on their own social media platforms to indicate and amplify their own anger and frustrations at certain situations that are going on in their personal lives. Although this may seem harmless, the image of Pollard, a Black woman sitting on the bed in anger and frustration has now become a gif staple regardless of one's racial or ethnic identity. Put simply, when someone is angry or enraged and they want to convey that with an image, all they need to do is put an image of Pollard or any other Black woman to convey just how angry they are ⁵.

I, myself have also frequently used Pollard's gif file to convey my own anger and frustration when my social media followers have asked "how you look when they said they were up the street 45 minutes ago", or "how you feel when your friends made you go out but you're determined to spoil the night", or even the question, "when you're mad at your boyfriend and don't want to go out anymore". It is only now that I recognize how problematic and ironic this pastime is. While it goes without saying that on season one and two of *The Flavor of Love*, Pollard threw a plethora of insults, got into various

⁴ Pollard was sitting on the bed because she was frustrated with other cast members. She was feeling angry, but also alone due to issues she was having with the majority of her fellow cast members. Her feelings of isolation and loneliness are often forgotten, overshadowed by her feelings of frustration and anger (Duribe, 2018).

⁵ This may also be referred to as social Blackfacing or Blackfishing. The term is used to describe how non-Black people use images of Black people to convey messages or emotions, typically in a stereotypical manner (Bigelow, 2020).

physical altercations, and instigated many verbal disputes, one of her most memorable moments that has been ubiquitously labeled as angry was one where she was just sitting; not cursing, threatening, or throwing anything, simply sitting. This ability for society, myself included, to freely label this moment as an ABW moment despite no rage filled actions or offensive words being used, illuminates how invested our society is with characterizing Black women as ABW caricatures.

Although these women are models, philanthropists, entrepreneurs, and moguls, Black women who are also BRT stars, who are then labeled as this ABW stereotype often find themselves alone, with few to no cast members as their allies by the end of an episode, season, or reunion (Boylorn, 2018). Being one of the longest running BRT shows, *Real Housewives of Atlanta (RHOA)* is notorious for its depiction of these high profile women seemingly in constant conflict. RHOA depicts the lives of some of the highest profiled and successful women in Atlanta. There is no greater example of a successful Black woman who is then transformed into a ABW stereotype than the infamous Nene Leakes who has the longest tenure on Bravo's RHOA.

As a longtime cast member, Leakes eventually rose to become the show's headliner, as she would often get into vicious verbal attacks and physical altercations with her other cast members during each season. During the first few seasons Leakes was mostly combative with her on-again and off-again friend and cast member, Kim Zolciak-Biermann, who Leakes would frequently make fun of for Biermann's attempts at a singing career, Biermann's estranged relationship with her lover, Big Papa, and for Bierman's perceived lack of class (Hearon, 2020). Even after Bierman's departure from

the show, Leakes welcomed arguments with new cast members, and has since been in several altercations with not only new cast members, but also the show's film crew.

During episode 16 of season 11, Leakes is hosting a party to encourage her other cast members to embrace their natural hair. During the party, she explodes on fellow cast members Portia Williams and Kandi Burruss for going into her closet without her permission. Leakes often boasted about her fabulous high-end closet, which the ladies claimed to have never seen before, so Williams and Burruss saw no harm in entering the closet, even after Leakes' had already refused them access. When Leakes realized Williams and Burruss had disrespected her wishes, and entered her closet anyway, she lost it, yelling "Get the f*** out of my closet, bitch," as well as "Don't f***ing play with me motherf***er. I will f*** you up," (Leakes, 2019) ⁶. Leakes then proceeded to chase after the ladies, and when she was blocked by the camera men, Leakes proceeded to grab him, rip off his shirt down his back, and almost slung him out of her closet door.

Williams who can be heard in the background during the scene, expresses her fear of Leakes explosive temper and begins talking about wanting to leave the party.

Williams who was well into her pregnancy during the episode feared that Leakes may assault her, causing harm to her and her unborn child, and many other cast members in the episode considered Leakes' explosion completely out of order. In various interviews, Leakes reminded audiences that "I don't even know why I have to explain anything in my house. If I tell you that you can't go in my closet, you can't go in my closet" (Leakes,

⁶ There are certain curse words that are not allowed to be voiced nor printed in closed captions on television. Those words are bleeped out of the vocals of the person speaking and the word "bleep" will appear in replacement of the curse word. Throughout the document, curse words that are bleeped will be spelled with letters and "*" marks. Curse words that are allowed will be spelled as they appear in the closed captions.

2019). It can most certainly be argued that Leakes was justified in her rage, upon discovering that her privacy had been violated by people she considered close friends, and this was most certainly a situation that provoked her anger.

However, Leakes is often characterized on the show as being a person who is never provoked but is still quick to overreact in anger at any situation, and thus Leakes has been frequently portrayed as easily angered and highly aggressive, rather than her anger being the result of her being provoked and/or cast members misunderstanding her anger. Leakes' performance as an ABW is both hated and loved, and as rumors of season 13 continue to circulate, fans are eager to see how her behavior will evolve, as Leakes' ABW portrayal has become an obsession for RTV watchers, and she is paid quite well for such behavior. Leakes earned roughly \$2.85 million from season 12 of RHOA, which was an increase from her previous \$2.7 million salary (Arissen, 2020). To date, Leakes remains the show's highest paid cast member.

Taking into consideration all of the aforementioned examples of the mammy, the jezebel, the sapphire and the ABW that have appeared within both mainstream and exclusively Black media, one must also speculate as to why there seems to be a need for Black women to be continuously depicted in these racist and sexist ways, and how these anti-Black and misogynist depictions negatively affect the societal perception everyday Black women. These images are not positive, nor do they offer holistic portrayals of Black women living in the US. These images also do not speak to the real issues that affect Black women on a day-to-day basis. These shows highlight drama, (whether real or contrived), glorify cattiness, and further perpetuate the white supremacist, narrow, and

limited narratives about Black women, which ultimately posit Black women as innately argumentative, hypersexual, bitter, and materialistic.

CHAPTER 3 – METHODOLOGY

I approach this project from a personal point of irritation and frustration at the constant portrayal of Black women as inherently angry, violent, and irrational. As a Black woman, I've lost count of how often someone has made an unsolicited comment about my physical appearance or behavior based on what they heard about Black women. Society polices Black women in virtually every aspect of our lives. Next to our bodies, our emotionally responsive actions are perhaps the most policed, in that, in most situations, society characterizes Black women as angry and there is also a blatant disregard for our emotional complexity and humanity (Morgan & Bennett, 2006).

What I mean by this is that the angry Black woman stereotype is not transferable to women of other cultural and/or other ethnic groups. There is no such thing or stereotype about angry white women, angry Asian women, or angry Latinx women (as a matter of a fact, Latinx women's anger is often viewed as sexy or feisty, and not as angry). Black women are expected to restrain and suppress their anger, to be quiet, docile, and in a manner of speaking, simply grateful that the larger society permits us to be present. For all intents and purposes, Black women are still expected to “mammy their way through oppression, injustice and critique” (Boylorn, 2014, p. 135). This dissertation explicitly rejects that notion. I call attention to the stereotypical

representation of Black women as angry, violent, and irrational, despite being in already hostile environments or being otherwise provoked on reality television.

Research Questions

- To what extent does the over-exaggeration of anger influence the manifestation of drama, verbal attacks, and physical altercations presented on *Basketball Wives* season eight?
- How could cultural differences and group relationships be influencing cast member OG's overall accusations of colorism exhibited in her fellow cast member's actions and word choices about her?

Within this study, the terms violence, and colorism will be used frequently. I use the term *violence* in this study to denote physical fights, and verbal aggression. I also use the term *violence* to denote attacks on the self-image of another cast member as well as personal insults, sarcasm, shouting, and name-calling (Glascok & Preston-Schreck, 2018). I use the term *colorism* to reference the set of systems that privileges lighter skin and more Eurocentric features over darker skin and more African features (Hunter, 2002).

This study will specifically analyze VH1's season eight of *Basketball Wives*. The season aired from June 19, 2019 - October 16, 2019. There have been other studies which discuss popular BRT shows including *Real Housewives of Atlanta* and *Love & Hip Hop* ((Millican, 2018); (Hill, 2015); (Patterson, 2015)) but *Basketball Wives* is one of the

less discussed shows, despite it having an average of 1 million views per episode (Rashad, 2021).

Theoretical Framework

Black feminist theory (Hill-Collins, 2002), and cultivation theory (Gerbner & Gross, 1976) will be the primary theories that this study will utilize. By employing the scholarship found within Black studies and media studies, I will argue that there is a connection between drama filled shows, intense viewership ⁷, and the maintenance of hegemonic and misogynistic views about Black women.

Black Feminist Theory

This study utilizes Black Feminist scholar and researcher Patricia Hill-Collins' controlling images framework to discuss how most of the anti-Black gendered stereotypes we see in RTV regarding Black women stem from the institution of enslavement and the resulting racism that followed its end. Enslavement was not only a physically brutal institution for Black Americans, but it also produced ideologically harmful stereotypes about Black women gendered and racialized identities. Hill-Collins asserts that it is these controlling images that should be pointed to in order to understand Black women's unique experiences with oppression. Hill-Collins also asserts it is also these controlling images that continue to be used by others to justify the unique oppressions that Black women experience (Hill-Collins, 2002). The past controlling

⁷ Intense viewership indicates a show that has an average of 1 million views per episode, *Basketball Wives* being one of those shows. This average is representative of the number of people who watch the episode as it is being aired. It does not account for the number of people who stream the episode after the original air date.

images that Hill-Collins discusses, I, as other scholars before me have, argue are still being reconstructed and transformed into new stereotypical media representations that inaccurately portray Black womanhood as well as continue to deny Black women their full breath of emotions, contributions to society, and their ability to be fully functioning beings. Although there are several controlling images that negatively characterize Black women, for the purposes of this study, I focus my analysis on the sapphire/ABW controlling image/stereotype, not only because it is one of the controlling image of Black womanhood that I continued to see over and over again while I binge watched BRT shows, but also because it is still one of the most common stereotypes depicted on BRT shows (Jefferson-James, 2015).

Cultivation Theory

This study will also employ cultivation theory (Gerbner & Gross, 1976), because it provides a framework that argues how extended amounts of time spent watching tv may cause people to fabricate their reality based on what they watch on tv. Cultivation theory is a three pronged approach involving institutional process analysis, message system analysis, and cultivation analysis. This research specifically utilizes the message system analysis prong. Message system analysis offers a framework to analyze the potential lessons which may be cultivated or learned by watching television (Gerbner, 2000).

Cultivation theory further contends that the more time people spend watching tv, the more influential the shows become in cultivating perspectives. For example, if a person sees Black women always in altercations with each other on these shows, they

may be persuaded and convinced to believe that Black women are routinely combative with each other. Therefore, I further argue that the stereotypes and scenarios portrayed on television do just as much as, if not more than, to inform viewers of how society runs and the behavioral expectations of fellow community members more than actual socialization. My use of cultivation theory will consequently help guide my conversation around how negative stereotypes portrayed on BRT can have damaging effects not only on the relationships Black women form with each other, but also on the ways in which society interacts with them based on stereotypical representations.

Consequently, I utilize Hill-Collins's theory of controlling images alongside cultivation theory to formulate a speculative study of how anti-Black and gendered stereotypes of Black women may be received by viewers, how that reception may also have negative effects on how society continues to view Black women in problematic ways, and how some Black women may view ourselves in distorted manners as a result of being depicted in racist and sexist ways. Both of these theories allow me to analyze content within an investigative framework that illuminates messages, discusses what those messages are saying, and how those messages may be being interpreted and accepted by viewers.

Case Study Method

Because this dissertation focuses on the observable events of a specific show, it has also been designed as a case study. A case study method is appropriate for this dissertation as a case study allows for a detailed description of the particularities and complexities of a phenomenon (event, organization, persons, etc.) within a specified time

frame (Baxter & Jack, 2008). Moreover, case studies are suitable when researchers (1) cannot manipulate the behavior of those involved in the study; (2) the focus of the study answers “why” or “how” questions; (3) or when the researcher desires to cover contextual conditions, believing they are relevant to the phenomenon under study (Yin, 2003).

As it is not my goal to produce a theory from this work, this case study is intrinsic by design, significantly developed based on my interests in the particularities on the case, season eight of *Basketball Wives*. Intrinsic case studies are exploratory in nature but can be coupled with instrumental case study methodology as well. As noted by Robert Stake (2000), intrinsic and instrumental case studies can often be confused with one another or are often used in combination during a case study. An instrumental case study is employed to facilitate the understanding of a particular phenomenon and further helps to develop or test a theory for the purpose of generalization (Grandy, 2012). The data analysis of an intrinsic case study focuses on interpreting meaning rather than aggregating categories of data. Although the collected data will be categorized, more emphasis will be placed on deciphering what the data means in relation to how Black women are being represented on *Basketball Wives* and how those representations could be impacting societal beliefs and misconceptions of Black women. The empirical contributions of this research will be determined based on the outcome of the exploratory structure of this research, therefore making an intrinsic case study the most appropriate method for this research project.

Intrinsic case studies rely on thick descriptions so that the reader may draw on their own understandings and experiences about the particularities of the phenomenon

and determine the transferability of the results and findings to other cases (Grandy, 2012). Thick descriptions provide context of the events of the phenomenon of study and help to further explain the event's significance and relevance (Dawson, 2012). Clifford Geertz first used the thick description in literature to describe the practice of doing ethnography. Thick description facilitates the interpretation of the nuances and complexities of human behavior (Geertz, 1973). This interpretation is an open ended, ongoing process which can be reassessed over time based on human behavioral changes. It should be noted that thick description does not imply an accumulation of masses of data. Rather, thick description balances illuminating details with analysis in order to establish the significance of meaning behind the events and actions of a particular case (Denzin, 1989).

Dawson (2012) further explains that using thick descriptions allows the author to place further emphasis on context, feelings, thoughts, networks and relationships, and meanings that are verbally explicated as well as those that are insinuated. For this reason, it is imperative that researchers using case study methodology also make special note of the historical context and physical setting in which events occur throughout the case. These special notations assist in providing rich details that can be analyzed and help make meaning throughout the case.

Case studies also require boundaries based on some type of context: time, place, activity, or definition (Baxter & Jack, 2008) in order to ensure a reasonable scope for the study. Therefore, this case study only focuses on season eight of *Basketball Wives* which aired between June 19-October 16, 2019. The writing of this dissertation began prior to the airing of season 9, therefore making season eight the most recent and complete season

of the show, providing the most up-to-date source of data. This research specifically analyzes season eight of the show due to that season's proliferation of a myriad of anti-Black stereotypes about Black women, which include but are not limited to, verbal and physical violence and accusations of colorism. Consequently, this research will deconstruct the cast members actions, conversations, and confessionals in order to provide a speculative interpretation of the routine angry/violent and colorist messages about Black women depicted on the show.

Textual Analysis

This case study also utilizes textual analysis methodology in order to “read” and understand cultural and societal messages. Textual analysis is a qualitative method commonly used to in communication and media studies but is also highly instrumental as an interdisciplinary method used to analyze various phenomenon and any messages that may be conveyed. Textual analysis allows researchers to analyze text from television shows, graffiti, clothes, advertisements, etc., derive meaning from said text, and provide further explanations for how we make sense of our society and our relationships with each other (McKee, 2003).

Textual analysis is used in this manuscript in order to derive meaning from the actions and words aired by the cast members during season eight. As also expounded on by Jason Smith (2017), my interpretation of the data collected from the show is used to offer an alternative view of understanding the how this information may be being receive by viewers and how viewers may be using the information garnered from the show to make sense of their experiences and social life.

Data Collection and Analysis

Data was collected via observation. Season eight of *Basketball Wives* was purchased through Amazon Prime and was watched with the closed captions on to ensure proper documentation of the conversations between cast members and during their confessionals. In total, I watched the entire season a total of three times throughout the data collecting process. Some episodes were watched, in part, more than three times in order to gather specific details related to cast member OG's accusations that the Collective⁸ were exhibiting colorist behavior towards her.

Using Microsoft Excel, I recorded the cast member's conversations based on drama points, verbal attacks, and physical altercations. During the observation of each episode, each cast member's name was placed in either the category initiator or victim when they were involved in a drama point, verbal attack, or physical altercation. Excel pivot tables were used to illustrate the frequency of the analyzed data.

Initially, all drama points were analyzed in order to illustrate the regularity in which drama was aired during the show. Next, drama points were broken down by cast member to illustrate who was involved in the most drama throughout the show. Verbal attacks were analyzed next. The verbal attack theme was broken down into two subthemes, attacks of character and name calling. I analyzed verbal attacks in order to illustrate who initiated the most verbal attacks as well as who was the victim of the most verbal attacks. The same method was applied to physical altercations. Physical

⁸ I use the term Collective to denote moments in the show where three or more cast members were all speaking negatively about another cast member, either at the same time, or in a linear sequence.

altercations are discussed based on two primary categories; those that ensued due the spreading of family secrets and rumors and those that transpired due to the buildup of previous drama and frustrations. Only one physical altercation did not fall into those two categories and the circumstances surrounding that altercation are explained in the body of the research. This data is used to demonstrate how often drama, physical altercations, and verbal attacks involving Black women were aired during the season.

Accusations of colorism were not expressed by cast member OG until the end of the season therefore the researcher had to backtrack and redocument the word choices of other cast members when they spoke about OG. Those cast members' statements were quoted and compared to the statements made by OG when she spoke directly to being mistreated or verbally attacked by fellow cast members. When compared, the other cast member's statements, and actions did not directly imply colorism as an issue. Yet, the data does suggest that cast members receive different treatment based on their status within the group, their marital status, and their status as parents.

Collectively, this data helps further understand the ways in which stereotypical anti-Black women representations are continuing to be presented on reality television.

Definition of Themes

Physical altercations indicate moments in which cast members got in each other's faces in an aggressive manner, posturing for the other to hit them. Often, security was required to intervene when a cast member needed to be held back from physically touching another or when a cast member threw an object at another cast member. Verbal assaults are representative of when cast members were talking to or talking about another

and statements were made which could be considered rude (such as childish name calling) or character damaging (such as statements of vilification). Verbal assaults also consisted of two subthemes, attacks of character and name calling. Acts of gossiping which could be damaging to another woman's identity or self-esteem were classified as attacks of character. When cast members called other cast members out of their given names in combination with abusive language, these moments were categorized as name calling. Victimization is another subtheme of verbal assaults. Victimization is discussed in the context of who was the recipient (victim) of the verbal assaults. Drama points represent the aired conversation which may not have an immediate or explicitly negative connotation but created a sense of anticipation for what may be about to happen, happened in the past. These points may occur off camera or in the presence of other cast members.

CHAPTER 4— THEY DID WHAT?!: DISCUSSING DRAMA, VERBAL ATTACKS, AND PHYSICAL ALTERCATIONS

Watching the eighth season of *Basketball Wives* on VH1 was extremely stressful and difficult. When I originally began watching the eighth season, I did so out of curiosity and pure entertainment. However, when I began this project, I decided to intentionally watch this season for a second time, closely taking notes of all of the fights, arguments, and all of the times when drama was showed more than actual real-life events (family bonding, work-life-balance, self-care via therapy, etc.). I found that throughout the season, events which showcased relevant life moments were briefly or rarely touched on, while fights and arguments of the season got much more camera time. I was profoundly disturbed by this trend and focus of this season.

Despite each one of the cast members of *Basketball Wives* having something major going on in their lives that had nothing to do with drama (rumors, lies, spiteful interactions, etc.), and everything to do with being a living, breathing, human being. Many of the cast members are mothers and wives, and many of the women also have their own business ventures. Shaunie O’Neal decided to go into real-estate this season and bought and began renovating a few properties. O’Neal also got into the marijuana

business⁹ and started working on her nursery in the US, while also having to mire her way through a major health scare involving her son Shareef who had to have open heart surgery due to an undetected birth defect that was discovered during this season of the show. Similarly, cast member Jackie Christie also dealt with new avenues of motherhood and business. Her youngest child, Douglas Jr., was preparing to leave home, making Christie an empty-nester, which she found hard to deal with. Christie published a book and launched her podcast this season, *The Jackie Christie Project*, which focuses on entertainment, sports, and lifestyle related topics as well as continuing to go to her therapy sessions, which she began seasons ago to address her past traumas¹⁰.

Other cast members also showcased their own business ventures and entrepreneurial pursuits this season. CeCe Gutierrez¹¹ who has worked as a registered trauma nurse for the past 10 years, this season began operating her own medical spa. It is also within this season that Gutierrez revealed she was having her own personal medical concerns. Throughout the eighth season we see Gutierrez go to numerous doctor appointments to determine if she may have uterine tumors or cancer. Byron Scott, Gutierrez's fiancé, is shown as being very concerned and supportive of Gutierrez getting the proper diagnosis and potential treatments. The men associated with these women aren't typically featured on the show, but we actually see and hear from Byron quite a bit

⁹ In season 7, O'Neal revealed that she was going to go into the marijuana business during the girls' trip to Amsterdam. During the trip, O'Neal visited a legal distributor to do preliminary research on what she needed to do in order to develop partnerships, define her area of specialty (cultivating and selling the plant or providing paraphernalia such as bongs, rolling papers, and vape pens), and what legal concerns she may be faced with as a new investor to the industry.

¹⁰ Christie has her first therapy session in season 7 where she and her therapist make a connection between her unstable childhood and her current issues of anger and control. During season 8, Christie returns to her therapist after a hiatus and seems to be struggling again with managing her emotions due to life changes.

¹¹ At the time of this season's airing, Gutierrez-Scott was not married to her now husband, Byron Scott. For that reason, she will be referred to by her maiden name throughout this project.

during this season. Also featured frequently this season is Byron's son, Thomas Scott, Kristen Scott's husband. Scott is a *Basketball Wives* cast member, a new mom, author, and fitness influencer. Malaysia Pargo is also a member of the Scott clan and in addition, she is a mother, an actress, and jewelry designer. Pargo also has her own skin care line. Although Scott and Pargo appear to be blood related early in the season, they are actually not of blood relation, which is later revealed during the season in an explosive way.

This season was also filled with many tear-jerking moments, as these ladies dealt with grief and had to traverse through many major milestones. For example, *Basketball Wives* cast member Jennifer Williams was still reeling from her mother's passing during a previous season, and like Christie was struggling with mental health issues and stability. Cast member Feby Torres, who is also a mother, was juggling the grief of losing her grandfather while also trying to stay focused on her music career on the other side of the country away from her support system. Cast member OG (Ogom Chijindu) shared her struggle of career navigation, as she announced her retirement from football, and her simultaneous aspirations of becoming a coach. OG was also trying to navigate the possibility of marriage and starting a family.

Throughout the season OG also struggles with feeling unsupported by people around her, especially because some of her family still lives in Nigeria. Cast member, Evelyn Lozada, who is also a mother, is a tv personality, fitness enthusiast, and like Pargo, has started her own skin care line. As a mother, Lozada juggles parenting her adult daughter while raising a young son, and still having to balance all those things with being a successful businesswoman. Tami Roman is another long-standing cast member, like O'Neal, Christie, and Lozada, and has her own set of motherhood trials to work

throughout season eight. Roman also reveals during the eighth season that she has married Reggie Youngblood in secret, even keeping it from her daughters. Because of this, Roman has to reconcile the isolation that her adult daughters feel, and also their desire to see her live a long and healthy life¹² especially after the girl's biological father, Kenny Anderson, suffers a stroke. In the middle of season eight during a confessional, Roman announces that she is officially leaving *Basketball Wives* to focus on her music career, new marriage, health, and family.

While each of these women had all of this going on during the filming of season eight, instead of the producers showing more footage of these real-life moments, the show's producers chose instead to focus on and highlight the drama, arguments, attitudes, and just about everything that was negative within their lives. Imagine how different the show would have been had the producers chosen to highlight the real-life moments to the exclusion of the drama. Imagine what a different outlook and representation the show could have been created. If show producers gave audiences more screen-time that highlighted cast members businesses, or their growth as mothers and significant others, and/or shown more overall growth of the cast members successfully going to therapy, perhaps we could have witnessed Black women breaking generational curses¹³ and raising their children differently than they had been raised.

¹² Serious concerns were raised this season about Tami's health due to her having diabetes and being a smoker.

¹³ Within the Black community, generational curses are understood to be anything that seems to repeat itself over and over throughout generations that has negative effects on the next generation. Examples include teenage pregnancy, parents being physically abusive to children and referring to it as appropriate correction, not offering support or discouraging younger generations from pursuing higher paying careers because of doubt in their abilities, etc. (Auld, 2010).

It's possible that by giving more screen time to these women having positive conversations about the benefits of therapy, the show could have helped facilitate conversations of therapy in the larger Black community as it being a good thing instead of stigmatized. The possibility of watching these women grow their various businesses could have done wonders for younger Black girls that have dreams of being entrepreneurs one day. Yet, audiences missed those opportunities due to the producers' insistence on portraying Black women in a negative light.

What's the Deal with All of the Drama?

This season was a rollercoaster of drama. I use the term *drama* to point out and discuss any particular moment in the show in which a cast member is involved in a conversation that, while had no immediate or explicitly negative connotation, still created a sense of anticipation for what may happen soon or even on the next episode. These conversations occurred either in the presence of other cast members or during confessionals with the producers and film crew. The data that is discussed in this chapter only represents the data collected from episodes 1-16 ¹⁴.

I found that episodes 1-16 included a significant amount of drama points.

Throughout the episodes, there was a constant feeling of anxiety, as I watched and waited for particular scenes to unfold. Via the use of Frankenbitching, and dramatic music, the show entices viewers to lean in to witness the drama unfold; all of which would help

¹⁴ Episodes 17 and 18 are not included in my discussion of violence and anger as they were season finale episodes and did not display the women interacting with each other in everyday situations. However, the actual events of the season finale episodes will be discussed later in the chapter because those episodes deal with colorism. Typically, for season finale episodes, there is an audience, various moments from the season are played on a screen for the women to discuss with a moderator/host, and the women are all on stage, rather than being in public spaces or their private homes.

facilitate the flow of verbal attacks and physical altercations that are to be discussed in this chapter.

I found that typically, an episode would begin with what had previously occurred on the prior episode in addition to a few new moments. In some of the higher drama episodes, the episode would begin by replaying the final scenes from the prior episode. The replaying of previous scenes only occurred if the women were in the middle of extremely heated arguments or physical altercations.

During the data collection process, I documented who was the initiator of the drama, and this was typically noted when one cast member asked another cast member's opinion of a particular situation, or when cast members began discussing a situation in which at least one cast member wasn't present. In other words, I documented anytime cast members were gossiping about one another or when cast members would exhibit messy behavior ¹⁵. No cast members were excluded from initiating drama. Adjacent cast members (cast members who are friends with the main cast of the show) were also documented as initiators, as well as producers of the show. The producers' drama points had more to deal with the way in which the show opened, specific cuts that were created via the use of frankenbiting, or by them airing themselves actually asking question to the cast members during the confessionals. The cast members who were involved in the most drama were Lozada and OG.

¹⁵ Messy in this sense does not refer to the physical cleanliness of a space. Rather, it is used to define the behavior of a person who spreads gossip or rumors or brings up topics that were supposed to be private, with the sole purpose of making someone else upset or causing a rift between people, without being the center of the issue.

In my opinion, OG and Lozada being involved in so much drama is more than just coincidental, these women were more often involved in starting drama on the show, and both also appear to be this season's most consistent adversaries ¹⁶. As the season opened, audiences anticipated that Lozada and OG would get into conflict, mostly due to the cast members friendship alliances. Gutierrez and Scott have communication struggles throughout the season. Lozada had a closer bond with Scott and OG had a closer bond with Gutierrez, indicating clear differences in alliances. On top of all of this, Lozada also had some lingering feelings about Gutierrez, and OG had her own lingering feelings about Scott. In both instances, all of these tensions stemmed from unresolved issues from the previous season ¹⁷.

Overall, most of the drama that ensued was the result of cast members gossiping or spreading rumors about each other. Lozada stirred up the most drama during her confessionals, with Torres, or with Pargo. When it came to cast member, OG, she also started drama during confessionals, with Gutierrez, or with Christie. Cast members Gutierrez, Torres, and Roman initiated the least amount of drama throughout the season. These three cast members were also seen the least number of times throughout the season, which could be one of the reasons why they appeared to be less involved in the cultivation of drama, lack of opportunity due to their lack of presence.

¹⁶ Each season has two or three ladies that are the most consistently at odds with each other even after what may have appeared to be an apology and reconciliation.

¹⁷ During season 7, Lozada and Williams had been spreading rumors that Gutierrez had been enticing men to come to her medical spa for happy endings (sexual massages). Gutierrez was upset because of the potentially negative stigma that their rumors could have placed on her business. Also, during season 7, Scott verbally assaulted OG at her birthday party and was also condemned for making culturally inappropriate remarks about OG's traditional Nigerian attire.

Producers of the show were involved in drama anytime that they recapped aired episodes with extra details, or when their voices could be heard asking the cast members questions on air. Examples of such drama include the opening of the season, in which frankenbiting¹⁸ was used to create a montage of dramatic verbal clips, or during episode 13 when Roman announces that this is the end of *Basketball Wives* for her. In this particular scene, producers loop in short clips from multiple previous seasons of Roman having fun with other cast members, but also of her arguing with and attempting to physically harm other cast members as well. At the end of those short clips, Roman gets up from her seat and she fades away, giving the illusion that indeed, this may be her quiet end. Adjacent cast members generated drama if their presence fueled a verbal or physical altercation, such as when Deion Stevenson witnessed the trial¹⁹ that Christie and OG orchestrated in front of the Collective. Stevenson's mere presence fueled the drama of this episode as he and Pargo had recently gotten into a shouting and shoving match.

The drama is just a small part of the show's malicious make up. While the drama draws audiences to watch the show, I believe it is actually the verbal assaults and physical altercations that keep audiences watching.

The Verbal Assaults

Overall, the *Basketball Wives* cast members engaged in numerous verbal assaults which genuinely made me question the validity of certain friendships and alliances. I use

¹⁸ The process of splicing various clips and audio together to create new conversations and interactions is referred to as frankenbiting.

¹⁹ During season 8, Christie attempted to host a pretend court session with the Collective in order to prove that she was innocent and did not spread rumors about Pargo and her children.

the term *verbal assault* to define any act of gossiping that can be damaging to another woman's character or self-esteem. These verbal assaults ranged from basic name-calling (such as bitch) to attacks of a cast member's character (such as referring to each other as manipulative liars). I discuss *verbal assaults* differently than drama points because *verbal assaults* have a clear and immediate intention to hurt someone's feelings, discredit them, or cause an immediate rift between the person being verbally assaulted and other cast members.

Roman verbally assaulted her fellow cast members the least, but we can infer this that was mostly due to Roman departing the show prior to the end of the season. The Collective also engaged in simultaneous verbal assaulting. One such example of this, was when the cast was having dinner in Costa Rica and Torres, Pargo, and Lozada started their morning by discussing how they "got their asses handed to them" by "crazy CeCe" and "bat-sh*t crazy Jackie" the night before, all the while joking with each other and discussing how to redeem themselves shortly thereafter. Although O'Neal was present during this conversation as well, she spent more time during the scene laughing and egging the other women on as they made their shrewed jokes. Collective scenes did not always consist of the same people but those scenes did successfully create Us vs Them moments, leading to more drama and more arguments.

Although the newest member of the collective, Torres dished out some pretty rough verbal attacks. What I found intriguing was that Torres' remarks were more frequently made during her confessionals, yet, it was clear that she repeated similar remarks to the Collective because of how often the Collective would make similar jokes or even take those remarks even further. While on a trip with the Collective, Torres

remarks that she isn't going to go crazy about her room so long as she's not staying in the same villa as the "vultures," referring to Christie, OG, and Gutierrez. She goes on during her confessional that it would be best to "keep geriatric Jackie, Stone Cold Steve Austin Junior, and Bozo ass CeCe away from me period". Despite that statement being made during a confessional, fellow cast members Pargo, O'Neal, and Lozada carry the jokes on and amplify them, indicating that the culture of the Collective condones name calling and degradation if it's funny enough.

Similar to her involvement in causing drama, Lozada also verbally assaulted her fellow cast members the most. Scott also verbally assaulted her fellow cast members frequently throughout the season, just not as much as Lozada. Lozada frequently engaged in both name calling and attacks of character. One example of Lozada engaging in name calling was when she referred to OG as Toe-G. This was a name that Lozada made up about OG due to a social media picture in which OG's feet were not properly fitting in her high heel shoes. Scott also "slipped" and referred to OG as Toe-G during one of her confessionals. Scott's usage of the inappropriate nickname serves as evidence that not only is Lozada comfortable creating nicknames about her fellow cast members based on their appearance, but that she is somehow creating an environment where it is acceptable for other cast members to feel comfortable engaging in such behavior, as well.

Lozada engages in intense acts of attacks on her fellow cast members' character as well. An example of that behavior would be during one of her confessionals in which she stated that "CeCe gives me low-key crazy vibes like she's fucking sneaky as shit. She acts like she's innocent, and you're not! You know exactly what you were doing. You know that OG is fucking thirsty and she's trying to have a moment and she's gonna

use that against fucking Kristen (Scott)". Although this statement is made during a confessional, the malice and vindictiveness in her voice does indicate that there is a certain level of dislike and attempted verbal hurt behind her words.

I was not at all suprised that Lozada consistantly dished out numerous verbal assaults. Outside of O'Neal and Christie, Lozada is also one of the longest-tenured members on the show and therefore has been afforded a certain level of privilege with her words and actions within the tenured group. There is a certain amount of grace, which I will discuss later, that is exteneded to tenured cast members when it comes to issues concerning their behavior; this grace and understanding is not typically given nor established quickly with newer cast members ²⁰.

What did surprise me during the data collection process was how comfortable cast member Scott became with dishing out verbal assaults to peoples' faces and during her confessionals, considering that she only joined the cast during the previous season. When she verbally assaulted other cast members she received support and allyship in the form of other cast members joining in on the harsh jokes, or deep understanding for her feelings and decisions to slander other cast members. Scott is positioned within the larger group as a desired member rather than simply a new-comer.

This was a different type of treatment than what Guterriez received from the collective. Guterriez was more frequently depicted in opposition with the other women

²⁰ More often than not, this type of grace is given to tenured cast members by other tenured cast members. For example, O'Neal is often in the middle of who discussions of who was wrong and write and typically, how ever she sides is a strong determiner of how the Collective will side as well. O'Neal is a tenured cast member, and she is also one of the executive directors of the show. Therefore, she is allotted several positions of power through which she may extend or decline grace.

when she made harsh comments or rude remarks, where Scott was often depicted as a trustworthy friend. Such an example can be seen during episode 4, during Lozada's skin care event. In the scene, OG exposes Scott's alleged family secret (that her husband is not her father-in-law's biological son, therefore disqualifying them as true "basketball royalty"). Gutierrez admitted to telling OG the information. During a confessional, Scott makes the statement that "She (Gutierrez) showed her ass and showed who she really was at Evelyn's skin care event". In this scene, a perception of innocence is created which seemingly indicates that Scott was justified in her reaction because Gutierrez was not being her true self in the first place.

Two adjacent cast members also engaged in verbally assaulting cast members during their appearances. During a family meeting with Gutierrez, Scott, and Pargo, LonDen Scott verbally assaulted Gutierrez's character by stating that Gutierrez was a liability because she wasn't living up to the standards that the family had set²¹. This is character attacking because it gives the impression that Gutierrez is of lower status than the other women regardless of their blood relation. This point is made more profound as none of the other women present disagree with LonDen Scott's statement nor offer any sort of comfort, allyship, or support towards Gutierrez.

During his appearance at the trial, Deion Stevenson also verbally assaulted the Collective when he yelled at them, referring to them as motherf*****s. This is a clear moment of name calling. Stevenson could have chosen to refer to the Collective as

²¹ LonDen Scott is the daughter of Byron Scott, Gutierrez's fiancé. It is not explicitly clear whether or not LonDen Scott approves of their relationship, from this scene it is clear that LonDen Scott dislikes Gutierrez for various reasons that are not fully explained to the audience.

women, females, or simply y'all. Instead, he chose to use a profane slur to refer to and degrade them. His presence and word choice would lead to physical altercation soon after.

Victimization

Cast members OG, Williams, and Gutierrez were the victims of the majority of the verbal assaults. These three cast members social standing within the group²² may offer insight as to why they essentially seem to be getting bullied. Even though the show is titled *Basketball Wives*, only two of the cast members, Christie and Scott are presently married to current or former basketball players. All of the other cast members, with the exception of Torres, OG, and Gutierrez, are all divorced, and have been members of the cast for several seasons.

Cast member OG, who has a distinct style and flavor all of her own, which isn't American nor African American, proudly embraces her Nigerian heritage and frequently displays that pride in her choice of style, and she is currently dating a basketball player who plays overseas and not in the U.S. When these factors are taken into consideration, it is no wonder that OG struggled to fit in with the rest of the cast, and maybe these factors are also an indicator as to why OG often received pushback or criticism from her other cast members for being "different," and "aggressive". Throughout the eighth season, OG can be seen pleading her case during a confessional and with O'Neal, asserting that even

²² In-group and out-group status is often based on implicit attitudes which are shaped by one's personal in-group identity and the cultural messages about that group. At times, those in historically-marginalized in-groups will develop positive associations with their specific group while unintentionally developing negative associations with other historically marginalized groups (Axt, 2018).

though she may make verbal threats, her verbal threats should not be condemned as being more aggressive than the other physical acts or aggression displayed by some of her other cast members who can be seen throughout the season running across tables and throwing drinks at each other²³. OG presents a very unique case of alienation and mistreatment which I hone in on during my discussion of colorism²⁴.

When season eight aired, Gutierrez was not married, but she was engaged to Byron Scott. OG nor Gutierrez were never fully accepted into the group. Gutierrez, also like OG has her own style and non-American heritage, and she is one of the only cast members who had established a successful career for herself before she was engaged. This leads me to infer, although not explicitly evident, that some of the other cast members might have been jealous of her success and therefore never fully embraced her as a cast member because of their own jealousy or bias.

Conversly, cast member Williams, who is a former basketball wife, has previously had strong bonds with the cast members on the show. Williams' discord and outcasting occurred during season 7 after her falling out with three of the other main cast members, O'Neal, Lozada, and Pargo. Although she seemingly made amends with O'Neal and Lozada during season eight, that was not the case with Pargo. We do find out prior to the end of the season that Lozada still harbors ill feelings towards Williams,

²³ If we make the connection between these instances of passable aggressive behavior as exhibited by tenured cast members in comparison to the non-passable aggressive behavior exhibited by new members to the Collective, we can possibly understand the ways in which in-group and out-group statuses impact what the Collective considers acceptable behavior. The Collective appears to be more tolerant of aggressive behavior from tenured members, and less tolerant of aggressive behavior from non-tenured members.

²⁴ Outside of short time being a cast member, there are various reasons which provide possible explanations as to why OG is not accepted within the larger Collective. These reasons range from her ethnic identity, to her career choice, to her personal word choices and vocalizing of issues she has with fellow cast members.

which lead the three women to once again become at odds with Williams. There are multiple times throughout the season in which Williams states that she feels that her other cast members are trying to make her come across as a bad person, and that if this is the case they must not really be friends.

Torres and Scott, were not victims of many instances of verbal assault. Although they were both new to the show, they both still appear to have had a much easier time being accepted by the main cast. It can be inferred that Scott and Torres were saved from being out-casted or ridiculed by the Collective due to their respective connections with other cast members. Torres has a close friendship with Lozada (who in my opinion is the main bully of the group), which helped Torres fit in with the other cast members and allowed her to quickly adapt to the group and discover who the other cast members were mad at, had outsed and/or who on cast should be further ostracized. Scott, who originally had a close friendship with Gutierrez , and familial bond with Pargo, quickly bonds with O'Neal and therefore benefits from the same friendly orienting process that Torres does²⁵.

Overall, cast member attacks of other cast members character were the most frequent forms of verbal assault that the cast used. Out of all the cast members, Lozada dished out the most verbal assaults in general. Whether in person, in conversation with the Collective, or during confessionals, Lozada appeared to direct the majority of her verbal assaults towards OG and Gutierrez. This isn't surprising at all because throughout

²⁵ This isn't an actual orientation. Rather, it's the type of orientation style of bonding that we may experience at a job when a new Black person gets hired and the current Black employees tell them who is cool, who isn't, who is messy, etc.

her tenure on the show, Lozada has been known for her feisty temper and bullying demeanor when it came to other cast members that she didn't like. If we consider their status as newcomers and therefore outsiders, as well as Lozada's status as a tenured cast member, it's possible to argue that Lozada is displaying behavior that is similar to grade school bullying of the new girls.

The Physical Altercations

Americans are obsessed with watching people fight. From professional boxers to UFC fighters, to the fights we witnessed as kids on the playground and in the school yard, our culture is fascinated and can't seem to turn away when people begin fighting. American culture's fascination with fighting is represented across various forms of media, including reality television. During the eighth season of *Basketball Wives*, audiences witnessed some of the cast members returning to their old bad habits of fighting and explosive anger that made the show immensely popular. Audiences also bore witness to some of the new cast members' tempers and triggers.

Although the show did not air many physical altercations, the ones that did occur between episodes 1-16 were fueled by a plethora of verbal attacks and dramatic build-ups. I use the phrase *physical altercation* to indicate a time when any of the cast members got into each other's faces, when they threw things at one another, or when security had to break people up. I also use it to indicate when cast members rushed at each other, and if given the opportunity, could have physically assaulted one another. It should be noted that while no one was physically injured (despite some false claims) during this season, it was only because of the show's on-site security, which would often

hold cast members back from touching each other in rage. Security would often intervene in those situations, ensuring that there would be no arrests or charges pressed at the end of the season.

Physical altercations and what triggered them were slightly easier to document than other points within my data. Overall, it was apparent that many of the altercations were centered around the buildup of drama and cast members talking behind each other's backs. The spreading of family secrets and rumors were the roots of some of the altercations, and other altercations were the products of explosive frustration directed at adjacent cast members.

Even though the majority of the cast are mothers, and therefore it should go without saying that talking about one's family or children should be off limits, this did not stop the cast members from doing so. In fact, the very first physical altercation occurred because of familial drama that was still lingering from season 7²⁶ which involved Scott, Gutierrez, and Gutierrez's fiancé Byron Scott, who is Scott's father-in-law. OG, presumably trying to be a good friend to Gutierrez, gets into an argument with Scott in which OG blurts out "That's why Byron isn't Thomas' real dad!" (Thomas is Kristen Scotts' husband). This outburst sends Scott over the edge, and she charges at OG but is quickly caught and ushered away by a few of the other women and security.

²⁶ During season 7, Scott went on a public tirade about how she felt that Bryon Scott, her father-in-law, was a bad grandfather because he hadn't come to see Scott's daughter. She also places partial blame of Gutierrez as his fiancé' because she feels that Gutierrez should be doing more to push Bryon to visit and spend time with his granddaughter.

On a separate occasion, Lozada who was still harboring ill feelings about Williams from season 7²⁷, throws a cup at Williams, and also tries to climb over a table to get to her but she is caught and held back by the other women and security. Another physical altercation that occurred during season eight was between Christie and Pargo. This altercation was fueled by rumors which Pargo had heard from others that Christie had been spreading rumors about Pargo's inability to take care of her children who were currently living in Atlanta. Christie claimed that some guy reached out to her via Instagram direct message and told her that he had gotten this information from Williams and another friend of hers. Yet, the audience only gets to see Christie initially telling the other women about the rumor, even though Christie deliberately neglects to inform Pargo about this newly shared information, despite having a pleasant and cordial relationship with Pargo at the time. When Pargo finally gets wind of the rumors that Christie has been spreading, she instantly goes into a rage, and upon Christie's arrival at an event, Pargo immediately gets into Christie's face yelling and chest shoving her. Security struggles to keep the women apart the entire scene.

Many of the other physical altercations which occur on the show can be attributed to a buildup of emotions and frustration, and all of them coincide with some of the drama points that I previously discussed. Whether the drama was lingering from a previous episode or a previous season, drama played a major role in the severity of these altercations. In the same scene that Scott charges OG, Scott makes a second charge at

²⁷ Also, during season 7, O'Neal and Pargo inform Lozada that Williams had been spreading rumors about her daughter. Allegedly, Lozada had not been taking care of the family expenses and that led to her daughter having to take care of the house with remorse of prostitution as the source of income. These rumors hurt Lozada because they got back to her daughter who, in Lozada's words, looked at Williams as an aunt since she and Lozada had been friends for so long.

Gutierrez after she was told that Gutierrez was the one who told OG that Byron Scott wasn't Thomas Scotts' biological father. Scott and Gutierrez had already been on the fence with each other since the previous season, so it's reasonable to infer that this realization by Scott added fuel to the pair's already estranged relationship.

In addition, during the scene with Williams, Lozada tried to fight William's friend Dominique Lenard, presumably because Williams had made her way indoors, away from Lozada. Lozada then decides to take out her frustration on Lenard, who's presence had already added to the drama building in the scene. Lozada even commented to producers when discussing the incident that Williams had only brought Lenard to the event to get under Lozada's skin.

In further examining the altercation between Pargo and Christie, Christie's attempts at throwing a chair and a bike at Pargo, and Pargo's attempt at walking across the table to get to Christie, all failed only because the show security was in place. During that scene, adjacent cast member Deion Stevenson gets into a face-to face, chest-to-chest shouting match with Pargo. Each of these incidents were either broken up by show security or the other cast members. This would be the most significant physical altercation, involving the most people until closer to the end of the season.

The cast travels out of the country during the last few episodes to have what was supposed to be a fun trip. However, the cast who had already been on edge during the entire trip, begins lashing out at one another when those tensions reach a boiling point at a pool party. Gutierrez and OG appeared to be on the defense with almost all the other

women the entire trip. The major clashing came to a head when Lozada chased after Gutierrez and tried to climb in the back of the golf cart to get at her.



Picture 2 - Torres was the first person to reach Lozada when she tried to climb into the back of the golf cart.

The entire cast, security, and several camera men try to keep Lozada away from Gutierrez as well as other cast members away from each other. In a confessional Lozada claims that she only wanted to talk to Gutierrez, but in viewing this scene, I conclude that this was not the actual and real reason Lozada climbed in the golf cart. I believe that she climbed in the cart in an attempt to physically harm Gutierrez, and had it not been for security and the other cast members, I genuinely believe she would have been able to do so.

In the picture above, Torres can be seen trying to keep Lozada from climbing into the back of the golf cart. Pargo and O'Neal were close behind and after Gutierrez jumped out of the golf cart, the other cast members attempted to create a human barrier between Lozada and Gutierrez. As the other cast members are scrambling and bumping into each other, other arguments begin to erupt between the Collective.

During the same scene, Scott also comes close to getting into an altercation with OG after wrongfully assuming that OG touched her in an attempt to pull her away from Gutierrez. It was actually O'Neal who placed her hand on Scott's back to pull her away. It is never aired that O'Neal admitted to Scott that it was in fact she and not OG that touched Scott.

CHAPTER 5 – UNDERSTANDING OG’S COLORISM

ACCUSATIONS

Throughout the season, OG verbalized multiple concerns of unfair treatment in the presence of other cast members as well as during confessionals. Yet, it was not until the end of the season that OG explicitly called out specific cast members for being colorist and racist. OG’s basis for her claims stems from other cast members calling her aggressive, or ugly, or referring to her by negative nicknames, and her overall treatment as an outcast by the Collective. Although the other cast members claimed that they didn’t get along with her because of her aggressive behavior, OG asserts that the same ostracization does not occur to other cast members when they speak or act violently, maintaining her position that her unfair treatment is based on colorism.

Again, colorism occurs when Black people impose anti-Black attitudes onto other Black people, specifically privileging lighter skin over darker skin (Hunter, 2002) . Therefore, it is permissible to assume that OG believes her mistreatment is linked to the other cast members’ views of her as a darker skinned Black woman. It may also be inferred that OG believes people think she is over exaggerating her feelings and treatment simply due to the hue of her skin. At this point, I would like to make very clear that this section will not attempt to validate nor discredit OG’s claims of colorism. Experiences of colorism, unfair treatment, and discrimination are personal and occur differently in

everyone's lives. By not knowing OG's full background and not having the exact same experiences as she, it would be unethical of me to attempt to validate or discredit OG's feelings and emotions based on my lived experiences. Instead, this chapter will solely focus on the moments in which OG stated that she was being mistreated by her fellow cast members as well as how she determined that she was being mistreated.

OG's Articulation of Mistreatment During Episodes 1-16

Throughout episodes 1-16, OG made several statements referencing her feelings of mistreatment and ostracization by the other cast members. The cast members whom she voiced her concerns to were Gutierrez, Christie, Roman, and O'Neal. She also stated her feelings of mistreatment during several confessionals. OG also brought specific issues forward that she had with particular cast members and what they said about her behind her back.

Early on in the season, during episode 3, OG verbalizes her first accusations of mistreatment by the group. After OG revealed the "Scott Family Secret", she was chastised by other members of the Collective, namely O'Neal and Pargo. In a burst of presumable anger and frustration, OG storms off yelling, "Y'all don't hear nothing when it's said about me, right? I'm not gone do this fake sh*t, miss me with that bullsh*t". This is the first instance in which OG verbalizes to the Collective that she feels she is being treated unfairly. It should also be noted that her verbalization occurs during a heated moment in which Scott is being held back by security and the other cast members because she wants to fight OG and Gutierrez. Scott was not chastised for the statements that she made toward OG, nor was she told that she was inappropriate in her angry

outburst during the same scene. What can be inferred in this scene is that OG is harboring feelings of mistreatment from when other cast members have spoken inappropriately about or to her, yet they were not chastised for their words. These may be conversations that viewers are not privy to because they were not aired.

In conversations with Gutierrez, Christie, and Roman, OG has expressed that she feels the other women don't know her and also make no effort to try to get to know her. OG further shares that she feels the other women do not treat her as a friend because they talk about her behind her back, gang up on her when she says something someone doesn't like or finds inappropriate or make fun of her appearance. At no time during the conversations that are aired does OG state that she believes that her mistreatment is based on the color of her skin. Nonetheless, each time OG has these conversations with Gutierrez, Christie, and Roman, they appear to comfort her and offer her some sort of validation in her feelings. Christie and Roman share their past experiences with the Collective and how they empathize with how OG feels. Gutierrez shares in her current feelings of being a newcomer that doesn't feel welcome by the Collective as well.

In a conversation with Christie, Roman, and O'Neal, OG attempts to share her grievances again. O'Neal's presence is important in this scene during episode 4 because throughout the season, O'Neal is often involved in the other cast members discussions of OG's character²⁸. Other than Christie and Roman, O'Neal is the only other seasoned cast member that makes any attempt to get to know OG²⁹. During OG and O'Neal's

²⁸ At no time does O'Neal ever attempt to take up for OG during the discussions with other women.

²⁹ If other cast members have made similar efforts, those conversations were not aired. Considering that O'Neal is both a cast member and one of the executive producers, she holds a particular position of power when it comes to the other cast members' alliances and tenure on the show. In past seasons, the firing of

conversation, OG expresses that she felt attacked by her and the other cast members and that Scott also said hurtful things to OG during their conflict. OG further asserts that she felt attacked because she did not start the conflict that occurred. In a confessional, O'Neal says that she feels that OG comes off as really aggressive and that's not a type of personality that she needs to be around. She further states that during the aforementioned conflict, Scott's reaction (cursing and wanting to fight) to what OG said "broke her heart". When the camera returns to OG and O'Neal having their in-person conversation, O'Neal informs OG that she has never witnessed anyone attack OG and that in hindsight, she should have been chastising Gutierrez instead of OG.

It is reasonable to assume that OG understood that a conversation with O'Neal could have significant positive impact on her relationship with the other cast members considering O'Neal's position of power as a tenured member and executive producer of the show. There isn't much that can be clearly inferred from their conversation, though. O'Neal does not share stories nor validate OG's feelings in the way Christie and Roman have. She also does not make a notion towards helping OG gain favor with the other women in the way that Roman does. Roman invites the other cast members, excluding Lozada³⁰, to a brunch in an effort to continue the conversation of getting to know OG and befriending her. What is particularly significant about this scene is that O'Neal inevitably shifts the blame from OG to Gutierrez which ultimately does not help alleviate

cast members has been an option when they have angered O'Neal and she no longer wanted them on the show with her (Burke, 2016).

³⁰ Roman and Evelyn Lozada do not get along after Roman confronted Evelyn Lozada about making fun of her and the way she walks. Roman and Evelyn Lozada have had a long term on again, off again working relationship.

any issues or provide any type of friendly support for OG. Blaming Gutierrez, still places OG in the line of fire because OG and Gutierrez are still close friends at the time.

Another significant moment which OG expresses deep felt hurt and mistreatment by the Collective was during her retirement party. During season eight, OG decided to retire from playing football to focus on establishing her family as well as potentially move into coaching football. She invited the Collective, excluding Lozada and Torres, to her retirement party in an effort give her fellow cast members an opportunity to get to know her better and experience new elements of her Nigerian culture. OG was disappointed that only Christie and Williams attended. Gutierrez, Roman, and Scott did not attend because of prior engagements which they informed OG about. Primarily, OG expressed her disappointment that O’Neal and Pargo did not attend the event, nor did they inform her that they would not be attending.

In speaking with Christie and Williams, OG expresses how sad she felt that the other cast members were not there to support her because she wanted to share her family, friends, and culture with them. In her own words she states that she was “giving the other ladies an opportunity to get to know me on a silver platter and they don't even show up". OG also expressed that it felt like the other cast members simply didn’t like her and that although being a part of the Basketball Wives Collective is supposed to be a sisterhood, she doesn’t feel included³¹. Because of O’Neal and Pargo’s absence and lack of communication, it can be argued at this point that OG may have some basis in her prior accusations that her fellow cast members do not try to get to know her. Her fellow

³¹ Similar remarks have been made by other past cast members including Williams who has also befriended OG and consistently shows herself to be OG’s ally even against Gutierrez.

cast members' absences offer a reference point for viewers to understand why OG feels that the other cast members do not like her.

OG often states that she is an honest person and prefers to get to the bottom of issues. I argue that that's a more than fair statement which she makes about herself. On several occasions, OG has confronted fellow cast members about things they have said about her behind her back. Her confrontation of Lozada and Torres are most notable. Lozada began referring to OG as "Toe-G" because of a picture which OG posted that showed her toe hanging over the edge of her shoe. OG confronted Lozada, insisting that her joke was inappropriate and distasteful. Although OG demanded that Lozada apologize for her joke, she did not receive an apology. In a confessional, OG further expresses that she feels Lozada is disrespectful and exhibits bullylike behavior (personally I agree).

On a separate occasion, OG confronted Torres about an alleged rap that Torres wrote about OG. The lyrics in question spoke negatively of someone who wore fake designer clothing. In front of OG, Torres denied that the lyrics were about her although she had previously admitted in front of Christie, Pargo, and Lozada that the lyrics were in fact about OG. While in the presence of Christie and Pargo, Torres also confirmed that it was Lozada who took the time to reach out to someone and verify if a shirt that OG had worn was authentic. In both of these occurrences, OG approaches the cast members in question directly about the inappropriateness or disrespect that she had felt. Both times, OG does not receive any type of resolution or apology for the statements that were made about her behind her back.

Other Cast Member's Treatment of OG During Episodes 1-16

Throughout the season, fellow cast members made various comments about their feelings about OG and specifically critiqued and commented on her appearance and behavior. Overall, the comments and critiques made by Lozada, and O'Neal can be classified as the most damaging. Although subtle, the moments in which O'Neal refer to OG as aggressive, negative, or crazy during her confessionals and primarily with Christie, I contend that O'Neal's comments about OG are more damaging than Lozada's due to O'Neal's compound status as a tenured cast member and one of the executive directors of the show. Pargo, Torres, and Scotts' remarks are more closely related to that of grade school bullying.

Friendship alliances are critical in understanding the significance of cast member's remarks. During episode 3, as Scott is being held back from fighting OG and Gutierrez, Torres comments to Scott that "OG is wack and that bitch is easy to manipulate. She's a guinea pig. She's a project." Presumably, Torres made these remarks in an effort to provide Scott words of support for her feelings in that moment. Yet, simultaneously, Torres verbally degraded OG with no concern of her feelings. Also, not to be forgotten, Torres wrote a rap, based on her belief that OG was wearing a fake designer shirt. She divulged to the Collective that Lozada was the one who conducted her own research to determine the shirt's authenticity and reported that information to Torres.

Considering that Torres is also a newcomer to the Collective, it is fair to assume that Torres is seeking to establish herself within the larger Collective who at the time

appear to oppose OG. This type of assimilation strategy is representative of the cycle that occurs in early childhood friendships in which newcomers will side with those whom they wish to befriend and when necessary, will participate in name-calling and bullying as well (Besag, 2006). This behavior is often learned during one's youth, but the habits persist into adulthood.

Scott and Pargo's remarks about OG are also reminiscent of grade school bullying antics. Scott and OG have had a strained relationship since Scott made culturally insensitive remarks³² at OG's birthday party during season 7. During season eight, Scott and OG seemed to reconcile their differences, but that was short lived. During a confessional, Scott refers to OG as "Toe-G", an insulting name originally used by Lozada. In a separate confessional, Scott makes the statement that "OG is not just thirsty, she may want to add trifling cheater to her resume," referencing an argument that occurred between OG and Lozada over her ex-husband Chad Johnson. None of these statements are made directly to OG, and viewers do not witness Scott receive any form of chastisement for her words. These separate confessional moments support OG's claims that people do speak negatively about her behind her back, a claim that she made during she and Scott's altercation during episode 3.

Pargo also makes negative remarks about OG during confessionals and in the presence of other cast members. During episode 4, Pargo has a conversation with Byron

³² During season 7 OG invited the Collective to her birthday party. During a heated conversation, Scott decides to leave the party but not before making remarks about OG's attire. As she walks off, she can be heard making statements such as, "Bitch you brought the hat. That's all you brought, the f*cking hat and your ass cheeks. The hat, your ass cheeks, and the weird ass titties... Your party's wack, bitch the thing on your head is whack." The hat that Scott was referring to was a Gele which is Nigerian headwrap. Her comments were deemed culturally insensitive by viewers which led Scott to issue an apology to anyone she offended (Davis, 2018).

Scott to discuss what was said between him, OG, and Gutierrez in reference to his son Thomas Scott. During their conversation Pargo refers to OG as a “wack ass bitch” for allegedly weaponizing Byron and Thomas Scott’s relationship in an attempt to hurt Kristen Scott’s feelings. As it had already been confirmed that OG and Byron Scott have a positive platonic relationship, Pargo’s remark may be classified as an act of character slander between two friends.

Also, during episode twelve, Pargo and Scott take a samba dance lesson during which Pargo makes the remark, “This look like some shit OG be doing. Ugh, I’ll break yo neck!”, referencing the foot shuffle warm-up move the instructor showed them. In doing so, Pargo also deepened her voice and made grunting sounds which can be perceived as manly imitations. Although Pargo and Scott were warming up for a dance lesson, because the move resembled what one may typically see football players doing to warm up their legs, Pargo turned the moment into a joke and referenced OG, although they had not been previously talking about OG. This joke between Pargo and Scott does support OG’s claims that people speak or reference her in a negative manner when she is not present.

Torres, Scott, and Pargo’s remarks could be hurtful and damaging. Nonetheless those moments are not aired at a frequent enough rate at which one could conclusively argue that their remarks may play a critical role in OG’s standing with the other cast members, nor that their remarks cause lasting damage to OG’s overall character. The same cannot be said for the remarks made by Lozada and O’Neal.

As noted in the preceding sections, Lozada engaged in the most drama and verbal assaults, the majority of which were targeted at OG. Lozada was responsible for creating and spreading the inappropriate nickname “Toe-G” which other cast members also began using to refer to OG. OG confronted Lozada about the inappropriate nickname to which Lozada responded, "What's so funny is that she's so big, manly, tough, roar, I want to beat you up. But you're mad because I called you “Toe-G”, girl it's not that serious." This rebuttal was made during a confessional, not to OG's face when she confronted Lozada. What is clear in this scene is that Lozada does in fact disregard OG's feelings in stating that it wasn't that serious. We can infer that indeed it was that serious to OG considering that she brought it directly to Lozada's attention and made it clear that she did not appreciate Lozada making inappropriate nicknames about her.

There are a number of times in which Lozada makes damaging or disregarding remarks towards OG, but never to her face. In another confessional, Lozada insinuates that the only way that Kwame Alexander can stand to be in a relationship with OG is because he has her perform fellatio so that she is quiet around him. This comment is reminiscent of the rumors Evelyn Lozada spread about Gutierrez's business and her performing happy endings on male clients. Statements such as these are character damaging and have the power to ruin a woman's reputation in business due to hegemonic power structures which influence the ways in which society still attempts to equate a woman's value with her sexual behavior.

Potentially one of the most damaging yet revealing remarks that Lozada made about OG was to Christie. At a brunch meeting, Lozada tells Christie that OG is nothing more than an outsider and that she doesn't know what OG is trying to gain by befriending

Christie. Lozada goes on to remark that OG needs to get a real job and calls her a nightmare. The job which Lozada was referring to was OG's career as a professional women's football player. Despite her remark about OG's job, it is her statement about OG being an outsider that is most revealing. By formally stating her views of OG's status within the group, Lozada affirms that at least in part, her treatment of OG is fueled by her non-acceptance of OG as an essential part of the Collective.

As with Lozada, O'Neal made severely character damaging remarks about OG as well. As a tenured cast member and an executive producer, O'Neal's position of power places a significance behind her words that is even more salient than the words of her fellow cast members. Categorically, it is quite easy to assert that O'Neal views OG as being inherently aggressive. O'Neal refers to OG as angry, crazy, and aggressive to OG's face, in the presence of fellow cast members, and in various confessionals. O'Neal scolded OG for coming off aggressive in several encounters with other cast members in which OG made comments that she could physically harm them if she chose to do so. This is not an infrequent threat amongst the cast members and O'Neal is not exempt from making such threats either.

In discussing the differences between OG's behavior and that of Pargo's and Lozada's, O'Neal acknowledges that throwing things at people is wrong and that in the heat of the moment, people do crazy things out of anger. Further, O'Neal states that "OG's aggression doesn't seem like a moment, it seems like it's just a lifestyle." O'Neal makes other remarks about OG's character such as "Evelyn's not perfect, none of us are. But OG's aggression is just like an angriness that never goes away. OG just wants to fight everybody." O'Neal's word choices in describing OG's character are indicative of

her personal view that OG is naturally aggressive while other cast members are just angry, momentarily.

In another conversation with Christie, O’Neal informs Christie that she believes “OG is a f*cking liability. It’s not a good environment when she’s around. We have crazy, but that’s a whole other level of crazy.” O’Neal also expects Christie, who is identified as a friend by OG, to inform OG that she is not invited to the dinner scheduled at the end of the Costa Rica trip. During a confessional referencing the aforementioned conversation, Christie states that OG technically has not done anything to physically harm a fellow cast member. Christie also poses the question as to when Lozada or Pargo will get their “talking to” about their behavior and their genuine attempts to physically harm someone. I must admit, I waited for quite some time for Lozada and Pargo to get their “talking to” as well.

Episodes 17-18 (Season Finale Episodes)

Conversations of colorism and mistreatment got intense during the season finale. At the beginning of episode seventeen, OG is having a casual conversation with her make-up artist and makes the statement, “For the first time in a long time, I feel like I’m going to be vindicated.” Her statement here is a clear indication of her feelings of being mistreated, misunderstood, and ostracized. She believes that she will be vindicated and that her actions throughout the season will also be justified during the season finale filming. Usually, cast members who choose to attend the finale are all seated on stage together in front of a live audience. Typically, during season finales, confessionals are revealed to the Collective and other conversations that may not have been aired during

the regular season may be used to expose and create more drama in front of the live audience. What OG was expecting, unfortunately, was not what she received.

What OG was not aware of was that Lozada and O'Neal were having a separate conversation about her. Lozada and O'Neal were discussing social media posts that OG allegedly made about Lozada's ex-husband. They further discuss how aggressive they believe OG is and O'Neal states that she wants to keep her jaw intact. This conversation leads to the decision to request that OG be seated in a separate room, on a separate stage, away from the other cast members. This information was delivered to OG by the season finale moderator, Dr. Marc Lamont Hill. Hill informs OG that people are saying they are afraid of her and that because security concerns have been raised, the producers felt it would be best if she were on a different set. With good reason, in my opinion, OG refuses to be on a different set and states that if she is not allowed to be on the same set as the other cast members then she will simply go home.

OG attempts to plead her case with Hill, stating that she has earned her seat and deserves to be on the same stage as the other women. She further posits that she should not be feared nor punished for her threats considering that fear or punishment is not imposed on other cast members who have been involved in physical altercations. Specifically, she asserts, "I don't want to go home, but if I'm not going to be treated fairly, I'm not gonna go on stage... Why don't you put the aggressive people, those who have thrown things (referring to Lozada), ran on tables (referring to Pargo), and hit people with sticks (again referring to Lozada), put them on the other set." To no avail, Hill pleads with Christie and Gutierrez to convince OG to stay. OG again declines and she and Gutierrez decide to leave.

Despite OG leaving, the season finale starts, and Hill opens the conversation by asking the ladies why they don't want to be on set with OG. For some time, the cast member's make remarks as to why they didn't want to be on set with her, citing her past outbursts and verbal threats as evidence that OG is aggressive. Unexpectedly, OG does return to the separate set, insisting that she "was not going to let the Collective dictate what was going to transpire... every time I open my mouth it was like OMG, she's the stereotypical crazy, loud, oh this Black girl's got an attitude problem."

As the conversation continues to unfold, the fellow cast members assert in various ways that it is OG's aggression that keeps other cast members from liking her, not her skin color. Torres even admitted that she did call OG ugly but insists that it had nothing to do with her complexion. She gives no alternative reason though for calling OG ugly. As no reconciliation occurs, Hill attempts to curtail the conversation by stating that in his perspective, it does appear that OG might be a target and that one day he hopes they may all be able to have a conversation and figure things out.

What is especially interesting about season eight is that after the official season finale ends, there is a special six-minute inserted clip. During the clip, Hill and O'Neal have a conversation about colorism and differences in treatment of cast members. This conversation is only between Hill and O'Neal. O'Neal admits that OG was right about being treated differently than other women who have lost their tempers and further stated that the difference was that those women had relationships from the past eight-nine years. Rather than colorism, O'Neal insists that the underlying issues of OG's treatment is one of chemistry and relationship. It is reasonable to assume that this is an accurate assumption from O'Neal as a tenured cast member. Yet, Scott and Torres are also new

cast members and did not experience the same treatment as OG. They were able to successfully connect with other cast members and establish themselves within the Collective. OG and Gutierrez were clearly not as successful.

Also, during their conversation, Hill asks O’Neal about her thoughts on a previous Instagram story post made by Lozada. The post, shown below, does not explicitly reference OG. And yet, the connotation of the post can easily be directed towards OG. At the time, OG and Lozada had been engaging in a back and forth social media argument, making posts that directly and indirectly referenced each other. Lozada’s post has a more explicitly negative connotation because she added the face of a yelling orangutang to her post. Although Lozada does not tag or reference OG in the post, fans may have attributed the post as a reference towards OG because she is darker skinned and is also from the African country of Nigeria.

What Lozada was consciously or unconsciously representing is similar to the racist thinking and practices of George Cuvier who concluded that Sara Bartman was the missing link between humans and apes, and furthermore, that people of African descent were more closely related to apes than their European counterparts. When Lozada included the image of the orangutang in her post she was essentially calling OG a monkey, which can be perceived as a very racist and very degrading reference to make to any person of African descent, but especially towards OG because she is originally from Nigeria. This post has led to several more social media exchanges and a defamation of character lawsuit between Lozada and OG.



Picture 3 - From Evelyn Lozada's Instagram Story originally posted September 11, 2019

In response to what her thoughts were, O’Neal answers Hill in stating that “as a show, we would never condone something that offensive or that racist”. By saying “that offensive or that racist” I am of the strong assumption that it is not to say that the show does not, in some fashion, condone offensive and even racist behavior, just not to that extent. This is all the more troubling because OG did accuse Lozada of being racist, highlighting her Latinx heritage, to which Lozada further denied and countered saying

that she has always identified as Afro-Latina. I can neither confirm nor deny how Lozada does or has always identified.

Nonetheless, we cannot know without asking Lozada personally, whether or not she did in fact direct her social media post towards OG. Despite that reality, one cannot deny the connotation that may be derived from such a post especially after the heated encounters between Lozada and OG all throughout the season.

CHAPTER 6—CONCLUSION

Season eight of *Basketball Wives* is just one example of how Black reality television shows continue to perpetuate negative and stereotypical imagery of Black women and attempt to pass it off as real and authentic entertainment. It is my strong belief that these representations of Black women further indoctrinate non-Black people to view Black women as a whole in a negative light, while also further indoctrinating Black people to view and judge each other based on the various hues of our skin, over our humanity. It cannot be denied that television has the potential to teach us amazing things about our society. All the same, it also cannot be denied that television has the potential to misinform us about our society and the people who make up our respective communities.

By analyzing season eight of *Basketball Wives*, it was not my intention to speak against the show, nor was it my intention to speak against watchers for the viewing of the show, or similar shows. Rather, I wanted to bring forward examples and reasons why watching shows such as these should be done with an understanding that they offer more than simply an opportunity to be entertained. *Basketball Wives* and shows of the like, present themselves as an opportunity to learn about the lives of others. As an audience member, it is imperative that we are mindful of how this learning may be influencing our personal views of the people we come in contact with on an everyday basis. As I have

been guilty myself, I assert that we all must be more conscious of the media we consume, how bias may be being cultivated during our viewing of shows, and how that bias may be impacting our expectations or assumptions of other people in everyday encounters.

What Exactly Do We Get from All of the Drama and Altercations?

Utilizing Black feminist theory in tandem with cultivation theory as my guiding theories for this project, I contend that the drama, physical altercations, and verbal assaults on the show during season eight of *Basketball Wives* are the issues that take center stage on the show to the exclusion of the cast members entrepreneurial pursuits or anything else that the cast members might be struggling with during the season. In each episode, the audience bears witness to countless incidents of drama as well as a variety of personal and character damaging insults. The audience also observes the numerous physical altercations that if security had not been in place, might have been followed up with a lawsuit. By the end of the season, it is easy to conclude that all the cast does is fuss, fight, argue, make up as friends, and then find something else to fuss, fight and argue about.

Throughout the season there is a lack of coverage about how the cast members are also focused on philanthropy and businesses, and how many are also concerned with their own physical and mental health. Instead, the audience observes all of the drama to the exclusion of these things and/or sweet moments that the cast members share with their families. This inevitably makes the audience forget that the cast members are real and actual women who have complex and complicated lives outside of the show.

Consequently, audiences who might not get to meet Black women in their everyday lives might become conditioned through watching this show to regard Black women as a racialized and gendered group that only loves drama and nothing more. The angry Black woman trope is consistently deployed throughout the season, which could also lead some viewers to assume that their interactions with Black women in real life will be inherently filled with drama, anger and even violence. Subsequently, this can give audiences a negative view of Black women, and they may in turn project and internalize these negative biases about Black women into the real ways they regard actual Black women in their day-to-day lives. This can be the case with almost anyone, even if those watchers aren't Black or women. Not one audience member is exempt from this kind of negative internalization. You, as an audience member may walk away from the show thinking that real and actual Black women are nothing more than the embodiment of these past sexist and racist controlling images, or even worse, that Black women do not engage with any emotions but anger.

Colorism?

OG spoke at length about her feelings and the treatment that she experienced at the hands of her other castmates. The audience witnessed OG's attempt to plead her case of mistreatment with several cast members, and the only two cast members to speak explicitly about OG's treatment were Lozada and O'Neal. On both occasions, those cast members referenced group relationships, and this referencing is clearly evident, at least in part, that OG experienced a difference in treatment due to her not being seen as an assimilated member of the Collective. Only O'Neal references years of personal

friendship as a potential explanation as to why OG's behavior is not tolerated in the same manner as more seasoned cast members.

What we sometimes call group relationships as adults, should also be understood as grade school clique behavior. Being mean to someone just because they are new or just because they don't have that much in common with others, can lead to bully like behavior, which *Basketball Wives* has been accused of in the past. This season, OG is positioned as an outsider. She's originally from Nigeria and for the most part, shares few similarities with the overall Collective. Although not explicit, the behavior presented in this manner on shows which receive more than one million views, could encourage xenophobia of other Black cultures outside of the United States.

In truth, I personally believe that colorism, even if subconsciously, did significantly impact OG's treatment by her fellow cast members. Although no instances were aired in which the other cast made derogatory statements about OG and the color of her skin specifically, many of their statements did indicate explicit bullying, othering, and outsiderism. Presumably having some level of cultural consciousness, being from an African country, and seemingly being aware that the hue of her skin may be deemed as dark(er), it can be reasonably understood how OG may have attributed her overall mistreatment by the Collective, intensely from Lozada, as a negative consequence of potential issues of colorism and bias.

The Finale

Many of the representations of Black women on reality television are distorted and center stereotyping and negativity within their story lines. In 2015, Dr. Sharon L.

Jones wrote similarly about *Basketball Wives*. Jones is a professor of English and Literature at Wright State University. Her manuscript discussed issues of racism, sexism, and income-level disparities as they were exhibited on the show (Jones, 2015). In her discussion, she expounds on how the show could have showcased the diversity of Black skin, countering the narrative that Black equates to one monolithic look. Jones argues in her work that Season five did not do that and missed an opportunity. Jones goes further to discuss how the show also played into the negative stereotype of the welfare queen³³ as the show essentially depicted Roman as a laughingstock because she had fallen on hard times and was receiving food stamps.

Season five also ignited national discussions of bullying³⁴ and although the show insisted that it would take the necessary measures to ensure the show would send more positive messages, it is evident that throughout the seasons, that has not been the case. Throughout the manuscript, Jones (2015) primarily discusses the events of season five of the show and concludes that any advances *Basketball Wives* could have made to present positive representations of Black women are undercut by the centrality of stereotypes.

After critically and intentionally watching season eight several times, unfortunately I agree with Jones' contentions whole heartedly. Season eight, like Dr.

³³ The original welfare queen was a woman by the name of Linda Taylor. She is credited as the first woman to be prosecuted for welfare fraud. Although there are varying records of her race or ethnic background, she is considered a woman of color and therefore unwittingly helped cultivate the anti-Black woman stereotype we refer to as the welfare queen (Meraji, 2019).

³⁴ During season five, cast member Tasha Marbury made fun at Lozada after she was assaulted by now ex-husband, Chad Ochocinco. This behavior gives the perception that Black women in general do see domestic violence as an issue. Also, during the season, Williams and Roman get into an argument about Williams' inability to understand Roman's financial hardships because Williams is not ghetto. This implies that Black women with higher social statuses are allegedly unable to even empathize with people whom they consider lower in status or class.

Jones writes of season five, missed so many opportunities to provide positive representations of Black women from various backgrounds and locations. Instead, the season leaned harder on disparaging stereotypes to create their so-called real narrative. Where we witness an abundance of drama, we only get glimpses of these women's businesses. We listened to them verbally degrade each other, growing more and more skeptical of their friendships. We sat on the phone with our friends chatting about "what if security had been late? They should have let her get her." In doing so, we were encouraging the physical abuse of Black women for the sake of entertainment. Eventually, we may start to incorporate some of these actions, word choices, and viewpoints into our everyday lives. Unknowingly, we may become settled into the normalcy of expecting negativity from Black women and find fewer and fewer reasons to critique and condemn the degradation.

My Final Thoughts as a Misrepresented Black Woman

I began this dissertation with feelings of anger, anger at the constant misrepresentation of Black women on reality television shows. I end this dissertation with feelings of tiredness, and to a certain extent, the feeling of being distraught. To simply watch a show of this genre with only entertainment in mind is quite easy. It requires little energy, and at best, subconscious investment; subconscious because all one has to do is turn on the show, sit back, and watch. The need to assess, understand, and even self-reflect is not required when one watches these shows as simply entertainment. As a scholar, I believe I no longer have access to such a luxury. I say luxury in this sense because prior to reading the aforementioned literature and analyzing *Basketball Wives* with a more critical view, I can no longer see it as simply entertainment.

I now reflect on how easy it is for me to turn my nose up, sneer, and roll my eyes at the mention of particular cast members. I do not know them personally, and yet, I dislike them as people in general because of how I have seen them on television. I have caught myself thinking ill of Black women whom I have come into contact with in the past. I have experienced many revelations that my ill thoughts were in part, rooted in the fact that those Black women either had similar features to or acted similarly to certain cast members whom I did not like. More and more, I have become increasingly concerned with how frequently others may be experiencing similar feelings towards Black women based on what they watch.

As a Black woman, I can attest to the fact that Black women are not inherently angry, the first word we speak as toddlers is not bitch, and we do engage in other emotions outside of anger. As a scholar, I am able to filter through other's research, citing historic misrepresentation, reinvigorated stereotypical practices, and intentional media degradation. I have the luxury of being a Black woman scholar, privy to such information and resources, but many do not have such a luxury.

Again, I want to be clear that my research does not call for the banning of Black reality tv shows. In truth, there are some shows that have provided significant exposure for certain businesses and professional personalities. Therefore, this dissertation is positioned to facilitate an alternative view and conversation about what we consider just entertainment and how that entertainment may also be teaching us. I offer my research as a critique to these perpetual portrayals as well as an addition to the conversations centering Black women's humanity and need for a shift in representation and ideals of authenticity.

Limitations

As this study only focuses on one season of one BRT show, the findings and conclusions of this study cannot be used to generalize all BRT shows and their representations of Black women. Intrinsic case studies and thick descriptions are not exact sciences. Rather, this methodological approach is effective in exploring and providing more detailed understandings of events that occur throughout society. Further, there is also no exact measurement of thick description, meaning there is no saturation point to determine how thick is thick enough. Nonetheless, this does not insinuate that intrinsic case studies and thick descriptions are flawed methodological approaches, it simply further illustrates the limits of human meaning making (Dawson, 2012).

In addition, cultivation theory can be limiting when applied to Black people. Cultivation theory assumes that people who consume large quantities of television do so in an indiscriminatory manner. Yet, there are studies which have found that Black youth intentionally seek Black media and shows (Ward, Day, & Thomas, 2010). Cultivation theory also posits that viewers passively watch television without a critical lens. However, scholars have asserted that Black viewers' media consumption is directed by their analyzation of television's representations of ethnic and cultural identity, gender, religiosity, etc. (Ward, Day, & Thomas, 2010). To adjust for the limitations of cultivation theory, a Black feminist perspective was employed to interpret the findings of the study.

Another limitation of this work is a lack of viewer reaction. Feedback from viewers other than the author could have presented data which may have further illustrated how other Black women feel about the representation of Black women on the show.

Suggestions for Future Application

In the future, I suggest that studies such as these be expanded to include either more seasons of a particular show, or at least various episodes from different shows. Doing so would allow the researcher an opportunity to track trends of representation and stereotyping between similar shows. By tracking trends, scholars may begin to build cases that explicitly identify stereotypical trends in casting, directing, and editing, especially for shows that have the same executive directors. Executive directors have a significant say-so in who is casted and how they must act. They also have the authority to nullify a cast member's contract if they are not in compliance with how the directors expect cast of a particular show to act and behave. Taking this direction within the research allows the scholar to dive much deeper into understanding who is truly controlling the narrative of a show.

Also, studies such as these could benefit from the inclusion of audience opinions and interpretations. This could be done through surveys, interviews, or group watch parties followed by focus groups. During the focus groups, the researcher could ask questions along the lines of:

- What were the dominant emotions that you felt while watching this show/season?
- In one sentence, can you sum up the overall message about Black women that you believe this show sends?

- Considering that this show depicts Black women in real and authentic ways, do you feel properly represented by what you've just watched? Why or why not?
- What is your belief on this show's, and other shows like it, impact on how Black women are viewed in larger society? Do you think these views impact all Black women, or just some? If all, why? If just some, why?
- If you were a director, what are three things that you would change about the show and how Black women are represented?

These opinions and interpretations would offer a deeper understanding of how other Black women genuinely perceive these shows and their influence on their views or the views of others. As I posit that I am not the only Black woman that has feelings of misrepresentation and even anger from time-to-time while watching these shows, I believe the voices of other Black women would aid in argument for more positive representations of Black women in media, especially if the media claims to be *real* in its representation of Black women.

Similarly, although a long shot, I believe it could also be informative to conduct interviews with cast members of these shows, but not to ask them about specifics of the show. Instead, these interviews could offer insight into how cast members are being impacted by how they are represented on these reality television shows. If taking this direction, the researcher could pose questions to cast members such as:

- After watching the show/season, what percent of the show's content do you believe was taken out of context? Can you give an example?

- Were there moments during the filming of the show where you felt you were forced to overreact or act out of your normal character? Did you address that with the directors? If so, how did they respond?
- Do you believe that people who have watched the show have a good understanding of what goes on in your everyday life and who you are as a person? Why or why not?
- In what ways has your appearance on the show impacted your personal life (love life, other friendships, motherhood, etc.)?
- Based on what was aired, were there any scenes in which you felt you were completely misrepresented? If so, please explain what actually happened in the scene and how you would have preferred to be represented in the scene.

These shows focus on the lives of Black women, but arguably, do not properly represent Black women. If attempting to assess what type of impact these shows may have on the cast members, questions such as these allow the cast members themselves to answer those types of questions. I will admit, I do not believe that it is fair to place judgement upon the women depicted in these shows primarily based on how someone else directs their narrative to be depicted. Therefore, asking the cast members how they explicitly feel and their thoughts or issues with the show (if any) opens the door wider to engage in conversations centering the impact these shows have on cast members' lives.

REFERENCES

- About Media Studies*. (n.d.). Retrieved from The New School:
<https://www.newschool.edu/media-studies/about/>
- Alfonseca, K. (2019, September 16). 'Love & Hip Hop' Star Amara La Negra On Why The Latinx Community Must Address Colorism. *HuffPost*. Retrieved from https://www.huffpost.com/entry/amara-la-negra-colorism-latinx-love-hip-hop_n_5d796125e4b0a938a42d887c
- Anderson, T. (2018, June 8). A look back at the blaxploitation era through 2018 eyes. *Los Angeles Times*. Retrieved from Los Angeles Times:
<https://www.latimes.com/entertainment/movies/la-ca-mn-blaxploitation-superfly-20180608-story.html>
- Arissen, R. (2020, February 23). *Does NeNe Leakes Make More Than the Rest of the 'RHOA' Cast?* Retrieved from Showbiz Cheat Sheet:
<https://www.cheatsheet.com/entertainment/does-nene-leakes-make-more-than-the-rest-of-the-rhoa-cast.html/>
- Auld, J. J. (2010). Generational Curses. In J. J. Auld, *What's Really Happening in African-American Relationships?* (pp. 20-25). Bloomington: AuthorHouse.
- Axt, J. (2018). INGROUP AND OUTGROUP FAVORITISM IN IMPLICIT ATTITUDES. *Society for Personality and Social Psychology*. Retrieved from <https://spsp.org/news-center/blog/ingroup-outgroup-implicit-attitudes>
- Baker, R., & Papillion, R. (2019, February 7). *BLACK WOMEN TALK BODY IMAGE IN THE BLACK COMMUNITY*. Retrieved from Refinery29:
<https://www.refinery29.com/en-us/black-women-body-image>
- Baxter, P., & Jack, S. (2008). Qualitative Case Study Methodology: Study Design and Implementation for Novice Researchers. *The Qualitative Report*, 544-559.
- BBCNews. (2019, February 11). *Cardi B: From stripper to Grammy award winner*. Retrieved from BBC News: <https://www.bbc.com/news/newsbeat-47197386>
- Bell-Jordan, K. (2008). Black. White. and a Survivor of The Real World: Constructions of. *Critical Studies in Media Communication*, 353-372.

- Besag, V. (2006). *Understanding girls' friendships, fights, and feuds a practical approach to girls' bullying*. New York: McGraw-Hill Education.
- Bigelow, M. (2020, March 19). *The danger of digital blackface*. Retrieved from CIO: <https://www.cio.com/article/196246/the-danger-of-digital-blackface.html>
- Bogle, D. (2001). *Toms, Coons, Mulattoes, Mammies, and Bucks: An Interpretive History of Blacks in American Films*. London: Bloomsbury Academic.
- Boylorn, R. M. (2014). A Story & A Stereotype: An Angry and Stron Auto/Ethnography of Race, Class, and Gender. In R. M. Boylorn, & M. P. Orbe, *Critical Autoethnography: Intersecting Cultural Identieis in Everyday Life* (pp. 129-143). Walnut Creek: Left Coast Pess, Inc.
- Boylorn, R. M. (2018, August 27). The Omarosa Effect. *Slate*. The Slate Group, a Graham Holdings Company. Retrieved from <https://slate.com/culture/2018/08/the-omarosa-effect-its-hard-to-overstate-the-cultural-influence-of-historys-greatest-reality-tv-villain.html>
- Burke, M. (2016, July 4). Shaunie O'Neal Explains Why Brandi Maxiell Was Allowed To Return For 'Basketball Wives: LA' Season 5. *International Business Times*. Retrieved from <https://www.ibtimes.com/shaunie-oneal-explains-why-brandi-maxiell-was-allowed-return-basketball-wives-la-2391747>
- Carter, B. (2006, October 5). Segregated Survivor teams turn out to be temporary. *New York Times*, p. 2.
- Charles, C. (2010). Skin bleaching in Jamaica: Self-esteem, racial self-esteem and Black identity transaction. *Caribbean Journal of Psychology*, 25-39.
- Clissold, B. D. (2004). Candid Camera and the Origins of Reality TV: contextualizing a historical precedent. In S. H. Jermyn, *Understanding Reality Television* (pp. 33–53). Oxfordshire: Routledge.
- Coard, S., Breland, A., & Raskin, P. (2001). Perceptions of and Preferences for Skin Color, Black Racial Identity, and Self-Esteem Among African Americans. *Journal of Applied Social Psychology*, 2256-2274.
- Colleluori, S., & Angster, D. (2015). *REPORT: New York City Television Stations Continue Disproportionate Coverage Of Black Crime*. Washington: Media Matters for America. Retrieved from <https://www.mediamatters.org/legacy/report-new-york-city-television-stations-continue-disproportionate-coverage-black-crime>
- Crais, C., & Scully, P. (2010). *Sara Baartman and the Hottentot Venus: A Ghost Story and a Biography*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

- Crenshaw, K. (1989). Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics. *University of Chicago Legal Forum*, 139-167.
- Crouch, M. (2018). *13 Secrets Reality TV Show Producers Won't Tell You*. Retrieved from Reader's Digest: <https://www.rd.com/list/13-secrets-reality-tv-show-producers-wont-tell-you/>
- Daley, S. (2002). Exploited in Life and Death, South African to Go Home. *New York Times*. Retrieved from <https://www.nytimes.com/2002/01/30/world/exploited-in-life-and-death-south-african-to-go-home.html>
- Davis, T. (2018). *Basketball Wives Newbie Kristen Scott Is Apologizing For Some "Tasteless" Comments That She Made About OG*. Retrieved from Vh1: <http://www.vh1.com/news/360880/kristen-apologizes-for-tasteless-joke/>
- Dawson, J. (2012). Thick Description. In A. J. Mills, G. Durepos, & E. Wiebe, *Albert J. Mills, Gabrielle Durepos & Elden Wiebe* (pp. 943-944). Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publication, Inc.
- Denzin, N. K. (1989). *The research act : a theoretical introduction to sociological methods*. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall.
- Drew, E. M. (2011). Pretending to Be "Postracial": The Spectacularization of Race in Reality TV's Survivor. *Television & New Media*, 326-346.
- Duribe, J. (2018). *Tiffany "New York" Pollard just recreated her iconic "sitting on a bed" meme*. Retrieved from Pop Buzz: <https://www.popbuzz.com/internet/viral/tiffany-pollard-new-york-meme-gif/>
- Fujioka, Y. (1999). Television Portrayals and African American Stereotypes: Examination of Television Effects When Direct Contact Is Lacking. *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, 52-75.
- Gandy, O. H. (2001). Racial Identity, Media Use, and the Social Construction of Risk among African Americans. *Journal of Black Studies*, 600-618.
- Geertz, C. (1973). Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture. In C. Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (pp. 310-323). New York: Harper Collins Publishers, Inc.
- Gerbner, G. (2000). Cultivation Analysis: an Overview. *Communicator*, 3-12.
- Gerbner, G., & Gross, L. (1976). Living with Television: The Violence Profile. *Journal of Communication*, 172-199.
- Gergen, K. J. (1991). *The Saturated Self : Dilemmas of Identity in Contemporary Life*. New York: Basic Books.

- Girl Scout Research Institute & TRU. (2011). *Girls and Reality TV*. Girl Scout. Retrieved from https://www.girlscouts.org/content/dam/girlscouts-gsusa/forms-and-documents/about-girl-scouts/research/real_to_me_factsheet.pdf
- Glascok, J., & Preston-Schreck, C. (2018). Verbal aggression, race, and sex on reality TV: Is this really the way it is? *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media*, 427-444.
- Golden, M. (2015, June 24). *My black hair: a tangled story of race and politics in America*. Retrieved from Quartz: <https://qz.com/432098/my-black-hair-a-tangled-story-of-race-and-politics-in-america/>
- Goldschmidt, W. (1977). Anthropology and the Coming Crisis: An Autoethnographic Appraisal. *American Anthropologist New Series*, 293-308.
- Grandy, G. (2012). Instrumental Case Study. In A. J. Mills, G. Durepos, & E. Wiebe, *Encyclopedia of Case Study Research* (pp. 474-475). Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications, Inc.
- Grandy, G. (2012). Intrinsic Case Study". In A. J. Mills, G. Durepos, & E. Wiebe, *Encyclopedia of Case Study Research* (pp. 500-501). Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications, Inc.
- Guy-Sheftall, B. (2002). The Body Politic: Black Female Sexuality and the Nineteenth-Century Euro-American Imagination. In K. Wallace-Sanders, *Skin Deep, Spirit Strong: The Black Female Body in American Culture* (pp. 13-36). Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.
- Hales, C. M., Carroll, M. D., Fryar, C. D., & Ogden, C. L. (2020). *Prevalence of Obesity and Severe Obesity Among Adults: United States, 2017–2018*. National Center for Health Statistics. Retrieved from <https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/databriefs/db360-h.pdf>
- Hall, S. (1997). The Spectacle of the "Other". In S. Hall, *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices* (pp. 223–290). Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.
- Hall, S. (2002). Encoding and Decoding in the Television Discourse. In D. McQuail, *McQuail's Reader in Mass Communication Theory* (pp. 302-308). Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications Ltd.
- Hayano, D. M. (1979). Auto-Ethnography: Paradigms, Problems, and Prospects. *Human Organization*, 99-104.
- Hearon, S. (2020, August 13). Biggest 'Real Housewives' Feuds Ever — And Where the Relationships Stand Today. *US Magazine - Online*. Retrieved from <https://www.usmagazine.com/entertainment/pictures/biggest-real-housewives-feuds-ever/kim-richards-vs-lisa-rinna-rhobh/>

- Heider, K. G. (1975). What Do People Do? Dani Auto-Ethnography. *Journal of Anthropological Research*, 3-17.
- Hill, A. (2005). The Idea of Learning. In A. Hill, *Reality TV: Audiences and Popular Factual Television* (pp. 79–107). Oxfordshire: Routledge.
- Hill-Collins, P. (2002). *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*. Milton Park: Routledge.
- hooks, b. (1992). *Black Looks: race and representation*. Boston: South End Press.
- Hope, D. P. (2009). Fashion ova style: Contemporary notions of skin bleaching in Jamaican dancehall culture. *Jenda: A Journal of Culture and African Women Studies*, 101-126.
- Hunt, D., & Ramón, A.-C. (2020). *Hollywood Diversity Report 2020: A Tale of Two Hollywoods*. Los Angeles: UCLA Institute for Research on Labor & Employment. Retrieved from <https://socialsciences.ucla.edu/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/UCLA-Hollywood-Diversity-Report-2020-Film-2-6-2020.pdf>
- Hunter, M. L. (2002). "If You're Light You're Alright": Light Skin Color as Social Capital for Women of Color. *Gender and Society*, 175-193.
- Iiams, I. (2021, September 30). *DATING SHOWS HAVE A COLORISM ISSUE*. Retrieved from Her Campus: <https://www.hercampus.com/school/american/dating-shows-have-a-colorism-issue/>
- Jefferson-James, L. (2015). World, Selective Reuptake Perpetuating Misleading Cultural Identities in the Reality Television. In J. R. Ward, *Real Sister: Stereotypes, Respectability, and Black Women in Reality TV* (pp. 31-52). New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press.
- Jewell, K. S. (1993). *From Mammy to Miss America and Beyond: Cultural Images and the Shaping of US Social Policy*. London: Psychology Press.
- Jones, S. L. (2015). Contemplating Basketball Wives: A Critique of Racism, Sexism, and Income-Level Disparity. In J. R. Ward, *Real Sister: Stereotypes, Respectability, and Black Women in Reality TV* (pp. 139-155). New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press.
- Jones, T., & Norwood, K. J. (2017). Aggressive Encounters & White Fragility: Deconstructing the Trope of the Angry Black Woman. *Iowa Law Review*, 2017-2070.
- Kafle, H. R. (2010). Media studies: Evolution and perspectives. *Bodhi: An Interdisciplinary Journal*, 10-20.

- Kleinman, S., Ezzell, M. B., & Frost, A. C. (2009). Reclaiming Critical Analysis: *Social Analysis*, 46-68.
- Klimstra, T. A., & van Doeselaar, L. (2017). Identity formation in adolescence and young adulthood. In T. A. Klimstra, & L. van Doeselaar, *Personality Development Across the Lifespan* (pp. 293-308). Amsterdam: Elsevier.
- Lannom, S. C. (2020, July 21). *Breaking the fourth wall: Definition, meaning and examples*. Retrieved from Studio Binder: <https://www.studiobinder.com/blog/breaking-the-fourth-wall/>
- Larson, S. G. (2006). "Reality" Television: American Myths and Racial Ideology. In S. G. Larson, *Media & Minorities The Politics of Race in News and Entertainment* (pp. 1-10). Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Leakes. (2019, March 3). Did Nene Leakes Overreact About Her Closet? | RHOA | WWHL. (A. Cohen, Interviewer) Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4BipfhdhOjU>
- Lewis, J. (2013). *The Ideological Octopus: An Exploration of Television and its Audience*. Milton Park: Routledge.
- Mathews, T. J., & Johnson, G. S. (2015). Skin complexion in the twenty-first century: The impact of colorism on African American women. *Race, Gender & Class*, 248-247.
- McGee, I. (2013, November 22). *Irene's True Story of The Real World: Seattle*. Retrieved from Vulture: <https://www.vulture.com/2013/11/real-world-seattle-irene-slap-her-story.html>
- McKee, A. (2003). What is Textual Analysis? In A. McKee, *Textual Analysis: A Beginner's Guide* (pp. 1-34). Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications.
- Meraji, S. M. (2019, June 5). The Original 'Welfare Queen'. (G. Demby, Interviewer) Retrieved from <https://www.npr.org/transcripts/729294210>
- Mercer, E. (2007). Good Girls Gone Bad: Race and Gender in Oxygen's The Bad Girls Club. *Inquiries Journal/Student Pulse*, 3. Retrieved from <http://www.inquiriesjournal.com/articles/668/3/good-girls-gone-bad-race-and-gender-in-oxygens-the-bad-girls-club>
- Miller, S. J. (2011). Demythologizing reality tv: Critical implications as a new literacy. *The International Journal of Critical Pedagogy*, 135-152.
- Morgan, M., & Bennett, D. (2006). GETTING OFF OF BLACK WOMEN'S BACKS: Love Her or Leave Her Alone. *Du Bois Review: Social Science Research on Race*, 485-502.

- Murray, J. (2006, December 5). *Oxygen's Bad Girls Club debuts tonight*. (A. Dehnart, Ed.) Retrieved from RealityBlurred: https://www.realityblurred.com/realitytv/2006/12/oxygen-oxygens_bad_girls_club/
- Nabi, R. L., Biely, E. N., Morgan, S. J., & Stitt, C. R. (2003). Reality-Based Television Programming and the Psychology of Its Appeal. *Media Psychology*, 303–330.
- Negra, A. L. (2018, March 14). 'Se Que Soy': Amara La Negra Embraces Her Afro-Latinidad. NPR. Retrieved from <https://www.npr.org/2018/03/14/592870320/se-que-soy-amara-la-negra-embraces-her-afro-latinidad>
- Neilsen. (2011). *10 YEARS OF PRIMETIME THE RISE OF REALITY AND SPORTS PROGRAMMING*. The Nielsen Company (US), LLC.
- Nielsen. (2019). *IT'S IN THE BAG: BLACK CONSUMERS' PATH TO PURCHASE*. New York: The Nielsen Company (US), LLC. Retrieved from <https://www.nielsen.com/wp-content/uploads/sites/3/2019/09/2019-african-american-DIS-report.pdf>
- Ouellette, L., & Murray, S. (2004). *Reality TV: Remaking television culture*. New York: University Press.
- Pilgrim, D. (2002). *The Jezebel Stereotype*. Retrieved from Jim Crow Museum - Ferris State University: <https://www.ferris.edu/jimcrow/jezebel/>
- Pilgrim, D. (2008, August). *The Sapphire Caricature*. Retrieved from Jim Crow Museum - Ferris State University: <https://www.ferris.edu/HTMLS/news/jimcrow/antiblack/sapphire.htm>
- Rashad, T. (2021, February 16). *Ratings: 'Basketball Wives' Opens to Lowest-Viewed Season Premiere to Date*. Retrieved from The Grape Juice: <https://thatgrapejuice.net/entertainment/2021/02/ratings-basketball-wives-opens-lowest-viewed-season-premiere-date/>
- Rogers Wood, N. A., & Petrie, T. A. (2010). Body dissatisfaction, ethnic identity, and disordered eating among African American women. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 141–153.
- Scales, T. B. (2013). The "Real" Deal: The Influence of Black Reality Television on Identification in Female College Students. *Thesis - Howard University - Department of Communication and Culture*. Washington, D.C., United States of America: ProQuest Dissertations Publishing. Retrieved from <http://echo.louisville.edu/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/dissertations-theses/real-deal-influence-black-reality-television-on/docview/1435626330/se-2>

- Scott-Young, M. (Producer). (2017). *Is Cardi B Ready For A Relationship With Swift?* [Motion Picture]. VH1 Television. Retrieved from <https://www.vh1.com/video-clips/rg5ld6/love-hip-hop-new-york-is-cardi-b-ready-for-a-relationship-with-swift>
- Severin, W. J., & Tankard Jr, J. W. (2014). *Communication Theories: Pearson New International Edition: Origins, Methods and Uses in the Mass Media*. London: Pearson Education Limited.
- Sims, Y. D. (2015). *Women of Blaxploitation: How the Black Action Film Heroine Changed American Popular Culture*. Jefferson: McFarland.
- Smith, J. A. (2017). Textual Analysis . In J. Matthes, *The International Encyclopedia of Communication Research Methods* (pp. 1-7). Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons, Inc.
- Smith, K. M. (2018). The Educated Hustlers and Divas: How Black Youth Use Black Television as a Tool to Communicate While in School. *Loyola eCommons*. Loyola University of Chicago. Retrieved from https://ecommons.luc.edu/luc_theses/4011
- Smith, S. (2010). “It’s gonna be some drama!”: a content analytical study of the portrayals of African Americans and historically black colleges and universities on BET’s College Hill. University of Missouri--Columbia.
- Spice. (2018, November 2). Instagram Post. Retrieved January 31, 2022, from https://www.instagram.com/p/BprucSzjWKc/?utm_source=ig_embed&ig_rid=60b2e31f-7497-4671-811f-c3a1b3772d6e
- Statista. (2016). *Popularity of reality TV genres in the U.S. by age 2016*. Statista Research Department. Retrieved from <https://www.statista.com/statistics/623265/popularity-reality-tv-genres-age-usa/>
- StudyCorgi. (2020). *Reality Television Shows’ Impact on Teenagers*. StudyCorgi. Retrieved from <https://studycorgi.com/reality-television-shows-impact-on-teenagers/>
- Tajfel, H., & Turner, J. C. (1986). The Social Identity Theory of Intergroup Behavior. In W. G. Stephen Worchel, *Psychology of Intergroup Relations* (pp. 7-24). Chicago: Nelson-Hall Publishers.
- Thornham, S., & O’sullivan, T. (2004). Chasing the Real: ‘Employability’ and the Media Studies Curriculum. *Media, Culture & Society*, 717-736.
- Turner, P. (1994). *Ceramic Uncles and Celluloid Mammies: Black Images and Their Influence on Culture*. New York: Anchor Books.
- Tyree, T. (2011). African American Stereotypes in Reality Television. *Howard Journal of Communications*, 394–413.

- Tyree, T., & Kirby, M. D. (2016). #THOTsBeLike: The Construction of the THOT Female Sexual Stereotype in Social Media. In T. T. Kehbama Langmia, *Social Media: Culture and Identity* (pp. 3-25). Washington: Lexington Books.
- Walker, A. (2003). If The Present Looks Like The Past, What Does The Future Look Like? In A. Walker, *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens: Womanist Prose* (pp. 290-312). Boston: Mariner Books.
- Ward, L. M., Day, K., & Thomas, K. (2010). Confronting the Assumptions: Exploring the Nature and Predictors of Black Adolescents' Media Use. *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media*, 69-86.
- Watson, A. (2020). *Most popular media activities carried out on a regular basis among consumers in the United States as of January 2018, by age*. Hamburg: Statista.
- Weinstock, S., Glenda Hersh, L. E., Haughton-Lawson, L., Martinez, K., Cox, G., Swan, A., . . . Cohen, A. (Producers), & Longwill, D. (Director). (2019). *Bye Wig, Hello Drama* [Motion Picture]. Bravo Cable. Retrieved from <https://www.bravotv.com/the-real-housewives-of-atlanta/season-11/ep-16-bye-wig-hello-drama>
- Weiss, S. H. (2020, December 19). *The Colorism Quandary on Reality TV*. Retrieved from Thrive Global: <https://thriveglobal.com/stories/the-colorism-quandary-on-reality-tv/>
- White, D. G. (1999). *Ar'n't I a Woman?: Female Slaves in the Plantation South (Revised Edition)*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company.
- Willis, D., & Williams, C. (2002). *The Black Female Body: A Photographic History*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.
- Yi, V., & Museus, S. D. (2015). Model minority myth. *The Wiley Blackwell Encyclopedia of Race, Ethnicity, and Nationalism*, 1-2.
- Yin, R. K. (2003). *Case study research : design and methods*. Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications.
- Zeta Phi Beta Sorority, Inc. & American Advertising Federation. (2015). *Reality TV: Entertaining...But No Laughing Matter*. American Advertising Federation. Retrieved from chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/viewer.html?pdfurl=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.aaf.org%2Fcommon%2FUploaded%2520files%2FMosaic%2520Center%2FResearch_Whitepaper_WatchParty.pdf

CURRICULUM VITA

W. Denaë Powell
Pan-African Studies - University of Louisville
Louisville, KY 40292
601.550.0041 wdenaep@gmail.com

Education

- Ph.D. Pan African Studies, University of Louisville, *Expected Spring 2022*
Dissertation – *Authentically (Un)Realistic: Assessing VHI’s Basketball Wives and its violent & colorist portrayal of Black women*
- MA Arts Leadership, University of Houston, 2017
Graduate Certificate in African American Studies
Thesis – *Creating an Advocacy Plan for Houston Ballet’s Education and Community Engagement (ECE) Department*
- BA Art Education, Tougaloo College, 2015

Research & Teaching Interests

Black Feminism
Racial Stereotypes
Race in Media
African American Popular Culture

Professional Experience

- **Graduate Assistant**, Pan African Studies - University of Louisville *August 2019-Present*
- Develops department marketing material
 - Coordinates community outreach and graduate department events programming
 - Conducts graduate assessment research
- **Education Intern**, Muhammad Ali Center *September 2021-November 2021*
- Supports the planning and implementation of public education programs
 - Assists in planning large public events including the Muhammad Ali Humanitarian Awards

- Works closely with Senior Manager on professional development trainings and consultations on topics such as leadership development, diversity, inclusion, equity, and anti-racism
- **Graduate Teaching Assistant, Pan African Studies**, University of Louisville
August 2020-May 2021
PAS 408/PAS 409 - Undergraduate Research Methods in Pan African Studies
 - Assisted with instructing, grading, and advising undergraduate courses
 - Created and presented lectures to students
 - Worked with students on developing researching projects
- **Program Assistant**, University of Louisville, Student Involvement *Sept. 2018-July 2019*
 - Coordinated leadership and service opportunities for students
 - Served as advisor to the Engage, Lead, Serve Board, Freshmen LEAD, and Task Force Freshmen programs – Community Service Arms of UofL SGA
 - Managed ESLB budget (\$80,000)
- **Art Teacher**, Hardy Middle School, Jackson Public School District *Aug. 2017-July 2018*
 - Prepared lessons, units, and projects to complete learning objectives
 - Adapted teaching methods and materials to meet the interests and learning styles of students
 - Created, assigned, and graded various assessments for students, including tests, quizzes, essays, and projects
- **Administrative Assistant**, Houston Ballet Education Department *May 2016-July 2017*
 - Coordinated department programs, implementation, & assessments
 - Collected and analyzed program implementation data
 - Produced programmatic impact reports for Houston City Council, Mayor, School Board, and Legislative Representatives
- **Development Intern**, Houston Ballet Development Department *January 2016-April 2016*
 - Maintained donor databases
 - Developed operations manual for the development department
 - Created promotional material

Conference Presentations

- *But She's More Than That – Discussing the REAL Deal Behind Black Reality TV Stereotypes*: National Council for Black Studies (NCBS) Conference (March 2021)

- *Why are We Still Doing it to Ourselves? Examining the Jezebel Reinvigorated by Black Female Rappers*: National Council for Black Studies (NCBS) Conference (March 2020)
- *Musical Blaxploitation: Bodies, Booties, & Money*: Popular Culture Association in the South (PCAS) and the American Culture Association in the South (ACAS) Conference (September 2019)
- *White Imagination, Black Aesthetic Resistance - Analyzing the Black Woman's Social and Self Identity in America*: National Council for Black Studies (NCBS) Conference (March 2019)
- *Contradictions – American Media and the Black Woman's Struggle towards an Authentic Identity*: Southern Conference on African American Studies, Inc. (February 2018)
- *HERstory of the Black Body in America*: Annual Gender Conference – University of Houston Downtown (April 2017)
- *Black Femininity – from Hottentot to Miss America*: National Council for Black Studies (NCBS) Conference (March 2017)

Publications

- Journal Article: "Say Word: A Textual Analysis of News Coverage of the 1961 Tougaloo Nine Study-In." *The Griot: Journal of African American Studies* Spring 2022 Expected.
- Book Chapter: "Resounding Resistance – A critical examination of the historical and mediated resistance in John Singleton's *Rosewood* (1997)." Carr, Joi. *John Singleton: The Soulful Auteur*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2023 Expected.

Fellowships and Awards

- National Council for Black Studies: 2020-2022 Dr. Tsehloane C. Keto Fellow
- University of Louisville: 2019 Multicultural Association for Graduate Students Research Award (\$500)
- University of Louisville: 2019 Graduate Student Council Travel Award (\$350)
- University of Louisville: 2019 Graduate Network - College of Arts and Sciences Research Award (\$250)
- University of Houston: 2017 Kwame Nkrumah International Study Abroad Scholarship Award (\$5,000)

Professional Development

- University of Louisville, Graduate Teaching Assistant Academy; completed Fall 2019

Affiliations and Membership

National Council for Black Studies (NCBS), *Member*
 Ankh Maat Wedjau Honor Society, *Member*
 Black Women's Studies Association (BWSA), *Member*
 Black Graduate & Professional Student Association, *Founding Member & Secretary*

Graduate Network - College of Arts and Sciences, *Former President*
Multicultural Association of Graduate Students, *Former Treasurer & Former Secretary*
Pan African Graduate Student Association, *Former President*
Fort Bend Symphony Orchestra, *Former Board of Directors Member*
Kappa Pi International Honorary Art Society, *Member*
Kappa Delta Pi International Honor Society in Education, *Member*
Alpha Lambda Delta National Honor Society, *Member*
Zeta Phi Beta Sorority, Inc, *Former National Board of Communications Member*
Ronald E. McNair, *Research Scholar*