WHAT’S REAL? WHAT’S NOT?: REALITY TV’S EFFECT ON RELATIONAL AGGRESSION AMONG BLACK COLLEGE WOMEN

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WHAT’S REAL? WHAT’S NOT?: REALITY TV’S EFFECT ON RELATIONAL AGGRESSION AMONG BLACK COLLEGE WOMEN

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Science at Virginia Commonwealth University

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December 2016
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Abstract

WHAT’S REAL? WHAT’S NOT? : REALITY TV’S EFFECT ON RELATIONAL AGGRESSION AMONG BLACK COLLEGE WOMEN

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Relational aggression, behaviors that manipulate social relationships, is a pressing issue among Black college women (Dahlen, Czar, Prather, & Dyess, 2013). As a result of experiencing and using relational aggression, Black women may experience diminished interpersonal interactions and poorer overall psychological well-being (Gomes, Davis, Baker, & Servonsky, 2009). The present study examined how Black reality television (BRTV) models relationally aggressive behaviors for viewers.

According to Cultivation theory, television has the power to influence the social reality (i.e. attitudes and perceptions) of individuals who consume high amounts of television (Gerbner et al, 2002), while Identification theory suggests that deep cognitive and emotional connection with a media character can lead to imitation (Cohen, 2001). Data was gathered from 93 Black college women through a survey measuring relational
aggression, BRTV television consumption and media identification. Participants were randomly assigned a BRTV viewing condition (a non-aggressive BRTV or aggressive BRTV). Results indicated that aggressiveness of the BRTV program and continued exposure to BRTV did not significantly increase relational aggression over time. In contrast, relational aggression was found to significantly decrease across both viewing conditions. Regression analyses revealed that identification did not significantly mediate the relationship between continued exposure to BRTV and relational aggression. Implications and recommendations for future research on relational aggression among Black women were also examined.
Chapter I: Introduction

Examining relational aggression within Black college women is crucial to understanding their personal and social development as emerging adults. Relational aggression has been linked to numerous adverse health effects (i.e. depression, anxiety and antisocial behavior) and poor social development (Dahlen, Czar, Prather, & Dyess, 2013; Gomes, Davis, Baker, & Servonsky, 2009; Prather, Dahlen, Nicholson, & Bullock-Yowell, 2012; Werner & Crick, 1999). In addition to the frequency and effects of relational aggression, it is important to investigate media’s influence on viewers. Reality television has more relationally aggressive acts than other genres of television (Coyne, 2010). Watching aggressive media can have powerful effects on behavior such as increasing aggressiveness within viewers (Coyne, Linder, Nelson, & Gentile, 2012; Gibson, Thompson, Hou, & Bushman, 2014). Expanding upon this research, the present study analyzed whether exposure to black reality television increases aggressive behavior.

Reality TV and the Black Woman

Researchers must begin to contextualize how reality television’s portrayal of Black women affects the psychological wellbeing of Black female viewers. Black reality television (BRTV) programs such as The Real Housewives of Atlanta, Love & Hip Hop, Basketball Wives, among others, have large viewing populations. In 2014, 5.6 million people watched the season premiere of Love and Hip Hop: Atlanta, making it the top cable show for women from age 18-49 (Eases & Bios, 2014). Despite the financial successes of these franchises, Black women are portrayed as violent, verbally abusive, untrustworthy, catty, and hypersexualized. Consequently, these depictions reinforce racial
stereotypes such as the Angry Black Woman, Jezebel, and Ghetto Hood Rat (Tyree, 2011). Internalization of these stereotypes contributes to self-esteem issues, shapes beauty ideals, negatively impacts identity development, and influences sexual risk-taking behaviors among Black adolescents (Davis & Tucker-Brown, 2013; Gordon, 2008; Littlefield, 2008; Anita Jones Thomas, Witherspoon, & Speight, 2008). Moreover, many of these BRTV programs are characterized by verbal assaults, backstabbing, and gossip—all forms of relational aggression. Analysis of black-oriented media provides context to view how BRTVs shapes relationally aggressive behaviors.

**Research of Reality TV**

Television can have a profound impact on viewers—particularly young adults. Previous research techniques, brief exposure to media and self-report questionnaires, have demonstrated that aggressive media can increase aggression in young adults. Gibson et al. (2014) found that exposure to reality television increased levels of relational aggression. Socially aggressive reality television has also been linked to social aggression among adolescents (Ward & Carlson, 2013). Another study found that participants were cognitively primed to act relationally aggressive after watching a video clip containing relational aggression (Coyne, Linder, Nelson, & Gentile, 2012). However, few studies have directly investigated how cultural similarities between the viewer and program affect relational aggression. More importantly, future research must also examine how media affects relational aggression within interpersonal relationships.

**Relationship Quality**

Relational aggression can have significant consequences for perpetrators and victims by negatively impacting peer and romantic relationships (Crick & Grotpeter,
At various developmental stages, Black college women may experience low relationship satisfaction and diminished relationship quality (Bulanda & Brown, 2007; Foshee et al., 2012; Scott et al., 2011). As adolescents, Black girls are more likely to initiate physical violence within their intimate relationships than their peers (Foshee et al., 2012). Later in emerging adulthood, Black couples are less likely to characterize their romantic relationships as loving and faithful than their ethnic counterparts (Scott et al., 2011). As older adults, married Black couples also report increased conflict and instability, increasing the likelihood of divorce (Brown, Birditt, Huff, & Edwards, 2012; Bulanda & Brown, 2007). Moreover, Black college students are more likely to act relationally aggressive toward peers and romantic partners than white students (Dahlen et al., 2013). Although a variety of factors influence relationship quality, relational aggression may contribute to the weakening of interpersonal relationships among Black women.

**Brief Overview of Relational Aggression**

Relational aggression is defined as "any behavior that causes harm by damaging relationships or feelings of acceptance and love" (Linder et al., 2002, p. 70). Among Black young women, relational aggression primarily takes three forms: 1) direct verbal aggression (e.g. verbal taunting, name calling, verbal harassment), 2) indirect aggression (e.g. damaging another's reputations through spreading rumors or gossiping), and 3) non-verbal aggression (e.g. hostile glares, eye rolling) (Rivera-Maestre, 2014). Research suggests that relational aggression has adaptive and maladaptive outcomes. Adverse consequences of relational aggression include psychosocial development setbacks, such as diminished peer and romantic relationships (Crick & Grotpeter, 1995; Linder et al., 2002).
2002). Perpetration and victimization of relational aggression can also lead to depression symptoms among Black adolescents (Gomes et al., 2009; Williams, Fredland, Han, Campbell, & Kub, 2009).

In addition to negative health outcomes, relational aggression also has adaptive features. Originating out of the systematic oppression of African people and their descendants, Black women have developed versatile coping strategies. To endure discrimination based on sex, race, and class, they embody strength enabling the survival of their family and community (Woods-Giscombe, 2010). Black female adolescents may use relational aggression to gain respect from peers by appearing strong (Rivera-Maestre, 2014). Relational aggression may be a byproduct of a strength schema associated with Black womanhood. As a defense mechanism, relational aggression allows Black women to establish boundaries and demand respect. Moreover, it may shield Black women from future victimization (Rivera-Maestre, 2014). Taking into consideration the sociocultural context, it is crucial in comprehending the complexity of relational aggression among African American women and its effect on interpersonal relationships.

**Brief Theoretical Overview**

Cultivation theory and Identification theory provide a framework to examine BRTV and its role in transforming behavior. According to Cultivation theory, individuals who heavily consume television are more likely to internalize media messages (Gerbner, 1998). Internalization of these messages leads to changes in attitudes, perceptions, and values in viewers (Gerbner, 1998). Identification theory then explains how viewer’s attitudes are transformed. The theory is rooted in the belief that individuals seek out commonalities between themselves and others to establish
connections (Quigley, 1998). Identification is a type of persuasion where the audience is convinced to adopt a new perspective, attitude, or behavior through relating to a fictional character (Cohen, 2001). Cohen (2001) suggests that the process of identification involves: (a) empathy and emotional understanding of the character (b) cognitive involvement through understanding the character's viewpoint (c) motivational engagement (embodiment of the character's goals) and (d) temporary loss of self-perspective and absorption of the character’s point of view. Therefore, Black women who heavily watch relationally aggressive BRTV and identify with cast members are more likely to use relational aggression in their interpersonal relationships.

It is important to note that this course of research does not seek to pathologize Black women. Moreover, it is rooted in a principle of research with integrity to further understand daily lived experiences of women of color (Boykin, 2000).
Chapter 2: Literature Review

Black Women and the Media

Comprehending the relationship between television and behavior among Black women begins with examining their media portrayal. Analysis of past and current media representations reveal that television continues to depict Black women as racially inferior and as sexual objects (Littlefield, 2008). As a result, Black female television roles have been characterized by stereotypes such as the Mammie, Jezebel, and Sapphire.

Mammie is one of the earliest caricatures of Black women in popular media. She can be considered the metaphorical grandmother of racialized stereotypes of Black women. Originating out of slavery, Mammie is the happy servant that dutifully caters to the needs of her white owners. The Mammie stereotype is characterized by being nurturing and self-sacrificing for others, while neglecting oneself (West, 1995). Iconic depictions of Mammie include "Mammie" in Gone With the Wind and “Beulah” in the television show Beulah, both portrayed by actress Hattie McDaniels. Moreover, the stereotype continues to influence contemporary virtues of Black womanhood. Black women continue to feel pressured to be the self-sacrificing caretaker who silences their emotional needs to take care of others (Adullah, 1998; West, 1995). Within interpersonal relationships, internalization of the Mammie stereotype can lead to depression and anxiety due to the stress of managing multiple and competing roles (West, 1995; Black & Peacock, 2011; Watson & Hunter, 2015).

In contrast to the maternal Mammie, emerges the sex-crazed Jezebel. Jezebel is the epitome of sexual desire – seductive and promiscuous. The Jezebel stereotype provided justification for the sexual abuse of enslaved Black women (West, 1995). Modern interpretations of the Jezebel stereotype, include the Gold Digger, Hoochie, and
the Freak, which frequently found on television and in hip hop culture (Stephens & Phillips, 2003; Tyree, 2011). A content analysis of BRTV, revealed that the character “New York” from the Black reality TV show, *I Love New York*, was a modern representation of Jezebel (Campbell, Giannino, China, & Harris, 2008). Her embodiment of this stereotype was evidenced by her provocative attire, use of sex to define her worth and manipulation of men (Campbell et al., 2008). Similar to the Mammie stereotype, internalization of the Jezebel stereotype can impact the emotional well-being of Black women. West (1995) argues that consequences of the Jezebel stereotype include basing self-esteem off of sexual ability or subduing sexual needs to avoid being labeled a Jezebel. Additionally, the Jezebel stereotype influences sexual risk-taking behaviors among Black women and impacts attitudes toward beauty and appearance ideals (Davis & Tucker-Brown, 2013; Gordon, 2008). Stereotyped images such as the Jezebel and Mammie of Black women also contribute to intimate partner violence through victim-blaming of sexual assault (Gillum, 2002; West, 1995).

Another racialized gender stereotype illustrated on television is Sapphire. Sapphire is the "a feisty, wise-cracking, emasculating, (Black) woman who is always eager to let everyone know, it is she, who is in charge” (Campbell et al., 2008, p. 20). She is based on the character, “Sapphire Stevens,” from the television program, *Amos N Andy*, who is the belligerent and irksome wife to Kingfish. She is characterized as outspoken, aggressive, and harshly critical of Black men (Campbell et al., 2008). A modern construction of Sapphire is the Angry Black Woman. On Black reality television programs, Black women are repeatedly portrayed as more verbally and physically abusive than their male counterparts (Tyree, 2011; Smith, 2013). Strongly identifying
with the Sapphire stereotype can lead to the misuse anger as a conflict resolution strategy, an inability to express vulnerable emotions, or the total avoidance of anger (West, 1995). Beyond verbal assaults, Black women who internalize the Sapphire may use relational aggression toward romantic partners and peers. Analysis of the Sapphire stereotype provides a contextual lens to observe how relational aggression on BRTV affects Black female viewers. The internalization of these caricatures, Mammie, Sapphire, and Jezebel, can lead to maladaptive developmental outcomes. In particular, high identification of the Sapphire stereotype may be linked to relational aggression among Black audience members.

**Defining Relational Aggression**

Relational aggression was first identified as a distinct form of aggression within children. Crick and Grotpeter (1995) found that alongside overt aggression, children used behaviors such as social exclusion to manipulate peer relationships. Relational aggression is often confused with social aggression, indirect aggression, and nonverbal aggression (Coyne, Archer, & Eslea, 2006). The process of distinguishing each type of aggression starts with examining the motives behind the behavior. Relationally aggressive actions seek to harmfully influence and control relationships (Coyne et al., 2011) which can be expressed as: a) verbal (i.e. Gossip, social exclusion, rumors), b) physical (i.e. damaging or taking another's personal belonging) or c) direct (i.e. verbal harassment or exclusion) (Coyne et al., 2006). Among young Black women, motivations for relationally aggressive behavior include jealously based on appearance and peer group status (Rivera-Maestre, 2014). Relational aggression was also used to assert dominance and demand respect (Rivera-Maestre, 2014). Additionally, Black women may
act relationally aggressive to protect themselves from future violence (Rivera-Maestre, 2014). No matter the motivation, relational aggression can impede optimal social development.

**Consequences of Relational Aggression.** Consequences of relational aggression can be different for perpetrators and victims. Black adolescents have been found to be more relationally aggressive than their peers (Dahlen et al., 2013). Relational aggression hinders social development for young Black women during the late adolescence and early adulthood. During this critical developmental stage, young adults work to solidify their self-identity and begin intimate relationships (Arnett, 2000; Dahlen et al., 2013). Relational aggression may also impede achievement of these developmental goals. Relationally aggressive verbal attacks damage the self-image, self-esteem and self-worth of their target (Rivera-Maestre, 2014). Black women who are victims of relational aggression are more likely to develop symptoms of depression, anxiety, social withdrawal, and feelings of isolation more than non-victims (Gomes et al., 2009; Williams et al., 2009). Perpetrators of relational aggression are at risk for interpersonal issues such as antisocial, disruptive, or delinquent behavior. They are also more likely to be rejected and disliked by their peers (Crick & Grotpeter, 1995; Williams et al., 2009). Moreover, both perpetrators and victims in romantic relationships are vulnerable to intimate partner violence (Wright & Benson, 2010). Evaluating relational aggression and its consequences is important to understand social development in emerging development.
Research on Relational Aggression

The combined consequences of relational aggression and viewing aggressive media on the audience has brought about a collection of research to explain media effects (Coyne et al., 2011; Coyne, Robinson, & Nelson, 2010; Gibson, Thompson, Hou, Bushman, et al., 2014; Scales, 2013). Bandura (1977) pioneered media effects research by demonstrating that brief exposure to aggression can teach aggressive behavior to children. Recent research on relationally aggressive media varied between content analysis, cross-sectional and experimental research designs. An analysis of reality television programming found that contains a high among of relationally aggressive acts (Coyne et al., 2010). Ward and Carlson (2013) employed cross-sectional design through using self-reports questionnaires and found that watching socially aggressive reality television regularly was connected to socially aggressive behaviors among adolescents (Ward & Carlson, 2013). Additionally, viewing relational aggression on television significantly predicted relational aggressive behaviors in romantic relationships (Coyne et al., 2011). Watching violent behaviors on television was also linked to acting relationally aggressive among women (Coyne et al., 2011).

Other researchers have used experimental designs to investigate whether watching relational aggression can prime viewers for aggressive behaviors. Researchers exposed college women to a relationally aggressive video clip from the movie Mean Girls then measured relational aggression using an Emotional Stroop Test (Coyne, Linder, Nelson, & Gentile, 2012). By measuring reaction time to relationally aggressive words, the Emotional Stroop test indicated that schemas for relationally aggressive behaviors were activated in participants. Watching physically aggressive video clips also primed viewers for relational aggressive behaviors (Coyne et al., 2012).
Likewise, watching an episode of a reality television show can lead to aggression. Gibson, Thompson, Hou, & Bushman (2014) employed an experimental design to examine the effects of watching reality television on aggression. Participants were randomly assigned to different reality TV conditions: Relationally aggressive (Jersey Shore or Real Housewives of Beverley Hills), physically aggressive (Dexter or CSI) or family oriented (Little Couple or Big World Little People). After being exposed to an episode, participants received an ego threat by randomly receiving negative feedback on a cognitive task. Later participants were given an opportunity to act aggressively by sending unpleasant sounds to the individual who gave the negative feedback (Gibson, Thompson, Hou, Bushman, 2014). Relational aggression was assessed by measuring the magnitude of the sound sent (Gibson et. al, 2014). Similar to earlier studies, participants were more aggressive after watching relationally aggressive reality television than those who watched non-aggressive and physically aggressive episode.

Although previous literature has established a causal link between watching relationally aggressive media and acting relationally aggressive, they have not specifically examined Black emerging adults. Many of these studies had a majority white adolescent sample or did not state the ethnic variability of participants. Additionally, few studies have demonstrated the effect of continued exposure on behavior. Future research is needed to understand how BRTV uniquely influences minority adolescents over time.

**Cultivation Theory**

Cultivation theory provides one explanation to describe how televised media affects viewers. According to Cultivation theory, television is a story telling mechanism that uniquely contributes to or “cultivates” viewers’ perceptions of the world (Gerbner, 1998).
Individuals who watch large amounts of television are more likely to internalize popular media messages which shape the way they view the world (Gerbner, 1998). Moreover, Cultivation theorists assert that television contains an inherent collection of ideologies and perceptions that are mass produced. Through these media messages, television is able to shape the social reality of viewers. Social reality refers to the attitudes, perceptions, values, and schemas that are used to understand the viewer’s environment (Gerbner, 1998). The relationship between the viewer and television is described as "gravitational", in which, "the angle and direction of the “pull” depends on where groups of viewers and their styles of life are with reference to the line of gravity"(Gerbner, 1998, p. 180). In essence, the closer the audience is to television, determined by viewing habits, the larger the effect.

Mainstreaming describes a core process of cultivation, where watching large amounts of television increases the media effect (Gerbner, 1998). Extreme television consumption renders individual characteristics such as gender or race less influential over the viewer’s point of view, making television the primary influence. Cultivation theory contends that despite the different cultures and subcultures within American society, television is an unifying agent that showcases the "broad dimensions of shared meaning and assumptions" (Gerbner, et al. 2002, pg. 51). Media messages learned from television are more likely to be incorporated into one’s conceptual view of the world if they are constantly repeated (Gerbner et al, 2002). Therefore, ubiquitous nature of stereotypes such as the Angry Black Woman on television makes black college women more vulnerable to adopting aggressive schemas.
Methodology and Application. The methodology for Cultivation theory is composed of three stages: institutional process analysis, message analysis, and cultivation analysis. First, institutional process analysis "is designed to investigate the formation and systematization of policies directing the massive flow of media messages" (Gerbner et al., 2002, pg. 46). Cultivation theory acknowledges that the policies and corporations that govern television have a profound impact on its content. Those entities may promote certain media messages and mass produce them for a variety of motivations such as profit. Secondly, researchers conduct analyses of these media messages to investigate the nature of the messages themselves. Large amounts of television is watched to assess the content of programming and to derive themes of “shared meaning” that transcend different types of programming (Gerbner et. al, 2002). Lastly, researchers engage in Cultivation analysis to assess how much television affects the social reality of viewers (Gerbner et. al, 2002). It is hypothesized that those who watch more television will adopt the messages (i.e. beliefs and perceptions) of TV, thus impacting their worldview. In respect to relationally aggressive media, exposure to large amounts of BRTV is hypothesized to increase levels of aggression among viewers.

Identification Theory
Identification theory suggests that individuals emulate patterns of behaviors or attitudes to establish commonality with others. Identification within media is defined as "adopting the identity and perspective of a character” (Cohen, 2001, p. 256). Cohen (2001) describes identification as the temporary loss of self-concept in which viewers believe they are the character. Viewers become invested in media characters cognitively by paying attention and interpreting the program’s content (Cohen, 2001; Godlewska &
Perse, 2010). Involvement can also be emotional where audience members are able to experience a variety of situations through the metaphorical eyes of the media character (Godlewska & Perse, 2010; Hoffner, Buchanan, & Virginia, 2005). Therefore, the audience is not only watching the fights, backstabbing and social exclusion of BRTV but also experiencing these exploits vicariously through their favorite character. The audience then becomes emotionally invested in their favorite character’s successes and failures.

Media identification can influence the values and behaviors of viewers. Wishful identification, wanting to be like a character, was found to mediate the relationship between exposure of sex on television and viewer’s attitudes of sexual behaviors (Bond & Drogos, 2014). Bond and Drogos (2014) examined how viewing episodes of the reality television show Jersey Shore influenced the attitudes of emerging adults toward causal sex. Another study found that when watching BRTV, Black college women are cognitively, emotionally and behaviorally involved with the cast and plot. Their engagement of the program enabled them to identify with the main characters (Scales, 2013). Additionally, motivation to watch BRTV and prolonged exposure to BRTV increases identification (Scales, 2013). Beyond influencing involvement and attitude adoption, identification is related to viewer aggression, where viewers’ trait aggression was predictive of whether they identified with aggressive characters (Eyal & Rubin, 2003).

Limitations of Cultivation Theory and Identification Theory

Cultivation theory and Identification theory can be limiting when applied to African American populations due to the underlying assumptions of each theory. In respect to
Cultivation theory, it is assumed is that viewers who heavily consume television and are relatively not selective. However, one study found that Black youth intentionally seek out certain types of media (e.g. Black oriented media) that are more representative of them (Ward, Day, & Thomas, 2010). Cultivation theory also asserts that viewers passively watch television without a critical lens. However, researchers have found that African American viewers critically analyze TV and that factors such as religiosity, ethnic identity, gender impact their media consumption habits (Ward et al., 2010). The theory also suggests that television’s overarching messages overpower cultural differences within viewers, overlooking the historical and social contextual factors that shape the Black experience. Similarly, Identification theory does not address how cultural factors impact the process of identifying with media characters. Therefore watching television in respect to African American viewers, may be a more complex experience than explained by Cultivation or Identification theory. To adjust for the limitations of Cultivation theory and Identification theory, a Womanist perspective was adopted to interpret the findings of the current study.

**Conceptual Framework**

Integrating Cultivation theory and Identification theory into a cohesive conceptual framework allows for deeper understanding on how BRTV affect Black college women. Drawing from Cultivation theory, BRTV is able to influence the attitudes and beliefs of people who frequently watch BRTV through the repetition of media messages. These media messages include the Sapphire and Angry Black Woman stereotypes which have relationally aggressive features. In addition to heavy exposure to BRTV, identification is needed to influence behavior. Identification theory asserts that deep cognitive and
affective involvement enables viewers to identify with media characters (Cohen, 2001). Womanist theory considers how cultural factors such as culturally coping strategies may affect how Black women view and identify with media stereotypes. Therefore, the current study explored how prolonged exposure to relationally aggressive BRTV programs that contain relational aggression and media identification increases relational aggression among Black female viewers.

**The Rationale of the Study**

Black young women experience relational aggression (Gomes, 2009) and consequently are at risk for poorer psychological wellbeing (Williams et al., 2009). Moreover, relational aggression poses a risk to the quality of their friendships and romantic relationships. Black women also have a higher likelihood to be victims of domestic and dating violence (Raiford, Wingood, & DiClemente, 2007). Due the increase risk of relational conflict, it is important to study its origins such as relational aggression. Building upon the vast media effects literature, it is essential to understand how Black oriented television affects Black viewers. Based on Cultivation Theory, Black young women who consume heavy amounts of BRTV are more likely to internalize a worldview that is profoundly influenced by television (Gerbner, 1998). Additionally, Identification theory suggests that identifying with characters on BRTV can lead to behavior modification. Previous studies on how the media influences behavior largely use majority White samples (Coyne et al., 2011, 2010; Gibson, Thompson, Hou, & Bushman, 2014; Ward, 2002), few specifically examine Black women (Scales, 2013). Greater understanding is needed to assess how Black oriented television and identification with racial stereotypes influences Black women.
Hypotheses
Media identification is predicted to enable relationally aggressive media to influence viewer's behavioral patterns.

H1: Media Identification within relationally aggressive Black reality television series (BRTV) will mediate the relationship between prolonged exposure to BRTV and relational aggression among viewers.

Black college women who watch the relationally aggressive BRTV program (i.e. Love and Hip Hop) are predicted to be more relationally aggressive than those who view the non-aggressive program (i.e. Tia and Tamera)

H2: Participants in the relationally aggressive condition will have higher amounts of relational aggression than the control (non-relationally aggressive) condition. Relational aggression scores will also increase between (T1) pre-episode and (T2) post episode. Lastly, the effect of type of condition on relational aggression scores will be depended upon time.
Chapter III: Methodology

Participants
The present study recruited a total of 93 Black female young women age 18-31. Recruitment was conducted through the online SONA Systems© in which students receive extra credit for participation in University wide research. Researchers used flyers, word of mouth, and University new announcements to supplement recruitment efforts. To determine the size sample size, an a priori power analysis was conducted utilizing G*Power software (Faul, Erdfelder, Buchner, & Land, 2009). Previous work on relational aggression and media (Gibson et al., 2014) found medium effect sizes when examining the effect of brief exposure of reality television on relational aggression. The a priori power analysis suggested a sample size of 106 participants are needed to detect a medium effect, $f^2 = .25$. The sample size was enlarged by 45% for a total of 160 participants, with 75 being randomly assigned to each manipulated experimental condition (i.e. relationally aggressive or nonaggressive BRTV) and 10 participants in the pilot study.

Measure
Demographic Questionnaire. It is a 9-item questionnaire that assesses age, race/ethnicity, gender, relationship status, parental income, VCU ID number (if applicable), parental education, and household structure.

Media Exposure Questionnaire. The scale assessed exposure to Black oriented television programs containing relational aggression. Ward & Carlson (2013) used a similar questionnaire in which participants were asked to list the number of hours they engaged the media i.e. watching television, watching music videos, and listening to music. This questionnaire was adapted where participants were asked the numbers of hours they watch reality television and television in general. They were also given a list of television programs with a majority African American casts and asked to rate the
frequency they had watched each program on a 4 point scale where 0 (Never watched the show) to 4 (15 or more episodes) in the past month. Higher scores demonstrated higher amounts of media exposure. Cronbach’s alpha was .86.

**Self-Report of Aggression and Social Behavior Measure (SRASBM).** The scale (SRASBM) was originally created by Morales and Crick in 1998 and was sequentially published (Linder et al., 2002). It has been used in several studies examining aggression in adolescents (Dahlen et al., 2013; Gomes et al., 2009; Ostrov & Houston, 2008) where Cronbach’s alpha ranged between .71-.73. The 56 item scale measures relational aggression, physical aggression, relational victimization, physical victimization, exclusivity and prosocial behavior on a 7 point scale that ranges from 0 (Not at All True) to 7 (Very True). Items include “When someone does something that makes me angry, I try to embarrass that person or make them look stupid in front of his/her friends” and “I have been pushed or shoved by people when they are mad at me.” Higher mean scores demonstrate higher amounts of aggression. Aggression of participants was measured before and after the episode viewing. Cronbach’s alpha was .81 for the entire measure and .79 for the relational aggression subscales.

**Measure of Identification.** The 10- item scale measures identification with a television character (Cohen, 2001) It was included in the post video survey. Responses range between from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). Items include “I think I have a good understanding of character X”. To adapt the scale to measure identification with a reality TV cast member “character X” was replaced with “my favorite female character”. Scales (2013) found that identification was significantly related with other components of audience involvement, such as emotional involvement (r=.40), cognitive involvement (r=
.19) and behavioral involvement ($r=0.45$). When adapted in previous studies (Scales, 2013) and (Ryu, Kline and Kim, 2007), Cronbach’s alpha was .87. Lower scores indicate higher levels of identification with favorite reality female character. The Cronbach’s alpha was .89

**Black Reality TV Series Conditions**

**Pilot Study.** Before conducting the main study, a pilot study was conducted to ensure that there were different amounts of relational aggression in each television program. Undergraduate students ($N=6$) were recruited to watch episodes from each Black reality TV program. Students were asked to respond to the following prompt: “Relational aggression describes behaviors that manipulate relationships to intentionally hurt others” (p.141), such as betrayal, hurtful gossip, and peer exclusion (Coyne et al., 2011). Acts of relational aggression can include rumor spreading/gossiping, threatening to break up with partner, damaging another’s reputation, giving someone the “silent treatment”, making one’s partner jealous, social exclusion, embarrassing someone in front of their friends, cheating on one's romantic partner, and a betrayal of trust. Rate the amount of relational aggression in each episode, where 0 (*Not at All Relationally Aggressive*) to 7 (*Extremely Relationally Aggressive*). Light refreshments such as pizza and soda were provided for pilot participants. Results from the pilot study indicated that the relationally aggressive episode and non-aggressive episode had significantly different amounts of relational aggression, $F(4,12)= 190, p<.001$.

**Current Study**

Participants were randomly assigned to one of two conditions (non-aggressive or relationally aggressive) and were required to attend a live screening of a BRTV episode.
The pilot study demonstrated different in the amounts of relational aggression depicted in each episode.

Relationally Aggressive Reality TV Episode Description – Participants assigned to the relationally aggressive condition watched, “Friend or Foe”, an episode from the second season of *Love and Hip Hop: Hollywood*. The program documents the lives of emerging musical artists and their romantic partners and contains relationally aggressive acts such as gossiping, social exclusion and backstabbing. The episode originally aired on September 14th, 2015.

Non-Aggressive Reality TV Episode Description—Participants assigned to the non-aggressive condition viewed an episode, “Bye Bye Baby Belly” from the second season of Tia and Tamera. The episode originally aired on July 30th, 2012. The program contains themes such as the importance of family and sisterhood. The program documents how actresses and businesswomen Tia Mowry and Tamera Mowry juggle their budding family and their bustling careers.

**Procedure**

Participants were given a comprehensive set of surveys (e.g. Demographic Questionnaire, Media Exposure Questionnaire, Self-Report of Aggression and Social Behavior Measure) through the confidential SONA-System© and Redcap. Informed consent was conducted at the beginning of the online survey and was reviewed at the start of each episode screening. After complete of the online Pre-episode survey, participants were randomly assigned to either an aggressive or non-aggressive episode condition and given anonymous identification numbers to use to check into each episode screening. Three episode viewing events were held on Virginia Commonwealth University’s
campus in lecture style classrooms. During the episode viewing events, the relationally aggressive episode (*Love and Hip Hop: Hollywood*) and the nonaggressive episode (*Tia & Tamera*) were simultaneously shown in different rooms.

After viewing the episode, each group of participants were given a paper version of the Post Episode Survey by research staff, version A for the relationally aggressive condition and version B for the non-aggressive condition. The questionnaire included the Self-Report of Aggression and Social Behavior Measure, and Measure of Identification questionnaire and a brief episode survey. The brief episode survey consisted of a question about the content of each episode. Lastly, participants were debriefed on the goals of the study and given the contact information of the research staff, in case they have any questions or need to be referred to VCU University psychological or medical resources (e.g., University Counseling Services).
Chapter IV: Results

Preliminary Analyses

Before analysis, the data set was screened and cleaned. During screening ineligible cases \((n=57)\), those not fitting the race, age, and sex inclusion criteria and those who only completed the online survey were deleted. The mean scores of the Media Exposure Questionnaire and Self-Report of Aggression and Social Behavior Measure, Identification, and Media Exposure Questionnaire were found across conditions and are displayed in Table 1. The assumptions of normality, linearity, homoscedacity and multicollinearity were met across all variables. The correlations as depicted in Table 1. There was a significant negative correlation between relational aggression and identification with media characters \((r=-.21, p<.05)\), in which participants who were more relationally aggressive before watching the episode were more likely to identify with media characters.

Assumptions for Analysis. To assess normality, a scatterplots were used to identify skewness or kurtosis of the data. Additionally, the statistics for skewness and kurtosis were examined for each variable. The relational aggression mean scores violated this assumption with skewness and kurtosis values greater than 1. A squared transformation was used relational aggressive scores at \(T_1\) and a log transformation of 10 was applied as a correction for the relational aggression scores at \(T_2\) and on to reduce the skewness and kurtosis statistics. The transformed variables were then used in the analyses. Univariate outliers were assessed on each variable by examining the saved standardized scores, following the guidelines of Tabachnick and Fidell (2001). Three scores were identified as an outlier to adjust to correct for its potential to skew the data, it was replaced with
score consisting of one standard deviation was added to the next highest score. To check for multivariate outliers, the mahalanobis distance variables were reviewed, they did not exceed the critical value of 13.82, indicating no multivariate outliers. As for linearity, a scatterplot was used to ensure that the variables did not have a curvilinear relationship; the assumption was met. Multicollinearity was also assessed by examining the correlations of the variables, and was met for the variables included in the mediation. Lastly, homoscedasticity was by checking whether the residuals were evenly distributed and was met for all variables.

**Demographics**

Data were collected from 93 Black college women ranging in age from 18 to 31 years old (M = 18.92, SD = 2.134). Although the entire sample identified as African American/Black, 9.8% reported a multiracial identity. To investigate socioeconomic status, father’s education, mother’s education and income were assessed. Of the 93 participants, only 78 reported parental income where 25% reported a household income of $34,999 or less, 37% $35,000-$75,000 and 27% 75,000 or higher. As for parental education, most students had a least one parent that attended college (78 % of mothers and 57% of fathers). Table 2 has the complete frequencies and percentages of the demographic information.

**Media Exposure.** Participant viewing habits of the Black reality television programs were categorized into three categories: light, moderate and heavy watchers. Light watchers had seen 1-5 episodes, moderate watchers had seen 6-15 episodes, heavy watchers had seen 15 or more episodes. The frequencies and percentages of BRTV exposure are displayed in Table 3. The most popular Black reality television program was
Love and Hip Hop New York, where 33% of participants were heavy watchers. As for general television consumption, 31% of the sample watched less than 5 hours of television episodes per week, 49% 5-10 hours of television, while 20% reported watching 12 or more hours of television. Of that weekly television viewing time, 79% of the indicated that they spent 5 hours or less per week watching reality television.

**Primary Analyses**

To investigate the relationship between BRTV and relational aggression, a quasi-experimental repeated measures design was conducted using one continuous non-manipulated independent variable (i.e. degree of self-reported exposure to BRTV). Media identification with one’s favorite female character was the mediating variable. The independent variable was type of condition, in which the experimental condition was viewing a relationally aggressive BRTV and control condition, viewing a non-aggressive BRTV. The dependent variable was relational aggression scores derived from the Self-Report of Aggression and Social Behavior Measure. It was assessed at pre-episode (T1) and post episode (T2). The study used a 2X2 crossed factorial design (time (T1, T2) x 2 (relationally aggressive or non-aggressive BRTV exposure).

**H1: Type of BRTV on Relational aggression:** A Mixed Between Within Subjects Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was used to assess examine whether exposure to relational aggression on BRTV increases relational aggression over time (pre-episode and post episode). There was no a significant interaction between time and aggression condition, Wilk’s Lambda= .099, F(1,91)= .052, p=.821, partial eta squared=.001. There was a main effect of time, Wilk’s Lambda= .020, F(1,91)= .052, p<.001, partial eta squared=.98 where relational aggression decreased after watching the episode in both
conditions. The main effect of type of episode (relationally aggressive and non-aggressive) was not significant, $F(1,91)= 1.98, p=.163$, partial eta squared=.02.

**H2: Identification as a mediator:** Regression analyses were used to examine whether identification with a favorite cast member mediates the relationship between self-reported exposure to relationally aggressive BRTV and post-episode relational aggression scores. The mediation analyses were conducted only on those viewed the relationally aggressive program ($N=46$). Aggressive reality television did not significantly predict relational aggression scores, $b= .007, p=.93$, nor did identification with a favorite female character, $b=.01, p=.91$. Exposure to aggressive media explained approximately .03% of the variance within relational aggression ($R^2=.0003$). A bootstrapping method was used to test the significance of the indirect effect using 5,000 samples via PROCESS (Hayes, 2012). Results revealed that the indirect effect was not significant, $b=.01, 95\% CI=[-.0753, .0668]$, because the confidence interval included zero. Disputing the initial hypothesis, identification and exposure to relationally aggressive media does not predict relationally aggressive behavior. However, exposure to relationally aggressive media did significantly predict identification with media characters, $b= .007, p=.01$. 
Chapter 5: Discussion

Cultivation theory and Identification theory provided a theoretical basis that informed the current study. Cultivation theory posits that heavy television consumption can shape one's worldview (Gerbner, 1998). Identification theory connects exposure and behavior in that it emphasizes the cognitive-emotional relationship between the viewer and their favorite female character (Cohen, 2001). Using this theoretical lens, past literature suggests that viewing relationally aggressive content can increase aggressive behavior (Ward & Carlson, 2013; Coyne et. al., 2012; Gibson et. al, 2014). This body of research has primarily focused on Caucasian adolescents, while few studies have investigated the effect of aggressive media among Black women (Scales, 2013).

The goals of this study included 1) expanding the literature on how media affects Black women and 2) examining if identification with media characters would explain the relationship between viewing relationally aggressive content and acting aggressively. However, the limitations of Cultivation theory and Identification theory such as the lack of cultural considerations, constrain the interpretation of the study’s findings. As a result, a Womanist perspective was adopted to provide a culturally specific frame to examine media effects within Black women.

Womanism aims to examine black women holistically in the context of their community and family and to redefine the image of Black womanhood to include their multiple and intersecting identities (Pellerin, 2012). It was developed in a reaction to traditional feminism that historically overlooked the unique concerns of Black women (King, 2003; Lindsay-Dennis, 2015). Womanist theory acknowledges how the multiples sources of oppression such as classism, racism, sexism intersect to shape Black
womanhood (King, 2003; Lindsay-Dennis, 2015). Additionally, womanist researchers urge the use of strength based methodologies that strengthen the adaptive coping strategies of Black woman (Lindsay-Dennis, 2015). By situating the results of the study in a womanist context, it better explains how viewing relationally aggressive media impacts Black women.

The initial hypothesis predicted a) a main effect of time in which relationally aggression would increase between T1 and T2, b) a main effect of condition where viewers in the aggressive condition would be more relationally aggressive than viewers in the control condition and c) an interaction effect where change in relational aggression scores were depended upon time and type of condition. Although relational aggression scores did significantly change after viewing the episode, scores decreased across both conditions. From a womanist perspective, the explanation of these findings is informed by the nature of the relationally aggressive images. The media stereotypes within BRTVs present a one dimensional view of Black women shaped by modern sexism and racism, which do not illustrate their multifaceted nature. Reality television frequently cast black women as angry and hypersexualized. Moreover in the relationally aggressive episode used in the current study, Black women were shown in insolation of their families and communities. Consequently, scores may have decreased due to a rejection of the unrealistic nature of the characters. Another reason behind these findings is that relational aggression is a developmental phenomenon that heightens in adolescence, but tapers in emerging adulthood. Scholars have argued that relationally aggressive behavior is most common in adolescence due to the rise in peer influence and identity exploration (Coyne et. al, 2015). However, it may function differently in African American populations,
where it provides protection from other forms of aggression (Rivera-Mastre, 2014). Following this viewpoint, watching relationally aggressive media, may not increase relational aggression in Black college women.

Womanist consciousness may have also influenced scores of relational aggression. It involves having awareness of the intersection of ethnicity and gender, recognizing that this intersection contribute to one’s identity and raising social justice concerns for those with marginalized identities (King, 2003). Among Black college women, adopting a womanist consciousness was related to increase perceived bias and awareness of prejudice toward one's gender (King, 2003). Within the current sample, participants may have developed aspects of womanist consciousness due to increase knowledge of racism and sexism. Having a strong understanding of Black history also increases awareness of media stereotypes and recognition of their unauthenticity (Adams-Bass, Stevenson, & Kotzin, 2014). This heightened awareness while watching the negative media stereotypes could have contributed to lower scores. Future studies should aim to directly measure womanist consciousness and its impact on how Black women watch television.

In addition to womanist conscious, the use of culturally specific coping mechanisms could also be contributing to the decrease in relational aggression. Viewing stereotypical images of Black women may have a reversal effect, where watching these images can lead to changes in one’s behavior to avoid being stereotyped. Black women engage in "shifting" to manage multiple sources of bias (Jones & Shorten-Gooden, 2003). Coping strategies that involve shifting include disproving stereotypes and hypervigilance of other’s perceptions (Jones & Shorten-Gooden, 2003). Participants may have provided
lower scores on the aggression items to distance themselves from the “Angry Black Woman” caricature. In the relationally aggressive episode, the main female characters were crude, divisive, and catty. Black women use an assortment of coping strategies in addition shifting to avoid being labeled as angry. Lewis et al. (2013) identified these strategies as active resistance, protective and collective strategies (i.e. use of social support). Active resistance was noted as using self-expression and rejecting of societal messages of black beauty, while self-preservation strategies include cognitive escape and endorsement of the Strong Black women schema. Viewing stereotypical images of Black women such as the Jezebel and Angry Black Woman, increased awareness of the potential to be stereotyped leading to enacting coping strategies. Therefore low endorsement of relational aggression may signify resistance to being characterized as aggressive and mean. Consequently, measures that account for shifting behavior such as the African American Women’s Shifting Scale (Johnson, Gamst, Meyers, Arellano-Morales, & Shorter-Gooden, 2016), will prove useful when assessing potentially stereotypical behavior such as aggression.

The main hypothesis that media identification would explain the relation between prolonged exposure to black reality television and relationally aggressive behavior was not supported. Exposure to aggressive media did not significantly predict relational aggression nor did identification significantly explain the relationship between exposure and relational aggression. One potential cause of these findings is that the majority of participants were not heavy watchers of BRTV, limiting the ability to detect an effect. The most popular reality television program was *Love and Hip Hop: New York* where 33% participants were heavy watchers. The nighttime soap opera programs *Empire* and
How to Get Away with Murder were more popular, where 40% and 31% of the sample respectively were heavy watchers. Future research should examine if exposure to fictitious programs that contain relational aggression are more predictive of aggressive behavior among African American women. However, prolonged exposure did significantly predict media identification, which is consistent with other studies that found that Black college women identify with reality television characters (Scale, 2013). Reality TV allows Black women to vicariously experience the “bad” behavior of their favorite character without facing consequences (Warner, 2014). Moreover, participants could identify with aspects of the one dimensional view of these media characters but changes in behavior did not occur because they are not holistic depictions of Black women. Consequently, Identification with relationally aggressive media characters may provide a catharsis for aggression instead of a motivation toward aggressive action.

Parental educational and household structure may also impede the influence of media messages. Within the sample, 78% of had mothers with a college education. Parental education may inform their child’s ability to critically challenge media stereotypes. African American viewers have been shown to critically analyze television content (Ward, Day, & Thomas, 2010), due to the incongruence between the daily lived experiences of Black people and media stereotypes. Supporting this viewpoint, Hall and Smith (2012) found that African American women begin to critically challenging media content in adolescence. Through brief interviews, they found that Black adolescents are able to recognize the problematic nature of media stereotypes such as the Jezebel. Moreover, they have awareness that others’ judgement can be based on these stereotypes (Hall & Smith, 2012). Additionally, a qualitative study exploring
perceptions sexual scripts within BRTV found that Black college women critically examine the social context surrounding stereotypical scripts and the potential consequences of internalization of these stereotypes (Coleman et al., 2016). Black college women may engage in media literacy, which overpowers the effect of media identification and decreases the likelihood of behavior changes.

**Limitations and Future Directions**

A significant limitation of the study was having a low sample size. Although 150 participants initially enrolled in the study, 54, failed to return to the episode screening. It may be more efficient to enabling online viewing of the relationally aggressive stimulus so as to decrease participant attrition. Consequently, the low sample size also influenced the power of the analyses, reducing the chance of detecting an effect. Another limitation was the face valid nature of the relational aggression scale. Additionally, none of the items needed to be reverse coded, so participants could easily discern what the questionnaire was measuring. Thus the characteristics of the scale made it susceptible to social desirability. Other measurements such using an Emotional Stroop Test that capture implicit use of relational aggression may be more useful when studying emerging adults.

Despite having findings that do not support the initial hypotheses, the present study can inform several directions for future research. Future researchers of media effects may want to focus on intrapersonal processes of Black women. For example, few studies have questioned how viewing Black reality television programs impacts the internalization of racial and gender stereotypes. Using scales such as the Stereotypical Roles of Black Women Scale (Thomas, Witherspoon, & Speight, 2004), which measures endorsement of stereotypes surrounding Black women, can help predict behavioral
outcomes. Likewise, cultural specific coping mechanisms such as shifting and womanist consciousness should be considered to deepen understanding of the relationship between media and relational aggression in Black women. Knowledge and recognition of stereotypes should also be accounted for because increased awareness may alter the effect of the media. Lastly, intersectional identities beyond race and gender, such as sexual and immigrant identities should be measured when exploring the influence of the media on the lives of Black women.
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APPENDIX A: Mediation Models

Figure 1. Model testing the mediation of the relationship between Self Report Exposure to Relationally aggressive BRTV and Relational Aggression through Media Identification. Values above depict the unstandardized coefficients.
APPENDIX B: Correlations among Variables Matrix

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measure</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>Min</th>
<th>Max</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Identification</td>
<td>1.71</td>
<td>.86</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(.89)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Relational Aggression (Pre)</td>
<td>1.33</td>
<td>.23</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.07</td>
<td>-.21**</td>
<td>(.79)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Relational Aggression (Post)</td>
<td>.23</td>
<td>.14</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>.71</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td>.75**</td>
<td>(.76)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Exposure to Relationally Aggressive Media</td>
<td>1.11</td>
<td>.95</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>-.16</td>
<td>-.11</td>
<td>.09</td>
<td>(.86)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1. Correlations among Variables Matrix

Note. *p < .05, Values in parentheses depict the coefficient alpha for each measure.
APPENDIX C: Participant Demographics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Demographic Variables</th>
<th>Maternal</th>
<th>Paternal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Age</strong></td>
<td>Mean = 18.92 (SD = 2.13)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Race/Ethnicity</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African American</td>
<td>84 (90.3%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mixed Race</td>
<td>9 (9.8%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Parental Income</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&lt;$34,999</td>
<td>20 (25.6%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$35,000 - $74,999</td>
<td>29 (31.2%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&gt;$75,000</td>
<td>29 (31.3%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Parental Education</strong></td>
<td>Maternal</td>
<td>Paternal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less than a high school diploma</td>
<td>5 (5.4%)</td>
<td>4 (4.3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High school graduate</td>
<td>15 (16.1%)</td>
<td>28 (30.3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some College but no degree</td>
<td>18 (19.4%)</td>
<td>12 (12.9%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Associate’s Degree</td>
<td>10 (10.8%)</td>
<td>6 (6.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bachelor’s degree</td>
<td>26 (28%)</td>
<td>21 (22.6%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Master’s Degree</td>
<td>13 (14%)</td>
<td>6 (6.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduate/Professional Degree</td>
<td>5 (5.4%)</td>
<td>6 (6.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t Know</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>7 (7.8%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Household Structure**

- Raised primarily by married parents: 55 (59%)
- Raised primarily by a single mother: 23 (24.7%)
- Raised jointly by parents, never married or divorced: 8 (8.6%)
- Raised primarily by extended family, grandparents or close family friends: 4 (4.4%)

Table 2. Participant Demographics
### APPENDIX D: Prolonged Exposure to Black Reality Television Program

#### Media Exposure

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Weekly Television Hours</th>
<th>N (% of Sample)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>&lt;5 hours</td>
<td>29 (31.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5-10 hours</td>
<td>45 (48.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&gt;10 hours</td>
<td>18 (19.6%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Weekly Reality Television Hours</th>
<th>Mean =2.98 (SD=3.99)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>&lt;5 hours</td>
<td>79 (79.3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5-10 hours</td>
<td>17 (18.3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&gt;10 hours</td>
<td>2 (2.2%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Black Reality TV Programs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Black Reality TV Programs</th>
<th>Type of Viewer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Never Watched</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Empire*</td>
<td>19 (20.4%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scandal*</td>
<td>34 (36.6%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How to Get Away With Murder*</td>
<td>36 (38.7%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bad Girls Club</td>
<td>36 (38.7%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Real Housewives of Atlanta</td>
<td>36 (38.7%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Love and Hip Hop: New York</td>
<td>31 (33.3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Basketball Wives</td>
<td>40 (43%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Love and Hip Hop: Atlanta</td>
<td>41 (44.1%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Love and Hip Hop: Hollywood</td>
<td>42 (45.2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Basketball Wives: LA</td>
<td>42 (45.2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black Ink Crew</td>
<td>49 (52.7%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hollywood Divas</td>
<td>76 (81.7%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R&amp;B Divas: Atlanta</td>
<td>75 (80.6%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R&amp;B Divas: Los Ángeles</td>
<td>83 (89.2%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3 depict the frequencies and percentages of prolonged exposure to Black reality television within the sample. Light viewers watched 1-5 episodes, Moderate viewers, 6-15 episodes and Heavy episodes 15 or episodes. * Not reality television programs.
APPENDIX E: Demographic Items

1. Please mark one or more groups to indicate what race you consider yourself to be.
   a. Black or African American
   b. White or European American
   c. American Indian or Alaska Native
   d. Asian or Asian American
   e. Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
   f. Hispanic or Latino; Please Specify

2. Age:

3. What is your gender?
   a. Male
   b. Female
   c. Other

4. Relationship Status
   a. Single
   b. Casually Dating
   c. Committed Relationship
   d. Married

5. What is your father’s education level?
   a. Less than a high school diploma?
   b. High School Graduate (diploma or the equivalent e.g. (GED)
   c. Some college but No degree
   d. Associate degree
   e. Bachelor's degree
   f. Master's degree
   g. Professional School Degree/Doctorate degree
   h. Don’t know

6. What is your mother’s education level?
   a. Less than a high school diploma?
   b. High School Graduate (diploma or the equivalent e.g. (GED)
   c. Some college but No degree
   d. Associate degree
   e. Bachelor's degree
   f. Master's degree
   g. Professional School Degree/Doctorate degree
   h. Don’t know

7. Which of the following best reflects the annual household income of your parent(s).
   a. Below Less than $10,000
   b. $10,000 to $14,999
   c. $15,000 to $24,999
   d. $25,000 to $34,999
   e. $35,000 to $49,999
   f. $50,000 to $74,999
   g. $75,000 to $99,999
   h. $100,000 to $149,999

51
i. $150,000 to $199,999
j. $200,000 or more

8. How would you best describe how you were raised?
   a. Raised primarily by married parents
   b. Raised jointly by parents, never married
   c. Raised jointly by parents, divorced
   d. Raised primarily by adoptive parents
   e. Raised primarily by grandparents
   f. Raised primarily by a single mother
   g. Raised primarily by a single father
   h. Raised primarily by extended family or close family friends
   i. Other please specify:
APPENDIX F: Self-Report Media Exposure Questionnaire

30. How many hours of television do you watch per week? ___________
31. How many hours of reality television do you watch per month? _______

Please indicate how frequently you watched the television programs listed below in the past month.

<p>| | | | | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- 0 = (Never watched the show)
- 1 = (1-5 episodes)
- 2 = (6-10 episodes)
- 3 = (11-15 episodes)
- 4 = (15 episodes or more)

32. Bad Girls Club
33. Basketball Wives LA
34. Basketball Wives
35. Hollywood Divas
36. R&B Divas: Atlanta
37. R&B Divas: Los Ángeles
38. The Real Housewives Atlanta
39. Love and Hip Hop Atlanta
40. Love and Hip Hop NY
41. Love and Hip Hop: Hollywood
42. Black Ink Crew
43. Scandal*
44. How to Get Away with Murder*
45. Empire *

*Not Reality Television
Directions: This questionnaire is designed to measure qualities of adult social interaction and close relationships. Please read each statement and indicate how true each is for you, **now and during the last year**, using the scale below. Write the appropriate number in the blank provided. IMPORTANT. The items marked with asterisks (*) ask about experiences in a current romantic relationship. **If you are not currently in a romantic relationship, or if you have not been in a relationship during the last year, please leave these items blank** (but answer all of the other items). Remember that your answers to these questions are completely anonymous, so please answer them as honestly as possible!

**APPENDIX G: Self-Report of Aggression and Social Behavior**

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22. ______ I get mad or upset if a friend wants to be close friends with someone else.
23. ______ When I have been angry at, or jealous of someone, I have tried to damage that person’s reputation by gossiping about him/her or by passing on negative information about him/her to other people.
24. ______ When someone does something that makes me angry, I try to embarrass that person or make them look stupid in front of his/her friends.
25. ______ I am willing to give advice to others when asked for it.
26. ______ *My romantic partner has threatened to physically harm me in order to control me.
27. ______ When I have been mad at a friend, I have flirted with his/her romantic partner.
28. ______ When I am mad at a person, I try to make sure s/he is excluded from group activities (going to the movies or to a bar).
29. ______ I have a friend who tries to get her/his own way with me through physical intimidation.
30. ______ *I get jealous if my romantic partner spends time with her/his other friends, instead of just being alone with me.
31. ______ I make an effort to include other people in my conversations.
32. ______ When I have been provoked by something a person has said or done, I have retaliated by threatening to physically harm that person.
33. ______ *My romantic partner has threatened to break up with me in order to get me to do what s/he wants.
34. ______ It bothers me if a friend wants to spend time with his/her other friends, instead of just being alone with me.
35. ______ *My romantic partner doesn’t pay attention to me when s/he is mad at me.
36. ______ I have threatened to share private information about my friends with other people in order to get them to comply with my wishes.
37. ______ I make other people feel welcome.
38. ______ *When my romantic partner wants something, s/he will ignore me until I give in.
39. ______ When someone has angered or provoked me in some way, I have reacted by hitting that person.
40. ______ *I have cheated on my romantic partner because I was angry at him/her.
41. ______ I get mad or upset if my romantic partner wants to be close friends with someone else.
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42. _____ I have a friend who excludes me from doing things with her/him and her/his other friends when s/he is mad at me.
43. _____ I am usually willing to lend my belongings (car, clothes, etc.) to other people.
44. _____ I have threatened to physically harm other people in order to control them.
45. _____ I have spread rumors about a person just to be mean.
46. _____ When a friend of mine has been mad at me, other people have “taken sides” with her/him and been mad at me too.
47. _____ *I would rather spend time alone with my romantic partner and not with other friends too.
48. _____ I have a friend who has threatened to physically harm me in order to get his/her own way.
49. _____ I am a good listener when someone has a problem to deal with.
50. _____ *My romantic partner has tried to get his/her own way through physical intimidation.
51. _____ *I give my romantic partner the silent treatment when s/he hurts my feelings in some way.
52. _____ When someone hurts my feelings, I intentionally ignore them.
53. _____ I try to help others out when they need it.
54. _____ *If my romantic partner makes me mad, I will flirt with another person in front of him/her
55. _____ I have intentionally ignored a person until they gave me my way about something.
56. _____ I have pushed and shoved others around in order to get things that I want.
APPENDIX H: Identification Questionnaire

Please select one response below.

1 = Strongly agree
2 = Agree
3 = Neither agree nor disagree
4 = Disagree
5 = Strongly disagree

9. While viewing my favorite reality show, I felt as if I was part of the action.
   
10. While viewing my favorite reality show I forgot myself and was fully absorbed.

11. I was able to understand the events of my favorite reality show in a manner similar to that in which my favorite female character understood them.

12. I think I have a good understanding of my favorite female character.

13. I tend to understand the reasons why my favorite female character does what she does.

14. While viewing the show I could feel the emotions my favorite female character portrayed.

15. During viewing, I felt I could really get inside my favorite female character’s head.

16. At key moments in the show, I felt I knew exactly what my favorite female character was going through.

17. While viewing the program, I wanted my favorite female character to succeed in achieving her goals.

18. When my favorite female character succeeded, I felt joy, but when she failed, I was sad.
APPENDIX I: Brief Episode Survey

Version A:

1. Which Statement best describes what happened during the episode?
   a. Ray J learns about Tierra and Princess’ new friendship. Also, Miles and Milan talk about moving in together.
   b. Max and Brandi are having issues in their relationship over their wedding rings. Fizz and Nikki begin dating.
   c. Princess confronts Tierra about their friendship. Also, Nikki and Brandi confront Kamiah and Jason at Nikki’s event.
   d. Moniece and Rich argue over Moniece’s feelings for Fizz. Moniece confronts Nikki at Fizz’s event.
   e. Tia and Tamera discuss their relationship.

Version B:

1. Which Statement best describes what happened during the episode?
   f. Tia begins filming a new holiday movie, while Tamera auditions for pilot season.
   g. Max and Brandi are having issues in their relationship over their wedding rings. Fizz and Nikki begin dating.
   h. Tia tries to negotiate motherhood with her acting career, while Tamera thinks about having a baby.
   i. Tamera helps Tia try to lose the baby weight.
APPENDIX J: Informed Consent-Pilot Study

TITLE: WHAT’S REAL? WHAT’S NOT?: REALITY TV’S EFFECT ON RELATIONAL AGGRESSION AMONG BLACK COLLEGE WOMEN

VCU IRB NO.: HM20006739

INVESTIGATOR: Dr. Shawn Utsey

If any information contained in this consent form is not clear, please contact the study staff for further explanation any information that you do not fully understand. You may print an unsigned copy of this consent form to think about or discuss with family or friends before making your decision.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this pilot study is to rate the amount of relational aggression in black reality television episodes. Participants will watch 3 episodes from Love and Hip Hop: Hollywood and 3 episodes Tia and Tamera. Afterwards levels of relational aggression will be rated via questionnaires. You are being asked to participate in this study because you are a VCU student, identify as Black/African American and are between 18 and 25 years old.

DESCRIPTION OF THE STUDY AND YOUR INVOLVEMENT

If you decide to be in this research study, you will be asked to agree this consent form after you have had all your questions answered and understand what will happen to you. In this study, you will be asked to attend screenings of the television episodes (approx. 40 minute long each). After watching each episode, you will be given a 5-minute post video survey. Total participation in the study should take approx. 4 hours and 30 minute. Light refreshments will be provided during viewing (i.e. popcorn and pizza). Significant new findings developed during the course of the research which may relate to your willingness to continue participation will be provided to you.

RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS

Participants in this study will be exposed to minimal risk. Sometimes content from the TV episodes may cause people to become upset or distressed. Additionally, some emotional distress or discomfort may arise from responding to items within the questionnaire. In case you do experience some uncomfortable emotions and would like to withdraw please contact the research in person, via phone or email. You may also contact the University Counseling Center in person at 907 Floyd Ave., Room 238, Richmond, VA 23284 or by phone (804) 828-6200, if you feel distressed.

BENEFITS TO YOU AND OTHERS
The only direct benefits that you will receive will be the experience of participating in the study. The information we learn by your participation may help us to better inform programs for African American college women.

COSTS

The costs for participating in this study include the time you will spend watching the television episodes and filling out questionnaires.

COMPENSATION

No compensation will be provided for participation.

ALTERNATIVES

The alternative to this study is to not participate.

CONFIDENTIALITY

No identifiable information about you will be collected. Data is being collected only for research purposes. Paper files will be kept in a locked file cabinet within the secure lab facility. Unidentifiable data will be kept in for up to 5 years after completion of the study. Access to all data will be limited to study personnel.

If something we learn through this research indicates that you may intend to harm yourself or others, we are obligated to report that to the appropriate authorities. What we find from this study may be presented at meetings or published in papers, but your name will not ever be used in these presentations or papers.

VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL

You do not have to participate in this study. If you choose to participate, you may stop at any time without any penalty. You may also choose not to answer particular questions that are asked in questionnaires of the study. If you do participate, you may freely withdraw from the study at any time. Your decision to withdraw will involve no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

Your participation in this study may be stopped at any time by the study staff without your consent. The reasons might include:

- the study staff thinks it necessary for your health or safety;
- you have not followed study instructions;
- Administrative reasons require your withdrawal.
You may also choose to withdraw from the study before completing the initial survey, during or after video screening. To withdrawal, you may contact Dr. Utsey or Ashley Hill and at that time your data will be removed from the data set.

QUESTIONS
If you have any questions, complaints, or concerns about your participation in this research, contact:

Ashley Hill, B.S.  Shawn Utsey, Ph.D.
Hillan3@vcu.edu  Soutsey@vcu.edu
609-781-8163  804-828-1144
Graduate Student  Primary Investigator

The study staff named above is the best persons to call for questions about your participation in this study.

If you have any general questions about your rights as a participant in this or any other research, you may contact:

Office of Research
Virginia Commonwealth University
800 East Leigh Street, Suite 3000
P.O. Box 980568
Richmond, VA 23298
Telephone: (804) 827-2157

Contact this number to ask general questions, to obtain information or offer input, and to express concerns or complaints about research. You may also call this number if you cannot reach the research team or if you wish to talk with someone else. General information about participation in research studies can also be found at http://www.research.vcu.edu/irb/volunteers.htm.

CONSENT

I have been given the chance to read this consent form. I understand the information about this study. Questions that I wanted to ask about the study have been answered. By provided my signature below, it says that I am willing to participate in this study. If you do not consent and do not wish to take part in the study, please do not sign below at this time.

Participant name printed  Participant signature  Date

Signature Person Conducting Informed Consent  Date
Discussion / Witness (If Applicable)
APPENDIX K: Informed Consent-Main Study

TITLE: WHAT’S REAL? WHAT’S NOT? : REALITY TV’S EFFECT ON RELATIONAL AGGRESSION AMONG BLACK COLLEGE WOMEN

VCU IRB NO.: HM20006739

INVESTIGATOR: Dr. Shawn Utsey

If any information contained in this consent form is not clear, please contact the study staff for further explanation any information that you do not fully understand. You may print an unsigned copy of this consent form to think about or discuss with family or friends before making your decision.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this research study is to examine black college women’s behavior and feelings after watching black oriented reality television. You are being asked to participate in this study because you identify as Black/African American and are between 18 and 25 years old.

DESCRIPTION OF THE STUDY AND YOUR INVOLVEMENT

If you decide to be in this research study, you will be asked to agree this consent form after you have had all your questions answered and understand what will happen to you. In this study, you will be asked to complete Part 1 and Part 2 of the study. Part 1 will consist of a 15-minute online questionnaire. In Part 2 of the study, you will be asked to attend a screening of a television episode (approx. 45 minutes). If you are a VCU student, to check in to the video screening, you will be asked to provide your VCU ID number. The researcher will then randomly assign you to watch one of two television episodes. After watching the episode, you will be given a 15-minute post video survey. Total participation in the study (Part 1 and Part 2) should take approximately 1 hour and 15 minutes. Significant new findings developed during the course of the research which may relate to your willingness to continue participation will be provided to you.

RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS

Participants in this study will be exposed to minimal risk. Sometimes content from the TV episodes may cause people to become upset or distressed. Additionally, some emotional distress or discomfort may arise from responding to items within the questionnaire. In the case, you do experience some uncomfortable emotions and would like to withdrawal please contact the research in person, via phone or email. You may also contact the University Counseling Center in person at 907 Floyd Ave., Room 238, Richmond, VA 23284 or by phone (804) 828-6200, if you feel distressed. If you are not a VCU student, you may contact the National Alliance of Mental Illness Hotline at 1-800-950-NAMI (6264) to connect to psychological services.
BENEFITS TO YOU AND OTHERS

The only direct benefits that you will receive will be the experience of participating in the study. The information we learn by your participation may help us to better inform programs for African American college women.

COSTS

The costs for participating in this study include the time you will spend watching the television episodes and filling out questionnaires.

COMPENSATION

Course credit through SONA systems will be awarded participants (1.5 SONA Credit). VCU students will be receiving credit for participating in the study through SONA-System©. Students are expected to accumulate research credit for the Psychology introduction class by volunteering to participate in research. Full SONA Credit will only be rewarded to all participants who participate in Part 1 and Part 2 of this study. If you only participate in part 1 of the study, 0.5 credits will be rewarded. If you are not a VCU student, credit will not be available.

ALTERNATIVES

The alternative to this study is to not participate. Students who do not wish to participate in research have an opportunity to earn a credit equivalent through non-research activities.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Potentially identifiable information about you will consist of VCU ID Number. Data is being collected only for research purposes. All personal identifying information will be kept in password protected files and these files will be deleted after the completion of the study. Paper files will be kept in a locked file cabinet within the secure lab facility. Unidentifiable data will be kept in for up to 5 years after completion of the study. Access to all data will be limited to study personnel.

If something we learn through this research indicates that you may intend to harm yourself or others, we are obligated to report that to the appropriate authorities. What we find from this study may be presented at meetings or published in papers, but your name will not ever be used in these presentations or papers.

VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL

You do not have to participate in this study. If you choose to participate, you may stop at any time without any penalty. You may also choose not to answer particular questions that are asked in questionnaires of the study. If you do participate, you may freely withdraw from the study at any time. Your decision to withdraw will involve no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. Your participation in this study may be stopped at any time by the study staff without your consent. The reasons might include:
- the study staff thinks it necessary for your health or safety;
- you have not followed study instructions;
- Administrative reasons require your withdrawal.

You may also choose to withdraw from the study before completing the initial survey, during or after video screening. To withdraw, you may contact Dr. Utsey or Ashley Hill and at that time your data will be removed from the data set.

**QUESTIONS**
If you have any questions, complaints, or concerns about your participation in this research, contact:

Ashley Hill, B.S.  Shawn Utsey, Ph.D.
Hillan3@vcu.edu  Soutsey@vcu.edu
609-781-8163  804-828-1144
 Graduate Student  Primary Investigator

The study staff named above is the best persons to call for questions about your participation in this study.

If you have any general questions about your rights as a participant in this or any other research, you may contact:

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Richmond, VA 23298
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Contact this number to ask general questions, to obtain information or offer input, and to express concerns or complaints about research. You may also call this number if you cannot reach the research team or if you wish to talk with someone else. General information about participation in research studies can also be found at http://www.research.vcu.edu/irb/volunteers.htm.

**CONSENT**
I have been given the chance to read this consent form. I understand the information about this study. Questions that I wanted to ask about the study have been answered. By clicking I agree and continuing to the next page, it says that I am willing to participate in this study. If you do not consent and do not wish to take part in the study, please exit at this time.

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APPENDIX L: Debriefing Page

Dear participant,

Thank you for your participation in this research project. You are being provided with this debriefing information because we did not fully disclose all the details of our study at the beginning. The survey that you just finished measured your levels of relational aggression and identification with the reality television cast members. Relational aggression describes behaviors that manipulate social relationships. The goal of this study was to investigate whether watching a reality TV episode that contains relational aggression would influence the behavior of viewers. Additionally, our aim was to see if identification with your favored female character would also contribute to levels of relational aggression. Lastly, you were randomly assigned to watch an episode that was either aggressive or non-aggressive.

Likewise, it is important that everyone in our study is unaware of the study goals. If people are aware of the study’s goals, it may change the way they respond to the questions. Then the study will not tell us anything. You can tell others that you answered questions about your personal and interpersonal experiences, but we ask that you do not share specific details about the nature of the questions or episode you just watched.

If you have any questions, complaints, or concerns about your participation in this research, contact:

Ashley Hill, B.S.  Shawn Utsey, Ph.D.
Hillan3@vcu.edu  Soutsey@vcu.edu
804-828-2489  804-828-1144
Graduate Student  Primary Investigator