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Impacts of the Sapphire stereotype seen on reality television in college-aged Black women

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Abstract

Stereotypes of Black women in media impact Black women heavily. Historically, the three main stereotypes of Black women on television are the Mammy, the Jezebel, and the Sapphire. Within recent television programming, reality television has gained popularity and now serves as a key pathway to observe Black female stereotypes. Out of these stereotypes, Black women are often portrayed as the Sapphire. While previous studies have focused on children's and adolescent's perspectives of the Sapphire's images in reality television (Adams-Bass, 2014, Cox, 2020), they neglect to address the issues that arise from the consumption of Black reality television by Black women. This project discusses the Sapphire image portrayed within reality television and analyzes how college-aged Black women are impacted by the Sapphire stereotype. To perform this project, I conducted oral histories with four college-aged Black women who attend EMU and were exposed to Black reality television. Major findings were that the observation of Sapphire stereotypes seen on reality television caused participants to reject said stereotype and encouraged them to behave in non-stereotypical ways. The discussion addresses implications and the underlying reasons behind these results.

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IMPACTS OF THE SAPPHIRE STEREOTYPE SEEN ON REALITY TELEVISION IN
COLLEGE-AGED BLACK WOMEN

By

Elijah J. Stevenson

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ABSTRACT

Stereotypes of Black women in media impact Black women heavily. Historically, the three main stereotypes of Black women on television are the Mammy, the Jezebel, and the Sapphire. Within recent television programming, reality television has gained popularity and now serves as a key pathway to observe Black female stereotypes. Out of these stereotypes, Black women are often portrayed as the Sapphire. While previous studies have focused on children's and adolescent's perspectives of the Sapphire's images in reality television (Adams-Bass, 2014, Cox, 2020), they neglect to address the issues that arise from the consumption of Black reality television by Black women. This project discusses the Sapphire image portrayed within reality television and analyzes how college-aged Black women are impacted by the Sapphire stereotype. To perform this project, I conducted oral histories with four college-aged Black women who attend EMU and were exposed to Black reality television. Major findings were that the observation of Sapphire stereotypes seen on reality television caused participants to reject said stereotype and encouraged them to behave in non-stereotypical ways. The discussion addresses implications and the underlying reasons behind these results.

SECTION 1: INTRODUCTION

Since the 1850s, Black women, whether free or enslaved, have always had to deal with stereotypes. Most of the images associated with Black women were negative. Originally this consisted of three characters or persona. One of them is the ‘Mammy’ stereotype. This character is painted out to be an ugly, grossly overweight, dark-skinned Black woman whose primary role is a caretaker. If she is taking care of children, she is loyal toward the white children she cares for, but she is cold and callous toward her own children. In addition to ‘Mammy,’ there is another stereotype known as the ‘Jezebel.’ As her name references in the Christian bible, she is a sexually promiscuous woman who manipulates and seduces men. Compared to the Mammy, she is a rather attractive, Mulatto woman. The final original stereotype is the ‘Sapphire.’ She is a loud, aggressive, argumentative, emasculating Black woman. Physically, she wears flamboyant colors, hairstyles that stand out, and long colorful fingernails. In short, everything about her presence says “I am here. Notice me” (Coleman, Reynolds, and Torbati, 2020).

Within reality television, various shows like *Bad Girls Club*, *Flavor of Love*, *Basketball Wives*, and the multiple series of *Real Housewives* portray Black women cast members as Jezebels and Sapphires (Campbell et. Al, 2008, Walley-Jean, 2009). A significant amount of research has been done to assess the kinds of implications that seeing all three of the classic stereotypes have on Black women, men, and children. Considering such literature and their findings, I will explore the real-world implications of seeing the Sapphire stereotype on reality-like national television and in cinema for young Black women. From this research, I hope to discover that although young Black women see the stereotype of Sapphire, they will reflect on those images and choose to not endorse such stereotypical behavior. In the remainder of this

paper, I will discuss previous research done on my topic to reveal why my specific research question is valid and necessary.

SECTION 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Black Women Portrayed in General Media

Black women have been portrayed in a negative, stereotypical manner in entertainment (Fontaine, 2011). This includes the use of minstrel shows, plays, songs, television, and films. In the television and cinema industry specifically, directors still view and portray Black women as Mammies, Jezebels and Sapphires. In a book written by Allison and colleagues (2016), the authors discuss the different shows that depict Black women in a stereotypical manner. In this book, the authors discuss shows like *Preachers of L.A.*, *Scandal*, and *Sanford and Son*, and the movie *Precious*. In their own ways, each of these cinematic pieces exhibit one or more of the stereotypes of Black women. In *Preachers of L.A.* and *Scandal*, there are a significant number of Black women shown as sex-objects, materialistic, or gold-diggers, all of which are associated with the Jezebel stereotype. In *Sanford and Son*, the character of Aunt Esther is shown to be a cantankerous woman who is unable to show sympathy or compassion which is associated with the Sapphire stereotype. In the film *Precious*, the character of Mary Lee is shown to be an abusive, largely obese mother of a vulnerable daughter, which is associated with the Mammy stereotype.

In addition to these cinematic pieces, dramatic plays and soap-opera like productions also show Black women as loud, aggressive, or hypersexualized. For example, this kind of character is seen in many of the productions written and directed by Tyler Perry. Fontaine (2011), critically examines the work of Tyler Perry and his character Madea found in many of his

television shows, movies, and plays. The author claims that the inherent nature of the Madea character embodies all three of the main stereotypes of Black women. Meaning, she behaves in a rude and snarky manner (Sapphire), while also being the matriarch of the family who acts as the glue that holds the family together (Mammy). Even more, she is highly sexualized and proudly exhibits herself as a woman without moral or ethical boundaries (Jezebel). Ultimately, Fontaine (2011) demonstrates that Black women are, indeed, portrayed in a stereotypical manner on television shows, cinema, and in live-action plays and performances.

Reality Television's Portrayal of Black Women

Given that Black women's stereotypes are shown in multiple types of media, it is fair to say that these same stereotypes are exhibited on reality television. Within reality television, Black women are mostly portrayed as the Sapphire and Jezebel stereotypes. Articles by Campbell and colleagues (2008) focus on a popular reality television show *I Love New York* and her Sapphire characteristics, while piece by Ward (2015) focuses on the reality television shows *Basketball Wives*, *Love and Hip Hop*, and the *Real Housewives series* to explain the Jezebel characteristics.

As mentioned previously, a modern version of the Sapphire stereotype can be seen within *I Love New York*. This show follows New York and records her dating life challenges. Campbell and colleagues (2008) explore Black female stereotypes by focusing on the reality television show *I Love New York*, first broadcasted in 2007. The star of the show, New York, formally known as Tiffany Pollard, acts in a mal-tempered, flamboyant, ill-mannered way throughout the show in the presence of her fellow cast members. To explain, the author references one scene in the show where New York stands on her island cabinet in her home and is actively screaming at

several men who were tasked with making her dinner. At the time, this kind of loud, boisterous behavior was new to reality television and in turn, helped affirm the Sapphire stereotype

According to Ward (2015), similar stereotypical behaviors can be found among Black women cast members in the reality television shows *Basketball Wives*, *Love and Hip Hop*, and the *Real Housewives series*. Ward argues that these women are portrayed in a hypersexual manner. For example, Ward and colleagues reference the uniforms of dancers in a scene from *Basketball Wives*. This wife claimed that the dancers barely have on sufficient clothing that cover their rear ends and other private parts of the body. Yet, while this wife comments on how one woman dresses herself in a highly sexualized way, the same wife later puts on a dress that is quite revealing. In sum, these examples of reality television exhibit the negative manner in which Black women are portrayed.

Implications, Perspectives, and Interpretations of Black women's stereotypes

Along with the negative nature of the stereotypes about Black women, there are also various implications of these kinds of stereotypes. In the Campbell (2008) article, the authors explain that reality television acts as a socialization agent and plays a significant role in shaping how audiences view race and gender. They also explain that reality television plays a big role in how Black women view themselves. The authors provide rich contextual data to capture the effects of the show *I Love New York* and illustrate that notions of patriarchy and hegemony within Black women come from these kinds of hypersexualized shows and characters. To understand this, one must have a solid grasp of the intersectionality of the Black woman. The authors attempted to help with this by explaining that the inherent stereotypical behavior of New York, namely the traits that are similar to the Jezebel and Sapphire, were created by oppressors who sought out to build a racist and patriarchal society. They did this to reinforce a hegemonic

hierarchy and place Black women in a subordinate social status and to ultimately outline the definition of womanhood. Such an idea was tied to theories of feminism and womanism which challenge the need for Black women to take on a patriarchal nature. Ultimately, the message behind this article was that the very notion that Black women should be senselessly sexual and heavily emasculating gives power to the society that stereotypes them, and that same society seeks to outline the definition of Black womanhood.

To add to the socialization impact, Adams-Bass (2014) claims that there is a link between how much time children spend watching reality television and their mental and emotional development. This article sought out to study Black children and their reactions to Black media images and revealed that reality television had a direct impact on children's self-esteem and likelihood of violent behavior, and ability to associate Black women in the show as aligning with the Black women's stereotypes. Some of the results simply showed that when a child saw a Black woman being blamed for acting inappropriately in public, the child would not side with the Black woman and try to defend her. Instead, it was seen that the child saw the Black woman as acting in an ill-mannered way and thought that she should be punished. However, it was also found that when shown images that relate to the Mammy or Jezebel, the children concluded that Black women are the caretakers of the family and are often found to be sexualized for no reason. These findings suggest that children have a sense of stereotypical images that the media pushes. In other words, the adolescents studied showed to not always blindly accept media images as representational of the reality or of Black women, in general.

Another article written by Cox (2020) studied Black adolescence's endorsement and perceptions of Black women on television. In this thesis, there was a direct correlation to how a child behaved, and which television shows they observed for that study. Additionally, there was a

direct correlation to the perspectives the child took on after watching those shows. Namely, if a child watched a show that showed clear signs of Afrocentric beauty and positivity, the child concluded that Afrocentric beauty was valuable and adopted the same Afrocentric perspective. However, when they were shown shows that had a Jezebel or Sapphire character, children would also tend to agree that Black women in real life actually behave as the show depicted them. This goes to show that when Black people consume television that contains images of Black female stereotypes, the audience often adopts and accepts the stereotype as real or valuable.

Not only do stereotypes in reality television impact children, but they also impact adult women. In a separate article, West and colleagues (2016) sought out to examine the perspectives of Black college women when discussing the Strong Black Woman stereotype and its implications on physical, mental, and emotional health. It is important to note that the Strong Black Woman stereotype derives from the original Mammy stereotype, but adds in that Black women should be hard-working, emotionally strong, independent, and self-sacrificing. The results of this showed that at least half of the women concluded that the implications of the Strong Black Woman stereotype were harmful to their mental and emotional health, while also concluding that same stereotype was also positive. Meaning, the Strong Black Woman stereotype could be a motivational agent for some Black women. Due to the impact caused by Black female stereotypical images in children and adults and the popularity of the Sapphire image on reality television, studying the Sapphire is worthwhile.

Why Study the Sapphire?

The Sapphire stereotype is different from the other original Black female stereotypes. For starters, the Sapphire takes action when things do not go her way and speaks up for herself when she feels as though she is being wronged, overlooked, or treated unfairly. Nowadays, specifically

within the past twenty years, Black women have experienced unfair treatment, were overlooked, and were wronged in ways that are different compared to previous eras. An article by Morris (2007) contests to this and sought to see how teachers and other adults of various races and genders viewed the Black girls that were in their classes and school. Many of the adults claimed that the girls were loud, rambunctious, and ill-mannered. For clarification, all these behavior characteristics are reflected within the Sapphire stereotype. This makes it fair to say that real people, indeed, do view Black females in a stereotypical way that is synonymous to the Sapphire. This can cause Black women to have low self-esteem and alter their personalities in order to fit in with the dominant culture (Adams-Bass, 2014). Similarly, Warner (2022) argued that getting past negative stereotypes in the media, specifically the Sapphire, is difficult to do. The author claimed that one reason this task is hard is because “ratchetness,” or loud, ill-mannered, boisterous behavior is widespread through the media by reality television.

It is no mistake that these given behavioral characteristics are reflective of the Sapphire stereotype. Thus, more focus toward this specific stereotype is needed so that the understanding of its implications can be further expanded. When we look at previously observed implications of the Sapphire stereotype, we saw that adolescents and young adults were able to identify scenes in television and images in general media that show Sapphire characteristics, but the internal effects of these stereotypes have not been studied. Meaning, few studies have explored the ways that Black women interpret the Sapphire image. This kind of deep investigation is necessary because it will allow Black women to speak for themselves, which is something the dominant culture does not welcome. With that, this type of study would also allow Black women to share their open opinions and perspectives, therefore giving them agency into how future depictions of Black women are portrayed in the media. In sum, I seek to study the real-world implications of

seeing the Sapphire stereotype in college-aged Black women. The overall aim of this Honors Project is to bring the Sapphire image into discussion and to analyze how college-aged Black women are impacted by the Sapphire stereotype portrayed on reality television. This research is important because, unlike other literature that has been described, my research consists of oral histories and is focused around reality television. Previous studies mostly used short interviews and surveys, but I believe utilizing oral history is a more comprehensive way of understanding the life of a participant and allows for a holistic view of Black women's internalization of the Sapphire stereotype.

SECTION 3: METHODS

Data was collected from four Black women who currently attend Eastern Michigan University. This study was qualitative in nature, and analyses consisted of data from all participants. Participants from this study were between the ages of 18 and 30. One hundred percent of the participants self-identified as Black and/or of African descent. All students were full-time students, where one identified as a senior, two identified as juniors, and one identified as a sophomore.

Participants were invited to be part of this study based on which student organizations they were part of. Specifically, I emailed members in student organizations titled *You Beautiful Black Woman*, *the Society of Africology and African American Studies*, *Bronze Beauties*, *Gemz*, and *N.A.P.S.* I also emailed other Black women I knew from my previous classes. Such emails explained the nature and topic of this research project and asked that volunteers have adequate knowledge about Black female stereotypes and Black reality television. After the participants agreed to volunteer their time and perspective to this study, a date and time was agreed upon by

myself and the participant to conduct the oral history. All oral histories performed were audibly recorded and consisted of the opinions, perspectives, and insights given by me and each individual participant.

This study was focused around a highly specified topic, pertaining directly to the perspectives that Black women have about Black women's stereotypes. Thus, it was imperative that the participants of this study were somewhat knowledgeable that said stereotypes exist and are prevalent in society. It was also equally important that each participant had been exposed to reality television that had a significant number of Black cast members within their lifetime. In addition, each participant was required to remember the shows and/or scenes of reality television shows and be able to reflect on those memories clearly. Participants were asked questions that pertained directly to such topics. I developed the mentioned questions for interactive, individual oral histories with the help of my project advisor to ask participants of this study. In total, 14 open-ended questions were posed to each participant. These questions ranged from their first exposure to Black reality television, how often they chose to watch it, and how the portrayals of Black women on those shows made them feel.

SECTION 4: RESULTS

The results for this study were measured by level of exposure to reality television shows and the impact that stereotypes seen on reality television shows had on their behavior.

Specifically, the labels of low exposure, medium exposure, and high exposure were assigned to those that presented with the associated levels of exposure they attested to during the oral history. In order to explain the kind of impact that reality television had on participants, the label of

rejection or endorsement was assigned to participants that presented with such results based on the data from the oral history.

Participant A: Low Exposure and Rejection of Sapphire Stereotype

Participant A:

“Yes, definitely uneasy. Just because when we see Caucasian people and things like that on TV and arguments, it is very different than when we see African American women on TV. And I'm going to say this simply because when I see a lot of the times when African American women are on TV and they're getting arguments and yadda, yadda, whatever. I feel like a lot of times we see the backstage security guards or whatever coming in to pull them off each other, trying to help resolve the conflict. On the opposite end, when it's white women or whatever, I really don't see that. So, you know, seeing that is very uneasy and unsettling. And then also, it just makes me feel as if this is really what people think of us. Like, do they really think that we're loud or, you know, obnoxious, very extra, you know? So I guess uncomfortable might be a good word for it, but I guess its just like uneasy and again, that's just not who we are.” (Excerpt from Participant A's Oral History)

Participant A attested to having a low exposure to Black reality television shows, while the shows themselves caused her to reject the stereotypes projected on reality television. The life history of Participant A consisted of her being raised in a city that is predominantly white. She began her experience with reality television during her preteen years while examining short bouts of shows like *Bad Girls Club* around her older siblings. She attested that while watching how the Black women behaved in these kinds of shows, that they indeed took on the role of a

Sapphire, exhibiting loud, boisterous, flamboyant behavior. This made her feel uneasy and overall uncomfortable because she knew that those images did not encapsulate the breadth of character of Black women in real life. Because Participant A had such a low exposure to Black reality television, she noted that her subsequent experiences with reality television did not include Black reality television. Meaning, during her later years, any reality television she observed did not have a significant amount of Black cast members. One thing the life history of this participant teaches is that viewing Black women in shows that portray Black women in a stereotypical manner caused this participant to desire more representation of Black females on reality television and desire them to be portrayed in a more realistic manner that encapsulates non stereotypical behavior of Black women.

Participant B: Mild Exposure and Early Endorsement, Later Rejection of Sapphire Stereotype

Participant B:

“Like, my friends, you know, I would say are the typical black woman. Not like ‘Oh, she can do all bad by herself. She's Miss Independent, highly educated, don't need a man, don't want a man’ type, how it's portrayed in the media. But my friends, they don't think like that. It's just like, you know when I get older I want to have a family. They want to have kids. Like, yeah, they want to have high paying jobs, but they also want to stay home and have their husbands work, if they could. And it's like what they portray in the media is not all black women and it's most definitely not, you know, the majority really. Because it's just like the media pushing the narrative and like what they want us to think and what they want us to look like.” (Excerpt from Participant B’s Oral History)

Participant B attested to having a mild exposure to Black reality television shows, while the shows themselves caused her to endorse the Black female stereotypes televised in her early years. She later learned to reject these same stereotypes. The life history of Participant B consisted of her growing up in a city that is moderately ethnically diverse. She began her experience with reality television during her mid-teen years, while watching shows like *Real Housewives*, *Bad Girls Club*, *I Love New York*, and *Love and Hip Hop* around friends and family. Much like Participant A, Participant B attested that the behavior of the Black women on these shows was indicative of the Sapphire stereotype, exhibiting loud, boisterous, and ill-mannered behavior. Participant B admitted that in her mid-teen years, she was quite gullible, so those behaviors shown on reality television were seen as acceptable to her during that time. Over the years, she learned that those images of Black women were stereotypical which caused her to later reject those stereotypes and ultimately caused her to stop watching Black reality television. One thing the life history of this participant teaches is that reality television's portrayals of Black women caused this participant to mimic those characteristics televised during the years of her life when she was trying to identify her role in society.

Participant C: High Exposure and Rejection of Sapphire Stereotype

Participant C:

“But my mother was one of those people that never had those kinds of behaviors. She definitely is snappy, definitely aggressive, you know, as she's had to be. But like quick to fight, she's just not that person quick to cuss you out... Well, she is quick to cuss you out. I ain't gon lie... so maybe she got it too, you know what I mean? So I feel like having that balance kind of made it easier for me to be like,

‘now I don't want to partake in those kind of behaviors or things’ because it's just so draining and unnecessary. But as a child it was a little harder just because like that was on TV. So I was consuming it that way. And then family members were perpetuate that, and then force it on me as well. Like I just said, I'm not by no means an aggressive person. Okay. I don't want to say that because at this point in my life, I have become a little aggressive, but that's just because I've had to be that way. But by no means am I like a fighter or no, I just don't like partaking in stuff like that. But it took me a long time to get to that point and realize that I didn't have to. You don't have to be quick to fight to prove your point. And tough for who? Who are you proving you're tough to? You know what I mean? It only matters what you think about yourself.” (Excerpt from Participant C's Oral History)

Participant C admitted to having a high exposure to Black reality television shows, while the shows caused her to reject the stereotypes of Black women projected on these kinds of shows. The life history of Participant C consisted of her growing up in an environment that was heavily populated by black people. She began her experience with reality television during her early years between 8 and 10 years old, while watching shows like *Love and Hip Hop*, *Real Housewives*, and *Basketball Wives* around older family members. Similar to Participants A and B, this woman found that the images of Black women on reality television acted in an ill-mannered, flamboyant, loud manner, which embody the characteristics of the Sapphire. Participant C noted that while she was a child, she was able to differentiate between the images of Black women she saw in real life and the images she saw of Black women on reality television. Therefore, reality television's portrayals of Black women she watched did not have a

great impact on her behavior. One takeaway from this participant's life history is that people do not inherently associate all images of television with real life.

Participant D: Low Exposure and Rejection of Sapphire Stereotype

Participant D:

“I see these clips of like all these shows, on reality TV shows, it's always black women acting a certain way that like loud, rude, blah, blah, blah. And so, I know I'm not like that, but this is like all you're seeing in that genre for black women. So that's like the representation we're getting. And the thing is that I've noticed that with people of my generation, even like back in high school, middle school, like you would see kids trying to emulate those behaviors like that rude, obnoxious, ‘arrogant’ but you would see the kids like modeling that behavior. And then those same kids would look at me, someone who doesn't act like that and be like, ‘oh, like, she doesn't act black.’ ” (Excerpt from Participant D's Oral History)

Participant D had a low exposure to Black reality television shows, while the shows themselves caused her to reject the Black female stereotypes portrayed in these kinds of shows. The life history of Participant D consisted of her growing up in an ethnically diverse city and going to predominantly Black schools. This participant was not allowed to watch reality television as a child. However, when she was a kid, she would catch glimpses of shows like *Real Housewives* through her older siblings that watched these shows. Although she may have only caught short scenes of these shows, Participant D agreed that Black women were portrayed as loud, mal-tempered, and aggressive. Participant D noted that she was seen as very different from

her counterparts when she was a child, given that she showed a higher level of intelligence compared to her peers. With this, and her household disapproving her observation of Black reality television, she felt as though she was seen as “not Black enough.” This ultimately caused her to reject the stereotypes of Black women she later saw on Black reality television. One takeaway from this participant’s life history is that one has to be able to identify with Black women on reality television in order for them to take on the behaviors televised. In the case of this participant, she did not identify with them, so she did not endorse the stereotypes imagined on reality television.

SECTION 5: DISCUSSION

My results indicate that the college-aged Black women that I interviewed reject the stereotypes seen on Black reality television. Although it was seen that one participant endorsed the stereotypical images of Black women, it was when she was younger and she rejected these same stereotypes as a young adult. Regardless, all participants did not model the stereotypical Black female behavior shown on Black reality television. As mentioned previously in this paper, the literature that was reviewed indicated that there were few studies that studied the impacts of the Sapphire stereotype in Black college-aged women. Coleman and colleagues (2020) were one of the few authors to explore the idea that Black female stereotypes impact the self-perception and influence endorsement or rejection of said stereotypes in Black women who watch reality television. This finding remains true with this current study. The Black women who were interviewed, all of them rejected the Sapphire stereotype and chose not to behave in ways that were associated with said image. Additionally, a different theme that was seen between all four oral histories is the fact that reality television producers make decisions based on what will make

their shows popular. Meaning, if it was proven by reality television companies that televising Black women fighting and being angry or loud resulted in an increase of viewers, then they would continue to broadcast more content like that. The data also shows that household, parent, and other social environments played a big role in how the participant was impacted by the Black women's stereotypes seen on reality television.

The following passage sums up the perspectives of Participant A:

“Yes, definitely uneasy. Just because when we see Caucasian people and things like that on TV and arguments, it is very different than when we see African American women on TV. And I'm going to say this simply because when I see a lot of the times when African American women are on TV and they're getting arguments and yadda, yadda, whatever. I feel like a lot of times we see the backstage security guards or whatever coming in to pull them off each other, trying to help resolve the conflict. On the opposite end, when it's white women or whatever, I really don't see that. So, you know, seeing that is very uneasy and unsettling. And then also, it just makes me feel as if this is really what people think of us. Like, do they really think that we're loud or, you know, obnoxious, very extra, you know? So I guess uncomfortable might be a good word for it, but I guess its just like uneasy and again, that's just not who we are.”

The following passage encapsulates the essential thoughts of Participant B:

“Like, my friends, you know, I would say are the typical black woman. Not like ‘Oh, she can do all bad by herself. She's Miss Independent, highly educated, don't need a man, don't want a man’ type, how it's portrayed in the media. But my friends, they don't think like that. It's just like, you know when I get older, I want to have a family. They want to

have kids. Like, yeah, they want to have high paying jobs, but they also want to stay home and have their husbands work, if they could. And it's like what they portray in the media is not all black women and it's most definitely not, you know, the majority really. Because it's just the media pushing the narrative and like what they want us to think and what they want us to look like.”

This passage speaks to the main opinions of Participant C:

“I definitely think about my aunt, because she's the same way. But to survive, I feel like that's a very key point to survive. I feel like she's felt like she's had to be very aggressive and angry. Pop off quick, do all this in your face, you know, to get her point across and not diminish in that or taken away from that at all. But I definitely think that was influenced by shows like reality TV shows like that and just seeing people in that manner. Cause, you know, it was always something that you knew, right? It was always somebody you always knew, whether it be a family member or friend, associate, whatever. Someone who behaved in that way with the type of quick to snap back. So I feel like once it got on TV and became entertainment, people subconsciously started to take on those behaviors. I definitely could see, like I said, my aunt, and now that I'm getting older it's a little different, but I can see how it's manifested. So I look at my boyfriend's family all the time and have seen that those negative stereotypes have kind of manifested themselves into who they are as people and how they operate with the world. Not taking away from the trauma and the struggle that they went through to make it that way, as well. That definitely plays a part. But I know that my boyfriend's sister, she was about to be casted for Bad Girls Club. So that just goes to show you, you know what I mean? Like, you know, so I think it's definitely manifested itself into a lot of women that I know. But my

mother was one of those people that never had those kinds of behaviors. She definitely is snappy, definitely aggressive, you know, as she's had to be. But like quick to fight, she's just not that person quick to cuss you out... Well, she is quick to cuss you out. I ain't gon lie... so maybe she got it too, you know what I mean? So I feel like having that balance kind of made it easier for me to be like, "now I don't want to partake in those kind of behaviors or things" because it's just so draining and unnecessary. But as a child it was a little harder just because like that was on TV. So I was consuming it that way. And then family members were perpetuate that, and then force it on me as well. Like I just said, I'm not by no means an aggressive person. Okay. I don't want to say that because at this point in my life, I have become a little aggressive, but that's just because I've had to be that way. But by no means am I like a fighter or no, I just don't like partaking in stuff like that. But it took me a long time to get to that point and realize that I didn't have to. You don't have to be quick to fight to prove your point. And tough for who? Who are you proving you're tough to? You know what I mean? It only matters what you think about yourself. So, you doing all this for other people who don't have shit to lose, like honestly. And so it's just like at this point, it's just too much to lose and it doesn't make sense. But I still know women to this day at this age that they still carry on behaviors like that and think it's normal and like the right thing to do. And if you're not like that, they're like, "What's wrong with you? Oh, you're weak or you're this or you're that." It's like, "No, I'm not weak." I don't have to prove I'm tough to nobody but myself. And tough for what? I don't wanna be tough no more. I want to be soft. I want to live my life. Like I don't want to worry about having to beat somebody up every time they say something. Or engage in conflict conversation when we going back and forth. No."

The following passage highlights the essence of Participant D's perspective:

“Okay, so like as a kid, and even now like I see these clips of like all these shows, on reality TV shows, it's always black women acting a certain way that like loud, rude, blah, blah, blah. And so, I know I'm not like that, but this is like all you're seeing in that genre for black women. So that's like the representation we're getting. And the thing is that I've noticed that with people of my generation, even like back in high school, middle school, like you would see kids trying to emulate those behaviors like that rude, obnoxious, ‘arrogant’ but you would see the kids like modeling that behavior. And then those same kids would look at me, someone who doesn't act like that and be like, ‘oh, like, she doesn't act black.’ So it's this whole like thing, because I've always been considered, like, not black enough, or too white, or this shit like that. So it's like, because I don't act this way that these same kids have been fed, they think I'm not black enough because I don't associate with that type of black woman.”

Results of this study are limited by the number of participants interviewed. Given that only four participants were included in the data analysis, we cannot assume that the opinions and sentiments of the women interviewed are reflective of a larger population size. Therefore, we do not yet have an adequate understanding of how Black women generally are impacted by the Sapphire stereotype seen on reality television. With later data collection, I hope to fill this gap in literature. A separate limitation in this study was that not all participants were well-versed within the subject of Black reality television. Although when participants were recruited, it was asked that all volunteering participants be well-acquainted with Black reality television shows.

Therefore, it was assumed that as the nature of this project is focused around such a topic that volunteers would be knowledgeable about said topic. However, the data shows that not all participants were well-versed with Black reality television shows. Given these limitations, it cannot be concluded that the sentiments and opinions of the women surveyed are representative of a larger population of Black women.

Future directions of this research include the use of a preliminary survey to gauge participants' experience with Black reality television. To add, these surveys should be short and inclusive of many different aspects of Black reality television shows, including shows watched, themes seen in shows, and if that show had a significant number of Black cast members. This is worthwhile because it will ensure that the data collected will be reliable and relevant to the study. It may also be useful to interview more people. By increasing the sample size, we would see a larger representation of opinions and may be able to draw connections between life history and perspectives seen in different volunteers. Thus, providing the ability to generalize results seen for said population.

SECTION 6: CONCLUSION

Black reality television imagines Black women to be loud, flamboyant, aggressive, and ill-mannered, all of which are characteristics of the Sapphire stereotype. Despite the overwhelming number of Sapphire images that are shown on Black reality television, Black women continue to observe Black reality television. As the data shows, the Black women in this study largely reject the stereotype of the Sapphire and do not let those images affect their behavior. However, there are still shortcomings when considering the sample population size and exposure to Black reality television.

This research was exploratory in nature, yet it still sheds light on the real world implications of seeing the Sapphire stereotype in college-aged Black women, as Black women volunteering in this study have stressed the ways that reality television makes them feel ignored, not properly represented, and impacts how they view other Black women. Lastly, our data shows that while there are barriers to understanding the full breadth of Black women's stereotypes on reality television, the Black women interviewed perceived such images to be negative.

While there is variety in how large populations of Black women view stereotypical issues, Black women do not all see themselves reflected in the way Black reality television portrays them. It has been seen that such negative portrayal of Black women on reality television have led to low self-esteem and behavioral acquiescence into the dominant culture. Hopefully Black women will not observe Black reality television as they come to understand that reality television producers do not seek to portray Black women in a positive manner.

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APPENDIX

Questions for Oral Histories

Topic & Research question: Considering your experience with the Black reality television, how did/ do you experience the Black reality television and its images of the Sapphire Stereotype and how does that compare to your current perspective of it and that stereotype now?

1. What was the first Black reality tv show you remember and/or the first reality television show you watched that had a Black cast of 50% or more?
2. Do you remember how old you were when you watched that show?
3. What was it about?
4. Were there any Black women in this show? How were they portrayed in the show? Did the women show behavior that was loud, boisterous, ill-mannered, or mal-tempered?
5. How did you process this image? How did it make you feel as a Black girl?
6. Did you see other Black women in your life taking on these characteristics? Did viewing these Black women on television influence your behavior?
7. Can you describe your subsequent experiences with Black reality television?
8. What did you think of the Black women you saw on those shows then? How were they portrayed in the show? Did the women show behavior that was loud, boisterous, ill-mannered, or mal-tempered?
9. How did their behavior on screen make you feel? Did those Black women on tv influence your behavior?
10. Did you ever watch shows like *I Love New York*, *Love & Hip Hop*, or *Basketball Wives*? How do you think women on these shows are portrayed?
11. Did you ever watch Black reality television with family or friends? What was special about those moments? What TV shows were they? What were their reactions to the Black female characters?
12. Do you still watch Black reality television? If so, think about a Black woman that you have seen in a Black reality television show recently? How would you describe her? What makes you think of her like that?
13. How do you compare your first experiences with Black reality television to how you view Black reality television now? What changed? What stayed the same? What made you change your perspective?
14. In your previous years watching reality television, did you ever understand the stereotypical nature of Black women in reality television? If so, when did you come to this realization?

Participant A's Oral History Transcription

Stevenson [00:00:09] So my project is based on black woman stereotypes and mostly those stereotypes being portrayed on reality TV shows. So, thinking about shows like I Love New York and Flavor of Love and all of the 2000s and 2010 reality TV shows that I really do like. But it's all about that and how people. Internalize those if they do internalize them, indeed. So, this oral history is very informal. So don't feel the need to like give a correct answer to it. I just want to understand your point of view and how you view things. So the first question I have is what was the first black reality TV show you remember, or the first reality television show that you watch where there was like a 50% or more black cast?

Participant A [00:01:30] So these are shows that I didn't personally watch, but like if my siblings are watching them or whatever, I mean, I would, you know, see them. But Bad Girls Club. And I'm trying to think of what that was like, number one, because they were always watching that. Um. This kind of misstep that I can't think of more reality TV shows that have a 50% more Black cast. But yeah, I think Bad Girls Club was like, really the only one that I ever saw my siblings watch. I never really watched a lot of reality T.V. with like a 50% or more Black cast.

Stevenson [00:02:25] Okay, okay. Of the kinds of reality television that you did watch, did they often have like one or like two black people?

Participant A [00:02:36] So, like, oftentimes I would watch The Bachelor.

Stevenson [00:02:40] Oh, okay.

Participant A [00:02:42] Rachel Lindsay's season, she was the first African American bachelorette. So, that was like, that was something I was really excited about. And I watched that season. I just thought it was kind of interesting. I felt like, I mean, the way that she was portrayed, I felt like it was very genuine as to who she is. I mean, I still follow her on social media and it seems like, you know, she's the same person as she was on the camera. Um, I don't know if you would consider love is blind reality T.V. or not.

Stevenson [00:03:19] Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Participant A [00:03:22] And also Lauren Hamilton. I was really interested in her story with her husband. I feel like the way that she was portrayed and just like who she is as well on social media aligns. Um, I feel like other people, like the people in Bad Girls Club are, um, I don't know who all of those women are. I feel like reality television and I feel like also the reason why I didn't watch it is because of the way that they make these women look like, you know. Like, that's just not who we are. We're not always loudmouthed, cussing each other out, you know, that's just not who we are. And for me, I just don't want to feed into the views of that because that's just not what I want them to hear me as, because that's not who we are, you know.

Stevenson [00:04:32] Mhm.

Participant A [00:04:32] So I think that. Yeah. That's not what your question was but, yeah.

Stevenson [00:04:40] It is okay. This is all about your perspective and how you view things. So, you talked about how you would watch if like whenever you did, that when your siblings would be watching Bad Girls Club that you may have entertained that somewhat. Do you remember how old you were when like that was going on?

Participant A [00:05:10] I was young. I had to have been probably. 11 or 12. Yeah. So me watching that at 11 or 12, I mean, even just for a second, I'm like, this is what you guys are watching? I mean, I could see how it might be entertaining, you know, because drama is entertaining, but I just don't really like... And not even just reality TV, but just like movies and TV shows in general. I'm not always a fan of how they portray African American women.

Stevenson [00:05:55] I understand that. So, kind of thinking back to the reality TV shows that you have seen that did have some black women in it like The Bachelor that you were talking about, and those are the kind of shows. How do you think they were portrayed in the show? Did the women show any kind of behavior that was like ill-mannered or like mal-tempered or very boisterous, very flamboyant?

Participant A [00:06:28] Yeah, absolutely. Definitely 100%. I feel like it's really hard because with reality TV you don't know what's true, and what's scripted. So a lot of the times when they're in arguments about, "she stole my man or she slept with my man" or whatever those situations, I feel like 99% of the time can be handled 100% differently. Like, there's just different ways to go about it than calling each other out of your name, going at each other. Like, because we're African American women, I just feel like we need to be together, not against each other. You know? So I definitely think there is that. But also at the same time, I mean, you shouldn't have to... I mean, if that's how you go about settling conflict, then that's how you go about settling conflict. But I definitely feel like there are different ways to go about it. And I also feel like behind the scenes, there could have been different ways that these reality TV stars have gone about it, but they were just portrayed in a more negative, entertaining way for the viewers to see.

Stevenson [00:07:50] Hmm. That's interesting. So kind of like, they were just following a script that was written for them. That's interesting. So when you would see this kind of behavior, how did you process that? How did it make you feel as a black girl at the time?

Participant A [00:08:19] It made me feel very... I don't want to say uncomfortable because uncomfortable I guess isn't the right word for it. But maybe I want to say like uneasy, or maybe feeling like that's not right. Just because it's just not right. Because we see Caucasian people all the time on TV. And I feel like the arguments that they have. I'm sorry, Can you repeat the question? I just totally lost my train of thought with all of this.

Stevenson [00:09:05] Yeah, It's okay. It's okay. So when you see these images of black women behaving like this, how did it make you feel?

Participant A [00:09:16] Yes, definitely uneasy. Just because when we see Caucasian people and things like that on TV and arguments, it is very different than when we see African

American women on TV. And I'm going to say this simply because when I see like a lot of the times when African American women are on TV and they're getting arguments and yadda, yadda, whatever. I feel like a lot of times we see the backstage security guards or whatever coming in to pull them off each other, trying to help resolve the conflict. On the opposite end, when it's white women or whatever, I really don't see that. So, you know, seeing that is very uneasy and unsettling. And then also, it just makes me feel as if this is really what people think of us. Like, do they really think that we're loud or, you know, obnoxious, very extra, you know? So I guess uncomfortable might be a good word for it, but I guess its just like uneasy and again, that's just not who we are.

Stevenson [00:10:36] Hmm. Just false. I get it.

Participant A [00:10:40] Yeah. It's a false reality of who we are.

Stevenson [00:10:45] So given that you were only 11 or 12, which is very young, when you first came across black woman on reality television acting in this kind of way, did you ever see, black women in your life taking on those kinds of characteristics that were portrayed on TV?

Participant A [00:11:18] Not at all. Not at all. And I think also it could be where I grew up. I grew up in Ann Arbor as an African American woman. So, I mean, I was mainly surrounded by white people, but also the women in my family didn't act like the people act on reality TV at all.

Stevenson [00:11:47] Did you see those same kind of images like influencing your behavior at all?

Participant A [00:11:55] Nope. Just because I was like, that is not how I want people to think of me. And it really sucks having to say that as a you know, as a fellow African American about another African American woman. Because like I said before, we need to be together because there's not that many of us. So we really just need to be a united front. And it's just a turnoff. Yeah.

Stevenson [00:12:29] I get it. I get it. 100%. So, with that, we've gone over you being 11 or 12 years old, which, I'm not going to get past that. That's really young. And we've talked about your experience with The Bachelor. Can you describe your subsequent experiences with black reality television or with a reality television show that had significant black characters that you remember?

Participant A [00:13:18] I mean, not really. I mean, I remember shows like Flavor of Love, but I was, again, very young. Like, I didn't watch it. Like, I'm not I can't tell you what happened on this show. Like, you know, word for word. So, no, I don't think I can. And it's really crazy that I can't because I feel like that at 21 years old and not knowing or not being able to think of reality TV shows with a main black cast is kind of concerning for me.

Stevenson [00:14:01] Why do you say that?

Participant A [00:14:03] Just because, why aren't there shows out there like that? Like, I feel like all the time we have The Real Housewives of L.A.. I mean, I don't know, there could be one for George or whatever. There probably is. But like, why isn't there something like that with majority of black women? There is Jersey Shore. There's FloriBama Shore. Why isn't there like. Something like Atlanta Shore? You know what I mean? Like, I just don't understand why there isn't you know, why there isn't more.

Stevenson [00:14:41] I get that. I get that 100%. Um, I would also say that the lack of representation is understandable. In my sight. Just because like how you said before that when we do see white people on reality television shows, they don't have the security called and so they just like let them fight and argue. And then when it's done, it's done. But I wouldn't even say that it's like analyzed in the same way, even for entertainment. So with that, I know we talked about when you were 11 watching The Bad Girls Club and how you were a little bit older and started watching The Bachelor. How would you compare those two experiences to like how you see it now?

Participant A [00:16:23] I guess, things have changed and things are very, very different. I don't really watch The Bachelor or anything like that anymore. I don't really watch reality TV like that anymore, but I guess my views, haven't really changed that much, honestly. I still feel like the black women that I do see on reality TV are portrayed... well I don't know. I guess it just depends on the show. Sometimes things are a little bit better and sometimes they're not. So I don't know. Does that answer the question?

Stevenson [00:17:28] I guess so. When you say that things are better, what do you mean?

Participant A [00:17:39] So, like I'm just thinking about FloriBama shore. In that show, there's an African American man and there's an African American girl on the show. And so, there's been multiple times where they've had altercations with one another. And you would think that it would be bad because it's, you know, two black people arguing, whatever, I mean, male and female or whatever. But I feel like the way that it's portrayed now is like I can see this being like a real, understandable argument. Whereas before, a couple of years ago when, you know, you see people arguing on TV or whatever, it just didn't seem real. Like, you know, like "are you guys really arguing about that? Like, is that a real argument?" But like, today, now I'm like, "okay, that's a real argument. That seems like it makes sense. I don't think that that was scripted." You know what I mean? I feel like I can kind of tell. If that makes sense.

Stevenson [00:18:58] For sure. So I guess with that, and kind of your previous years of watching reality television, did you ever understand like the stereotypical nature of black women that were on these shows? Just like how, you now, understand that, okay, the conversation that you're having may actually be real. Did you ever, like, understand that the black women who were on these reality TV shows were acting in a stereotypical way or did you think like that was just like regular behavior?

Participant A [00:19:44] I never even thought about it. So now that you said that they might have been acting in a stereotypical way. And now that you say it, I mean, maybe they could have

been doing it, but I don't know. Maybe. But I would hate to think that they were trying to fit into that stereotype.

Stevenson [00:20:21] I get that. It's different when you come to that realization so much later, like after you've seen the show and you're like, "Oh my gosh, that's what I was?" And yeah, yeah, I get it. Well, that's really all the questions that I have.

Participant A [00:20:47] But I feel like I didn't answer your question. Do you have what you need for your assignment?

Stevenson [00:20:52] I do, absolutely. Thank you so much!

Participant B's Oral History Transcription

Stevenson [00:00:05] As I've told you, my project is about black female stereotypes and how black women perceive them and/or interpret them. So can you remember the first black reality television show that you've seen and/or like the first reality television show that you watched that had like a pretty significant percentage of black people in it?

Participant B [00:00:38] I would say like Love and Hip Hop is like the main show that I watch growing up, especially with my mom, because that's like really all she watched, as well as Real Housewives of Atlanta. That was predominantly black women on there as well.

Stevenson [00:00:54] Okay. That one is pretty popular. Do you remember like how old you were kind of when this happened, or was it just around your childhood?

Participant B [00:01:28] So I would say I was still in high school, maybe 15, 16, watching these shows. So, like, it was entertaining after I got done doing my homework or whatever, you know. I would watch it with my mom after she got done cooking and, you know, the drama was fun. It was interesting. So it was just a lot going on.

Stevenson [00:01:55] I like that. It sounds like you had a lot of fun watching it. Did you ever like was like a ton of seasons or was it just like something that you did like in you guys' leisure time, like were you both really invested in it? Or did you guys just kinds of turn it on?

Participant B [00:02:14] It was more or less like in the leisure time because like I know also watched Bad Girls Club, like when I was younger. So I had to be whenever it came out. I don't remember how old I was, but I know I was watching it with a couple of my friends and like we would sit at this one girl's house and we were just watching her room. So like, we just watched we watched all those shows in our leisure time.

Stevenson [00:02:47] All right. What do you remember those shows being about? And I haven't seen all of them personally, but could you describe what they're about?

Participant B [00:03:01] So, like, Bad girls club is just like, you know, a group of girls in a house together. I don't even remember, like, the main point of it, but like, everybody remembers them fighting. Everyone remembers the iconic lady banging in the pants together, screaming. So, like, it was just us watched those shows just for the action, mainly.

Stevenson [00:03:28] Okay. I'm starting to remember a little bit, but its kind of still a little bit fuzzy on my head. So I know that there must have been a lot of black women within these shows. How do you think that they were portrayed in the show? You know, did they show any kind of behavior that was ill-mannered? I know you mentioned loud already and kind of angry, but any other kind of behavior that was like really flamboyant or just out there.

Participant B [00:04:03] So far as the shows that I've watched with my mom and with my friends, they were mainly like, black women were more quick to act, like they're more impulsive.

So like, you always see them fighting about a small thing, like over a comment. You know, that could be obviously avoided. And they start fighting over it.

Stevenson [00:04:26] Hmm. I get that. Yeah. I feel like that was really common, if I remember any of it. So when you would watch scenes like this, how did you process this when you were younger? How did it make you personally feel as a black girl?

Participant B [00:04:59] Growing up, I was very gullible. Like I was like somebody you could be influential on. So like for those those shows, particularly Bad Girls Club, we used to act those shows up. Okay.

Stevenson [00:05:11] Okay.

Participant B [00:05:14] We used to act those shows. We had our little posse over here and the other one over there and we would just try to act it out and stuff. And we have somebody recording, thinking we was doing something. Whereas like, you know how Atlanta Housewives, Love and Hip Hop, you know, I Love New York, all of those shows... It's just like "is that like really how black women are supposed to act?" You know, it makes you question like, is that how we supposed to act or is it just for show? You know?

Stevenson [00:05:50] Hmm. And I see. I see what you're saying.

Participant B [00:05:54] Yeah. It's just like I feel like whatever they push out towards us is, like, unconsciously, you're going to act it out. You're going to do it.

Stevenson [00:06:05] And I see that. I see the line of influence that you're talking about. I understand that. I know you mentioned, like, you and your friends and try to act it out. Did you ever see, like, any woman in your life, actually act in those ways, like take on those characteristics full on or was just like something that you only saw on television?

Participant B [00:06:34] So, like my mom, she has this one particular friend and she acts just like some of the girls on these reality T.V. shows, like, you know, at heart, she's very she's a very nice person, but she's just she's just that she's popping off like, everywhere. And it's "dang." it's just like the T.V. is right there. So, yeah. You do have some people that do act out those characteristics.

Stevenson [00:07:09] Okay, okay. So what do you think about that?

Participant B [00:07:11] I feel like I don't even know. I don't really know how to feel about it. It's just weird at first, but then it's just like, you know, the more you're around that person the more you get used to it. Just like more you sit there and watch TV, the more you get used to it.

Stevenson [00:07:34] So it's kind of just normalized at this point.

Participant B [00:07:36] Yeah, it's more normalized.

Stevenson [00:07:39] I get that. I get that. So you talked about watching Love and Hip Hop with your mom and like your mid teens. What were like your subsequent experiences with black reality television? So like after that.

Participant B [00:08:21] I honestly stopped watching them for the most part, mainly because I'm more busy than usual. But I kind of avoided it because just like, like, why would y'all want to be on television because of bad behavior? Like they're going to continue to put that type of TV in front of you because it sells.

Stevenson [00:08:41] Mm hmm. So kind of like more of just pure entertainment.

Participant B [00:08:48] Yes. Like they use us for pure entertainment and, like, that's why it keeps going. That's how you have so many more seasons than you usually see in a show.

Stevenson [00:09:03] For sure. So now that we're not like you don't really watch it anymore, and other than the fact that like you're busier, why else do you think that like you've kind of weaned yourself off of that?

Participant B [00:09:27] Um, because, like, I don't want it to influence me anymore. Like, you know, I see things on Tik Tok, like reality shows, and I mean, "Oh, okay, that's cool, that's funny." Or whatever. But I'm not going to watch it personally because I don't want to, you know, act out those behaviors or let that influence me in any kind of way.

Stevenson [00:09:48] Okay. Okay. I feel that. So you said that you've watched shows like Love and Hip Hop, and how they are portrayed as kind of like this scripted role, how they're just being used for somebody to laugh at and kind of then just like keep in that idea of like, "oh, that's a character that we see on TV". And you talked about like watching that with your family, like with your mom and your friends. What was special about like those moments that you spent with your mom or like with your friends?

Participant B [00:10:35] So, like, us commenting. Like, you know, how you when you watch a movie, you comment on it? That's just my mom and my friends were like, "oh, if that was me, it would beat her up." Or, you know, "if that was me, like I would just left the show. You know, it aint worth losing a wig over her or nothing." So it's whatever. And those moments was really fun because we get to joke and laugh about it. You know, we sit there and eat our popcorn and have our snacks or whatever.

Stevenson [00:11:10] I get that. I understand. So when you now, like, think of these women who unfortunately were taking on those scripted roles. What do you think of those women? Like if you could think of like one woman in particular that you've seen on a reality television show like this. How would you describe her? Do you think she's really like that?

Participant B [00:11:49] Its just because it's been so long that watch that show. But like, sometimes they'll come on even with, you know, the reality TV show Black Ink Crew with the tattoos and stuff, they'll talk about how they want to pursue their dreams, their goals and stuff. And it's just like, "okay, that's good." But it's just like you got all the other stuff like, it wouldn't

be interesting if it were just like you pursuing your goals. Like you got to act out, you got to be disrespectful, you got to be this, that, and the third. And it just like it questions whether or not they really think like that or act like that in public. Because my mom, she met one girl from I think it was Love and Hip Hop. She went to Atlanta, she met her, she went to our shop and everything. And she my mom said she was like the nicest person in the world. Like, she was really nice. She was very personable, very respectful and professional. So it was just like, maybe it is an act. Maybe it's just something that they portray on television so they can get money, you know?

Stevenson [00:13:00] Hmm. That's a valuable perspective. Wow. Just so you can see that that's not real life.

Participant B [00:13:15] Yeah. I mean, you could say the same thing for the music industry. So it's just like maybe that can go hand in hand.

Stevenson [00:13:25] I never thought about that. So in your previous years watching these reality TV shows, did you ever think about or like understand the stereotypical nature of these shows or like, was this something that you're like just now thinking about and you can identify like, "Oh, that was not completely true," the image that they were depicting.

Participant B [00:13:58] So, like I will say its more recently. Like, I want to say my freshman year of college and I believe I had to do a research project, you know, like for writing 121.

Stevenson [00:14:11] Mm hmm.

Participant B [00:14:12] And I mostly pick a topic about, like, it's unrelated to this, but it's like about, like, black women's health in the health industry. And, like, I'm going through this book. It was this black lady. She was black and Jewish, and she talked about different aspects about black women and how they're stereotypes, you know, stemming back from slavery. You got the sapphire, the Jezebel, the the super woman, you know, the mammy, all of tht stuff. All that stuff you can see nowadays and television, you can see it in like, you know, your movies, your television shows. Even in the industry, if you could point those out. So it's just like those stereotypes are being replaced redundantly. So you can see a lot of that. Oh, and the sapphire, you can see the sapphire in a lot of the TV shows like that "oh, you know, I'm better than you. I'm Miss Independent." All of that stuff.

Stevenson [00:15:13] Mm hmm. 100%. How do you see that in the behaviors of like women around you. Do you think like they're taking on these kind of stereotypical characteristics?

Participant B [00:15:40] I don't believe so. I think it's just because the friends that I'm around and like the women in my life, they're older. So, they're going to think like, "Oh, I'm Miss Independent. I could do it all by myself." But it's just like at some point they going to admit that, like, "I can't do it by myself, I can't do that." You know, you're going to grow up, you're going to have some regrets. But the people around me, like as far as my friends, I don't believe they think like that. It's more or less like they're mellow, they're chill. Something that, you know, you would never catch on TV, like the typical black woman.

Stevenson [00:16:19] Hmm. Say more about that. I like that.

Participant B [00:16:26] Like, my friends, you know, I would say are the typical black woman. Not like "Oh, she can do all bad by herself. She's Miss independent, highly educated, don't need a man, don't want a man" type, how its portrayed in the media. But my friends, they don't they don't think like that. It's just like, you know when I get older I want to have a family. They want to have kids. Like, yeah, they want to have high paying jobs, but they also want to stay home and have their husbands work, if they could.

Stevenson [00:16:56] Mhmm. Mhmm.

Participant B [00:17:00] And it's like what they portray in the media is not all black women and its most definitely not, you know, the majority really. Because it's just like the media pushing the narrative and like what they want us to think and what they want us to look like.

Stevenson [00:17:18] Word. Well, I thank you for participating in this oral history, and we can stop the recording here.

Participant B [00:17:21] Yeah, thank you for including me!

Participant C's Oral History Transcription

Stevenson [00:00:01] So it's nice to see you again. I'm very excited.

Participant C [00:00:06] Me too. I am so excited.

Stevenson [00:00:09] So our first question for this oral history is what was the first black reality TV show you remember and/or like the first reality television show you watched that had a pretty significant amount of black cast members?

Participant C [00:00:33] Okay. Probably when I was little, I used to watch like That's So Raven, for sure. Um. All Disney shows that had a black lead, but, you know, they didn't have a majority black cast until just now, basically. Most of the shows besides, That's So Raven and Cory in the House had a black lead but all white or other race characters. So I would say that. This is kind of hard for me. I'm trying to think.

Stevenson [00:01:16] Take your time.

Participant C [00:01:18] I definitely remember when my aunt watching like Bad Girls Club. My mom didn't let me watch it at home, but I used to watch it with my aunt, but like Love and Hip Hop, stuff like that. I got all my ghetto TV over there. I don't like to use the term ghetto, but, you know. I got all that kind of TV over there. So, like Real Housewives... But even like Real Housewives I didn't really watch until more recently. I would say probably just like, Bad Girls Club and Love and Hip Hop and That's So Raven, Ant Farm. I'm trying to think of any other Disney shows besides Doc McStuffins. But I really can't, even in Nickelodeon shows. Oh, True Jackson, VP. I used to watch that for sure. But you say reality?

Stevenson [00:02:18] Yeah, like reality kind of TV shows.

Participant C [00:02:23] Oh, definitely. Like Bad Girls Club. That was it.

Stevenson [00:02:35] Did you have like, any kind of, favorite episodes, like our favorite season that you remember maybe?

Participant C [00:02:42] Yes. My favorite season, it might be season nine, I believe, when they were in Mexico, and Erica was on there. She's like, "I don't understand. I don't understand." That is my favorite. I love that. And then, well, I would say my favorite is, you know, they have so many different branches. I would say my favorite would probably be New York, the one they started with. And that's the one I probably used to watch more frequently. Definitely Atlanta, too. Still to this day, I love the Atlanta season.

Stevenson [00:03:25] I get that. I get that. So do you remember, like, how old you were maybe like when you first started watching these kinds of shows? There aren't.

Participant C [00:04:07] Do I remember how old I was? I was probably about eight. Watch your back, Girls Club. Because I used to spend a lot of time with my aunt when I was younger. Like a

lot of time we were like best friends. So. Probably even earlier, you know, like six or seven. Just don't remember. Mm hmm. Yeah. Say around a.

Stevenson [00:04:37] So like. Third or fourth grade. Some somewhere like that.

Participant C [00:04:46] Yeah, I was. Yeah, Because you're a fourth grade, I believe. I think I turned nine in fifth grade. And. Yeah. Yeah. A word for you.

Stevenson [00:05:02] All right. Um, I am pretty familiar with that Girls club. You mentioned season nine, and that was the first season of various club that I ever watched. And I was. I was enthralled. I couldn't get enough. So of the black women that I can remember. And this TV show I heard you mentioned, Erica. So how did you when you were like this old right when you were around eight, maybe nine, how did you view them as like being portrayed during the show?

Participant C [00:05:42] Oh. As a child, I just thought it was normal. I just thought that's how women, particularly black women or women of color. That's what mostly was on the show. It would be portrayed in that light. So I just thought that was just how they acted. And then on top of like interacting with kids at my school who were probably watching the same things, and then they kind of adopted that behavior. So it was like all around me, so to speak. So I really just thought it was normal. And I just view them as like, it should be entertainment. I don't know. I never really thought too much into it until my adult age. And then I started saying, you know, how it could be harmful.

Stevenson [00:06:40] That's fair. That's fair. So. I want to understand. So when you were a child, did you kind of view any of the, like black women's behaviors, like any like flamboyant or like out there, maybe loud or like ill-mannered? Did you view as that or was it just like, okay, that's just how people act.

Participant C [00:07:14] So I didn't know because like I said, my mom definitely would tell me that, like, Oh, you should watch that. You can't watch that when I was at home. So I didn't know that their behavior was wrong to say anything. And I wouldn't say wrong because even now that I understand it a little bit more and I'm an adult, I can understand that they were put in that situation to behave like that. And they will put them in certain situations. They would kind of agitate everything and make, you know, sometimes people pop off or do too much by stuff like that. So understanding that I went in place as much blame on their behavior on the women more than I would like production and like how they were intentional and just how they presented themselves and in what situations they would show. Mm hmm. But at the time. Like I said, I felt like I knew I was not It wasn't normal to a certain extent or it wasn't right. But I didn't think definitely. No, it was a little out there. Okay. But I also grew up in the age of like, I don't know if you've ever used to watch the show Girls Gone Wild. Do you remember that show?

Stevenson [00:08:35] A little bit.

Participant C [00:08:38] So that used to come on and nighttime, Right? And so I would sneak in, watch it, because my curious little brain. Oh, really? Okay. Okay. In my in my I would that, you know, like TV in general around that time was kind of just raunchy anyways. So I just

thought, you know, so people like me, I mean, when you're not especially in terms of Bad Girls Club and how raunchy and and sometimes like sexual stuff they got when you think about it in terms of like I was watching girls going, wow, that was like pretty dirty compared to Girls Gone Wild. And I was like, x x rated. So. So yeah. I don't think. Yeah, I definitely didn't think it was bad. In fact, I thought that was what she should aspire to be like. Woman loud and angry kind of thing. And it gave me a lot of trouble growing up just because I was trying to be something that I really wasn't. Hmm. But with having, like, I wouldn't call them role models because, you know, they probably didn't intend to be that. But just these women that you do look to, and that's your representation. So I thought it was just, you know, how black women were. Honestly.

Stevenson [00:10:10] I can understand that. I can definitely understand that, especially because, like now that you say that, I'm thinking back to like how they were on the series finale of shows like The Bad Girls Club, and they were trying to show like, Oh, okay, I've reformed from my bad ways.

Participant C [00:10:32] And yeah.

Stevenson [00:10:36] As if like their whole entire life was for the world to see. But knowing that we would never understand or even see the full picture.

Participant C [00:10:47] Right. So. Right. And then like that also speaks to like a give production because you have to think about the women they intended to choose. You know what I mean? Like, they kind of there's a group of black women who don't behave that way that they could've picked from, but they chose not to. A because obviously they knew it was going to be entertaining. Mm hmm. B I think they knew it would be harmful. To the black woman's image because she's into those negative stereotypes anyways. Like all black women are and how they act and interact with each other. So I think shows like Bad Girls Club and things like that kind of just perpetrated that over and over and over and over again. I see that. So. Yes, I do. I take less. Blame the women because in terms of like they took these women from situations that weren't the best and make them stars basically, you know what I mean? And gave them so many opportunities. Yes. One can look at those opportunities and say that they weren't the best or that no, maybe they shouldn't have taken them, but it was still an opportunity. And when you don't have anything like that, especially coming along, you take you jump at it.

Stevenson [00:12:26] I see. I see what you're saying.

Participant C [00:12:27] So you know what I mean. Like, I really put a lot of. Yeah. Anger, I guess. Or questions towards the production team and just like who was back there making them cause because when the production people came out, they was white. So explain to me how you got majority black cast members and all the production team members are white, you know, and it makes you ask like even further question on like okay, so when they fightin and stuff like that or do you see coming in to break up the fighting not white production you know how much a big burly security guard you know what I mean? I don't know is this. It sends a very clear image. It's like a picture of. The turn we see now in our generation from past generations and just how I feel like. We decided to conduct ourselves is definitely a direct, direct, direct reflection of shows like

that. Okay. Just like they of like reality T.V. showing black women like that. This heavy. Yeah. That's ego. Yeah.

Stevenson [00:14:02] All right. All right. I'm going to have to sit with that.

Participant C [00:14:05] I definitely am interested in this conversation because I want. This topic has been very interesting to me in my adult years. Just because I could see it more and, like, get into the historical background of, like, African Americans in this country. Mm hmm. It makes it make sense. You know what I mean? Especially black women.

Stevenson [00:14:27] Like there's a place altogether. Yeah.

Participant C [00:14:29] Mm hmm. Mm hmm.

Stevenson [00:14:33] So when you are watching these kind of shows, how did that you said that it influenced your. Not really your perception, but kind of just like normalized the behavior. But how did the how did these images that you saw made you feel like about yourself? Like as a black girl.

Participant C [00:14:57] It made me feel like I had to be tough. And I'm not that person. I'm such a lover. I'm so positive. I just want to live in peace all the time of happiness. I just want everybody to love me, love them. You know what I mean? I just want everything to be happiness. Because that's how my mom raised me, to just live in this fantasy world. So seeing stuff like that put me in a position where I felt like I had to then show up as. Oh, reflection of those women whether it be a. My first instinct is that the two talk about a situation is to fight, or whether it be to always be defensive or loud or angry. Aggressive. Overtly sexual. I can see how all of those characteristics definitely play into my life and my perception of myself and how I viewed even my friends and the world in general. Yeah, not necessarily specifically bad roles like Bad Girls Club with, you know, with other stuff. Kind of made me feel like I had to be this person and it didn't take no shit, you know, or like, you know, just this image of angry women. So angry even now, I'd be like, Why are you so angry? Why do you carry so much anger? And on it? You know, you don't have to have that. But that's how I felt like I had to Big E, you know what I mean? Especially like now in terms of like being in a space where so many white people, it just makes me feel like I have to be angry all the time. Like because you just never know how they coming at you. So you just always got to be on guard, right? You got to be ready. Right. But I definitely got those images and and perceptions from reality TV and just how they handle situations and interact with the world. Even things as simple as like getting their bodies burned or which is kind of a newer thing. I wouldn't say that was as popular as I was younger. Maybe getting smaller bodies like Adam, but that's very fairly new. Oh yeah. So like, even like I've always been a thicker girl. So images about myself wanting to be smaller, skinnier, that was everywhere. But these shows kind of just, um. Push that down my throat a little bit more. This idea of being this mean girl I thought was cute or attractive and would associate myself with people like that. But in my spirit, I always knew that's just not who I was. But. I feel like that's where I had to be to survive, where people would just run all over me if I was my true, like, happy go lucky, sensitive self. You know what I mean? Yeah.

Stevenson [00:18:18] Wow. That. Okay.

Participant C [00:18:20] Okay. Okay.

Stevenson [00:18:23] Um. So you mentioned like how you took on or attempted to take on these kind of characteristics that you saw within different kinds of black reality TV shows. Did you ever see like. Other adult black woman in your life taking on these characteristics or like how did their how would you think that their behavior was changed by these kind of reality TV shows like the adults that you saw?

Participant C [00:19:00] I definitely think my aunt, because she's the same way. But to survive, I feel like that's a very key point to survive. I feel like she's felt like she's had to be very aggressive and angry. Pop off quick, do all this in your face, you know, to get her point across and not diminish in that or taken away from that at all. But I definitely think that was influenced by shows like reality TV shows like that and just seeing people in that manner. Cause, you know, it was always something that you knew, right? It was always somebody you always knew, whether it be a family member or friend, associate, whatever. Someone who behaved in that way with the type of quick to snap back. So I feel like once it got on TV and became entertainment, people subconsciously started to take on those behaviors. I definitely could see, like I said, my aunt, and now that I'm getting older it's a little different, but I can see how it's manifested. So I look at my boyfriend's family all the time and have seen that those negative stereotypes have kind of manifested themselves into who they are as people and how they operate with the world. Not taking away from the trauma and the struggle that they went through to make it that way, as well. That definitely plays a part. But I know that my boyfriend's sister, she was about to be casted for Bad Girls Club. So that just goes to show you, you know what I mean? Like, you know, so I think it's definitely manifested itself into a lot of women that I know. But my mother was one of those people that never had those kinds of behaviors. She definitely is snappy, definitely aggressive, you know, as she's had to be. But like quick to fight, she's just not that person Quick to cuss you out... Well, she is quick to cuss you out. I ain't gon lie... so maybe she got it too, you know what I mean? So I feel like having that balance kind of made it easier for me to be like, "now I don't want to partake in those kind of behaviors or things" because it's just so draining and unnecessary. But as a child it was a little harder just because like that was on TV. So I was consuming it that way. And then family members were perpetrate that, and then force it on me as well. Like I just said, I'm not by no means an aggressive person. Okay. I don't want to say that because at this point in my life, I have become a little aggressive, but that's just because I've had to be that way. But by no means am I like a fighter or no, I just don't like partaking in stuff like that. But it took me a long time to get to that point and realize that I didn't have to. You don't have to be quick to fight to prove your point. And tough for who? Who are you proving you're tough to? You know what I mean? It only matters what you think about yourself. So, you doing all this for other people who don't have shit to lose, like honestly. And so it's just like at this point, it's just too much to lose and it doesn't make sense. But I still know women to this day at this age that they still carry on behaviors like that and think it's normal and like the right thing to do. And if you're not like that, they're like, "What's wrong with you? Oh, you're weak or you're this or you're that." It's like, "No, I'm not weak." I don't have to prove I'm tough to nobody but myself. And tough for what? I don't wanna be tough no more. I want to be soft. I want to live my life. Like I don't want to worry about having to beat somebody up every time they say

something. Or engage in conflict conversation when we going back and forth. No. But, you know, so yeah, that was a long-winded answer to your question. I hope I did answer it though.

Stevenson [00:23:50] It's you're fine. You're fine. So we kind of talked about, you know, your child had experiences with like reality television, what we're like. You know, post childhood experience. It's a vision. I know you mentioned kind of in the beginning of our conversation that, you know, how you view it now is very different. You know, Do you still watch any kind of black or white television at all?

Participant C [00:24:23] Okay, So after I just said all of that, parts of people still. Right. I definitely still watch body cells and bodies with just like my raunchy TV because it is entertaining, I do have to admit, is entertaining. And I hate to admit it because it's at the parents of our people, but it's so entertaining. It just keeps you wanting more, you know? And so it's just one of those things where I'm very conflicted on whether I should support it or not, because in the same breath, I love the fact that it does give black women primarily that's all who's on Batty's race and South experience and opportunity. Like, I'm just thinking about Chris Rock. I don't know if you've heard of her, but she's become a millionaire. You know, Lucas girlfriend now is it's been a little questionable. Her tactics and. And the things that she goes through. Yeah. To a certain degree. I'm happy for her. But to a certain degree, I understand. Why she feels like she got to be that way to sell. Because that's what sells, you know?

Stevenson [00:25:44] Okay. Okay.

Participant C [00:25:45] Thinking of it in terms of, like, people who have never had nothing. Who have never had opportunities. Who don't have resources. You tell them if they can get \$20,000 an episode. They don't care. What are you telling them to do? Like, you know what I mean? So in that way, I definitely understand. But to answer your question, yes, I still watch reality TV. I watch all the Real Housewives. Love it when it comes on. And I only saw it I refused to watch is Keeping Up with the Kardashians. And that's they're not black anyways. But I refuse to watch it because I just don't like how they've just been dragging black women and then they try to make it seem like it's not black women. Like, is this luxury? No, you got that from a black woman. And it's also just like they're just super problematic to me because it's just so many ways in which they appropriate our culture. And everybody's just like, Oh, but they're the Asians. That's what they do. No, that's not me. So I did. I did. I used to watch that show, but I had to stop. Because it was it was one episode I was just watching like a year ago maybe, and I was watching it. Kim has said something and it just completely turned me off. I said I would never have about them off Instagram immediately, all of them. Like I was like, I can not engage no more. It was just and this was before all the stuff started going, Oh, that situation made me even more. Not necessarily. Be against them, but just I didn't like the way that she handled it. And I didn't like the the message she was trying to put out there. I like that. And if I was angry, I would have told him that. But, you know, that kind of guy is a piece of work within another. And so. But, um, so yeah, but I definitely do still engage in watching them. I am cautious in what I take in and like, um, what I choose to like actually subscribe to it my whole life. Definitely super cautious and I definitely feel like some of them are taking. Actually, I was going to say I feel like some of them because I don't like leather hip hop, for instance, is one that I'm thinking of after Colgate. Things have just not been the same. And so, yes, they have drama, but in no ways near

the way loving hip hop used to be, really. And then for that, I feel like their viewer rates are kind of declining. So then there's that, too. Well, it's yeah, it's like they have drama, but it's petty, stupid stuff. Like, it's not substantial. Like, Oh my God, they didn't want, you know, like how it used to be, like betrayal, like huge, major, major things. It's just like the same. It's kind of boring, actually, because a lot of the guys this time, they only say, Oh, they've been on it since I was little, so it's time for them to get it.

Stevenson [00:29:17] I, I get that. I get that I'd be tired to shoot those.

Participant C [00:29:25] Mad.

Stevenson [00:29:27] Men. So. Of the. So of the like the current or I guess more recent. Black reality TV shows that you watch. What do you think of the black women that you see like now? Like how were they portrayed in the show? Did you perceive their behavior to be like loud, ill-mannered or like now tempered out there as you did, like when you were a child?

Participant C [00:30:07] Yes, definitely. Even on a larger scale, like I said, just because I have like a basic consciousness on why this is harmful to black women. So I definitely keep that in mind when watching it. But I would say now there's this trend. It's like trendy to be like a gangster or like street or not saying that it wasn't before, but it's definitely, definitely, definitely super, super, super, super, super popular now. And people are just taking it to like, crazy, crazy, crazy extremes to the point where sometimes I'm watching a women fight and I feel like I'm watching to grow to ask me if I like, Oh my God, it's so I don't know if. I say, I just feel like things have gotten worse. And then the generation now that's like doing this is informed from generations prior. Like, I was thinking about all of those women doing the same thing. So I'm specifically talking about that is, is like the same things. But I go for the newer things, like a newer version. So I would have yeah, I would say they definitely perpetrate the same tendencies in the past. Unfortunately, I wouldn't. Yeah, they're not the best, but it's now. It's also like a to gain clout in whatever way you can't. Right. And so sometimes it's not even just a race thing or like a black one specific thing. But anybody it just is crazy outlandish. It just to get more popularity and it works. Yeah, it works. So it's like I feel like you're our society because then you have the, like, bad Barbizon and all these white girls who now have adopted these traditional black women, you know, characteristics.

Stevenson [00:32:30] Mm hmm.

Participant C [00:32:31] And so it's becoming a trend. It's like, trendy and. I don't know. I feel like it's just further like. Just harming? I don't know. I feel like it is detrimental. But like I just said, to the same extent, I am happy that so many black people are able to get these kinds of opportunities because it doesn't. I feel like it doesn't matter where you start, but more so just where you take it and what you do with it. So yeah. Again with the answer. I'm a long winded person. I'm sorry. You're fine.

Stevenson [00:33:16] You're fine. So when we think about like the current. Right. The recent reality, the black reality TV shows, TV shows that you watch. How did their behavior on screen

make you feel like compared to when you were a child? Did those black women on TV? Like, do they still influence your behavior at all?

Participant C [00:33:48] I'll definitely say that. They try to influence me not to behave that way, but in the way like, okay, for instance, like. The images of the still, for instance, whether that be their hair or their makeup or their body or their clothes. Does that influence me? Yes. Does it influence me as much as it did when I was a child? No. Okay. But it definitely does influence me on top of like Instagram culture in general right now. Yeah, it's just like social media in general and just you see so many images of what should could be or should be. And it's hard not to internalize that. Yeah, at least for me, it is hard not to internalize that like, you know, just regular things. Everybody got a bus now for each week, so you feel like you need a bus now, 40 years later. Everybody got their lashes always done. So you feel like you have to. You know what I mean? Show up like that. So I definitely think. Yeah, I definitely think it influences my standard of beauty for sure. Okay. And what I. See. It definitely influences my friendships and my lack of interest, cause I just I just see women do some crazy things, whether it be in reality or like on reality T.V. or in real life. Um, so. It makes me a little. Cautious, I would say, or mindful when I'm pursuing relationships with people, especially black women. And I hate to say that, but you always have in the back of your mind like she's catty or going to try to say something that's going to come from me. That's what at least what I think. And I feel like that's definitely has been influenced by reality television.

Stevenson [00:36:06] That's interesting.

Participant C [00:36:08] Yeah. And I've talked to black women who feel the same. And so I do think maybe it's by subconsciously. Picking up those. Well, pick it up. Those characteristics and then. The flip side of that, that's like being cautious of other black women because we are scared that they may carry the characteristics and some of them too, which is kind of a fortunate. I don't know because I don't know. So, yeah, I do think it definitely influences my behavior now and like what I kind of want my life to be. Unfortunately.

Stevenson [00:36:57] I can see that. I can see that.

Participant C [00:37:01] Mm.

Stevenson [00:37:04] All right. All right. All right. So, um. Did. I guess, like do you now? Ever choose to. This is like a preference question. Like, do you ever choose like, go back and watch like the old, I guess old 2000, like shows, Like I love New York, I like Flavor of Love and is like, stick with the, um, like the newer recent, like early television shows.

Participant C [00:37:42] So I definitely go back and watch them. Like if I'm in a mood, like I've gone back and watched the whole from start to finish, um, all the seasons available. Real Housewives of Atlanta, all of them. All of them. And I just did that recently. In the past two years. Oh, oh, Kobe I would say definitely allow me to do that more for sure. Got me interested in doing it. I recently also started to watch the game again, um, which isn't a reality T.V. show, but, you know, just a black T.V. show that I started to watch like the also in the newer episodes. And then I definitely, when they put they just go on and loses it all Seasons of Bad Girls Club,

Hulu and Peacock. So I definitely watch them from start to finish. It was also season of seasons I hadn't seen, so I watched them and then. That's that's you know, that's not it. But yes, answer your question. I guess we go back. It was the outer.

Stevenson [00:38:54] I feel that. I still think there's like. You still see a lot of the same traits passed on throughout the reality television generations, which makes it kind of is what it is. So, yeah. So let's let's get a little bit deeper into it. So I just want to like, encourage you to because you, like, still do think or you still do watch a lot of like black reality television. If you can think of like one black female character from any one of these shows, right? Mm hmm. Um, how would you describe her and, like, what makes you. Think of her like that.

Participant C [00:39:52] And the one that's come in most to my is Christian. And Tommy, I would think, to describe Christian as being someone that's hurt. She seems like someone who's been through immense trauma and pain. Someone who has had to defend herself to survive. He. Someone who's surviving and not thriving. Um. So I just look at it as a really sad situation because I do know women personally who just allow a man to bring them down so bad to the point that they feel like they're nothing or not worth anything or. Or. Just a little themselves. So when I see her, I just see that and see. Like I was just saying, all of those things kind of compile into one person as she's the outcome, you know what I mean, man? Okay, So yeah. And then and the other one, I mean, her name's Tommy. She I would describe as being someone who was aggressive, loud. I do kind of like her just because I'd be feeling like to a certain extent. She's real and. She's like, Not for the petty, stupid shit. Unless you ever invite her to be a part of it. But she's not asking for it. You know what I mean? Yeah. I also feel like that comes with age as well. Like she's older than a lot of the girls on the show. So that may just come with her being a wiser. But yeah, I really like Tommy. I feel like she's a. She does a lot of hip hop as well. And so I feel like she's always been the type of person to. React a little outlandish, but when you think about it in terms of like a what she's gone through and B, some of the stuff you've probably seen and then see like. How is it that the world is kind of telling her to me? Then I feel like you can understand her a little bit more. I can. I have 2 seconds. I'm going to call really quick. Yeah.

Stevenson [00:42:44] So we were just talking about, uh, well, I guess we're going to finish that question. Yeah, I guess that was it. So I'm kind of trying to gain a holistic view at this point. So how do you compare your first experiences with black reality television? It's all the kind of shows that we've talked about too, like how you view it now, like what's changed or what's stayed the same?

Participant C [00:43:17] Um, if anything, I feel like the only thing that's probably changed is. The stuff that they're able to say. I know. I've been watching The Real Housewives of Potomac and they deal with colorism. They talk a lot about colorism on their show because they have some ladies who are lighter skinned and some who are darker skinned. And the perceptions of them are totally different. And there's been multiple incidents where they've done the exact same thing. But the darker skinned woman is like, be in doubt about it, And then the lighter skinned women, it's just like, Oh, but that's okay. Specifically speaking about a physical incident. So both of them were aggressive. Both the darker skinned women and the lighter skinned women were aggressors in the situation and. Like. We're like I agitating something. I will say. All right. The darker skinned one day incident. She was more so defending herself because it was two women

arguing and. The second woman has said something a little outlandish, but she kept saying she kept baiting her to hit her. She was like, Hit me. So if you tell somebody to keep hitting you here, you invited me to hit you. I'm hit you. You know, so but she was beaten down for that as she was like all your regrets. She's kicked off the show because of it. Yes. Okay. So fast forward to this season. A lighter skinned woman did a similar thing. It was a similar actually, because she was they were arguing verbally. She looked about herself. First of all, she started the argument and for no reason she was just in the other ladies business. And it just so happened the lady that she was being aggressive towards was a darker skinned lady. Hmm. Okay. So she throws a drink on this girl, then proceeds to throw her purse at her, gets up, and attempts to hit her like security is holding her back on this. And it's just. Wow, craziness right in the premises. Another large scale woman. So it's a darker skinned one because after she'd gone to drink or had a dark skin, woman got it and was like, I'm going to fuck you up like it's about to be is about to be real bad for you, you know, come on back and forth. And it got real nasty. And another lighter skinned woman will say to the darker skin, woman, why are you being the aggressor? You're agitating the situation. Just leave it alone. Leave it on my weekend. Which is the one drink on me. You also tell her I'll leave it alone. She didn't talk about this with y pad, just leaving it alone. But even if she wasn't, those lighter skinned woman wasn't big enough. Or is she still on the show? Still on the reunion? Still didn't have to make this huge, big public apology like they made the other woman do. So it's definitely a issue of colorism on the show. But back in the day, I feel like it wasn't talked about. And so now that, you know, people have a consciousness of what Colourism is and how it operates, it's easier to point out, right? So I feel like in that way shows have definitely changed and like the consent and the manner in which they give the consent because it just can't be. But then I say that. But then on the flipside of that, you have shows like all the shows on The Social Network, who they kind of have this unfiltered, raw.

Stevenson [00:47:25] Mum.

Participant C [00:47:27] Approach. So. I do think mainstream, like I said, love of hip hop. They don't have the same beefs that they used to have and as substantial as they used to be in Real Housewives, the same. So I feel like the only thing that may have changed is it's not as. Popular to be. Like we can't have a show like Bad Girls Club. In today's day and age on, like, syndicated television. You know what I mean?

Stevenson [00:48:00] Okay. Okay.

Participant C [00:48:02] Commercial breaks. And we can have it on a platform like zoos because they have creative control. But as far as like how big it is going to be on oxygen, something like that would never been a game. Or even the networks that carry shows like reality TV shows are like rebranding themselves to being like this clean cut image because everyone is so hyper aware and wanting to point out something wrong. So I feel like they got to be a little bit more on their PS and Qs, and because of that it makes reality television a lot less raw and no filter. Yeah. Also come out since I was a child. Like it's come to my attention at least that a majority of these reality shows are scripted. And if they are scripted, like I say, they put their message. Like in real life, you're not hanging around somebody that you don't like every single day. That's just not even realistic. But that's the type of situations they put them in specifically to agitate. So I feel like now, even with, like the love of hip hop's and The Real Housewives and the

Basketball Wives and shows like that, it shows more of their personal life and less. Drama. If the drama comes out, they definitely, definitely, definitely use it and it'll be three episodes still of the same situation. Each episode, you only get so far with the conversation. You know what I mean? So yeah, I definitely think they have been a little bit more mindful with. How they look. People are just really concerned about their image and how people perceive them. Now more than ever. So I think that has changed the ways people go on TV and just do whatever while out.

Stevenson [00:49:58] I see that. I see now I can I can see how you get to that conclusion to.

Participant C [00:50:06] Yeah.

Stevenson [00:50:08] Well, okay, so. The last question I have for you is, so when you were a child, right, watching reality television and the black reality television, did you ever understand, like the stereotypical nature of the black women that you would see in reality television, but if not like, when did you come to this realization?

Participant C [00:50:43] I definitely came to this realization in my older age, like coming to college and being around people who don't behave that way and that and learning. Well, when I say I was around people who'd been that way and didn't behave that way, but. Not being so absorbed in it. I kind of felt like when I was in high school and elementary school and middle school that I had to become that because that's all that was surrounding me. That's what we would watching on TV. That's what everybody told me I needed to be. So now that when I came to college, people just naturally anyways, because I was going into adulthood, kind of stopped doing that. So you kind of just form your own opinions about yourself and about the world. So I say. Yeah, I was really helped me realize how harmful it was. I had never thought about it in that way. Obviously, I knew the older I got how it could be harmful to see these two women on TV behaving like this. I never really thought about it in terms of how harmful it is, how it's informing our next generation and how they should behave and act and carry themselves. Especially revolving around conflict. But. I don't know, because it also makes me think of a really great point I like. Black people. I have adopted this very defensive and aggressive way to approach conflict, because typically, historically, I won't say all, but most, like our grandparents in that generation, didn't partake in that conflict. Or you know what I mean? Weren't allowed to portray themselves in that way. And then you have. If I'm right, because I also think that plays a part into it as well, just in like the verbiage. And that kind of informed our like parents generation, right? Yeah. And so then you have reality television on top of hip hop, on top of black people feeling like they haven't been able to respond to conflict and raising their children to respond to conflict. I know my mom, when I was a child, she always told me if somebody's hitting them back. Right. Or if somebody. Like says they're going to hate you. You don't wait for them. You hit them first. That was always our thing. And so I always like I said, though, like I had to be this person who I truly knew I wasn't. Um, so you I think I think your first question, but I hope that I answered it in a roundabout way. You did?

Stevenson [00:53:56] You did. So I thank you for giving me your perspective. I really appreciate it. And I'm going to stop the recording right here.

Participant D's Oral History Transcription

Stevenson [00:00:01] So it's nice to meet you though. I thank you for volunteering your time with me today. Like I said, this oral history is to help me with my project. And my project is about black female stereotypes on reality television, and like black reality television. So, to just jump in, what was like your first black reality TV show that you watched? Or maybe if it maybe it's not like a black reality TV show, but a reality TV show that had like, a significant amount of black people within the cast?

Participant D [00:01:02] Well, the first one, I remember as a kid, I wasn't allowed to watch it, but like, I heard about it through my siblings, and my parents was like Real Housewives of Atlanta. Like, any of the Real Housewives pretty much. But yeah, that was definitely my first exposure to that kind of stuff. So I never really watched it. It was never something that really catered towards me and like my interest, but I could see how that and just reality TV in general is like, can be addicting or like can be alluring because it's usually put in a very chaotic way. So to make it you know, drum up the drama and stuff.

Stevenson [00:01:38] I feel that. I feel like a lot of a lot of people would definitely agree with that. Other than like, Real Housewives, were you ever around any other kind of black reality TV shows? Or was that like the only one that your siblings watched?

Participant D [00:02:01] I'm trying to remember, I don't think they really watched a lot of like black reality TV, but they'd watch like the black dramas like any Tyler Perry series. Yeah. Like, I remember, my parents really liked power and stuff like that. And there's like one other one I can't remember. But like shows like that were like, really dramatic and like black people and black issues. So yeah, that's kind of like an extension of the reality TV show. But still a lot of those same stereotypes you would see in both.

Stevenson [00:02:28] Definitely. I couldn't agree more. So within that how would you describe your experiences with that same kind of group, or genre of television? Like did you ever watch power? Or another popular one was Empire? I know, I was a fan. But like, like, how would you describe your experience with it?

Participant D [00:03:08] I'd say I'd honestly have a pretty minimal experience, especially with the reality TV genre, and the like, drama genre. But I think my only like real exposure of me sitting down and watching it would be like those YouTube compilations like, oh, top 10 Most drama moments from level blah, blah, blah. And like, because it's very short, it's very simple, and I don't really have to make as much of a time commitment as watching like full length episodes on some subscription service or TV or whatever. But like, I would see the clips of it, where it's like, someone's throwing a bottle at somebody else, or somebody's calling somebody a bitch, you know, And that made me think "that's enough."

Stevenson [00:03:48] Yeah, the episodes are pretty long. I think like the average time was like, 45 minutes. Yeah, that's a long time to watch one episode, because that's a lot. That's a lot. So just like thinking about it's like these first encounters that you've had with these kinds of

television shows or even like these short YouTube clips. About how old were you when that kind of started?

Participant D [00:04:24] Maybe like 10 or 12. Like somewhere in that range? So not like super super young, but still young enough where I wasn't allowed to watch it. Yeah, but even as I got older and like I could have watched it if I want it to I never really gravitated towards that genre.

Stevenson [00:04:45] Why?

Participant D [00:04:46] Its a good question. I don't know. Not even just black reality TV shows. I feel like reality TV in general, it's not really reality a lot of the times. Like a lot of it's mainly produced and even still a lot of the characters that you would see black or otherwise were just not very appealing to me. Like I could see the entertainment value, but it wasn't really something that I wanted to really engage in.

Stevenson [00:05:12] Okay, okay. And what do you mean? Like, by engage?

Participant D [00:05:18] Like, I didn't want to watch the TV shows, because I knew like it would get me stressed. Like, I'm seeing two people arguing with each other. I'm gonna be like, "Oh my God, they're both so stupid." You know, so yeah, it just never really entertained me.

Stevenson [00:05:34] I get it. It doesn't float your boat. Um, I know there have been a couple of times, like moments, where I would see a black girl and television show. I'd be like, wow, you know, this is... that's out there. Like someone's like, behavior. I know, one of them that I found particularly interesting was and it got turned into like, a really big gif, I think was on Bad Girls Club one season was the lady in the nightgown was like "I don't get no sleep cuz of yall!"

Participant D [00:06:17] Oh yeah, that was pretty popular.

Stevenson [00:06:20] That's just like something that I remember from it. Do you have like, a favorite clip that like you would associate with like any of this genre of TV?

Participant D [00:06:32] Well, I think the one that you just said was a pretty good summation of what could happen. That one, I didn't even realize those Bad Girls Club until you said that, but that one was like, everywhere on the internet. So it's like clips like that you always see of like, some black girl acting "crazy." You know.

Stevenson [00:06:55] Oh my god. Okay, so you just like kind of mentioned these clips that we would all see that like it, there'd be like some kind of some black girl acting out there in some kind of flamboyant manner. Would you categorize that as, like, loud or ill-mannered? Or was it just like, some people really do just act like that? Like, is that the norm for some people? Or to you, did you see it as like, "wow, that's not okay."

Participant D [00:07:40] Um, mean both. This I knew this question will come up. So I wanted to prepare like as nice big ole answer. So I feel like when you see these reality TV shows, especially ones that purposefully cast a lot of black women, like Real Housewives, blah, blah,

blah. Usually they're casting these women that have these sort of personalities that can be categorized as like loud or obnoxious or confrontational things that they know that audiences already perceive with black women. Especially ones that are already on reality TV, so they're bringing the audience what they want to see, like these loud black woman, they feel like "Oh, she's so loud, just like all black woman" and things like that. So I feel like reality TV is a slippery slope when you separate it from like what you see with actual black woman in society. Because like, when watching reality TV shows, you see all these loud, out there women as you want to put up. And you know, they're grown women, they're different than like teenagers or whatever. So there's the argument where it's like, "oh, they can be ill-mannered", blah, blah, blah, blah. But then there's also that, like, subliminal stereotype that's already there of the loud black woman. So anytime you see a reality TV show where a woman is arguing, and like standing her ground, it's automatically assumed like, Oh, she's just allowed black woman she's just being out there, being black, you know, being blah. But oh my god, it just lost my train of thought. I was on a roll. Oh, but um, it's like, anyone can be loud and stand their ground and be assertive, but it's like when a black woman does it whether she's right or wrong, it's automatically viewed in the negative. But if someone like have another race does it, they're strong. There is more positive attributes.

Stevenson [00:09:31] Okay. Okay. I see. I see.

Participant D [00:09:35] Does that make any sense? I don't know if I explained anything of that right.

Stevenson [00:09:39] I'm understanding. So it sounds like the "confrontational" behavior that would be seen in any kind of like these black reality TV shows would be positive within another race behaving like that. But because they're black woman, it's automatically negative.

Participant D [00:10:10] Yes. You explained that a lot better.

Stevenson [00:10:14] That's deep. Okay, okay. Alright. So going with that, how would you personally process these images that you've seen? Like, how does that affect you as a black woman?

Participant D [00:10:39] Okay, so like as a as a kid, and even now like I see these clips of like all these shows, on reality TV show, it's always black woman at an acting a certain way that like loud, rude, blah, blah, blah. And so, I know I'm not like that, but this is like all you're seeing in that genre for black woman. So that's like the representation we're getting. And the thing is that I've noticed like with people of my generation, even like back in high school, middle school, like you would see kids trying to emulate those behaviors like that rude, obnoxious, "arrogant" but you would see the kids like modeling that behavior. And then those same kids would look at me someone who doesn't act like that and be like, "oh, like, she doesn't act black." So it's this whole like thing, because I've always been considered, like, not black enough, or too white, or this shit like that. So it's like, because I don't act this way that these same kids have been fed, they think I'm not black enough because I don't associate with that type of black woman. Does that makes sense? Am I crazy?

Stevenson [00:11:50] Absolutely! You're not crazy at all! No, no. So, wow. Okay, keeping that in mind, of the adults that you saw when you were a child when this would happen, did they take on the behaviors of that stereotype? Like the loud, the just mal-tempered, ill-mannered, you know, the kind of stereotype that black these types of television will try to push? And/ or would they take on more of the "calm" or "collected" type you know, the types of behavior that wouldn't necessarily be associated with that, how you described yourself?

Participant D [00:13:05] Um, well, the main people I knew within my circle that watched it would be like my parents and like my older siblings, and they weren't like that. They just watched it like for entertainment. But I would be lying if I said I didn't have family, especially like aunts and uncles, who may or may not watch this, but still could be described as being loud or blah, blah, blah, blah. But it's not like reality TV made them that way. It's more like that's just how they were raised and that's just their personalities. So it's like when people meet them, like, if anybody were to meet them, they'd be like, "Oh, you're like this, which means you're this stereotype because you happen to be the same."

Stevenson [00:14:15] I'm gonna have to sit with that. Well, okay. So, what I'm thinking is that this is getting like so off topic. But, this this is one of the things that I had to come in realize and kind of define my project with because now we're talking about two really similar topics, but still kind of different. So what I'm thinking is within the subject of black reality television and how they influence behavior, my hypothesis would be that as women watch these black woman behaving like this on TV, that that would influence their behavior. Now, we're kind of getting into a conversation about how people act like that, without seeing that article exactly like without seeing any of it. And I love it.

Participant D [00:15:36] Yeah, well, if you want to focus on that sector of it to like, support your project, we can, because I kind of teased at it with when I was talking about my peers that I grew up with, because some of them like do have family that are like that, which would obviously influence how they behave. But I feel like when they watch shows like that at such a young age, it definitely, like enforced that kind of behavior.

Stevenson [00:015:58] I could see that, okay.

Participant D [00:16:01] Because like, if you grew up a certain way, that's one thing. But if you are seeing this and like, "Oh, look at all these black women that are rich and successful, and make so much money and have their own TV show and get to drink all the time," and blah, blah, blah, they're gonna see that and be like, "Oh, that's cool." And like, if they see them like fighting like, "Oh, she's assertive, and she's taking her ground and you don't take nobody bullshit." That's the things that they're gonna see and implement in their like persona.

Stevenson [00:16:28] Right. Right. So, um, we've kind of already talked about, like, how you would see these clips of these black shows and other black reality TV shows, and wouldn't necessarily take on that behavior, and that was like, as a child. How would you describe, like, your subsequent experiences with these kinds of TV shows, so like, growing up and beyond childhood, even like until now?

Participant D [00:17:14] I mean, now I feel like I kind of look at it the same way, in a weird way, where it's like, I see the entertainment in it, and I get why people watch it. But I would never look up to these women per se. Like, I wouldn't want to be them. Like I have no desire to emulate their behavior, not necessarily saying it's bad, because you know, they're grown women, they can do whatever they want in their grown lives. But it's not something I idolize or want for myself, so I have no need to use it.

Stevenson [00:17:44] I see that. I see that. Talk more about that. So like, why isn't that attractive to you?

Participant D [00:18:00] Hmm, now I gotta sit with that. You got me stumped.

Stevenson [00:18:05] And it's okay. Like, if you think through it, there's no, like, correct answer to this. It's just your perspective.

Participant D [00:18:16] Well, I guess one part of it is that all of the women that they usually show would be like, rich, they'd be the wives of some famous basketball player or whatever. I didn't on watch it. But they'd be really rich and like, live really opulent lives. And I've never really had a desire to be rich and live in like, glamour, and we're all these luxury things. So that was one part of it. Just never being never wanting that, that excess. Okay, saying I don't want money. But you know, that was one part of it. And I don't know, I guess we can tie it back to the behaviors. It was never something that I saw as myself. So I knew, like they represented people who were different from me just at a basic personality level. So I never really felt a connection to them. And I never really like, not necessarily sympathize with their position, because I feel like that's too strong of a word, but I never really wanted to put myself in their shoes.

Stevenson [00:19:18] I see what you're saying. I see what you're saying. So it sounds like...

Participant D [00:19:24] Their lifestyle just didn't attract me. Yeah.

Stevenson [00:19:28] I get it. I get it. I get it. A lot of people do a lot for money.

Participant D [00:19:40] Yeah, and the thing is it also never really, I haven't really seen much of the show or like what they do, but I see them like sitting and drinking and talking a lot and like having dinner or brunch or whatever. And it never really seems like they do anything. Like the whole thing is that they're housewives. So it's like, what are you doing? Like I always knew I wanted to career so I couldn't picture myself living that lifestyle, and then hanging out with people I don't like.

Stevenson [00:20:05] That makes, I see how you're tying those things together now. I see it. I see it. I'm getting it, I'm getting it. So when you would see them, I don't want to say like they're doing nothing because I don't know. It might just been scripted. Maybe they only film that part where they're not doing anything. But, what did you think of the black woman that you would see? Obviously like, yeah, like "you don't have a real job." Like, how else would you like describe them?

Participant D [00:20:48] Rich. I mean, that's pretty obvious, but a rich, conniving. I don't know the right word, but gossip-y, talk-behind-back-y. I'm trying to think like, it's kind of hard since I didn't watch most episodes, but...

Stevenson [00:21:21] Or even like the clips that you've seen a woman who would present a certain way? How would you describe that?

Participant D [00:21:37] I mean, like you said earlier confrontational, but not necessarily in that, like, black negative stereotype way, but just in general, since they were they, they always had like verbal arguments, and they weren't, like, shy about it, you know, which I did. Like, like, I think just as a person, you shouldn't be able to stand your own battles and you know, not take shit, especially if you're passionate about something. But that seems like a constant and like every episode, you know,

Stevenson [00:22:04] Oh, okay. Okay, all right. All right. That's fair. Um, so when you got older, right? And if and when you still see like these kinds of clips, or like these kinds of shows, how does that make, like what you see reflected there and make you feel now compared to like, when you were a child?

Participant D [00:22:37] I mean, now I have, like, even less disregard for it. I mean, even more disregard for it than I would as a child, like as a child. I'm like, Ooh, what's this? It's interesting. I kind of want to watch it. But now it's just like, Oh, next thing move along. Like I don't want to see that

Stevenson [00:22:58] okay, Okay. Okay. Okay. Is there like, a particular reason that like, you, like, that's just not for your liking? Is it the same reason? Like I like when you were a child? So I know we talked about, um, you know, I so what you would see and who you are just two really different people? It would you say that it's like the same reason why you don't particularly feel any kind of way about watching these kind of shows.

Participant D [00:23:41] Yeah, that's a that's definitely part of it. And then I feel like that's like the main part. But then like, I guess other stuff would be it just just makes me uncomfortable to watch grown women argue? Like, it's not the same entertainment value to me as it could have been as a kid. It just doesn't really do anything for me. It just kind of not makes me sad because that's the wrong word. But it just makes me like, this is the situation is sad

Stevenson [00:24:10] Okay, okay. Okay. All right. All right. All right.

Participant D [00:24:19] Cuz again, I don't remember much but it seemed like a lot of the arguments were just over petty things or miscommunications or misunderstanding. So it just seemed really tired watching that over and over again.

Stevenson [00:24:33] Like, we've been over this this. So she'll say something to you. You'll say something back and we have seasons of this and this is what you do. Like so of these, I know we talked about Real Housewives. Um, and I guess it's just like a preference question. So of when you would pass by your older siblings and maybe like watching whatever shows that they're watching, remember, I'm an older one. Probably when I was like, I don't know, four was like flavor I love. And I love New York. Or I know. Like a 2010 version is like Basketball Wives. Oh. Did you ever like pass by shows like that?

Participant D [00:25:36] Like all those sound very familiar

Stevenson [00:25:40] Yeah, well, it's all part of that. era which, you know, people have either very strongly for very strong weekends, and it doesn't seem like there's ever a middle ground is weird. So, um, let's see. So when you would like, pass by your older siblings, and maybe watching this? Did you ever, like, sit down and watch it with them? Or would you pass by and you're like, oh my gosh, it's so stupid. What are you doing?

Participant D [00:26:22] More of the second one. Like I see a glance of it. But usually nothing interesting would be happening that just be talking at that point. No fights yet. But yeah, usually they wouldn't let me stay and watch it with them. Because like, I had older brothers, so they never wanted to let me do anything. And then yeah, my parents would watch it like later at night. So I wasn't I wasn't allowed. Yeah, it's fine.

Stevenson [00:26:49] Good thing, a good thing, but I don't know. I don't know. So of these things that were like, that you would see or like, even of the clips that you would see, now. We've talked about, like, how you conceptualize them? And what kinds of like categories you put them in. But what do you see them as, like, empowering at all? Or, like only working toward the demise of the people who they have, like these, these negative stereotypes against?

Participant D [00:027:41] I wouldn't necessarily say they're causing any demise. But I could see how they could be empowering. Just seeing like, wealthy black woman in power and having their own show. And having like, a lot of power over, you know, what happens in their lives. Even as housewives, you know? So like, even just having that luxury of being a housewife, that's, I can see how that can be seen as empowering. Like, yeah, you made it through the system, you're successful. Now you have all these riches, and you can relax. Like, I can definitely see that. And I can also see the other side of the coin, where it's like, it's just another show about black woman being loud and causing fights. Oh, there we go. Another part of the stereotype. Another thing people can say, Oh, look at all these black woman being aggressive or whatever. So I can see both of them. And it was not a concrete answer. But no, I could I could see it both ways.

Stevenson [00:28:44] I get it, I get it. I keep having the thought of us going back to I know you like hinted at the issue of when, and I don't know, I don't know, like what is keeps, like being reflected in my mind still, of when you were a child and you wouldn't take on this our times that you've seen that. Somehow or another people wouldn't associate you not being black enough. Say more about how that made you feel or like how you see the world differently.

Participant D [00:29:28] Um, well, it didn't make me feel very good. Uncomfortable is not the word. I'm trying to think of the word very, like. Icky because it's like, who are you to tell me I'm not black enough, just because I don't act a certain way around talk a certain way. Or I don't listen to this type of music or etc, etc. Especially by your own people, you know, like, whoa, whoa, whoa, no black people. Because I went to school like 99.999%, black. Okay, it's more like a solid 95%. And I'm talking like elementary, middle school and high school until I came here, like, all black kids are ill. So it's like. So first of all, we're talking about the reality TV part, I was already a target to not be one of the black black people. Because I was smart. I was one of the gifted kids. So I'm not saying not saying it mainly on the educational system. I get it, I get I get it, but like being labeled the gifted kid or like, Oh, she's smart, bla, bla, bla, or Oh, she reads well, she talks white. It's already like those things that were being directed towards me by these other black kids who may not have been as academically successful. But that's a whole nother thing as a part of the system. We could talk all day about that. But so it's like, I'm already being a target for not fitting a stereotype, whether that be negative or positive. And then like, when you get to middle school, where you see really a lot of kids trying to find themselves and like trying to take on these stereotypes. I feel like that was like the main point in time. Well, I'd say more of high school, but middle school was like when you start to see kids trying to emulate these behaviors, like talking back to their teachers are things like that are causing fights or fighting over boys, if like, like verbally and physically. It's like a lot of those behaviors you see on the TV shows, and some of them will even talk about the shows like during lunch or whatever. Especially like during high school. And then it's like, by the time I got to high school, it's like, like, I have my solid group of friends. But it was still like, it was like it felt like my friends and then everybody else who were acting that way. So it's like, because we didn't act that same way. And we weren't part of the pod, emulating these behaviors, okay? They're like, Oh, you're you're white, or you're trying to not be black because you don't fit this stereotype. So it's like, these kids would see those type of shows basically reinforcing like, Oh, this is a black person, like, this is how black people act. This is a real black person, even if like not within the shows, but even if we expand it to other things, like rappers or whatever, like, Oh, if you don't listen to bla bla bla, that are even black like your black cards were furloughed. Like that's a whole joke. But like how? How much of a joke really is it? Its the whole thing. Yeah.

Stevenson [00:06:20] When you were a child did you understand that that's the ideology that was being put forth or did you just like or did you just think like "OK well I'm like this and my friends are like this they're like that." Did you understand that there was like any kind of underlying stereotypical behavior and reinforcement that was happening or did you just come to realize that like once you became adult?

Participant D [00:06:17] I mean, well as a kid like that 10 to 12 age I was talking about I didn't realize like about the angry black woman stereotype or the loud aggressive black woman stereotype. That was probably like middle school so probably like 14 or 15 that really started seeing that like in media or whatever. I don't know exactly when I found out but that was like the area where I came more like aware of those things. And yeah even back then at the 10 to 12 age it always felt like "OK I'm like this and they're like this." I thought it was just because they're older and they're grown but even like as I'm getting older, I'm like no that's just them or that's that specific type of person but that's not me still.

Stevenson [00:33:46] Okay, well alright. I want to thank you for volunteering your time with this process. I really value your opinion and open way of expressing it to me. We can stop the recording here.

Participant D [00:33:56] Yeah, no problem. And if you need to go over anything else or have another project, just let me know.