'Is light still right' : the perception of stereotype of light-skinned black women versus dark-skinned black women in the 1990's situation comedies Living Single and Family Matters

Umbiroo A. Swartz-Karuaihe

Follow this and additional works at: https://trace.tennessee.edu/utk_gradthes

Recommended Citation

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Graduate School at TRACE: Tennessee Research and Creative Exchange. It has been accepted for inclusion in Masters Theses by an authorized administrator of TRACE: Tennessee Research and Creative Exchange. For more information, please contact trace@utk.edu.
To the Graduate Council:

I am submitting herewith a thesis written by Umbiroo A. Swartz-Karuaihe entitled "Is light still right': the perception of stereotype of light-skinned black women versus dark-skinned black women in the 1990's situation comedies Living Single and Family Matters." I have examined the final electronic copy of this thesis for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Science, with a major in Communication.

Dhyana Ziegler, Major Professor

We have read this thesis and recommend its acceptance:

Barbara Moore, Jeffery S. Wilkinson

Accepted for the Council:

Carolyn R. Hodges

Vice Provost and Dean of the Graduate School

(Original signatures are on file with official student records.)
To The Graduate Council:

I am submitting herewith a thesis written by Umbiroom A. Swartz-Karuaihe entitled “Is Light Still Right: The Perception of Stereotype of Light-Skinned Black Women versus Dark-Skinned Black Women in the 1990’s Situation Comedies, Living Single and Family Matters.” I have examined the final copy of this thesis for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Science, with a major in Communications.

Dhyana Ziegler, Major Professor

We have read this thesis and recommend its acceptance:

[Signatures]

Accepted for the Council:

Associate Vice Chancellor and Dean of The Graduate School
'Is Light Still Right'
The Perception of Stereotype of Light-skinned Black Women versus
Dark-Skinned Black Women in the 1990's Situation Comedies
Living Single and Family Matters

A Thesis
Presented for the
Master of Science
Degree
The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Umbiroo A. Swartz-Karuaihe
August 1997
DEDICATION

This research study is dedicated to my late parents, Veneruru Amalia Karuaihe and Johannes Paulus Karuaihe, as well as my sister Constance Karuaihe. My mother was indeed a remarkable woman with exceptional vision. She had courage and strong spirits. Paying tribute to this brave African woman recently at her funeral, someone said: “she was black and she was white; she was a man and she was a women.” Yes, that is my mom. She was biracial as a result of German Colonialism. And turning her fortunes from domestic servant to entrepreneur through sheer hard work, earned her that last remark which might sound chauvinistic, but isn’t.

The charismatic J.P Karuaihe, my dad, was highly intelligent, loving and those close to him called him the Morning Star. He was a Morning Star because he made sure that he was awake before the sun came up. That way he remained one step ahead of the rest. I am privileged to have been born to parents so great. They remain my dream team.

Connie, thanks for helping me grow into someone as positive, determined and success-oriented as you. You have been a shining example of excellence, my role model and most definitely instrumental in my education. Thanks for standing by me those days in New York when I was still young and unaware. And lots of thanks for making my life at UTK worthwhile.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Thanks so much for making my research study possible. Ruhonjo that money helped a lot; Kaiikona, you brought home here; Kanono those perfumes lifted my spirits, so did your never ending courage; Pera, for turning Riko into a man; Fonnie, for encouraging me to study since grade school, even though I did not listen; Noko, for your strong belief in me, your love and friendship; Keitjie, being an example of perseverance; Seuua, my best friend, my significant other, my twin, I love you!, German, for continuing the Karuaihe legacy of courage; Sigrid, for saving Tai’s life and loving us so much; Shikari for your confidence in me and helping me out at S-11. Kaundjopie, for making sure my babies join me; Paul for keeping Uma, the business and family together. My greatest appreciation goes to my four lovely kids, Katataizire, Rikotoka, Ujama and Takie for their patience and unconditional love. And my late mother-in-law, Theresia Swartz, always my guarding angel. To my wind beneath my wings, Chompunuch “apple” Punyapiroje, for your friendship, so true, your wisdom and being a shoulder to cry on. And helping out with the thesis. Gratitude also goes to Scottie, Michael, Letearf and Toure my African American family for love and support, Aruna and Brisa for your friendship, as well as Kitongo Mugemuzi, for your selflessness and fixing those bikes! Special thanks to Dr. C.W Minkel for believing in me and having me attend UT. Dr. Ziegler, for encouraging me and proving such a great and worthwhile example to follow. Your optimism and spirituality are contagious! Dr. Moore thanks for your open door policy and that comforting smile. Dr. Wilkinson, thanks for making
my first semester so much easier. Lots of thanks to the great moderator Lee Greenwood Scurry, you are simply the best. Finally, I would not be here if it was not for the Namibian government. Thanks.
ABSTRACT

The research explored perceptions of stereotypes of Light-Skinned black women versus Dark-Skinned black women in the 1990's television situation comedies, *Living Single* and *Family Matters*. This study was designed to discover information about stereotypes of black females and generate questions to pursue further research. The method of analysis for the study was two-fold: Focus Groups and Survey Research. The purpose of the study was to assess individual's perceptions of stereotypes of Light-Skinned versus Dark-Skinned black female stereotypes in television situation comedies *Living Single* and *Family Matters* and examine how those perceptions related to race. Fifteen participants were divided into two groups by race and each group was led by the same moderator, through four components during a maximum of two hour session. The participants were administered a Perception Assessment Survey, then a Pre-Test Questionnaire after which they viewed two thirty-minutes situation comedies. They were given Post-Test Questionnaires after viewing the two focus groups programs and led into a discussion by a moderator where they answered open ended questions. The research found that race determined to a certain extend how the two focus group participants perceived Light-Skinned versus Dark-Skinned black female stereotypes in the two situation comedies.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

## CHAPTER | PAGE

### I. INTRODUCTION
- Statement of the Problem .......................................................... 5
- Method of Analysis ......................................................................... 7
- Purpose and Significance of the study ........................................... 8
- Definitions of Terms ..................................................................... 9
- Organization of Chapters ............................................................. 10

### II. REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE
- Television’s Effect and Perception ................................................ 12
- History of Black Women Stereotypes ............................................. 14
- Black Women on Television Situation Comedies .......................... 15
- Colorism in the Black Community ............................................... 19
- Passing ......................................................................................... 19
- Denouncing Black ........................................................................ 21
- Beauty ......................................................................................... 22
- Psychological Effects ..................................................................... 24
- Summary ...................................................................................... 31

### III. METHODOLOGY
- Method of Analysis ..................................................................... 32
- Focus Groups ............................................................................... 34
- Moderator ..................................................................................... 41
- Research Control .......................................................................... 42

### IV. RESULTS
- Section I: Perception Assessment Survey .................................... 43
- Section II: Pre-Test Questionnaire Before Viewing the Two Television Programs ................................................................. 43
- Section III: Post-Test Questionnaire After Viewing the Two Television Programs ................................................................. 56
- Section IV: Participants’ Responses to Open Ended Questions During Audio-Taped Discussion ........................................... 57
- Section V: Participants’ Responses to Open Ended Questions During Audio-Taped Discussion ........................................... 68
V. SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, LIMITATIONS AND
RECOMMENDATIONS ......................................... 80
Conclusions................................................................ 91
Limitations of Study.................................................. 100
Recommendations for Future Research ....................... 101

BIBLIOGRAPHY .......................................................... 102

APPENDICES ............................................................. 108
Appendix A: Focus Group Screening Survey ............... 109
Appendix B: Perception Assessment Survey ................ 111
Appendix C: Questionnaires ...................................... 114
Appendix D: Audio Tape Discussion ........................... 120
Appendix E: Synopsis ............................................... 155
Appendix F: Moderator’s Script .................................. 157

VITA ........................................................................... 161
## LIST OF TABLES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TABLE</th>
<th>PAGE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Age/Race/Sex (Black (n=8), White (n=7))</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Race/Education/Working Status (Black (n=8), White (n=7))</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Race/Income (Black (n=8), White (n=7))</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Interaction with Black Female (Black (n=8), White (n=7))</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Close Black Female Friend (Black (n=8), White (n=7))</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Participants’ Time Spent Watching Television Per Week (Black (n=8), White (n=7))</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Participants’ Perception of Black Female Stereotypes in Situation Comedies (Black (n=8), White (n=7))</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Participants’ Perception of Whether Television Situation Comedies Make Distinction Between White Female and Black Female Roles (Black (n=8), White (n=7))</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Post-Test Questionnaire Family Matters Perception of Characteristics of Female Characters in Family Matters by Black Participants (Black (n=8), White (n=7))</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Post-Test Questionnaire Family Matters Perception of Characteristics of Female Characters in Family Matters by White Participants (Black (n=8), White (n=7))</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>The Most and Least Favorite Character on Family Matters (Black (n=8), White (n=7))</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Post-Test Questionnaire Living Single Perception of Characteristics of Female Characters in Living Single by Black Participants (Black (n=8), White (n=7))</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TABLE</td>
<td>PAGE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------</td>
<td>------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Post-Test Questionnaire <em>Living Single</em> Perception of Characteristics of Female Characters in <em>Living Single</em> by White Participants (Black (n=8), White (n=7)).................. 63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>The most and Least Favorite character on <em>Living Single</em> (Black (n=8), White (n=7)).................................................. 65</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

As a teacher television has frequently been blamed for many of society's ills. Television can teach aggressive and non-aggressive behavior, law breaking and enforcement, as well as racial prejudice and racial tolerance. However, what it teaches depends on the hand that controls it, whether wisely, ignorantly, innocently, or inadvertently.

David Baptiste, Jr.

Television is a major source of information and primary socializer in American society; through television we observe, transmit and reflect our valuation of society to each other (Greenberg, 1972). Hence, this medium exerts tremendous influence on the perceptions, self-concept, and behaviors of individuals (Dates, 1991; Ziegler, 1991). When the images reflected on television are negative and false, the perceptions and identity of individuals can be negative and false (Evuleocha & Ugbah, 1989). Since television serves as a mirror to society, it has reflected the social consciousness and racial conditions of the time periods in its programming (MacDonald, 1986). Historically, black males, females and children have been portrayed as coons, mammies, and pickaninnies respectively. This reflects a view of the social structure of society, by selection and presentation of its characters, according to mass media critics (Baptiste, 1986).
Clark (1969) suggests that by doing so, television has become involved in social control through non-recognition, regulation or ridicule. The Kerner Commission, formed by President Lyndon B. Johnson to study the racial incidents that took place in the country, suggested that television was one of several institutions contributing to the separation of white and black Americans (Strohman, et al., 1988). It recommended in 1968 the inclusion of more Negroes in television dramas, comedies and news programs (Strohman, et al., 1988). As more and more African Americans appeared on television, critics, particularly black organizations, protested against the negative stereotypes of blacks and the effects thereof (Cummings, 1986). Critics maintained these images, to advocates of slavery were laughable, ugly, and unlike those of whites. These images were used to control, degrade and humiliate black people (Harris, 1992 p. 47).

Furthermore, numerous research studies suggest that blacks and women in general are portrayed as less powerful and less important in stereotypical roles compared to white males (Signorielli, 1985). Therefore the black woman had to fight a double jeopardy. The late actress, Rosalind Cash, once said that it has been a struggle for a black actress in America to portray positive and accurate images as a result of untruths and stereotypes which are part of the American concept of the African American. She added that black actresses needed guts and perseverance in an industry that ignores and deplores their existence (Hill et al., 1990). Another black female stereotype that has been reported in countless magazines and some scholarly publication is the difference in portrayal of light-skinned black female roles versus dark-skinned black female roles. Ethnic Notions (1987) illustrated that the dark-skinned black women had been primarily portrayed as the portly and domineering maid. The
light-skinned black woman, on the other hand, mostly portrayed the good looking black female (Brown, 1993).

Living in a racist and sexist society is said to be one of the main reasons why lighter skinned black women are selected to portray good looking females in ads, movies, television, and music videos (Parrish, 1944; Okazawa-Rey, et al., 1987). According to Brown (1993), women with darker complexions continue to be featured primarily as mother figures in advertisements. However, if a story board calls for a young sexually appealing African-American woman, the model will more likely look like Sherry Belafonte, who is light-skinned, than Whoopi Goldberg, who is dark-skinned. He writes that black female actresses who have made breakthroughs since the inception of television were light-skinned, such as Diahann Carroll in the TV series Julia, Dorothy Dandridge in the movies, and Lena Horne in the music industry.

New York Times reporter, Charisse Jones, wrote in Glamour (1995) that if she hears that a movie follows the tired old scenario in which a light-skinned beauty is the love interest while a darker-skinned woman is the comic foil, the butt of the ugly jokes, she refuses to watch it and advocates others to do likewise.

The early movies and subsequently television programs restricted the roles of black females to maids, wet nurses, cooks, waitresses and prostitutes (Cummings, 1986). Black women on television situation comedies primarily portrayed the character of the motherly maid or shrewish mammy (Ugbah & Evuleocha, 1989). The name, mammy given to a black nursemaid during the period of slavery, subsequently came to be much more. A favorite minstrel-show character, she was hugely fat, charcoal black, and dressed in gaudy rags and a head scarf. She was usually played by a man. The most
famous *mammy* appeared in the movie *Gone With The Wind*, played by Hattie McDaniel (Comer, 1997). The *mammy* in situation comedies, usually the maid, dominated and controlled the household. She was also lovable and nurturing. Early sitcom *mammy* characters were found in *Beulah, Make Room For Daddy* and the *Amos and Andy Show* (Cummings, 1986). Other situations comedies that followed containing the *mammy* character were *That's My Mama, Good Times, Different Strokes, What's Happening* and *The Jeffersons* among others. Nell Carter of *Gimme a Break* was named by critics as America’s most famous *mammy* (Evuleocha & Ugbah, 1989). They alleged that with the introduction of her character television no longer pretended to be socially responsible (Cummings, 1986).

Television is however not the only medium perceived as perpetuating the "light is right" stereotype. The print media, including magazine covers and advertisements, billboards, films and even fiction are reported to be guilty of this practice.

Okazawa-Rey, Ward and Robinson (1987) wrote that the first published black novelist, William Wells Brown, in 1853 depicted black women as white. Beautiful black women had long, flowing hair cascading down their backs, light, clear eyes, and finely cut, well modeled features. Other novels, such as *Clotel* (Brown, 1969), *Lola Leroy* (Harper, 1971), and *The Chinaberry Tree* (Fauset, 1969), continued to depict black women in this manner.

In a related study, Michael Leslie (1995) investigated the changing image of blacks in advertisements in *Ebony* magazine from the late 1950 to 1989. He used a content analysis of paired samples from three decades, and found not only significant differences in the mix of products advertised, but also in the aesthetic qualities of
models used in the advertisements. Leslie concluded that while the civil rights revolt of the sixties, 'blackened' Ebony ads, the light skinned Eurocentric model had begun to reassert itself as the somatic norm for Ebony advertising by the late 1980s.

If the media, in general, promote light-skinned and dark-skinned black female stereotypes, then they reinforce and perpetuate a system based on a skin color hierarchy that assigns differential value, power, status, and access to resources based on skin color (Landrum-Brown, 1994). A skin color privilege stigmatize those associated with membership in the less valued skin-tone group. Hence, if television induces attitude formation toward minority groups and women through its characterization and portrayals of them, it helps to control how individuals and groups view and learn about the world. When characterization become habitual caricatures, then stereotypes results (Greenberg, et al., 1980).

Allport (1954) defined a stereotype as an exaggerated belief associated with a group of people, such as racial, ethnic, or religious. The exaggerated belief refers to the stereotyping of some groups in ways that bear absolutely no resemblance to reality. Other times, there are real cultural differences between racial and ethnic groups and some stereotypes do contain a kernel of truth (Evuleocha & Ugbah, 1989).

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The perception of light-skinned and dark-skinned black female stereotypes on television situation comedies is the main focus of this research study. Historically, the light-skinned black woman has portrayed the image of the beautiful sexually appealing black female, while the dark-skinned black female mostly portrayed the less attractive,
obese, domineering and aggressive mammy-types of roles (Brown, 1993; Parish, 1944; Cummings, 1986). Numerous studies have focused on stereotypes of black females; however, very few have investigated "colorism" in the media. Colorism involves the doctrine, practice or belief that perceived skin color is associated with an individual's or groups' innate capabilities, worth and traits (Landrum-Brown, 1994). Colorism refers to the preference for light-skinned blacks over darker skinned blacks by blacks and whites. There is a need to explore and battle colorism at various levels, particularly in media, because of the reported implications it has on individuals.

Colorism at an institutional and cultural level develops when personal opinions and individual biases are codified as norms and doctrines and then reinforced as societal behaviors and institutional practices, and this process can have a adverse effect on people's perception and interpersonal relationships (Landrum-Brown, 1994).

This study investigates and explores the images and perceptions of light-skinned black females versus dark-skinned black females on television situation comedies. Throughout the study, relevant literature was examined and questions asked in an attempt to examine and gather information about perceptions of black females in television situation comedies. This study was designed to answer the following research questions:

1. Will the black-dominated television situation comedies in the 1990's, Living Single and Family Matters, be perceived to contain instances of light-skinned black female stereotypes and dark-skinned black female stereotypes based on racial group?
2. How are light-skinned black women and dark-skinned black women’s images perceived in television situation comedies by blacks and whites, with references to positive and/or negative traits, such as good-looking, unattractive, attractive, domineering, fat, thin, average, and loud?

3. What are the overall perceptions of black female stereotypes in television situation comedies by the focus groups?

METHOD OF ANALYSIS

This research study was developed and designed to answer some questions about light-skinned black females and dark-skinned black females. Two methods were used namely focus groups and survey research. Two focus groups were assembled. Group One consisted of eight black participants and Group Two consisted of seven white participants. Each focus group was led by a moderator. The research consisted of four segments. First, participants were administered a perception assessment survey. Second, they were administered a Pre-Test questionnaire before they watched the two television situation comedies. They watched Living Single and Family Matters. The two television programs were selected, because they have many female lead characters. (A synopsis of these two programs can be found in the appendix E.) Following the viewing of both situation comedies, participants were given a Post-Test questionnaire. The last segment allowed the participants to answer open-ended questions in a discussion format with other group members. This session was audio-taped. The results of these four segments are in Chapter Four.
PURPOSE AND SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

Television ranks with the educational system as the primary transmitter of education and society’s value (Evuleocha et al., 1989). It influences how people perceive the world (Reid, 1979). In addition, television is one of the most consistent reinforcer of negative and false imaging on television and can therefore influence black woman’s self-perceptions negatively (Evuleocha et al., 1989).

Stereotypes of black women have been explored; however, not many studies have touched on colorism. This lack is mainly due to the nature of colorism, as it has been a taboo subject in the black community, due to its painful effects. Since colorism refers to the distinction blacks and whites make between light-skinned blacks and dark-skinned blacks, it has reported negative effects on the overall self images and self worth of people of color, particularly females. Colorism at the personal level is a set of beliefs. On the other hand, when a group or individual has the power to institutionalize and enforce behaviors, laws, norms, and standards based on beliefs of skin color superiority or inferiority, then colorism takes on a whole new dimension (Landrum-Brown, 1994). It is therefore vital to investigate colorism and eliminate it. Colorism does not operate in isolation. It is linked to racism, racial classification, racial identity, racial self-designation, internalized racial oppression, and white privilege. Since racial relations in the United States have been reported as regressing, (Thomas, 1990), it is important to bring awareness on issues that can contribute significantly to a better understanding amongst the different races.
DEFINITIONS OF TERMS

Colorism

Colorism involves the doctrine, the practice or belief that perceived skin color is associated with an individual’s or groups’ innate capabilities, worth and traits. Colorism is a more specific element of phenotypism. Phenotypism is the doctrine, practice or belief that genetically and environmental determined physical appearance are associated with an individual’s or groups’ innate capabilities, worth and traits. In hierarchically stratified societies, colorism may manifest in the social stratification system as a skin color hierarchy.

Traditionally, the color complex involved light-skinned blacks rejection of blacks who were darker; however, the color complex also shows up in terms of dark-skinned African Americans spurning their lighter skinned brothers and sisters for not being “Black Enough” (Landrum-Brown, 1994).

Stereotype

Stereotypes are generalizations about groups characteristics that are attributed to all members of a given group, without regard to variation that must exist among members of that group. Stereotypes are not necessarily based on people’s first-hand experience with members of stereotyped groups. They may be learned from the media; the lack of regard for differences within stereotyped groups makes stereotypes into “over-generalizations” and as such they are always at least somewhat distorted. However, some stereotypes may have a valid ‘kernel of truth’ to them (Babad, et al. 1963).
**Mammy**

A stereotype introduced after the Civil War portraying black women in the media as fat, lovable, happy, and nurturing maid. She was extremely loyal to and protective of her white employers (Comer, 1997).

**Coon**

It is those characters who were loud, conniving, and ostentatious. These were created for the black male by the dominant society (Comer, 1997).

**Pickaninny**

This stereotype of a wild, uncivilized and brutal child was exclusively created for black children in the media (Comer, 1997).

**Television situation comedy**

A television program generally scheduled for prime-time television viewing hours (8pm-9pm) that is designed to be humorous interpretation of an event that has taken place in the lives of characters on the programs.

**ORGANIZATION OF CHAPTERS**

This research study is presented in five chapters. The study assessed the perceptions of stereotypes of light-skinned versus dark-skinned black female roles on television situation comedies through the observation of focus group discussion and examination of surveys.

**Chapter I**

Chapter one is the introduction and contain the history of stereotypes with an emphasize on black female stereotypes on television situation comedies and the media
in general. It also includes the statement of the problem, the purpose and significance of the study as well as the term of definitions.

Chapter II

Chapter two includes a review of related literature on stereotypes in television and the media as well as perceptions of black female stereotypes and colorism.

Chapter III

Chapter three explains the methodology used in the study.

Chapter IV

Chapter four details the findings of the study.

Chapter V

Chapter five includes the summary, conclusions, limitations and recommendations of the research.
CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

TELEVISION’S EFFECT AND PERCEPTION

The primary focus of this study is the perception of colorism and stereotypes of black females in television situation comedies. Research on stereotypes and/or the perceptions of stereotypes and colorism in the media is essential because television ranks with the education system as the primary transmitter of education and society’s values (Evuleocha et al., 1989). It influences how people perceive the world (Reid, 1979). Television is said to be one of the most consistent reinforcer of negative and false imaging of African Americans and other minority groups (Evuleocha et al., 1989).

Hence, television can influence black women’s self-perception and interpersonal relationships negatively through perceived promotion of stereotypes and colorism. The media contribute significantly to how individuals view others and how individuals and groups view themselves. When people are given no other identity images than those served up to them by the white majority, they tend to enact the expectation, which in turn reinforces the prejudice (Evuleocha & Ugbah, 1989). This is based on the implicit personality theories which asserts that blacks have been unable to provide their own images and critics maintain that white males have always been in charge of inventing and perpetuating stereotypical images of blacks in the media.
Dates (1991) mentions numerous research that found youngsters to use the media characters as models to find out who they are. She contends that until recently that expectation was restricted to the “contented slave (servant), the brute Negro, the wretched freedman, the comic Negro, the tragic mulatto, the local color Negro and the exotic primitive” (p.7).

Television is with no doubt an integral part of American life, with the average household watching six to seven hours of television per day (Signorielli, 1985). Its function is therefore not only to entertain, but to inform, persuade, educate and transmit culture. Ziegler (1991) argues that it is in the transmitting of culture where the media have “fallen short.” Communication is the transmitting of information, ideas, and attitudes from person to person. The manner in which sources (Media) select and arrange to present and communicate a message results in the transmission of culture, according to Ziegler.

Viewers or the receivers of media messages process or interpret the information according to how the information is organized, selected and arranged as well as according to their own personal beliefs or the beliefs of their cultural groups, because each individual has own ego-related beliefs and values. Messages that contradict these values could be rejected, distorted and or misinterpreted. Thus, Ziegler explains the level of the stored experiences of both the media (source) and the viewers (receivers) is related to how information is processed. Ziegler argues that the media’s influence on individual perceptions and attitudes are formed from the information, symbols, and ideas received during a transmission of culture is “enculturation” (Ziegler, 1991).
"Enculturation" involves the processing of information about cultures received and assessed through the media.

"Enculturation" can be positive or negative depending on how the information is packaged and presented by the media as well as how it is assessed by the audiences during the communication process. Hence, "enculturation" in a negative form can promote prejudices, hostility and hatred among various cultural groups. However, positive "enculturation" could result in a broader understanding and appreciation of differences among cultures.

The theory of the mass media "enculturation" relates to this research, because it focuses primarily on the transmission of messages about various cultures or ethnic groups and not the mainstream culture. Information, values, ideas and attitudes about black females transmitted by situation comedies are received by many viewers who have no direct contact or experience with black females, and can therefore develop a misconception about black females in general. Learning about other cultures and ethnic groups or "enculturation" in the media will only be beneficial to all, if it is supplemented with education and personal experience.

**HISTORY OF BLACK WOMEN STEREOTYPES**

The notion that light-skinned black women are perceived as prettier than their darker sisters is indeed perpetuated (but not invented) by the mass media. It dates back to the days of slavery. And it has been used by both black and white to discriminate and make distinction among themselves. Hair texture and politics of skin shades started with the house Negro and the field Negro. Biracial children of slaves and slave
owners usually used their lighter complexions and straight hair for survival. White slave masters usually assigned lighter skinned blacks the easier household jobs and the darker Negro worked in the field. The lighter skinned ones benefited from education as many slave owners let their children go to school. The dark-skinned black woman found herself at the very bottom of the economical ladder as she was least likely to get higher education or to get married. Some historically black colleges only enrolled light-skinned blacks. Of the 12 black PhD's awarded prior to the 1900, eleven were to light-skinned blacks. Books were written by whites suggesting the mulattos to be genetically and intellectually superior to blacks due to their white blood. This was called the "Mulatto hypothesis" (Landrum-Brown, 1994; Neal & Wilson, 1989; Okazawa-Rey et al., 1987).

BLACK WOMEN ON TELEVISION SITUATION COMEDIES

Historically, blacks, especially black women, have been underrepresented in television. The civil rights movement affected the media, particularly, television, resulting in more blacks to appear on television (Roberts, 1970-71; Seggar, 1977). In the fifties and the sixties black women were most likely to be cast as maids, wet nurses, cooks, waitresses, with racial distorted characteristics. White people found these characteristics funny, lovable, enjoyable, entertaining and controllable. The actresses had to make a livelihood out of this, and no matter how demeaning and unflattering it was they had to do it (Banks, 1977, MacDonald, 1983). The black females in situation comedies (Sanford & Son, What's Happening, and Good Times) have always been portrayed as overly aggressive, domineering and sole decision makers, while the black
man has been portrayed as the absent and irresponsible father (Cummings, 1986). The *mammy* was a character introduced to represent black women. She was fat, charcoal black, loyal, docile, obedient, and protective of the white family. The *mammy* was asexual and ugly. She was very strong and dominated the 'weak' black man (Ethnic Notions, 1987).

During the period 1969-1974, there were only 20 black female major characters as opposed to 111 white female major characters (U.S. Commission on Civil rights, 1979). According to Stroman (1983), lesser than 30 black women have appeared in television starring roles between the years 1968-1983.

When blacks appeared on television situation comedies or dramas, they were given supporting roles. These characters created and perpetuated stereotypical images. The *mammy* role on shows like *Beulah*, *The Jack Benny Program* and *Trouble with Father* portrayed black women unrealistically (Cummings, 1986). The *Amos and Andy Show* was also another show that perpetuated the myth about African American women, as the black matriarch, the castrating, domineering, and overpowering black female. Kingfish's wife, Saphire and her mother Mama found everything wrong with him. Strohman (1983) refers to these two women as 'caricature of black femininity.' She adds that though the attractive Ernestine Wade portrayed Saphire, she was cast as shrewish and overbearing. The women were just abusive towards their men. Furthermore, they served no positive role models as all of them were unemployed housewives. The Amos and Andy show was on for only two season 1951-1953, but continued in syndication until 1966, when it had to stop because of protest from black organizations (Strohman, 1983).
Following the *Amos and Andy Show*, in the 1968-1969 season, was *Julia*. It was a series about a young, professional black woman raising her child as a single parent. Cummings (1986) calls the show a 'whitewash', and a patronizing look at what life could be for blacks if they waited their turn. He said that *Julia* continued to perpetuate the racial stereotype of the black matriarch, because she never encountered racial prejudice in the nice apartment she lived. *Julia* was popular and positive. It showed that black people could keep a job, speak good English, dress well without being prostitutes or royalty. However critics maintain that she was too positive; it was just implausible (Cummings, 1986).

In the 1970’s black women continued to depict African American women as the *mammy* stereotype, with their husbands or sons as *coons* and *sambos*. These shows included *That’s My Mama*, featuring a single mother and her son, *Good Times* with the *mammy* played by Florida, *Sanford and Son* with the domineering, purse swinging, swearing aunt *Esther, Baby I’m Back* with the two abusive and domineering wife and mother-in-law and the irresponsible, shiftless and self-centered husband, *The Jeffersons* with its three domineering women, Louise the wife, Florence the maid, and Helen the friend of Louise, with the loud, boisterous and ignorant *coon* stereotype played by George Jefferson. In *What’s Happening*, mother Mabel depicted the *mammy* stereotype with her shiftless, conniving and irresponsible husband, her pickaniny children and the *sambo* portrayed by, Rerun, her son’s friend (Cummings, 1986). “Then came the show *Gimme a Break* with America’s most visible big black *mammy* (Cummings, 1986). Nell Carter was called the robust, happy, musical, loud self-deprecating maid in an all-white household. Cummings (1986) says that critics felt television no longer attempted
to be socially responsible. This is said as a way to psychologically control a people. The sambo, the coon, the mammy and the pickaninny stripped away from blacks-their identities (Ethnic Notions, 1987).

The 1984-85 season premiered hit shows like the Cosby Shows, 227, Charlie and Company. No negative stereotypes could be seen in these black shows. Harris (1992) investigated the current portrayals of the black family on prime-time television. He took a sample of four black dominated situation comedies and one drama show from the NBC, CBS and ABC networks shown between the hours 7:00 PM and 10:00 MP, Central Standard time. The content analysis of the shows was conducted during the weeks March 25 through March 30 and April 1 through April 7. Three whites and two blacks were asked to look for any instances of stereotypical images, (i.e., Sambo, Coon, Mammy and Pickaninny) and the structure of the family. The five shows observed were In The Heat Of The Night, The Cosby Show, Family Matters, Sugar and Spice and Amen. They found the mammy stereotype only in Sugar and Spice, reappearing in the character of Vickilynn, who portrayed a fat, pitch black, and ugly homebody. The rest of the shows had no such stereotypes except for Amen with the loud, conniving coon stereotype played by Deacon Frye. This study concluded that there are still stereotypes of blacks and black families on television; however, not as prevalent as before.

The history of the black female on television situation comedies mostly consisted of stereotypes. Depicting the light-skinned and the dark-skinned black females in qualitatively different images creates a skin color hierarchy with a system of skin color privilege that often result in a "color line" being constructed on the basis of skin color differences. Hence, when groups are differentiated, hierarchically, and evaluated from
one another by color, color based race prejudice is likely to develop. Skin color is one of the many characteristics that provides a stimulus cue to thoughts and emotions that impacts people's perception and interpersonal relationships (Landrum-Brown 1994).

COLORISM IN THE BLACK COMMUNITY

As a direct consequence of this color-conscious past, light-skinned blacks started to dissociate themselves from their darker counterparts. Okazawa-Rey et al. (1987) mention various ways some of the lighter complexioned blacks used to discriminate against other people of color. The so-called "blue vein societies" were exclusive clubs which only granted membership, if a person's inner arm veins were clearly visible. The "test comb" practice meant that one could only be granted membership, if a comb was able to move smoothly through a person's hair. Another practice was called the brown-bag test. A prospective member had to lay his or her arm next to a brown paper bag, and if it turned to be darker than the paper bag, membership was simply refused on that basis. Last but definitely not least was the "color tax." Fraternities were holding prank passport parties, whereby people had to pay extra if their dates were dark (Parrish, 1944; Poussaint, 1975).

PASSING

The ideal in this country is whiteness, because white stands for opportunity, power and progress. Hence, it is not surprising that many blacks who had a choice to be the one or the other opted for the world of privilege. They passed as white, particularly at the end of the 19th and first half of the 20th centuries. Countless stories
are told about this period and how people got mixed up and confused, and in fact paranoid. A man named Peter Zeigler, was identified by a women as a Negro passing. The Atlanta Georgian published that he had been seen "dining and associating with the best white families in town." He was however later re-identified as white (Smith, 1966 p. 152).

Another colored man who passed as white sneaking out early in the mornings to go to work and sneaking back at night got fed up, and wanted to lead an open normal life. He said that he wanted a respectable life, so he decided to stand back like many other blacks. The popular rhyme from the first part of the century clearly illustrates the mindset of that time.

"If you're white you're all right
If you're yellow you're mellow
If you're brown stick around
If you're black, get back.
(Parrish, 1944, p.90)

Passing was also no easy way out. Many horrors of passing included the loneliness, the pretensions, the lies, the constant fear of being found out. But many did "To be white and free" writes Reba Lee in her autobiography (1955). She says, she could move as an equal among the whites. She married into a white influential family. However, when she fell pregnant she was only thinking how to kill the baby if it turned out black (Lee, p. 193).

A study by Keith Herring (1991) revealed that skin color in the United States determines who gets what. Two other sociologists, Huges and Hertel in 1990
investigated the influence of skin color on the earning potential of Black Americans. They found that for every 72 cents a dark-skinned Black made, a light-skinned Black earned a dollar. The ratio between the earnings of light-skinned and dark-skinned blacks were proportional to that between Blacks and Whites. In Atlanta, Georgia in the case "Morrow Versus Internal Revenue Services," a light-skinned black sued her supervisor, a dark-skinned black for discrimination on the basis of skin color (Landrum-Brown, 1994).

Anyone in the United States with one drop of Negro blood is considered black. A person born of a white and a black parent is automatically black. White caste thinking refers to white beliefs that blacks are biologically, culturally and socially inferior to whites (Berreman, 1960).

DENOUNCING BLACK

It also comes as no surprise, say media critics that blacks who make it in the entertainment world denounce their ancestry. In the article, Who is black and Who's not? Lynn Norment cites the example of singer Paula Abdul and others who shocked their parents by denouncing their black origin (Norment, 1990). Psychiatrists say these people are also victims of the system. Since the media portray black in a negative light, no one wishes to be associated with it. The biracial stars are particularly quick to denounce black. Because they are biracial, they down play the significance of race, and in doing so, they say they are not black, but they never say they are not white, explains Dr. Alvin Poussant, an associate professor of Psychiatry at the Harvard Medical School (Poussaint, 1975). Zora Neale Hurston, in her novel, My people, My people (1984) writes:
If it was so honorable and glorious to be black, why is it the yellow-skinned people among us who have so much prestige? Even a child in the first grade could see that this was so from what happened in the classroom and on school programs. The light skin children were always the angels and the fairies and queens of the school plays. The lighter the girl, the more money and prestige she was apt and expected to marry. Was it really honorable to be black?

(Okazawa-Rey, et al. 1987)

Studies done by Marks (1947) and Martin (1964) suggest that light-skinned black women with Caucasian features are seen as more attractive than darker ones with Negroid features (Neal & Ward, 1989). In a related study done by Warner, Junker & Adams (1941) examining the effects skin color had on adolescents' development found that the issue of skin color was a greater liability for girls than boys.

In a related study done recently by Ronald Hall (1992), it was found a sample of African American College students considered darker skin color in a negative manner, while the lighter skin tones were evaluated as more desirable.

BEAUTY

The majority of women regardless of race put great emphasis on physical attractiveness. According to various studies, society responds positively to persons who, by some culturally sanctioned standard, are considered more attractive or better looking than others (Dion, Berscheid & Walster, 1972). According to Lakoff & Scherr (1984), attractiveness affords certain benefits to both men and women. Beauty is defined as a particular combination of hair, skin color, and body size and shape. While appearance is
important to most people, physical beauty is considered as the most important virtue a woman can possess. Beauty, education, and occupation are all status symbols, affecting both cognition and behavior. This response affects people's self-esteem and socialization, since humans are shaped by how others respond or don't respond to them. From research in social psychology conducted predominantly on whites "Beautiful is good." Attractive adults are perceived to have happier marriages than those who are not (Dion, Berscheid, & Walster, 1972). Attractive people are associated with intelligence, power, and are said to appear more successful, with higher self-esteem and self-worth (Cash, 1981). Grier and Cobbs, in their book Black Rage, explain that the beauty of the dark-skinned black woman in America is not acknowledged at all.

In this country, the standard of beauty is the blond, blue eyed girl with regular features. Since communication media spread the ideal to every inhabitant via television, newspapers, magazines, and motion pictures there is no room for deviation. The girl who is black has no option in the matter; her lips are thick, her hair is kinky and short. She is in fact the antithesis of the American beauty. However beautiful she might be in a different setting with different standards, in this country she is ugly.

(Black Rage, 1968)

According to empirical evidence, black men prefer to marry light-skinned black women. They are also more eligible to marry influential men (Drake & Cayton, 1962; Grier & Cobbs, 1968; Parrish, 1944; Okazawa-Rey, et al. 1987). This trend showed a decline in the seventies, but a national sample done by Ebony's Kenneth B. and MaMie Phips Clark (1980) still found that 30% of the people surveyed felt Black men preferred light-skinned black women (Okazawa-Rey et al., 1987)
In the Sandler (1992) video production, a girl named, Curtia, said she was taken aback when her longtime boyfriend informed her he couldn't introduce her to his mother as she was too dark for marriage. He was told by his mother to marry light-skinned to lighten up the kids.

PSYCHOLOGICAL EFFECTS

How does colorism affect black females as they strive for feelings of attractiveness, positive self esteem and identity in a dominant white society? And what does this all mean for the psychological development of the black women, particularly the dark-skinned black woman? Psychologists agree that this has a definite negative and long lasting impact on how the black women perceive herself (Hernton, 1965). The light-skinned woman reports in therapy sessions that she is constantly nagged about her lineage and heritage. The darker women is always questioned about her appearance and attractiveness.

Frequent exposure to such questions can either undermine a woman's self esteem or feelings of resentment and anger about the possibility that one is perhaps too dark or too unattractive to males are just as common as feelings of shame and guilt about the possibility that perhaps one is enjoying unfair advantages because of lightness of skin color and straightness of features (Okazawa-Rey et al., 1987; Pousaint, 1975).

A women's self-concept develops in part from observing and internalizing what others think about her. Consequently, the attributes society assigns to the attractive and unattractive black female have profound implications for her psycho/social development. The light-skinned women resent representing the unobtainable white
women, since some men say they are the closest to white they (black men) can get. If a black girl is repeatedly told she is ugly and experiences treatment supporting these views, she may feel as such, particularly, if her community’s views are consistent with the larger community’s negative self-deprecating messages (Okazawa-Rey et al., p. 91).

As we can see, this obsession with the color line is deeply rooted in the political and socio-economical situation dating to slavery. This issue has always been a taboo subject in the black community and it is only until recently that it is being addressed in the open. This is sensitive and very painful to black people (Neal & Wilson, 1989). The most troubling aspect of this color-consciousness among the blacks of various shades is that it leads to more division within an already divided nation.

Sociologist, Calvin Hernton (1965) reported that intra-racial color discrimination among black women lead to sexual jealousy with the darker ones resenting the lighter ones (p.149). Charisse Jones (1995), says that as a dark-skinned black women, she had always been rejected by most black men. At cocktail parties, only the light-skinned black women get attention. This preference for lighter women is referred to as being "color struck" (Drake & Cayton, 1962). Jones adds that a racial encounter hurts badly, but it does not equal the pain of colorism, being rejected by your own people because your skin is “colored cocoa and not cream, ebony and not olive” (p. 27). She contends that although this was started by whites, blacks have done an excellent job keeping colorism alive. Jones says she receives a litany of twisted compliments from fellow blacks, that she is the prettiest dark-skinned black girl they have ever seen or that she is pretty for a dark girl. She says that a people who have overcome slavery and disprove
many lies pronounced about them can certainly learn to love themselves again in seeing that black is beautiful in all its shades and hues.

Lisa Marie Scott, a sports franchise executive, says black men treat her as if she is invisible, because of her dark skin. "It is like they don't even acknowledge me, like I'm a blank wall. It makes me feel cheated, like I was not even given a chance" (Bates, 1994, p.132). She maintains that the light skin women have this superiority complex because of their complexion (p.80).

Oprah Winfrey, in an interview with Barbara Walters on ABC, said that at times she wished to be white. She says that the light-skinned girls, whom she called "vanillas" and who referred to her as a "fudge child," were surprised that she won the Miss Black Tennessee beauty pageant. Congress woman Maxine Walters relates how she was compared to her prettier sisters with long hair. Marita Golden states in her autobiography, *Migrations of the Heart*, that her mother cautioned her to stay out of the sun in order to get herself a lighter husband for the sake of the children (Neal & Wilson, 1989).

Producer, Sandler (1992) interviewed the president of Tuskegee University in Alabama, Benjamin Payton. Payton said he was the first dark-skinned black man to head this university. The black people in the area were surprised and some were unhappy to have a dark-skinned black with a dark-skinned wife. Someone in the video commented: "They expected someone tall, light and handsome, not tall dark and ...eh qualified." Payton was also quick to add that he is indeed the first dark president, but also the "only one with so many Ivy League degrees."
Colorism as we can see does not operate in a vacuum. It is most definitely linked to racism, racial identity white privilege and internalized oppression. Colorism operates between and within groups. Hence, skin color and features is not only a disturbing thorn in the flesh of the darker black women, but also for the very light-skinned black women. According to Klose (1984), A light-skinned columnist for the Chicago Tribune, Leanita McClain committed suicide at the age of 32, due to guilt feelings of having success because of her skin color. In a book compiled after her death, McClain expresses her guilt about her perception that being light-skinned contributed to her success as the first member of the paper’s editorial board, as well as her fear that black would not accept her because of her skin color.

Light-skinned, tall with light eyes, Donna Stewart, interviewed by Ebony says she has constantly to prove to other blacks that she is black enough. “There is always a challenge: How much cognizance do you have of black issues? How black are you, really? I must always prove myself because of how I look, and how I look affects other people’s perceptions of who I am” (Bates, 1994 p.80).

Lisa Page, a bi-racial woman, say she has been called many names, “zebra,” “mulatto,” “cafe' au lait,” “mixed” or “bright skinned”, but she says she calls herself “high yellow white trash.” She says that sums up her feelings of being black, yet being aware of white heritage. She says she developed a double consciousness that never goes away. And no matter how black she feels, she is treated forever as light skinned (Cross, 1991). Vanessa Williams, born of light-skinned black parents and the first black Miss America, was highly discussed in the black media in 1983 as to whether she truly represented blacks as she is so fair skinned. They said that she is in essence not black
and that her features and color played a role in her selection (Norment, 1983). Both sides of the coin is said to be ugly. Mainstream seems to be brown brothers and sisters. Cultural Nationalism of the sixties did not succeed to kill this kind of color prejudice, but the traditional wisdom favored paler Blacks. Bates (1994) says that "If you're light, you're all right gave way to another preference for brown-skinned people who more closely resembled the African aesthetic and translated into its own bias (namely the popular accord that asserted that the true brothers and sisters are brown; house Negroes need not apply" (p. 80).

A study done by Porter (1991) exploring black skin tone preferences among black children between the ages of 6-13 found that they preferred honey brown rather than lighter or darker skin tones. The data suggest that in the social world of these kids skin tone is a salient personal characteristic and that over the years little has changed in black children's tone preferences. The finding asserts that skin color differentiation can still be viable though usually unspoken.

Robinson and Ward (1995) found that adolescents, who perceived themselves to be at either extreme of the skin color continuum, may be more vulnerable to dissatisfaction with their skin color, than those who didn't perceive themselves to be at the color extremes. "Perhaps colorism in the African American community is a double-edged sword affecting those who are seen as too black and those not black enough" (p. 269).

The previous study is consistent with one done by Neal and Wilson (1989). They concluded that Many blacks linked their self-worth intelligence, success, and attractiveness to the structure of their features and shades of their colors. "Skin color,
facial features and hair play a significant albeit quiet role in the lives of Black Americans." It affects both genders, but more women, because they concern themselves more with appearance (p.323).

Okazawa-Rey, Robinson & Ward (1987) state that color-consciousness has divided the black community. This in fact has contributed to our own oppression. "After all, isn't it true that when we as black women within a racist and color-conscious society despise and degrade our darker sisters, we are doing little more than identifying with racist whites: The true oppressors? And when we, as black women, turn against our lighter black sisters, isn't it any more than acting out the frustration and envy we subconsciously hold towards a racist society that assigns status and power to one's race and gender?" (p.99).

An article, addressing race-relations in the United States (Morganthau, 1995), reports both white and blacks regard their relationship as poor. It finds that the country is still preoccupied with race. However, what most don't realize is that race itself is being attacked by science. To scientists race is a notoriously slippery concept that eludes any serious attempt at definition: it refers mostly to observable differences in skin color, hair texture and shape of one's nose or eyes. They say these differences are superficial, when one looks at a range of biological differences in humans.

Science has tried to come up with any significant set of differences that distinguishes one racial group from the other, but they had failed. So this social invented racialism can also be unlearned and people can live together in harmony. This only shows that people are different, but a difference that can be appreciated, not be frowned upon. In reality, differences are indeed frowned upon. Eleanor Holmes
Norton, of Georgetown University, Law School, says the color line survived and often thrived when ethnicity, language and old world customs didn't; "with persistence even tenacity race lingers in American life, seeming to mock us like a disquieting riddle. It is our longest running unsolved issue" (Thomas, 1990, p. xvii).

Another major problems is that whites and blacks are reluctant to talk about race-related issues. Whitaker (1993) says when it comes to discussing race, Americans might as well be watching different movies, confronted with everything from the Regional Denny beating trial to the Ted Danson Jokes. He adds that whites see one reality and blacks see another, and the fact that both had such a hard time talking straight about their grievances only makes matters worse. He asks how can Americans move the racial debate to more realistic and honest ground.

Just like many scholars, Ziegler (1991) explains in her enculturation theory the importance of healthy debates, on issues such as these. Historian John Franklin points out that it is a game that dates back to slavery; "we've got a history of dishonesty and hypocrisy in this area, and we pile one on top of another, and have to continue to lie and misrepresent in order to validate our original position" (p.54). Raymond Mack, a white sociologist at Northwestern University, says many whites believe two things. That all people are created equal and that blacks are inferior to whites. Even if they like one black, their views don't change of the whole group. This seems to be problematic, because if we do not know one another, how is it possible to portray one another in a true and honest ways. Enculturation which includes education in school, combined with the mass media and personal experience of one another provide a sound base and start in the direction towards reconciliation and better race relations.
Meanwhile, The road ahead in American race-relations is long and arduous. Findings suggest that racial stratification and inequality have changed in nature, rather than in significance, from a more overt to a more covert, subtle form of racial isolation and inequality. America is also regressing in its efforts and success in promoting equality of education, occupational and economic opportunity for blacks (Thomas, 1990).

**SUMMARY**

Black females have been stereotyped in the media since the early films. The most common portrayal of the black female was the *mammy* stereotype. The literature also suggests that the light-skinned black female has been treated differently from the dark-skinned black female. It is also evident from the literature that colorism and racism influence how black females are portrayed in the media. Although the *mammy* stereotype has been decreasing; however, it seems that the other types of black female stereotypes still persist such as the strong, independent, single parent, black female stereotypes. This research would like to investigate whether or not the perception of dark-skinned and light-skinned black female stereotypes continues.
CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

METHOD OF ANALYSIS

This research study was developed and designed to answer some questions about the perceptions of stereotypes of light-skinned black females and dark-skinned black females in television situation comedies, based on race. This exploratory study on the perceptions of colorism in black female roles primarily aimed at building upon existing theory rather than testing it. The study intended to generate more information and education in the area of colorism, sexism, and racism, to aid in further research. The following research questions were posed in the study:

1. Will two black-dominated television situation comedies in the 1990's, *Living Single* and *Family Matters* be perceived by focus groups to contain instances of light-skinned black female stereotypes and dark-skinned black female stereotypes?

2. How are light-skinned black women and dark-skinned black women's images perceived in television situation comedies by focus groups of blacks and whites, with references to positive and/or negative traits, such as good-looking, unattractive, attractive, domineering, fat, thin, average, and loud?
3. What is the overall perceptions of stereotypes of black females in television situation comedies and the media in general, by the focus groups?

Two methods were used: Survey and Focus groups. First, participants were administered a perception assessment survey. The perception assessment questionnaire was designed to assess the participants’ television watching habits, their perceptions of black female stereotypes in the media, their perceptions of distinction made between white female and black female roles, their interaction with blacks, as well as their demographics. The participants were asked about their television viewing habits, because the research needed to know their perceptions on specific as well as general television programs, because the study wanted to get additional information on black female stereotypes in the media. The perceptions about black female stereotypes were asked, because the researcher needed to know whether the participants would mention light-skinned black female and dark-skinned black female stereotypes without being specifically asked about it. This question was also posed to generate additional information about black female stereotypes in general. In addition, the survey wanted to assess how different or similar perceptions were about white female and black female roles because women in general are treated as less powerful and in stereotypical roles as compared to males (Signorielli, 1985). The study was designed to compare perceptions of white and black as well as light-skinned, and dark-skinned black women roles, and whether or not distinctions are made among these roles. The assessment survey also assessed how interaction or lack of interaction with black females related to the perceptions of black females in television situation comedies. The survey also gathered demographic information on age, race, gender, education, occupation, and income.
The Pre-Test Questionnaire was used to assess the familiarity and the perceptions of participants toward the female characters in their favorite television programs. The Post-Test questionnaire was designed to see whether the perceptions were the same or different for those who have indicated that they watched the programs before. The open ended questions were also used in the focus group discussion.

FOCUS GROUPS

The two principal means of collecting qualitative data today in the social sciences are individual interviews and participant observation in groups (Morgan 1988). He explains that focus groups, as group interviews, combine elements of both of these better-known approaches. The intermediate nature of focus groups occupies an easily comprehensible position within the existing set of qualitative methods and it also possess a distinctive identity of its own. The other method used in this study was surveys and involved, pre-test and post-test television viewing session questionnaires and perception surveys to assess perceptions of stereotypes.

Twenty individuals were selected to participate in the study. However, only fifteen made it to the focus groups. This was perhaps because it was during the examination period. These people were divided into a white and a black group, because the study was designed to examine the perceptions of colorism stereotypes, based on race. All the blacks were African Americans and all the whites were white Americans because this is an American study. The black group consisted of the following 8 individuals:
Participant B1 was a 24-year-old male, graduate student (Law), part-time musician, watched 3-4 hours of television per week and earned less that $15,000 a year. He perceived media in general to stereotype black females. He said the way they express themselves; he perceived the media to make distinction between white female and black female roles with regard to background and the way they spoke. He perceived colorism in the media in general. His favorite programs: *Judge Judy, Party of Five, and Thinking out Loud*. Favorite female characters: Kim Wayans, Lynda Carter, Halle Berry.

Participant B2 was a 46-year-old female, a senior (English), part-time writer, watched 2 hours of television per week and earned between $25,001-$35,000 per annum. She perceived the media in general to stereotype black females saying there seems to be majority comedy representation and people appearing animated and slapstick. She said white female roles represented diverse characters, while black female roles were one-dimensional. She perceived colorism in the media in general. Favorite television programs: *Nova* and *Ron Brown*, and favorite female star was Angela Basset.

Participant B3 was a 30-year-old male, Junior (African American Studies) and part-time cutting machine operator, watched 3-4 hours of television and earned between $15,000-$25,000 per year. He perceived black female stereotypes as single parents, strong and independent from black men. He perceived White female roles to be more in a family setting as opposed to those of black females. He perceived colorism in the media in general. Favorite programs: *C-Span* and *B.E.T.* Favorite stars: Angela Basset and Whoopi Goldberg.

Participant B4 was a 23-year-old male, senior (Finance), watched 5-6 hours of Television per week and earned between $15,000-$25,000 per year. He perceived black
female stereotypes as the "natural street black woman, i.e. girl, child please, a regular
street slang." He perceived black female roles to make fool of themselves as opposed to
white female roles. He perceived colorism in the media in general. Favorite programs:
_Martin, Living Single, Malcom and Eddy;_ favorite stars: Halle Berry, Demi Moore and
Angela Basset.

**Participant B5** was a 42 years old female, a housewife who completed more than
100 credits at college (Education), watched more than 6 hours of television per week,
and earned over $50,000 per year. She perceived black female stereotypes, as the strong
black woman, running the household. White female roles are more glamorous
compared to black female roles. She perceived colorism in the media in general. Favorite
programs: _Days of Our Lives, Cosby Show and Family Matters_. Favorite stars: Phylisia
Rashad, Angela Basset, Cicely Tyson.

**Participant B6** was a 34-year-old female, graduate student (Education), watched
more than 6 hours of television per week and earned between $35,001-$50,000. She did
not think that the media stereotype black females or made distinction between white
and black female roles. She did not perceive colorism in the media in general. Favorite
shows: _News Hour with Jim Lehrer, 60 Minutes and 20/20_; favorite actress: Whoopi
Goldberg.

**Participant B7** was a 22-year-old female, senior (Nutrition), watched more than 6
hours of television per week, and earned less than $15,000 per year. She perceived black
female stereotypes as gold-diggers, but did not perceive a distinction made between
white and black female roles. She perceived colorism in the media in general. Favorite
shows: *Martin, Living Single* and *Law and Order*; favorite stars: Erika Alexander, Tischa Campbell, Jada Pinkett.

**Participant B8** was a 28-year-old male, self employed, watched more than 6 hours of television per week and earned less than $15,000 per week. He perceived black female stereotypes: Black women and men are rarely seen together as loving couples; Black women play subordinate roles to white males and females, they are only sexual beings. He perceived a distinction made white and black female roles: Black women are not offered as many roles as their white counterparts. Black women are only put in demeaning roles, i.e. pregnant teens, ghetto queens, drug addicts, supporting wife, sexual beings. He perceive colorism in the media in general. Favorite shows were *Rap City* and *Our Voices*; Favorite female actresses: Angela Basset and Nia Long.

The white group consisting of the following 7 participants:

**Participant W1** was a 33-year-old male, senior (Education), part-time work at Benefits and Social Services, watched 5-6 hours of television per week, and earned between $25,001-$35,000 per annum. He perceived black female stereotypes in the media in general as generally aggressive, often unmarried mothers. He also perceived a distinction made between white and black female roles: It seems the media often steers away from the romantic lives of black families; and characterization of black females in many television shows lack depth. He perceive colorism in the media in general. Favorite programs: *Seinfeld, 60 Minutes* and *Nightline*. Favorite actresses: Diana Keaton, Holly Hunter, Meg Ryan. He never interacts with black females and have no close black female.
Participant W2 was a 42 male, Computer Programmer/Technician, associate degree, watched 2 hours of television per week, and earned $15,000-$25,000 per year. He perceived media to stereotype black females: Broadcast network television in general operates from formulas based on statistics that reflect the statisticians’ (White upper class males) view. This tends to make for very poor programming content. “Yes, black women suffer very much from this formula.” He perceived a distinction made between black and white female roles: “black” and “white” shows, although less common today have always had a slant to “their” particular target audience. “But, I believe the content is regulated by the very narrow minded people that are very far removed from the characters in the shows and their target audiences.” He did not perceive colorism, saying it is an outdated stereotype. He had no favorite television shows or favorite female characters. He has several close black female friends and interacts with black females at home and in the work place.

Participant W3 was a 19-year-old male, sophomore (English), watched more than 6 hours of television per week, and earned over $50,000 per year. He perceived the media to stereotype black females: To a point; “I’m not familiar with many black female actresses, but the ones I have seen seem to stereotype with typical black issues, problems, racial confrontations etc.” He also perceived white female roles to be portrayed differently from black female roles: “Sometimes black women are below white women or have attitudes toward white women.” He has close black female friends and interacts in class with black females. He perceive colorism in the media in general. Favorite television programs: Seinfeld, Simpsons and Friends. Favorite stars: Courtney Cox, Jennifer Aniston and Claire Danes.
Participant W4 was a 46-year-old female, graduate student (Education), watched more than 6 hours of television per week and earned between $25,001-$35,000 per year. She perceived the media to stereotype black females: As society does; perhaps to a larger degree, though. She also perceived the media to make distinction between white and black female roles: Again, reflecting society, black females are more likely to be maids, etc. She perceive colorism in the media in general. Favorite programs: Politically Incorrect, Wings and Married with Children. Favorite stars: Katherine Hepburn, Bette Midler, Meryl Streep. She has close black females at home, school; and work and interacts with black females.

Participant W5 was a 37-year-old female, interior designer, no degree, watched 5-6 hours of television per week and earned $15,000-$25,000 per year. She does not perceive the media to stereotype black females and to make distinction between white and black female roles. She has no close black female friend and does not interact with black females. She did not perceive colorism in the media in general. Favorite shows: The Oprah Winfrey Show, The Cosby Show and Nightline; favorite actresses: Oprah Winfrey and Whoopi Goldberg.

Participant W6 was a 66-year-old female, retired, 2 years of college (Advertising), watched more than 6 hours of television per week and earned more than $50,000 per year. She did perceive the media to stereotype black females and making distinction between white and black female roles. She had no close black female friends and only interacted in church with black females. She perceived colorism in the media in general. Favorite programs: The Nanny, 60 Minutes and Cosby; Favorite stars, Fran Drescher, Cybil Sheppard and Liz Taylor.
Participant W7 was a 22-year-old female, Junior (Information Sciences), student research assistant, watched more than 6 hours of television and earned less than $15,000 per year. She perceived the media to stereotype black females: They stereotype every black female. Make every black woman very strong-minded and good dancers - kind of in your face. She also perceived the media to make a distinction between white female and black female roles: Seems that white are made to be a bit smarter, but a lot weaker and absent minded than black women. She does not interact with black females and has no close black female friend. She perceived colorism in the media in general. Favorite programs: X-files, Seinfeld, and Simpsons. Favorite stars: Kathy Bates, Jodie Foster and Oprah Winfrey.

The participants were selected from the University of Tennessee and the Knoxville area. The participants came from a variety of backgrounds. The selection of the participants was based on age, race, classification, and time spent viewing television and time available. See Focus Group Screening Questionnaire in Appendix A. Participants were recruited through classified advertisements placed in the student newspaper, The Daily Beacon, and flyers posted around the campus area.

Two programs were selected for the study because it has various female lead characters, in jobs that seem to reflect the 1990's. Khadijah is a magazine owner, Maxine is a lawyer, Regine is a socialite, and Sinclaire works for Khadijah. Family Matters was selected because it portrays a black family, and the study wanted to see how the females in a black family are portrayed with regard to colorism. A synopsis of these two programs can be found in the appendix E. The last segment allowed the
participants to answer open-ended questions in a discussion format with other group members. This was to assess the qualitative explanation of their perceptions.

MODERATOR

Each focus group was lead by a moderator. The moderator was a white graduate student in Journalism at the University of Tennessee and was selected because of her excellent communication skills and because the researcher did not want to affect the discussion. The moderator was trained by the researcher on group dynamics. The researcher was present during both focus group discussions, to observe and get better insight in the discussions as well as assess the focus group participants, but did not get involved in the discussions. The focus group sessions were organized in four segments. First, participants were administered a perception assessment survey. Second, they were administered a Pre-Test questionnaire before they watched the two television situation comedies. They watched Living Single and Family Matters. Following the viewing of both situation comedies, participants were given a Post-Test questionnaire. The last segment allowed the participants to answer open-ended questions in a discussion format with other group members. This session was audio-taped. Each focus group participant received ten dollars for participating. The sessions lasted less than two hours each. An informed consent form containing an agreement of confidentiality of the study was signed by all participants.
RESEARCH CONTROL

The study was designed and conducted to reduce bias and outside influences. The sessions were held in the group viewing room in the Hodges library at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville. There were no outside interruptions during the course of both focus groups. The sessions took place on a weekday at a time that was convenient for all participants. The moderator informed the members of the focus groups about the purpose of the research in general and nothing specific about colorism was mentioned, because she did not want to put their attention to what the study was really looking for. The study wanted to see if they would mention colorism without being asked about it and also not force them to look specifically for colorism stereotypes during the viewing of the focus group programs. Participants were told at the end of the session that they could request a copy of the results if they so desire. They were thoroughly briefed about what was going to take place during the sessions, and thus were fully aware of the procedure in which the sessions operated. The researcher attended both sessions, but did not participate in the discussions. The data were analyzed using descriptive measures and is reported in Chapter IV.
CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

The results of this research study are organized in this chapter under four sections. Section 1 includes data from the Perception Assessment Survey, Section 2 contains information from the Pre-Test Questionnaire administrated before the participants viewed the focus group television programs. Section 3 contains data from the Post-Test Questionnaire administered after participants viewed the focus group television programs. Section 4 contains data from the audio-taped discussion segment of the two focus group sessions. The results are categorized on each table by race and total group responses.

SECTION I: PERCEPTION ASSESSMENT SURVEY

The perception assessment questionnaire was designed to assess the participants' television watching habits, their perceptions of black female stereotypes in the media, their perceptions of distinctions made between white female and black female roles, their interactions with black females and their demographics. The participants were asked about their television viewing habits to assess their perceptions on specific as well as general television programs. The research also wanted to explore how the amount of television viewing related to the perceptions of stereotypes, and the
perceptions of black female stereotypes, in particular. In addition, the research was
designed to assess light-skinned and dark-skinned black female characteristics, without
participants being specifically questioned about them. These questions were also posed
to generate additional information about black female stereotypes in general.
Furthermore, the research wanted to assess how white female roles as compared to
black female roles were perceived to be portrayed in the media because research suggest
women in general are treated as less powerful in stereotypical roles as compared to
males (Signorielli, 1985). Research also wanted to discover how perceptions of white
female roles and black female roles, as well as light-skinned, and dark-skinned black
female roles compared to another. Additionally, the perception assessment survey
wanted to find out how interaction or lack of interaction with black females related to
the perceptions of black females in television situation comedies. The demographics was
designed to look at the representation of participants' age, race, gender, education,
occupation, and income and how that related to the perceptions of the female
stereotypes on television.

Table 1 describes the demographics of the participants. Out of eight black

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TABLE 1:</th>
<th>AGE/RACE/SEX (Black (n=8), White (n=7))</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>Race</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Under 18</td>
<td>Black</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18-24</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25-35</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36-45</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>over 45</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

44
participants, three were between ages 18-24, three were in the 25-35 age category, one was between 36-45, and one was 45 or older. Out of seven white participants, two were between the ages 18-24, one was 25-35, two were between 36-45 and another two were 45 years and older.

For both the white group and the black group, five out of fifteen were between the age group 18-24. Four were between 25-35, three were between 36-45, and three were 45 years and older. This data indicate that the majority of both black and white participants were represented in the age group 18-35, and the rest was represented between the ages 36-45 and over.

Table 2 shows classification of participants by race, education and working status. Out of eight black participants, three were working professionals, two were graduate students, two were seniors, and one was a junior. The white participants consisted of three working professionals, one sophomore, one junior, one senior, and one graduate student.

**TABLE 2**  
RACE/EDUCATION/WORKING STATUS (Black (n=8), White (n=7))

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Race</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th>Both</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Both</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Both</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Total</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Freshman</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sophomore</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Junior</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senior</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduate student</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working professional</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

45
For both groups, there were six out of fifteen working professionals and nine out of fifteen students. The data indicate that there was a cross section of race, education and working status.

Table 3 shows participants' income by race and group. Overall, out of eight black participants, three were earned less than $15,000; two earned between $15,000 and $25,000; one earned $25,001-$35,000; one earned $35,001-$50,000, and one earned $50,000 and more. Overall, out of seven white participants, one earned less than $15,000; two earned between $15,000-$25,000; two earned between $25,001-$50,000; and two earned $50,000 or more.

Among the fifteen participants, four earned less than $15,000; four earned between $15,000-$25,000; three earned between $25,001-$35,000; one earned $35,001-$50,000, and three earned $50,000 and more. The data indicate that there was a cross section of income levels.

TABLE 3    RACE/INCOME (Black (n=8), White (n=7))
Table 4 and 5 show participants' interaction with black females and participants having close black female friends respectively. All black participants do interact with black females, and have close black female friends. Four out of seven white participants interact with black females and have close black female friends, while three do not interact with black females.

Table 6 shows participants' time spent watching television per week. Overall, out of eight black participants, four watch TV six or more hours per week, one watches TV five to six hours per week, two watch TV 3-4 hours per week and one watches TV zero to two hours per week.

### Table 4

**INTERACTION WITH BLACK FEMALE (Black (n=8), White (n=7))**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Answer</th>
<th>Black</th>
<th>White</th>
<th>Both</th>
<th>Black &amp; White</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>YES</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NO</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table 5

**CLOSE BLACK FEMALE FRIEND (Black (n=8), White (n=7))**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Answer</th>
<th>Black</th>
<th>White</th>
<th>Both</th>
<th>Black &amp; White</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>YES</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NO</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Out of the seven white participants, four watch six or more hours of TV per week, two watch TV five to six hours per week, while one watches TV zero to two hours per week. The data indicate that most participants, white and black, watch TV five to six and more hours of television per week. The research suggest television forms an integral part of American life; and that some people may use television to get their information about other cultures. However, there was no correlation between the amount of television watched and the perceptions of stereotypes.

Table 7 shows participants' perception of black female stereotypes in situation comedies and the media in the general. Seven out of eight black participants perceive situation comedies on television and the media in general to stereotype black women. Here are some of the black participants' responses to the question about how black females are stereotyped:

"There is an orchestrated portrayal of the strong black African woman living alone without a man or mate to equally share the duties of raising a family. I think this is most evident in the film called "Birth of a Nation" and can be traced through the years and continues in the majority of today's situation comedies. It creates an impression that African American women are traditionally single, strong, and independent of the black male."

"Yes, the stereotype is seen in the way black females express themselves."

"Sometimes, it seems like the woman runs the household instead of having a strong black father or husband."
“Black women are rarely seen living together as a loving couple. Black women play subordinate roles when opposite white male and white females. They are portrayed as only sexual beings.”

“Black women are sometimes portrayed as gold-diggers. People tend to stereotype them as such. Not every woman is that way.”

“There seems to be a majority representation in comedy. People appear animated and slapstick.”

Six of the seven white participants perceive television situation comedies and the media in general to stereotype black females. Here are some of the white participants’ responses to the question how the media stereotype black females:

“Yes, they stereotype everyone. Make every black woman very strong-minded and good dancers-kind of in your face.”

“Television in general operates from formulas based on statistics that reflect the statisticians’ (white upper class males) view. This tends to make for very poor programming content. Yes, black women suffer very much from this formula.”

“Yes, to a point. I am not real familiar with black female actresses, but the ones I have seen seem to stereotype with typical black issues, problems, racial confrontations.”

“Yes, generally aggressive, often unmarried mothers.”
### TABLE 6
PARTICIPANTS' TIME SPENT WATCHING TELEVISION PER WEEK
(Black (n=8), White (n=7))

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Answer</th>
<th>Black</th>
<th></th>
<th>White</th>
<th></th>
<th>Both</th>
<th>Black &amp; White</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Total</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0-2 hours</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3-4 hours</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5-6 hours</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 hours +</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### TABLE 7
PARTICIPANTS' PERCEPTION OF BLACK FEMALE STEREOTYPES IN SITUATION COMEDIES (Black (n=8), White (n=7))

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Answer</th>
<th>Black</th>
<th></th>
<th>White</th>
<th></th>
<th>Both</th>
<th>Black &amp; White</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Total</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>YES</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NO</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### TABLE 8
PARTICIPANTS' PERCEPTION OF WHETHER TELEVISION SITUATION COMEDIES MAKE DISTINCTION BETWEEN WHITE FEMALE AND BLACK FEMALE ROLES (Black (n=8), White (n=7))

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Answer</th>
<th>Black</th>
<th></th>
<th>White</th>
<th></th>
<th>Both</th>
<th>Black &amp; White</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Total</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>YES</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NO</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
One out of the seven white participants said: "no, there are no stereotypes of black women in television situation comedies or in the media, in general."

The data indicate that the majority of both black and white participants perceive television situation comedies, and the media, in general, to promote stereotypes of black females. There was no correlation between race and the perception of stereotypes in the media in general.

Table 8 shows participants' perceptions of whether or not the media make distinctions between role allocations for white females versus roles for black females. Six out of the eight black participants perceive the media, in general, to make a distinction between role portrayals for white females versus black females. Here are some of black participants' responses to the question how the media make distinction between white female and black female roles:

"White female roles represent diverse characters."

"Making distinction between the way they speak."

"You do not see white women portrayed independent of white men, you see a more traditional family setting."

"Yes, the white females have more glamorous roles."

"Black women are not offered as many roles as their white counterparts because of the perception of the men in power. Black women are only put in demeaning roles, a.k.a. pregnant teenagers, prostitutes, ghetto queens, drug addicts, and sexual objects."

Five out of the seven white participants perceive the media in general to make distinctions between white females and black females in their various roles. Here are
some of the white participants’ responses to the question how the media in general make distinction between white and black female roles:

“Yes, sometimes, black women are below the white woman or have an attitude towards white women."

“Yes, it seems that the media often steers away from the romantic lives of black families. Characterization of black females in many television shows lack depth.”

The data indicate that the majority of black and white participants perceive the media, in general, as well as television situation comedies to make a distinctions between role selection and allocations for white female actresses versus black female actresses.

Discussion

The data collected in this section indicate that there was a cross section of race, education, working status and an adequate spread of representations across incomes. Seven of the eight black participants perceived the media and television situation comedies in general to promote stereotypes of black females and to make distinctions between white female and black female roles. There was only one 34-year-old graduate student in education (B6), who did not agree with the group. She did not perceive any of these stereotypes. She also said that the viewers should be more responsible in separating fiction from reality, adding that these television shows are just for entertainment. However, she said that stereotypes in the news can be seriously considered, because they deal with real people. Hence, it is interesting to note that her
favorite programs were listed as 20/20, Sixty Minutes and News Hour with Jim Lehrer, all news programs or news magazines. It is perhaps correct to assume from her response that she does perceive stereotypes in the news, as she watches more news compared to other shows.

Six out of the seven white participants perceived the media and television programs in general to stereotype black females and to make distinction between white female and black female roles. Again, there was only one 37-year-old interior designer (W5) who thought that the media did not promote these stereotypes. This participant said she had no contact with black females, and she also had no close black female friends. Ironically she listed her favorite actresses as Oprah Winfrey and Whoopi Goldberg and her favorite shows as The Oprah Winfrey Show, The Cosby Show and Nightline. Her response indicate that perhaps, the shows that she watches contain no stereotypes of black females.

The majority of the fifteen participants watch 6 or more hours of television per week. The 46-year-old black female participant (B3), who watches about two hours of television per week, was a senior in English and a part-time writer and had strong feelings about stereotypes of black females in general. Hence, her perceptions did not differ much from the rest who watch more hours of television per week. Another 42 years old white male (W2), who also watches 2 hours of television per week, said the media perpetuate black female stereotypes and make distinctions between white and black female roles. So, his limited hours of television watching as compared to the rest the participants, did not play a role in his perception of black female stereotypes in general.
Overall, the data indicate that the majority of participants watch 6 or more television hours per week, and this fits the national statistics. The research indicate that television is indeed a prime socializer and transmitter of culture, and therefore it is important to portray people of different cultures in more realistic ways.

There was no correlation between those who had close black female friends and those who perceived black female stereotypes. There were some white participants who had no close black female and did not interact with black females, but were very much aware of black female stereotypes, while there were those who had no contact with black females, but who still perceived black female stereotypes. Only W5 who had no contact with black females did not perceive any black female stereotypes.

The data on Table 8 indicate that the majority of both white and black participants perceived the media to make distinction between white female roles versus black female roles. Six of the eight black participants as well as six out of the seven white participants perceived a distinction made in the media between white female roles and black female roles. The most common distinction cited by both groups indicated that black female roles are one dimensional as opposed to the multi-dimensional portrayal of the white female actress; black females have lesser romantic roles, their characters lack depth and their roles are less glamorous. This shows again that the black females have a harder struggle to fight against males, as well as white females. So, where does this leave the dark-skinned black females?

Two black participants, a 34-year-old graduate student in education (B6) and a 22-year-old senior in nutrition (B7), did not perceive the media to make distinctions between white and black female roles. The white participant W6, an interior designer,
did not perceive the media to make distinctions between black female and white female roles.

Note that both B6 and W5 are the two participants who did not perceive any black female stereotypes in the media. B7 was in general, extremely vocal on female stereotypes in the media but then again, she did not perceive any white female and black female roles distinction made in the media. This suggests that there was no correlation between age, race, perceptions of other black female stereotypes in the media and the perceptions of distinction made between white female and black female roles.

Summary

The data collected from this Perception Assessment Survey suggest that the majority of black participants and the majority of white participants perceived black female stereotypes in the media in general. The majority of black participants as well as the majority of white participants perceived the media to make a distinction between black female and white female roles. The data also indicated that there was a fairly well-balanced representation from a variety of incomes, background classification and age groups. Overall, there were no major differences between the perception of white participants and the perceptions of black participants. Hence, it can be concluded that based on these responses, the media in general, do promote black female stereotypes. The data also revealed that white female roles are treated better than black female roles, therefore the black female ranks lower again.
SECTION II: PRE-TEST-QUESTIONNAIRE

BEFORE VIEWING THE TWO TELEVISION PROGRAMS

The pre-questionnaire was designed to assess the participants’ familiarity with the programs and their perceptions of the programs including their perception of black female lead characters. Seven out of eight black participants watched *Living Single*, in the past while only two of the seven white participants have seen the program. All eight of the black participants watched *Family Matters*, while only three of the seven white participants have previously seen the program. This shows that the black group watched more episodes of both focus groups programs compared to whites, and were more familiar with them.

Four of the eight black participants perceived *Living Single’s* Khadijah as positive; three perceived Maxine as positive; one thought Sinclaire to be positive, while none perceived Regine as positive before viewing *Living Single*. Three of the eight black participants perceived Regine as negative, three perceived Maxine as negative, and two perceived Sinclaire as negative. No one perceived Khadijah as negative before viewing *Living Single*. The white participants had no opinion as most had never watched the program, *Living Single* before, and those who did, could not recollect the characters. Data indicate that black participants were more familiar with the characters on both focus group programs.

Harriet and Laura of *Family Matters* were perceived as positive by six out of eight black participants and the three out of seven white participants, who indicated they watched the shows. Again more blacks were familiar with these programs as opposed to the white participants.
SECTION III: POST-TEST QUESTIONNAIRE
AFTER VIEWING THE TWO TELEVISION PROGRAMS

The post-test questionnaire was designed to assess the perceptions of participants after viewing the two focus group programs. Overall, there was not much difference about the perceptions of those who have seen the programs before and after viewing them. Table 9 shows participants' perceptions of characteristics of female stars in *Family Matters* and *Living Single* after they have viewed the focus group television programs. The words most frequently used by black participants to describe Harriet in *Family Matters* were intelligent, motherly, sensible, beautiful, and dark-skinned. None perceived Harriet as fat, light-skinned, stupid, unattractive and aggressive.

The words most frequently used by black participants to describe Kim, the love interest in *Family Matters*, were light-skinned, intelligent, aggressive, domineering, loud, beautiful, and thin. None of the black participants perceived Kim as fat, motherly, dark-skinned, stupid, sensible, passive and unattractive.

The words most frequently used by black participants to describe Laura, the daughter in *Family Matters* were intelligent, sensible and beautiful. None perceived Laura as fat, light-skinned, stupid, and unattractive.

Table 10 shows white participants' perception of black female characters in *Family Matters*. The words most frequently used by white participants to describe Harriet, the mother in *Family Matters*, were intelligent, motherly, sensible and dark-skinned. None perceived Harriet as stupid or passive.

The words most frequently used by white participants to describe Kim, the love interest in *Family Matters*, were sexy, light-skinned, intelligent, beautiful, and thin. None
TABLE 9  POST-TEST QUESTIONNAIRE FAMILY MATTERS PERCEPTION OF CHARACTERISTICS OF FEMALE CHARACTERS IN FAMILY MATTERS BY BLACK PARTICIPANTS (Black (n=8), White (n=7))

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kim</td>
<td></td>
<td>Laura</td>
<td></td>
<td>Harriet</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intelligent</td>
<td>(6)</td>
<td>Intelligent</td>
<td>(6)</td>
<td>Light-skinned</td>
<td>(7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motherly</td>
<td>(5)</td>
<td>Sensible</td>
<td>(5)</td>
<td>Intelligent</td>
<td>(7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sensible</td>
<td>(5)</td>
<td>Beautiful</td>
<td>(5)</td>
<td>Aggressive</td>
<td>(7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beautiful</td>
<td>(5)</td>
<td>Dark-skinned</td>
<td>(3)</td>
<td>Domineering</td>
<td>(6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dark-skinned</td>
<td>(4)</td>
<td>Sexy</td>
<td>(2)</td>
<td>Loud</td>
<td>(6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Passive</td>
<td>(2)</td>
<td>Motherly</td>
<td>(1)</td>
<td>Beautiful</td>
<td>(6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loud</td>
<td>(1)</td>
<td>Passive</td>
<td>(1)</td>
<td>Thin</td>
<td>(4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexy</td>
<td>(1)</td>
<td>Thin</td>
<td>(1)</td>
<td>Sexy</td>
<td>(3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thin</td>
<td>(1)</td>
<td>Domineering</td>
<td>(1)</td>
<td>Fat</td>
<td>(0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Domineering</td>
<td>(1)</td>
<td>Aggressive</td>
<td>(1)</td>
<td>Motherly</td>
<td>(0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fat</td>
<td>(0)</td>
<td>Loud</td>
<td>(1)</td>
<td>Dark-skinned</td>
<td>(0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Light-skinned</td>
<td>(0)</td>
<td>Light-skinned</td>
<td>(0)</td>
<td>Stupid</td>
<td>(0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unattractive</td>
<td>(0)</td>
<td>Stupid</td>
<td>(0)</td>
<td>Sensible</td>
<td>(0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aggressive</td>
<td>(0)</td>
<td>Unattractive</td>
<td>(0)</td>
<td>Passive</td>
<td>(0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stupid</td>
<td>(0)</td>
<td>Fat</td>
<td>(0)</td>
<td>Unattractive</td>
<td>(0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Characteristics</td>
<td>Harriet</td>
<td>Laura</td>
<td>Kim</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------</td>
<td>---------</td>
<td>-------</td>
<td>-----</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Frequency</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intelligent</td>
<td>(7)</td>
<td>(5)</td>
<td>(7)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motherly</td>
<td>(6)</td>
<td>(5)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sensible</td>
<td>(5)</td>
<td>(3)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dark-skinned</td>
<td>(4)</td>
<td>(3)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Domineering</td>
<td>(2)</td>
<td>(2)</td>
<td>(4)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aggressive</td>
<td>(2)</td>
<td>(1)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loud</td>
<td>(2)</td>
<td>(1)</td>
<td>(1)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fat</td>
<td>(1)</td>
<td>(1)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexy</td>
<td>(1)</td>
<td>(1)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unattractive</td>
<td>(1)</td>
<td>(0)</td>
<td>(1)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thin</td>
<td>(1)</td>
<td>(0)</td>
<td>(0)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beautiful</td>
<td>(1)</td>
<td>(0)</td>
<td>(0)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Passive</td>
<td>(0)</td>
<td>(0)</td>
<td>(0)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Light-skinned</td>
<td>(0)</td>
<td>(0)</td>
<td>(0)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stupid</td>
<td>(0)</td>
<td>(0)</td>
<td>(0)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**TABLE 10** Post-test Questionnaire Family Matters Perception of Characteristics of Female Characters in Family Matters by White Participants (Black (n=8), White (n=7))
of the white participants perceived Kim as fat, loud, motherly, dark skinned, passive and unattractive.

The words most frequently used by white participants to describe Laura, the daughter in *Family Matters* were beautiful, thin, sexy, and sensible. None of the white participants perceived Laura as domineering, aggressive, stupid, motherly, loud, and fat. The research indicate that there were similar as well as different perceptions among the white and black participants in the study.

Table 11 shows participants’ most and least favorite characters on *Family Matters* after viewing the focus group programs. Two of the eight black participants referred to Harriet as their most favorite character, while two found Laura their most favorite character and four did not answer. None found Kim, the love interest, as most favorite character. Three of the eight the black participants found Kim as their least favorite character in *Family Matters*, one found Harriet as the least favorite, while four did not.

**TABLE 11**  THE MOST AND LEAST FAVORITE CHARACTER ON “FAMILY MATTERS” (Black (n=8), White (n=7))

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>White (n=7)</th>
<th>Black (n=8)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Most favorite</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harriet</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laura</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Love interest</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No answer</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Least favorite</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harriet</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laura</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Love interest</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No answer</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
answer and none referred to Laura in this category. The data indicate that the most favorite characters were Harriet and Laura and the least favorite character was Kim.

Six out of the seven white participants perceived Kim, the love interest in *Family Matters*, as their most favorite character after viewing the focus group program, and one found Laura as the most favorite; none of the white participants found Harriet to be their most favorite character. The data indicate Kim, followed by Laura were the most favorite character for the white group.

Table 12 shows black participants' perception of the female characters in *Living Single* after viewing the focus. The words most frequently used to describe Khadijah were motherly, intelligent, sensible, and beautiful. None of the participants considered her aggressive, domineering, thin, unattractive, passive, and stupid. The words most frequently used by black participants to describe Regine were beautiful, light-skinned, and sexy. None perceived Regine to be fat, motherly, stupid, passive, thin and aggressive.

The words most frequently used by black participants to describe Maxine were dark-skinned, intelligent, aggressive, domineering, and beautiful. None perceived Maxine as fat, motherly, light-skinned, stupid, sensible, and unattractive. The words most frequently used by the black participants to describe Sinclaire were light-skinned, beautiful, and passive. None found Sinclaire loud, dark-skinned, unattractive, thin, domineering, and aggressive.

Table 13 Shows white participants' perception of female characters in *Living Single* after viewing the focus group program. The words most frequently used to
### TABLE 12  POST-TEST QUESTIONNAIRE LIVING SINGLE PERCEPTION OF CHARACTERISTICS OF FEMALE CHARACTERS IN LIVING SINGLE BY BLACK PARTICIPANTS (Black (n=8), White (n=7))

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>Khadijah Frequency</th>
<th>Maxine Frequency</th>
<th>Regine Frequency</th>
<th>Sinclaire Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Motherly</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intelligent</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Beautiful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sensible</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Passive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beautiful</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Light-skinned</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fat</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexy</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loud</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aggressive</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Domineering</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Passive</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stupid</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thin</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dark-skinned</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unattractive</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### TABLE 13 POST-TEST QUESTIONNAIRE LIVING SINGLE PERCEPTION OF CHARACTERISTICS OF FEMALE CHARACTERS IN LIVING SINGLE BY WHITE PARTICIPANTS (Black (n=8), White (n=7))

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Khadijah</th>
<th>Maxine</th>
<th>Regine</th>
<th>Sinclaire</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Frequency</strong></td>
<td><strong>Frequency</strong></td>
<td><strong>Frequency</strong></td>
<td><strong>Frequency</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motherly (7)</td>
<td>Loud (6)</td>
<td>Sexy (4)</td>
<td>Fat (4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sensible (7)</td>
<td>Dark-skinned</td>
<td>Beautiful (3)</td>
<td>Motherly (4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intelligent (5) Aggressive (6)</td>
<td>Domineering (3)</td>
<td>Aggressive (2)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fat (1)</td>
<td>Sexy (5)</td>
<td>Intelligent (2)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loud (1)</td>
<td>Thin (4)</td>
<td>Sensible (2)</td>
<td>Light-skinned</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dark-skinned (1) Intensitive (3)</td>
<td>Passive (2)</td>
<td>Loud (1)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Passive (1)</td>
<td>Domineering (3)</td>
<td>Fat (1)</td>
<td>Stupid (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Domineering (1) Beautiful (2)</td>
<td>Motherly (1)</td>
<td>Sensible (1)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexy (0)</td>
<td>Fat (0)</td>
<td>Light-skinned (1)</td>
<td>Passive (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Light-skinned (0) Motherly (0)</td>
<td>Loud (0)</td>
<td>Unattractive (1)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thin (0)</td>
<td>Sensible (0)</td>
<td>Dark-skinned (0)</td>
<td>Beautiful (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stupid (0)</td>
<td>Stupid (0)</td>
<td>Stupid (0)</td>
<td>Thin (0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beautiful (0)</td>
<td>Passive (0)</td>
<td>Unattractive (0)</td>
<td>Domineering (0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aggressive (0)</td>
<td>Unattractive (0)</td>
<td>Thin (0)</td>
<td>Dark-skinned (0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unattractive (0) Light-skinned (0)</td>
<td>Aggressive (0)</td>
<td>Sexy (0)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
describe Khadijah were motherly, sensible, and intelligent. None of the white participants found Khadijah sexy, light-skinned, stupid, unattractive, beautiful, thin, and aggressive.

The words most frequently used by white participants to describe Regine were sexy, beautiful, and domineering. None perceived Regine as loud, dark-skinned, stupid, unattractive, and thin. The words most frequently used by the white participants to describe Maxine were loud, dark-skinned, aggressive, sexy, and thin. None found Maxine fat, motherly, stupid, sensible, and passive. The words most frequently used to describe Sinclaire by the white participants were fat and motherly. None perceived Sinclaire as domineering, thin, and dark-skinned.

Table 14 shows participants' most favorite and least favorite female characters on Living Single after viewing the focus group program. Six of the seven white participants found Maxine to be their most favorite character after viewing the focus group program. None thought of Khadijah and Sinclaire as the most favorite, while one of the seven white participants perceived Regine as their most favorite.

Three of the eight black participants considered both Khadijah and Maxine as their favorite character. One selected Sinclaire and none indicated Regine as most favorite character. One black participant did not answer. Five of the white participants indicated Sinclaire was their least favorite character; one listed Khadijah; one selected Regine; and one chose Maxine. Three of the eight black participants considered Regine as their least favorite character; three listed Maxine; one indicated Sinclaire; and none chose Khadijah as least favorite character. Two black participants did not answer.
TABLE 14  THE MOST AND LEAST FAVORITE CHARACTER ON LIVING SINGLE (Black (n=8), White (n=7))

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Race</th>
<th>White (n=7)</th>
<th>Black (n=8)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Most favorite</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Khadijah</td>
<td></td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regine</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maxine</td>
<td></td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sinclaire</td>
<td></td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No answer</td>
<td></td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Least favorite</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Khadijah</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regine</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maxine</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sinclaire</td>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No answer</td>
<td></td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Discussion

The data in tables 9-14 assessed the participants’ perception of female characters in both Living Single and Family Matters through a post test questionnaire after they have watched the two programs. The black participants in general perceived Kim of Family Matters as light-skinned, intelligent, beautiful, thin, aggressive and loud. The white participants perceived Kim as light-skinned, sexy, intelligent, beautiful and thin. The data indicated that the white and the black group have common as well as different perceptions of Kim. Loud and domineering are considered negative behaviors in the black community. It is true that one will find many loud and domineering black females, however research suggest that if the media present black females in a one dimensional view, this can be construed as reality.

Both black and white participants perceived Harriet, the mother character in Family Matters, as motherly, intelligent, sensible, and dark-skinned. However, only the black group considered her beautiful. She was considered a black female stereotype in the sense that she was portrayed as stronger than her husband, Carl. Previous research indicate the black family on television has often been depicted in this manner. This research indicates that the stereotypes still exist, and there is a need to produce program that would portray the black family more realistically and less stereotypical.

Laura was perceived as beautiful by both the white and black groups. However, the white group perceived her as sensible and beautiful, while the black group perceived her as thin. The data indicate that the white and the black groups share similar as well as different perceptions for the female characters in Family Matters. This can be attributed to the differences between the culture of the focus group participants.
Concerning the perception of the most and least favorite characters after viewing *Family Matters*, there were major differences between white and black participants. Kim was the most favorite character for the white participants, while she was considered the least favorite character by the black participants. Harriet was more favored by the black group, while she was perceived as the least favorite by the white group. With Laura, there were minor differences between least and most favored with regard to racial groups. The data indicates that blacks and whites seemed to have different preferences for the female characters in *Family Matters*. The reason why blacks perceived Kim as least favorite is because they thought of her as a black female stereotype, and her trying to go out with a younger person was also perceived as a bad role model for youngsters. Based on these responses, it is evident that black people are still searching for role models in the media. These participants are still looking for role models in the media that represent the ordinary black people who have the same aspirations as the rest of the population.

The black participants perceived Khadijah of *Living Single* as motherly, sensible, beautiful and intelligent. The white participants considered Khadijah as motherly sensible, beautiful and intelligent. The two groups only differed in the beauty category.

The black participants perceived Maxine as dark-skinned, aggressive, intelligent, domineering, beautiful, loud and thin. The white participants considered Maxine as dark-skinned, aggressive, loud, sexy and thin. There were overall similar perceptions as well as differences between the groups. Maxine was seen as negative by the blacks and positive by the whites. Maxine's role as a lawyer generates expectations of a positive role model; however, the way she was portrayed on this episode of *Living Single* was
seen in a negative light. Whites perceived her as funny and humorous and just enjoyed her, while blacks felt that whites like those characters they can laugh at, and not laugh with. The black participants perceived Regine as beautiful, light-skinned and sexy, while the white participants perceived her as sexy, beautiful and domineering. Overall, Regine was perceived as negative before and after viewing the show. The black participants were familiar with her character, and they also said she was a bad role model for youngsters. She was seen as a prostitute.

Sinclaire was perceived by the black group as light-skinned, beautiful and passive, while the white group saw her as fat and motherly. Blacks saw her also as naive and dumb. Again, a bad role model for black youngsters, according to the black participants. Whites had little to say about her; perhaps because her character, was not as exciting as that of Maxine.

The data indicate that the perceptions of the characters mostly differed based on race, even though there were common perception for some characters. This can be attributed to cultural differences and how those difference influence perceptions. Blacks are looking for entertainment and role models, while whites are perhaps looking mainly for entertainment.

SECTION IV : PARTICIPANTS’ RESPONSES TO OPEN ENDED QUESTIONS DURING AUDIO-TAPED DISCUSSION

The focus groups were designed to give the participants an opportunity to express their opinions, and concerns, and perceptions of the two programs they viewed and other issues they chose to discuss. These sessions were audio-taped. The researcher
attended both sessions and observed the responses and recorded notes about the participants' behaviors during the discussions. A formal content analysis was not designed for this project. The research simply made several general observations of the groups.

The format for the discussion segment of the study was the same for both groups. The moderator presented several open-ended questions to each group. The questions were mostly asked in the same manner and same way. This section will summarize participants' responses to these questions by racial group as observed by the researcher who was present at the sessions and through recording on audio tape.

**Question I: What did you think of Living Single and Family Matters?**

**LIVING SINGLE**

The majority of the black participants did not like the show or perhaps this particular episode of *Living Single*. Most participants indicated that they were not impressed with the way Maxine, the attorney, went about trying to pick up a man in a bar. They said that a woman of her standing in real life would not stoop to that level trying to get a man. Furthermore, they felt that the show portrayed Maxine as incapable of getting a man. Hence, this illustrates again the unrealistic portrayal of black females in the media, according to some participants. The program was also interpreted as not only demeaning to black women, but a bad role model for black youngsters. Participant B2 commented that since those behind the scenes are busy shaping, writing and creating, they felt that a black woman lawyer would most probably act this way. She maintained that, if they had 20 black female attorneys in the room as they wrote, with
twenty different personalities, they would not consist of any of those personalities they
write about. There was also one black participant (B6) who said that viewers should be
more responsible and try to distinguish between entertainment that is fiction and
perhaps news that is real. She said she enjoyed watching Living Single and appreciates it
for its pure entertainment value. This was met with great disagreement from the group.
Participant B8 said that it was just impossible to separate reality from fiction. He said
that, images were the most powerful teachers; “in all our childhood, we grew up on
images, so when you talk about television, you talk about images, and if you keep a
certain image on the screen, many kids who view this all the time, get their selves out of
there. You cannot separate yourself from your environment. And part of your
environment is that TV and you can’t...,” the participant added. Another participant
(B4), who enjoys the program in general said he was shocked to see Maxine acting this
way in this episode, because she is usually “cool and conservative.” The research
suggests, they had seen other episodes that were more positive.

All of the white participants found Living Single funny and entertaining and they
enjoyed watching the program. Most said that Maxine had a good sense of humor. They
also commented that the living area was not as stereotypical as older situation
comedies, i.e. there were no holes in the ceiling, the language was more grammatically
correct in other shows; and in general nowadays, the sitcoms, such as The Cosby Show
and The Fresh Prince of Bel Aire are different from earlier “black sitcoms.” They called it
sophisticated humor. The remarks from the white participants suggest that they have a
very good knowledge about these stereotypes in general. However, the data indicate
that perceptions varied based on race. This can be attributed to cultural differences again.

**FAMILY MATTERS**

The majority of black participants (6/8) perceived *Family Matters* negatively. Those, who did not like the program, said that most people watched the show just because of the Urkel character. Participant B8 said: “that goes back right to what we are saying...Stephit Fetchit, *Amos and Andy, Martin, and now Urkel.*” They criticized *Family Matters* as another show where you have a black man who never grows up. Participant B2 said: “Stephit Fetchit never grew up, Gary Coleman of Different Strokes, Immanuel Lewis of Webster, also never grew up.” She felt that in these two cases (Coleman and Lewis), they seemingly monopolized on the health of the two characters by continuously treating them as little boys. They were wondering why a character, such as Urkel, that is supposed to be a scientist and intelligent, has an inability to mature and grow up. She said that Stephit Fetchit was unable to comprehend and take responsibility and make adult decisions. So, it is a recurring image from the 1950s, expanded in the Urkel character, who is adored in the sense of the black family. Most felt that a show such as *Family Matters* just about the family wouldn’t be on TV. The show’s characters were heavily criticized. Participant B3 said: “You got to have a strong mother and a strong father. You cannot have a wacko father...Carl is exactly what my father is not. He is not in shape, he is an idiot, clumsy, clown, what kind of father is that? He doesn’t think, does not make sensible decisions and that is sort of bad image for males in general.” Those who did not like it said they had strong feelings against this show.
Those (B1, B5), who liked *Family Matters*, said that the program was entertaining, positive and fun to watch. They also felt that Steve Urkel was just a character made up for laughter and that young children would know better than to imitate him. Participant B5 said; “certainly as smart as Steve is on the show, he is not portraying the black man; as for people to say all black man are nerdy, that will be wrong.” The black participants once again are looking for what type of role models are out there for black kids.

All white participants found *Family Matters* entertaining and fun to watch. One participant, (W4) said: “I thought it was funny and unrealistic. Somebody said earlier that the unrealistic ones were the best.” The whites found this show particularly entertaining. This research suggests whites in this study preferred slapstick over any other type of entertainment.

**Question II : Which characters in Living Single and Family Matters did you find negative or positive?**

**LIVING SINGLE**

Khadijah was generally referred to as the most positive character in *Living Single* by the black participants. She was said to be motherly, thoughtful, and concerned. Regine was labeled as a gold-digger, a borderline prostitute, and depending on men for money. One participant (B7) said that this type of influence, where the woman use the man for money, is so strong that she has recognized that in most of her friends. She said, they will not go out with a man unless he can buy them things. Thus, the media could be perpetuating this belief, that a woman can only go out with a man, if he pays. It was again about role models and the effects on the black population.
"Maxine is just aggressive another participant commented while everyone agreed. Maxine and Kyle, who are having an off and on relationship in the show, were said to continually put off each other. Some participants noted that it is only these two dark-skinned people, who behave like that and they referred to these behaviors ‘checking’ each other.

Sinclaire was interpreted as dumb and clueless, naïve, silly, and a mismatch for her more intelligent boyfriend. But, another participant commented that what amazes her was that Sinclaire does think. “She is real nice and goodhearted.” In addition, the participants explained that Sinclaire’s naivety, associated in situation comedies, can be interpreted as a kind of the insult given to people of color.

The majority of the white participants found the most positive character in Maxine, the attorney. She was also called a strong woman. They noticed that the term lawyer was mentioned twice, while it had nothing to do with the plot. There was one participant (W6) who referred to Maxine as ridiculous, Sinclaire was the least favorite, while people were divided on Regine. There was no opinion on Khadijah. The data indicate that there was a difference in perception of the characters on Living Single depending on racial group.

FAMILY MATTERS

The majority of the black participants found Harriet, the mother character in Family Matters, as stronger than the husband, Carl. She is said to be devoted to her family, caring and loving. The love interest of Eddie, Kim was overall perceived negatively by the majority of black participants. She was perceived as not acting like a mature black woman, a 29 years old, trying make it with a twenty-year old man. They
also had a problem with the way she went about pursuing this younger man. Laura was perceived as positive, and because she played a small role, there was not much opinion about her.

The majority of the white participants found Harriet positive. A participant (W4) said; “She is pride, she has wisdom,” while the rest agreed. Laura was seen as pretty, slender and attractive, while some felt she should have been nicer to Urkel. Kim, the love interest to Eddie, Harriet’s son, was well liked by most participants. They said that she was educated, intelligent, ambitious, honest and knew what she wanted. The black participants perceived Harriet’s character as positive; however, blacks criticized her portrayal as stronger than her husband, Carl. They said that was a negative stereotype of the black family.

On the other hand, white participants perceived Carl as a good father, who even took care of Steve Urkel, who was not his own son. Again, the perceptions of participants do vary according to racial group. The data also indicate that the majority of black participants perceive Kim as negative, while the majority of white participants perceive Kim as positive. The black participants perceived Kim as a bad role model for black youngsters, a stereotype of black female portrayed as acting “Ho-ish.” The majority of whites saw Kim as being truthful about her intentions, and felt that if older men can go out with younger girls, why can’t women do the same. Hence, they perceived the portrayal of Kim in a positive light, where women are in positions today that were reserved for only men in the past. The data indicate that the majority of both blacks and whites perceived Laura in a positive light, and since she played a small part, the only comments were that she was pretty and slender. However, they felt she should
be a little nicer to Urkel. The data overall indicate that the participants’ perceptions do vary according to racial group.

**Question III:** Do television and the media in general make a distinction between dark-skinned black women and light-skinned black woman with regard to role selection and role allocation?

The majority of the black participants agreed that the light-skinned black women are portrayed differently in television and the media in general from the dark-skinned black woman. The light-skinned black women will most likely play the role of sexually attractive black female, while the dark-skinned black woman will get the role of unattractive black female. Participant W8 said: “Kim is light-skinned, and beautiful, like Halle Berry. Even a lot of black men think light-skinned long hair is the closest thing you can get to being blond and blue eyed... that’s the mental bondage, black folks had for hundred of years and is perpetuated on the screen.” Most also agreed that in several music videos and commercials, black women have light-colored eyes, and light complexions. One participant commented: “dark-skinned black women...they hate themselves” a participant commented, while another recounted that many black men have told her, they could never date a women as dark as she is. The black group felt that the light-skinned beautiful black woman is the preferred image, and the image that a lot of black children grew up with, watching television.

The majority of Black participants felt that the focus group episode of *Family Matters* contained the light-skinned black female stereotype in Kim, the love interest. “You have a high yellow, sexy...high yellow, sexy...you know what I’m saying and she got these skirts on, and you see this line on TV... if you’re high yellow and you wear
certain things you’re sexy... and if you’re dark and doing that... there is some dark-side or ugliness to it. I am not saying that light-skinned black women can’t be sexy, but, also, there has to be a balance.”

In the program Living Single, the majority of black participants did not perceive the characteristics of light-skinned black female or dark-skinned black female stereotypes; however they, mentioned that Maxine and Kyle, both dark-skinned, kept on putting each other down or “checking” each other as they referred to that type of behavior. They went on to explain that this also can be seen in the television situation comedy “Martin.” Almost all agreed that the light-skinned and dark-skinned black women stereotypes, in general, are portrayed more covertly in the 1990’s.

The majority of the white participants also felt that the light-skinned black women are treated differently from the dark-skinned women in television and the media in general. They said that the light-skinned black woman is more likely to play the love interest, while the dark-skinned black woman will more likely play the maid. There was one person who disagreed, saying that was traditionally the case, but it is not happening anymore. This statement was received with a lot of disagreement. Participant W6 said: “the beautiful light-skinned black woman is going to have the bigger part, the love interest, whereas the darker one maybe the maid.” They said this was because whites in general relate better to light-skinned blacks. In addition society likes white people and even the black male prefers light-skinned black women, they said. One said; “you know it is the white race...you know the blondes...”.

During the debate, one participant (W2) said that there were cultures where big heavy-set women were more sexually attractive than thinner ones. This generated
laughter from the rest of the group. Though they laughed at this statement, it is true that there are cultures that think like that. Again, the rest of the group insisted that even when watching a newscast, it is better to have a light-skinned black person and said that is one of the reasons that contributed to the success of journalists like Bryant Gumble. One white participant still insisted that only the content of the news was more important than the shade of skin. The other members of the group did not agree and said he was most definitely in the minority.

In *Family Matters*, the white participants said that it was easy to identify Harriet as a dark-skinned woman; however, they did not see any dark-skinned black woman stereotype. While most agreed that Laura and Kim, were light-skinned, one participant said that it was hard to identify the love interest as light-skinned. All agreed that the Kim played the sexy role.

When the moderator asked the difference in role portrayal between the dark-skinned motherly Harriet and the light-skinned attractive Kim, one participant answered: “Harriet appeared more rounder in physical appearance, but she also appeared 20+ years older. So we have to take into consideration normal facts of life.”

The data indicate most white participants felt that the “light is right” stereotype is still perpetuated in the media and in other television shows; however, not in *Living Single* and *Family Matters*. Overall, they rated the two programs as “exceptional.”
Discussion

Group Observations

Fifteen individuals participated in the sessions. The groups were designed to accommodate ten people per group, however only 15 showed. Group 1 consisted of 7 white participants and based on the observation of the researcher. They were very interactive, even though most of the participants did not know one another. From the beginning to the end, there was a lively interaction among the member of the focus group. The session lasted about an hour and thirty minutes.

Group 2 consisted of eight black participants. This group was also very much interactive and a lively debate ensued from the beginning to the end. The session lasted for approximately one hour and forty-five minutes. This session was longer because the topic at hand seemed to be more salient to this group. The moderator had to cut the discussion short because they wanted to go on and on.

Summary of Responses

The responses by the black group indicate they perceived Living Single's female characters Khadijah as positive in the sense that, she is caring and considerate, Regine was perceived as negative in the sense that, she is portrayed as a gold-digger and borderline prostitute, Maxine was perceived as negative in the sense that, she is too aggressive, and Sinclaire was perceived as negative in the sense that, she is dumb. Silly, naïve, and clueless.

For the program, Family Matters, the black participants perceived Harriet as positive in the sense that she is devoted to her family, yet negative in the sense that she is portrayed stronger than her husband, Carl. This is interpreted as a negative
stereotype of the black family in general. The black participants perceived Kim as negative in the sense that she is immoral, a loose woman, and a negative role model for black youngsters. Laura was perceived to be positive in general, and since her part was not that big, little was said about her character. Overall, the responses indicated that black people were more concerned with their image on television, because for years they have been portrayed unrealistically and therefore they are still searching for the roles that portray blacks in a more balanced way.

The responses from the white group suggest that they perceived Living Single’s female characters in the following manner: Maxine as positive in the sense that she is a lawyer and a strong woman, Regine as both negative and positive, and Sinclaire’s character as negative in the sense that she seemed to be referred to as the least favorite.

For the program, Family Matters, the majority of white participants perceived Kim as the most positive in the sense that she was ambitious, honest, intelligent and knew what she wanted. Harriet was also seen as positive in the sense that she was wise and proud and concerned about the well being of her family. Laura was also seen as positive in the sense that they say she was pretty and slender. The research suggest that the whites were seemingly more interested in the entertainment and gender issues, because those might be issues that are more salient to them as opposed to blacks who dealt more with the stereotypical issues.
CHAPTER V

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, LIMITATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose of this study was to assess the perceptions of stereotypes of light-skinned black females versus dark-skinned black females on television situation comedies. The study also assessed the perceptions of black female stereotypes versus white female stereotypes on television. Two popular television situation comedies, Living Single and Family Matters, starring black females in leading roles, were analyzed to assess how individuals perceived light-skinned black females versus dark-skinned black female characters. The fifteen participants in the focus groups shared essential information that enabled the research to achieve its goal of acquiring more knowledge about perceptions of black female stereotypes. The study was able to pinpoint ideas and themes common to stereotypes of black women, by primarily concentrating on black female stereotypes in the media. Three research questions guided the research.

1. Will two black-dominated television situation comedies in the 1990's, Living Single and Family Matters be perceived by focus groups to contain instances of light-skinned black female stereotypes and dark-skinned black female stereotypes?

2. How are light-skinned black women and dark-skinned black women's images perceived in television situation comedies by focus groups of blacks?
and whites, with references to positive and/or negative traits, such as good-looking, unattractive, attractive, domineering, fat, thin, average, and loud?

3. What is the overall perceptions of stereotypes of black females in television situation comedies and the media in general, by the focus groups?

The research provided information to answer these questions; however, these questions are merely a component of a larger answer to larger questions. The research has revealed that the light-skinned black female stereotypes and the dark-skinned black female stereotypes were not perceived by the white participants in the two focus group programs *Living Single* and *Family Matters*. However, the black group perceived the light-skinned black female stereotype in the character of Kim, who played the love interest in *Family Matters*. The Black group did not find any light-skinned black female and dark-skinned black female stereotypes in *Living Single*, but perceived a subtle continuation of a different kind of colorism stereotype, in the way dark-skinned Maxine, the lawyer, and dark-skinned Kyle, her on and off boyfriend, behaved with each other.

Also note that the study has discovered additional information about the perceptions of black female stereotypes in the media in general. These stereotypes are not necessarily about colorism, but images that stereotype black females in television situation comedies and the media in general, in the 1990s. This also included the perceptions of white female role portrayals versus black female role portrayals in the media in general. The majority of both black and most white participants perceived black females to be stereotyped negatively, and white female roles to be more glamorous than black female roles in the media in general.
Question I: What is the perceived image of light-skinned black female versus dark-skinned black female characters in television situation comedies and the media in general?

The responses from most of the fifteen individuals suggest that light-skinned black female characters and dark-skinned black female characters on television situation comedies, and the media in general, are perceived to be portrayed differently. The majority of the black participants as well as the majority of the white participants perceive light-skinned black female characters to be portrayed as more positive, beautiful, sexy, glamorous, sexually appealing, and most likely to play the love interest part. The majority of both black and white participants perceived dark-skinned black female characters to be portrayed on television situation comedies in general as more negative, ugly, aggressive, and most likely to be the maid and/or get smaller parts. The black participants mostly linked this to the historical situation in the United States and the creators of television programs who are predominantly white. They also acknowledged that black writers and producers are not much different from white writers and producers, because they have been educated and influenced by the same system and the same people who perpetuate these stereotypes. Black participants reiterated that blacks who continue to reinforce the notion that "light is right" are in a kind of "mental bondage" or suffer from "internalized oppression." However they have to make a conscious effort to change the way they continue to oppress themselves and other blacks by breaking this cycle within themselves, according to one black participant (B8). Another black participant (B2) said that when black writers and producers are questioned about the stereotypical images they create, they are always surprised, replying: "What do you mean? I just write." Hence, the black participants felt
that this kind of reply illustrates that creating black stereotypical images seems to come naturally to blacks as it comes to whites due to the influence of same system.

The data also indicate that the majority of white participants perceive the "light is right" stereotype to be promoted by situation comedies and the media in general, because as participant (W7) put it, white people relate better to light-skinned black people than to darker-skinned black people. Most participants agreed with her. Participant (W6) said that it is just how the society and the white race are; adding that even the blondes within the white race are preferred as opposed to brunettes. Once again all participants, except for participant W2, agreed with her. Hence, the data from the study suggest that the majority of black and white participants perceive light-skinned black females to be portrayed more positively as opposed to dark-skinned black females on situation comedies and in the media in general in the 1990's. Overall, this research suggest their perceptions are congruent with previous research reflecting a racist and sexist country.

**Question II**: Do television situation comedies make distinction between white female roles and black female roles in television situation comedies and the media in general?

The data from the focus group suggest that the majority of both black and most white participants perceive television situation comedies and the media in general, in the 1990s to make a distinction between white female roles and black female roles. Based on the examination, observation and assessment of the fifteen participants, the data suggest that black women are not offered as many roles as their white counterparts; white female roles represent diverse characters; white women are portrayed in traditional family settings, and not independent from the white male;
while black women are mostly unwed parents, drug addicts, sexual objects and prostitutes. Black females get smaller parts and less glamorous roles and sometimes black women are portrayed as subservient to white women or have attitudes toward white women. Additionally, the media often steers away from the romantic lives of black families and many black female roles lack depth. White female roles are multidimensional as opposed to those of black females that are mostly one-dimensional. The majority of participants also agreed that black females are stereotyped as strong and good dancers. Hence, the majority of both black and white participants perceive white women to be portrayed more positively as opposed to the mostly negative portrayals of black females on situation comedies and the media in the 1990’s.

**Question III : Will the black dominated television situation comedies in the 1990’s Living Single and Family Matters be perceived to contain any instances of Light-skinned black women stereotypes of being pretty, sexy, more positive, versus the historically dark-skinned black female stereotype of ugly, obese, loud, domineering and aggressive that is more negative?**

The data based on these fifteen individuals suggest that the overall perceptions of dark-skinned black female stereotypes and light-skinned black female stereotypes in the two focus group situation comedies, Living Single and Family Matters differed slightly according to racial group.

**MAXINE**

The data suggest that in, Living Single, the overwhelming majority of the black participants perceived Maxine, as dark-skinned. They also perceived her as beautiful, thin, sexy and the love interest. Thus, judging from these perceptions, Maxine could not fit into the dark-skinned black female stereotype of obese, ugly, being a mammy and

84
having smaller parts. She played a lawyer and also a starring role in the program. However, the majority of the black participants considered her a stereotype of the strong, loud, aggressive and domineering black female. They did not like her character at all. She was also considered an unrealistic portrayal of the black female in her attempt to pick up a guy in the bar (being a lawyer) was perceived as a bad role model for black youngsters. The black participants could not reconcile the fact that a lawyer, who is supposed to be a positive role model, contained all the black female stereotypes that they perceive as negative. It is obvious that black people are still looking for media images that will portray them more realistically and provide positive role models for black youngsters. The main reasons are that positive black female roles are few or non-existent. They perceived that whites do have stereotypical roles, however, there are so many positive white female roles that balances the two images.

The majority of blacks also mentioned that the dark-skinned black stereotype appeared rather covertly in this episode of Living Single in the way dark-skinned Maxine and dark-skinned Kyle, put each down in every episode. They called it a subtle continuation of the colorism stereotype. They refer to it as 'checking' and said it can also be seen in many other situation comedies, one being Martin.

The data indicate that the overwhelming majority of white participants perceived the Maxine character also as dark-skinned. They perceived her as thin, sexy and the love interest. Hence, judging from these perceptions Maxine could not fit into the quintessential dark-skinned female stereotype of ugly, fat, mammy, and having smaller parts. Although this group considered her as loud, aggressive, domineering, and strong, they reiterated that in a positive sense. Her character was well-liked and
considered positive by the overwhelming majority of white participants. She was seen as humorous and positive in being a lawyer. The white participants felt that if men can pick up girls in bars, they see nothing wrong with Maxine doing the same. The white group were more concerned with the gender issue. If a man can do it, why can't a woman do the same, while the blacks were more worried about the image. This can probably be interpreted that whites and blacks have different concerns when it comes to media imaging, since both groups are portrayed differently. The issue that is more salient to blacks, like stereotypes, will be more easily noticed by blacks, because they had suffered more from negative stereotypes as compared to whites. The issue that seems more important to whites (gender issues) would be mostly noticed by whites. This is not to imply that blacks are not aware of gender issues, but if both are presented in front of them, they will most likely react to the racial stereotype issues, as this group has demonstrated. The white group also considered her humorous, while the blacks were appalled by her overall behavior. Perhaps the white group prefer the buffoon types of roles where they can laugh at blacks and that might explains why slapstick comedy about blacks have longer lives on television than other serious programs, such as Frank’s Place.

KIM

The data based on the perceptions of the fifteen individuals who participated in the study, suggest that the perception of Kim, the love interest in Family Matters also differed according to racial group. Kim was perceived by the overwhelming majority of black participant as light-skinned. She was also perceived by the majority of black participants as a definite light-skinned black female stereotype. She was called “high
yellow and sexy.” Most agreed that she was sexy, beautiful, thin, and intelligent. However, the majority of the black participants disliked her character. She was perceived as loud, domineering, and aggressive. They perceived her character as acting “Ho-ish”, a loose woman with low morals, trying to make it with a young man, an unrealistic portrayal of the mature black female as well as a bad role model for black youngsters. Hence, the light-skinned black female stereotype was identified in Kim’s character by the black participants.

The data suggest that the overwhelming majority of white participants perceived Kim as light-skinned. She was also perceived by the majority of the white participants as sexy, thin, and beautiful. Her character was well liked by the white group. Although they saw her as loud, domineering, and aggressive, they interpreted her character as positive. They called her an ambitious, intelligent, and honest woman who knew what she wanted. The white participants they saw nothing wrong with Kim, an older person going out with a younger male, because if males can do it why can’t females do it. They did not see a light-skinned black female stereotype in Kim.

Again, when we compare the black participants’ perceptions of Kim and Maxine, there are some interesting correlation. Both Characters were perceived by blacks as negative, portraying the unrealistic black female and providing bad role modeling for black youngsters; while whites did not perceive that at all. Again, blacks are still searching for positive and realistic portrayals of themselves in the media. It is evident that they do not appreciate the one-dimensional and exaggerated portrayals of black females in the media. The whites, on the other hand, are more concerned with gender issues, perhaps something that is salient in their communities. There are black people
who are also concerned about gender issues; however, it seems the stereotype issue enjoys more priority, because not a single black person mentioned the gender issue in both the Maxine and the Kim cases. The whites commented for example, if older man can go out with younger girls, why can't the reverse happen? The research suggest these perceptions are based on experience and culture differences, priorities, and needs of whites and blacks. That's why it is important to learn about different cultures and ethnic groups through positive enculturation that would include education, the mass media, and personal experience. By so doing, ignorance about others' cultures, no longer can be used as an excuse to oppress and stigmatize others. If the mass media would select and present information of others or transmit culture in a more positive and rewarding way, they can educate themselves better about the various cultures and ethnic groups.

**HARRIET**

The data based on the perceptions of the fifteen individuals, who participated in the study, indicate that the majority of both white and black participants did not differ much in their perception of Harriet, the mother in *Family Matters*. Both black and white participants found Harriet as motherly, intelligent, dark-skinned, and sensible. Based on the data Harriet cannot be perceived as a dark-skinned black female stereotype. Both groups found her character as positive, but the black group found her a bit stronger than her husband, which they perceive as a black female stereotype. The black family, in early and subsequent situation comedies, contained the stereotype of the strong black female and the weak black man. This is also one of the negative stereotypes that media
critics have attacked decade after decade; and apparently it still persist, according to the perceptions of the black focus group participants.

REGINE

The data based on the perceptions of the fifteen individuals, who participated in the study, suggest that there was a difference in perception and interpretation of the Regine character in Living Single. The majority of the black participants considered Regine light-skinned. She was also seen as sexy, beautiful, and intelligent. The black group did not see her as a light-skinned black female stereotype. However, the majority disliked her character that was interpreted as a borderline prostitute, a gold-digger, and a bad influence for black youngsters. Once again, it is about role models for black youngsters. Regine will only go out with a man if he can give her something like money or jewelry, and so forth. Black participants felt that since black female roles are so few, these types of portrayals are not really necessary. They prefer black female roles that were more realistic.

The majority of the white participants experienced difficulty in identifying Regine as dark-skinned or light-skinned. Overall, the white group was divided on Regine. Some found her beautiful and domineering, while others found her sexy. It was easier for the white group to identify "extreme" shades like Maxine and Kim, as opposed to the black group in general. This could probably be because blacks live with, and learn about colorism since childhood; and that makes is easier to tell the different shades. Participant (B2) said that her siblings are all brown-skinned, but people in her community always try to pinpoint who is lighter or darker than the other.
KHADIJAH

The data based on the perceptions of the fifteen individuals, who participated in the study, suggest that both the white and black participants did not perceive the character of Khadijah in *Living Single* to contain any light-skinned black and/or dark-skinned black female stereotypes. Khadijah was considered by the overwhelming majority of both black and white participants as motherly, sensible, and intelligent.

SINCLAIRE

The data based on the perceptions of the fifteen individuals, who participated in the study, suggest that the perception of Sinclaire in *Living Single* differed based on the racial groups. The majority of black participants perceived Sinclaire as light-skinned. However, they did not perceived her as a light-skinned black female stereotype. She was seen as passive, sexy and beautiful. She was also perceived as stupid, dumb, clueless, and naïve. The white group perceived her as fat and motherly. They did not see her as any type of dark-skinned or light-skinned black female stereotype. Most said they did not care much for her. The black group said that her naiveté was another type of stereotype that is given to the black race as a whole, and that is why blacks have always been portrayed as not growing up, stupid, buffoons, foolish, ignorant and lazy.

LAURA

The data based on the perceptions of the fifteen individuals, who participated in the study, indicate that there were slight differences in the perception of Laura in *Family Matters*. Both groups agreed that she was beautiful, thin, sexy, sensible and intelligent. She played a minor role and most participants could not recall her character that well.
Overall, the data indicate that the character of Laura did not contain any light-skinned black and or dark-skinned black female stereotypes.

**Conclusions**

*When groups are differentiated, hierarchically ranked and evaluated from one another by color, color based race prejudice is likely to develop. In today's society, skin color provides a stimulus cue to thoughts and emotions that impacts person perception and interpersonal relationships.*

Jocelyn Landrum-Brown, Ph. D.

The data from this study indicate that the perceptions of light-skinned and dark-skinned black female stereotypes in *Living Single* and *Family Matters* differed according to racial group. The white group did not perceive any instances of dark-skinned and light-skinned black female stereotypes in these two particular programs. The reasons why the white participants did not perceive any light-skinned black female stereotypes and dark-skinned black female stereotypes in the two focus groups programs are perhaps television situation comedies are changing with regard to the colorism stereotypes, or these two shows were just exceptions to other television situation comedies. The majority of whites indicated that in general television situations comedies in the 1990's do perpetuate and reinforce the "light is right" stereotype. They said that the main reason why the light-skinned black female is preferred over the dark-skinned black female is because "white people relate better to light-skinned black people." This indicates that whites are very much aware of racism and colorism in the society. They were open and frank about discussing the media's preference for lighter skinned black females, saying that is how "the white race and society are."
Among the seven white participants, there were only one male, a 35 year old computer programmer (W2), who disagreed that the “light is right” stereotype is still perpetuated by the media. He said that was an old stereotype that died out already. The rest of the group said that it was still going on. One participant (W7) asked him if he would prefer to watch a newscast with light-skinned black people, or dark-skinned black people. When participant W2 said that he did not care how the news anchor looked, the rest of the group told him in unison, that he was definitely in the minority. There was just this sense of disbelief among the rest of the group that this one participant, would even make such a statement. One participant (W6), who worked in advertising for many years, said that it was not only the white people, but also black males who like light-skinned black females. She is right in the sense that some empirical evidence (Drake & Cayton, 1962; Grier & Cobbs, 1968; Parrish, 1944; Walker, 1983; Clark, 1980), have shown that most black men prefer light-skinned black women over dark-skinned black women; but that is no justification for this stereotype to be perpetuated in the media. Black males live in a racist and color conscious society, therefore it comes as no surprise that some will have such feelings. Many black males are also very much to blame, because they continue with this self internalized oppression and therefore they have to make a conscious effort to change.

The research aimed to investigate the perception of light-skinned black female versus dark-skinned black female stereotypes in the two focus groups programs, Living Single and Family Matters; as well as to generate more information about black female stereotypes in general. The majority of the white participants indicated that black female stereotypes are still promoted and that white female roles were perceived to be better,
more glamorous, and less stereotypical as opposed to those of black females, that are mostly one-dimensional and exaggerated. One participant (W1) said soap operas, while another (W4) felt that situation comedies have more black female stereotypes. Based on the perceptions of the white focus group, the research suggests, television situation comedies in general continue to reinforce negative stereotypes of black females. And since women in general, according to numerous research studies (Signorielli, 1985), are portrayed as less important in stereotypical roles, the dark-skinned black female once again found herself at the very bottom, with the light-skinned black female second and the white female on top. These participants' perceptions are also their reality, therefore one wonders what they think of the black female and the dark-skinned black female in real life. The black female, in general, as well as the dark-skinned black female who might perceive these negative stereotypes, could be adversely affected by these portrayal with regard to self-esteem and inter-personal relationships. This is a possibility, given the powerful effect television has on the perception, attitudes and behaviors of individuals, in its role as prime socializer in the America society.

The majority of the black participants, indicated that the character of Kim, who played the love interest in Family Matters was a light-skinned black female stereotype. They called her "sexy and high yellow," and even said that it is okay for a light-skinned black female to wear these mini skirts, but if a dark-skinned black female wears it, then there was some kind of darkness or ugliness to it. Interestingly, Maxine, the lawyer in Living Single, trying to pick up a man in the bar, also wore similar clothing as Kim and was perceived as dark-skinned (and playing the sexy role); yet no one indicated that she
was playing a traditional light-skinned black female role or that things were changing allowing the dark-skinned black female to play the sexy role.

Why is this?

There are a number of explanations for this occurrence in my opinion. First, colorism is still very much a big part of African American life. And it still continues to influence how African Americans perceive one another. Second, the media has perpetuated this light-skinned versus the dark-skinned black female stereotype to such an extensive degree that it ("light is right") could be perceived as the norm. Therefore, when change is introduced people might not really grasp as fast or might even see it as out of the ordinary. Third, There are still so few roles that portray dark-skinned black females in traditional light-skinned black female roles at present. So, when it happens it is not noticed at all. Such changes could perhaps make an impact with a consistent reinforcement of positive and realistic portrayal of black females as time passes. Finally, there is a cultural difference between the white and black participants based on their life experiences in America, their respective needs, as well as their respective priorities. Most people learn about other cultures through the media, thus, the media should transmit culture in a more positive and realistic manner.

The discussion around Kim prompted the participants to recount some of their own experiences. The light-skinned blacks felt that they have been discriminated and rejected by the darker skinned blacks. Participant (B5), who was so light and looked white, said that black women sometimes have refused to associate with her due to her color. She said that she had never been called names, but her daughter, who is two shades darker than her, had been called a nigger the first day at school. She said her
daughter has a low self-esteem because of all the messages she receives from whites as well as from blacks. She also added that the media is not helping much with career women such as the character of Maxine on Living Single acting the way she does. Hence, blacks continue to search for role models in the media that is apparently few and/or non-existent.

The darker skinned blacks talked about the same rejection and for dark-skinned black females in the group, it was even harder, because they said that most African American men simply refuse to date them. They talked about the self-hatred dark-skinned black females have and how this can affect the relationships of dark-skinned and light-skinned black females. These assertions tie nicely in with most studies, books and articles examined in the literature review such as Parrish, 1944; Lee, 1954; Drake and Cayton, 1962; Pousaint, 1975, Walker, 1983; Okazawa-Rey et al. 1987; Porter, 1991; and Hall, 1992 among others.

There were four light skinned and four dark-skinned black participants in the focus groups. The light-skinned black woman (B5), who appeared to be white, had the similar difficulty identifying some of the characters as light-skinned and or dark-skinned. This might also have some relation to the way a person’s shade as perceived and how he/she is treated in every day life. The darker-skinned blacks were more vocal on the issue and they had even more discrimination stories to tell. At one point when the very fair skinned participant (B5) was unable to distinguish between a light-skinned and dark-skinned character, another dark-skinned female (B7) got very excited, saying “no, no, no... what do you consider me?” And before she could answer, another dark-skinned black male participant (B8) told her that it was all about hue: “it is like, ice-
cream is strawberry, vanilla, chocolate, but it is all ice-cream, whatever you like to call it.

This is a clear indication of how colorism has affected the black community and how colorism continues to influence the perceptions of individual and interpersonal relationships. Kim seemed to be perceived by the majority of the black participants with a certain amount of resentment, aimed particularly at her lighter complexion.

Okazawa-Rey, Robinson & Ward (1987) state that color-consciousness has divided the black community. They contended that this has contributed to self oppression among blacks, especially women. “After all, isn't it true that when we as black women within a racist and color-conscious society despise and degrade our darker sisters, we are doing little more than identifying with the racist whites, the true oppressors? And when we as black women turn against our lighter black sisters, isn't it any more than acting out the frustration and envy we subconsciously hold towards a racist society that assigns status and power to one's race and gender?” (p.99).

Hence, colorism in the black community continues; and this could be an unconscious phenomena, something that just happens naturally to blacks. It has become part of them. However, as we noted in the literature, colorism does not operates in a vacuum; it is inter-related to racism for example. So, it is just normal that if one's communities' views are reinforced by the views of the society at large, it has greater impact. And is where the media most definitely share the blame. For years the “light is right” stereotype has been promoted, reinforced and perpetuated to such an extend that is has almost become the norm. Even when programs do portray dark-skinned black females, such as in the case of Maxine, in a “traditionally” light-skinned black female
role, the group had hardly noticed that. This is what Landrum-Brown (1997) refers to as internalized oppression. Colorism reinforces and perpetuates a system based on skin color hierarchy that assigns differential value power status, and access to resources based on skin color. A skin color privilege stigmatizes those who are associated with membership in the less valued skin-tone group. According to the literature, black people who found themselves at both extremes of the color continuum suffer most from colorism discrimination. African Americans have skin colors that range from very fair to extreme dark. Terms use to describe these shades are fair, bright, half-white, yellow, redbone, tan, skillet blonde, bronze, brown skin, olive, jet black, black, blue black, inkpot, darky etc. (Drake & Cayton, 1962; Parrish 1944). The most preferred skin tone according to empirical studies is light-brown (Hernton, 1965; Parrish, 1944; Porter, 1991; Neal et al., 1989).

So, the bottom line is that the media have too few realistic black female roles for women of color that represent them realistically and in multi-dimensional images. And it is the responsibility of the media to rectify the situation. As David Baptiste (1986) noted, the TV can teach positive and negative things depending on the hand that controls it; “whether wisely, innocently or inadvertently.” Therefore those who control the output of the programs should be familiar or knowledgeable about other cultures. The American society is becoming more diversified and the media should try even harder to accommodate the changing society. Ziegler (1991), arguing her mass media enculturation theory explains that a broad and true picture of other cultures can be best achieved through the combination of education, mass media and personal experience.
It is also obvious that the white participants and the black participants have qualitatively different experiences in life, due to their cultures and history, therefore their perceptions, needs and priorities are different. The groups looked at two similar programs, but they had more different than similar perceptions of the female characters of the shows. Aggressive, loud, and domineering, in the black culture are always seen as negative, but most black females are portrayed as such. This is just another way of the dominant culture stereotyping a culture. This is also analogous with how colonialist destroyed cultures all over the world by changing the way the colonized perceived themselves. For years, colonialists have trivialized and ridiculed the traditions and ways of people, the world over; and today, many generations later, these people continue to oppress themselves, by believing they are worthless unless they can be exactly like the white man. It is a destructive cycle and needs to be discontinued.

The issue of stereotypes seemed more salient to blacks, while the issue of gender seemed more salient to whites. This does not; however, suggest that blacks are not concerned about gender issues. They are, but when the two issues are presented at the same time, they would most likely recognize and or discuss the stereotype issues, because that perhaps strike a cord with them. Whites are also stereotyped in the media. So, why are blacks complaining? Blacks are complaining, because for every stereotype there is a counter stereotype. There is a balance in the portrayal of white roles. As far as the black roles are concerned, there are few positive ones and more negative ones. That is the reason why blacks are complaining. Role models are important to everyone; and since blacks have not yet found that in the media, as opposed to whites, they are still searching. Therefore, the mass media should seriously look at how they portray black
females and portray them more realistically in multi-dimensional images. There are people who say that stereotypes are easier to identify and analyze, when one relaxes, with television. But I still feel that black people as a nation cannot afford to be laughed at so that some people can find relaxation and entertainment. Besides, if white roles can be multi-dimensional without interfering relaxation and entertainment, I don't see why black roles can't be more realistic. It is therefore important to start educating people about each other's culture that will eventually lead to a better understanding of each other and better race relations. So, the best starting point should be the educational system in this country. However controversial, many scholars believe that it is imperative for the education system in the United States to accommodate a curriculum of multi-culturalism. In so doing, various aspects of different, under-represented cultural and ethnic groups will be included. According to scholars such as Asante, multi-culturalism in education is a non-hierarchical approach that respects and celebrates a variety of cultural perspectives (Ziegler, p63). The current curriculum in this country is in fact contributing to the misconception that only people of European descent, have developed this country as well as the world. The consequence for African American students is a feeling of alienation, due to the belief that their people haven't done anything. Asante says that the African American student sits inside the classroom but outside the content of the literature. As for the white students a general feeling of superiority may result, because of the misconception that only their people developed the world (Dates, 1991). Furthermore, Dates (1991) says that the mass media, as an educator should assist in the "social and spiritual healing of America by consciously
and affirmatively presenting the richly textured history and heritage of many groups that have contributed to our popular culture" (p.5).

In summary, as Ziegler (1991) states, the integration of media, knowledge, education and personal experience can in fact help to combat stereotyping, while at the same time cultivate a sense of appreciating cultural differences. She stresses the importance of healthy debate. The media have been complimenting the American Education curriculum, by ignoring and or presenting minorities in stereotypical images. Asante quoted in a 1993 speech said that "no people can rise to any position of analysis or understanding, unless they see themselves in some position of ownership of their own experience; otherwise, we’re dislocated. We become merely a fringe people” (Ziegler, 1995 p.63). And the people of color, should also stop oppressing themselves and one another through the chains of colorism. The American Indians say that, it is better to be at the bottom of the economic ladder and still exist as a people; thus black should embrace Afrocentricity by starting to educate themselves about their heritage and learn to take pride in their culture. Molefi kete Assante puts it this way:

> Afrocentricity is the belief in post modern history. It is our history, our mythology, our creative motif and our other ethos exemplifying our collective will. On the basis of our story we build upon the work of our ancestors that gave signs toward our humanizing function.

(Asante, 1988 p.6)

**LIMITATIONS OF STUDY**

The study was intended to assess the perceptions of stereotypes of individuals in a group setting comprising of twenty individuals. However, only fifteen, eight blacks and seven whites attended the focus group. This might have hindered the results. Another important factor to consider is that it was not always easy for white
participants, in particular, to identify characters as light-skinned or dark-skinned, except in “extreme cases” such as Maxine and Kim. Hence, this could have influenced the outcome of their interpretations and the results of the study. The moderator was trained for two days to conduct the focus group discussions but was not a professional moderator. This could have affected the outcome of the results.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

More research is needed, concentrating on black female characters in the media. A more in-depth questionnaire should be sent to television producers, writers and directors about their criteria used in assigning roles to dark-skinned black females, and light-skinned-black females. More survey research is recommended to assess black actresses’ opinions of their working experience and the issue of colorism. A rather interesting content analyzes research can be conducted on how white female roles are portrayed compared to light-skinned black female as well as dark-skinned black female roles.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


APPENDIX A

FOCUS GROUP SCREENING SURVEY
Focus Groups Screening Questions

Name: ______________________________________

Age: [ ] Under 18 [ ] 18-24
[ ] 25-35 [ ] 36-45
[ ] 46 and over

Race: [ ] African American [ ] White
[ ] Hispanic [ ] Asian American
[ ] American Indian [ ] Other________________________

Occupation: ______________________________________

Education: [ ] Freshman [ ] Sophomore
[ ] Junior [ ] Senior
[ ] Graduate

1. How Often Do You Watch Television per week? (Mark one)
   [ ] 0-2 hours [ ] 3-4 hours
   [ ] 5-6 hours [ ] more than 6 hours

2. Have you ever watch any of the following television programs before?
   (Answer Yes or No)

   Yes No
   20/20 [ ] [ ]
   All My Children [ ] [ ]
   The Oprah Winfrey Show [ ] [ ]
   Martin [ ] [ ]
   Family Matters [ ] [ ]
   Saturday Night Live [ ] [ ]
   Seinfeld [ ] [ ]
   CNN [ ] [ ]
   Living Single [ ] [ ]
   Rosie O’ Donnel Show [ ] [ ]
   Black Entertainment TV [ ] [ ]
   Married with Children [ ] [ ]
   Friends [ ] [ ]

3. What is the best time that you will be available for the focus groups sessions?
   _______ AM/PM

4. Address: ______________________________________

5. Phone Number ________________________________
APPENDIX B

PERCEPTION ASSESSMENT SURVEY
Part 1: Behaviors and attitudes in watching television program

Instructions: Please answer the questions or by check-mark items expressing your behavior closely. Please answer honestly and answer every question.

1. How Often Do You Watch Television per week? (Mark one)
   [ ] 0-2 hours
   [ ] 3-4 hours
   [ ] 5-6 hours
   [ ] more than 6 hours

2. Please identify your top three favorite television programs.
   1. 
   2. 
   3. 

3. Please list three of your favorite female actresses:
   1. 
   2. 
   3. 

4. Do you believe the media stereotype black women in situation comedies or other programs?
   [ ] Yes  [ ] No
   If yes, how?

5. Do you think the media make a distinction between white females and black females in their various roles on television?
   [ ] Yes  [ ] No
   If yes, how?
6. Do you interact with black females?
[ ] Yes       [ ] No

If yes, where________________________________________

7. Do you have a close black female friend?
[ ] Yes       [ ] No

Part 2: Demographic Data

Age: __________________________

Sex: [ ] Male       [ ] Female

Race: [ ] African American       [ ] White
      [ ] Hispanic       [ ] Asian American
      [ ] American Indian [ ] Other_____________________

Occupation: __________________________

Education: [ ] Freshman       [ ] Sophomore
          [ ] Junior       [ ] Senior
          [ ] Graduate

Household Income: [ ] Less than $15,000 [ ] $15,000-$25,000
(Per Year) [ ] $25,001-$35,000 [ ] $35,001-$50,000
[ ] Over $50,000

113
APPENDIX C

QUESTIONNAIRES
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>C1</td>
<td>.......................................</td>
<td>.......................................</td>
<td>.......................................</td>
<td>.......................................</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C2</td>
<td>.......................................</td>
<td>.......................................</td>
<td>.......................................</td>
<td>.......................................</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

116

117

118

119

115
Pre-test of "Living Single" program

Instruction: Please answer the questions by check-mark items expressing your behavior and perception. Please answer honestly and answer every question.

1. Have you ever watched "Living Single"?
   [ ] Yes  [ ] No

2. Amongst the 4 female characters in "Living Single", which one portrays a positive image and which one portrays a negative image of black women?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Positive</th>
<th>Negative</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Khadijah</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regine</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sinclaire</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maxine</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Pre-test of "Family Matters" program

**Instruction**: Please answer the questions by check-mark items expressing your behavior and perception. Please answer honestly and answer every question.

1. Have you ever watched "Family Matters"?
   [ ] Yes  [ ] No

2. Amongst the 2 female characters in "Family Matters", which one portrays a positive image and which one portrays a negative image of black women?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Positive</th>
<th>Negative</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Laura</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harriet</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Post-test of "Living Single" program

**Instruction**: Please answer the questions by check-mark items expressing your perception. Please answer honestly and answer every question.

1. Which of the following words best describe the female characters of "Living Single." Please Indicate with an x the corresponding word.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Khadijah</th>
<th>Regine</th>
<th>Maxine</th>
<th>Sindaire</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fat</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loud</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexy</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motherly</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Light-skinned</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dark-skinned</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intelligent</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stupid</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sensible</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Passive</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unattractive</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beautiful</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thin</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Domineering</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aggressive</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2a. Please mark the name of your favorite character on Living Single

[ ] Khadijah [ ] Regine [ ] Maxine [ ] Sinclaire

2b. Also circle the name of your least favorite character on "Living Single".

[ ] Khadijah [ ] Regine [ ] Maxine [ ] Sinclaire
Post-test of "Family Matters" program

**Instruction**: Please answer the questions by check-mark items expressing your perception. Please answer honestly and answer every question.

1. Which of the following words best describe the female characters of this episode of "Family Matters." Please, indicate with an x the corresponding word.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Word</th>
<th>Harriet</th>
<th>Laura</th>
<th>Kim</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fat</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loud</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexy</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motherly</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Light-skinned</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dark-skinned</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intelligent</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stupid</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sensible</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Passive</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unattractive</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beautiful</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thin</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Domineering</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aggressive</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2a. Please mark the name of your favorite character on "Family Matters"
- [ ] Harriet  [ ] Laura  [ ] Kim

2b. Please mark the name of your least favorite character on "Family Matters"
- [ ] Harriet  [ ] Laura  [ ] Kim
APPENDIX D

AUDIO TAPE DISCUSSION
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>D1</th>
<th>Black group</th>
<th>122</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>D1</td>
<td>White group</td>
<td>143</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Question: What did you think of Living Single?

"I think there are some dangerous things in the picture, of course. One of the things I don't like is, I don't like when you make fun of a sister who has ethnic features: for instance the sister with the braids. And the fact that the sister is intelligent and the silly antics that she has to go through for a man, it makes men, particularly black men look silly, because the sister has to go through and the man is not worth getting."

"I think, that, I am not familiar with the show, believe it or not, because I do not allow my children to watch programs that is demeaning to people in general. Just look at Maxine, the woman who is a lawyer, I think that they have denounced, what she is capable of doing. Her abilities of looking for a man. She tried to get on a boat to get that number, She knew, who she was, where she was coming from, and she did not have to prove a point, to get him or nobody else, I thought that she was a little bit aggressive, to get the number and maybe, nowadays is permissive, but I think you ought to be a woman, first of all and let the men approach you and not necessary to push yourself off someone. And for her to want to make a point, that she could get any men that she wanted, I felt is kind of demeaning to a woman."
"As far as Maxine is concerned, she is just aggressive. I do not like the character. The one thing I do not agree with is how her and Carl put each other down."

"Kyle and Maxine. Something is being said to me. Two black people can't get along. They constantly fighting each other. But if you light and get close to white you can make it okay."

"I don't like television, and for me it's not so much what the people are saying - I take it back to the responsibility of those people who create that image, and so it is not so much realistic possibilities, for human beings, it is someone behind is busy shaping, writing, and the they say you need to say this, and while you say that, you wear your hair this way, and wear these colors, Your pants needs to be this tight. A black woman who is a lawyer would probably act this way. And even if they had 20 black female attorneys in the room as the wrote, with twenty different personalities, they, wouldn't include any of those personalities they write, because they have already decided, what they want. It is kind of like, slapstick. They decide what, certain people are going to buffoons. Certain people are going to make fools out of themselves. I find that people laugh anyway, whether they make sense or not, whether the image fits anything that is realistic - people are condition to sit there and laugh. After a while or a certain amount of exposure, it becomes a kind of ongoing campaign, where everybody tunes in and laugh."
"I found *Living Single* entertaining. I feel that if all television viewers were responsible viewers, they would see all TV programs such as this one, as just being entertainment, and not portraying the reality of life. If we see these shows as just, absolutely for the sake of entertainment, they shouldn't affect our behavior at all. What I found dangerous is the portrayal of certain people in the news, because, they are portrayed as being facts. That can influence the viewers' attitudes. If they are made just for entertainment, logically they shouldn't be taken seriously."

"First of all, I do not watch *Living Single* every time it comes on, but every now and then I will catch it. I was kind of shocked with this particular episode, because Maxine is kind of more conservative, more kind of cool, so when she came on with this kind of tight pants like that, man, that is not the regular Maxine I used to on TV."

**Question:** Which characters on *Living Single* were positive and or Negative? Let's start with **Khadijah**.

"On this particular show Khadijah was kind of laid back, kind of cool. It was not a lot of focus on her. So, I can't say anything. As far as negative, I didn't see anything."

"It was the portrayal of a positive character or characteristics. Being thoughtful such as when she commented on Maxine's aggressive behavior. She advised her and I thought that as thoughtful."
"It is a motherly character."

"I have a problem with all these characters. It is abnormal to me, because, all characters represent one complete woman. A complete normal woman as motherly, as aggressive, as intelligent, as all these things in one. I have a problem with the picture to separate all these qualities and make up a complete woman. To me my mother is all these characters together a different time. A different time she is aggressive, a different time she is motherly, at times she is silly. Why didn't the person who make these characters make one with all these qualities and create more positive values. I disagree with this entertainment in particular. It is very dangerous. Because if you ever see a movie called the Birth of a Nation, it is entertainment, and is you see how it portrays blacks, and movies in general how black are portrayed and the you ask white people what they think of blacks, their judgment is based on television and that is entertainment."

"That is true."

"I don't disagree with that, but if we, the viewers take it strictly for entertainment, then we would not be influenced, but that is not, the case, because viewers, get the information from the media, whether its entertainment or presented as fact. What is shown on the screen is what they go by."

"Images are the most powerful teachers. In all our childhood when we grew up on images, then when you talk about television, you talk about
images, and if you keep a certain image on the screen and you have many kids especially in America, who view this all the time, they get their selves out of there. You cannot separate, yourself from your environment. And part of your environment is that TV and you can't, It's hard, because if you have to break down an extra person that have been, and the people who are programming, they'll understand that a lot of these programs goes into your sub-conscious. And affects you: I don't care - and as Linda said, she cuts out cable, because she knows regardless of positive values she instill in her children, they will get in their minds. If you do not control those images, that child is going to grow up affected as an adult. You cannot separate entertainment. A lot of people cannot separate reality from fantasy. We talk about being true to yourself. A lot of people get their selves from what they see around them. You look at Living Single - I used to work with children. The next day they would act out what they see on TV. All day, everyday, because in their minds, that is part of them. They see black women on television, and are aspiring to be like them.”

“If you take Waiting to Exhale, a lot of women saw it and some went towards distraction, and it did happen. In the newspaper, they told horror stories of women going and burning men’s stuff - Saying, they’re not going to take it no more, they’re going to exhale.”

“The Khadijah character is queen Latifah and for certain people of a certain age group, is why they turn on that program. Because Queen
Latifah is there and she make the show. There is some representation of whom she represent outside of that television show.”

Question: And what about the Regine character?

“That is the character that I have a problem with. I agree with her in the sense that it is entertainment, but it is not about how you take it. Children pick up these things up subconsciously, and they grow up: “Oh I want to be like this I want to be like that.” She is frankly a gold-digger. That is how they portray her. My mom teaches me: You are independent, you do not depend on a man for everything. My philosophy is what a man can buy me, I can buy myself. I don’t like the image - she is bourgeois. All about money. Men, that are lawyers, doctors, It is about the money.”

“Regine is my biggest problem. I don’t like her. My cousin watch this show every Thursday - and I talk to her. She is in the 10th grade and she is all about boys. She can’t get good grades. If he doesn’t buy me that: I won’t talk to him - he can’t get my number, he got to buy me this before he can get my telephone number. Buy me a pager and pay my bill every month - and that’s what I dislike. A lot of my friends are like that. That’s what I’m talking about. That’s what I want. I want him to do that for me.”

“It is true”

“Oh, I agree, I did not put anything good down on her character. I thought she was a borderline (prostitute) whatever.”
Question: And what about Sinclaire?

"I just can’t figure out what she is doing for a living. Because it is hard to tell, since it suppose to be some kind of a collection of intelligent, professional, people of color. That is hard to tell that it is what is supposed to be portrayed. It is almost like, well these people in these professions, but they are still stupid. It is real offensive.”

"I think she was a mismatch to boyfriend. I think he is more intelligent than she was and she didn’t have very much to offer.”

"Sinclaire is portrayed as dumb, clueless, I don’t like that.”

"I don’t see Sinclaire as dumb and silly per se. I guess, she is more naive. In this episode, I thought that a dumb an a silly person, would not really be concerned about the relationship. She wanted to get it right, make sure everything is okay. We are really meant for each other. I see her more as a naive person rather than silly.”

"What amazes me is that she does think and is really a nice person. she thinks from a kind hearted perspective. That is what the joke is all about. It is not really her associates that is making a joke about it. But the whole thing of naivety is kind of, insult, if you notice, that in the greater culture naivety is the insult given to people of color. And somehow Kindness or kind of welcoming state, that people of color made welcome Europeans into their nations, was a kind of naive, thing for people to do like, they are so stupid let’s just take their country. But it is the kindness that is
being reinterpreted as naive, not only by the general public, but by the camera."

"That is a history. It is the people who created Hollywood, who created TV. The purpose they did...You were talking about the Birth of a Nation, even though this is the 90's, it is in some instances the same as in the 30's, 40's, 50's, 60's, because you have a lot of black images playing these buffoon roles. You went from Amos And Andy, now you've got Martin. You used to have, Gone With The Wind, the maid, those images, and now you've got these images."

"And it is not different."

"If you look between the lines, it is really not good. Most people on the street would say, oh, it is a great show, it is funny, I like it... you know what I'm saying...because what they do is, they go for the laughter, like she says, everybody wants to...laugh...and now it gets to the point where people will do anything for a laugh, I don't care, how I'm portrayed."

"TV is such a great, broad cultural controlling piece. There is a kind of mono...kind of one world view, one cultural perspective. He touched on women of color for some reason, women of color have to be either or...we have to be this or that, and then when you start, try to communicate with people in diverse terms than it is no, you need to be this or that, but don't be all those things at once, I can't handle."
"My daughter attending school with Euro-Americans heard a lot that the Bill Cosby thing was not an example of the average black family. So it did not matter, that it was on television, it was still a sitcom, it was not interpreted as a serious possibility of a black family by the majority of the people of the culture, that look at it every week."

Question: Do the media make distinction between roles for light-skinned and dark-skinned black women?

"You have to understand that the majority of the people who write, produce, direct, do not come from the same community as these people do, I mean, like I said, you have to go to history, and you have to know, we are so caught up in the actor/actress the person you see, you never think of the people that control that, atmosphere, you got to talk about the majority of people who write and produce, are not from the African American community, and then the few you have, all they do is perpetuate what they have been taught by those, you know, they go to the schools, and are taught by the same people who are in control. Thus, they never get a whole view by themselves.

Moderator: So, it is more stereotyped.

"Yes it is more stereotyped. Dark-skinned black women, hate themselves, they can't have a mate, they can't be that family.

Light-skinned: She is beautiful, Like Halle Berry, Even a lot of black men...they think...light-skinned, long hair, that is the closest thing you
can get to being...blond and blue eyed...that's a mental bondage, black folks have endured for hundreds of years, and it is perpetuated on the screen.”

“He is right, I don’t know what people consider me to be...dark-skinned? Like him, I consider myself dark-skinned. There is a difference. He is darker than him. I don’t know if people put me in his category, or his, but, like he said, the majority of the women that you see, a lot in these music videos, a lot of these commercials are light-skinned. These black women, have long hair, light-colored eyes, usually his complexion.”

“or lighter...”

“Or lighter...They’re not me and I have grown up around men that say that I can never date a woman your skin color, although, I am black.”

“It is the image.”

“That is the image. My skin color is darker than his color. They want somebody that is light-skinned, this long hair, you know, oh, you know, that is the image, That is the image that a lot of girls grown up around.”

“He is right.”

“God made you the hue that you are in, you can’t help it...”

“Right...”

“They hate themselves, because of the hue they’re in, because even within the community, the thing was: No, you’re too black, this day and hour. What Kyle/Maxine were doing... people say is checking, or
playing the ‘doxens’, or ‘jarning.’ What that is, is putting each other down.”

“I am light skinned, and I am proud of it, I never felt like I shouldn’t be proud, even though at times black women did not want to be around me because of my color. My brother was darker, but all of us were light. I come from Morris Town where most blacks are light-skinned. I was never called a nigger. My brother was. My daughter was. The first day of school. That hurt me, I was very hurt. She is about 2 shades darker than I am. I had to teach her, counsel her, motivate her to be proud, She is going through an identity crisis. I told her, be proud of yourself, whatever color, do not make noise. Be all what you can be she is good. The whites made a difference with her. She had a low self-esteem, low self-confidence, if she saw Maxine, she would think, Is this the way I was suppose to act as a career person?”

“I think in relationship to the television, I think a lot of things are coded, and this make people to have greater status of internalized oppression. It started with Stephit Fetchit and Buckwead, it is so coded and embedded in the system, that it comes up in automatic ways, so, if you would go to the writers and producers, and critique and criticized, they would be like ‘Oh what you mean? what do you think? I don’t think like that when I write, I just write.” This is because that all comes out of their childhood, in their subconscious minds, in the way that they have been brain washed and orientated to think in the culture. So it is almost a natural
dynamic for the script evolving in this way. It is like people might not be able to notice, but look at the script in Living Single, this racist way to have two-dark skinned people, that were supposed to be intelligent really, hating each other and being at each other’s throats every week. It is so embedded in reality, it naturally comes up as a story line, or a series."

"Nowadays, colorism is covert. It is over you face....it’s over your face, but now it is sophisticated, it is covert, it is subliminal. you don’t pick it up.
"I liked it. It is totally different from Living Single. I can’t say the females were portrayed negatively."

"Everybody tunes in to the Urkel character. Family matters just about the family wouldn’t be on TV. Most people watch the show, because of that Urkel character. That goes back to right what we are saying. Spethit Fethit, Amos and Andy, Flip Wilson, Martin, now Urkel."

"This Type of character where you have a black man that never grows up...Stephit Fetchit never grew up; Different strokes’, Gary Coleman and Webster’s Emanuel Lewis, never grew up. In these two last mentioned cases they monopolized on health problems of the character, to demonstrate, in both cases they were teens and were short, and continuously treated as little boys. And in this particular case Urkel just keeps getting older and older, he is past teenage, college age and still he doesn’t grow up and even though he is a scientist, he is supposedly intelligent, he has this inability to mature and grow up. Stephit Fetchit was unable to comprehend and take responsibility, make adult decisions. So it is a recurring image from the 50’s and has kind of expanded in this Urkel character, who is totally adored in the sense of the black family. Several shows that is serious and positive, about black families, got totally rejected, after the first or 3 episodes; wiped of the air. In terms of this show, the men are kind of the dark people and the women are clear,
kind of assertive, strong, intelligent, and the men just never quite make it. The women have to kind of always say: Okay get it together. In the end kind of skip of into la-la heaven of something, but hate this television show. I have strong emotional feelings towards it.”

“I agree, both shows are horrible to me. You put an image out there, so you got to balance the image. A family: you got to have a strong mother and strong father. You can’t have a wacko father and a wacko mother. That say the black family is never a stable institute. Carl, is exactly what my father is not. He is not in shape; he is an idiot; he is clumsy; and he is a clown. What kind of father does that make a son want to have? He doesn’t think; he doesn’t make sensible decisions; and that is sort of bad image for males in general.”

“I never though about this until He brought it out, but, I guess I am wrong. I see some positive and some negative things in Family Matters. I liked Harriet, because she did not come out to strong in terms of approaching the son. She was straight to the point at the same time she tried to do it in a loving fashion. She was calm, cool and collected, different from what you normally see.”

“I watch Family Matters. I allow my kids to watch. They know better to imitate Steve Urkel. They know that he is not real, they laugh with him and everything and they see they want to be with him, not like him. They’re small kids and do not try to imitate him. They are able to tell the difference between a real life character and a character they made up
from TV. It has helped them to see that you do not agree with people when they act nerdy or whatever, this is not a personality. Somebody is just making up for laughter or whatever. Certainly Steve as smart as he is on the show, he is not portraying the black man as for people to say all black men are nerdy, that will be a wrong statement. So, I think that for this show whoever brought the character in, revive show with Steve. Harriet is a stronger character than the father, I truly believe the father ought to be the stronger in the family. He is supposed to protect his family, He is supposed to help make decisions, certainly show his kids the way they should grow up. But, you know being a black woman she plays her part. She is devoted to her family which is a good point to black women. But the father image is to be more apparent than mother.”

Question: What did you think of Kim?

“There are a lot of women who act that way or who are that way. Oh most definitely negative, but true most black women act that way in today’s society. Like she said earlier, Kim is more for the money, just like Regine.”

“What did she do, but just wanting a short term relationship?”

“She should not have been kissing him in his mouth, when they were in his home. She should have kissing him on his cheek. She did lead him on in a certain way. If you do not want to be committed to a long-term
relationship watch the things that you do. And that is what did she not do.”

“She did not act like a mature black woman.”

“Exactly.”

“She is 30 years old, and here she is playing games.”

“Yes, playing games.”

“And nobody should play games. And you know, this thing that you have a high yellow woman; sexy...high yellow, sexy...you know what I’m saying and she got these skirts on, and you see this line on TV... if you’re high yellow and you wear certain things you’re sexy... and if you’re dark and doing that, there is some dark side or ugliness to it. I am not saying that light-skinned black women can’t be sexy, but, also, there has to be a balance. You have dark women that are beautiful too.”

“You know I consider her brown skin, not really light. You all keeping on saying she is light-skinned.”

“No, no, no... What do you consider me?”

“She is a lighter hue. Some people will consider you darker than them, some would consider you lighter than them. It is all hue. It is like ice-cream. Ice-cream is strawberry, vanilla, chocolate, but it is all ice-cream. You can have a lighter hue, a darker hue, caramel, whatever you like to call it.”
"Well Kim's character was high yellow. A lot of TV do that. Like I said Halle Berry...She is a lighter hue and a lot of guys think that she is the sexiest woman on earth. She is put in their faces all the time."

"How are we even able to notice these things, except that we are trained to?"

"That is society."

"It is immoral, it is a socially constructed attitude. My siblings are all brown skinned, but people can always tell who is the lightest. I don't care, we have to reject those images. Is it necessary to discuss it? What is the point? Once established, you know who is lighter and who is darker complexion, and this all about people's perceptions. It is invalid. It is unnecessary to discuss that and people are not going to move away from it. When people talk about Kim, there were specific judgments made upon her, based upon these perceptions. It was a kind of a tunnel vision. As a character the writers do not tell anything about this woman other than that she is employed as a talent thing; that she want to wear her clothes tight; and low cut. There is basically nothing that informs us about her character even in her kissing. We make a moralistic judgment upon her, which we are doing just as the TV people are doing, evidently, in the way they decided to dress her. I can't deduce anything than it was fun for her to go on a date, but when it started to shape up in something she did not want, she was able to say in a strong way that she did not want this. I do not have a judgment against her in the way she
dresses, and if I did it would be in a kind of moralistic or religious perspective; in a way that I say, she shouldn’t dress like that or being like that. It would be from my moralistic upbringing from what is good and bad and should and shouldn’t. And if I leave it at that, as a person she was strong as a person.”

“Does every black woman with black male friends kiss them in the mouth?”

“Right!”

“I got a more Ho-ish aspect.”

“That is what I got, too?”

“She said she had a lot of male friends and so, she was using Eddy as a sex object.”

“She was going to add him quote an quote to that friend list!”

“Right!”

“So my question is: if she is doing all these traveling and she doesn’t want a long term relationship, she is kissing every last one of them in the mouth like that.”

“If that was a guy would he be a Ho?”

“yeah! he would be a bad person.”

“Yes, he would be a ho.”

“But not a ho, as it is not a word we use for a guy. Did you say gigolo? “I did not say ho I said ho-ish acts. There is a stigma when it is a lady.”
“The movie is a reflection on whoever creates it. In the white community there is always this fascination of black people’s sexuality. Black people always been seen as more sexual than any others - sexuality between males and females. That is the prime drives within us as a people.”

“I see it from the political perspective that he describes.

I am an American with African, Indian and European ancestors. So, it is hard for me to look outside the culture of socio-economic cultural system that I reside under. I learned from others today that some people are able to do that. If something is going on, I have to critique that in the context of the environment. And how we became black or white is a social construction, nobody is really white. So the notion of perceiving somebody light-skinned, red, or yellow is a social construction, and it is hierarchy that was created 500 year ago for a specific purpose, when people started to call folks white and why they did it. The color hierarchy with the whites at the top of the hierarchy, and the rest at the bottom, is based on your white blood. In this country or India or where people are mixed with Europeans, they started to judged one another, who has more European blood, you don’t hear people say: I am part black when they found themselves lost in the white community. You do not have whites lost in white communities claiming black parentage for social status. I see it in the media, but I try not have conversation about that, because it is self judgment. It affects people. I know a little girl with a barbie doll and she had an argument with me, that her eyes were blue.
She has a light complexion and she said her eyes were blue, but it was a thing for her, a personal thing. "No your eyes aren't blue" I said. "Yes They are" She said. It was a complete thing of lightness, for her. I tried to talk against it, but it is obvious that it has a greater affect than I am capable of wanting it to have. I don't think I can talk against it enough at the rate it is increasing and damaging people."

"Mass media is controlled by European males, some Europe females and blacks, but the majority is outside of what you say, what you do."

"Blacks who write and produce shows are not much different from the whites because they have been influenced by the same system."

"It is a black man, Robert Townsend, who wrote the script of the movie, Baps. Black folks in this country have a hard time finding out who they are and who they are not. From the time that we are born we are told that this is who you are. This is what you act like. It comes from our parent and our fore parents. It's from slavery and it is passed down."

"I think that is internalized oppression. I have seen living single 10-15 times. I always thought that must be an okay show. In this episode I was surprised it was almost a different image than I had assume. I think I had assume something about Kim Fields, something about Queen latifah, I assumed about Kyle, whom I met him once at the National Black Theater Festival. I assumed about the content of some people's characters. Just like I assumed something about Robert Townsend, that is evidently not manifesting itself. It is wrong for us to assume."
Question: Do the media make distinction between white female and black female roles?

"White women are multi-dimensional and represent a variety of areas."

"They do not get to be only ho's and funnies."

"They get to be Monday night at the movies, Tuesday night at the movies, they get to be news commentators; you see them as the producers; the get forefront representation while the black women are the mothers on the sitcoms; or they are lawyers on the police story; or the ho on the police story; or the ho's on the soap operas."
Question: What did you think of the show, *Living Single*?

"I Liked it."

"It was fun to watch"

"I liked Maxine. She has a good sense of humor."

"I did not like Maxine. She was ridiculous."

"I don't think so, because if guys can pick up girls in bars, why can't she?"

Maxine is a strong woman, I liked her."

"I loved Regine."

"I did not like Regine"

"I did not like Sinclaire"

"Me, too. I did not like her."

"I have never seen this show before, but I remember the Jefferson's. Blacks were always in the Ghetto and whites in the suburbs."

"There were no holes in the ceilings"

"The language was sophisticated - not non-grammatical as it is in other black shows."

"This show does not reflect black women in the 90's."

"Characters here are more intelligent."

"The show is not realistic, anyway it is not reflecting reality."
Question: Does the media and television situation comedies in general stereotype black women?

"Yes, the media in general do stereotype black women.

"Yes, definitely."

"The black people always seem to live in buildings that feel vertical to me. They always have more of a...there are more stereotypes of blacks in the sitcoms I have seen, this is what we are expected to think what blacks are like, and this is what we are expected to think what whites are like."

"They are stereotyped in income level and behavior. Blacks are more boisterous and they seem to have... definitely a tight stereotype, I think..."

"There seem to be a lack of character depth in black roles."

"Except for Maxine, but then again you have the stereotype of the strong black woman. Although I have noticed they use extremely good English and vocabulary...and she is a lawyer, so that is different than a lot of black shows."

"But it is changing, definitely changing. I have never seen this show before. In the past I watched a few like the Jefferson's, and... what was the guy and his son? The junk yard...."

"Sanford and son."

"Yes, Sanford and Son. You know... , here we go again, junk yard... massive filth avenue."

"Black 's income levels on the shows are lower."
"The shows are designed to appeal to very different levels of audiences, and these people sitting in these Ivory towers and believe they are making decisions about who they going to get to watch it, think that blacks live in the ghetto and whites live in the suburbs."

"I think it is different these days with the Cosby shows and the Fresh Prince of Bell Air. They are coming up."

"The Cosby show is not as race dependent as all the others in the 70's."

**Question: Did you see any negative stereotypes in this show?**

The area they lived in. It is urban, the subways, but perhaps it can be in any big city or any poor white neighborhood. It was kind of negative.

"Quite frankly I do see much racial stereotypes."

**Question: Any positive stereotypes in the show?**

"Maxine being a lawyer. That was mentioned twice. It had nothing to do with the plot, and that struck me as interesting. They wear fairly nice clothes, nice place, no holes in the ceilings definitely is changing It is sophisticated humor."

"yeah"

**Question: Does this show reflects black women in 90's?**

"No, I don't think it reflects reality in particular, anyway?"
“The characters are more independent and seem intelligent. But, they are successful and they still go to bar to pick up men in bars. I guess it happens.”

“I did not see the show as very realistic, so I do not know what it reflects or doesn’t reflects and did not see it had an interest in reflecting anything anyway.”

Question: Does television situation comedies and the media in general stereotype black women?

“yes, definitely.”

“Soap operas have more stereotypes than prime time shows.”

“I disagree.”

“Yes, there are a couple of stereotypes in days of our lives.”

“ But, I think this show has more stereotypes than soaps. I don’t see stereotypes in the soaps.”

“Maybe it is just the one soap I have seen. Sunset beach, has blacks as gangsters, murderers, single parents. Maybe it is only this one show.

“I couldn’t tell every character accurately as light-skinned or dark-skinned in living Single.”
“I thought it was funny but unrealistic. Somebody said earlier that the unrealistic ones were the best.”

“I liked family Matters.”

“Yeah, it was fun to watch”

Harriet:

“She is Pride, she has wisdom.”

“I agree, she has wisdom.”

Laura:

“The only thing I remember about her is that she was pretty and slender.”

“she had a small role. She was attractive.”

Regine:

“I think she should be nicer to Urkel.”

Kim:

“I was very much interested in that. Very stereotypical, if that has been a 30 year old male and 20 year old female it would not be an issue. So, what is the problem?

At the same time I can see the mother’s concern for her son. If it was a male, things would be different.”

“I did not care for her. She was just using him to get the money. And I think she is stereotyped in that way.”

147
"She was interested in money."

"She was stereotype in that way, just interested in the money."

"She was honest about it."

"Why was she interested in money?"

"She is a talent agent and her primary goal is for his ability to produce a song and subsequently money for her."

"But, that is her business, right?"

"I thought she was intelligent and she knows what she wants to go for."

Question: Who was the favorite character?

"Harriet. She did not really interfere in his business, but she tried to warn him in advance. So just to know what he will go through, so that helped a lot."

"I think the script had him over reacting. She was not trying to run his life, but he overreacted. I think she was extremely wise."

"Oh yes I agree. I Think she was wise and thoughtful. Her character did not over react, to protect her son."

"I thought Kim was cool. I thought I knew her the best. Harriet, I thought, was wise as the mother, but I thought he is twenty, and should learn from his own mistakes. Kim was honest, she was attractive, but that was not the reason I liked her the best."

"I liked Harriet. Laura did not have that big a part. And Kim she was just there to develop some kind of a plot."
"I think she was manipulative, that is one of the things that I think she was very straightforward with him."

Question: And who was the least favorite character?

"Harriet."

"Laura for putting Steve down."

"Laura, the way she treated her brother and interfering."

"Kim"

Question: What was positive about the show?

"The mother was supposed to be motherly, intelligent, and promoting positive images."

"The family was positive."

"Yes, a strong family."

"Even the love interest was educated and ambitious."

"The father was caring while Urkel is not even his son."

"The family was caring."

"Kim, the love interest seems ambitious. She knew what she wanted and that is positive. She was a record company executive and ambitious, thus positive."

"The show has a male there intact. The black family unit was not always like this on TV"

"Yes. Now a male in family."

149
Question: Do you think that television situation comedies today and the media in general portray the light-skinned black woman different from the dark-skinned black woman?

“Yes, the light-skinned black female is always the beauty and the dark-skinned black female usually, the maid.”

“It is only noticeable in extremes cases. Nowadays it is not noticeable any more.”

“I disagree, the light-skinned black female is most likely to play love interest and look like Vanessa Williams.”

“Yes, the light-skinned black women is always the love interest.”

“It is the white race. You know the blondes .... olive skins black eyes...”

“I thought that Maxine was quite sexy... I think this is an old stereotype...”

“Yeah.”

“But it is still going on...”

“I am not going to deny that, but blacks make up about 13% of the population, whites are majority. I do not think it is as much as it used to be. I think we are becoming a much more homogenous society.”

“I know what you are saying, but still when we look at Hollywood or TV or whatever, the beautiful light-skinned black woman is going to have the bigger part. She is going to be the actress or the love interest...”

“Yes, while the dark-skinned black woman will maybe the maid.”
"The reason I liked Maxine, is not because of her color, it was her personality."

"she is sexy..."

"She is physically beautiful..."

"I do not think, she was so much physically beautiful, as she projected beauty."

"Traditionally the light-skinned black woman has been the love interest..."

"Yes, Traditionally, but not anymore."

"I think the light-skinned black woman is still preferred. Society likes white people, whites in general, think that they can relate better to lighter-skinned persons. I don't know."

"I do not think it is white people, I would think it is the black male. They would first choose someone who looks like Vanessa Williams."

"There are modern Cultures where big heavyset woman are more sexually attractive that thinner ones."

(Laughter from all!)

"I want to go there."

"Even, if you watch a news cast, would you prefer someone who is dark-skinned or light-skinned?"

"I would prefer someone who is coherent, intelligent. I don't care if they are 6 feet wide and green-striped. I want to understand the news."

"You are in the minority?"
“Yeah, you are in the minority.”

“What is attractive about the news though?”

“A person who is attractive.”

“Light skin helped Braynt Gamble in the news industry.”

Question: What about these two programs. Did you find any of those stereotypes?

“No, I did not see it.”

“I think these two are pretty exceptional shows. They are not kind of representative of the shows I saw, over the years and I really do watch a lot of TV.”

“There is a tremendous change.”

“I liked the old Bill Cosby show. He is a path finder.”

“When you talk about blacks on TV I see the Jefferson’s, because there were a whole authority shows... they were rammed downed our throats for 5 years... It’s all it was and... I found a lot of stereotypes in there!”

“That is what they are, they are formulated by people who had no concept, but... these people probably had done no more than say hi to a black man.”

“Oh I don’t not think that is true. I really don’t. They have to pre-test. I come from that industry. They pre-test them.”

“I understand what you’re saying, but I come from that industry too.”

“Well, I come from that industry, Advertising. It shows that it is tested on us, but I don’t think it is representative on what we want to see.
"But they go on the ratings..."

"Ratings are garbage..."

"But they live and die by them..."

"That's fine, we live and die by the gun... you know, but guns are garbage too..."

"I think there are a lot of ways we do things, that I think is terribly, terribly flawed.

Question: Do you think that television situation comedies or the media in general make distinction between white female and black female roles?

"It is difficult to say, because there are not many black females on television to compared to."

"Yes, the way they express themselves."

"Sometimes it seems like the woman runs the household instead of having a strong black father or husband."

"Black women are rarely seen living together as a loving couple. Black women play subordinate roles when opposite white male and white females. They are portrayed as only sexual beings."

"Black women are sometimes portrayed as gold - diggers. People tend to "Yes, they stereotype everyone. Make every black woman very strong-minded and good dancers - kind of in your face."

"Television in general operates from formulas based on statistics that reflect the statisticians' (white upper class males) view. This

153
tends to make for very poor programming content. Yes black
women suffer very much from this formula."

“Yes, to a point. I am not real familiar with black female actresses, but
the ones I have seen, seem to stereotype with typical black issues,
problems, racial confrontations."

“Yes, generally aggressive, often unmarried mothers.”

Question: Did you see any light-skinned and dark-skinned female stereotypes
in Family Matters?

“Again I couldn’t tell.”

“Laura and the Kim were light-skinned.”

“Kim was Light-skinned.”

“Harriet is obviously black. She is probably quickly to identify as being
black. I don’t think it was a stereotype image. White people are not dark
and dark people are not white, big deal. I mean I am a little confused by
the race thing anyway when see these little things.”

“It is hard for me to look at the love interest and quickly identify her as
any racial stereotype of sort. She can easily be 3-4 different nationalities
unnamed or black or white.”

154
APPENDIX E

SYNOPSIS
SYNOPSIS OF FAMILY MATTERS

Eddy, the twenty year-old son of Harriet and Carl falls in love with Kim, a thirty year-old talent agent. The mother expresses concern over the affair, but stressed to her son that Kim might break his heart. Eddy ask Kim for a long term relationship and she refused, saying she has a lot of male friends and due to the nature of her job that includes a lot of traveling she cannot commit her to a long-term relationship. Eddy is of course disappointed.

SYNOPSIS OF LIVING SINGLE

Maxine, the lawyer in the show falls for the bartender. She asked him for his phone number, but he refused. Feeling humiliated and rejected she pursue the guy aggressively for many evenings. She wears everything tight - skirts and pants, however the guy will not budge. She ells him she is a lawyer, but he still refused. Finally she goes on the stage in the bar and sing a song. He then give her his phone number and she throw it back in his face, saying she doesn’t go out with desperate men. Khadijah throughout the show tells her to give it up. Even Regine tells her about the secrets of getting and keeping a man. Sinclaire and her fiancee are getting married and have to write a compatibility test according to the church. Both flunk with zeros.
APPENDIX F

MODERATOR’S SCRIPT
SCRIPT

MODERATOR

Thank you very much for your participation in this focus group. My name is ________________ and I will be your leader for this session. Please get comfortable and relax. Read the informed consent form thoroughly before signing and I will answer any questions you might have. We hope you will gain some knowledge about television through your participation in this project as much as we will gain insight from your perceptions of television.

ADMINISTER INFORMED CONSENT FORMS.
GIVE PARTICIPANTS CHANCE TO READ AND SIGN.
ANSWER ANY QUESTIONS PARTICIPANTS MAY HAVE ABOUT THE FORM.
TAKE UP ALL SIGN FORMS AND PROCEED TO NEXT SECTION.

MODERATOR

We will now proceed to the next part of the session. Please fill out this brief questionnaire, answer all questions as thoroughly as you can and work alone. Raise your hand if you have questions concerning the questionnaire.

ADMINISTER PRE-VIEWING QUESTIONNAIRE.
ANSWER ANY QUESTIONS PARTICIPANTS MAY HAVE ABOUT THE QUESTIONNAIRE.

MODERATOR

At this time, we will beginning viewing two 30 minutes television programs. Before and after each television program, I will give you a questionnaire concerning the shows.
ADMINISTER BEFORE AND AFTER QUESTIONNAIRE BEFORE AND AFTER EACH TELEVISION PROGRAM.

MODERATOR

It is now time to talk for a little while about these television programs. We would like everyone to participate. We would like everyone to share their opinions, whatever they may be. I am just going to start the discussion with a few questions and we’ll move forward from there.

There is no right or wrong. It is all about how you interpret the programs, and how you think and feel about them. Be as honest as you can.

COMPLETE POST-QUESTIONNAIRE.
LIVING SINGLE AND FAMILY MATTERS DISCUSSION

1. What do you think about the show?

2. Let's discuss each character: What is positive/negative about: (Why)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Living Single</th>
<th>Family Matters</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Khadijah</td>
<td>Kim</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regine</td>
<td>Laura</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sinclaire</td>
<td>Harriet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maxine</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3. Who is the most favorite character and why?

4. Who is the least favorite character and why?

5. Does the show promote positive or negative images of black women in society?

6. Do you think there are differences in the roles of the light-skinned black women versus dark-skinned black women in this television situation comedy? If so, how different?

7. Do you see any major differences between the portrayal of white female characters on television versus the portrayal of black females, in general? Please explain your answer.

8. Do you think that the media and television in particular stereotype black women?

160
VITA

Umiboo Swartz Karuaihe was born January 14, 1964, in a little village, in the Eastern part of Namibia. She received her bachelor degree in Television-and-Radio, from Wayne State University, Detroit Michigan in 1987. She worked as a Manager for Pamodzi/Morning Star Enterprises from 1988-1990. With the independence of Namibia in 1990 she joined the Namibia Broadcasting Corporation, where she worked as a television reporter and eventually as a producer until 1995. During this period Ms. Swartz studied also in Germany at the Senders Freies Berlin TV Training Center in TV productions and Engineering. She created, produced, and hosted a television magazine program called ‘Channel One.’ She was awarded the ATLAS scholarship, in August 1995, to attend the University of Tennessee and completed her Master of Science degree in communications, with a concentration in Broadcasting. She will continue to work for the Namibia Broadcasting Corporation, upon her return to that country.