



# REALITY TV:

ENTERTAINING...

BUT NO LAUGHING MATTER



In the spring of 2015, the American Advertising Federation (AAF) and Zeta Phi Beta Sorority, Incorporated (Zeta), through its GET ENGAGED™ social action initiative, co-sponsored “Reality TV: Realistic, Stereotypical, Helpful or Harmful?,” a series of “watch parties” focused on the impact of media images. During the Watch Parties, participants examined the state of African-American images in media, their effects on public perception and policy, and the role that people of good will can play in driving change. Following the watch parties, a series of national panels continued the conversation. The panels included “Color, Content and Cash,” held during the AAF’s national conference ADMERICA, as well as Advertising Week’s “Images, Ethics, and Power: The Portrayal of Diverse Communities on Television and in the Media” and Zeta’s “Balancing Our Media Images, Saving Our Communities,” held during the Congressional Black Caucus 45th Annual Legislative Conference week of activities.

As a result, the AAF and Zeta have produced a whitepaper which will explore:

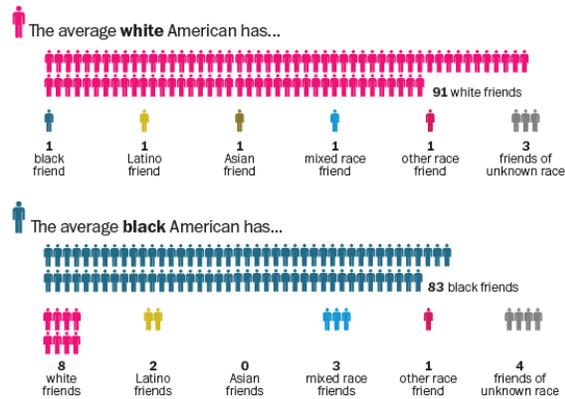
- Research theories that can be used to understand current media effects
- Key discussion points from the Watch Party series
- Connections between the advertising industry and images displayed in ads and in programming, with a targeted focus on advertising ethics
- Suggestions from participants on tackling the problem of media misrepresentation

## Background

With the events surrounding the emergence of the #BlackLivesMatter (BLM) movement, AAF and Zeta became increasingly concerned about the images of African-Americans and the effects of those images on public perceptions and policies. In order to comprehensively address the misperceptions of people of color in the media, the spotlight must be broadened beyond the issues of violence and discrimination in the justice system.

### Some Hardly any of my best friends are black

Assuming the average white and average black American each have 100 friends, this is what the racial breakdown of their friend networks would look like.



WASHINGTONPOST.COM/WONKBLOG

Source: Public Religion Research Institute

reported that the average American’s social circle is typically 91 percent Caucasian, and just 1 percent designated to each of the following races: African-American, Hispanic, Asian and mixed-race. Summarily, in 2016 most people are still living strikingly separate racial lives. This not only suggests that people are missing out on the cultural exchange and fluency necessary to navigate a modern global society, but it also signifies that for an astonishing number of people, their only exposure to people of color is through their television or computer screen.

### Co-Existing in a Segregated Society

According to the most recent Census, the average non-Hispanic Caucasian American living in a metropolitan area resides in a neighborhood that is 74 percent Caucasian (El Nasser, 2010). African-Americans are the most segregated minority, living in neighborhoods that are majority African-American, followed by Hispanics and then Asians (El Nasser, 2010). This in turn leads to racially homogenous primary and secondary schooling, creating less diverse social circles. If one attends college, this trend continues with many “predominately White institutions” reporting low numbers of students of color and faculty, which has been highlighted by recent demonstrations at colleges and universities across the nation. The Public Religion Research Institute (2014)

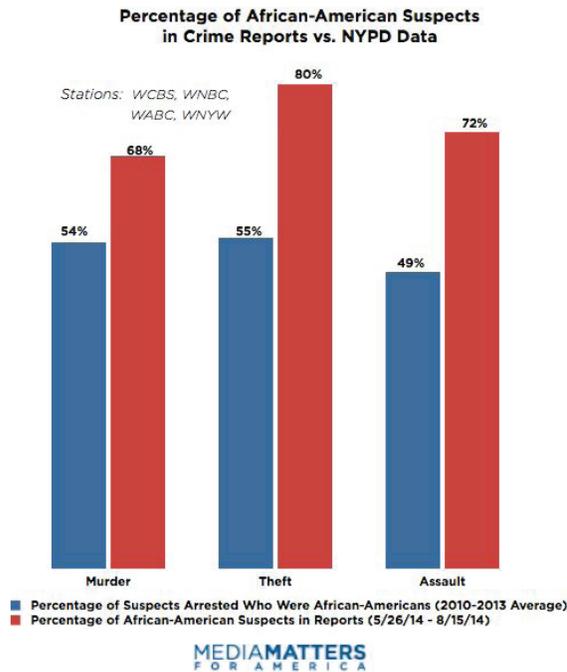
*“Do the right thing ... When we depict people unfairly it has a major impact on our society. Our value system is supposed to be equality, fairness and objectivity. It’s supposed to be inclusive and not exclusive. So when these negative images are portrayed for example about people of color, it hurts our society.”*

—Wally Snyder, President, Institute for Advertising Ethics

### Media Representation vs. Reality

Knowing that the source of many Americans information about people outside of their social circles is derived from various media outlets, it is important to examine the way media characterizes African-Americans. For example, local news outlets grossly over-represent African-Americans in reporting instances of crime, as evidenced in the Media Matters For America graph (Angster & Colleluori, 2015). This overrepresentation translates into people’s beliefs about African-American criminality. In a 2010 survey, “White people overestimated African-

Americans’ participation in burglaries, illegal drug sales and juvenile crime by 20-30 percent” (Townes, 2015). Another study conducted by Narissra Punyanunt-Carter (2015) uncovered that television shows that portray African-Americans as “criminals or unemployed” were thought to be realistic, as were negative personality characteristics.




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*“From the very beginning, the dominant culture was determined to put African Americans in a box and define them in certain negative ways... It’s a thread that continues today, that started in slavery, and those patterns are still very prevalent. Not only do the general audiences see those images and say that’s who this group is, some in the group itself, see those images and feel—OK—that’s my role in society ...that’s who I am.”*

*—J. Dates, Dean Emerita, School of Communications, Howard University; Member, Board of Directors, Corporation for Public Broadcasting*

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for better or for worse. Therefore, African-Americans, who are more likely to be heavy television viewers (Nielsen, 2011), could suffer a long-term psychological effect by watching stereotypical and unrealistic images of people of color in the media.

### Reality TV Watch Parties: Starting a Community Dialogue

Historically, portrayals of African-American women in media have been predominantly unrealistic and stereotypical, and rarely examined by researchers. As heavy television viewers, African-American women watch 14 more hours a week than any other

These mischaracterizations may create disproportionate hiring, housing, and loan options for African-Americans. Caucasian high school dropouts have the same chances of getting hired as African-American college students, and African-Americans with no criminal record are less likely to be hired than Caucasians with a past felony (Adams, 2015; Council of State Governments Justice Center, 2014). According to the Federal Reserve (2015), African-Americans received only 5.2 percent of all home loans in 2014. Additionally, when it comes to housing, in a 2013 study by the Urban Institute and Department of Housing and Urban Development, compared to Caucasians, “African-American renters learned about 11 percent fewer rental properties and African-American homebuyers were shown roughly 20 percent fewer homes. Despite having credit scores of 650 or higher, a 2012 Economic Policy Institute Report states that African-American and Hispanic consumers often end up with a high interest-rate mortgage, which could also impact their ability to live in less segregated neighborhoods.” These statistics suggest that by associating African-Americans with criminality, unemployment, and poor attitudes in the media, then in real life African-Americans might be less desirable neighbors or tenants, unreliable borrowers, and hostile employees.

Lastly, people mimic what they see on television. First studied in relationship to violence on television and children’s behavior, Cultivation Theory hypothesizes that the more an individual watches television programming, the more likely they are to “cultivate” attitudes or behaviors that reflect the program that is being consumed (Gerbner & Gross, 1976). This should be coupled with the findings of Jennings, Geis, and Brown (1980) who concluded that images viewed in commercials can in fact impact women’s independence of judgment and self-confidence,

ethnic group (Nielsen, 2014) and African-American women are 59 percent more likely to watch reality-based programming, (Mediamark Research & Intelligence (MRI), 2015), which prompted the decision to make Reality TV a focal point for this study.

At the onset of the study, the Watch Party planning team created a list of African-American female personas most frequently portrayed in U.S. culture based on research written by Moody-Ramirez and Dates (2014) and a blog post from feminist blogger Spelledwoman (Spelledwoman, 2014), which combined some of the personas described by Moody-Ramirez and Dates. Frequently cited African-American female personas, include:

- **The Hood Rat** is usually loud and boisterous, depicted as crazy and irrational. She is consistently shown screaming, cursing in public, and instigating fights.
- **The Bitch/Combination Hyper-Independent Black Woman** and **Angry Black Woman** is an emasculating woman who speaks to (or about) people with little tact or regard for their feelings.
- **The Jezebel** is depicted as a promiscuous, emotionally damaged, hypersexual predator.
- **The Desperate Single/Combination Hyper-Independent Black Woman, Tragic Mulatto** and **Jezebel** is often portrayed as unlovable and in need of a man, who therefore settles for mediocre men to compensate for loneliness and lack of self-confidence.
- **The Bible Thumper** is a woman who quotes the Bible, assesses and then judges people, often hypocritically, for their “ungodly” behavior.
- **The Angry Black Woman** is an upset, irate, aggressive, loud and, rude woman, whose damaged self-concept makes her lash out at others (verbally, non-verbally, physically, and psychologically) to cover her own pain.
- **The Tragic Mulatto** is usually a light-skinned African-American woman, depicted as one destined to have tragedies befall her.
- **The Mammy** had her roots during slavery, when she was caricatured as content, even happy to be a slave or to be in a less desirable situation. Her wide grin, hearty laughter and loyal servitude were seen as evidence of the humanity of the slave, Jim Crow, discrimination, segregation, or otherwise deplorable system under which she lived(s).

### **Hypothesis and Analytical Approach**

The initial hypothesis was that reality television, defined as unscripted but producer-controlled programs featuring non-professional actors, was responsible in many, but not all, instances for reinforcing historical stereotypes about African-American women that could be harmful to viewers, directly and indirectly impacting how they are viewed and treated by the public.

Critical Race Theory (CRT), an academic discipline developed by Derrick Bell (1995) and other leading law scholars in the 1970s, underscores the need to better understand how media images influence the perceptions and beliefs of all viewers whether consciously or subconsciously. Initially designed to critique the laws and policies that uphold “White supremacy” in the United States, other disciplines soon adopted it for various forms of analyses, including communications. One primary goal of CRT is to re-center the inquiry and experience of the marginalized African-American perspective—moving African-Americans to the center of the frame (Delgado and Stefancic, 2000). With that goal in mind, this study uses CRT as a framework to examine the ways that people, primarily but not limited to people of color, view images of women of color that have been portrayed during recent television seasons (2010–2015).

**Methodology**

To determine if the identified personas are present in reality television and seen as portraying realistic or unrealistic, helpful or harmful images, AAF Mosaic Council members and Zeta, through their GET ENGAGED social action initiative, sponsored a series of Watch Parties held at AAF member offices and campuses. Agency hosts included DigitaLBI Boston and Detroit, FCB, Omnicom, Publicis VivaWomen: Leo Burnett, Starcom MediaVest Group, Razorfish Atlanta, and Saatchi & Saatchi. University hosts represented AAF and Zeta college chapters at Baylor University, Cheyney University, Howard University, Syracuse University, and the University of Virginia.

The series of Watch Parties, a total of ten, with more than 400 total participants, took place in Atlanta, GA; Boston, MA; Charlottesville, VA; Chicago, IL; Detroit, MI; New York, NY; Philadelphia, PA; Syracuse, NY; Waco, TX; and Washington, DC, from April 6, 2015 to April 23, 2015. Each Watch Party lasted approximately 90 minutes. During these Watch Parties there were moderated discussions with the participants which included advertising and entertainment industry professionals, students, community leaders, and educators. This group represented a mixture of genders, ages, races and ethnicities, with the majority of participants being African-Americans, along with Caucasian-Americans, Asian-Americans, and Hispanic-Americans.

City	Number of Participants	Men	Women
Atlanta	31	2	29
Boston	40	10	30
Charlottesville	22	4	18
Chicago	150	N/R	N/R
Detroit	25	N/R	N/R
New York	50	N/R	N/R
Philadelphia	36	4	32
Syracuse	22	1	21
Waco	27	4	23
Washington, DC	35	9	26

Seven pre-selected videos that attempted to highlight the various images of African-American women depicted in reality television were shown to the participants and subsequently discussed. Along with the videos, the planning team developed a discussion guide that defined stereotypes and labels for African-American women, as well as rating sheets to gauge how the participants felt about the cast members on the reality shows.

**Assessment of African-American Female Personas by Television Show**

Critical Race Theory (CRT) was used to analyze reactions to the reality show video clips shown to Watch Party participants. Participants critically examined how

society and culture were depicted, and how race and power were central to the obvious plots and arcs of the programs. The participants racial linkages to the protagonists in the series of shows gave added weight to their criticisms. Those criticisms included the negative feelings that surfaced as participants assessed the programs and shared their perspectives about the dire effects of the programs on them, personally, and possibly others, with an emphasis on children and young adults who watch the shows. The following provides an assessment of audience reactions to each of the Reality TV shows viewed:

**Love & Hip Hop: Atlanta (2012, VH1)** A spinoff of the original *Love & Hip Hop*, based in NYC. This show follows the lives of several men and women who are connected to the music industry through the Hip Hop genre.

**Watch Party Participant Reactions:** Most Watch Party participants felt that the manner in which African-American women were represented in this show was negative and stereotypical. Participants felt that this particular show (*Love & Hip Hop: Atlanta*) has greatly influenced youth and teenagers. Among all of the shows previewed, this one has the

highest viewership among the younger generation. Many participants believe younger viewers may not understand that the shows are scripted with much of the drama orchestrated by the producers/creators of the show.

One female Syracuse participant expounded on why she believed *Love & Hip Hop* was harmful: “I feel like there are so many high school kids watching. They feel that it’s ok to just to put your hands on someone.”

***Real Housewives of Atlanta (2008, Bravo)*** A spinoff of the *Real Housewives* franchise that follows the lives of several professional women in Atlanta, GA.

**Watch Party Participant Reactions:** Most participants perceived this show as more stereotypical than hurtful. One Boston participant stated that the overall direction of the show changed, specifically with the Atlanta spinoff. The show was originally centered on women, most of whom were housewives. In the last few years of the series, the show’s producers have consistently framed it to exhibit extreme personality differences resulting in regular clashes between cast members. Participants interpreted this as an effort on the part of the creators to create content that has regular conflict and drama to increase viewership.

***The Apprentice (2004, NBC)*** A competition reality show in which celebrity contestants compete to raise money for a charity of their choice, and non-celebrity contestants could secure a job with the show’s lead, billionaire businessman Donald Trump.

**Watch Party Participant Reactions:** The reaction to this show was split among participants across the cities. A consensus could not be reached on whether Omorosa’s appearance was harmful, helpful, stereotypical or realistic. The majority of the participants felt that the show’s producers framed Omorosa in a negative light by painting her as a villainous or “bitchy” character, which made her unlikeable to viewers. Several respondents felt that Omorosa’s appearances were realistic, as others perceive many successful African-American women as angry, overbearing, or bitchy instead of being viewed as strong or commanding. They believed the show’s producers ignored the fact that Omorosa was a successful woman, and made her the overbearing antagonist to bolster the drama on the show.

However, her demeanor seemed to garner sympathy from many of the participants. Some Atlanta participants felt that Omorosa maintained her composure in the face of the other cast members attacking her. Likewise, one Syracuse female participant stated that other characters “were trying to egg [Omorosa] on, to see if they could get a reaction out of her...where she would retaliate and hit them.”

***Deion’s Family Playbook (2014, OWN)*** A reality show that follows the life of the retired football player Deion Sanders, as he raises five of his own children, and several others who are living with him.

**Watch Party Participant Reactions:** Everyone felt that this program was one of the most positive programs of the group. The participants said it was refreshing to see not only a father figure, but also a single father’s perspective on raising his own five children, as well as other children in his care. A Boston participant said that he expected to see drama and chaos, but when the clip of this program was shown, he was pleasantly surprised that the show was positive and uplifting.

***Raising Whitley (2013, OWN)*** A reality show that follows actress, Kym Whitley, as she raises her son as a single mother.

**Watch Party Participant Reactions:** All participants described this show as a helpful and realistic portrayal of African-American mothers and single mothers. Several of the participants stated that they related to this show because a single, African-American mother raised them. “I feel that having a show like *Raising Whitley*, that has a woman loving her child is always helpful,” one Syracuse student participant stated.

**Six Little McGhees (2012, OWN, canceled in December 2014)** This show followed the lives of a husband and wife in Columbus, Ohio and the challenges they faced raising sextuplets while running a family business.

**Watch Party Participant Reactions:** The majority of the participants were unaware of this show prior to viewing the clip. Participants noted that this program showed positive images of African-American families. However, a segment of the participants felt that the show was not entertaining, and instead it seemed to showcase the couple’s stressful lifestyle. Younger participants felt that the show would appeal to older viewers or those who have children, who could better relate to the struggles and challenges of raising multiple children.

**Thicker Than Water (2013, Bravo)** A reality show that follows The Tankard family, whose patriarch is an acclaimed gospel artist.

**Watch Party Participant Reactions:** Responses toward this program were split among the participants regarding whether this show was hurtful, helpful, stereotypical or realistic. Some participants felt that the program featured positive depictions of African-American families, but with a heavy emphasis on the wealth of the family. One participant in Boston felt that the patriarch of the family compensated for his shortcomings by flaunting his economic wealth. Additionally, some participants felt that even though the show might be helpful, it was not a realistic portrayal of African-American families. One participant stated, “The way that (The Tankards) deal with issues isn’t very real.”

Reality Show Name	Audience Analysis	Creators	Channel	Synopsis of Clip Shown
<i>Love &amp; Hip Hop: Atlanta</i> (2012)	Harmful/ Stereotypical	Brad Abramson, Mona Scott-Young, Danielle Gelfand, Nina L. Diaz, Stefan Springman, Susan Levison, Toby Barraud	VH1	Chrissy explains that her, fiancé Jim Jones, can cheat; just do it respectfully.
<i>Real Housewives of Atlanta</i> (2008)	Harmful/ Stereotypical	Glenda Hersh, Lauren Eskelin, Megan Sanchez Warner, Omid Kahangi, Steven Weinstock	Bravo	Phaedra confronts Kendra about her spreading rumors that she is having an affair.
<i>The Apprentice</i> (2004)	Unsure	Mark Burnett, Donald Trump	NBC	Omorosa is having an altercation with her teammates.
<i>Deion's Family Playbook</i> (2014)	Helpful/Realistic	Deion Sanders, Eli Frankel, Ro Cornick, Tracey Edmonds	OWN	Deion is preparing for a daddy-daughter dance, and goes to rehearsal to show off his moves.
<i>Raising Whitley</i> (2013)	Helpful/Realistic	Craig Piligian, Kym Whitley, Melodie Calvert	OWN	Kym's babysitter is late, so she spends part of the morning dealing with her son, Joshua.
<i>6 Little McGhees</i> (2012)	Helpful/Realistic	Joe Sorge, Phillip Sternberg	OWN	The parents are dealing with six kids during their bath time.
<i>Thicker Than Water</i> (2013)	Unsure	Rebecca Toth Diefenbach, Valerie Haselton Drescher, Lucilla D'Agostino, Renard Young, Darren Toon	Bravo	Marcus and Tish Tankard are revealing the sex of their baby to the family.

Despite feeling that many of these shows were little more than on-screen spectacles, many of the participants stated that they watch these shows for the drama.

*“I hate it and love it all at the same time”*

*“I love trash TV, but know it is trash TV”*

*“It’s like a train wreck; you can’t look away.”*

Participants summarized that reality television viewership was driven by three different factors:

1. Relate to the characters or situations
2. Gawk or look at with fascination
3. Learn about the lifestyles of people unlike you

They posited that viewership among non-African-Americans of reality television shows featuring African-Americans was driven by this curiosity of the unknown. African-Americans were seen as being fascinating and foreign to other ethnic groups. “African-Americans only make up thirteen percent of the population... In rural areas there’s a huge viewership. They might see one African-American person their entire lives. They don’t have that exposure,” as stated by another participant.

## **Perspectives on the Impact of Reality Television on African-American Women**

Overwhelmingly, participants recognized the identified African-American woman personas, although not always calling them by name, and were insistent that the images did not reflect them personally. Across the cities, three key themes surfaced that were seen as directly affecting the African-American community, as well as the way African-American women are viewed and treated within the broader U.S. society.

- **The Reduction of African-American Womanhood:** Many reality television shows saturate the airwaves with stereotypical images of African-American women that while existent, do not represent the entire or majority of the spectrum of African-American womanhood. As one participant stated, “That’s not my life. The harm is that it makes people think it is my life.” In return, unflattering behavior—like aggressiveness, excessive materialism and hyper-sexuality has become acceptable and expected behavior from African-American women.
- **Diminished Respect for the African-American Woman:** The popularity of these reality shows with harmful and stereotypical images has influenced the way men and women from other ethnic groups view African-American women in the work place and other social situations. It is believed that non-African-Americans typically expect the worst and anticipate the most outrageous behavior as the norm when they interact with African-American women. This could impact hiring and advancement decisions, and the ability for an African-American woman to be taken seriously as a leader within an organization.
- **The New Road to Success:** By default, reality television actors have become role models for some African-American teenage girls and young adults who emulate their dress, speech, interpersonal skills, or lack thereof, and their attitudes towards money, sex, and material possessions. Not only do they become regular viewers, but also followers in social media, carefully studying all aspects of these crafted personas.

Participants, many of whom were educators, shared that the emergence of reality television stars has made it harder to inspire African-American girls to try to attain success through school and hard work. Instead, many are looking for a fast

way out of their situation through reality television which, gives the impression that overnight fame and riches can be easily obtained. “All you have to do is get on a show, and become memorable for bad behavior.”

### Countering Harmful and Stereotypical Programming

The Watch Parties in Chicago and New York, primarily made up of professionals in the advertising and media community, pointed out a larger issue—the need for “counter-balanced programming” to mitigate the overbalance of hurtful, stereotypical images. They voiced that advertisers, who want to entice African-American viewers, have the power. It is the advertiser who pays to have their commercials aired on a television network that enables the production and distribution of reality television programming. Advertising professionals who work directly for the advertiser (or corporation) and at the agencies that represent them, directly influence the type of programming broadcast by the television networks.

*“As individuals we need to encourage our friends and relatives not to watch some of the negative programming that we see—and to write to the people who are producing the commercials and the programs when there is something we don’t like. We should not let this just wash over us, because if we don’t do something, we are going to still be talking about this 10 to 20 years from now.”*

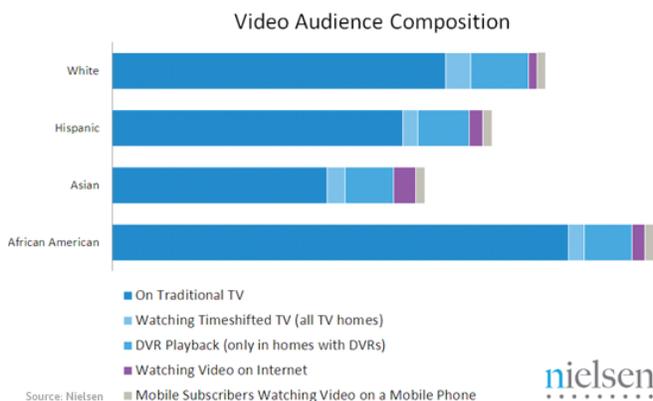
—J. Dates, Dean Emerita, School of Communications, Howard University; Member, Board of Directors, Corporation for Public Broadcasting

With a collective buying power of \$1.1 trillion and a propensity to watch television, African-Americans also have the power to demand change. According to Nielsen, African-Americans consume, on average, 213 hours of traditional television a month, which is “roughly 57 hours more than Whites” (Nielsen, 2011). Participants in the advertising and entertainment industries expressed that the high ratings these shows received, indirectly told television network executives, advertisers, and their agencies that they enjoyed reality television and did not have a problem with the content being shown. Instead, it was suggested that African-American women should “vote with their eyeballs” by not watching those reality television shows in question, thus demonstrating their disapproval of the images portrayed.

Advertisers have become more aware of the concern. Prior to the airing of *Sorority Sisters*, a reality television show that followed the lives of members of four historical African-American sororities, members petitioned Viacom’s VH1 network to keep the show from airing. Despite the members’ efforts to maintain the integrity of these respected organizations, the show aired in December 2014 and instantly created a social media uproar. Members of the National Pan-Hellenic Council, which is comprised of nine historically African-American Greek-lettered fraternities and sororities, and numerous other community supporters led a well-organized social media campaign on Twitter and Facebook to bring awareness of their concerns to companies advertising on *Sorority Sisters*.

### Who’s Watching

By race & ethnicity



Additionally, African-Americans working inside the advertising and media industry and client-side also stepped up. They brought the issue to the attention of those inside the industry responsible for making decisions about how to invest advertiser dollars. At one leading global media agency, a recommendation to withhold or withdraw investment in *Sorority Sisters* was issued based on the premise that supporting the show could damage African-American's perception of brands associated with the show. The recommendation was accepted and was a major factor in the show's removal.

*Sorority Sisters* was mentioned by Watch Party participants as an example of the power of African-Americans to mobilize and protect the image of African-American women. Some questioned why no one has taken the initiative to organize and remove reality television programming that is far more damaging than *Sorority Sisters*. It was also noted that there is no watchdog group that stands up to defend all African-American women.

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*“The perception of what is ‘American’ is constantly being reshaped and perpetuated by the images in commercials, TV shows and textbooks... We are cueing each other about what is ‘American’... and I think this has a large impact on policy.”*

*—Jessica J. Kang, Senior Research Scientist, Center for Social Inclusion*

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### **Balancing Images to Save Communities**

Based upon the reactions from our Watch Party participants, it was concluded that some of the popular reality television shows reinforced stereotypes that could be perceived as harmful to the self-esteem and self-image of African-American women. Many participants voiced their concern with the genre as a whole, but also offered actions for key stakeholders—viewers, parents, community advocates, and advertising/media

professionals. The emphasis was on creating more balanced images of African-American women in the media, protecting African-American youth from the harmful images, and educating the general public and advertising/media industry about the impact of stereotypes.

- **Seek Multicultural Expertise.** Advertisers have the ability to flex their “client muscle” and ask to integrate multicultural expertise from the television networks and media planning and buying teams. This will prevent their brands from supporting programming that negatively impacts their standing with African-American viewers. Additionally, these teams should consciously and actively seek the input of multicultural consumers to better understand which images resonate, and how best to portray multicultural people holistically in various life situations without erasing the unique aspects of their distinct cultures.
- **Mentor Television-Writing Talent.** Diverse casts ruled television in 2014 and 2015. From *How to Get Away with Murder* and *Empire*, to *Jane the Virgin* and *Fresh Off the Boat*, viewers have an interest in watching more diverse stories on television. Following the HBO Access Writing Fellowship model, advertisers could partner with networks to offer classes and access to mentors, executives and show runners with the intent to help multicultural writers develop and workshop their show.
- **Amplify Your Voice, and Vote with Your Eyeballs.** Be a vocal and visible supporter of reality television programs and/or online web series that promote positive images of African-American women and girls. When damaging images arise (whether related to ethnicity, gender, age, lifestyle, ability), viewers of all backgrounds must be vocal and “put their money where their mouth is” by not watching these shows (driving down the ratings), and making the networks and advertisers aware of your concerns. Remember that a television show only stays on air as long as there are advertisers willing to support it.

There is also shared onus on advertising and media professionals to carefully evaluate new programs during the annual television “upfront” meetings. Don’t be afraid to ask the hard questions and raise red flags before committing advertising dollars.

- **Support the Healthy Media For Youth Act.** This bill, originally introduced in the House of Representatives in 2010, seeks to research the impact of the images of girls and women in the media, establish a national task force, and provide grants for media literacy and youth empowerment programs. Notably, issues pertinent to African-American girls and women were not addressed in the original bill, and should be incorporated before reintroducing.
- **Promote Media Literacy in Schools.** As elementary, middle, and high school students study economics, consumerism, and the internet/social media, media literacy should be taught to further critical thinking skills. This will prepare students to scrutinize messaging presented in the media, online and offline. Cross-functional teams of educators, advertising and media professionals, social workers, and counselors should be established to work with students inside and outside the classroom. Parents must also be educated on the impact that harmful, stereotypical reality television programming can have on children.

## Limitations

Future research projects need to include a more uniform methodology for obtaining viewer reactions to the television programs. Stronger, more robust generalizations could be made as a result.

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### **About the American Advertising Federation (AAF.org)**

The American Advertising Federation protects and promotes the well-being of advertising. We accomplish this through a unique, nationally coordinated grassroots network of advertisers, agencies, media companies, local advertising clubs and college chapters. The AAF operates a host of programs and initiatives including the Advertising Hall of Fame, the American Advertising Awards, the National Student Advertising Competition, the Mosaic Center on Multiculturalism, and summer Ad Camps for high school students in Chicago, New York City and Washington, DC.

### **About AAF's Mosaic Council**

The AAF Mosaic Council is an established infrastructure of national advertisers, general market and minority advertising agencies, media organizations and suppliers. As the advertising industry's premier "think tank" on diversity and multiculturalism, the council identifies best practices for achieving greater industry diversity and multiculturalism while advancing the common interest of all industry segments.

### **AAF Mosaic Principles**

1. Recruit for America.
2. Recognize the diversity of talent within the industry.
3. Provide greater access to development and leadership opportunities.
4. Encourage the industry to portray realistic images of multicultural youth and communities.

Follow AAF on Twitter, Facebook, Instagram (@AAFNational) and LinkedIn (American Advertising Federation).

### **About Zeta Phi Beta Sorority, Inc. (ZPHIB1920.org)**

Zeta Phi Beta Sorority, Incorporated was founded in 1920 by five co-ed students at Howard University who envisioned a sorority that would promote the highest standard of scholastic achievement and Finer Womanhood. Headquartered in Washington, DC, Zeta Phi Beta Sorority, Inc. has a diverse membership of more than 120,000 college-educated women with more than 800 chapters in North America, Europe, Asia, the Caribbean, Africa and the Middle East.

### **GET ENGAGED™**

GET ENGAGED is a social action initiative designed by Zeta Phi Beta Sorority, Inc. to address the underlying issues that are contributing to the senseless killing of African-Americans in the U.S. The objectives are threefold:

1. Drive individual and community engagement in the underlying issues that are destroying communities, and an understanding of the benefits and consequences of action or inaction.
2. Empower citizens through knowledge sharing, and by fostering collective responsibility among community members.
3. Cultivate a culture of mutual respect in our communities.

GET ENGAGED provides Zeta chapters with a strategic framework to foster citizen engagement and strengthen relationships among the community, elected officials, law enforcement and educators. The initiative is implemented as a series of quarterly Z-HOPE (Zetas Helping Other People Excel) programs on criminal justice, media diversity, public policy education and civic engagement.

Follow Zeta on Twitter (@ZPHIBHQ), Facebook or Pinterest.