PARASOCIAL INTERACTION:

THAT’S SO RAVEN AND THE AFRICAN AMERICAN TWEEN AUDIENCE

by

Davia Rose Lassiter

(Under the direction of Dwight E. Brooks)

ABSTRACT

African American female tweens (ages 9-14) were found to engage in parasocial interaction with the main character on Disney’s top rated show That’s So Raven. An audience reception analysis of this particular demographic showed these participants displayed essential components of parasocial interaction, which are homophily, personal identity, and companionship. Race and gender were the two factors that emerged though discussions about their perceptions of show, their favorite character, their perceptions of African Americans and Whites, and their media preferences and habits.

Parasocial interaction is a one-sided interpersonal relationship viewers of a television show establish with the characters, developing a bond of intimacy through repeated viewings of the character over time, resembling a face to face interaction between the viewers and the character (Auter, 1992; Eyal and Rubin, 2003; Hoffner, 1996; McHugh and Rubin, 1987).

INDEX WORDS: African American girls, Disney, parasocial interaction, That’s So Raven, tweens, uses and gratifications
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by

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION AND PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

This chapter will introduce the reader to a new area of communication research: African American female tweens and television. While literature exists about African Americans and media, there are very few studies that focus on this particular demographic. When I was a tween, there were few television shows that depicted African American women or my peers, especially as leading actresses or in a majority African American cast. Now, 15 years later, these types of shows can be seen on various channels. While I was not able to enjoy these current shows as a nine-year-old, 18 particular African American tweens have this option and chose to talk to me about their media habits and preferences, in particular about the television show *That’s So Raven*. This study examines if these African American female tween viewers of Disney’s *That’s So Raven* interact parasocially with the main character Raven Baxter, as well as their reasons for watching the show. This chapter serves to introduce the reader to the reasons why this type of research is important and my reasons for investigating this particular television show and its audience.

*That’s So Raven*

As Allison Samuels (2005) writes:

Anyone who’s stood in line at a supermarket knows who Paris, Jessica, Mary-Kate, Ashley, Hilary and Lindsay are. Too many late nights and too little body fat, a surfeit of fast cash and a bare minimum of clothing have made them tabloid princesses. So why aren’t the tabs on a first-name basis with Raven? …Could it be – we’re just taking a guess here – because Symone is African-American, not even close to a size 2 and prefers sweats and T-shirts to Dolce and Gabbanna?
In the world of thin blondes, African American females growing up have very few representations of themselves in the media. However, Disney’s *That’s So Raven* has provided these girls with a character that they can possibly relate to in the form of Raven Baxter, a precocious high school student who has a knack for seeing into the future and getting herself into comical situations as she tries to alter the outcome of her frequent visions.

The main character is played by 20-year-old Raven-Symone, who is most famous for appearing on *The Cosby Show* as Olivia (Wikipedia, 2006). She has also appeared in both “Dr. Doolittle” movies and the television show *Hangin’ With Mr. Cooper* (Wikipedia, 2006). Her audition in 2002 (Ho, 2006) for the new Disney show *Absolutely Psychic* for the role of the best friend was so impressive that she was cast as the lead (Ho, 2006; Wikipedia, 2006) and *That’s So Raven* was given its current name.

It is the first show in Disney’s history that has aired for more than three seasons (Huff, 2005). Averaging three million viewers each week, *That’s So Raven* is the highest rated show with black tweens (Samuels, 2005). This show first aired on January 17, 2003, (Roberts, 2003) and featured Raven Baxter posing as a parent to fool her teacher (Fries, 2003). On July 29, 2005, the “Country Cousins” episode was the network’s highest rated of an original series, beating out the March 8th episode of *Lizzie McGuire* (Multichannel News, 2005), Disney’s former highest-rated show (Huff, 2005).

This show garners laughs through Raven’s physical comedy abilities, which many critics have compared to that of Lucille Ball (Fries, 2003; Hiltbrand, 2005; Samuels, 2005), as well as comical situations surrounding Raven’s visions and her relationships and interactions with her friends and family. This 30-minute show also features the
following characters: best friends Eddie Thomas (Orlando Brown) and Chelsea Daniels (Anneliese van der Pol), parents Tonya (T’Keyah Crystal Keymah) and Victor (Rondell Sheridan), and little brother Cory (Kyle Orlando Massey) (Fries, 2003).

*That’s So Raven* airs daily at 7:30 p.m. (Eastern Time) and on Saturday mornings on ABC at 10:30 a.m. (Eastern Time) (“Disney and Raven-Symone Unveil New Cosmetic and Fragrance Line,” 2005). It is filmed in Los Angeles by Brookwell McNamara Entertainment (in association with Disney) (Fries, 2003).

*Tweens*

*That’s So Raven* is rated as the number one show for African American females between the ages of 9 and 14, or tweens (Littlejohn, 2004; Samuels, 2005). Why the name? Marjorie Kaplan, executive vice president and general manager for Discovery Kids, says tweens are in between one thing and another, not yet full-fledged adolescents and others not ready to make the transition into adolescence (Littlejohn, 2004). In a 2002 *Electronic Media* article, they were described as “halfway between stuffed animals and dating” (Phipps, p. 14).

This particular group watches a variety of programs but the Disney Channel has been extremely successful in designing programs for this age group (Dempsey, 2001), like *That’s So Raven*. Levin (2005) writes, “The Disney Channel has proved to be a magnet to older kids with its stew of comedy, fantasy and a dollop of preteen angst” (p. 1) and has capitalized on the tween audience during primetime viewing. Michael Poryes, the executive producer of *That’s So Raven*, says while Nickelodeon is still the highest rated children’s network, Disney’s power comes from their ability to create reality for tweens (Levin, 2005). Instead of Nickelodeon’s highly animated content, Poryes says the
Disney Channel has characters that viewers want to hang out with and who represent their lives. Disney is also more family-friendly than other networks like The N and Cartoon Network, which target older audiences with mature subjects like faith and sexual identity (Levin, 2005). Levin (2005) writes, “Shows are imbued with moral messages, friendship and preteen angst, which are sugarcoated with comedy” (p. 2). He also writes that programs’ combination of traditional family comedy mixed with a tween (often a female) and the “element of wish-fulfillment fantasy” makes the shows extremely successful (Levin, 2005, p. 2). However, Duke (2000) cites media critics who maintain that as long as media executives are White, difficulties will continue to exist when it comes to portrayals of ethnic minorities. According to Johnson, Roberts, and Worell (1999), six million girls of color mature from a child to an adult without seeing an accurate representation of themselves developmentally and psychologically. Therefore, while African American female tweens have representations of themselves gender-wise, they lack representations of their racial identity.

Purpose of the Study

The popularity and success of That’s So Raven, as well as my deep interest in the show, led the way for a research opportunity to investigate this television show and the African American tweens who watch it. I have always been intrigued with African American girls and media preferences. I have conducted research and composed literature reviews about this topic, but they have always focused on print, never television. I intended to conduct research about African American girls and “Seventeen” magazine but a former Grady graduate, Lisa Duke, had already conducted extensive research on this topic.
However, *That’s So Raven* provided me with a different insight into my research interests. The target audience for the show is girls between the ages of 9 and 14. However, at 24 years old, I am incredibly attracted to the show. Although I am well over the age range of the show’s target audience, I still find the show entertaining and relatable. With every viewing of the episodes, I always think about how I would have loved to have had a show like *That’s So Raven* when I was younger. Aside from my personal preferences, there is also a limited body of scholarly literature that investigates the role of media in the lives of African American tweens.

When African American children and teenagers watch television, they tend to attach significance to those shows with black characters (Appiah, 2001; “Black Teen Media Preferences Monitored,” 1999; Brand & Greenburg, 1994; Caruthers et al, 2004; Conners, 2004; Edwards, 2001; Gutiérrez & Wilson III, 1995; Liss, 1981; Stroman, 1986). When African American children were asked about how they felt when they saw a black person on television, more than 80 percent said words like “good,” “happy,” or “great” (Stroman, 1986). This group of children also watches television as a source of guidance; for example, learning dating behavior or about different jobs (Stroman, 1991). With few images of African Americans on television, it can be argued that these children may yearn for representation of other people of the same race in the media. The need for representation, or interaction, according to Rubin (1994) can result in parasocial interaction, which occurs when television viewers form a relationship with the character through repeated viewings of the television show (Auter, 1992; Cohen, 2004; Cole and Leets, 1999; Giles, 2002; McHugh & Rubin, 1987).
Therefore, not only do I intend to investigate why these tweens watch *That’s So Raven*, I also intend to determine if they interact parasocially with the main character, Raven Baxter. *That’s So Raven* and the response to it by African American female tweens are significant. Although it is one out of many shows on the Disney channel targeting tweens, it is the longest running show in Disney history and is currently the highest rated. I believe these African American female tweens feel connected with Raven Baxter because of their avid viewing of the show. I expect reasons cited as to why this show is so popular with them will be because the character mirrors her African American viewers in some form or fashion: curvy, boy-crazy, speaks with slang, talks about her hair (which ranges from a long weave to a fake ponytail to microbraids), hip hop dance moves and an attitude to match. While the show is entertaining, it is also different from many shows on television because it features a mostly African American cast.

I also believe this show provides young African American females a character that they can identify with. As stated before, youth use media for identity formation and Davis and Gandy (1999) maintain most information about the influence of television on identity has some focus on self-concept and self-esteem. African American audiences are often conceptualized as victims of stereotypical portrayals of their race in the media that are subsequently internalized by African American youth, which lead to negative self-concepts and low self-esteem (Davis and Gandy, 1999). However, *That’s So Raven* and the portrayal of Raven Baxter as a girl who shares similar experiences with the show’s audience provides someone for African American tweens to identify with and who has the potential to have a positive effect on their self-concept and self esteem.
Critics of television’s impact on African American children cite television’s potential to negatively impact minorities’ self-concept (Stroman, 1991). The exclusion of African Americans from television can be destructive to children’s self-concept because it lessens the importance of their existence (Stroman, 1991). Furthermore, the television roles in which African Americans are cast tend to communicate to African American children the negative values society places on them (Stroman, 1991).

Therefore, I expect to discover why these girls watch this show, what role Raven Baxter’s race and gender have in their reasons for watching show, and if a parasocial interaction occurs between Raven Baxter and the viewers in areas of companionship, personal identity, and homophily.

Organization of the thesis

Chapter II discusses parasocial interaction as the cultural framework for the study. I will also discuss relevant literature about African American females on television. The research design that employs focus group interviews will be outlined in Chapter III. Chapter IV will analyze the participants’ responses in relation to the literature and issues of race and gender. Chapter V will provide a summary of the study, implications, future research areas, and limitations of the thesis. Overall, I expect this research will add to the body of knowledge about African Americans and media use and preferences, as well as foster more research about African American female tweens.
CHAPTER II: CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK AND LITERATURE REVIEW

Cultural Studies

This interdisciplinary area of research examines culture and the media’s prominent role in creating it by questioning how meanings are constructed and the sentiments consumers produce during active participation in media culture. Scholars define culture as the way people navigate and sometimes struggle with the meanings of their social experiences and relations.

Television is a type of media that provides materials from which viewers form their identities and notions around race and gender (Kellner, 1995). Media stories also provide a source of cultural pedagogy that teaches people how to function in our commercial media culture (Kellner, 1995).

Radio television, film and other products of media culture provide materials of which we forge our very identities, our sense of selfhood; our notion of what it means to be male or female; our sense of class, of ethnicity and race, of nationality, of sexuality, of “us” and “them” (Kellner, 1995, p. 5).

When people watch television, the images and stories they consume acquire meaning (Fingerson, 1999). Stuart Hall’s encoding/decoding model is often used to examine how media can evoke different reactions from audiences (Bobo, 2002; Duke, 2000). This model is composed of three ways audience members respond to media messages: dominant (accepting the message without question), negotiated (questioning parts of the content of the text but does not question the dominant ideology from which the text was produced), and oppositional (being at odds from the system that produced the text) (Bobo, 2002). Unlike television shows with majority White characters, That’s
So Raven provides African American female tweens with an African American leading actress and a majority African American cast. Therefore, while dominant might be the way in which they interpret the texts of That’s So Raven, negotiated and oppositional are still likely.

The way audience members decode messages is often based on their social and cultural perspective, assigning significance to certain messages through social interaction and their own personal experience (Fingerson, 1999). Tracy (2004) maintains that our media consumption is always connected to broader social and cultural issues.

Cultural studies scholars insist culture must be studied within social relations and the system in which it is produced and consumed. Therefore, I believe African American female tweens watch That’s So Raven not only for entertainment, but also to learn about their peers by watching Raven Baxter, an African American girl, on television. Ideology is an important concept of cultural studies, as dominant ideologies serve to reproduce social relations of domination and subordination (Kellner, 1995). For example, ideologies of gender promote women in sexist representations and ideologies of race utilize racist representations of people of color (Kellner, 1995). Portrayals of certain populations in television may be skewed. Nothing this marginalization, cultural studies promotes multiculturalist politics and media pedagogy whose purpose it is to make people sensitive to how the relationship between power and domination are encoded in cultural texts (Kellner, 1995).

Audience reception analysis has been able to provide this model with one of its major contributions, as all texts can be interpreted differently (Kellner, 1995). Differences in perspectives and subject positions of the viewers, as well as their gender
and race, cause them to read tests in multiple ways (Kellner, 1995). For example, if two separate audience reception analyses of That’s So Raven were conducted with White and African American viewers, the differences in race might result in different interpretations. Likewise, if two audience reception analyses were conducted with a group of boys and girls, the differences in gender might result in different interpretations. Different viewers have different needs and therefore choose different types of media to engage in and even those who engage in the same type of media will interpret it in different ways (Arnett et al, 1995).

Media culture provides materials for individuals to create identities and meanings, and cultural studies detect specific ways that individuals use cultural forms (Kellner, 1995). For example, teenagers who use video games could possibly use it as an escape from disciplinary demands from society (Kellner, 1995). Emphasis on audience reception helps cultural studies to look past “previous one-sided textualist orientations to culture” and, instead, focus on how audiences use the texts and learn how the texts affect their daily lives (Kellner, 1995, p. 16). It can be argued that African American female tweens watch That’s So Raven as an outlet to live vicariously through Raven Baxter, wanting to do the same things she does, thus engaging in parasocial interaction.

Parasocial Interaction

Parasocial interaction has become well established in media and communication literature since it was introduced by Horton and Wohl in 1956 (Auter, 1992; Eyal & Rubin, 2003; Giles, 2002; Hoffner, 1996; McHugh & Rubin, 1987). It is a one-sided interpersonal relationship viewers of a television show establish with the characters, developing a bond of intimacy through repeated viewings of the character over time,
resembling a face to face interaction between the viewers and the character (Auter, 1992; Eyal & Rubin, 2003; Hoffner, 1992; McHugh & Rubin, 1987). Norlund, as cited in Eyal and Rubin (2003) says television has a high interaction potential because of recurring characters.

In Horton and Wohl’s original 1956 study, (“Mass Communication and Parasocial Interaction”) they developed the concept when they discussed ways of how interaction between the media and representations of people in the media produce a form of parasocial relationship (Giles, 2002). The viewer responds to the television character as an actual person, mimicking a typical social relationship (Giles, 2002). Social relationships and parasocial relationships are similar because viewers judge characters and their personal characteristics and respond to them as if they are a real person (Giles, 2002). In 1989, Perse and Rubin stated people use similar cognitive processes in interpersonal and mediated communication (e.g. watching That’s So Raven) (Giles, 2002). Horton and Wohl assert that after the program ends, the viewer will determine whether to reject, accept or further interpret the proposition of parasocial interaction (McHugh & Rubin, 1987).

Parasocial relationships were initially viewed as a low-grade, unreal relationship for the elderly and disabled but they are now viewed as a more respectable form of a relationship (Cohen, 2004). Rubin and Rubin, as cited in McHugh and Rubin (1987), claim these interactions could be a functional alternative to interpersonal relationships (McHugh & Rubin, 1987). Therefore, African American female tweens are not necessarily lonely. They could just be lacking representations of girls like them in race, gender, age and lifestyle. Therefore, any indication of parasocial interaction with Raven
Baxter by these tweens can be attributed to finding some comfort in watching someone they perceive as a friend and a peer.

Horton and Wohl identified two essential components of parasocial interaction, companionship and personal identity. Rubin and Perse (1987) maintain parasocial interaction may develop from an altruistic human instinct to form attachments with other people, regardless of the distance between them (Giles, 2002). So, it can be argued that African American female tweens who potentially interact parasocially with Raven Baxter are acting out on that instinct. Personal identity occurs when a viewer shares a television character’s perspective and lives vicariously through them (Eyal and Rubin, 2003; Hoffner, 1996). It can be argued that African American tween viewers of That’s So Raven have the potential to interact parasocially with Raven Baxter because of their shared experience as a young African American female who attends school, like boys, fights with her brother, hangs out with her best friends, and likes shopping.

Similar to personal identification is homophily, which is the degree to which people who are similar interact with each other and concerns people’s perception of the degree of similarity (Eyal and Rubin, 2003). Homophily has been linked to more identification with a television character (Eyal & Rubin, 2003). Homophily can also be viewed as a component of parasocial behavior because of its links with personal identity. Research has also linked attitude and behavior homophily in interpersonal and mass media relationships (Eyal and Rubin, 2003). For example, Hoffner and Cantor, as cited in Eyal & Rubin (2003) stated similar characters have the potential to confirm validity in the viewer’s beliefs and concerns.
For the purpose of this study, homophily will be the shared race and gender of Raven Baxter and the tweens I will be analyzing. Many scholars have regarded race as a social construct rather than a biological occurrence. In researching race, Orbe and Harris (2001) found scientists were unable to prove race as a biological difference, even after such experiments involving blood tests, body part measurements, and gene cluster analyses. They assert the better way to view race is as a sociopolitical construct (Orbe and Harris, 2001).

While sex is biological, gender can also be viewed as a social construct. Holtzman (2000) uses studies on gender, like Margaret Mead’s 1953 study of different cultures, to show how gender is perceived differently to different types of people. She also uses the common American examples of putting pink bows on the heads of newborn females and the different chores males and females were assigned growing up (like yard work versus washing dishes, respectively) (Holtzman, 2002). Although biology and interpersonal factors impact gender, culture is the biggest significance (Holtzman, 2000). Therefore, Raven Baxter’s race and gender have the potential to affect how and why African American female tweens watch That’s So Raven on a regular basis.

It was not until the 1970s that a link was made between parasocial interaction and uses and gratifications (Giles, 2002; McHugh & Rubin, 1987) and in the 1980s, researchers like Alan Rubin began to develop parasocial interaction extensively in relation to communication studies (Giles, 2002). Uses and gratifications research examines the ways people use the media to satisfy unmet needs (Edwards, 2001; McHugh & Rubin, 1987; Rubin, 1994). According to researchers Blumler, Gurevitch, and Katz, as cited in Rubin (1994), people are active users of the media and they choose
certain types of media to gratify their needs (Edwards, 2001; McHugh & Rubin, 1987; Rubin, 1994), one of which might be some type of interaction with their peers (Rubin, 1994). The goal of this thesis is to examine how African American female tweens are active users of *That’s So Raven.* Potter (2001) writes, “When people have a conscious need for a particular kind of information, they will actively seek out this type of information in the media, and the chance of them learning from this experience is high” (p. 308). So, I expect that particular tweens choose this show intentionally to fill a gap in their media experience. Racial identity affects viewers’ choices regarding mass media and use media for surveillance, socialization, and entertainment (Davis & Gandy, 1999). Television dependency and viewing frequency have been correlated with parasocial interaction, race and gender, and differences in viewers’ parasocial media experience can change (Giles, 2002).

Parasocial interaction in childhood and adolescence has been neglected in communication literature, as well as the influence of the media in childhood developmental psychology (Giles, 2002). These are fields where a parasocial interaction could be analyzed and make a useful contribution to this body of knowledge (Giles, 2002). Hoffner, as cited in Giles (2002), was the first researcher to apply the concept of parasocial interaction and children’s favorite television characters (Giles, 2002). Hoffner found that by the ages of 10 and 11, children choose their favorite characters based on parasocial interaction, describing the characters as being similar to their actual friends (Giles, 2002). Based on the findings from that study, it is plausible that the favorite characters of these tweens in the current study could be related to the companionship aspect of parasocial interaction. However, I will argue they could also choose their
favorite character based on their similarities of race and gender (homophily) and/or shared qualities and characteristics (personal identity).

**Television, Identification, and African American Youth**

There is research that indicates that children begin to watch television as early as the age of two, viewing peaks around preadolescence, and then declines during late adolescence (Stroman, 1991). For that reason, tweens are heavy television viewers because of their age as well as their race. In terms of race, African American youth watch more television that any other racial group (5 times daily and some more than 40 hours per week (Brand & Greenberg, 1994; Caruthers, Merriwether, Schooler, and Ward, 2004; Stroman, 1991).

As the results suggest, race tends to be the main factor guiding African American youth’s media preferences, especially young girls. Just as African Americans as a whole prefer television shows with African American characters, African American girls have similar sentiments (Edwards, 2001), as ethnic minority children have distinctive preferences toward television shows (Brand and Greenberg, 1994). They also are searching for information and those television shows that provide answers are preferred over others (Brand and Greenberg, 1994). The African American tween viewers for this study are no different, as they may have many questions about life as they near adolescence and search for answers from various social networks like family, peers, and, of course, the media. As these tweens will mature, their identity searches become more difficult because of their race and gender (Edwards, 2001) and they will begin “to use televised portrayals to reflect upon themselves” (Brand & Greenberg, 1994, p. 301). Therefore, television is able to gratify psychological needs for these girls (Edwards,
Television acts as a socialization agent and affects young viewers’ attitudes, beliefs and behaviors (Hoffner, 1996; Stroman, 1991). As these tweens watch That’s So Raven, it is possible that through parasocial interaction they are receiving the answers to their questions and learning in their minds about what it means to be an African American female by watching Raven Baxter.

Race is also more often than not a factor in African American girls’ childrearing because they are taught that being black may have negative consequences (Brooks-Gunn, Graber, and O’Connor, 2000) and, therefore, is more prominent for them than for their White female peers (Erkut, Fields, Marx, and Sing, 1996). According to a 1992 Children Now study, children said it was important to see people of their race on television because it signified that their race is important (Conners, 2004). In a 1998 Children Now study, 41% of children said there were not enough African American main characters on television (Conners, 2004). These findings are not surprising, considering most children watch primetime television, which is the least diverse as compared to other day parts (Children Now, 2002). In contrast, children’s television shows tend to be more racially diverse with shows (e.g. “That’s So Raven” and “Dora the Explorer”) (Children Now, 2002). In fact, when “Sesame Street” debuted in 1969, children were able to be exposed to a multicultural cast (Children Now, 2002). Nevertheless, there are fewer characters of color on Saturday morning children’s television shows (Seiter, 1995). However, That’s So Raven is television show that is able to depict African American females.

Representation of African American Females on Television

Cultivation research is an area that examines how repeated exposure to a certain type of media content affects one’s social beliefs (Gorham, 1999). For example, if
African American females are portrayed negatively in television shows, heavy television viewers will begin to believe the actions of the characters are the same as African American women in real life. Also, the majority of television shows have White characters. In 2004, African American females were only about 6% of the characters on primetime television (Caruthers et al, 2004), so these tweens did not have many options to see other same-race and gender characters on television shows. Those shows with White female characters however more often than not embody a certain beauty ideal, White, thin, and blond (Caruthers et al, 2004; Duke, 2000). Although the majority cast of That’s So Raven is African American, there is one White character, Raven Baxter’s best friend Chelsea Daniels.

Frequent portrayals of African American females have often been characterized in two ways: the Mammy, an asexual representation, and the Jezebel, an extremely sexual depiction (Collins, 2000; Gutiérrez & Wilson III, 1995; hooks, 1997; Hudson, 1998). For example, Nell Carter was a maid in the show 1980s show Gimme a Break: “The stereotypical portrayal of the black maid with no family of her own – and no sense of a need for such – continued to be the most acceptable portrayal of black women in prime-time comedies” (Alligood & Pieracinni, 2005, pg. 42).

The Jezebel seems to be portrayed more frequently in modern times. Television often has recurring images of this stereotype, most commonly in music videos, where African American females appear as “sexually available hoochies” (Collins, 2000, p. 85).

In terms of television programming, the first television show with an African American woman as the lead, not the maid (Chao et al, 2003; Rhodes, 1995), was “Julia” starring Diahann Carroll (Gutiérrez & Wilson III, 1995) in 1968 (Abdroghkozy, 1995).
The premise for this show was Julia’s move to an integrated apartment complex and working after her husband’s death in Vietnam (Abdroghkozy, 1995). This unlikely success lasted three years on NBC, and although it was heavily criticized for not portraying the hardships of African American life, it still was able to transcend typical stereotypes for African American women (Abdroghkozy, 1995). In the 1980s and 1990s, The Cosby Show, Amen, and A Different World offered more diverse representations of African American women as well (Rhodes, 1995).

Chao, Gutiérrez, and Wilson II (2003) states African American females have “come a long way” since they were cast in subservient positions (maids) or sexualized powerful women (Foxy Brown) (p.193), That’s So Raven being one example of this progress.

Many areas of literature exist about portrayals and representations of African American women on television but there is much to be discovered about African American female tweens. Regarding That’s So Raven and this particular audience, I will investigate why African American female tweens watch the show and if they interact parasocially with the main character Raven Baxter, examining the degrees to which they display homophily, personal identity, and companionship. I expect to find correlations between race and gender and their viewing habits and preferences as well.
CHAPTER III: RESEARCH DESIGN

Focus groups are an in-depth investigation of a particular topic to better understand that area (Krueger & Morgan, 1998). According to Krueger & Morgan (1998), analysis begins with careful listening, which leads to learning. In order to analyze That’s So Raven, I chose focus group interviews as my method, which is appropriate for this type of study because focus group interviews allow investigators to understand participants’ experiences, beliefs, complex behaviors, and their motivations (Krueger & Morgan, 1998). Therefore, I cannot merely assume how African American female tweens watch the That’s So Raven. Instead, I have to ask them and interpret their responses.

There are four basic uses of a focus group: (1) problem identification, (2) planning, (3) implementation, and (4) assessment (Krueger & Morgan, 1998). Although the lack of representation of African American female tweens on television can be viewed as problem, I will argue that this study will not directly examine a problem, but rather investigate how African American female tweens use the media, how they watch That’s So Raven and their interpretation of the show’s content.

In order to plan the execution of the groups, I had to focus on recruitment and the best way to maximize my chances of getting participants. Since I was investigating African American female tweens, I had to find the local resources that would maximize the potential for ample sized focus groups. The typical focus group size is between six and 10 participants (Krueger & Morgan, 1998). The time of day and length of time for
the interviews was also crucial because I wanted to pick a time and date that was reasonable and convenient. So as not to interfere with school and work Monday through Friday, and to leave Saturday open for rest, I chose Sunday, February 26 and Sunday, March 5. These dates would allow me to have enough time to contact the supervisors at locations where I needed permission to distribute materials, to create information about the study to give the participants, and to have enough time to recruit.

After determining the days, I needed to find locations in Athens to recruit participants. Unlike quantitative methods, focus groups results are not generalizable to the public (Krueger & Morgan, 1998). They are an in-depth investigation of a particular topic to better understand a certain area and instead of using random sampling, participants are chosen with a purpose (Krueger and Morgan, 1998). Therefore, I chose locations in Athens that were either African American-based or had a high population of African American students. I determined which locations to recruit from based on my knowledge of the Athens area churches with African American congregations, community centers and programs for children, and from talking with people who either worked at these locations, attended the churches, had children who attended the locations, or who were just familiar with Athens because they live here.

Timothy Elementary School has a high rate of African American students, something I learned from talking with teachers and the principal of the school. It was suggested that I recruit at East Athens Educational Dance Center because many of the students there are young African American females. I was not familiar with the Athens Boys and Girls Club so I called the supervisor there and told her about my study and the specific population I needed in order to make sure this location would be feasible for
recruitment. Fortunately, the location had African American female tweens and most of
my participants were recruited here. There were other places (Timothy Baptist Church,
Ebenezer Baptist Church and First African Methodist Episcopal Church) that I planned to
recruit from but I was able to get enough participants from the first three locations.

In order to attract potential participants, I designed information packets. The first
page was a flyer with a picture of Raven Baxter and the headline, “Do you watch That’s
So Raven?” followed by the dates, times, incentives for participating, and my name,
phone number, and e-mail address (see Appendix A). The second page was a detailed
letter to parents explaining the purpose of the project (see Appendix B). The third page
was a parental consent form (see Appendix C) and the fourth page was the participant
assent form (see Appendix D). The fifth page was directions to the Grady College (see
Appendix E).

I also chose to have incentives for participants in order to maximize my chances
of having enough tweens to come. Incentives are a bonus to focus groups interviews
because it is a way of rewarding and thanking participants for coming. For my study,
parents of the tweens were also involved because they had to give permission first,
contact me second, and take the time to drop off and pick up their children. I indicated on
the flyers that transportation could be arranged to ease this burden and three out of 18
participants took this offer. I also provided pizza and drinks for the participants because
many children like pizza and having food at focus groups help to promote
communication and aid in starting and maintaining conversation (Krueger & Morgan,
1998). The last incentive for participating was a movie pass to Carmike Cinemas for the
February 26 group and Blockbuster gift certificates for the March 5 group. My intent was
to have the movie passes for both groups but there were no more movie passes available for the March group. Therefore, I purchased gift certificates for Blockbuster as a comparable incentive. All of the incentives were listed on the flyer and the letter to the parents/guardians.

I gave 50 copies of the packets to the principal at Timothy Elementary so they could be distributed to the 3rd, 4th, and 5th grade classrooms. I was not able to address the girls because of the school’s policy. I mailed and brought packets to East Athens Educational Dance Center, where I was able to talk to two African American female tweens. Last, I went to the Athens Boys and Girls Club and announced my study to about 50 very excited and energetic African American female tweens. I made two more trips to this location to bring more packets. In all, there were about 150 packets of information delivered to the three locations. All were instructed to call or e-mail me to reserve a spot on either date. I began receiving calls about two days after recruitment up until the last focus group on March 5.

I chose to have two groups in order to be able to compare the responses and seek any similarities and burgeoning trends between the two groups. The typical number for focus groups is between three and five but it is best for the researcher to determine what they want to hear and then decide how many focus groups will be conducted (Krueger & Morgan, 1998). Also, if a group and topic are moderately diverse and complex (respectively), three to five groups is the standard (Krueger & Morgan, 1998). However, more groups lead to theoretical saturation, which occurs when responses become repetitive and there are no new ideas or thoughts (Krueger & Morgan, 1998). In contrast, having only one group is risky because the researcher is unable to compare the findings
and find similarities (Krueger & Morgan, 1998). For my study, having two groups was beneficial because I was able to see the many similarities regarding the participants’ media preferences, thoughts on the main character, race and gender.

Another component of planning these focus groups was determining who would moderate the groups. The moderator is often the primary research designer or someone who is brought in just to moderate the group (Krueger & Morgan, 1998). Moderator tasks are to develop questions, train assistants, lead the group, identify external props or materials to be used during the groups and, most importantly, be familiar with the topic (Krueger & Morgan, 1998). The decency of a moderator can be determined based on their previous experience and their relationship to the participants, as well as their interest in the participants (Krueger & Morgan, 1998). It is crucial that the moderator does not participate in the focus group, so as not to present a bias (Krueger & Morgan, 1998). They must also have good communication skills, have a sincere interest in the participants, and must present an air of friendliness, as well as humor (Krueger & Morgan, 1998). Other important qualities of a moderator are that they have good listening skills and the ability to referee, or provide balance during the focus groups (Krueger & Morgan, 1998). Because of the intimate setting between the moderators and the participants, it is also helpful for both to be interested in the topic of investigation (Krueger & Morgan, 1998). The entire group (participants, assistant moderators, and myself) consisted of That’s So Raven fans so everyone was eager to participate.

Instead of using someone else to moderate, I believed I was the best person to do it because of my investment in my thesis. I was also confident of my ability to work with this particular age group because of three years of experience with working with children
of the same age. I am also extremely comfortable leading discussions and meetings, as I have done in the past with leadership positions and supervising staffs.

The time allotted for both groups was 2 hours, from 3:30 p.m. to 5:30 p.m. This time period would not interfere with church or any other religious Sunday morning observances. It was also not extremely late in the evening. I divided the two-hour block into different time slots so as to progress smoothly throughout the interviews. I utilized the first 30 minutes for participants to arrive and meet myself, my assistants, and other participants. This was also the time for them to eat and basically get comfortable being in an unfamiliar setting, the Faherty Lab in the Grady College of Journalism and Mass Communication at the University of Georgia (this room is specifically designed for focus group interviews and has all the necessary technological equipment to record the interviews). The time from 4:00 p.m.-5:00 p.m. was designed to conduct the focus group. 5:00 p.m.-5:30 p.m. was for extra time if the focus group interviews exceeded one hour, to give out the movie passes/gift cards, to give parents ample time to pick up their children, to debrief, etc.

I needed assistant moderators to help with greeting the participants, serving the pizza and drinks, and creating a comfortable group dynamic. I had three assistants for each group. All were African American women in graduate school. I purposely chose these women in order to keep the race and gender of everyone involved consistent. Also, I think the participants would have been reluctant to answer the questions if there were either males and/or assistants who were not African American. I arrived at Grady at 2:00 p.m. and my assistant moderators arrived at 2:30 p.m. I briefed all moderators again as to what their duties were throughout the entire duration of the interviews, as well as gave
them hard copies of the questions and notepads to make any necessary notes. We all made name placards for the participants.

Food and drink are not allowed in the Faherty Lab so I arranged chairs and benches for a common area once participants arrived in order to create a friendly and welcoming environment. As parents began to arrive, I greeted them and the participants, answered any questions they had for me, and made sure the participants brought the proper paperwork; (in the packets, it was stated that they needed to bring the consent and assent forms in order to participate). I walked all the participants inside of the building, where my assistants and the food were.

Both sets of participants were very quiet upon arrival but with the help of my assistant moderators and pizza, we were able to get the girls talking. Since some knew each other, it did not take long for them to get comfortable being there. There was a lot of tween dialogue ranging from school to celebrities like Destiny’s Child and Bow Wow. When all participants had arrived and were finished eating, we all went in the Faherty Lab. The participants grabbed their name placards, seated themselves, and taping began.

I started the interviews by introducing myself and thanking them for coming. The assistant moderators then introduced themselves and then the participants. The first part of the focus group consisted of the participants completing a questionnaire (see Appendix F) about their television watching habits. This was done to collect demographic data and to get unbiased answers (they would not be influenced by what others had to say so they would be comfortable writing their answers). One characteristic of a focus group is participants sometimes change their answers once they hear something another participant said, something that does not normally occur with other research methods.
(Krueger & Morgan, 1998). I also administered the questionnaire because I did not have enough time to ask them the questions it and the questions on my interview guide. After the participants finished the questionnaire, I played scenes from “The Four Aces” episode of That’s So Raven. I randomly recorded this episode on Sunday, February 19, 2006.

I explained to the girls that I would show them a few scenes of the show (for sake of time) and that we would watch the rest when the interviews were complete. Many of the girls had seen “The Four Aces” episode, so much that they had memorized lines from the show. They also sang the theme song. They were extremely attentive and laughed at Raven Baxter and the other characters.

In this episode, Ronnie Wilcox (played by Della Reese) is a resident in a nursing home where Raven, Eddie and Chelsea are volunteering. Raven creates a rapport with extremely stubborn Wilcox, only to learn that she was once a famous jazz singer who sang at a nightclub called The Four Aces. When Raven takes Wilcox to her father’s restaurant The Chill Grill, Wilcox learns that the restaurant is the former location of her beloved nightclub. Unfortunately, this is upsetting to her, and she leaves Raven alone in the restaurant. Raven later has a vision of someone introducing Wilcox at The Four Aces. Raven later surprises Wilcox by renovating The Chill Grill to make it look like the Four Aces. By the episode’s end, Wilcox is encouraged to sing and Raven’s vision comes true when her father introduces Wilcox, who comes and sings to the crowd, reliving her old days at the Four Aces.

Next, I began the focus group interviews. Most of the questions on my interview guide (see Appendix G) were directed specifically at the three components of parasocial interaction (homophily, companionship, and personal identity). Others were opening and
closing questions. I did, however, ask questions that were not on my interview guide that stemmed from the responses, especially when I began asking questions related to race.

The majority of the participants provided feedback about *That’s So Raven*, the characters and how they felt about them, and their views on mainly race. Some were eager throughout the entire process but others became more quiet and shy and did not respond as much as others. This was expected, as participant personalities can range from disruptive to shy to ramblers and wanderers (Krueger & Morgan, 1998). This was not the most attentive age group, as they became distracted easily, but, for the most part, I received the necessary information in order to investigate the show and its audience. One advantage focus groups have over other types of methodologies is that the participants’ responses can be used instead of instruments to find out thoughts, feelings and observations about the topic of discussion and the researcher is able to draw on multiple sources of information that are not always available to a quantitative researcher (Krueger & Morgan, 1998). For instance, I was able to use the questionnaire responses, the individual responses, and the group responses from the tweens to summarize and analyze their responses.

I conducted a tape-based analysis (Krueger & Morgan, 1998) of the interviews, instead of transcriptions, to compile the information from the short surveys and carefully analyze the information to investigate my research questions. I was able to better organize the data from the interviews for analysis.

To retain confidentiality promised to the participants as indicated on the consent and assent form, participants will not be identified by name or any physical characteristics, only by pseudonyms. Although I was looking for participants between the
ages of 9-14, my oldest participants were 11. I had a total of 18 participants (10 in February and 8 in March). There were six 9-year-olds, five 10-year-olds, and seven 11-year-olds, thus the average age of all girls was 9. There were four third-graders, five fourth-graders, eight fifth-graders and one sixth-grader and the average grade was fourth. The Boys and Girls Club was the place where I had the most participation, with seven girls attending. This is more than likely due to the fact that the girls were able to place a face with the name on the flyers. I had five participants from Timothy Elementary and one from East Athens Dance Educational Center. The remaining five were a result of snowball sampling.
CHAPTER IV: ANALYSIS

Collaborative talk occurs when people have a shared experience, like watching the same television show, and build upon each others’ comments (Fingerson, 1999). In my two focus group interviews, I saw much of this, as the girls had similar reactions and responses to the same questions, especially those about race. They supported each other’s answers because many felt the same sentiments about characteristics of That’s So Raven. From the written survey data and verbal feedback of the participants, I was able to discover burgeoning trends of this particular demographic regarding their television viewing habits, their perspective on That’s So Raven, and their views on race and gender.

Television

The questionnaire provided information about the tweens’ television viewing habits. Almost half of the participants stated they watch television because of shows that were funny to them. Other reasons stated were because they like to watch their favorite characters, it was entertaining, and it gave them something to do when they were bored. One participant wrote, “When you don’t have anything to do, you can always watch TV.”

Fourteen out of the 18 girls indicated that they watched television the day before attending the focus group. As far as their favorite television show, 12 out of 18 chose That’s So Raven. They liked it mainly because they think it’s funny. One participant wrote, “It’s funny and mostly for girls.” Other shows mentioned were My Gym Partner is a Monkey (Cartoon Network), Phil of the Future (Disney), and The Boondocks (Cartoon Network).
Many participants (all but two) indicated they watch the Disney Channel frequently because of the funny shows. One participant wrote, “Yes, because most of my favorite shows come on the Disney Channel.” Another participant wrote, “Yes, because it is a good channel for everyone to watch.” When they are not watching television, most are playing outside, playing video games, or sleeping.

**Viewing habits**

The participants had been watching *That’s So Raven* for at least one year, based on their current grade and the time they indicated they started watching the show. The girls stated they watch the show on a daily basis, with answers from “almost everyday” to “One thousand times a day.”

*Why do they watch That’s So Raven?*

When I asked this question, I assumed the participants would immediately tell me they watched the show because Raven Baxter is an African American girl like them. I also thought they would say this because of my personal feelings about the show that guides my viewing preferences. I enjoy watching *That’s So Raven* because I think she is a good representation of a young African American female and she is a good role model for other girls like her. I also relate to her because of my classification as an African American woman. I take pride in watching the program because there were not shows like *Raven* when I was a tween. The few outlets I did have (that I remember) were *The Cosby Show, A Different World, and Living Single.*

However, when I asked them their reasons for watching the show, they said it is funny and entertaining. They are mostly entertained by Raven Baxter, the predicaments she gets herself into with her visions, and her relationship with her friends Eddie Thomas
and Chelsea Daniels. Since the participants did not immediately cite race and gender as the reason for watching the show, I assumed that race and gender were not a factor. However, through more analysis of the responses, I discovered because of their age they might not have been able to articulate the prevalence of race and gender in their favorite shows, most of which feature African American female characters. While the participants may not have directly said race and gender were why they watch That's So Raven, their responses about their television viewing preferences proved otherwise.

Young African Americans today have many shows on television that have African American women as not only characters, but as the leading actress on the show, like Girlfriends and The Parkers. Although the participants did not directly cite race as a reason for why they watch the show, it is indeed prevalent. According to the interviews, other shows these tweens watch are some of the most commonly watched shows in African American households. This suggests that they are attracted to programs that feature African American casts, many of them featuring African American women as lead actresses. Although That's So Raven might not have been everyone’s favorite show, it is in a group of shows that these girls watch frequently. All of the programs share a common thread, which is African American characters, most of them being females. Therefore, these tweens are able to be exposed to media representations of their racial and gendered identities from various shows, not just That's So Raven.

The participants said they also liked the humor of the show, Raven Baxter’s fashion sense, and her relationships with the other characters. “Valerie” immediately said she liked the show, “Because she is like me [because] both of us [are] crazy.” She added both she and the character speak their minds. Other participants were able to identify with
Raven Baxter because of her relationship with her brother (some of the participants had siblings, some of which were participating) and her love of fashion (almost all of the participants said they liked clothes and to go the mall like Raven Baxter).

When I asked about their favorite character, I expected all of the participants to name Raven Baxter because of shared race and gender. However, nearly half of the participants named Raven Baxter as the favorite and Chelsea Daniels as the favorite character was a close second. They said both of the characters were funny and that is why they liked them. Only four girls named other characters (Eddie Thomas and Cory Baxter). As the results suggest, these tweens were primarily attracted to characters of the same gender.

I asked the tweens about Raven Baxter’s psychic abilities, which did not prove to be problematic to the participants. Some said it was neat to be psychic and others said it made Raven look crazy and that it was “stupid.” None of the participants mentioned anything about spirituality. “Monica” said if she was psychic she would tell “the whole wide world” because she would make a lot of money for her abilities. “Keena” had a negative response: “I think it’s kind of stupid. When it was about to come out, I thought it would be like a reality show. It’s dumb because even if she can see the future, she can’t change anything.” “Valerie” talked about how Raven Baxter has to lie about her psychic abilities because only her family and two best friends know she is psychic:

It’s kind of like the title psychic really don’t fit her but psycho do [sic]. Why? Because, it seems she can predict her future on her own; like she can plan for her future but she still needs to be psychic to help out her friends and stuff like that. It’s kind of making her act kind of crazy to be psychic. It makes her seem, you know, kind of off.
As the interviews suggest, other than being funny and weird to most, and annoying to a few, Raven Baxter’s psychic abilities are perceived by the participants as entertainment.

The participants are all fans of the show, but when asked if there were things they did not like about *That’s So Raven*, some did have comments. Some said Raven Baxter acts “stuck up” and is “bossy” and tries to do everything her way. “Valerie” said she did not like the way Raven Baxter did not stand up for herself when she was being bullied by another character. “Michelle” said she did not like how Raven Baxter tries to change the outcome of her visions, even though the vision will happen regardless of what Raven tried to do to interpret it. Fortunately, the participants had more positive comments about the show than negative.

*Homophily*

The race of television characters was of some significance to this particular audience. For others, Raven Baxter’s race had no effect on why they watched the show and for others, it was culturally relevant. I asked them whether they would watch the show if Raven Baxter was White and the thought of her having a different racial identity changed some of their perceptions of the show, which garnered commentary about their thoughts and feelings toward White people and White characters. Ten of the participants said they would not watch *That’s So Raven* if she was White and four claimed her race did not matter and four did not have a response. For those ten participants, Raven Baxter’s status as African American was equated with humor. Many of the participants said if Raven Baxter was White, the show would not be as funny. “Lindsey” said, “I don’t like White people too much because they’re not real funny like black people.”
“Denise” said that black actors are better than White actors. “Kenya” said she did not like White people unless she knew them well. Regarding the show, she said she would watch it, “If there was some black people in there. But I wouldn’t look at [Raven Baxter].” “Michelle” said, “It wouldn’t be funny, it wouldn’t be natural.”

“Valerie” said, “I just think they ain’t funny. They [are] kind of boring and they…use them big ole [sic] words. I don’t like it. I like a little slang to the TV show.”

“Monica” added, “It’s kind of like how [Raven Baxter] says “you nasty.” It’s got a little slang to it. If she was White, it probably wouldn’t be like that. It would sound wack [sic].”

It is apparent that race to these participants brings on different meanings. They characterized African Americans and Whites according to mannerisms and speech instead of physical characteristics, which is in line with the common scholarly notion that race is a social construction. Overall, most of the participants would lose interest in the show if the main character was White. “Keisha” said, “I wouldn’t watch the show because it wouldn’t be funny because even though Chelsea [is] White, [she’s] funny. If it was a That’s So Raven that was White, I wouldn’t watch her show at all.”

As we started discussing race, many of the participants provided much feedback about Chelsea Daniels, Raven Baxter’s White best friend, some even saying they watch the show because of her. I probed for more feedback about this character, asking them what else they thought about her. They liked her because they laugh at her. Some tolerate her because of Raven Baxter’s friendship with her; they have comfort with a White character because of Raven Baxter’s presence as an African American. “Theresa” said she would not watch the show if Raven Baxter was White. She talked about Chelsea,
saying, “I wouldn’t like it because White people act so crazy sometimes.” I asked her how and she said, “The way Chelsea be acting [sic].”

The participants indicated they liked both of these characters because they are funny but they looked at Raven Baxter as more mature and Chelsea Daniels as more of a buffoon. Examples of their comments were that she was “slow,” “retarded,” and, “She acts like she doesn’t care.” However, “Sharon” had a different perspective:

I think even if she was black or White I think she will still be, like, funny because she’s just like that. Some is just wrong with her. Not in a bad way. She would still be funny and cool and stuff.

Therefore, the participants who said they would watch the show if Raven Baxter was White mostly said the show would still be funny. The most extreme answer, which also came from “Sharon” was, “I don’t really believe in racism so it wouldn’t probably matter. She would still be the same funny crazy little Raven.”

As the interviews suggest, Raven’s race is important to most of the girls and is probably one of the reasons they watch the show. Their main reason for watching the show is because it is funny and although they feel Chelsea Daniels is funny, Raven Baxter’s presence keeps them watching the show. They also equate humor with African Americans. So, as long as the show is funny and there is an African American female character, they will keep watching.

In general, Chelsea represented Whiteness for these participants. They likened Chelsea’s antics to how “White people act.” Again, they viewed race as a social construction, basing Chelsea’s actions on stereotypes and assumptions about White people. For example, Chelsea Daniel’s presence on the show provided me with interesting commentary from the participants about standards of beauty in regards to hair.
“Kenya”: Chelsea…she’s like socially retarded and all but she still acts like she’s kind of slow. But the reason I don’t like White people [is because] they think they’re all that because they have long hair.
“Sharon”: You seen Tyra Banks? She has long hair.
“Kenya”: That’s a weave honey.

Later on, “Kenya” mentioned White people and long hair again, saying “Raven got some hair like that too so they can’t do nothing [sic].” Based on their comments about beauty standards, it is evident that when these tweens see African American women with certain enviable and mainstream beauty standards characteristic of White women, like long hair, the perspective of superiority of Whites to African Americans is lessened because the African American women can achieve the same look and still be proud of their racial identity.

Images of White women on television as the stereotypical dumb blonde (Foege, 2004) could be a factor as to why tweens perceive Chelsea Daniels’ character and real Whites to act the same way. Also, instead of feeling threatened by her, they are amused. While some of the participants talked about White people and language (“they use them big ole [sic] words”) and beauty standards (“They think they’re all that because they have long hair”), they did not perceive Chelsea Daniels to be superior. Instead, Raven Baxter is the more respected character because of her race. Therefore, homophily in regards to race is important to these participants because it brings with it a sense of superiority and dignity. Three decades of literature have shown that African American youth respond more favorably towards, relate more to, and prefer programs with characters of the same race (Appiah, 2001; Gutiérrez and Wilson III, 1995; Stroman, 1986). This study is no different. Although some of the participants said they watch the show because of Chelsea, their reasons were more about laughing at her. Regarding Raven Baxter, they
saw things they wanted to emulate (e.g. her fashion sense and relationship with her friends). Therefore, homophily in this situation can also be linked to personal identity. These two concepts are similar because of the degree to which television audiences interact with people (in this case, characters) similar to them (Eyal and Rubin, 2003).

This leads to the television preferences of these participants. I asked them to name shows that they watched which featured African American female characters. They watch many television shows that are popular in African American households (Alligood & Pieraccini, 2005) like *Girlfriends, The Parkers, The Bernie Mac Show, One on One, All of Us, Moesha*, and *My Wife and Kids*. They also watched classic shows, like *The Cosby Show*, but mainly because Raven-Symone played Olivia. However, they referred to the character Olivia as “Raven.” “Tiffany” said she used to watch the show because it was funny, but now, “It’s annoying because they don’t show much of Raven in that show.” Others said they watched the show because they said Bill Cosby was funny and they were also fans of the *Fat Albert* movie.

However, with the exception of Raven and *The Proud Family*, many of these shows were intended for older audiences. Therefore, the girls are attracted to shows with African American characters but they do not have many shows that represent them in regards to their age. The other shows with young girls are high-school aged (*Sister, Sister, Moesha*); Raven Baxter is even in high school. These tweens have many options as far as shows with African American women, but not as many options for accurate portrayals of themselves in terms of age and lived experiences.

The shows they frequently watched with White characters did have actual tweens (*Lizzie McGuire, The Suite Life of Zack and Cody, Zoë 101, Naturally Sadie*) but the
participants did not elaborate as much on these shows as they did with those with African American casts/lead actresses. “Sharon” commented about Lizzie McGuire, saying, “She is not really funny, but we learn a lesson throughout the entire show.”

The participants mainly liked the shows with White leading characters for entertainment purposes and did not indicate whether they were as important or relatable as the shows with African American characters. Humor was the reason why the participants watched both types of shows. The shows with White characters were fine, just as long as they were funny. “Keshia” said, “Some White people can be funny at times and some can’t. They can be fun too but half the time they [are] boring.”

Again, these girls equate humor with African Americans. Shows with black families in comedies have always been popular (Means Coleman, 1998) and some of the shows these tweens watch prove this (That’s So Raven, The Cosby Show, My Wife and Kids, etc. Overall, these participants liked shows with African American casts, That’s So Raven being no exception.

**Personal Identity**

I asked the tweens how Raven Baxter was similar to them. The participants needed clarification when asked to compare Raven Baxter to them because they thought I was referring to the actress Raven-Symone. However, after I explained that I meant Raven Baxter, they understood. “Sharon” said Raven was like her because,

She has friends in her everyday life and she has to go to school too and she gets a good education like we do. She also gets to go out and have fun like we also do.

Many of the girls said Raven likes fashion and they liked fashion as well. “Valerie” said, “I liked that she inspired me because I did want to become a fashion
designer.” Raven Baxter is an aspiring fashion designer. Many admired her qualities and personality.

“Valerie” said, “She never gives up.” “Denise” said, “I think she’s really nice…and funny.” “Lauren” said, “She’s a pretty cool girl.” “Sharon” said, “I think she’s real energetic. She’s always happy and jumpy…she loves to go wild and crazy.”

Although Raven Baxter was not everyone’s favorite television character, they still had positive things to say about her. Many of the participants’ responses about similarities with Raven Baxter were about the things they all liked to do, like shopping and fashion. The participants spoke a lot about how Raven Baxter inspired them because they wanted to be a fashion designer. Others admired Raven Baxter because of shared hobbies (mostly shopping) and her friendly personality and humor.

I think Raven Baxter also represents femininity to these tweens. Many commented on how pretty she is and how they like her clothes. They also see her as a girl that likes fashion, shopping, hanging out with her friends, and boys. They want to be just like her. They did not make many comments about race which may be due to the fact that many of their peers they interact with frequently are African American and they probably see them most often in school, at church, and in the community at places like The Boys and Girls Club. Again, they did not directly state race as a factor for identifying with Raven Baxter but I believe if the character was White, their perspective of her would be totally different. Raven Baxter mirrors their lives through her personality and things she likes to do, as well as her race. I believe they would see the difference in race before they would be able to see similarities between the hypothetical White character and themselves.
However, this group was split when asked if it was important to them that Raven Baxter is African American. The tweens who said it did not matter felt Raven Baxter’s personality would not change based on her race because she would still be a funny girl. “Sharon” said, “It’s not really important because even if Raven was Black she would still probably be energetic and be the same girl she was before she turned White. It doesn’t matter.”

For the girls who said her race was important, the answers were definitely more meaningful. One said Raven Baxter inspires girls who watch the show. “Valerie” said, “Yes, because she stands up for people like her, like black women. When they had that fashion show and that woman didn’t want her to be in the fashion show because of her size.”

She also compared this episode and Raven Baxter to Nikki on The Parkers, saying how they are “big-boned” and stand up for other women like them. I concluded that these tweens do not identify with Raven Baxter based solely on race, but her race is important to some of the participants. They have things in common with Raven Baxter, other things they want to emulate, and in general they like her because she represents a pretty, feminine, African American girl who is friendly and lives a similar life to them.

As evidenced by “Valerie” and her thoughts about body type, standards of beauty issues emerged when the participants were asked about the importance of Raven Baxter’s race. They mentioned body type and hair length when they were talking about White girls. However, they named Raven Baxter as someone who stands up to pressures of body image. They also mentioned supermodel Tyra Banks and Raven Baxter as African American women who have long hair, regardless of whether it is natural or extensions,
like the White girls they picture in their minds. Therefore, these girls are aware of certain beauty standards in African American and European culture. However, they are not extremely affected by it because they see other African American women who can achieve certain looks and combat others. In this sense only, race stands out in terms of personal identification. However, African Americans are more likely accompanied by strong sense of identification when they watch shows with other African Americans (Brand and Greenberg, 1994). Therefore, seeing African American women with enviable characteristics (like long hair) while combating the status quo (thin bodies) can add to their self-concept in a positive way.

*Companionship*

When asked if they thought of Raven Baxter as a friend, “Valerie” asked me, “How can we really know her when she is just a character on TV?” However, many of the participants easily said they viewed her as a friend, mainly because of her good relationship with her best friends Chelsea Daniels and Eddie Thomas. This led them to believe Raven Baxter would be a good friend to them. They even began citing episodes and characteristics of Raven’s relationship with her best friends Eddie and Chelsea that made her a likeable and relatable character. They seemed to trust the character. They also said her comic nature was another reason why they viewed Raven Baxter as their friend.

“Sharon” said, I think she would be like a friend because on the show she seems really nice and helps her friends when they’re in need. So if, like, I was her friend, she would probably help me if I was in need.”

“Keisha” added, “She’s a friend to me because me and her [sic] got something in common. We like to act crazy and go shopping at the mall.”
For this question, they did not mention race or gender. However, I believe Raven Baxter’s similarity in race and gender makes it easier for these participants to develop feelings of companionship. While the effect of race may be understated in their responses, I would argue it does have a presence because if Raven Baxter was a White character, I believe the viewing dynamics would change and some participants would not be as eager to claim her as a friend.
CHAPTER V: SUMMARY

Through my study of African American female tweens and That’s So Raven, I found my 18 participants interacted parasocially with Raven Baxter. Shared characteristics, feelings of companionship and compatibility, and personal identification with Raven Baxter all resulted in parasocial interactions with these tweens and this character. The repeated viewings of the show have allowed the participants to find a television character that they not only enjoy watching, but whom they see as a companion who not only mirrors them regarding race and gender, but who also share personality traits, hobbies, and interests while being inspirational at the same time. My initial analysis of their responses did not include the importance of race and gender because these two factors were not stated directly by the participants for all of the questions asked. However, after multiple reviews of my notes and the tapes, I was able to observe how race and gender are prevalent in their lives, even though they did not directly say so. Raven Baxter’s status as an African American female is perhaps what attracted most (if not all) of the participants to the show. Her presence allowed many participants to relate to her immediately and the humor of the show has allowed them to remain viewers and fans.

Their interpretation of the show is evidence of how certain audiences interpret media texts. A component of cultural studies is how audiences interpret texts in multiple ways (Kellner, 1995) and these tweens demonstrated this polysemic nature of
interpretation. For example, when asked about whether Raven Baxter being an African American female was important to them, some said yes because they consider her a role model for African American girls. Some even went so far as to say if Raven Baxter was White, they would stop watching the show. For a few, her race did not matter.

Their particular status as African American and female, as well as their ages, were the driving forces behind their interpretations. Taking into account components of a person’s cultural status (in this case, their race and gender) and recognizing it as a factor in how they interpret media texts is also a component of cultural studies (Kellner, 1995). Although the girls said they liked the show because it was funny, their commentary about race and gender especially showed That’s So Raven satisfies some underlying motives for viewing the show. These tweens actively use media and many of the shows they frequently watch along with That’s So Raven have African American females as either a main character or as the majority of the cast. Therefore, the show is one of a group of shows that these girls learn about race and gender. They create ideologies of race from watching Raven Baxter and Chelsea Daniels, as well as other characters on television. They want to emulate Raven Baxter’s femininity in her looks and dress, saying how pretty she is, and want to have a boyfriend and go shopping.

The frequency of That’s So Raven viewing is also an indicator that parasocial interaction exists because repeated viewings of a particular show often result in the audience member forming an opinion about the a particular character, and continued viewing fosters that relationship (Auter, 1992; McHugh & Rubin, 1987). That’s So Raven premiered in 2003 (Fries, 2003; Roberts, 2003) and, as stated in the analysis, these tweens had been watching it for at least one year. The participants watched the show so
much that they were able to recite lines from the “Four Aces” episode and others. African Americans also watch television frequently, 20 percent more than Whites (Alligood & Pieraccini, 2005) and African American youth watch on average 5 hours daily, more than any other racial group (Caruthers et al, 2004), and some more than 40 hours each week (Stroman, 1991). It is apparent that the tweens watch That’s So Raven often.

This show, along with other shows that feature African American female characters in various roles, are a positive influence on these girls. These shows have the potential to add to their self-concept in helpful ways. They are able to see African American females portrayed in other roles, instead of the Mammy and Jezebel roles from decades ago. It is also meaningful for these girls to see an African American female on television because they have some media representations of their racial and gendered identity. As they learn about race and gender from other socialization agents, they use media to learn as well.

Seeing African American female characters not wholly complying with mainstream standards of beauty is also meaningful, as issues of beauty standards regarding hair and body type emerged from some of the tweens’ comments. Hair in African American culture has historical basis as many African American women have used many methods to change hair texture, primarily chemical or heat processing (Grayson, 1995). Hair length and texture issues have also made their way into other components of African American women’s lives, as some have straightened their hair to comply with standards they hope will secure their place in the world of work and society (Grayson, 1995). African American standards have remained consistent in regards to body type as fleshier women have normally been desirable (Arogundade, Longo, &
Solomon, 2002) as opposed to thin bodies being the standard with Whites (Mazur, 1986). While young African American girls have to deal with physical changes and pressures to conform to society’s view of beauty, their perceptions of their own bodies are likely to be affected most by their use of media featuring others (Caruthers et al, 2004). As the interviews suggest, these tweens are receiving positive messages about themselves from Raven Baxter and other African American female characters in regard to standards of beauty.

Uses and gratifications is an area of research that defines audiences as active users of the media (Edwards, 2001; McHugh & Rubin, 1987; Rubin, 1994). Potter (2001) writes, “When people have a conscious need for a particular kind of information, they will actively seek out this type of information in the media, and the chance of them learning from this experience is high” (p. 308). Davis and Gandy (1999) maintain that, “Much of this selective process has to do with the individual expectation of perceived utility of the information” (p. 377). It is apparent by the shows the participants like to watch that they are searching for a particular kind of information: African American females. They are looking for homogeneous representations of race and gender to admire, emulate, and identify with. African Americans tend to attach significance to television programs with black characters (Appiah, 2001; “Black Teen Media Preferences Monitored,” 1999; Brand and Greenburg, 1994; Caruthers et al, 2004; Conners, 2004; Edwards, 2001; Guitérrez and Wilson, 1995; Liss, 1981; Stroman, 1986). It is meaningful to see a representative of their racial identity because it makes them feel as though they are important and that they matter to others.
Even though they watch other shows with White characters, the shows with African American female characters are more important because they are able to see representations of themselves in the media. African American characters make up the largest non-White racial presence in network television (Gutierrez & Wilson, 1995), being seen most often in sitcoms (Dates, 2004; Gutiérrez and Wilson III, 1995), which helps explain why these participants favor comedies with African American characters. African Americans are 11 percent of the characters in primetime television but almost 40 percent of sitcom characters (Conners, 2004). Sitcoms are also the oldest genre of television program, with 800 shows being broadcast since 1947 (Means Coleman, 1998). A 1986 study by Stroman showed African American youth ages 7-13 preferred watching sitcoms. African Americans watch television shows with same-race characters because they see their lives reflected on the screen (Edwards, 2001). They either have similar characteristics or they see things they want to emulate.

Children also rely on media cues in order to learn about other types of people they do not come into contact with frequently (Conners, 2004). Greenburg’s (1972) research found White children rely on television to describe African Americans and Atkin et al (1983) found the similar findings with White adults (Conner, 2004). This is similar to other findings; for example, children as young as three years old will begin to classify the race of people based on stereotypes (Ingram, 2005). Based on the participants’ responses about Chelsea and Whites, I do not believe they have many interactions with other White people, and have been left to make assumptions about how they are from television. Studies on Whiteness have examined cultural practices (i.e. popular media) that portray
the “fiction of ‘Whiteness’” and challenge White privilege (Jay and Jones, 2005, p.100). The tweens’ view of Chelsea demonstrates this notion.

*That’s So Raven* and other shows with African American female characters are able to fill voids regarding television character representation. Since television fills psychological needs for African American girls (Edwards, 2001), I believe these shows are positive, revolutionary, and a factor in the racial and gender development of this demographic. African American children prefer to see African American television characters because it signals to them that their race is important (Conners, 2004) and they respond positively to those characters (Stroman, 1986), as these tweens displayed. For these participants, race is also more often than not a factor in their upbringing because they are taught that being black may have negative consequences (Brooks-Gunn et al, 2000). Therefore, race to African American girls is more prominent to them than it is for their White female peers (Erkut et al, 1996). Since television acts as a socialization agent and affects their attitudes, beliefs and behaviors (Hoffner, 1996; Stroman, 1991), I believe *That’s So Raven* serves as not only entertainment, but as inspiration and guidance in these tweens’ lives.

The Disney Channel also is a factor as to why this show is popular with these tweens. Levin (2005) writes Disney is more family-friendly than other networks than older audiences: “Shows are imbued with moral messages, friendship and preteen angst, which are sugarcoated with comedy” (pg. 2). Disney’s formula of traditional family comedy, a female tween, and the “element of wish-fulfillment fantasy” (Levin, 2005, pg. 1) has obviously worked with the participants in my focus groups. Michael Poryes, the executive producer of *That’s So Raven*, says while Nickelodeon is still the highest rated
children’s network, Disney’s power comes from their ability to create reality for tweens (Levin, 2005). Instead of Nickelodeon’s highly animated content, Poryes says the Disney Channel has characters that viewers want to hang out with and who represent their lives. Again, this is evident in the attraction towards this show as exhibited by these African American female tweens. Although Raven Baxter is a high school student and these girls are in elementary school, these girls are still able to be represented on television in regards to their race and gender.

My study is important because scholarly literature on this particular demographic and their media use is limited. Also, That’s So Raven is such a success on the Disney Channel but no scholarly literature about the show exists. The show is Disney’s longest-running series, but the audience has not been analyzed, aside from demographic data. Therefore, the current study introduces this new area of research.

Like the show, very little scholarly information on tweens exists. There is also a lack of television shows that depict African American female tweens, especially as the lead character. While these tweens have shows they like, many of the characters are older than 14. For example, Raven Baxter portrays a high-school student but the actress is in her 20s. The participants liked shows like Girlfriends and The Parkers but they are intended for older audiences. This supports literature that finds television shows children watch is actually meant for older adults (Stroman, 1991).

There needs to be more programming for this group with characters who portray them in age, race, and lifestyle. However, this study is able to examine the advances of media programming for African Americans. Twenty years ago, there were few shows on television that depicted African American characters, and in versatile roles. Now, African
American female characters can be seen on various networks in various roles. These new representations of African American females (e.g. Raven Baxter) are able to counter negative media portrayals of African American females. Overall, race and gender in the media is still an important factor that can not be ignored.

In the future, more audience reception analyses on That’s So Raven using this demographic could determine if any trends exists. As I stated in my analysis, I was able to discover burgeoning trends of this particular demographic in regard to the show, their race and gender perceptions, and their viewing habits. Content and textual analyses of the show could also be conducted to further examine That’s So Raven as text.

Furthermore, focus groups could be conducted about African American media outlets (broadcast, print, Internet, etc.) to see if these media are meeting the needs of their intended audiences. Another area of future research could focus on African American male tweens and how they interpret certain media texts. All of these studies can add to the body of knowledge of media, race, gender, tweens, and how they are all connected, as well as create new ideas for media products geared toward this particular demographic.

Limitations

From the beginning, there were many difficulties with this methodology. First, focus group interviews bring with them the potential for false information because participants may exaggerate their answers for attention from other participants (Kreuger & Morgan, 1998). This was also my first time conducting a focus group, as well as for my assistant moderators. Recruitment for this method is also risky because it could result in having too few or too many participants (Krueger & Morgan, 1998). I was not able to contact the students at Timothy Elementary School, due to their school policy, so the
potential participants were not able to put a name with a face, as they were able to do at The Boys and Girls Club when I went there. East Athens Educational Dance Center had a performance scheduled on February 26, the first day of my focus group, so I was not able to get any participants from there on that date. I was able to talk to two participants at the center, but at the time of my visit, the majority of the girls were not present.

On the Friday before the first group, I had three participants scheduled to come so I was not sure I would be able to actually conduct the first group. However, more calls came over the weekend. In both groups, many parents called the Saturday before and the morning of the focus groups. There were also a few participants who did not come, although they were scheduled to do so. There were 12 participants scheduled for the March 5 group but only three came and I had eight participants arrive without any prior notification.

There was also some confusion about the consent forms. Many parents thought they were permission slips and they turned them in to the supervisor at the Boys and Girls Club, which resulted in calls from the supervisor. This confusion was the result of the supervisor and parents failing to read the instructions that indicated for them to either call or e-mail me, schedule a day to come, and bring the consent and assent forms to me the day of the interviews.

I also had a very young age group (9-11). My intended age range was 9-14 so my participants were all towards the younger end. These tweens were also easily distracted so I had to really work to keep their attention. Luckily, both groups went according to schedule and ended just before the girls got too restless.
Focus group dynamics can be troublesome, as stated by Krueger & Morgan (1998). While many of the participants were willing to participate, others were not as enthusiastic. There were definitely leaders in both groups and some passive participants. However, group dynamics is a risk that all focus group moderators face and can not be avoided (Kreuger and Morgan, 1998). Additionally, I am very passionate about this subject but as a moderator, I had to be totally objective. I instructed my assistant moderators to do the same, as we are all fans of the show.

The incentives for the focus groups (pizza, drinks, and movie tickets) were very expensive, costing over $250 that I paid for with my own money. In the future, I will seek either donations or less expensive incentives. Lastly, I did not properly record the first group with the audio tape and the tape recorder did not work for the second group so the video tapes were the only source of recordings for both groups.

Conclusion

My viewing of *That’s So Raven* in the summer of 2005 has resulted in what I expect to be a major contribution to scholarly research involving African American youth and the media and *That’s So Raven*. This thesis has not only provided a current glimpse into the significance of African American females on television (past and present) but also what television might look like in the future. It took 15 years for me to see more television shows representing this race and gender. Fortunately for African American female tweens, they have many options to see other African American female characters.

In the future, African American female tweens might have the possibility to see more shows being created that feature other African American female tweens. Therefore, their race and gender, as well as age, will be represented. Hopefully they will not have to
wait 15 more years for this to become a reality. With more television shows like *That’s So Raven*, I expect these shows will exist more sooner than they think.

Overall, this research is valuable because I show that in the midst of *That’s So Raven*’s success, this show is important because of its impact on the lives of these African American female tweens, as well as mine.


Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia, looked at on 2/19/06, “Raven-Symone’”
If you are an African American girl between the ages of 9-14, you are invited to come to UGA to talk about “That’s So Raven!”

All you have to do is get your parents’ or guardians’ permission to come to UGA’s campus on February 26 or March 5 from 3:30-5:30.

You will get FREE pizza and drinks and also a FREE movie ticket!
We will have fun and talk about “That’s So Raven!”

Interested?
Call DAVIA at 706 357 2353 or e-mail her at darola@uga.edu
Information for Parents/Guardians

I am Davia Lassiter, master’s student in the Grady College of Journalism and Mass Communication at the University of Georgia. I am working on my master’s thesis for graduation. My research project is about African American girls and the Disney television show “That’s So Raven.”

I want to talk to your daughters and see why they watch the show. I will ask them a few questions and we will watch clips of the show. It should take no more than two hours.

The dates for the project are February 26 OR March 5. Your daughters will only attend ONE of the sessions. If you agree to let your daughter participate, please read and sign the parental consent form. Your daughter must bring this form to campus in order to participate in the study.

On February 26 or March 5, your daughters will come to UGA to the Grady College (directions will be provided). Transportation can also be provided if necessary. We will watch a few clips of the show and I will ask them a few questions about why they watch the show.

They will receive free pizza and drinks AND a free movie ticket to Carmike Cinemas.

I can be contacted at 706 357 2353 or at darola@uga.edu. As stated before, this project is for graduation so if you could help me, I will greatly appreciate it.

Sincerely, Davia Lassiter
APPENDIX C
Parasocial Relationships: “That’s So Raven” and the African American Tween Audience
February/March 2006
PARENTAL PERMISSION FORM

I agree to allow my child, _________________________________, to participate in the research study titled "Parasocial Relationships: ‘That’s So Raven’ and the African American Tween Audience” which is being conducted by Ms. Davia Rose Lassiter, from the Journalism and Mass Communication Department at the University of Georgia under the direction of Dr. Dwight E. Brooks, Department of Telecommunications (542-5951). I do not have to allow my child to be in this study if I do not want to. My child can stop taking part at any time without giving any reason, and without penalty. I can ask to have the information related to my child returned to me, removed from the research records, or destroyed.

- The purpose of the research is to investigate why African American girls (ages 9-14) watch Disney's "That's So Raven" and how they feel about main character “Raven Baxter.” The benefit may be to better understand how African American girls between the ages of 9-14 actively use the media.
- If I allow my child to take part, my child participate in an audio-taped focus group about ‘That’s So Raven’ with other girls for one hour.
- The research is not expected to cause any harm or discomfort. My child will also receive a free movie ticket as compensation for attending the focus group.
- Any information collected about my child will be held confidential unless otherwise required by law. The researcher will keep all recorded information from the focus group interviews and audio will not be erased.
- The researcher will answer any further questions about the research, now or during the course of the project (706 357 2353). I may also contact the professor supervising the research, Dr. Dwight E. Brooks, Telecommunications Department, at 542-5951.

My daughter will attend the focus group on February 26
OR
My daughter will attend the focus group on March 5.

- I understand the study procedures described above. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I agree to allow my child to take part in this study. I have been given a copy of this form to keep.

________________________________________ __________________________
Signature of Investigator Date

________________________________________ __________________________
Signature of Parent/Guardian Date

Please sign both copies, keep one and return one to the researcher.

For questions or problems about your rights please call or write: Human Subjects Office, University of Georgia, 606A Boyd Graduate Studies Research Center, Athens, Georgia 30602-7411; Telephone (706) 542-3199; E-Mail Address IRB@uga.edu.

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APPENDIX D

Parasocial Relationships: “That’s So Raven” and the African American Tween Audience
February/March 2006

PARTICIPANT ASSENT FORM

Dear Participant,
You are invited to participate in the research study titled “Parasocial Relationships: ‘That’s So Raven’ and the African American Tween Audience” by Davia Rose Lassiter, master’s student in journalism in the Grady College of Journalism and Mass Communication at the University of Georgia.

If you decide you want to participate, you and other girls like you will be asked questions about the television show “That’s So Raven” in a group session that will last one hour. I will audio tape the things you will say but I will not use your real name in the papers I write about this project.

To say thank you for coming, you will receive free pizza and free movie tickets. If you want to stop participating, you can stop at any time.

If you have any questions or concerns, you can call me at 706-357-2353 or you can call my teacher, Dr. Dwight E. Brooks, at 706-542-5951.

Thank You,
Davia Rose Lassiter
Department Journalism and Mass Communication
Henry W. Grady College of Journalism and Mass Communication
706-357-2353
darola@uga.edu

I understand the project described above. My questions have been answered and I agree to participate in this project. I have received a copy of this form.

_______________________________________
Signature of Participant/Date

Please sign both copies, keep one and return one to the researcher.

Additional questions or problems regarding your rights as a research participant should be addressed to The Chairperson, Institutional Review Board, University of Georgia, 612 Boyd Graduate Studies Research Center, Athens, Georgia 30602-7411; Telephone (706) 542-3199; E-Mail Address IRB@uga.edu
APPENDIX E

Directions to the Grady College

Grady is located on the corner of Sanford Drive and Baldwin Street. Come up Sanford Drive and the Grady College will be on the right, before you get to the light. There is a glass door up the stairs. All participants can enter there. Someone will be outside waiting for them.
APPENDIX F

Please take a few moments to fill out this brief questionnaire. **All responses will be strictly kept confidential.**

How old are you? _______
What grade are you in? _______

How did you find out about this project?
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

Why do you watch television?
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

What television shows do you watch?
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

How much television did you watch yesterday?
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

What is your favorite television show? Why?
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

When did you start watching *That’s So Raven*?
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

How many times do you think you watch *That’s So Raven* each week?
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

Do you watch the Disney Channel a lot? Why or why not?
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

What other things do you like to do when you are not watching television?
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
APPENDIX G

INTERVIEW GUIDE

Thank you all for coming. I am glad that you are here. My name is Davia and I will let my helpers introduce themselves.

Before we start talking about the show, I would like for you all to introduce yourself by telling us your name and age.

Next, I want you to complete this sheet with information about yourself, television, and That’s So Raven.

Now we are going to watch a short part of one episode.

Now, I am going to ask you all questions about That’s So Raven.

1. What is your favorite thing about That’s So Raven?
2. Tell me about your favorite character on the show.
3. Tell me what you think about Raven Baxter.
   PROBE: How much is she like you? What do you like about her? What are similarities and differences?
4. Do you think of Raven Baxter as just a girl on television or is she like a friend to you?
   PROBE: Do you think of Raven Baxter as a friend, even though she is a television character? If so, what characteristics of a friend do you see in her?
5. Would you watch the show if Raven was a White girl?
   PROBE: Is it important to you that she is a black girl like you? Why?
6. Do you watch other television shows that have leading black female characters? If so, which ones and why do you watch them?
7. Do you watch other shows that have leading White female characters? If so, which ones and why do you watch them?
8. What do you think about Raven Baxter being psychic?
   PROBE: How do her psychic abilities affect the way you watch the show?
9. Is there anything that you don’t like about That’s So Raven? Why or why not?

This is the end of the questions. Thank you for coming!