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ABSTRACT

The paper examines the role the mass media play in the functioning of black families. Emphasis is on the perspectives and images of black families that are presented via commercial television, newspapers, and magazines. Divided into four parts, the paper discusses the following: (1) the theoretical framework around which the paper is centered, including the various perspectives utilized by social scientists in studying black family life; (2) content analysis of newspaper and magazine coverage and television portrayal of black families; (3) commentaries and criticisms that have been made about the media's coverage and portrayal; and (4) a research agenda of priority topics for future research in this area, and recommendations for action by parents, educators, and practitioners. The effects of media coverage and portrayals of blacks and their families are discussed. An extensive list of references is included. (PS)

BLACK FAMILIES AND THE MASS MEDIA

by

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

About The Author

Carolyn A. Stroman is Acting Chairperson of the Urban Studies Department and Research Associate at the Institute for Urban Affairs and Research at Howard University. She received her Ph.D. in social science from Syracuse University. She has published several articles on Blacks and the media and the social and psychological effects of media exposure.

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List of Tables

INTRODUCTION

Most people would probably agree with the assertion that "the family is at once the most sensitive, important, and enduring element in the culture of any people" (Billingsley, 1968). For it is within the family--the principal socializer--that an individual's personality and identity are formed and norms and values of particular cultures and subcultures are transmitted.

Perhaps because of this central role that the family plays in the socialization of individuals, the family has received an enormous amount of attention from scholars in the various disciplines. As is true of the family in general, Black families have also been the subject of a great deal of scholarly inquiry, particularly in the social sciences.

Social scientific interest in Black families has evolved over the years. Such interest dates back to the classical Black family studies: DuBois' The Negro American Family (1908) and Frazier's The Negro Family in Chicago (1932) and The Negro Family in the United States (1939). After lagging for a number of years, intense interest in the study of Black families was revived by the publication of Moynihan's The Negro Family: The Call for National Action (1965). Recent works (e.g., Bass, Wyatt & Powell, 1982; Gary, et al., 1983; Lewis & Looney, 1983; and McAdoo, 1981) indicate that scholarly interest in Black families extends to the present day.

The notion that Black families are a diverse group is a central theme of the recent Black family literature. In addition, recent works emphasize that the Black family is not an isolated, independent institution, and if one wants to understand the

uniqueness and diversity of Black families, one must study them in relation to the larger society of which they are part. Hence, any detailed understanding of the nature of Black families must be preceded by an examination of the roles played by other social institutions in the functioning of Black families.

This paper attempts to examine the Black family in relation to one such institution-- the mass media. Intended to advance our understanding of how Black families came to be viewed as they are viewed, this paper is an examination of the perspectives and images of Black families that are presented via the mass media, namely, commercial television, newspapers, and magazines. Divided into four parts, this paper considers a number of issues related to the portrayal of Black families in the mass media. The first section provides the theoretical framework around which the paper is centered; it is mainly concerned with the various perspectives utilized by social scientists in studying Black family life. The second section provides a content analysis of newspaper and magazine coverage and television portrayal of Blacks and their families. The third section explores the commentaries and criticisms that have been made about the media's coverage and portrayal of Black families. The final section contains a research agenda which suggests issues warranting priority in conducting future research in this area, and recommendations for action by parents, educators, and practitioners.

It is appropriate to note here that the topic of Blacks and the mass media has been infrequently dealt with by the social and behavioral science community (Poindexter & Stroman, 1979). Thus we know very little about the relationship between Blacks and the

media. Even less is known about Black families and the media. The present study attempts to add to our knowledge of a very timely and important subject.

THEORETICAL UNDERPINNINGS

Social and behavioral scientists have offered a number of interpretations of Black families. Some sociologists view Black families as being disorganized and dysfunctional (Frazier, 1939); matriarchal (Frazier, 1939; Moynihan, 1965; Rainwater, 1966); and a tangle of pathology (Moynihan, 1965; Rainwater, 1966). Others label Black families as strong (Hill, 1971); adaptive (Billingsley, 1968; Rodman, 1971; Stack, 1974); and equalitarian (Billingsley, 1968; Ladner, 1971).

Using these conceptualizations and others, Allen (1978) developed a three-pronged typology which summarizes the various ideological perspectives of Black families. Since this typology is the basic theoretical framework guiding the development of this paper, it will be briefly elaborated below.

One of the components of Allen's typology is the cultural equivalent perspective. In this perspective, the emphasis is on the similarities between Black and white families, with the result being that there are no distinct differences between the values and norms of Black and white families possessing similar educational, occupational, and income levels. Proponents of this orientation, including Bernard (1966), Frazier (1939), and Scanzoni (1971), overlook the inherent strengths within the structures of Black families. As Allen (1978) readily points out, this perspective "makes the implicit value judgement that Black

families constitute legitimate forms only insofar as their organization and functioning approximate or parallel that of the white, middle-class families taken as the norm."

A second component, the cultural deviant perspective, recognizes the cultural distinctiveness of Black families. It does so, however, in a negative fashion by subscribing to the notion that to the extent that Black families deviate from the norm--that is the white middle-class family-- they are pathological (Frazier, 1939; Moynihan, 1965; Rainwater, 1970; Schultz, 1969). Thus, for example, the high number of female-headed Black families, in comparision to the number of female-headed white families, would be cited as evidence of the pathological nature of Black families.

The third component, the cultural variant perspective, rejects the notion that deviation from the white middle-class family norm is pathological. Instead, it traces differences in Black and white family lifestyles to differences in their social and cultural environment and background (Billingsley, 1968; Hill, 1971; Ladner, 1971; Rodman, 1971; Stack, 1974). Thus, proponents of this perspective would look at the example cited above, i.e., female-headed Black families, and analyze how racial and job discrimination contributed to the rise of such families. In addition, some advocates of this perspective, which emphasizes the strengths rather than the weaknesses of Black families, trace differences between Black and white families to the African heritage of Black people.

To reiterate, a number of interpretations and perspectives of Black families have been offered, frequently by different

researchers utilizing the same data. The following is quite appropriate as a summary of a large portion of the scholarly literature on Black families:

> Scholars have tried to show that the Black family was either a product of social conditions in the United States or has strong traces of African cultural survivals; that the Black family was or was not female-dominated; that female dominance was a source of strength or weakness; that the Black family was a pathological expression of the American family or a product of a viable subculture (Bracey, Meier, & Rudwich (1971:3).

This examination of perspectives of Black families is not intended to be an in-depth treatment of the various theoretical orientations on Black families. Instead, it was developed merely to show that sociological perspectives on Black families have provided us with varied, yet conflicting, interpretations of Black families.

Certainly these diverse sociological perspectives flow to the mass media. The question with which we are concerned is which of these perspectives or views of Black families flow from the media to the respective audiences, particularly Black audiences. In order to address this question, we will begin with an in-depth examination of the coverage of Black families in newspapers and magazines, and the portrayal of Black families on television.

PRINT MEDIA COVERAGE OF BLACK FAMILIES

Methodology: Content Analysis

In this section of the paper, we wish to consider how much and what kinds of coverage are accorded Black families by

newspapers and magazines. In order to do so, data were gathered from a number of sources.

No one analyst can examine all of the information on a given subject presented in the media. One can, however, look for recurring patterns in the ideological positions of the media. To determine print media coverage of the different views of Black families, articles published in The Washington Post, The New York Times, and the three major news magazines, Time, Newsweek, and U.S. News & World Report from 1969 to 1982 were content-analyzed. The beginning date of 1969 was chosen because past research (Report of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders, 1968; U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, 1977) has firmly established that prior to 1969, media coverage of Blacks was totally inadequate. Little change has occurred in media coverage of Blacks and Black families since the early 1980's; thus, the study concludes with the year 1982.

The major assumption underlying the choice of the above-mentioned newspapers and magazines is that these media are recognized leaders in disseminating opinions about issues, and if these media are emphasizing or de-emphasizing certain issues, namely, Black families, other newspapers and magazines are also likely to do so. Moreover, research indicates that these are the media that policy makers utilize most frequently (Grace, 1976; Weiss, 1974). Thus, it is conceivable that these media are included among the sources used by policy makers in developing policies affecting Black families.

The method of analysis was to read each article published by the two newspapers and three news magazines between 1969 and 1982

to determine if it was appropriate for inclusion in the study. After it was determined that an item qualified for inclusion, it was coded as follows:

(1) Type: Whether the article was a hard news article, backgrounder, editorial, opinion column, etc. Hard news was operationalized as news of the day. Background was operationalized as news which goes beyond superficial spot reporting.

(2) Play: Whether the article appeared on the front page, editorial page, op-ed page, or other page. (This category was used for newspaper articles only.)

Each article was then read for specific assertions about Black families; these assertions were coded into three categories: positive, negative, neutral. Examples of these assertions are provided in the results section (p. 13) and should be consulted for clarification.

Finally, each article was coded into one of the categories appearing below. These categories, which were based on Allen's (1978) typology and specifically defined for coding purposes by Johnson (1981), correspond to the ideological perspectives identified in the theoretical framework:

(1) Cultural Variant: White middle-class norms are not the primary referent to which Black families are compared; Black families differ from white families because of differences in norms, values, and experiences.

(2) Cultural Equivalent: Black families are functionally equivalent to white families; similarities between the two groups are explicitly or implicitly interpreted as support for shared cultural values.

(3) Cultural Deviant: Deviations from white middle-class norms by Black families are viewed as pathological or deviant.

Articles presenting more than one perspective were categorized as "combination."

It should be noted that the column inch unit of measurement is often used in content analyses. Since previous research (Budd, 1964; Poindexter & Stroman, 1980) has demonstrated that the item count is almost as accurate as is measuring column inches, the item count was used in this study. Thus, each article carried the same weight regardless of length.

A graduate student assisted the author in the coding. A formula by Holsti was employed to determine reliability between the author and the coder. The formula is C.R. = $\frac{2M}{N^1 \quad N^2}$ where M is the number of coding decisions on which the coders agreed, and N and N refer to the number of coding decisions made by the two coders.

A pretest using the coding system on material similar to that used in this study was conducted. The reliability test for this pretest resulted in an average CR of .90, which was judged to be an adequate level of coder reliability when compared to levels noted in other studies.

Analysis

The search for articles pertaining specifically to Black families disclosed a total of sixty-two (62) articles. (See Table 1.) Analysis by type of article revealed that forty-four (44) percent of the articles were classified as hard news, operationalized as news of the day. In general, hard news items were articles announcing the release of new census data. The second largest category (25%) was composed of "backgrounders,"

i.e., articles which went beyond superficial spot reporting. Feature articles, which generally publicized the virtues of the Black middle-class or at least the virtues of striving for such status, comprised twelve (12) percent of the coverage. The remaining nineteen (19) percent was made up of editorial and opinion columns and book reviews.

The play of an article (as measured by page location) gives a measure of the importance that newspapers and magazines place on an issue. Front page and front section coverage are normally given to items deemed most important. Twelve (12) percent of the Black family news items appeared on the front page of newspapers. Editorial commentary is also an indication of how a subject ranks in importance. Black family editorial commentary was very limited; less than one (1) percent of the articles pertaining to Black familes appearing in the sample newspapers and magazines were editorials.

The ideological perspectives of the articles are shown in Table 1. The cultural variant perspective characterized roughly 50 percent of the articles. Thus, this was the perspective emphazized most, followed by the cultural deviant perspective. It should be pointed out that the majority of the articles utilizing the cultural deviant framework appeared from 1969 to 1971, and no article published within the last five (5) years has used this perspective.

Table 1

Black Family Articles by Source and Ideological Perspective

Source	Ideological Perspective*				Number of Articles
	CV	CD	CE	Combination	
The New York Times	11	9	4	8	32
The Washington Post	16	1	1	2	20
Time, Newsweek and U.S. News and World Report	5	5	0	0	10
Total	32	15	5	10	62

*CV = Cultural Variant
CD = Cultural Deviant
CE = Cultural Equivalent

The ideological perspective classification applies to the article in its entirety; assertion analysis allows us to examine the exact statements made about Black families and to determine whether the statements are positive, negative, or neutral. Assertion analysis also provides a more precise view of the messages emanating from a particular medium. As shown in Table 2, the majority of the messages about Black families sent out by the print media were neutral (49%), followed by a moderate number of positive statements (33%) and a lesser number of negative statements (18%). (See Table 3 for examples of each type of statement.)

Table 2

Black Family Articles Classified by Source and Assertion Direction

Source	Assertion Direction: Positive	Neutral	Negative	Number of Assertions
The New York Times	36	65	24	125
The Washington Post	24	28	8	60
Time, Newsweek and U.S. News and World Report	16	22	10	48
Total	76	115	42	233

It may be noted that the publication of two books, Hill's The Strengths of Black Families (1971) and Gutman's The Black Family in Slavery and Freedom, 1850-1925 (1976), resulted in a number of positive statements about Black families appearing in the print media. Indeed, many of the 76 positive assertions about Black families appeared in articles that either reviewed these two books or reported on conferences or meetings at which these books sparked much debate or commentary. Hence, these attributions, rather than the editors' or reporters' sentiments about Black families, were responsible for a number of the positive assertions about Black families appearing in the print media.

Feature articles also carried a number of positive assertions about Black families. Framed in the cultural variant perspective, feature articles, which comprised twelve (12) percent of the

coverage, generally described Black families who had achieved middle-class status or were in the process of doing so. As an example, one article focused on a family that has educated a dentist, a psychologist, and a medical doctor. Another article portrayed the warmth of a Black family reunion in which the author, a staff reporter for The Washington Post, stated emphatically, "To those critics who claim that families in general and Black families in particular have been crumbling, I say, on behalf of my family members, it just ain't so" (Knight, 1981).

Table 3

Black Family Assertions Made by the Print Media

Type	Source
Positive	
"An Urban League study, 'The Strength of Black Families,' places these factors in a larger context by stressing the many sound aspects of Negro family life, including the strength of kinship system, the desire for education and the stabilizing influence of religious values."	The New York Times, November 28, 1971, IV, p. 10.
"In 'The Black Family in Slavery and Freedom,' Gutman pointed out in 1976 that Black families have strong, stable networks that have survived from slavery to the present."	The Washington Post August 9, 1981, p. E5.
Neutral	
"The number of Black families in Washington with incomes greater than $8,000 more than doubled between 1960 and 1970, according to an analysis of census data released yesterday."	The Washington Post, May 29, 1972, p. C1.

"The percentage of Black families headed by women increased from 28 percent to 35 percent from 1970 to 1973.	The New York Times, August 8, 1974, p. 14.

Negative

"The instability of urban Negro families noted 3 decades ago by Negro sociologist E. Franklin Frazier and more recently by urbanologist Daniel P. Moynihan is actually getting more pronounced."	The New York Times, April 5, 1969, p. 26.
"It is almost a commonplace of popular sociology that one of the most serious problems facing Negro Americans today is deterioration of the Black family--a social pathology characterized by the "matriarchal" domination of Black families by Black women."	Newsweek, April 9, 1971, p. 26.

Earlier it was reported that a substantial portion of the articles were simply reports of census data findings. In an article titled "Just How Unstable Is the Black Family?", the author noted the importance of the implications arising from such articles. In his opinion "the view of the Black community is a view based, in large measure, upon the statistics published periodically by the Bureau of the Census and Bureau of Labor Statistics" (Hamilton, 1971).

Frequently, articles on Black families which reported census data compared Black families with white families. In making the comparisons, however, differences in the percentage of intact Black and white families, for example, were rarely related to the larger society which produced these differences. Thus, one article was unusual in its suggestion that factors in the social

system have a great impact on Black family organization. In the article, Andrew Billingsley suggests that the operations of General Motors, the State Department and the Ford Foundation have more to do with the structure and functioning of the Black family than do family members themselves (Fraser, 1972).

What conclusions can be drawn about the print media's coverage of the subject of Black families? Content analysis of The Washington Post, The New York Times, U.S. News and World Report, Time, and Newsweek suggests the following conclusions:

(1) The subject of Black families, as does the subject of families in general, receives little attention in newspapers and magazines; in the fourteen (14) years covered by the study, sixty-two (62) articles appeared in five (5) of the leading sources of information, resulting in an average of less than six (6) articles per year.

(2) The New York Times is the most likely source to carry an article pertaining to Black families, while the major news magazines are the least likely source.

(3) The majority of articles appearing in the print media on Black families are concerned with family structure and are generally hard news items announcing new census findings; rarely are subjects such as parent-child relations, child rearing practices, kinship relationships, or husband-wife relations discussed as they relate to Black families.

(4) In reporting about Black families, the print media have made a decisive shift from the cultural deviant perspective to the cultural variant one.

(5) In general, the cultural variant perspective is utilized in most articles; feature articles are almost always written from this viewpoint and generally contain positive assertions, while hard news items are the ones most likely to contain negative assertions about Black families.

(6) The majority of assertions about Black families are neutral ones, with negative assertions the least likely to occur.

What picture of Black families is likely to emerge from the coverage of Black families by the print news media? Clearly, the messages regarding Black families originating from the print media are similar to those identified in the brief examination of social scientific perspectives of Black families; that is, Black family messages may be categorized as culturally equivalent, culturally deviant, and culturally variant. In short, a variety of ideological messages about Black families emanate from the print media's coverage of Black families, with the cultural variant perspective dominating and positive assertions outweighing negative ones.

Yet it must be noted that since little effort was made to interpret and place into context the status of Black families, the broad picture that a reader is likely to come away with is essentially a nebulous one. Recall that the neutral statement predominates in newspaper and magazine coverage of Black families. The problem with such statements (e.g., "three out of ten Black families in the central cities in 1968 had no male head," ("Two Shades," 1969) is that they have little or no meaning unless placed in the proper context. Contrast this with the following examples of insightful assertions which attempted to relate Black

family disorganization to the social system and to suggest remedies that would enable more Black families to remain intact:

(1) "With the vast migration of Blacks in this century from the South and the urban North and West, husbands have often deserted homes and low-paying jobs so their families would become eligible for welfare payments that might exceed their weekly earnings ("How Children Fare," 1975);

(2) "Race relations scholars suggest more help in housing for the urban poor and a revision in welfare rules that would encourage (Black) husbands to stay home" ("How Children Fare," 1975).

In essence, the print news media provided limited coverage of the topic of Black families and this limited coverage lacked perspective and interpretation. Consequently, a reader trying to obtain an understanding of the problems and dynamic nature of Black families would not have received adequate information from which he or she could have developed an informed opinion. Does television provide a more meaningful picture of Black family life? We turn next to a discussion of televised portrayals of Blacks and Black families.

TELEVISION PORTRAYAL OF BLACK FAMILIES

Methodology

Television portrayal of Black families was ascertained through the use of the data cumulation method. This method involves the systematic collecting and recording of the results of all available pertinent studies. For the present study, pertinent studies included all those published between 1969 and 1982 which dealt with the portrayal of Blacks on commercial television.

In the past, the data cumulation method has been employed as a powerful tool for ascertaining valid answers to a stated problem

(Anderson, 1977; Feldman, 1971). Problems associated with using this method (e.g., selection of studies to be included) can be avoided through the use of a systematic and structured approach.

Such an approach was utilized in this paper. The analysis is done in the form of propositions to be tested by research findings. This method of analysis systematizes the approach and it circumvents, partially, the problems arising from differences in sampling and data collection methods and research foci. The analysis utilizes the data collected from studies listed in Table 5. Data that were recorded from each study deemed appropriate for inclusion in this study include: author, title, study year, sample, content variables, and findings.

In order to locate pertinent studies, a systematic search of the indices of the major mass communications research journals was conducted. In addition, Communications Abstract, Social Science Index, and Psychological Abstracts were searched. Finally, a computer search was instituted as a final check.

Analysis

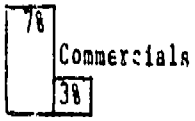
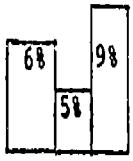
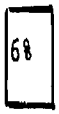
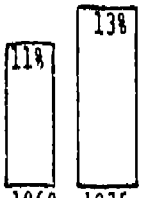
As mentioned previously, the analysis is done in the form of propositions:

> Historically, Blacks and their families have been underrepresented on television; there has been, however, an increase in Black representation from 1969 to 1982. (See Table 4.).

A report by the U. S. Commission on Civil Rights (1977) revealed that in the 1950s, Blacks did not appear on commercial television except to play stereotyped roles in programs such as "Amos 'n' Andy." In the 1960s, however, the civil rights movement focused attention on Blacks, and as a result, there was an

Table 4

Black Representation in Television Programming

	Adult dramatic programs broadcast between 8-11 p.m. and children's dramatic programs broadcast on Saturday	Adult programs broadcast from 7 a.m. - 12 p.m.	Programs broadcast between 3:30 - 11 p.m.	Prime-time Commercials	Adult dramatic programs broadcast between 8-11 p.m. and children's dramatic programs broadcast on Saturday
					
	1969	1973	1971 1973 1975	1974	1969-1974 1975-1977
Year (s) Studied					
Source	U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, (1977)	O'Kelly & Bloomquist, (1976)	Seggar, (1977)	Culley & Bennett (1976)	U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, (1977)

increase in Black visibility on television. For example, the proportion of non-white characters appearing on commercial television increased from 6.6 percent in 1969 to 12.5 percent in 1974 (U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, 1977). In addition, Seggar's study (1977) indicated that over the period 1971-75, Black representation on television had improved, as did Roberts' (1970-1971) analysis which found that Blacks appeared in 46 percent of the programs and 10 percent of the television commercials analyzed. There is also evidence of increased visibility of Blacks in television commercials (Culley & Bennett, 1976; Dominick & Greenberg, 1970).

It may be observed that the increase in the number and proportion of Blacks appearing on television has been curvilinear rather than linear. Northcott, Seggar & Hinton (1975), for example, noted a decline in Black participation on television beginning in 1973; other analyses suggest that there has been a decrease followed by an increase and then another decrease or stabilization (Seggar, 1977; U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, 1979).

It should be noted that in spite of the increases noted above, Blacks are still not included in television programming proportionate to their numbers in the population. O'Kelly & Bloomquist's (1976) analysis of 1973 TV shows indicates that non-white characters comprised only 1.6 percent of the characters on children's shows and 7.4 percent of the characters on adult shows. In addition, of the 2,309 characters coded in their study, only 4.9 percent of them were non-whites. Similarly, Culley &

Bennett (1976) found that Blacks made up only 5.9 percent of the characters appearing in prime-time television commercials.

When Black representation is broken down by sex, it is clear that Black males appear on television to a significantly greater extent than do Black females. One study showed that Black women comprised only one-third of the Black characters appearing on the three major networks (O'Kelly & Bloomquist, 1976). Similarly, the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights' (1977) study further corroborates this general pattern with its finding that non-white males comprised 8.6 percent of the characters analyzed for a five (5) year period, while non-white females comprised just 2.3 percent of the characters during this same time.

Because of the disproportionate Black male-female ratio of characters on television, and the fact that three-fourths of the non-white male major characters were not depicted as husbands (U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, 1977), it is not surprising to discover that Black families on television are scarce. Specifically examining the Black family as a unit, Greenberg & Neuendorf (1980) found that of 160 television families, 12 percent or 19 were Black. This study was based on the 1975-1978 television seasons; a content analysis of the present television season (1984-1985) would undoubtedly reveal a much lower percentage.

In summary, then, the evidence suggests that although the visibility of Blacks in television presentations has increased in recent years, Blacks and their families have yet to obtain and maintain proportionate representation.

Stereotypes and other negative connotations characterize television programs featuring Blacks and their families.

Past research indicates that it is instructive to examine qualities associated with the appearance of Blacks on television, as well as the frequency with which they appear. In the past, Blacks were likely to be portrayed as violent, incompetent, lazy, and so forth. Recent portrayals are more positive with studies indicating more positive personality characteristics for Blacks than for whites (Dorr, 1982; Baptista-Fernandez, & Greenberg, 1980; U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, 1977). For example, whites are more likely than Blacks to be portrayed as violent and hostile, and Blacks are frequently portrayed as industrious, competent, and law-abiding (Hinton, et al., 1973).

Yet analyses of character portrayals reveal that some stereotyping remains. For example, one study found that Black females are frequently projected as being low achieving but highly domineering individuals (Reid, 1979). Research also suggests that Blacks are projected as less aggressive than whites, with Black men more likely to display more helping, sharing, and cooperative behavior than either white males or Black females (Donagher, et al., 1976). In addition, another study found that Black characters in all-Black television casts were more likely to display stereotypical Black characteristics than were Black characters in integrated casts (Banks, 1977).

Analyses of the roles to which Blacks are assigned reveal similar stereotypes. The majority of Blacks appearing on television appear in situation comedies or other such comic roles (Baptista-Fernandez & Greenberg, 1980).

Interestingly, Blacks appearing on television are generally younger than whites. Baptista-Fernandez & Greenberg's (1980) study revealed that while 38 percent of white characters were less than 23 years old, 62 percent of Blacks were younger than 23. The result of this disparity in the ages of Blacks and whites is that Black men, in particular, have been portrayed as being younger and less mature than white men.

It should also be noted that half of all Black characters appear in all-Black shows (Baptista-Fernandez & Greenberg, 1980). A fall 1977 content analysis indicated that nearly half of the Black characters appearing on television that season appeared in only six shows, with the other half widely dispersed (Baptista-Fernandez & Greenberg, 1980). This gives the impression that either Blacks are token characters or that Blacks live in all-Black environments, with no interaction with whites.

Black family members are generally presented on television in minor roles and in low-status occupational roles.

Research indicates that Blacks are likely to be cast in insignificant roles that are not central to the plot (Culley & Bennett, 1976; Hinton, et al., 1974). Black women in particular were likely to assume a minor role; during the period 1969-1974, there were only 20 non-white female major characters compared to 111 non-white female minor characters (U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, 1977). A recent study documents that fewer than 30 Black females have appeared in starring roles on television from 1968 to 1983 (Stroman, 1983b).

Additionally, the occupational roles to which Blacks are assigned on television are generally of lower status than those of whites. In the 1950s and early 1960s, Blacks were most likely to be cast as maids or handymen; this resulted in some individuals charging that television stereotyped Blacks in terms of occupation. Apparently, efforts were made to show Blacks in a variety of occupations; for at the beginning of the 1970's, Blacks were frequently featured in high status professions and in glamorous occupations related to the law and entertainment business (Northcott, Seggar & Hinton, 1975; Seggar & Wheeler, 1973). However, this pattern has abated; research documents the continued trend away from diverse occupational roles for televised Blacks. For example, one study revealed that Blacks were less likely (30%) than whites (50%) to have an identifiable job and less likely (10%) than whites (25%) to be a professional, administrator, or manager (Baptista-Fernandez & Greenberg, 1980). In short, the range of occupational roles for Blacks is limited, and to some extent, stereotypical.

The differential treatment accorded Blacks and whites in terms of occupational portrayal resulted in whites comprising 75 percent of the television characters with the highest socioeconomic status (SES), while Blacks comprised 75 percent of the lowest SES characters (Baptista-Fernandez & Greenberg, 1980). Moreover, as was indicated in the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights' study (1977), 61.5 percent of those portrayed on television as very poor are non-white.

The following adequately sums up the qualitative portrayal of Blacks on television and provides an explanation of this portrayal:

> Television generally remains a white man's world in that Blacks are given only marginal roles. The Blacks when portrayed in bit parts and minor roles constitute no threat to the world of the white man on television (Hinton, et al, 1974).

Black family portrayals reflect characteristics similar to those associated with Black portrayals in general.

Specifically examining Black family portrayals on television, we find that an historical analysis reveals that Black family portrayals are also subjected to stereotyped treatment. Until the late 1960s, Black family appearances on television were rare, the exception being the infamous "Amos 'n' Andy." In the 1968-1969 season, along with the increase in Black portrayals, came one of the first Black family series since "Amos 'n' Andy" -- a show entitled "Julia." Starring Diahann Carroll as Julia, the show featured a middle-class widowed Black woman and her young son. Other Black family shows which followed in the 1970s included:

(1) "That's My Mama" which featured a mother and a grown son;

(2) "Good Times" which was initally comprised of a mother, father, daughter, and two sons living in a project;

(3) "Sanford and Son" which featured a father and a grown son who lived together and were junkmen;

(4) "Baby, I'm Back" which featured a father who had previously deserted his wife and two children but later wanted to reenter their lives;

(5) "The Jeffersons" which was initially comprised of a mother, father, and son who eventually moved from the working class to a middle-class existence; and

(6) "What's Happening" which featured a divorced mother struggling to raise a son and a daughter.

"The Jeffersons" may be used as an example to illustrate the portrayal of Black family life. The longest-running Black family show, "The Jeffersons" provides us with a view of a stable upper-middle-class Black family. The father, George Jefferson, is a very competent businessman who has succeeded in obtaining material success for his wife, Louise, and son, Lionel. However, his impetuous personality results in a great deal of conflict between him and his compassionate, strong-willed wife, Louise, and the ever-present, belligerent maid, Florence.

What images of Black family life emerge from the show? On a positive note, we see a Black father succeeding as a professional, as well as maintaining a deep interest in family affairs. We also see glimpses of strong kinship ties as exemplified in an extended family framework. Unfortunately, however, George's tendency to engage in verbal battle leaves the impression of a Black family beset with internal conflicts. Moreover, Louise's attempts to reason with George are frequently reminiscent of the Black matriarchal stereotype.

In what is probably the only available content analysis of Black family television shows, it was determined that (1) the dominant televised Black family type was the broken family--a single parent plus children; and (2) conflict was a prevalent theme in televised Black family interaction--the wife was frequently portrayed as attacking and opposing her husband, and siblings were frequently in conflict situations (Greenberg & Neuendorf, 1980). The authors made a poignant observation: "The

Black wife is set up as a most active antagonist against her husband."

By way of summary, what could you expect to find if you had studied in detail the portrayal of Blacks and their families during 1969 to 1982? Clearly, you would have witnessed an increase in the number of Blacks, particularly Black men, on television from 1969-1982. Moreover, you would have seen many young, lower SES Blacks in situation comedies, service occupational roles, and in other roles which were insignificant and less central to the plot (e.g., a three-second appearance in an eating establishment). Rarely would you have seen a Black person in a managerial or professional occupational role or in a dramatic program. In essence, Blacks frequently appeared in roles designed to subtly evoke in the minds of viewers stereotypes often associated with Blacks. Finally, you would not have seen Blacks featured consistently in television programming in numbers proportionate to their representation in the general population from 1969 to 1982.

The characteristics or compositions of Black family shows appearing from 1969 to 1982 may be summarized as follows. All of these shows were situation comedies. Few of them featured a husband, wife, and children living together. Furthermore, few of these shows portrayed a lifestyle other than that of a poor struggling Black family.

As a result, viewers of these shows may come to believe or expect that: (1) all Blacks come from a single parent home (usually the single parent is a mother); (2) the Black mother is an overly aggressive, dominating person; (3) the Black father is

an irresponsible person who exhibits little concern for his family's welfare; (4) there is little love and affection among Black family members; (5) Black mothers and fathers are unable to assume professional positions; (6) Black family life is characterized by frequent conflicts; and (7) all Blacks come from poor homes (Berry, 1980a; Stroman, 1983a). All of this corroborates James Comer's (1982) observations that the impression often received from television is that Blacks cannot care for their families adequately, that they are not responsible, and that they are not competent.

To be sure, positive images of Black families have surfaced occasionally. Before James and Florida Evans left the show, "Good Times" provided a classic example of the strong family bonds that characterize many Black families. Totally involved with his family, the father, James, provided a source of wisdom and strength for both his wife and children. The love, warmth, and respect that existed between the mother and father and among all family members were obvious.

Other Black family shows (notably "The Jeffersons" and "What's Happening") have, at times, exhibited those characteristics that make for positive images of Black families. Indeed, there have been some instances of televised Black families reflecting those same characteristics that Hill (1971) identifies as necessary components of the stability of Black families: strong kinship bonds, a strong work orientation, a strong religious orientation, and a strong achievement orientation.

Black televised families possessing the characteristics identified above would result in a more positive portrayal of

Black families. Such families, however, are seen too infrequently, despite the fact that the number of family shows featuring all-Black casts increased from less than one (1) percent to approximately twelve (12) percent by the late 1970s. And a multifaceted perspective of Black family shows is yet to emerge, as few Black family shows portray a lifestyle other than that of an undereducated, ineffective, poor Black family.

In short, television presentations featuring Blacks and Black families generally promote the stereotypes commonly associated with Black families. That is, televised Black families are characterized by family disorganization, female-headed households, a low SES, and internal conflicts and chaos. Moreover, members of televised Black families are constantly amused by their limited skills and resources and their resultant powerlessness to improve the quality of their lives. Hence, instead of providing a view of Blacks and their families as culturally equivalent or culturally variant, or as the complex, varied entity that they are, the sociological interpretation of Black families as culturally deviant is the one most likely to be presented in televised portrayals of Black families.

Table 5

Content Analyses of Blacks and Black Families

Study	Sample	Content Variables	Major Findings
Banks, 1977	Dramatic and comedy series broadcast during prime time from October to November 1974. N=6 series (3 all-Black and 3 integrated).	Social and personal characteristics of characters in all-Black and integrated shows.	Black characters in Black shows displayed a greater number of stereotypical Black characteristics, more personal and family problems, and tended to have low social status; while Blacks in integrated shows displayed a greater number of socially valued characteristics, community problems, and tended to have high social status.
Baptista-Fernandez & Greenberg, 1980	Sample week of prime time and Saturday morning commercial television series aired in fall 1977. N=43 fictional series containing both Blacks and whites.	Physical and social attributes, e.g., sex and clothing style; programming content, e.g., time of day; social interaction attributes, e.g., topic of conversation.	Black characters were generally younger, less likely to have an identifiable job, and more likely to be a member of a lower social class and hold a low-status position.
Culley & Bennett, 1976	Commercials aired on 3 major networks in January, 1974 during prime time. N=368 commercials.	Product advertising; sex; setting; occupation and primary role of the character.	Blacks were under-represented in prime time television commercials; although there was an increasing tendency to include Blacks in magazine and TV ads, it was usually in background roles.
Donagher, et al., 1976	Series featuring both Black and white charac-	Eight (8) categories of interpersonal and self-control behaviors:	Blacks tended to be portrayed as less aggressive than whites;

	ters broadcast from May-July, 1974. N=9 series and 60 characters.	aggression, altruism, control of aggressive impulses, delay of gratification/task persistence, reparation of bad behavior, resistance to temptation, sympathy, explaining feelings of self or others.	Blacks engaged in explaining feelings of self and others more than whites; Black men displayed more helping, sharing, and cooperation than Black females.
reenberg & euendorf, 1980	Three (3) sample weeks reflecting 3 different television seasons (1975-1976, 1976-1977, 1977-1978).	Family role interactions.	The dominant Black family type on television was a broken one; conflict accounted for a significant portion of Black family interactions.
inton, et al., 974	Comedy and drama programs which depicted people interacting in modern settings. N=317 different portrayals.	Role significance; characteristics of characters, e.g., competence, attractiveness, and dominance.	Blacks were shown significantly more often than whites in bit parts and minor roles; Black females were largely ignored or excluded from significant TV roles; Blacks were portrayed as industrious, competent, and law-abiding.
emon, 1977	Crime dramas and situation comedies broadcast during March 18-31, 1975.	Race; sex; whether character was dominated, or treated as equal; program type; occupational status.	Blacks had stronger portrayals in situation comedies, while whites dominated Blacks in crime dramas.
orthcott, eggar & Hinton, 975	Randomly selected dramas portraying a modern setting and shown on the 3 major networks from 6:30-11 p.m. in	Occupational roles.	Blacks appeared more frequently in high-status occupations and less frequently in lower-status occupations in the 1971 programs; by 1973, Blacks had all but disappeared from the

	April, 1971 and February, 1973. Total N=216 characters.		high-status occupations, and Black women characters were almost non-existent.
O'Kelly & Bloomquist, 1976	Twenty-eight (28) hour-long segments were selected from programs broadcast from 7 a.m. - 12 p.m. over the 3 major networks from October 1-28, 1973. N=2,309 characters.	Sex; race; roles; age.	Blacks were greatly underrepresented in TV presentations.
Reid, 1979	Ten (10) half-hour comedy programs broadcast over the 3 major networks during the Spring, 1977. N= 110 characters.	Twelve (12) behavior categories: aggression-female, aggression-male, activity, achievement, dominance, deference, autonomy, harm, avoidance, nurturance, recognition, self-recognition, succorance.	No significant differences between the behavior of Black and white males; Black females were more likely to be projected as nurturing, dominating, and low achievers.
Roberts, 1970-1971	All network - provided programs broadcast during prime time March 8-14, 1970. N=40 characters.	Occupational role; setting; frequency of Black appearances.	Blacks appeared in 46 percent of the programs presented; Blacks appeared most often as entertainers and in occupations related to the law.
Seggar, 1977	Sample of programs broadcast during 3:30-11 p.m. in February-March, 1971, 1973, and 1975. Total N=10,794 characters.	Performance time; role significance (e.g., major or supporting role).	Over a five (5) year period, Blacks have consolidated and slightly improved their gains in TV role allocation.

.S. Commission n Civil Rights, 977	Sample week of dramatic programs broadcast from 8-11 p.m. and children's dramatic programs broadcast on Saturdays during the fall, 1969-1974. Total N=5,624.	Sex; race; age; occupation; SES; marital and parental status; perceived goodness.	The proportion of non-white characters increased from 1969 to 1974; most of the gains were made by non-white males; non-white females seen most often in a minor role; non-whites were most likely to be portrayed as very poor and as service workers.
.S. Commission a Civil Rights, 979	Sample week of dramatic programs broadcast from 8-11 p.m. and children's dramatic programs broadcast on Saturdays during the fall and spring, 1975 and 1976, and the fall, 1977 Total N= 5,042.	Sex, race, age, type of role (comic or serious); occupation.	Continued increases in the proportion of non-white characters; minority males were more likely to appear in teenage roles or comic roles; minorities seen more frequently in professional roles; racial stereotyping continued to flourish in television presentations.

ote: The majority of these content analyses exclude cartoons, news programs, quiz programs, sports events, documentaries, talk shows, and commercials from the data analyzed.

THE EFFECTS OF MEDIA COVERAGE AND PORTRAYALS OF BLACKS AND THEIR FAMILIES

The preceding analyses indicate that both print media coverage and televised portrayals of Black families frequently promulgate misleading views of Black family life. What impact do these misleading views have on readers and viewers? For example, do the images and messages about Black families that emanate from the media create or reinforce stereotypical attitudes and beliefs about Black families? This portion of the paper examines current thought on the impact of media coverage and portrayals of Blacks and their families, particularly televised portrayals, as revealed by pertinent commentaries and critiques. It should be noted at the outset that much of the commentary on the effects of the media refers to Blacks; seldom is there specific reference to Black families as a unit.

In critiques of media coverage and portrayals of Blacks and their families, the practice of stereotyping is generally one of the issues raised. For example, critics have frequently charged that the infrequent appearance of Blacks in serious roles is a form of stereotyping (Berry, 1980b; Powell, 1982). Moreover, Powell (1982) noted that "the familiar stereotypes--the Toms, coons, mulattoes, mammies and bucks--are still in existence in programs such as "The Jeffersons," "Good Times," "Sanford and Son," and "What's Happening." In a similar vein, Berry (1980b) argued that the behaviors exhibited by characters appearing on Black -oriented shows may result in an increase in stereotypical perceptions of Blacks by whites. Apparently in agreement with other critics, the National Black Feminist Organization (1974)

forcefully argued that Black televised portrayals are "slanted toward the ridiculous with no redeeming counter images."

Critics have been just as vocal in expressing the stereotyped messages that they perceive as emanating from specific shows. A recent article by Campbell (1983) assails "Gimme A Break" for its stereotypical image of the mammy as portrayed by the very talented Nell Carter, one of the few Black women holding a starring role on current-day commercial television. "Sanford and Son" was castigated by a critic for its tendency to portray Black characters as being not very intelligent, but wily in the sense of being quick to take advantage of each other (Collier, 1974). Powell (1982) identified the stereotypes resulting from "The Jeffersons," the longest running Black family show:

> The Jeffersons are a Black family that has "made it," but George, the husband, is still the comic coon or buffoon whose business acumen is never displayed, but only his lack of it. The maid, Florence, is the headstrong, cantankerous mammy who challenges George as the head of the household and makes disparaging remarks about his ability and character.

Similarly, Jackson (1982) criticized George Jefferson for failing to use the role of a successful businessman to provide a positive image of and for Blacks.

"Good Times," one of the all-time favorite Black shows, was perhaps the most heavily assailed show. Much of the criticism was related to J.J.'s (portrayed by Jimmy Walker) behavior; one critic described him as a young man with nothing much to do in his life, who tickled the public by screaming "dy-no-mite" (Douglas, 1978). The fact that John Amos and Esther Rolle (the father and mother) eventually left the show, leaving the family separated, was also

heavily criticized (Morrow, 1978; U.S. Commission on Civil Rights 1979).

Another line of criticism of media coverage and portrayal of Blacks and their families is connected with the absent father figure on some Black family television shows. One article, "The Black Male and His Family at Risk" (1980), notes that in presenting Black men as non-family-oriented, as being very poor, non-professional, and non-law-abiding, television may have a negative effect on the socialization of many Black males for family life.

It may be noted that viewers themselves acknowledge the negative images which television projects about Black families. For example, in a study of viewer reactions to "Sanford & Son," "Good Times," and "The Jeffersons," respondents noted that televised portrayals of Black families often send the message that Black families are poor and fatherless (Cited in U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, 1979).

Taking all of the criticism as a whole, it is understandable that some writers maintain that television hinders Black parents' efforts to teach pride and self-respect to their children by its glamorization of negative images (Poussaint, 1974; Rosser, 1978). Indeed, a number of writers have expressed the opinion that the media, particularly television, may have deleterious effects on all members of Black families. As an example, Clark (1971) argued that television damages Black self-concept by its nonrecognition of Blacks. Similarly, Tan & Tan (1979) reasoned that since Blacks are often portrayed negatively or are non-existent in television entertainment programming, Blacks viewing such programming may

learn negative self-concepts. After finding that high television viewing was accompanied by low self-esteem in a sample of Black adults, the authors concluded that heavy television viewing leads to low self-concepts among Blacks (Tan & Tan, 1979).

A great deal of the concern expressed about the portrayals of Blacks and their families is related to the perceived impact that television has on Black children. It has been suggested that Black-oriented television programs can have two (2) different effects; Graves (1980) maintains that if televised Blacks are presented in positive, non-stereotyped roles, the self-concept of Blacks who view these roles may be enhanced. However, if Blacks are portrayed in a manner which supports negative stereotypes of Blacks, the self-concept of Blacks viewing these portrayals may be lowered.

The predominant view is that television probably affects Black children in a negative fashion. Poussaint's (1974) views are representative of this line of thought; Poussaint writes:

> A child's sense of self is affected by how he views his environment, both through direct involvement and through various media presentations. The powerful influence of television and films often challenges parental guidance. A poor young Black viewing television may see no representation of his community or lifestyle and get the impression that he does not count in this society.

Powell (1982) echoes this view in her assertion that the paucity of Blacks on television is particularly destructive to Black children's self-concept because it denies the importance of their existence.

In a discussion of the dysfunctional personal attitudes that Black children may acquire from television, Janis (1980)

elaborated on television's negative influence on Black youngsters' self-concepts. He maintains that "because Blacks are often shown in menial occupational roles, Black youths may acquire the impression that professional and leadership roles are out of the question for them."

Clearly the foregoing critiques and commentaries suggest that the media have negative effects on Blacks and their families. Yet very little of the available research has examined empirically the effects of the media on Blacks. There is, however, research and theory upon which we can develop suppositions regarding the impact of media coverage and portrayal of Blacks on both Black and white viewers and readers.

Among the previous findings from which media effects can be inferred is the repeated finding of Gerbner and his associates at the University of Pennsylvania that heavy television-viewing is associated with the acceptance of television entertainment as factual or as reality (Gerbner & Gross, 1976; Gerbner, et al., 1978; Gerbner et al., 1979). Thus, it is conceivable that media audiences may accept media images of Black families as representing "real" Black families.

Related to this is the theoretical proposition that frequent exposure to the media may result in audiences modeling their behavior after that which they see displayed in the media. In addition, frequent exposure may also influence audiences' perceptions of the types of behavior that are acceptable and appropriate. Thus, it would appear that the media have a socializing effect. That is, just as families, schools, and peers

influence children's attitudes, beliefs, and behavior, so do the media (Berry, 1980a; Dorr, 1982; Stroman, 1984).

Specifically addressing the media and perceptions of family life, it should be noted that some individuals believe that the media, particularly television, shape our ideas and attitudes about what kinds of family structures and interaction are acceptable and appropriate, and what kinds are serious or funny. The media also define for us how spouses and parents and children are "supposed" to relate to each other (Glennon & Butsch, 1982; Greenberg, et al., (1980). The implication here is that since children learn other attitudes and behaviors from the media, it is expected that they would also learn family roles, attitudes, and behaviors from the models presented in the media (Greenberg, et al., 1980; Stroman, 1983a).

In this regard, questions must be raised about the socializing messages that are being sent out about the Black family through Black situation comedies--the vehicle for most Black family portrayals on commercial television. Consider, for example, the messages that "Good Times" sent out when, as was described by a critic (Morrow, 1978), "its producers eliminated not only the family's strong, if frustrated father, but also, later, its mother, who abandoned her three children in their Chicago housing project to move to Arizona to be near her man." Contrast these messages with those sent out by "Roots," which featured a Black father who exhibited a strong desire to be with and care for his family.

Clearly, the models appearing on commercial television shows, especially those Black family television shows, may be

sending out messages that contradict thos. which Black parents want for their children, and in the process, the media have the effect of competing with the Black family as an agent of socialization (Stroman, 1982).

In addition to having implications for Black audiences, media coverage and portrayal of Black families have implications for others. Unlike Blacks who have first-hand information of how Black families function in "real life," other persons have little opportunity to observe Black family life directly. Hence, in many instances the only source for that type of information is the mass media, particularly television. For example, several studies indicate that white children and adult viewers who do not interact with Blacks report that they get their information about Blacks from television (Greenberg, 1972; Greenberg & Atkin, 1978; Greenberg & Hanneman, 1970).

In sum, then, theorists and other writers are emphatic in their contention that media coverage and portrayal of Black families have far-reaching effects. Seemingly, the most important of these effects is that which they may have on Black children, i.e., the media have the potential to teach Black children unrealistic and negative lessons, especially lessons pertaining to their self-worth. In addition, it appears that the media are providing white audiences with highly erroneous perceptions of the nature of Black families.

CONCLUSION

In the Kerner Commission report, which was published in 1968, the media were severely criticized for failing to portray an accurate image of Black Americans and for contributing to the

racist tone of American society. The present analysis has demonstrated that in spite of the changes in the coverage and portrayal of Blacks and their families that have occurred since 1968, the general message emphasized in media presentations is that Blacks and their families are not important entities in American society.

To give a balanced view, it must be noted that the media have relegated families in general to a secondary position (Wahlstrom, 1979). However, there appears to be something sinister in media treatment of Black families. That is, for every comical, nonproductive white family appearing on television, there is one that offers a counter view. For Black families, however, as this analysis has demonstrated, the image of Black families as funny and poor is not counterbalanced with a different type of image.

Clark (1969) identified the stages through which minority portrayals on television pass. These stages are: nonrecognition-ridicule-regulation-and respect. Obviously, Blacks (like other minorities) have not reached the respect stage. This is unfortunate, especially in light of Berry's (1980b) contention that "television has the potential to become a major mediator in assisting American society toward a more enlightened and humane concept concerning people of different races."

Clearly, the importance of television serving as a major mediator of racial tensions is related to the notion that some Blacks, particularly children, may internalize television's messages and some whites depend on the media for their perceptions and understanding of Blacks and their families. Futhermore, not

only do the media ensure that Blacks are portrayed in a manner that teaches white superiority, but many of the negative and superior attitudes held by white Americans can also be traced back to the media (Berry, 1980a; Pierce, 1974).

If, as Berry (1980b), Gerbner et al, (1978, 1979), and others have argued, the images and messages transmitted by the media are capable of distorting reality, the effects of the media are potentially dangerous. What, then, can the media do to improve the image of Blacks and their families currently received by viewers and readers? Clearly, efforts should be exerted toward developing media presentations which provide a more balanced set of Black family images. Or to state it another way, efforts should be made to change the image of Blacks and their families to reflect their strengths and diversity more accurately. For the print media, this means providing more interpretative material regarding the status of Black families and focusing more attention on those families that do not meet the stereotyped criteria of being poor and fatherless. For television this means producing a more balanced picture of Black families. For example, television producers should not merely provide the types of images gleaned from "The Jeffersons" and "Sanford and Son," but should also provide more positive images as exemplified by programs such as "Up and Coming" and "Kinfolks," i.e., the image of a Black mother and father working together to do that which they deem best for the children and the family as a whole. For all of the media, this means doing what Whitney Young asked them to do in 1969:

> ...explode the myths of the past and present. Instead of talking about the weaknesses of Black people and their pathologies, talk about their strengths. Break the news that (some) Black families are stable families. Spell it out that despite humiliation and discrimination, they are surviving in the worst housing. And talk about the contributions that Black people have made to our society. (Young, 1969).

In short, the media should portray the Black family as the dynamic, complex, different but functional family formation that it is in real life.

This analysis could not conclude without some acknowledgement of the fact that the media are profit-making entities, and in order to be profitable they must present a product that appeals to the broadest possible audience. Also, stereotyped portrayals of Blacks have provided commercial television networks with a formula for successful programs and are perpetuated by those networks in order to boost ratings and profits (U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, 1977). It is argued here, however, that the media can present shows that project more realistic and diverse images of Black people, and that these shows can be entertaining and profit-producing at the same time.

A RESEARCH AGENDA

Many questions about the relationships between Black families and the mass media remain unanswered. This next section suggests several issues which should receive high priority in future research dealing with Blacks, Black families, and the media.

The socializing influence of the mass media, particularly television, on Black children should be of primary concern in future research in this area. Since little empirical evidence

regarding the relationship between television and Black children's self-concept exists, it seems imperative that we begin to examine the ways in which Black children's images of themselves respond to the stereotyped and other more subtle messages that television emits. The broad question to be investigated is how does the portrayal or lack of portrayal of Blacks on television impact on the self-concept of Black children? Specifically, what if anything, do Black children learn from Black television characters and how does this learning affect their self-concepts? In addition, two questions posed by Berry (1980b) warrant attention: (1) What information is given through television communication channels that might influence the child's feelings, attitudes, and behavior toward his or her ethnic group and the broader community? and (2) What is the role of television in shaping the values, beliefs, attitudes, and actions of the Black child?

In this regard, more content analyses are needed, particularly analyses of the manner in which Blacks are portrayed on television, in both entertainment programs and newscasts. Especially useful analyses would record the behaviors of televised Blacks, the accoutrements that surround them, the nature of the social interactions including Black characters, and the ways in which the issue of race is broached on television (Graves, 1980). The diversity of characters in terms of age, sex, and socio-economic status should also be noted. Such analyses would result in a deeper understanding of the more subtle messages about Blacks and Black families presented by television.

Undoubtedly, parents can mediate the effect that the media have on their children; consequently, future research should also

address the following questions: (1) Do the media have a greater or lesser influence on Black children than Black parents do? and (2) What characteristics of Black family life, if any, increase of decrease the influence of the media on Black children? Research is also needed to evaluate the effectiveness of a resource guide devised by Anderson and Merritt (1978) to aid Black parents in supervising the television viewing of their children.

Most of the literature on socialization and the media focuses on children. While this is understandable, we need to broaden our scope by including an examination of the socializing influences of the media on all Blacks. As an example, Greenberg and Atkins (1978) suggest that future research should address this question: "What do youngsters acquire from fictional portrayals that may establish or alter cognitions, aspirations, expectations and beliefs?" Future research should expand this question to include the entire lifespan in an effort to ascertain what children and adults acquire from both fictional and nonfictional media content.

Of particular revelance to Black families is the role of television in the formation of ideas about how families should operate or interact. We know very little, for example, about Black attitudes towards family life acquired from or reinforced by currently popular Black programs such as "What's Happening?" "Good Times," or "The Jeffersons." An equally important question that should be answered in this connection is, "What impact, if any, does the Public Broadcasting Service series "Up and Coming"--a program which purports to give a balanced, positive treatment of Black family life -- have on attitudes toward Black families? Similarly, there is a need to study the Black media in

an effort to understand what their roles in Black family life and the Black community are, and if the Black media play positive roles, how these roles can be strenghtened. The Black press, particularly, is suggested as a medium that should be examined for its value and relevance to the Black community and Black family life.

Needless to say, a wide variety of research approaches should be used in studying the impact of the media on Black families. Multi-method approaches, combining quantitative and qualitative techniques, would be particularly appropriate in determining the casual influence of the media on Blacks and their families.

Finally, it must be emphasized that we need longitudinal studies that trace: (1) the consequences accruing to Black families as a result of repeated exposure to white-dominated media content; and (2) perceptions of Blacks and Black families that are fostered in the minds of both Blacks and whites as a result of the inclusion or exclusion of Blacks in the media.

The proposed research agenda suggests areas which, if thoroughly studied, would contribute greatly to our knowledge about the influence of the mass media on Blacks and their families.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACTION

There are no quick solutions to the problems arising from inadequate and sometimes negative coverage and portrayal of Black families in the mass media. However, parents, educators, social work practitioners, community groups, and others can all

contribute to improved coverage and portrayal of Black families. Suggested strategies for such improvement are presented below.

Parents can do a number of things to ensure better treatment of Blacks in media presentations and to counter the harmful effects of the media on children. They can, for example, control the amount of time children spend passively with the media by encouraging them to engage in activities more conducive to physical and intellectual growth. When possible they can watch television or read with their children and teach them to be critical consumers of media fare. Also, they can invest in cable and other new communications technologies, which promise to provide a more accurate view of Black communities.

In addition, parents can join with other interested citizens to develop media action groups which work for better media in their community. They can also protest against offensive images by writing to the members of the Federal Communications Commission and the Federal Trade Commission, as well as presidents of national networks, local network executives, and advertisers and other program sponsors. (They should also write to express their approval of positive portrayals of Blacks and Black family life). Finally, parents can provide financial support to groups such as Action for Children's Television, Accuracy in Media, and the United Church of Christ, Office of Communications, which advocate and work towards reforms in the media. One such group especially worthy of support is the National Black Media Coalition, which seeks to increase the number of Black media owners in the hope that they will have a good influence on media content pertaining to Blacks.

In addition to following some of the aforementioned suggestions, educators and social work practitioners have special roles to play. Frequently, they have the opportunity to raise the awareness of parents and children about both the negative and positive potential of the media, particularly television. Educators can also encourage more prosocial television viewing. Speaking specifically to child welfare professionals, Cruthirds (1984) suggests that, in the delivery of protective services, the worker should be cognizant of a potential relationship between family and television viewing habits and problematic child behaviors.

In summary, media coverage and images of Black family life can be changed so that a variety of portraits of Black family life emerges. For this to occur, however, continuous action and surveillance on the part of many organizations and individuals, as well as the media industry itself, must be exerted to find appropriate ways to achieve lasting positive changes.

EPILOGUE

Since the research for this paper was completed, the enormously popular "The Cosby Show" has premiered. A very different kind of Black family show, "The Cosby Show" features the Huxtable family, comprised of an obstetrician father, a lawyer mother, four daughters, one of whom is enrolled in college, and one son.

The show, which generally ranks among the top five (5) shows in the Neilsen ratings and was recently renewed for a second season, promises to provide a positive view of the Black family. The father, a nurturing, caring individual, obviously adores and takes pride in his children. The mother and father are happily married; their union lacks the conflict that characterizes many televised Black male-female relationships. Children are taught achievement values, and strong kinship bonds exist in the family. All of these qualities surface in a humorous atmosphere.

This positive view of Black families which emanates from the show is a direct result of the efforts of the show's originator, Bill Cosby. Desirous of showing Black family life in a positive and realistic vein Cosby maintains strict control of each program's script. In addition, he employs the renowned psychologist, Dr. Alvin Poussaint, as the show's consultant to insure that the intended messages are the ones sent to viewers.

This step in the direction of improved images of Black family forms is to be applauded. There is a need, however, for more programs like the "The Cosby Show" as well as a Black show patterned after such programs as "The Waltons," and "Little House

on the Prairie," if a balance is to be reached in media presentations of Black families.

FOOTNOTES

1. Since one study has examined only Black families as a unit, the decision was made to use studies that had Blacks in general (i.e., Black family members) as the unit of analysis. In the case of the print media, however, articles dealing specificaly with Black families were the unit of analysis.
2. Generally, non-white characters appearing on commercial television are almost always Black. Hence, the figures for non-whites refer mostly to Blacks.
3. It may be noted that in a largely exploratory study, Stroman (in press) did not find evidence that television has a negative impact on Black children's self-concept. Indeed, a positive association between self-concept and the amount of television viewing was found for girls.

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