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Exploring Media's Impact on African-American Women's Healthy Food Habits in Kentucky

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While cardiovascular disease is a general problem in the United States, it is especially problematic in the South (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2012).
Cardiovascular disease impacts the lives of African Americans more than those of other

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ethnicities (The Office of Minority Health, 2012); this fact is particularly true in Kentucky. African Americans who live in Kentucky suffer cardiovascular disease at a rate higher than their Caucasian American contemporaries (261.1 out of 100,000 versus 235.1 of 100,000; statehealthfacts.org, n.d.). Because of this alarming situation, researchers are developing strategies to alleviate it. There is evidence that eating fruits and vegetables (F&V), and acquiring other generally healthy food habits can help people maintain healthier weights and even lose weight (Akers et al., 2012). However, engaging in a lifestyle that includes healthy food habits might be difficult for some members of the African American community because many African Americans live in food deserts, areas in which there are no nearby grocery stores that offer fresh fruits and vegetables. As such, they often rely on convenience stores and fast food chains for their needs. Other issues include the cultural differences between African Americans and Caucasian Americans. For instance, it is likely that African American women have a preference for heavier bodies, when compared to Caucasian-American women (e.g., Bennett, Philipp, Shuler, & Roy, 2007; Demarest & Allen, 2000; Jones, Freis, & Danish, 2007; Schooler, Ward, Merriwether, & Caruthers, 2004). Also, one must consider how certain cultural aspects of food preparation and consumption in the African American community could influence its food preferences. For example, many African Americans cook with “fatback,” a cut of pork taken from a pig's back, which is often used to flavor beans and cooked greens.

Therefore, any strategies to encourage healthy food habits in the African American community must take into account all of these factors, as well as consider different pathways for disseminating health information to the community. For instance, Black churches and barber/beauty shops, institutions that are important to this community, have been utilized in order to inform and encourage better health practices (e.g., Hess et al., 2007; Linnan & Ferguson, 2007). Of course, media can also be utilized to provide information regarding healthy food habits. One such resource is the website for Louisville, Kentucky's Mayor Greg Fischer's Healthy Hometown initiative. More specifically, one of the videos located on this website focuses on the opening of two *Healthy in a Hurry* stores in the Chickasaw and Portland neighborhoods of the city in December 2011 (MetroTV, n.d.). These areas are predominately African American, and such initiatives, including media, are targeted towards people who should consider dietary adjustments that will better their health. Any attempt to intervene in the African American community regarding food consumption must be culturally appropriate (Kreuter, Lukwago, Bucholtz, Clark, & Sanders-Thompson, 2003). Such strategies to achieve cultural appropriateness include peripheral strategies (i.e., packing materials using fonts, images that will appeal to a particular group), evidential strategies (i.e., utilizing health data to argue to relevance of a health issue to a particular group), linguistic strategies (i.e., ensuring that program materials are in the native language of particular group to make them more accessible), constituent-involving strategies (i.e., including members of a particular group as staff), and sociocultural strategies (i.e., realizing a particular group's cultural beliefs, values to contextualize a health issue). Media represent one such context in which cultural appropriateness is important to consider, because they can be used as intervention tools to increase people's knowledge regarding the benefits of healthy food habits.

To better ensure the success of such a program, one must discover if, and how, African Americans gather and utilize information regarding healthy food habits from media; uses and gratifications (U&G) theory provides this perspective. Using a U&G framework in this context recognizes African Americans as active media consumers who choose media they utilize. Understanding how African Americans use the information they gather from media about healthy food habits is an important first step in initiating an intervention program tailor-made for the African American community in Kentucky. Therefore, this qualitative study explores the perspective of African American women in Kentucky, specifically urban Louisville and rural Hopkinsville, to understand their use of media as potential sources for gathering information about healthy food habits.

Theory: Uses and Gratifications

Researchers have used U&G to explain how people utilize media in their lives (Katz, Blumler, & Gurevitch, 1974; Palmgreen, 1984). Rather than suggest that media impact people as a result of their exposure (usually negatively), U&G posits that people are active media participants, using media for their unique reasons and at their own leisure. For example, in the case of television, one of the older studies of this medium found that people used television to entertain themselves and to also glean information (Rubin, 1983). By contrast, a study of the Internet found that people used the web not only for entertainment and information-seeking, but also to interact with others, to help them pass free time while relaxing and to explore particular websites (Kaye, 1998). The focus of the framework is on how active audience members use mass media to satisfy their needs and the gratifications they derive from media.

There are some basic assumptions that appear in the scholarship utilizing U&G (Katz, et al., 1974). First, audience(s) are active, not passive media consumers. Audiences do not just sit back and absorb media thoughtlessly, but engage with their media. Second, U&G favors the audience as having power over its media. More specifically, illustrating the differences between media effects, on one hand, and gratifications on the other. Schramm, Lyle, and Parker (1961) insist, for instance, that it is the (television) audience “who is the most active...it is they who use television rather than television that uses them (p. 1).” Third, media only serve a portion of people's needs. For instance, many people still desire to interact with others to satisfy their needs to be entertained and informed. Also, audience-members have agency and are aware of their media selections and why they make these choices. Lastly, researchers should not place value judgments on media in this context, but let the audience present their own evaluations of media.

Some classical applications of the theory have resulted in studies of newspaper (e.g., Berelson, 1949), radio (e.g., Cantril & Allport, 1935), and television (e.g., Blumler, Brown, & McQuail, 1970), and it appears that each new medium/media context can be explored with U&G. Papacharissi and Mendelson (2007) applied the U&G framework to study reality television, and O'Donohoe (1993) utilized the theory to explore advertising.

More recent applications have focused on digital media, social media, and cell phone use. Specifically, Kaye and Johnson (2002) found that guidance, information seeking,

entertainment, and social utility motivated people to pursue political information on the Internet. In another U&G study, Leung and Wei (2000) found that the main reasons people used cell phones were to look stylish, to socialize with friends and family members, to relax by passing time chatting with friends, and to be mobile. They also found that people from different demographic backgrounds had different gratifications concerning their cell phone use. For example, men tended to use their phones for business purposes, as compared to women, who used their phones to maintain relationships with family and friends. This study is relevant to the current one because though the researchers did find that people of different demographic groups presented unique gratifications, the study did not specifically discuss African Americans' behaviors, or those of African American women in particular.

Analyzing social media usage, Raacke and Bonds-Raacke (2008) explored the U&G of people who do not utilize MySpace or Facebook accounts. They found that the majority of these anti-users “just have no desire to have an account (p. 171).” They also found that Native Americans were less likely to have social media accounts than their Caucasian American, African American, and Hispanic counterparts. This study is useful to the current project because Raacke and Bonds-Raacke (2008) suggest some general differences among people from different ethnic groups and their social media use. They do not explore how gender differences might impact their context. In sum, each of these studies, which focus on people's uses of new technologies, are relevant to the current study because a particular concern of this project is the possibility that African American women utilize these media to discover information about F&V consumption and other healthy food habits. Regardless of media they have explored, the majority of U&G studies have attempted to categorize the many different gratifications that people receive from their media, as informed by self-reports from audience participants (Palmgreen, 1984). As Miller (2005) explains, these categories include ritualistic versus instrumental gratifications (Rubin, 1984), process versus content gratifications (Cutler & Danowski, 1980), and affective/imaginative versus cognitive gratifications (McQuail, 1984). Researchers who employ U&G also recognize that there is a difference between the gratifications audience members desire and the ones they actually obtain (e.g., Palmgreen, 1984).

As suggested by these findings, the U&G model is useful because this framework can be directly applied to learning how African American women might use media to learn more about healthy food habits. In exploring this possibility, one would likely have to take into account the accessibility of certain media technology to members of the African American community. The literature discussed below details issues surrounding the technology gap/digital divide and how it impacts various communities differently, in addition to the ways in which the African American community utilizes traditional media.

African Americans and Traditional Media Use

When attempting to learn the ways in which African Americans might use media to learn about healthy food habits, one should note general usage trends among members of this community. According to African American Consumers (2012), “the most popular programming in African American households are television programs starring Black characters” (p. 21). These shows include *The Game* and *Love and Hip Hop* (Guskin, Moore,

& Mitchell, 2011). Guskin, Moore, and Mitchell (2011) also explain that African Americans prefer media that are targeted toward them and feature them, such as the African American newspaper *The New York Amsterdam News* for their international news stories and they also enjoy African American targeted magazines (e.g., *Ebony*, *Black Enterprise*).

African Americans, the Digital Divide, and Digital Media Use

Though the Internet offers its users access to immeasurable amounts of knowledge, there exists the unfortunate fact that the Internet is more accessible to those who can afford the technology. This situation is what Morrisett coined the “digital divide” (Hoffman, Novak, & Schlosser, 2000). According to Hoffman and Novak (1998), this divide is often defined according to racial patterns, with Caucasian Americans more likely than African Americans to have access to a computer in their homes as well as at work. Caucasian Americans were also more likely than African Americans to access the Internet in places other than in their homes (e.g., places of employment, schools). Simply, access to the Internet encourages its use and its wealth of information. However, the population under study here is not likely to have that access.

The current study considers the possibility that African American women in Louisville and Hopkinsville might use media in various ways when they are gathering different types of food-related information. For example, different media may provide different levels of insight into facts (e.g., national daily recommendations) and opinions (e.g., how a food tastes). It is important to understand the extent to which African American women's access to and understanding of technologies, such as the Internet and social media applications, might influence how they derive and use information about healthy foods and habits. As such, the authors developed the following research questions: How do African American women in Louisville, and Hopkinsville, Kentucky, gather and utilize information regarding healthy foods habits from media? If they do, what particular sources are the most helpful and influential for them?

Method

Research Design

In order to better understand how African American women might use media to learn more about ways they can eat healthier, we conducted exploratory semi-structured interviews with African American women who reside on the West side of Louisville and Hopkinsville. Louisville is socially classified as a hyper-segregated city, with a large majority of African Americans living in a distinct geographic area of the city termed West Louisville, also referred to as the West End (Glaeser E. & Vigdor, 2001). As such, African Americans residing in West Louisville represent most of the African Americans living in Louisville. It is essential to explore the similarities and differences of the participants who live in these two areas because African American Kentuckians live in both urban and rural areas. Both the selected areas have large African American populations: Louisville (23%) and Hopkinsville (32%) (USDOC, 2012). For information regarding the two cities' populations, median incomes, and other information, see Table 1. West Louisville has also been included in this table to aid in comparison.

The data presented here are part of a larger study that also included 13 African American men. The semi-structured interviews were held in the urban, Park DuValle neighborhood of West Louisville, and in rural Hopkinsville, Kentucky. These procedures were reviewed and approved by the authors' university's Institutional Review Board. More specifically, the 17 interviews held in West Louisville were held in the women's own homes, with the exception of one interview, which was conducted in a combination of face-to-face and phone interview. The 10 interviews held in Hopkinsville were conducted in the lobby and room of a local hotel. By interviewing the participants either in their homes or providing them with a comfortable, private area in the hotel, the researchers encouraged participants to be relaxed while sharing their perspectives. All of the interviews were conducted between November and December, 2011. Because the West Louisville interviews were conducted first, and the researchers noted the need for more information about participant Internet use, they subsequently added the question about Internet use on mobile devices for the interviews in Hopkinsville.

The researchers utilized a snowball sample to recruit participants for the study (e.g., Keyton, 2006). In both West Louisville and Hopkinsville, two of the authors served as initial study informants and contacted potential participants for the study. Each participant received a \$40 gift card as compensation for her time. The interview guide led participants through questions about several topics related to general food habits, including F&V consumption and knowledge sources. Of particular interest to this study were how different types of media were used, focusing on broadcast sources (i.e., television), print sources (i.e., books and magazines), the Internet, and social media. See Table 2 for examples of questions utilized.

Participants

The research sample included 27 African American women. The participants ranged in age from 25 years to 80 years old with a mean of 42.19 years; a plurality of the participants (10, 37%) was in their thirties. The greatest number of participants (12, 44.4%) had completed at least some college or vocational school when compared to the other levels of education, and almost half of the women (13; 48.1%) had incomes of \$20,000 or less. Twelve of the women (44.4%) received food assistance, and 15 (55.6%) of them had at least one child that lived in the household with them. See Table 3 for participant demographical information.

Procedure

To explore how African American women might use media to learn more about healthy foods, the researchers designed the interview questions to generate vivid descriptions of their experiences. Interviews lasted from 25-90 minutes; most lasted an hour. The researchers that also had active roles as interviewers informed participants that they were participating in a research study regarding health, food knowledge, and food access in the African American community. In addition, the interviewers assured participants that their contributions would remain confidential; each was given a number or letter to maintain her anonymity.

Before each interview, the interviewers requested each participant's permission to audio-record the interview. During these interactions, the interviewers cross-checked their interpretations with the participants to make sure that the interviewers understood the participants' responses (e.g., Parker, 2001). Occasionally, the interviewers were able to take brief notes during the interviews.

Analysis

The researchers transcribed each audio recording of the interviews, allowing them to analyze and interpret the data (Keyton, 2006). This procedure resulted in approximately 1,119 single-spaced pages of professionally-transcribed data.¹

The transcripts were uploaded into the qualitative analysis software package QDA Miner, and the data were analyzed using a thematic analysis (i.e., Glesne, 2006) to understand how this sample of African American women from Louisville and Hopkinsville might use media to learn more about healthy food habits. The first and fourth author independently read 10% of the transcripts from the Louisville interviews and developed codes to capture the essence of the interviewee statements. The initial data analysis and code development were included in the open coding process, which Strauss and Corbin (1998) define as “the analytic process through which concepts are identified and their properties and dimensions are discovered in data” (p. 101). The researchers then discussed their respective codes, and grouped them into eleven major themes or categories specifically related to participant media use. These primary codes were: 1) print media for research, 2) broadcast media for research, 3) internet/mobile media for research, 4) print media for education, 5) broadcast media for education, 6) internet/mobile media for education, 7) media makes one willing to change behaviors, 8) influence of specific media personalities, 9) saving money with media, 10) being unaware of media influence, and 11) “media are bad for you.”

As it became apparent to these authors that the participants' media sources and their reasons for using them were best understood using U&G to guide the analysis, the researchers used the theory to further develop the themes. Some themes were re-categorized and collapsed to reflect constructs of U&G. The completion of this process resulted in six major codes, which became the codes utilized in the QDA miner analysis. These six codes were: 1) source of information, 2) media for education, 3) incidental media influence, 4) being unaware of media influence, 5) having a negative opinion of media/ “media are bad for you,” and 6) media makes one willing to change behaviors.

The fourth author recruited a 21-year-old student in her junior year to code the transcripts. This coder received 3 hours of course credit for coding the data using the six codes developed by the first and fourth authors. The fourth author trained this student for eight hours with the coding materials. Another coding assistant (the ninth author) also coded 20% of the data to ensure intercoder reliability (Kappa = .81). The six codes were initially based on media sources, such as newspapers, magazines, television, and the Internet. In the final round of analysis, the researchers further compared the data within each of the six codes with the U&G framework and noted that the participants were using these media in a

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¹These pages featured double-spacing between paragraphs.

particular fashion. As such, these six codes were subsumed under the three main themes presented in the results section. These themes were developed during the process of axial coding, which Strauss and Corbin (1998) explain as “The process of relating categories to their subcategories...linking categories at the level of properties and dimensions” (p. 123).

Verification

Many researchers (e.g., Cresswell, 1997) have suggested explicit and thorough discussion and member checking to verify data. This paper presents rich description from the transcripts (Cresswell, 1997); readers of this manuscript are invited to draw their own conclusions from our interpretations. In addition, during each interview, the interviewers attempted to clarify thoughts, feelings, and statements presented by the participants. The researchers also utilized formal member checking for this study, such that three participants were invited to see how the emergent themes matched the data they provided. Of these three participants only Participant G responded. She expressed her agreement with the themes, stating, “I do think you captured accurate information and did a good job illustrating [how] media experiences [affect our] health decisions.” These processes verified the quality of the themes.

Results: Thematic Analysis

The interviewers asked the participants to describe their media use, specifically how they utilize media to learn more about healthy food habits. The three major themes that emerged from the coded data corresponded to the different media sources the women used to gather information regarding healthy food habits, in addition to the particular needs/wants/desires they had for seeking the information. The first theme concerned the sources of information the participants utilized to conduct informal research. The second theme explored how the participants used media for instrumental purposes to educate themselves about healthy food habits. It also explored the ways in which digital media specifically could be used in this context. The third theme revealed how the participants used media to spark behavioral change in their lives. Contained within the third theme was the finding that specific media personalities were very important to the participants as they decided to make healthier food selections.²

“Places That Tell You Different Stuff”: Using Media as Sources of Factual Information

The participants used the print, broadcast, and digital media to gather information about healthy food habits. Particularly helpful were recipes and television, because they showed them how certain foods affect people. Regarding print media, participants stated that they used “some cookbooks and magazines” for informal information searches. Purchasing these print media, or gathering them from their friends, allowed them to find recipes that gave them ideas about how to prepare foods in new and exciting ways. Participant O said that she “buys all those magazines...at the cash register”:

Interviewer: Why do you -- why do you buy magazines [like *Women's Health*]?

²Omissions from participant quotes are represented by ellipsis points (...) and quotes amended are denoted by square brackets [ ] for clarity.

Interviewee: Because they always have “Lose 30 pounds in a week”...And then they have, like, books up there that has, like, um, eating 430 calories a day...Stuff like that...And then they give you like a month worth of recipes.

In this example, the participant explains that catchy, if unrealistic, headlines grab her attention and lead to her purchasing magazines. In addition, the added bonus for her is the many recipes. Participant 6 said she possessed four cookbooks and named some hard-cover cookbooks that are companions to their magazine formats: “I got *Good Housekeeping*, *Better Home[s]* and *Garden*, good, uh, cookbook.”

Like the print media, the broadcast media were also used to discover new recipes. In addition, these media had the ability to show participants the impact that particular foods/substances have on people. As Participant B explains here, seeing a food she has never tasted before being enjoyed by people on morning shows makes her curious:

Like, what you call it? Um, like I always watch my WDRB, Fox 41...Because the news is on forever -- like four hours in the morning. But they always have, like, you know one is a different restaurant...so it exposes me to different types of foods and like, I'm like, ooh, I want to try that one day.

The digital media, the Internet in particular, were used to find information about F&V as well. Both specific websites and general searches through search engines were used for tips and recipes about food preparation, as Participant 20 stated:

I don't have a specific, you know, a specific [site I find most useful and most helpful.] I mean it just, I just go and see what they have to say and then I decide whether I wanna use the information or not. So it's not like it gives me a wealth of information. I just may have a question that I wanna answer...If I have a question then I Google the question.

In this particular example, the participant utilized Google, rather than specific websites, for information about healthy food habits. By contrast, Participant O, who above stated her enjoyment of magazines with catchy article titles, used a few specific websites to find recipes, with the Food Network's website being a choice favorite:

Interviewer: Um, what websites do you find the most useful for, like, your recipes or -- where do you go?

Interviewee: Food Network...Southern Living...Better Homes & Gardens.

Interviewer: Uh, would you say that these are actually the ones that are most useful to you?

Interviewee: Um, Food Network.

By contrast, Participant C's comments below illustrate how she utilizes the Internet for more general information. Because this participant sometimes did not trust her doctor's recommendations, she would use the Internet to find information for herself:

I don't know. Well you know, I do have a doctor. I can't say -- I talk to him sometimes but he -- I don't like some of what he tells because he always had a big plan for your life. But he's heavier than me, so it's like if it's that easy, why are you so heavy? You know? But I mean I talk to him, I look up, anything that I want to know, I usually look it up online. I don't really ask -- I don't know why.

In each of these examples, participants used the print, broadcast, and digital media in an instrumental way to obtain more information about food preparation in the form of recipes, or about the impact of certain foods on the body. In this way, media were informative for the participants.

“They Teach [You] What to Do”: Using Media to Take Small Steps Toward Behavioral Change

As illustrated above, the participants explained that they utilized the Internet for food preparation information. In addition, general comments were made about how the print media and broadcast media met people's needs as specific teaching tools. For example, Participant 15 stated that cooking shows educate her about the foods she should eat, in a way that does not discourage her or make her feel ashamed about her current habits:

I think [the cooking shows] make you feel good...they teach you what to eat...I mean you know I don't think it [makes] you feel bad about yourself...it doesn't make me feel bad about myself.

According to the overwhelming majority of the participants, the Internet, as well as mobile technology, could be used to educate people about and encourage people to eat F&V. Many participants expressed that they felt digital media could be used for a variety of educational purposes, even if they did not have access to these media themselves. In the following instance, Participant R suggests that advertising built into social media could educate people about healthy food habits:

Well, they could...we have Facebook and all this other stuff. If they would put some kinda like -- every once in a while when you're on an app it'll do, like, ten seconds until you can go into the app and you have the little commercial thing.

In the next instance, Participant O reveals how one website that is helpful to her could be helpful to others:

Because the Internet makes 'em more aware...A lot of times, people don't just wanna sit down and watch Food Network, like myself...But they might wanna cook something...So they'll go to the Internet. Then, like, when you go to Food Network, you put in one ingredient, and then all the recipes that's -- that uses that ingredient is on there...And then, like, if you don't have something at home, like vanilla or baking soda or something like that, they tell you a substitution you can use for it...they don't have to be as limited to, like, the one little option that you grew up with. It shows you different ways to, like -- for instance, if I was making Chicken Alfredo...Instead of just making the Chicken Alfredo, I can add some broccoli to it and add my green vegetable.

According to this participant, a website like Food Network gives people options for food preparation based on the ingredient(s) they have on hand.

In addition, Participant 20 possessed mobile technology, but did not use this platform to learn more about healthy food habits. She pointed out that awareness of websites that provided information about healthy eating habits was low in her community:

- Interviewer: Sites, okay. Okay. Do you have access to the Internet on your cell phone?
- Interviewee: Yes.
- Interviewer: Okay. And, um, do you have any food related applications, um, or mobile sites that you can use on a regular basis [that are] food related?
- Interviewee: No.
- Interviewer: Okay. Well do you think technology can be useful to help people in their community to be healthier?
- Interviewee: Yeah, but we have to, we have to know which websites do you use and which apps and that's not known.

In all of these examples, the participants expressed that the digital media do have the ability to teach their users how to modify their culinary habits to cook healthier meals.

They “Really Encourage You”: Using Media to Motivate Oneself

In addition to stating how media, digital media in particular, could teach people about unfamiliar ingredients and healthier foods, the participants explained that media encouraged them to make changes in their food preparation and to eat healthier foods. This theme differed from the previous one because within this theme, the participants mentioned specific instances in which media led to changes in their food consumption and exercise behaviors. Participant 15 said that advertising and cooking shows encouraged her family to try new foods:

It could be like a television, sitting and watching TV and most of the time we get up from the TV, we see something advertised on the TV we will get up and go get it, or go out and get it. That's how we try a lot of stuff. The cooking shows on TV I watch them.

In the next examples, the participants explained that the physique of TV characters encouraged them to eat healthier. For instance, Participant 10 stated that “just the form—the body look” of her favorite TV characters inspired her to eat more F&V. Participant H's response below echoed that of the previous participant's:

Yeah, [I'm inspired to eat more fruits and vegetables] when I see those that got that shape. When I think about the shapes of their bodies, it's like, yeah, I need to slow it down. It really do inspire you to try to lose weight. Like when Oprah lost all that weight. She changed the way she ate. So that sort of helped me out.

Also unique to this theme was the recurrence of specific media personalities who encouraged these behavioral changes. The participants named Oprah Winfrey, *Barefoot Contessa's* Ina Garten, and singer/actress/Weight Watchers spokesperson Jennifer Hudson as influences. However, Dr. Mehmet Oz, Paula Deen, and Rachael Ray were mentioned the most frequently as influential. Dr. Oz greatly impacted these participants, as illustrated here. Participant S stated that she “listen[ed] to that Dr. Oz a lot on different things.” Participant N explained how Dr. Oz provided her with information that helped her to better understand her metabolism:

- Interviewee: I was eating snacks all the time. I've stopped eating a lot of sweets with a lot of sugar.
- Interviewer: Do you remember what he said about it?
- Interviewee: Sugar turns into fat, fat turns into calories, pounds or whatever.
- Interviewer: What does he say?

Interviewee: Sugar turns into fat.

Interviewer: Sugar turns into fat? And?

Interviewee: There's a lot of sugar in everything you eat. Hidden sugar.

One other participant, Participant 20, explained that Dr. Oz inspired her to change her eating habits because of “the knowledge that he has on his show and how certain...[foods] affect your body and the problems that they cause.” While Dr. Oz seems to appeal to viewers because of his ability to show his audience tangible outcomes/impacts regarding various health issues, the participants in the study related to Paula Deen and Rachael Ray on a more intimate level, also taking into account the hosts' physiques and personal lives and comparing these hosts to themselves. As Participant 6 illustrated:

I don't use butter. I'll use margarine instead of butter. But I don't use as much as Paula Deen. I don't like greasy food. And, uh, I use canola oil – Well, not canola oil. Uh, virgin olive oil.

Participant O had a more positive opinion of Paula Deen's cooking, and also used her as a frame of reference:

Um, you know, Paula Deen – I take to her because she cooks a lot like me...And she reminds me of an older version of myself...[Paula Deen and Rachael Ray] make me feel pretty good...Because Paula Deen – I find I relate to her because she's the mother of two boys...And she was single mother for a long time...And Rachael Ray – she's kinda curvy like me and vivacious...And she takes it in stride...So she makes me a little bit more comfortable with my hippies – my hippy self, yeah.

As one can see, the participants' disagree about the preparation methods some cooking hosts utilize (e.g., Paula Deen). However, these hosts are still appealing to the participants because of their family lives or body types. In the following example, Participant D recognizes that the hosts can afford more expensive ingredients and have already completed the dish. Despite this, she can still understand and enjoy the preparation process, as illustrated in this extended example:

Sometimes [Rachael Ray] makes something, I say, “Oh, I can make that. Oh, I've made that.” I may make mine a little bit different, but because she uses other herbs, and I limit myself to them. There are some of the herbs that I don't even use. I have some of them in the cabinet that I don't use on a regular basis...I always watch Rachael Ray. And then I look at other cooking shows. So they can get kind of fancy. They get a little bit too fancy for me, but I get a – kind of sometimes I get a little basic idea. But I can understand the cooking shows because they got plenty of money and they can have everything. And they have everything on hand already fixed and done.

Participant O, who referred to herself as “hippy,” followed some of Rachael Ray's cooking directives, in addition to comparing their body types:

Like I said, I used to use margarine, 'cause I grew up using margarine. I started using real butter. Um, Rachael Ray – she cooks with E-V-E – uh, L-O –...So I use extra – or extra virgin olive oil now. Instead of cooking more so – like my fish, I

used to cook it in vegetable oil and deep fry it. Now I put a little bit of olive oil in the skillet and turn it over. That's about it.

Rachael Ray inspired this participant to cook using extra virgin olive oil, a healthier alternative to butter and grease.

In these examples, the participants explained how TV personalities encouraged them to prepare their foods using healthier methods. Dr. Oz, Paula Deen, and Rachael Ray were the participants' favorites. The participants appreciated Dr. Oz because he explained how healthy food habits, such as eating F&V, could positively impact their health. Paula Deen and Rachael Ray were enjoyed and admired not only for their cooking expertise, but for their human qualities: the participants could relate to their bodies and their personal lives, which inspired them to try new things.

Discussion

The aim of this study was to describe how African American women in Louisville and Hopkinsville, Kentucky used media to gather information about healthy food habits. The researchers found that participants used media as informal sources of information, yet also used media to teach themselves about small changes they could make to develop healthier food habits. They also used media to motivate and initiate change in their lives.

The first finding was that the participants used cookbooks, magazines, TV shows, and both general web searches and specific websites for information about food, searching for both nutrition information and preparation information. The participants did not mention any specific African American targeted media used for this informal learning, but rather they referenced print, broadcast, and Internet sources that appeal to a general audience.

The second finding appears to be the alternative to the first: in addition to informal learning, the participants also use media to teach themselves about small steps toward healthy food habits. However, this theme differed from the first in that the participants were not using mobile applications to help themselves, rather they identified the social media as platforms for teaching the African American community about how to adopt healthy food habits. Even though some of the participants did not have access to the Internet and/or mobile technology, they recognized that these media can be used to help facilitate behavioral change. This sentiment was expressed by participants regardless of age. Because one of the larger goals of this project is to determine the best ways to disseminate information regarding healthy food habits to the African American community, and then execute this plan, this understanding of which tools have the potential to facilitate this change is invaluable.

It should be noted that some participants in Hopkinsville had access to the Internet on a mobile device, while others did not. As mentioned above, this question was not asked of the Louisville participants, and reflects the researchers' realization that this data was necessary and should be included in the study, even though the Louisville interviews had already been completed. One such framework that speaks to this situation is the technology gap/digital divide, which also explains how audience members use their media, as well as access it.

This theory recognizes that there is indeed a “divide between those with access to the Internet and those without access to the opportunities that [Internet] ‘connectedness’ provides” (Cho, Zuniga, Rojas, & Shah, 2003, p. 47). The particular gap discovered in the context of the current study appeared to be a result of socio-economics, as some Hopkinsville participants were more financially stable than their fellow Hopkinsvillians. Although the participants recognized how social media could be used as teaching tools, nothing could be gained if people were not made aware of these sources. As Participant 20 from Hopkinsville stated, “We have to know which websites do you use and that's not known.” This quote serves as a reminder that any educational program designed for a specific community must be widely introduced to that community and be accessible to its members. Digital media can be integral in teaching members of the African American community more healthy eating habits—but they have to be familiar with the websites that carry this information. Further, several health organizations are using mobile phone strategies to reach underserved populations in instances they otherwise could not. For instance, consider Project HealthDesign, which monitors the song choices and texts of chronically-depressed teenagers to send them medication reminders when they are feeling ill. Utilizing mobile alerts appears a smart strategy to reach specific populations: minority children (African- and Hispanic-American) are more likely to engage with mobile technologies than their Caucasian-American counterparts (Rideout, Lauricella, & Wartella, 2011). AsFox (2010) argues:

If [an] organization's information is not available on a small screen, it's not available at all to people who rely on their mobile phones for access. That's likely to be young people, people with lower household incomes, and recent immigrants – arguably important target audiences for public health messages. (para. 21)

Fox's statements coupled with past research (e.g., Rideout, Lauricella, & Wartella, 2011) and the findings presented here suggest that more research is needed to determine if digital media outlets should be a priority when considering the proper platform to educate minority populations, such as those who participated in this study.

The third finding was that media were used to induce change in participants' healthy food habits. Television had the upper hand here, supporting the adage that “seeing is believing.” Television hosts were instrumental in motivating audiences to try and to eat healthier foods. Although previous research has found that the most popular programs among African American viewers were fictional narratives such as *The Game* and reality TV shows such as *Basketball Wives* and *American Idol* (e.g., Guskin, Moore, & Mitchell, 2011), in the specific context of health behavior it was Dr. Oz who communicated motivating information because he explained medical issues with vivid visual aids. Even if participants could not exactly explain certain metabolic processes (“sugar turns into fat, fat turns into calories, pounds or whatever”), participants recognized his ability to translate medical knowledge into a language they could understand that motivated their personal behavioral changes. As Participant 20 stated above, Oz's knowledge of “how certain...[foods] affect your body and the problems that they cause” has garnered him several fans among these participants. This finding suggests that any programs developed for these particular community members

should provide them with concrete and thorough information that vividly illustrates the consequences of one's food habits.

In addition, the participants appeared to develop parasocial relationships with certain media personalities. For example, the participants identified with Oprah's challenges with weight loss and viewed her as inspirational. Squire's (1994) analysis of the *Oprah Winfrey Show* includes a mention of how frequently audience members tell her how much they enjoy the show, "and how they feel they know her almost as a friend" (p. 73). The participants in this study appear to feel similarly. Further, the curvy bodies and cooking techniques of Paula Deen and Rachael Ray appealed to the participants. This general positive regard for these women suggests a parasocial relationship exists between the participants and these female hosts. The hosts appear human and relatable to these participants. Sacramento365.com (2012) quotes Deen, "Once I walk on stage, there's no telling what will happen...I always start with good intentions in the kitchen but by evening's end I'm so involved with the audience and crying with laughter. There is nothing better than an audience that wants to play!" (p. 3) The audience that engages with Deen is not only in her production studio, but also in the homes of Deen's viewers. Interestingly, none of the participants discussed *Down Home with the Neelys*, Food Network's cooking program that features a married African American couple, nor did they cite *The Doctor's* Lisa Masterson, who is the only female and African American featured on the talk show, as influential figures.

Overall, this study illustrates that the U&G perspective is fruitful for discerning the specific ways in which members of the African American community in Hopkinsville, and Louisville, Kentucky, utilize media to gather healthy food information and help them adopt healthier habits. The women interviewed here utilized media and complex strategies to access information relevant to healthy food habits. This study also reveals that when determining a mediated health plan for a particular community including members of the community during its development is essential in discovering possible media usage differences, such as the technology gap/digital divide issues. Researchers might have to spend time brainstorming and exploring innovative media pathways to reach targeted communities. As evidenced by these findings, media can be powerful educational and motivational tools.

Limitations, Implications for Future Study, and Conclusion

One limitation of this study was that as a result of the snowball sampling procedures, the women interviewed in Hopkinsville were generally more economically stable than their Louisville counterparts, suggesting that expensive technologies might be more accessible in Hopkinsville, thereby affecting digital media access. It is possible that more socio-economically-similar samples of the African American participants might still have displayed evidence of the technology gap/digital divide, and it is probable that this study's sampling processes skewed evidence of this situation. Future studies should explore the best mediated methods for disseminating the benefits of healthy food habits to the African American community, in hopes that these procedures might reduce the occurrence of diabetes, high blood pressure, heart disease, and other health concerns in the community.

In conclusion, this study provides evidence that media can, and do, play a positive role in helping members of the African American community learn more about healthy food habits. Despite the numbers of African Americans in Kentucky and across the nation suffering from cardiovascular disease, this study suggests that utilizing digital media strategies could be one factor in reducing the number of African Americans with this disease. In addition, the fact that interviewees found media personalities who encourage parasocial bonding between themselves and those who engage in their programs charismatic implies that these shows are entertaining, educational, and motivational. Ultimately, media *can* be used to encourage healthy food habits in the community.

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Table 1
City Information

City Name	Hopkinsville, Kentucky	Louisville, Kentucky	West Louisville, Kentucky
Population	Approximately 31,500	Approximately 683,000	Approximately 11,474
Demographics	62.6% Caucasian American; 31.9% African American	77.4% Caucasian American; 18.9% African American	8.0% Caucasian American; 88.9% African American
Average Household Size	2.39	2.37	-
Average Family Size	2.95	2.97	-
Median Income	Approximately \$30,400	Approximately \$39,500	\$19,965
Median Income for a Family	Approximately \$37,500	Approximately \$49,100	\$24,130
Percentage of Population Living Below the Poverty Line	16.8%	12.4%	33.8%
Percentage of Families Living Below the Poverty Line	13.6%	9.5%	36.6%

Table 2
Sample Interview Questions

Section	Sample Question
Demographics	How many people currently live in your household? Who are they? (relationship, ages, school/working)
Demographics	Are you currently employed? If yes, where? What is your work schedule? Do you work day/night shift?
Shopping habits and food access	Who in the household does most of the grocery shopping?
Shopping habits and food access	What kinds of fruits and vegetables does the family buy on a regular basis?
Food security	In the last year, since last November, did you (or other adults in your household) ever cut the size of meals, or skip meals because there wasn't enough money for food?
Food security	When some families run out of food and do not have money to buy more, they just do not eat nutritious meals. In the last year was this true for you family?
Meal preparation	In this home, describe for me what is a typical: breakfast, lunch, dinner, snack.
Meal preparation	If we were to look in your refrigerator and cupboard what food items do you have on hand?
Sources of information	Do you use recipes? If so, where do you get them?
Sources of information	Do you ever find yourself comparing yourself to any of your favorite media personalities/TV characters? If so, which ones?
Sources of information	Do/have they ever inspired you to change your eating habits? How so?
Perceptions about health and eating	When the term "healthy eating" is mentioned, what food comes to mind to eat and what to avoid?
Perceptions about health and eating	Where do you get information about healthy eating? (family, friends, TV, magazines, read labels, church, other?)
Community	In general, what foods do you associate with the African American community (regardless of income)?
Community	Overall, what do you think can be done to help African Americans eat more fruits and vegetables?
Media	Do you ever find yourself comparing yourself to any of your favorite media personalities or TV characters?
Media	Do any of your favorite media personalities or media characters ever make you think about the foods you eat, especially with regard to fruits and vegetables?

Table 3

Participant Demographics

Name	Location	Age	Household Income	Highest Level of Education Attained	Received Food Assistance	Children Lived in the Household	Number of People in the Household	Utilized Recipes	Compared Herself to TV Personalities/ Characters*	Had Access to the Internet on a Mobile Device
Participant 1	Louisville	34	Less than \$20,000	Bachelor's Degree	Y	Y	5	Y	N	Not Asked
Participant 2	Louisville	32	\$40-60,000	Some college/vocation	N	Y	5	N	N	Not Asked
Participant 4	Louisville	38	Less than \$20,000	Some college/vocation	Y	Y	4	Y	N	Not Asked
Participant 5	Louisville	32	\$20-40,000	Some college/vocation	N	Y	4	Y	Y	Not Asked
Participant 6	Louisville	55	\$20-40,000	Some college/vocation	N	N	4	Y	Y	Not Asked
Participant 7	Louisville	25	\$60-80,000	Master's Degree	N	N	3	Y	N	Not Asked
Participant 8	Louisville	37	Less than \$20,000	Some college/vocation	Y	Y	5	N	N	Not Asked
Participant 10	Louisville	38	Less than \$20,000	Some college/vocation	Y	N	1	N	Y	Not Asked
Participant 12	Hopkinsville	38	\$40-60,000	High school/GED	N	Y	3	Y	Y	N
Participant 15	Hopkinsville	63	\$20-40,000	Less than high school	N	N	1	Y	N	N
Participant 16	Hopkinsville	58	Less than \$20,000	Some college/vocation	N	N	1	N	N	N
Participant 17	Hopkinsville	75	Less than \$20,000	Less than high school	N	N	1	N	N	N
Participant 20	Hopkinsville	39	Less than \$20,000	Bachelor's Degree	N	N	1	N	N	Y
Participant A	Louisville	28	Less than \$20,000	High school/GED	Y	Y	2	Y	N	Not Asked
Participant B	Louisville	26	Less than \$20,000	Master's Degree	Y	Y	6	N	N	Not Asked
Participant C	Louisville	32	Less than \$20,000	Bachelor's Degree	Y	Y	3	Y	N	Not Asked
Participant D	Louisville	80	Less than \$20,000	Less than high school	Y	Y	4	Y	Y	Not Asked
Participant E	Louisville	27	\$20-40,000	Some college/vocation	N	N	1	N	N	Not Asked
Participant F	Louisville	26	\$20-40,000	Some college/vocation	Y	Y	3	Y	N	Not Asked
Participant G	Louisville	28	\$40-60,000	Bachelor's Degree	N	Y	2	Y	N	Not Asked
Participant H	Louisville	51	\$20-40,000	High school/GED	N	N	4	Y	Y	Not Asked
Participant I	Louisville	54	Less than \$20,000	Less than high school	Y	N	1	Y	N	Not Asked
Participant N	Hopkinsville	46	\$60-80,000	High school/GED	N	N	3	Y	N	Y

Name	Location	Age	Household Income	Highest Level of Education Attained	Received Food Assistance	Children Lived in the Household	Number of People in the Household	Utilized Recipes	Compared Herself to TV Personalities/ Characters *	Had Access to the Internet on a Mobile Device
Participant O	Hopkinsville	28	Less than \$20,000	Some college/vocation	Y	Y	3	Y	Y	Y
Participant P	Hopkinsville	44	\$40-60,000	Some college/vocation	N	Y	4	N	N	Y
Participant R	Hopkinsville	38	\$20-40,000	Some college/vocation	Y	Y	3	Y	N	Y
Participant S	Hopkinsville	67	\$40-60,000	High school/GED	N	N	4	Y	N	N

Note.

* This question was not asked of the Louisville participants.