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Media and Music: A Qualitative Content Analysis of the African American Educational Experience as Portrayed in Black-Produced Films, Songs and Print Publications

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MEDIA AND MUSIC: A QUALITATIVE, CONTENT ANALYSIS OF THE AFRICAN

AMERICAN EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCE AS PORTRAYED IN BLACK-PRODUCED

FILMS, SONGS, AND PRINT PUBLICATIONS

by

Jamel Major

A Dissertation

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Education

Major: Leadership and Policy Studies

The University of Memphis

May 2020

Dedication

I am dedicating this dissertation to the four people who have played a tremendous role in shaping me into the man I am today. First and foremost, to my late grandparents, Florence and Roger Major, Sr., I appreciate all the prayers, love and encouragement you have shown me over the years. I would not be where I am without you. I would also like to remember my late great grandmother Victoria Saunders Rivers and my stepfather Rawlin Simmons. I love and miss you all so much. I hope I have made you proud.

Acknowledgments

  First and foremost, I thank God for his love, joy, peace, mercy and strength in helping me to get through this doctoral journey. I am also forever grateful for my praying mother, Sarah G. Major-Simmons. Thank you for your infinite love and all you have done for me. You have always stood by me and have been such an inspiration and positive influence in my life. I am blessed to have you as my mom. To my father, Christopher Venning, and stepmother, Aileen (Gena) Venning, I thank you both for your love, gratitude and caring hearts. I appreciate you more than words can ever say. I am also very fortunate to have siblings who have been such wonderful role models in my life. You all may not realize it, but I look up to you all more than you know. Seth, Brandon, Cara, Casi and Cori, you are constantly teaching me life lessons and helping me to be the best I can be. I would also like to thank my chair, Dr. Eric Platt, and members of my dissertation committee: Dr. Edith Gnanadass, Dr. Donna Menke, and Dr. Ladrica Menson-Furr for your leadership and guidance. Your input, expertise and advice has been invaluable. Last, but by no means least, I could not have completed this dissertation without the support of Dr. Donald Hopper and the Gamma Cohort (Roland, Stacy, Jill, Youlanda, Laura and Lauren). Thank you for being a shoulder to cry and lean on. I will forever cherish our lifelong friendships.

Abstract

African Americans have been treated unequally and unfairly by the media. This issue deserves national attention while stressing the need for more positive messages of African Americans. The intent of this study was to examine how Black produced films, Hip-Hop songs and magazines portray the African American high school educational experience. The theory that guides this paper is critical media literacy. Critical media literacy provides an opportunity to evaluate, understand and critically analyze all forms of media. A qualitative content analysis was used to determine how African Americans are depicted by Black producers, directors and writers. Central questions worth exploring were: (a) How is the African American experience in high school portrayed by Black producers, directors and writers? (b) In what ways do film, Hip-Hop and magazines illustrate the usefulness of the educational experience for social mobility (financial attainment, career vocation attainment, and school attainment)? and (c) Do certain types of media portray the African American high school experience in a more positive or negative light? The results of the study show that African Americans high school students are often portrayed as violent, criminal, poor, uneducated, overly sexual and athletes in popular films, Hip-Hop and magazines. These negative cultural stereotypes remain a concern for many African Americans.

Keywords: African American educational experience, critical media literacy

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Chapter I – Introduction

There has been great interest regarding the educational experiences of African Americans in high school, and few studies have focused on the perspectives of Black producers, directors and writers who portray African Americans in popular films; for example, *Lean on Me* (1989) where principal Joe Clark (Morgan Freeman) saves a school from being taken over by the state; music, in particular Hip-Hop, such as artist Kanye West's "School Spirit" (2004) which focuses on the experience of dropping out of school; and magazines like *Ebony and Jet, Essence, and Black Enterprise*. The purpose of this study is to inform Black producers, directors and writers about the messages they are portraying regarding the educational experiences of African Americans when compared to the research literature and how these messages should be aimed at being more positive. The study will also expose educators, teachers and parents to these messages, both positive and negative, making them more knowledgeable and aware of how to educate students. Historically, African Americans have been portrayed as disrespectful, violent, greedy, ignorant, and power driven (Dates, 1990). One of the first depictions of African Americans in film was blackface. Due to racial discrimination in the 19th and early 20th centuries, Hollywood did not use African American actors or actresses. Instead, blackface became a popular form of entertainment which allowed Hollywood to use different characters without having to hire Blacks. Actor Al Jolson made blackface popular with characters such as Amos 'n' Andy and Jakie Rabinowitz (Guerrero, 2012). These roles were demeaning for Black actors and actresses. Stereotypes such as sambo, mammy, coon, and Uncle Tom were also detrimental to the reputation of African Americans. For instance, "Sambo", one of the most recognized

stereotypes in American history, became popular through the children's book *The Story of Little Black Sambo* by Helen Bannerman (1898). It told the story of a boy named Sambo who outsmarted a group of hungry tigers. "Sambo" refers to Black men who were considered to be very frivolous, loyal, and happy-go-lucky (Turner, 1995). The stereotypical image of Blacks have changed in some media, and in recent years Hollywood has made an effort to eliminate some of the racial tension by employing more African Americans. While these historical stereotypes have disappeared from mainstream films, they have resurfaced in new media representations; for example, in the 1980s and 1990s, stereotypes of Black men shifted and the primary images were of drug dealers, crack victims, the underclass, the homeless, and subway muggers (Drummond, 1990). However, the predominant modern stereotypes are the violent, brutish African-American male and the dominant, lazy African-American female - the Welfare Mother (Hurwitz, Peffley & Sniderman, 1997). Because the media's portrayal of African Americans has played a key role in the formation of many of these modern stereotypes, educating people about how inaccurate and damaging they can be is essential.

Education has always been a core value in the African American experience, and it has historically been equated with freedom and empowerment, and has served as a strategy to combat these types of discrimination, exclusion, slavery, segregation, and other systematic forms of oppression (Ervin & Sheer, 2016). While the landscape has significantly improved and Black students are achieving significantly more from an academic standpoint than they have in the past, there is still work to be done (Center for American Progress (2017). According to Ervin & Sheer (2016) education has long been held as a key to success in American society by Black leaders,

families, and civic organizations, but the year between the 1940s and the 1970s were little short of revolutionary in fostering attainment among African Americans. Since the 1960s, the unemployment rate for Black Americans has been between two and 2.5 times higher than that of white Americans (U.S. Census Bureau, 2017). From the 1960s to early 2010s, there was a marked decrease in the gap between White and Black Americans completing a high school diploma or GED (U.S. Census Bureau, 2017). However, the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) (2019) confirms that there is still a significant gap between White and Black Americans in terms of on-time high school graduation. In 2016-2017, 88.6% of White students finished high school within four years, compared with 77.8% of Black students (NCES, 2019). Although there is other research that influences the high school population (grades 9-12); for instance, social intelligence norms, there have been few studies that have looked specifically at these grades and how more positive portrayals of African American high school students might help benefit this group socially and culturally. The high school has stood as a critical hurdle in the quest for education for many years. Black schooling, largely at the elementary level, existed before the Civil War, grew in the latter 1800s, and began to blossom in the early decades of the 20th century (Ervin & Sheer, 2016).

The systematic challenges of the Black experience continue today for parents and children (W.K. Kellogg Foundation, 2014). Poverty and racism, past and present, compromise the ability of many poor minority families – especially African American families – to provide the secure base young children need (Grusky, Varner, & Mattingly, 2015). However, the educational system in America has seen some progress. In 2009, the Obama Administration

established a set of reforms to ensure that every child in the U.S. receives a quality education.

These improvements include higher standards, more useful assessments and data, and stronger

teachers in the classroom. Bowman, Comer and Johns (2018) argue that the ultimate solution to

the education gap is the elimination of race and class prejudice and oppression. Film, Hip-Hop

and the print media also play an important role in helping to fill these achievement gaps. They

can all inform the public about social issues, raise public awareness and can be used as an aid for

teaching. According to Kellner (1995) these forms of media entertainment use sight, sound, and

spectacle to seduce audiences into identifying with certain views, attitudes, feelings, and

positions. "Media and consumer culture work hand in hand to generate thought and behavior that

conform to existing values, institutions, beliefs and practices, yet audiences may resist the

dominant meanings and messages, create their own readings and appropriations of mass

produced culture, use their culture as resources to empower themselves and to invent their own

meanings, identities, and forms of life" (Kellner, 1995, p. 3). Holtzman and Sharpe (2014) argue

that entertainment media in the form of film, Hip-Hop and magazines offer images that can

either fill in the gaps of our formal and informal learning, reinforce what we already have

learned, or challenge previous learning (p. 30).

Representation of African Americans in the Media

The representation of African Americans in media – speech, writing, still or moving

pictures – has been a major concern in mainstream American culture and a component of media

bias in the United States (Chandler & Munday, 2011). Such media representation is not always

seen in a positive light and can lead to controversial or misconstrued images of what African

Americans represent. For example, research on the portrayal of African Americans in prime-time television from 1955 to 1986 found that only 6 percent of the characters were African-Americans, while 89 percent of the TV population was white. Among these African-American characters, 19 percent lacked a high school diploma and 47 percent were low in economic status (Lichter, 1987). However, great progress has been made over the years. According to a 2018 report from the Department of Social Sciences at UCLA, despite making up less than 13 percent of the U.S. population, Blacks were overrepresented among actors in broadcast scripted shows in 2015-16, claiming 17 percent of the roles (Hunt, Ramon, Tran, Sargent & Roychoudhury, 2018). Unfortunately, African Americans must continue to overcome long chains of media stereotypes. For instance, these media stereotypes can create low expectations for African American males. Media images of what being Black is include foul language, poor performance in school, criminal behavior, athletic prowess, buffoonish conduct, bad attitudes and skirt chasing (Diuguid & Rivers, 2000). Diuguid and Rivers (2000) argue that these stereotypes can hold adult African Americans back, and young African Americans who witness that internalize those limitations and create for themselves a generation-wide barrier to achievement.

It is important to note that stereotyping occurs within each individual in a given society, and there is no exception with those who are producing media content (Kulaszewicz, 2015). "Media producers are also embedded within a society that is affected by racial tension and misperceptions, and this reality translates into media production that may in itself reinforce stereotyping or is directly influenced by racial perceptions in a negative manner" (Kulaszewicz, 2015, p. 19). However, all of the blame cannot be placed on White males who run the industry,

for a small number of Black entertainers perpetrate these stereotypes as well (Horton et al., 1999). "Even though they defend their actions as an 'insiders look' into the life of a certain minority group, they are guilty of the same offenses that opponents have indicted the media, film and entertainment industries of" (Horton et al., 1999, p. 1).

According to the research not all studies dealing with Black portrayals in the media have been stereotypical. For instance, Gunter (1998) analyzed portrayals between British television and American television. He observed that Whites were more likely to be aggressors than Blacks. In addition, he noticed that Whites were more likely to be victims than Blacks. Atkin (1992) found that Blacks were more prominent in regulatory roles, such as law enforcement officers and depicted with more positive characters than before. Kocic (2017) examined the representation of Black masculinity in four popular Hollywood films: Sergio Corbucci's *Django* from 1966; Gordon Park's *Shaft* from 1971 and their contemporary adaptations, *Shaft* (2000), directed by John Singleton and *Django Unchained* (2012), directed by Quentin Tarantino. One of the objectives of this research was to study how the stereotype of a violent black thug has been deconstructed and modified in more recent movies to usher the "Black Hero" character (Kocic, 2017). The author noticed that many features that were stereotypically ascribed to Black male characters have been deconstructed and subverted in a more recent period, thus paving the way for the genuine "Black Hero" (Kocic, 2017).

Tosi (2011) argues that while representations of African Americans are changing, much more work needs to be done and the media industry will not change unless viewers demand that change. Hence, there is a need to help our nation's youth become more media-literate and to

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understand both the intended and unintended messages coming out of Hollywood. Davis and Gandy (1999) suggest that African Americans develop and use strategies in dealing with biased media images of Blacks so they can protect themselves from possible negative influence. Donald Bogle (2016), a noted Black Hollywood historian, spent many years tying to provide a rationale for why the media industry consistently portrayed African Americans in roles that perpetrated certain cultural stereotypes. Based on his research, there is a certain amount of media illiteracy within the industry itself, and despite recent attempts at nullifying stereotypical African American portrayals, in many cases an unintended message can be found running concurrent with the intended one (Tosi, 2011). Encouraging people to recognize these stereotypes not only informs them of the oppression Blacks face, it plays a significant role in shaping attitudes toward African Americans, especially in film.

Film

Bogle's (2016) book, *Toms, Coons, Mulattoes, Mammies, and Bucks*, examines how the Hollywood film industry has portrayed African Americans in movies and the recurring stereotypical characters that appear. The presence of African Americans in major motion picture roles has stirred controversy since Hattie McDaniel played Mammy, the house servant, in Gone with the Wind. "Through most of the 20th century, images of African-Americans in advertising were mainly limited to servants like the pancake-mammy Aunt Jemima and Rastus, the chef on the Cream of Wheat box" (Staples, 2012). During the early years of the motion picture industry, Black performers were often depicted as "shuckin" and "jiving" caricatures (Lawrence, 2007). The migration of large numbers of African Americans from the rural South to urban areas across

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the U.S. between the 1910s and 1940s shifted the racial landscape, and mainstream Hollywood began to reflect this demographic change in its films. The growing momentum from the Civil Rights movement also brought more changes in Hollywood as the 1950s saw an increase in large productions featuring all-Black casts and performers such as Dorothy Dandridge and Sidney Poitier who were cast in more positive roles (Lawrence, 2007). In the 1970s a variety of opportunities open to African American actors, directors, writers and producers continued to expand, presenting Black audiences with new depictions of the Black community. These performers paved the way for the Blaxploitation movement, which began in 1970 and flourished until 1975. According to Lawrence (2007) the movement is characterized by films that feature a Black hero of heroine, Black supporting characters, a predominately Black urban setting, a display of Black sexuality, excessive violence, and a contemporary rhythm and blues soundtrack. While the motion picture industry has evolved in a more positive direction over the vast majority of the 20th century, many controversial images and stereotypical messages still exist. For instance, opportunities for black youth are commonly seen to be limited to poverty. Berry (1994) states that the future of Black urban youth is mangled by racism, prejudice, discrimination, and economic and educational stagnation. Hollywood has also historically portrayed the Black male negatively, providing inappropriate role models for young black males. According to Miller (1998) Black males have been characterized only in terms of society's own political agenda and its own economic gain. These media representations of black men not only serve the interests of the dominant white class and help maintain existing institutions, but they also keep black people from positions of power and stature in American society (Miller, 1998). Frequently, African

American students are portrayed as athletes with serious deficiencies in reading and basic skills and the classroom is merely a backdrop to the football field, basketball court or track (Hayes, 1996). Movies such as "Blue Chips," "The Program" and the highly-acclaimed documentary "Hoop Dreams" all deal with the experience of talented athletes whose primary goal is to transcend their struggling economic backgrounds with sports, and while college is simply a vehicle to their dreams, few teachers or coaches talk to them about other career choices besides sports (Hayes, 1996). However, in the Hip-Hop music industry artists have been offering lessons of success to their fans and listeners for decades.

Hip-Hop

In the early 70s, in New York's South Bronx, the cultural phenomenon of Hip-Hop was born. The mastermind behind its birth was Clive Campbell, aka DJ Kool Herc, who was from Kingston, Jamaica. Responding to the nightclub culture of the Bronx, DJ Kool Herc used two turn tables to accentuate the parts of the song that people liked best, and he rapped along to encourage breakdancing and emphasize a syncopated beat (Jackson & Anderson, 2009). This gave rise to rap music: competitive DJs began to rap while sampling, mixing and scratching music during block parties that were hosted by Kool Herc (Jackson & Anderson, 2009). According to Aldridge (2005) Hip-Hop artists from the late 1970s have criticized the U.S. education system and argued that public schools often perpetuate "miseducation." Since emerging on the Hip-Hop scene in the mid-1980s, KRS-One, also known as "The Teacher," has offered a scathing critique of the American educational system and its curricula, while calling for more historically accurate portrayals of African Americans in textbooks and other classroom

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materials (Aldridge, 2005). According to Petchauer (2009) Hip-Hop has become relevant to the field of education and educational research in three distinct ways:

> First, at an increasing rate, teachers are centering rap music texts in urban high school curricula to empower marginalized groups, teach academic skills, and educate students about how aspects of their lives are subject to manipulation and control by capitalist demands; Second, Hip-Hop exists as more than a musical genre. The creative practices of Hip-Hop and the messages constructed in the music are woven into the processes of identity formation to help youth conceive of themselves, others and the world around them; and finally, more and more higher education institutions around the world are engaging Hip-Hop in an academically rigorous manner through courses, research, conferences and symposia. (p. 947)

While Hip-Hop is indisputably the dominant youth culture, Evelyn (2000) argues that it can be very brash and vulgar where men wear lots of diamonds and other expensive jewelry, book bad bitches (usually scantily clad, less than the take home kind of girl) and in general, party it up. With college completion statistics at an embarrassing low and the Black-White achievement gap getting wider, perhaps it's time to be concerned if the culture's malicious message is at play (Evelyn, 2000). In fact, many in the Black community believe that Hip-Hop is bad for black people, detrimental to black existence, and destabilizes the efforts of African Americans to obtain social and economic mobility (Richmond, 2013). Thus, Hip-Hop undermines the gains of the Civil Rights Movement which fought so diligently to make racial equality a reality for

African Americans (Goff, 2008). However, Barack Obama, the first black president of the U.S. would arguably defy this notion of Hip-Hop undermining the reality of what a Black person could achieve in America more than ever (Richmond, 2013). Over the years, magazine publishers have also highlighted the success of Blacks by recognizing and celebrating their identity and culture.

Magazines

The history of magazine publishing by Blacks dates back as far as the first Black newspaper (Diuguid & Rivers, 2000). "New England born militant Black abolitionist" David Ruggles was the editor of *Mirror of Liberty*, which was published in New York in 1838 (Lee, 1997). Thomas Hamilton began publication of the Anglo-African Magazine in 1859, which became a weekly and ran until 1885 (Diuguid & Rivers, 2000). One of the struggles all of the publications faced was the limited readership the publishers could expect in the Black community. For Blacks who could afford the publications, the literacy rate was very low. However, this did not stop the publication of magazines. Successful Black magazines that exist today include John Johnson's *Ebony* and *Jet* magazines. *Ebony* is widely read in the U.S. and abroad and serves as a good resource for keeping up with famous Black people in the U.S. (Diuguid & Rivers, 2000). Earl Graves's *Black Enterprise* takes a no-fluff approach to economic issues and opportunities targeted to African American entrepreneurs and executives (Diuguid & Rivers, 2000). Historically, Black people did not fare well in the photographs of the early days of the newspaper and magazine industries (Diuguid & Rivers, 2000). Yale University political scientist Martin Gilens released a study that revealed that photo editors at leading

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newsmagazines had a false impression of the racial composition of the poor (Freeman, 1997).

Gilens' study showed the poor portrayed in the newsmagazines were much less likely to be

employed than their real-world counterparts, and this distortion was greater for African

Americans: 42 percent of poor African Americans work, but only 12 percent of poor blacks

shown in the newsmagazines do (Freeman, 1997). Interviews with photo editors at *Time*,

Newsweek and *U.S. News & World Report* showed that they had a distorted impression of the

racial makeup of the poor, and on average, they estimated that 42 percent of America's poor

people are Black. That may account for the decisions that they make on how to portray poor

people. (Freeman, 1997). Humphrey and Schuman (1984) conducted a content analysis of ads

featured in Time and Ladies' Home Journal from 1950 to 1980 to examine changes in the

portrayal of Black people. Humphrey and Schuman (1984) discovered that in 1950, Black people

were never portrayed in dominant roles and were portrayed in subordinate positions in 62 percent

of the ads; furthermore, they determined that all of the ads featuring Black people portrayed them

in low-skilled labor positions (e.g., laborers, cooks, servants). By 1982, only 14 percent of the

ads featuring Black people portrayed them in low-skilled labor positions. In contrast, White

people were portrayed as high-status, idle consumers in magazine ads from 1950 to 1982 while

Black people were overrepresented in the occupation of professional athlete (Humphrey &

Schuman, 1984). Bowen and Schmid (1997) confirmed most of the previous researchers' results,

finding that Black people were most often portrayed as athletes, musicians, and in family

settings.

Statement of the Problem

While there has been great interest in education regarding the portrayal of African

Americans in film, music and magazines, few studies have focused on Black producers, directors

and writers and their perspectives of the African American high school experience in education.

Film, Hip-Hop music and magazines are the best representations for this study because these

forms of media work together in helping us to explore how our understanding, values, and

beliefs about other people are constructed. They help analyze how personal histories, combined

with collective history of oppression and liberation, contribute to stereotypes and

misinformation, as well as how personal engagement with the media can impact prospects for

individual and social freedom (Holtzman & Sharpe, 2014). Bell Hooks (1992) argues that

"opening a magazine or book, turning on the television set, watching a film, or looking at

photographs in public spaces, we are most likely to see images of Black people that reinforce and

reinscribe White supremacy" (p. 1). While African Americans have made some progress in the

areas of education and employment, there has been little change in how African Americans are

represented in the media (hooks, 1992). "Clearly, those of us committed to Black liberation

struggle, to the freedom and determination of all Black people, must face daily the tragic reality

that we have collectively made few, if any interventions in the area of race and representations"

(hooks, 1992, p. 1-2). Diuguid and Rivers (2000) confirm that the media industry in the United

States has a racist history. "Whether one examines the newspaper industry, the radio industry,

the film industry, or the television industry, the history of each includes segments where those in

control enforced policies or practices to exclude or denigrate anyone who was not a white male"

(Diuguid & Rivers, 2000, p. 124). Exploring this problem will not only help build a new understanding of the African American experience in education, it may also eliminate some of the many negative stereotypes Blacks face by transforming society's perceptions of African Americans while improving educational outcomes for all students.

Purpose of the Study

Cultural stereotypes have been especially problematic for African Americans, who are often negatively portrayed by the entertainment industry. The intent of this study was to examine how Black produced films, music and the print media portray the African American experience in education. This study analyzed the content in films, Hip-Hop and magazines from the 1980s to the present. This time period was chosen due to the influence these types of media had on the African American population. For instance, in the late 1980s and early 1990s, which was known as the "Golden Age" of Hip-Hop, a number of popular artists began to emerge (Linhardt, 2004). Black cinema also experienced a "breakthrough" as African American actors began to take on leading roles (Rose, 2016). During this time period, magazines also began to proliferate, and *Essence* and *Black Enterprise* successfully reached a growing audience of young urban Americans (Danesi, 2015). The study examined media depictions of African Americans which can often bear little resemblance to reality. According to Jhally and Lewis (1992) some Black viewers have indicated that consequences of the unrealistic Black images presented in the media goes beyond how Blacks feel about themselves. They have made a clear connection between Black media images and how Whites view and understand Blacks in real life and, thus, have anticipated negative consequences (such as being stereotyped) as a result of their interaction with

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other people (Jhally & Lewis, 1992). The study's findings will help create a better understanding of how film, Hip-Hop and the magazines can be used to produce more favorable educational processes, outcomes or environments for African Americans.

Context and Conceptual Framework

We live in a multimedia age where the majority of information people receive come less often from print sources and more typically from highly constructed visual images, complex sound arrangements and multiple media formats (Kellner & Share, 2007). The influential role that broadcasting and emergent information and the media play in organizing, shaping, and disseminating information, ideas, and values is creating a powerful public pedagogy (Giroux, 1999; Luke, 1997). Individuals are often not aware that they are being educated and positioned by media culture, as its pedagogy is frequently invisible and is absorbed unconsciously (Kellner & Share, 2007). This situation calls for critical approaches that make us aware of how media construct meanings, influence and educate audiences, and impose their messages and values. Critical media literacy is the theoretical framework that was used for this study.

Critical Media Literacy

In today's digital world, critical media literacy is being used in the classroom to help students learn the skills to understand and critically analyze how all forms of media work including television, radio, newspapers, video and the Internet. For instance, in the 1990s, New Mexico was first state in the U.S. to require all of its students to study media literacy – how to read and analyze photographs, video, audio, animations and online postings as well as printed words (O'Donnell & Williams, 1995). Media literacy not only allowed the students to become

more critical and careful about what they watch and read, it also taught them how visual imagery affects them. Kellner and Share (2007) confirm that critical media literacy expands the notion of literacy to include different forms of mass communication and popular culture as well as deepens the potential of education to critically analyze relationships between media and audiences, information and power. According to Kellner & Share (2005) critical media literacy involves perceiving how media like film or video can be used to positively teach a wide range of topics, like multicultural understanding and education:

> It involves cultivating skills in analyzing media codes and conventions, abilities to criticize stereotypes, dominant values, and ideologies, and competencies to interpret the multiple meanings and messages generated by media texts. Media literacy helps people to discriminate and evaluate media content, to critically dissect media forms, to investigate media effects and uses, to use media intelligently, and to construct alternative media. (p. 4)

Critical media literacy not only teaches people to learn from media, to resist media manipulation, and to use media materials in constructive ways, but it is also concerned with developing skills that will help create good citizens and that will make individuals more motivated and competent participants in social life (Kellner & Share, 2005).

Research Questions

By using critical media literacy, we can examine different types of media through content analysis to better understand how they portray the African American high school experience in education. Central questions worth exploring in this study were:

(1) How is the African American experience in high school portrayed by Black producers, directors and writers?

(2) In what ways do film, Hip-Hop and magazines illustrate the usefulness of the educational experience for social mobility (financial attainment, career vocation attainment, and school attainment)?

(3) Do certain types of media portray the African American high school experience in a more positive or negative light?

Research Design

This study makes use of qualitative research methods that explore the point of view, perspectives and narratives of Black actors, producers, directors and writers. Qualitative Content Analysis (QCA) is one of numerous research methods used to analyze text data. Research using QCA focuses on the characteristics of language as communication with attention to the content or contextual meaning of the text (McTavish & Pirro, 1990; Tesch, 1990). Text data can be in verbal, print or electronic form and might be obtained from narrative responses, open-ended survey questions, interviews, focus groups, observations, or print media such as articles, books or manuals (Kondracki & Wellman, 2002). QCA goes beyond counting words to examine language intensely for the purpose of classifying large amounts of texts into an efficient number of categories that represent similar meanings (Weber, 1990).

Using a critical media literacy approach to QCA, content from Black produced, directed, and written films, Hip-Hop songs and magazines were analyzed to identify particular themes that are associated with how African Americans are portrayed in education. This study will rely on a

sampling of 10 films, 12 Hip-Hop songs and 12 magazine articles. The films, songs, and magazine articles will be selected from the 1980s, 1990s, 2000s, and 2010s and will be chosen based on social popularity ratings. The 1980s to the present is a significant time period due to its impact on the African American population. The late 80s and early 90s was known as the Golden Age of Hip-Hop, particularly by artists and musicians originating from the New York metropolitan area (Linhardt, 2004). Black films were also making a huge impact during this time as African American actors began to take on leading roles (Rose, 2016). Hip-hop, and white audiences' interest in it, fed into the movement, while rappers and musicians like Ice Cube, Ice-T, Tupac Shakur and Queen Latifah seamlessly transitioned into film (Rose, 2016). There was also a proliferation of magazines in the 1980s and 1990s. For example, *Essence* and *Black Enterprise* successfully reached the growing market of young urban Americans (Danesi, 2015). Black produced films, Hip-Hop music and magazines not only helped their audiences gauge what was happening in popular culture, they allowed African Americans to stay informed and focused on issues pertaining to them.

Significance of the Study

This study analyzed the perspectives of Black actors, producers, directors and writers regarding their portrayal of African Americans in education. This study will help shed some light on previous research related to the same topic. Over the years, scholarly evidence has suggested that African Americans face racial discrimination, unfairness and inequalities in the entertainment industry. For instance, Tosi (2011) stated that African American stereotypes have been represented in television media historically and those representations have been

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recirculated, promoting generations of consumers who have become desensitized to the negative messages those stereotypes convey. The findings of this study will create a better understanding of the importance of how popular African American media outlets influence society's beliefs, values and how people relate to each other. Results from the study might also help change or influence these attitudes, beliefs and behaviors. For instance, it may inform directors, producers and writers about the message they are portraying when compared to the research literature, and it may encourage them to spread more positive messages. Educators and teachers will also be exposed to the positive and negative messages, making them more knowledgeable and aware of how to educate their students. Critical media literacy merits a place in teacher education because it encourages critical thinking in a media dominated age, engages students more, and makes connections between life and school (Schwarz, 2001). It is important for teachers to demonstrate or model critical media literacy for their students. This study could impact how media literacy is established in school curriculum such as social science, language, and communications; media affects all of these areas of study (Cassidy, 2004). For instance, media literacy in social studies allows teachers to uncover hidden assumptions, to distinguish between relevant and irrelevant information, to recognize biases, to separate fact from opinion, and ultimately, to determine the strength of the mass medium's message (Schwarz, 2001). Educators who are aware of how media influences the lives of their students have the opportunity to teach students the language of media, and how to become literate consumers of the media rich environment in which they live (Tosi, 2011).

Definition of Terms

For the purpose of this research the following definitions apply:

African American: Also referred to as Black Americans or Afro-Americans are an ethnic group of Americans with total or partial ancestry from any of the Black racial groups of Africa (Rastogi, Johnson, Hoeffel, & Drewery, 2011).

Black: A person with African ancestral origins (Agyemang, Bhopal, & Bruijnzeels, 2005).

Critical media literacy: The practices that allow people to access, critically evaluate, and develop skills in creating their own media messages using all forms of communication (Potter, 2010).

Film: Also called movie or motion picture, is a medium used to simulate experiences that communicate ideas, stories, perceptions, feeling, beauty or atmosphere by the means of recorded or programmed moving images along with other sensory stimulations (Severny, 2013).

Hip-Hop: A music genre developed in the United States by inner-city African Americans and Latino Americans in the Bronx borough of New York City which contains four key stylistic elements: MCing/rapping, DJing/scratching with turntables, break dancing, and graffiti writing (Kugelberg, 2007; Brown, 2009; Chang, 2005).

Magazines: A regularly published collection of articles that might focus on any topic in general or on topics of interest to a specific group (LeMasurier, 2014).

Media: Communication outlets or tools used to store and deliver information or data; for example, print media, publishing, the news media, photography, cinema, broadcasting (radio and television), and advertising (Lister, Dovey, Giddings, Grant, & Kelly, 2009).

Print media: Communications delivered via paper or canvas; for instance, books, newspapers, academic journals or magazines (Wodak & Krzyzanowski, 2008). In this research, the term print media is used to mean "magazines."

Stereotypes: Belief that all members of the same race share given characteristics (Liberman, Woodward, & Kinzler, 2017).

Delimitations

The literature has addressed the content of media portrayals of African Americans in education. These portrayals, which are often negative, contribute to public perceptions of African Americans. However, this study did not assess the effect these portrayals have on African Americans or other audiences. Rada (2000) argues that to measure the effect of a media portrayal, a study design must include a reasonable behavioral result from viewing the portrayal. At the same time the behavioral result must be captured in an unobtrusive way that will not compromise the ecological validity of the study (Rada, 2000). The chosen methodology for the study allows for a closer exploration of how media and music impact African Americans in education. However, the researcher was not able to examine the personal experiences or responses of this group.

Limitations

QCA is a popular method chosen by researchers because it is an efficient way to investigate the content of the media. However, this method does have a few limitations. Wimmer and Dominick (2016) argue that content analysis cannot serve as the sole basis for claims about media effects. Other potential limitations of content analysis include a lack of messages relevant

to the research, it can be time consuming and expensive, and the task of examining and categorizing large volumes of content is often laborious and tedious (Wimmer & Dominick, 2016). Yet, this method was appropriate for this study because it provided the researcher with an additional tool to assist with interpretation and analysis.

The study also uses purposive sampling. A purposive sample, also referred to as a judgmental or expert sample, is a type of nonprobability sample (Lavrakas, 2008). One limitation of purposive sampling is that another expert would likely come up with different sampled elements from the target population in terms of important characteristics and typical elements to be in the sample (Lavrakas, 2008). Given the subjectivity of the selection mechanism, purposive sampling is considered to be appropriate when selecting small samples from a limited geographic area or a restricted population definition, when inference to the population is not the highest priority (Lavrakas, 2008).

Another limitation of the study is that only one film was examined from the 1980's. The researcher intended to examine three Black produced, directed or written films from this decade which focused on the African American high school educational experience; however, only one film was purposely selected based on these characteristics. The study examined a total of 10 films, 12 Hip-Hop songs and 12 magazine articles from the 1980s to the present.

While television has the potential to influence youth and plays an important role in the media depictions of African American high school students, television sitcoms were not included in this study. Including television programming in this study would have added more insight into

the long-standing social problems affecting Blacks and Whites and the incongruities and disparities that existed in the television industry during this era (Bogle, 2001).

One final limitation of the study is that print media has existed long before audio-visual media. While print media is a way of generating or delivering material, such as books and static visual materials primarily through mechanical or photographic printing processes, audio-visual media allows for the production or delivery of materials using mechanical and electronical machines in order to present audio and visual messages (Satiadarma, 2006). However, Djamarah (2010) argues that since audio-visual media is the medium having the elements of sound and images, this media has a better ability than others, because it covers both media namely audio media and visual media.

Summary

In the entertainment industry, how African Americans are portrayed can have a lasting and devastating impact on society. Historically, African Americans have been depicted as dumb, evil, lazy, poor, cannibalistic, smelly, uncivilized, and un-Christian (Hurst, 2007). Stereotypes such as sambo, mammy, coon, and Uncle Tom have also been detrimental to the reputation of African Americans. Many scholars have attempted to understand why African Americans have been depicted unfavorably in film, music and by the print media. However, few studies have concentrated on the perspectives of Black producers, directors and writers who portray African American high school students in popular films, Hip-Hop and magazines. The purpose of this study is to inform Black producers, directors and writers about the messages they are portraying regarding the educational experiences of African Americans when compared to the research

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literature and how these messages should be aimed at being more positive. The study will also expose educators, teachers and parents to these messages, both positive and negative, making them more knowledgeable and aware of how to educate students. This study can help improve educators' and administrators' understanding of critical media literacy education and how it holds great promise for its ability to shape media-related knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors and encourage an active critical stance toward the media (Scharrer & Ramasubramanian, 2015). It is important for educators to develop a deeper understanding of this impact. By closely examining the principals and practices behind media production, media content, and providing a critical analysis of the media's treatment of underrepresented social groups, this may open up their views of race or ethnicity (Scharrer & Ramasubramanian, 2015). Data for this study was gathered through content analysis of films, Hip-Hop songs, and magazine articles from 1980 to the present. These types of media can all work together in the elimination of race, prejudice and oppression by informing the public about social issues, raise public awareness, and they can also be used as an aid for teaching and educating. From the data, the researcher was able to examine how the portrayal of the African American high school experience in education has evolved over the years. This study looked at critical media literacy, the integral role it plays in education, and the importance of learning the skills to understand and critically analyze how the media works. Critical media literacy helps students understand and critically analyze all forms of media including television, radio, newspapers, video and the Internet. Critical media literacy encourages students to be more critical and careful about what they watch and read. The study explored the research questions (1) How is the African American experience in high school

portrayed by Black producers, directors and writers? (2) In what ways do film, Hip-Hop and magazines illustrate the usefulness of the educational experience for social mobility (financial attainment, career vocation attainment, and school attainment)? (3) Do certain types of media portray the African American high school experience in a more positive or negative light? Answering these questions is timely because it will help us to understand how challenging certain barriers can be for African Americans who are regularly stereotyped, silenced, and blamed for the unjust treatment they face. American culture must embrace Black people in order to develop a better understanding of them. Exploring this problem may help eliminate some of the many negative stereotypes African Americans face by transforming society's perceptions of African Americans, increasing the number of Black leaders in schools, and improving the education of all students, especially African American students.

Chapter II – Literature Review

Racial stereotypes have historically played a significant role in shaping people's attitudes toward African Americans. The educational experiences of African Americans in high school has been a major concern for decades; however, further attention must be given to the perspectives of Black producers, directors and writers who portray African Americans in popular films, Hip-Hop and magazines. Black producers, directors and writers must be informed about the messages they are portraying when compared to the research literature and how these messages should be aimed at being more positive. Educators, teachers and parents must also be exposed to these messages, both positive and negative, making them more knowledgeable and aware of how to educate students. Few studies have looked specifically at how more positive portrayals of African Americans might benefit high school students from a social and cultural standpoint. Stereotypes such as sambo, mammy, coon, and Uncle Tom were detrimental to the reputation of African Americans in the 19th and early 20th centuries (Bogle, 2016). For many years, the stereotypical image of Blacks have changed in some media and disappeared from mainstream films; however, they have resurfaced in new media representations (Drummond, 1990). Because the media's portrayal of African Americans has played a key role in the formation of many of these modern stereotypes, educating people about how inaccurate and damaging they can be is essential. It is necessary for Black entertainers to be responsible to the Black community in the images they choose to portray because even when they think that they are helping to eliminate stereotypes, they must be mindful that many Whites might not understand the context in which their social commentaries are made, as is the case with Chris

Rock's comedy and some of the Hughes' brothers works (Horton et al., 1999). The most important reason this problem needs further study is because society is concerned about the future of Black high school students. Twenty-first century schools must develop a better understanding of what it takes for children to succeed and recognize the impact media and music portrayals can have on their lives. "Many researchers argue that media portrayals of minorities tend to reflect Whites' attitudes toward minorities and, therefore, reveal more about Whites themselves than about the varied and lived experiences of minorities, and though these are one group's (White people) opinions it still seems to dominate mainstream media" (Bristor, 1995, p. 48).

The media is an important source of information for introducing, replicating, and reinforcing a society's dominant ideologies and these ideologies are often invisible to the media consumer, and they often simply confirm what the consumer already knows to be true (Holtzman & Sharpe, 2014). According to Herbert (2008) a common problem with media is their tendency to lead with stories the public wants to read, rather than what it needs to know, and the press focuses too much on personalities and process, rather than what is happening and why it is happening. The media seems to favor writing about problematic school systems rather than inspirational stories of school and students success, and the focus on educational struggles and failures only serves to compound education problems and confirm existing stereotypes (Herbert, 2008). Historically, the media has had a long struggle with proper portrayals of African Americans. In a study entitled, "A Dangerous Distortion of Our Families," Dixon (2017) found that Blacks are disproportionately more often depicted as being poor, recipients of welfare, or

criminals. After examining more than 800 local and national news stories and opinion pieces

from each major broadcast and cable network, Dixon (2017) discovered that 37 percent of the

people represented as criminals in media were Black, even though national crime statistics from

the Department of Justice find that they only constitute 26 percent of those actually arrested.

White people were associated with crime in media 28 percent of the time, while the FBI's

national crime statistics say they make up 70 percent of people arrested (Dixon, 2017). Film,

Hip-Hop and magazines can all work together in the elimination of race, prejudice, and

oppression by informing the public about social issues that exist in society while raising public

awareness. "We can examine programs, songs, or films to see how they demonstrate certain

kinds of thinking about cultural issues and about the social order of things and people"

(Holtzman & Sharpe, 2014, p. 34). To fully comprehend negative racial stereotypes and their

effect on attitudes toward African Americans, critical media literacy is used as a framework to

help explain the importance of learning the skills to understand and critically analyze the media.

Critical Media Literacy

Media literacy education has been a topic of interest since the early 20th century. This is

when high school English teachers first started using film to develop students' critical thinking

and communication skills; however, media literacy education is distinct from simply using media

and technology in the classroom, a distinction that is exemplified by the difference between

"teaching with media" and "teaching about media" (Culver, Hobbs, & Jensen, 2010). In the

1950s and 60s, the 'film grammar' approach to media literacy education developed in the United

States, where educators began to show commercial films to children, having them learn a new

terminology consisting of words such as: fade, dissolve, truck, pan, zoom, and cut (Hobbs &

Jensen, 2009). Films were connected to literature and history and to understand the constructed

nature of film, students explored plot development, character, mood and tone (Hobbs & Jensen,

2009). During the 1970s and 1980s, attitudes about mass media and mass culture began to shift

around the English-speaking world. A whole generation of educators began to not only

acknowledge film and television as new, legitimate forms of expression and communication, but

also explored practical ways to promote serious inquiry and analysis – higher education, in the

family, in schools and in society (Hobbs and Jensen, 2009). Media literacy education began to

appear in state English education curriculum frameworks by the early 1990s, and since then,

many school districts have begun to develop school-wide programs, elective courses, and other

after-school opportunities for media analysis and production (Hobbs & Jensen, 2009).

Critical media literacy teaches students to learn from the media, to resist media

manipulation, to use media materials in constructive ways, and is also concerned with

developing the skills that will help them create good citizens and that will make individuals more

motivated and competent participants in social life (Kellner & Share, 2005). Torres and Mercado

(2006) claim that critical media literacy closely examines how corporate for-profit mainstream

media work, in terms of economic, political, social, and cultural power; develops abilities and

consciousness for searching, creating, developing, and supporting alternative non-profit

independent public-interest media; and understands the educator's responsibility to help students

become media-literate and actively engaged in alternative media use and development. "We are

not against mass media communication per se; however, we are concerned with the use and

abuse of power of media to control masses of people, especially children, for the profit of those who own those media and their potential allies" (Torres & Mercado, 2006, p. 262). Kellner and Share (2005) insist that critical media literacy involves cultivating skills in analyzing media codes and conventions, abilities to criticize stereotypes, dominant values, ideologies, and competencies to interpret multiple meanings and messages generated by media texts. Media literacy helps people to use media intelligently, to discriminate and evaluate media content, to critically dissect media forms, to investigate media effects and uses, and to construct alternative media (Kellner & Share, 2005).

Core Concepts of Critical Media Literacy

Everyday people are inundated with different types of media messages. With so many viewpoints and opinions, it is sometimes difficult to separate fact from fiction. To help provide a better understanding of the media, Kellner and Share (2005) outline five core concepts of critical media literacy: (1) Principle of Non-Transparency: All media messages are "constructed"; (2) Codes and Conventions: Media messages are constructed using a creative language with its own rules; (3) Audience Decoding: Different people experience the same media message differently; (4) Content and Message: Media have embedded values and points of view; and (5) Motivation: Media are organized to gain profit and/or power.

The first core concept looks at the close examination of media texts. It suggests that individuals question who constructed the message, how the message was constructed and to what effect. This concept challenges the power of the media to present messages as non-problematic and transparent (Kellner & Share, 2005). Kellner and Share (2005) argue that media do not

present reality like the transparent windows or simple reflections of the world because media

messages are created, shaped, and positioned through a construction process which involves

many decisions about what to include or exclude and how to represent reality. For instance, bell

hooks (2005) argues that *Hoop Dreams* was another case where she wanted people to see that

this documentary reflected as much about the individuals who shot and directed it as it did the

lives of the people that they were shooting.

> They made choices about when to show us that one of the boys had a girlfriend
>
> and that she was pregnant. It's like all of a sudden you blink, you think wait a
>
> minute, we didn't even know he had a girlfriend and now he's going to be a
>
> father. What happened? What that moment should have made audiences
>
> remember is that you are not getting some direct account of this individual's life
>
> or these two individuals, but that in fact, you are getting a version of their life
>
> mediated by the concerns and interests of the filmmakers (p. 9)

The second core concept insists that every form of communication has its own creative

language. This concept also relies heavily on semiotics to illustrate how signs and symbols

function, and understanding the grammar, syntax and metaphor of media language helps people

to be less susceptible to manipulation (Kellner & Share, 2005). For example, discussion of the

representation of class, gender, and race in media such as television or film requires analysis of

the codes and stereotypes through which subordinate groups like workers, women, and people of

color are represented, in constrast to representations of bosses and the rich, men, and white

people (Kellner & Share, 2005). Analyis of different models of representation of women or

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people of color makes clear the constructedness of gender and race representations and that dominate negative representations further subordination and make it look natural; therefore, media are highly coded constructions that are not windows on the world (Kellner & Share, 2005).

The third core concept insists that audiences play a role in interpreting media messages because each audience member brings to the message his or her own unique set of life experiences. Differences in age, gender, education, sexuality and cultural upbringing might also create unique interpretations (Kellner & Share, 2005). Hall (1980) argues that a distinction must be made between the encoding of media texts by producers and the decoding by consumers in a study of "Encoding/decoding". This distinction highlights the ability of audiences to produce their own reading and meanings and to decode texts in aberrant or oppositional ways, as well as the "preferred" ways in tune with the dominant ideology (Hall, 1980). Kellner and Share (2015) state that the process of grasping different audience readings and interpretations enhances democracy as multicultural education for a pluralistic democracy depends on a citizenry that embraces multiple perspectives as a natural consequence of varying experiences, histories, and cultures constructed within structures of dominance and subordination.

The fourth core concept focuses on the actual content of media messages in order to question ideology, bias, and the connotations explicit and implicit in the representation; for instance, the choice of a character's age, gender, race, the selection of a setting or actions within the plot are just some ways these values can become embedded within a film, music, or the print media (Kellner & Share, 2005). Cultural studies, feminist theory, and critical pedagogy offer

arsenals of research for this line of inquiry to question media representations of race, class, gender, and so on; beyond simply locating the bias in media, this concept helps people to recognize the subjective nature of all communication (Kellner & Share, 2005).

The fifth core concept assumes that most media have been created to generate or make money; therefore, people are encouraged to consider the question of why the message was sent and where it came from, because too often people believe the role of media is simply to entertain or inform, with little knowledge of the economic structure that supports it (Kellner & Share, 2015). For example, mainstream media in the U.S. tended to present George W. Bush favorably in the 2000 election because, in part, the conservative Republican agenda of the Texas governor was in line with the corporate interests of media companies that favored deregulation, absence of impediments to corporate mergers, and tax breaks for their wealthy employees and advertisers (Kellner & Share, 2005). Bell Hooks (2005) acknowledges that what young White consumers, primarily male, often times suburban, were energized by in rap music was misogyny, obscenity, eroticism and therefore rap began to make large sums of money.

> And for me this is not to condone the sexism and the misogyny of rap, but it is to say that this has to be seen in the larger framework of cultural production within capitalism in our society and that far from being different from multinational corporations and their processes of gaining greater wealth one might argue you know that rap musicians, especially the success of a certain kind of misogynistic anti-feminist, anti-woman rap, is totally in line with, if you find a product that gives you the maximum profit and reward, then push that product

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whether you actually believe what you're saying or not (p. 18)

Knowing what sort of corporation produces a media artifact or what sort of system of production dominates given media will help to critically interpret biases and distortions in media texts (Kellner & Share, 2005). Media literacy concerns all media, including television, film, radio, recorded music, the press, the Internet, and any other digitial communication technology (Perez Tornero & Varis, 2010). They share the idea that media literacy is a basic skill, one that supports many others and that it therefore should not solely be taught as a specific field of knowledge, nor simply as a skill, nor as a collective practice (Perez Tornero & Varis, 2010).

Applying Critical Media Literacy

In this study, critical media literacy helps explain how to effectively access, evaluate, and produce different forms of media. Because the media has played such an important role in the portrayal of the African American high school experience in education, it is important to make the public aware of how the media can shape one's attitude or opinions of other people. Kellner and Share (2007) claim that critical media literacy challenges the power of the media to present messages as nonproblematic and transparent. Because messages are created by people who make decisions about what to communicate and how to communicate, all messages are influenced by the subjectivity and biases of those creating the message as well as the social contexts within which the process occurs (Kellner & Share, 2007). Potter (2013) notes that becoming more media literate gives you a much clearer perspective to see the border between your real world and the world manufactured by the media. When people are media literate, they have clear maps to help them navigate better in the media world so that they can get to those experiences and

information they want without becoming distracted by those things that are harmful to them (Potter, 2013). Kellner and Share (2007) insist that in our global information society it is insufficient to teach students to read and write only with letters and numbers. "We live in a multimedia age where the majority of the information people receive comes less often from print sources and more typically from highly constructed visual images, complex sound arrangements, and multiple media formats" (Kellner & Share, 2007, p. 3). In response to these changes in society, critical media literacy teaches the skills of analysis and production in multimedia as well as print literacy is essential to meet the 21st century needs of participatory democracy (Kellner & Share, 2007). In recent years, many different approaches have been used for teaching critical media literacy. Kellner and Share (2007) categorized four different approaches to media education: the protectionist approach, media arts education, media literacy movement, and critical media literacy:

> The protectionist approach views audiences of mass media as vulnerable to cultural, ideological or moral influences, and needing protection by means of education; the media arts education approach focuses on creative production of different media forms by learners; the media literacy movement is an attempt to bring traditional aspects of literacy from the educational sphere and apply it to media; and critical media literacy aims to analyze and understand the power structures that shape media representations and the ways in which audiences work to make meaning through dominant, oppositional and negotiated readings of media (p. 60-62)

Approximately 15,000 educators in school districts across the U.S. are introducing their students to instructional practices of media analysis and media production (Hobbs, 2004). When teachers use videos, films, websites, popular music, newspapers, and magazines in the K-12 classroom or when they involve students in creating media productions using video cameras or computers, they aim to motivate students' interest in the subject, build communication and critical thinking skills, encourage political activism, or promote personal and social development (Hobbs, 2004). For example, Our Lady of Malibu School in Malibu, California, developed a media literacy initiative with elementary students, exploring consumerism, representation, and violence prevention, and conducted an animation workshop for fifth- to eighth-grade students to support values-oriented education (Hobbs, 2004). Forest Knolls Elementary School in Silver Spring, Maryland, embeds a communication arts focus into its program for students in Grades 4 and 5, in which students learn about journalism by comparing and contrasting the differences between newspaper and television news, analyzing patterns in news coverage, and interviewing and writing news articles and television reports (Hobbs, 2004). The *Pacesetter English* program helped bring media literacy into the advanced placement curriculum in high school English by encouraging English educators to incorporate a wide range of texts beyond the traditional literary canon, including film, television, advertising, the Internet, and popular media (College Board, 2000). Many statewide initiatives have also been implemented in Texas, Maryland, and New Mexico. In fact, New Mexico became the first state in the U.S. to require all of its students to study media literacy. The New Mexico Media Literacy Project (2008) is an outreach program at Albuquerque Academy, a private K-12 school founded by retired teacher and coach Bob

McCannon who made more than 150 presentations to students and teachers annually, donating his fees to support the organization. Topics included analyzing sexual imagery in beer advertising, media marketing and the tobacco industry, strategies of persuasion and media manipulation, and the health risks of television viewing (New Mexico Literacy Project, 2008).

Although researchers have begun to evaluate the effectiveness of media literacy programs in schools, one of the challenges faced by most evaluators is the question of conducting research that takes into account the real-life characteristics of the school environment, including implementation by ordinary teachers, not specifically trained experts (Hobbs, 2004). Many factors encourage (or discourage) K-12 teachers from implementing curriculum materials in a way that they are intended to be used, and although funding agencies place a premium on scientifically evaluated curriculum, teachers rarely (if ever) implement instructional materials according to the teachers' manual (Hobbs, 2004). Media Literacy in the K-12 classroom also emphasizes students as media makers, composing for school newspapers and video yearbooks; creating public service announcements, narrative films, and music videos; writing film scripts, song lyrics, and magazine articles; and designing Websites and video games (Hobbs, 2004). Since the 1980s, media production facilities have been present in nearly half of all American high schools, with electronic courses offered to students, often as part of vocational education, and in these courses, students learn how to operate media production equipment including cameras, switching and sound equipment, and editing and image manipulation software (Cuban, 2002). However, media literacy have had some anxiety about the value of media production. In particular, many video production programs are taught by former media professionals who may

(or may not) emphasize the development of critical thinking about the media, adolescent

personal development, or political activism (Goldfarb, 2002). Some educational leaders also

worry about the potential of media literacy to be used as a tool for propagandizing by the teacher,

as slickly produced media literacy videos warn students that advertising is destroying the

environment, that video games are causing young boys to violent, or that women's magazines are

dehumanizing to adolescent girls (Hobbs, 2004). Callahan (2001) has documented that some

teachers are aware when media literacy materials that they want to use in the classroom will be

perceived as controversial by parents or school district officials. A number of school districts

have adopted policies to minimize the possibility of parental disapproval and to encourage

teachers to reflect carefully on their specific educational goals when using film and video in the

classroom (Zirkel, 1999). Because of the perceived misuse of entertainment media in the

classroom, many school districts across the nation have instituted policies that limit teachers' use

of popular films, television programs, and music (Hobbs, 2004).

A Critical Media Literacy Perspective of the African American Experience in Education

For decades, African Americans have been depicted negatively in popular media

(Drummond, 1990). African American men have been stereotyped as violent and impulsive

sexual predators (Watson, 2009). Blacks were portrayed negatively in reality TV, scripted

television shows, news outlets, and they were more consistently shown as being poorly dressed

or being restrained by figures of authority (Entman, 1992). Overall, media outlets created a

narrative that portrayed African Americans as lazy, violent people who were prone to crime

(Entman, 1990). These negative portrayals can have devastating effects on African Americans.

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According to the Center for Media Literacy (2005) the first core concept of critical media literacy explains that whatever is "constructed" by just a few people then becomes "normal" for everyone else, and like the air we breathe, media get taken for granted and their messages can go unquestioned. Media are not "real" but they affect people in real ways because we take and make meaning for ourselves out of whatever we've been given by those who are doing the creating (Center for Media Literacy, 2005). "This construction involves many decisions about what to include or exclude and how to represent reality" (Kellner & Share, 2005, p. 374). Media misrepresentation has been linked to African Americans receiving less attention from doctors and harsher sentences by judges (Rachlinski, Johnson, Wistrich, & Guthrie, 2009). There is also a lower likelihood of being hired for a job or admitted to a school, shorter life expectancy (Entman, 2006), lower odds of getting loans, and higher likelihood of being shot by police (Greenwald, Oakes, & Hoffman, 2003). These portrayals cause African Americans to have low expectations for themselves (Martin, 2008) and implicit bias against members of their own race (Schmader, Johns, & Forbes, 2008). It has also led to increased domestic violence abuse rates among African American women, and cause African American men to underachieve on standardized tests and in job interviews (Schmader et al., 2008). The third core concept of critical media literacy incorporates two important ideas: first, that our differences influence our various interpretations of media messages and second, that our similarities create common understandings (Center for Media Literacy, 2005). The more questions we can ask about what we and others are experiencing around us, the more prepared we are to evaluate the message and to accept or reject it, and hearing multiple interpretations can build respect for different cultures

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and appreciation for minority opinions, a critical skill in an increasingly multicultural world (Center for Media Literacy, 2005). Our similarities are also important to understanding how media makers "target" different segments of the population in order to influence their opinion or, more typically, to sell them something (Center for Media Literacy, 2005).

Meanwhile, some scholars argue that there is a significant underrepresentation of African Americans when it comes to ownership of the media. Washington (2008) states that historically, the participation in media production by minorities in the U.S. has also been low; yet the trend towards inclusiveness, while generally growing has been uneven; for example, a 2007 report showed that Blacks, Latinos, Asians, and Native Americans made up only 13.62% of American newsrooms. The numbers dwindle further at upper levels of media management where during the 2013-2014 season only 5.5% of executive-level television producers were people of color (Writers Guild of America West, 2015). Ownership in the media helps control what media is being broadcast, which also helps define who and how people are being portrayed. The fifth core concept of critical media literacy looks at the motive or purpose of a media message – and whether or how a message may have been influenced by money, ego, or ideology (Center for Media Literacy, 2005). To respond to a message appropriately, we need to be able to see beyond the basic content motives of informing, persuading or entertaining (Center for Media Literacy, 2005). Examining the purpose of a message also uncovers issues of ownership and the structure and influence of media institutions in society (Center for Media Literacy, 2005).

According to Kellner and Share (2007) individuals are often not aware that they are being educated and positioned by media culture, as its pedagogy is frequently invisible and is absorbed

unconsciously, and this situation calls for critical approaches that make us aware of how media construct meanings, influence and educate audiences, and impose their messages and values. Critical media literacy expands the notion of literacy to include different forms of mass communication and popular culture as well as deepens the potential of education to critically analyze relationships between media and audiences, information and power (Kellner & Share, 2007). In the classroom, teachers utilize instructional tools and lesson plans that create learning environments where students can learn about the media and express their views and ideas about the economic, political, social, and cultural aspects of media's role in society (Hobbs, 2004). Teachers help students to (a) reflect on their own beliefs and attitudes about the mass media in society, (b) gather information on the topic from different points of view, (c) subject the evidence to critically inquiry, and (d) create messages for authentic audiences using a wide range of media production tools (Hobbs, 2004). Kellner and Share (2005) confirm that teaching critical media literacy should be a participatory, collaborative project. "Watching television shows or films together could promote productive discussions between teachers and students (or parents and children), with an emphasis on eliciting student views, producing a variety of interpretations of media texts, and teaching basic principals of hermeneutics and criticism" (Kellner & Share, 2005, p. 373). Along with critical discussion, debate, and analysis, teachers must also guide students in an inquiry process that deepens their critical exploration of issues that affect them and society (Kellner & Share, 2005). According to Kellner and Share (2005) there are a few challenges in developing critical media literacy:

It is not a pedagogy in the traditional sense, with firmly established principals, a

canon of texts, and tried-and-true teaching procedures. It requires a democratic

pedagogy which involves teachers sharing power with students as they join

together in the process of unveiling myths and challenging hegemony. Moreover,

the material of media culture is so polymorphous, multivalent, and polysemic that

it necessitates sensitivity to different readings, interpretations, and perceptions of

the complex images, scenes, narratives, meanings, and messages of media culture

(p. 373)

Media culture can advance sexism, racism, ethnocentrism, homophobia, and other forms of

prejudice, as well as misinformation, problematic ideologies, and questionable values (Kellner &

Share, 2005). Some (but not all) teachers are committed political activists, dedicating themselves

to important work that helps to change the systems of media power that they find oppressive; but

instead of adopting an essentially persuasive effort to convince students of a particular belief

system about the media, these teachers emphasize the values of critical literacy and student

autonomy (Hobbs, 2004). They aim to provide learning experiences where students strengthen

critical-thinking skills to reach their own understandings about how to fully participate as

citizens and consumers in a media-saturated society (Hobbs, 2004). These skills can allow

students to carefully evaluate and analyze the media and gives them the ability to criticize the

many stereotypes African Americans face.

Stereotypes

   Historically, African Americans have been subjected to negative stereotypes

(Drummond, 1990). Two distinct stereotypes that has been associated with Black men are brute

and sambo (Hall, 2001). Both were initially developed by Europeans to secure their position in

Western society and simultaneously denigrate Africans for the purposes of subordination (Hall,

2001). "Sambo" would also become popular through *Little Black Sambo*, an 1898 children's

book where a South Indian boy encounters four hungry tigers. The brute defined Africans as

primitive, temperamental, violent, and sexually powerful, and the sambo defined them as

childlike (Hall, 2001). The brute stereotype in particular was effective in conveying Africans'

mental dullness and lack of self-control (Hall, 2001). Europeans and their Western cohorts then

validated race, enabling a status hierarchy between Africans and themselves (Hall, 2001).

Pilgrim (2000) maintains that the coon stereotype has also been insulting to African Americans.

As with Sambo, the coon was portrayed as a lazy, easily frightened, chronically idle, inarticulate,

buffoon who acted childish, but he was an adult; albeit a good-for-little adult (Pilgrim, 2000).

Stereotypes of African American women in the media have also been prevalent over the years.

For instance, women in the media have been referred to as the Mammy, the Sapphire, and the

Jezebel (Bogle, 2016; West, 1995; McCaughey & King, 2001). The Mammy, who is usually big,

fat, and cantankerous, is distinguished by her sex and fierce independence (Bogle, 2016).

Mammy's offshoot is the Aunt Jemima, sometimes derogatorily referred to as a "handkerchief

head" (Bogle, 2016). The Sapphire woman, also know as the angry Black woman, is hostile and

emasculates Black men through various insults (West, 1995). In the 1930s radio show Amos and

Andy, the character named Sapphire was known for nagging and emasculating her husband

(West, 1995). The Jezebel is a slave woman that satisfied the sexual needs of their white slave

masters, and was used to justify the rape of Black slave women (McCaughey & King, 2001).

While many of these stereotypes have been persistent throughout history a lot has changed;

however, many scholars argue that similar stereotypes of African Americans exist today.

Modern Day Stereotypes

According to Adams-Bass, Bentley-Edwards, & Stevenson (2014) these new stereotypes

include the welfare queen, the gold digger, and the video vixen. The first is characterized by her

sexual promiscuity and schemes for getting money, the second for her exploitation of good-

hearted men, and the third for her sexual promiscuity as well (Adams-Bass et al, 2014).

Drummond (1990) argues that stereotypes of Black men have shifted and the primary images are

of drug dealers, crack victims, the underclass, the homeless, and subway muggers. African

Americans are also more likely to appear as perpetrators in drug and violent crime stories on

network news (Entman & Rojecki, 2000). There are also other stereotypes associated with crime

and welfare. A study conducted by Peffley, Hurwitz, and Sniderman (1997) indicated that

Whites who hold negative stereotypes of African Americans judge them more harshly than they

do other Whites when making hypothetical decisions about violent crime and welfare benefits

(Peffley et al, 1997). Warren (1988) found that the media often portrayed African Americans in

occupational roles such as a servant, a crook, a cook, an entertainer, a musician, a sad non-White

person, an exhibitionist, an athlete, or a corrupt individual; moreover, he affirmed that most

stereotypes about Blacks are intensified by television portrayals. Jenkins (2006) emphasizes that

without proper education and increased job skills, Black men will especially remain an unemployable class and thus continue to fall victim to the consequences of economic deprivation, including an inability to help take care of their families and children; frustration with society, which results in feelings of rage; and a sense of hopelessness that makes criminality seem like the only viable option. Meanwhile, Plous & Williams (1995) were interested in measuring the extent to which Whites still hold the racial stereotypes formed in the days of "American Slavery"; but they noted a lack of current data on this subject. However; according to the research, not all studies dealing with Black portrayals in the media have been stereotypical.

Tosi (2011) argues that while representations of African Americans are changing, much more work needs to be done, and the media industry will not change unless viewers demand that change. For example, television, in the past two decades, has made major gains in terms of casting diversity and the portrayal of minorities in differing roles. From being scarcely visible in the 1950's to being portrayed as wealthy attorneys and doctors in the 1990's, television has taken great strides to change the way it portrays minorities. Gunter (1998) analyzed portrayals between British television and American television where he observed that Whites were more likely to be agressors than Blacks; in addition, he noticed that Whites were more likely to be victims than Blacks. Atkin (1992) discovered that Blacks were more prominent in regulatory roles, such as law enforcement officers and depicted with more positive characteristics than before. Tamborini, Mastro, Chory-Assad, and Huang (2000) noticed that Black television characters had similar characteristics as their White television counterparts. Encouraging people to recognize

stereotypes, both positive and negative, not only informs them of the oppression African

Americans face, it plays a significant role in shaping attitudes toward Blacks in education.

The African American High School Experience

The history of education in the African American experience is one of unremitting

struggle and perseverance; it is a history that details the determination of a people to use schools

and knowledge for liberation and inclusion in the American social order (Ervin & Sheer, 2016).

Black schooling, largely at the elementary level, existed before the Civil War, grew in the latter

1800s, and began to blossom in the early decades of the 20th century; however, African

American secondary schools remained scarce and, where they existed, they were underfunded

and offered limited instruction (Ervin & Sheer, 2016). The "separate but equal doctrine" of

Plessy v. Ferguson heightened racial inequalities in education. In 1940, more than three-quarters

of African Americans lived in the South, most of them in rural communities where secondary

schooling was sparse or nonexistent (Ervin & Sheer, 2016). During the 1940s, the gap in high

school attainment between White and Black students narrowed appreciably and continued to do

so in the ensuing decades (Ervin & Sheer, 2016). Southern equalization campaigns of the latter

1940s and 1950s provided a significant boost to Black secondary attainment and was a major

step in closing the racial attainment gap as a result of legal battles at the local level, along with

persistent agitation by Black communities for better facilities and higher standards (Ervin &

Sheer, 2016). This process of social change and educational expansion encouraged efforts to

improve the schools as civil rights organizations, community leaders, and parents all demanded

more resources for Blacks (Ervin & Sheer, 2016). As a result, enrollments surged and Black high

schools appeared across the country, either as new institutions or as Whites abandoned older

schools creating an era of rising expectations in employment and civil rights as well as education

(Ervin & Sheer, 2016).

Today, Blacks in the United States are gaining in wealth and education faster than other

groups. A study by Nielsen (2015) revealed the rate of Black high school graduates enrolled in

college increased in 2014 to 70.9 percent, exceeding the rate of all high school graduates in the

nation. African American income growth rates also outpaced those of non-Hispanic whites at

every annual household income level above $60,000 (Nielsen, 2015). While the landscape has

significantly improved and Black students are achieving significantly more from an academic

standpoint than they have in the past, there is still room for improvement (Center for American

Progress, 2017). For instance, in 2016, the high school dropout rate among African Americans

ages 16 to 24 was 6.2%, which was 1% higher than Whites student (NCES, 2017). In 2017, the

graduation rate, or rate at which a high school student completed a GED or diploma, was 85.9%

for African Americans, which was 4% lower than Whites (U.S. Census Bureau, 2017).

According to Bowman, Comer and Johns (2018) so many African American students have

trouble learning in school due to the differing expectations for children between home and

school, and the skills and knowledge children gain at home and in their communities often do not

match schools' demands. With Black students, particularly those from low-income families in

highly segregated communities, there is more likely to be a poor fit between their language

experiences and what schools require; for example, students who learn "Black" English at home,

as opposed to learning Standard English, have a steeper learning curve for school reading and

writing because Standard English is very similar to academic English (Bowman et al., 2018).

African American students, even those from low-income families, have information about their

immediate environment and learn through their experiences; however, they may not have the

same knowledge base as students from other communities, especially students from more

economically advantaged ones (Bowman et al., 2018).

African American high school students are rarely, if ever, asked for their perceptions of

the problems or ideas about possible solutions (Freeman, 1997). In a study conducted by

Freeman (1997) to explore African American high school students'perceptions of barriers to

African Americans' participation in higher education and their perceptions of effective programs

for addressing the problems, students stressed that being accepted for who they are and having

someone who encourages them to maximize their potential was important for their success and

participation in higher education. According to Freeman (1997) the students' responses can be

classified into the following categories:

> (a) Improve School Conditions – the need to improve the physical condition of
>
> the building as well as the contents of the building, such as having more
>
> computers available for students; (b) More Interested Teachers and Actively
>
> Involved Counselors – having teachers who instill a passion in students, who
>
> believe in African American students' ability to learn, and who push students to
>
> maximize their potential; (c) Instill Possibilites Early – instilling at an early age
>
> an awareness of the possibilities of attending college and providing students with
>
> information on possibilities, requirements, and outcomes earlier than in high

school; and (d) Emphasize Cultural Awareness – increase cultural awareness as a

way to motivate more African Americans to participate in higher education and

provide more male role models (p. 541-544)

Wimberly (2002) claims educational expectations and postsecondary participation are higher

among students who talk with their teachers and have positive feelings toward them. Wimberly

(2002) suggests three major recommendations for improving the educational experiences of

African Americans. First, districts should evaluate school relationship models, determine the

essential characteristics and needs of their students, and implement a program that best fosters

these important relationships and begins at least in middle school (Wimberly, 2002). Second, the

school district's implementation plan should include cultural, social, and economic diversity

awareness and training components so that staff are sensitive to these potential differences and

do not inadvertently allow them to become barriers to building effective relationships with

students (Wimberly, 2002). Teachers and administrators often view the different expressions of

development in African Americans as evidence of intentionally bad and distasteful behavior

and/or low academic potential (Bowman et al., 2018). When African American students

demonstrate adaptive behaviors (such as passivity or aggression), teachers and administrators

usually spend little time trying to understand the etiology of these behaviors or the systems that

cause them; instead, they label the students "special needs" or delinquent and exclude them from

grade-level curricula (Bowman et al., 2018). Finally, schools should make available school-

based and school-sponsored activities that connect students to adults in their school and

encourage all students to participate in these activities (Wimberly, 2002).

In 2009, the Obama Administration established a set of reforms to ensure that every child in the U.S. receives a quality education. According to the U.S. Department of Education (2019) these improvements include higher standards, more useful assessments and data, and stronger teachers in the classroom. President Obama set two ambitious goals: that the United States would once again lead the world in college completion, and that every student would receive at least one year of college or specialized training after high school (U.S. Department of Education, 2019).

Black Lives Matter Movement

Born as a Twitter hashtag, #BlackLivesMatter has evolved into a "potent alternative to the political paralysis and isolation that racial justice proponents have faced since the election of Obama (Rickford, 2016, p. 34). Black Lives Matter was created in 2013 by Patrice Cullors, Alicia Garza, and Opal Tometi – California and New York-based organizers active in incarceration, immigration, and domestic labor campaigns – after the acquittal of George Zimmerman for the murder of seventeen-year-old Trayvon Martin in Florida (Rickford, 2016). "The slogan's deeper significance as the rallying cry for an incipient movement crystalized in 2014 during the Ferguson, Missouri uprisings against police brutality" (Rickford, 2016, p. 34). Building on strategies used by the civil rights movement in the 1960s, Black Lives Matter engages in nonviolent direction action to bring attention to police killings and abuse of African Americans (Clayton, 2018). The Black Lives Matter Movement addresses some of the same issues that previous Black liberation movements addressed: Black people are seen as criminal, and Black bodies are seen as expendable (Clayton, 2018). Both movements have been opposed

to racism and systemic oppression; however, many see Black Lives Matters as the new civil rights movement (Clayton, 2018). While the civil rights movement demanded basic equality for African Americans in the 20th century, Black Lives Matter has focused on police abuse of African Americans (Clayton, 2018).

Trayvon Martin's death arguably galvanized the rise of the Black Lives Matter movement, something that has inspired many filmmakers (Roberts, 2019). For example; *Rest in Power*, produced by Jay-Z, "provides powerful context for Martin's shooting, spins an intricate web of racial microagressions that add up to a greater threat, and details a devastating look at a young life lost and of race relations in America today" (Roberts, 2019, p. 1). This six-part docuseries is just one of many documentaries, TV shows, and movies inspired by the Black Lives Matter movement. The movement has also left its mark on the Hip-Hop industry. Tate (2015) argues that the "Hip-Hop-savvy radicalism of #BlackLivesMatter has liberated commercial rap from its default modern setting – the one that birthed the breezy millennial perception that 'Hip-Hop' was a synonym for a consumer market where rowdy, rhyming negro gentleman callers and ballers sold vernacular song and dance to an adoringly vicarious and increasingly whiter public – a fair portion of whom are undeniably apathetic to race politics" (p. 6). #BlackLivesMatter's reclamation of Hip-Hop proper has brought complexity and revolutionary street cred back to the race conversation in commercial rap, and the struggle against racialized injustice once again matters in the rap and Hip-Hop industry (Tate, 2015). Film, Hip-Hop and magazines work together in helping us to explore how our understanding, values, and beliefs of other people are constructed. They can help eliminate race, prejudice and

oppression by informing the public about social issues, raising public awareness, and can be used to teach and educate the public.

Film

The main factor influencing the portrayal of African Americans in early film was the fact that the American Civil War ended not long before film became an industry (Bernardi & Green, 2017). During the first decades of the 20th century many films sought to portray a nostalgic, idealized version of life in pre-Civil War Southern states, and as a result films tended to depict the "Old South" while portraying African American characters as ineffectual, unsophisticated, overtly sexual, immoral, and criminal people who needed to be kept in check by White masters and mistresses (Bernardi & Green, 2017). Black characters have appeared in American films since 1888; however, Blacks were not hired to portray Blacks in early works (Horton, Price, & Brown, 1999). American films made between 1910 and the 1920s included African American characters played by white actors wearing blackface, a type of stage makeup worn in the minstrel shows of the 19th century (Bernardi & Green, 2017). To create blackface makeup, actors applied charred cork, dark shoe polish, or other products to their faces, while also emphasizing and exaggerating their hair and lips in order to mimic stereotypical "African" physical characteristics (Bernardi & Green, 2017). Creative techniques like blackface were used to attract or capture the audience's attention. Media messages are often constructed using a creative language with its own rules (Center for Media Literacy, 2005). The second core concept of critical media literacy explores the "format" of a media message and examines the way a message is constructed, the creative components that are used in putting it together – words, music, color, movement and

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camera angles (Center for Media Literacy, 2005). Understanding the grammar, syntax and metaphor system of media, especially visual language, not only helps us to be less susceptible to manipulation but also increases our appreciation and enjoyment of media as a constructed "text" (Center for Media Literacy, 2005). One film where white actors appeared in blackface was the popular film adaptation of Harriet Beecher Stowe's best-selling 1852 novel, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1903), which focused on the character of Uncle Tom, a black slave (Bernardi & Green, 2017). D.W. Griffith's *Birth of a Nation* (1915) was another notable film that featured blackface. The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) tried to ban the film due to its vicious portrayal of Blacks as subhuman compared to the glorified Ku Klux Klan (Horton et al., 1999). *Birth of a Nation* was important because it led to the creation of a new industry that produced "race films" for African Americans, which portrayed Blacks in a positive light and addressed social concerns of the community (Horton et al., 1999).

Because African American audiences were ignored, there was a high demand for films geared to catering to Black audiences. This created the need for Black motion picture production companies like Lincoln Motion Picture Company and Oscar Micheaux's Chicago based Micheaux Film Corporation. Lincoln Motion Picture Company, founded in 1916 by Noble and George Johnson, was known as the first producer of race movies and is considered the first all-black movie production company, building a reputation for making films that showcased African American talent in the film industry (Ravage, 2007). The company made and distributed only five films which were limited to African American audiences in churches, schools, and "Colored Only" theaters, despite the Johnson brothers wanting a wider audience (Ravage, 2007). Oscar

Micheaux, founder of the Micheaux Film and Book Company Corporation in 1918, is regarded as the first major African American filmmaker who produced "race movies" to counter stereotypical representations of African Americans (Bernardi & Green, 2017). "Micheaux's films focused on contemporary Black life, dealing with relationships between Blacks and Whites and opposing the racial injustice faced by African Americans" (Bernardi & Green, 2007, p. 592). Micheaux's first film, *The Homesteader* was produced in 1919 and was financed by farmers who were Black and White (Horton et al., 1999). Between 1919 and 1940, Micheaux produced over 35 films covering a wide variety of topics including racism of Jim Crow laws, racial solidarity, assimilation, and the politics of skin color (Horton et al., 1999). Micheaux rejected typical Hollywood roles for Blacks, frequently showed Blacks in positions of power, authority and respectability, offered fully developed Black characters as opposed to the simplistic, cruel stereotypes of mainstream film, and he presented controversial subjects, such as lynchings, in his films (Horton et al., 1999). Much like the Johnson brothers' films, Blacks would only see Micheaux's films when they were originally released, not society at large (Horton et al., 1999).

During the 1940s and 1950s the ways in which Black characters were written and represented in mainstream Hollywood films began to change (Bernardi & Green, 2017). Representatives from the NAACP met with several Hollywood studios where an agreement was made to improve the depictions of African Americans in film by reducing traditional Black stereotypes (Bernardi & Green, 2007). In the 1950s, African American actors began appearing in mainstream films and the growing civil rights movement brought more changes to Hollywood; many all Black productions began to be made (Bernardi & Green, 2007). The race film genre

consisted of films produced outside of the Hollywood system for an all-Black audience and featured all-Black casts (Bernardi & Green, 2007). The 1960s saw "increased levels of cast integration, further challenges to prevailing attitudes about race, and greater consideration of the meaning of ethnicity contained within films that confronted attitudes to race directly" (Bernardi & Green, 2007, p.11). Sidney Poitier, one of the most famous Black actor in the 1960s, starred in several movies dealing with race relations including *To Sir, With Love, In the Heat of the Night, and Guess Who's Coming to Dinner* (Bernardi & Green, 2007). "Poitier tended to portray good characters and that led to criticism that his roles, such as the polite, highly educated, idealistic doctor in *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner* and the philanthropic handyman in *Lilies of the Field*, dated back to the stereotype of the wise Uncle Remus figure that was prevalent in U.S. cinema of the 1930s and 1940s" (Bernardi & Green, 2007, p. 11).

From 1970 to 1975 the new genre of "blaxploitation" cinema, a term created by Junius Griffin, former president of the Hollywood branch of the NAACP, sparked a major change in how African Americans were depicted on screen and in films that were made specifically with Black audiences in mind (Bernardi & Green, 2007). Films belonging to the blaxploitation genre were written by, directed by, and starred African Americans (though often produced by whites) and confronted older stereotypes of African Americans as loyal servants, criminals, victims, or childlike fools (Bernardi & Green, 2007). "These films targeted young, urban Blacks and encouraged them to stand up against their White oppressors by depicting acts of racism against them; however, as more and more Black filmmakers emerged, though, the tide shifted to films that focused less on enraging the Blacks against their oppressors, and to those that simply

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glorified violence" (Horton et al., 1999, p. 7). African American cinema from the 1980s onward

concentrated on "ghetto-dwelling male protagonists driven by machismo to interact with drugs

and guns while revealing a dubious attitude to women (something that troubles many feminist

critics) and a desire for escape from situations through death" (Bernardi & Green, 2007, p. 15).

Some critics suggest that these types of film overemphasize the negative aspects of African

American life by playing on the idea of Black-on-Black crime, thereby creating abnormal

depictions of African Americans, especially African American men (Bernardi & Green, 2007).

When August Wilson (1990) began searching for a Black director for the film version of

his play, *Fences*, he faced resistance from Paramount Pictures and his peers. In the October 1990

issue of *Spin*, guest-edited by Spike Lee, the Pulitzer Prize winning playwright wrote about

Hollywood's resistance to a Black-directed film. In discussing the possibility of Paramount

Pictures purchasing the rights to his play *Fences*, Wilson (1990) explained

> I usually have had to repeat my request, 'I want a Black director,' as though it
>
> were a complex statement in a foreign tongue. I have often heard the same
>
> response: 'We don't want to hire anyone just because they are Black.' What is
>
> being implied is that the only qualification any Black has is the color of his skin
>
> (Wilson, 1990, p. 2)

Wilson (1990) argued that he wanted someone talented, who understands the play and sees the

possibilities of the film, who would approach his work with the same amount of passion and

measure of respect that he does, and who shared the same cultural sensibilities of the characters.

According to Wilson (1990) some Americans, Black and White, do not see any value to Black

Americans lives that do not contribute to the leisure or profit of White America, and some

Americans, Black and White, would also deny that a Black American culture even exists

(Wilson, 1990). Meanwhile, some Americans, Black and White, would argue that by insisting on

a Black director for *Fences* Wilson is doing irreparable harm to the efforts of Black directors

who have spent years trying to get Hollywood to ignore the fact that they are Black (Wilson,

1990).

Recently, African Americans have been appearing in a number of mainstream

blockbuster films. Will Smith, Wesley Snipes, Chris Rock, Morgan Freeman, Samuel L.

Jackson, Jamie Foxx, Halle Berry, Whoopi Goldberg, and Viola Davis have become major stars

(Bernardi & Green, 2007). The success of these actors means that people may feel that progress

has been made in terms of how African Americans are depicted on screen; however, some critics

argue that a lack of racial diversity still exists (Bernardi & Green, 2007). This has been

highlighted by the recent controversy regarding the lack of Black nominees in acting categories

at the 2016 Academy Awards; moreover, some of the most critically acclaimed films that

centered on the Black experience, such as *Django Unchained* (2012) and *The Help* (2011)

continue to portray African Americans as slaves and servants (Bernardi & Green, 2007). *The

Help* received criticism from the Association of Black Women Historians (ABWH) for

trivializing the lives of Black domestic servants, general inaccuracies, and insensitivity to

African American dialect, while other critics suggested the film employed old stereotypes like

the magical Negro and the mammy (Bernardi & Green, 2007).

Bogle's (2016) book, *Toms, Coons, Mulattoes, Mammies, and Bucks*, examines how the Hollywood film industry has portrayed African Americans in movies and the recurring stereotypical characters that appear. Bogle (2016) indicated that one of the main reasons these types of roles keep appearing is due in part to the desire to work. Hollywood is a very competitive industry and typically the stories that are told cater to a predominately White audience (Bogle 2016). African American actresses like Hattie McDaniel and Butterfly McQueen played maids because those were usually the only roles offered to Black women (Bogle, 2016). Bogle (2016) stated that all Black actors – from Stephin Fetchit to Rex Ingram to Lena Horne to Sidney Poitier and Jim Brown – have played stereotyped roles. But the essence of black film history is not found in the stereotyped role but in what certain talented actors have done with the stereotype (Bogle, 2016). Bogle (2016) outlines five basic character types that have impacted Black characters since the early 20th century. The tom, which was the first in a long line of socially acceptable Good Negro characters, first appeared in the 1903 version of Uncle Tom's Cabin (Bogle, 2016). Toms are chased, harassed, hounded, flogged, enslaved, and insulted, they keep the faith, turn against their White massas, and remain hearty, submissive, stoic, generous, selfless, and very kind; thus they endear themselves to White audiences and emerge as hero of sorts (Bogle, 2016).

The coon appeared in a series of Black films presenting the Negro as an amusement object and buffoon (Bogle, 2016). There were two types of coons: the pickaninny and Uncle Remus. The pickaninny was a "harmless, little screwball creation whose eyes popped, whose hair stood on end with the least excitement, and whose antics were pleasant and diverting"

(Bogle, 2016). Uncle Remus was "harmless and congenial, he is a first cousin to the Tom, yet he distinguishes himself by his quaint, naive, and comic philosophizing" (Bogle, 2016).

The third type of Black character was the mulatto, which first appeared in *The Debt* (1912), a movie about the old South where a White man's wife and his Black mistress bear him children at the same time (Bogle, 2016). Growing up together, the White son and the mulatto daughter fall in love and decide to get married. Their lives are ruined not only because they are brother and sister but also because the girl has a drop of Black blood (Bogle, 2016).

Mammy, the fourth Black type, made her debut around 1914 when audiences were treated to a blackface version of *Lysistrata* (Bogle, 2016). The comedy, titled *Coon Town Suffragettes*, dealt with a group of bossy mammy washerwomen who organize a militant movement to keep their good-for-nothing husbands at home (Bogle, 2016). The militancy of the washerwomen served as a primer for the mammy roles Hattie McDaniel was to perfect in the 1930s (Bogle, 2016).

D.W. Griffith's *The Birth of a Nation* (1915) was the motion picture that introduced the final character type, the brutal black buck (Bogle, 2016). The Buck was typically over-sexed, savage, violent and lusted for White flesh (Bogle, 2016). As far as the audiences were concerned, the toms, the coons, the mulattoes, the mammies, and the bucks embodied all aspects and facets of the Black experience itself (Bogle, 2016).

Today, researchers have noted how the film industry continues to report negative events that are occurring in Black communities. For example, McGarrah (2015) argues that film traditionally shows White film stars as supreme icons, while depicting Black males as bystanders

or aggressive villains; rarely are Black men the hero. Harris and Tassie (2012) used data from four Tyler Perry films (*Diary of a Mad Black Woman, Madea's Family Reunion, Why Did I Get Married, and Madea Goes to Jail*) to test their hypothesis that while more images of middle-class Blacks have begun to appear, these images can have detrimental consequences. The authors take a critical look at Perry's images of middle class Blacks for several reasons. First, they argue his images represent duplicated versions of old stereotypes of Blacks on film, which depict them as violent, criminal, and even hypersexual; Second, Perry's images also appear to be similar to E. Franklin Frazier's work, *The Black Bourgeoisie* (Harris and Tassie, 2012). Like Frazier, Perry frames them as (1) materialistic and status-obsessed, (2) dysfunctional and abusive, and (3) unsympathetic of working- and lower-class Blacks (Harris and Tassie, 2012). These stereotypes suggest that even Blacks who have been successfully integrated into the mainstream lead lives filled with dysfunction behind closed doors, and the authors find that these films negatively portray middle-class Blacks which ultimately mirror old stereotypes of Blacks on film, even while creating new ones (Harris and Tassie, 2012).

Becoming media literate is one way to gaining a better understanding of how these films impact society and the world around us, both in and out of the classroom. When educators teach students critical media literacy, they often begin with media arts activities or simple decoding of media texts in the mode of the established media literacy movement, perhaps adding discussion of how audiences receive media messages (Kellner & Share, 2007). "However, critical media literacy also engages students in exploring the depths of the iceberg with critical questions to challenge "commonsense" assumptions concerning the meanings of texts with negotiated and

oppositional interpretations, as well as seeking alternative media with oppositional and counterhegemonic representations and messages, and, where feasible, teaching critical media literacy through production" (Kellner & Share, 2007, p. 9). Hobbs (2007) took a closer examination of popular films and the integration of media literacy into a traditional English curriculum by conducting research at Concord High School in Concord, New Hampshire over a seven-year period. The qualitative study details the integration of print and non-print texts; for example, one unit demonstrated reading with multiple version of Frankenstein (Hobbs, 2007). Students read different iterations of that text, from Mary Shelley's original work to a review of Monster Theory (Cohen, 1996). They also viewed several versions of the film including Boris Karloff's Frankenstein, Mel Brook's Young Frankenstein, and Kenneth Branaugh's Mary Shelley's Frankenstein (Hobbs, 2007). The class explored several themes: historical contexts, role of technology and and science, parenting, and identity (Hobbs, 2007). Hobbs (2007) found that students who received viewing and training with media literacy (Concord High students) showed significant differences from the control group in their critical ability to identify main ideas and purposes of media texts, creative construction techniques, point of view, and omitted information. Hobbs (2007) stated that the infusion of media literacy into the English course supported students' growth as writers. In addition to using critical media literacy to study film in the classroom, similar approaches are being created to incorporate Hip-Hop music and its culture into the traditional high school setting.

Hip-Hop

In the late 60s and early 70s, Clive Campbell, also known as DJ Kool Herc, became the first person to bring Hip-Hop music to Bronx, NY (Jackson & Anderson, 2009). Responding to the nightclub culture of the Bronx, DJ Kool Herc used a turtable to accentuate the parts of the song that people liked best, and he rapped along to encourage breakdancing and emphasized a syncopated beat (Jackson & Anderson, 2009). This gave rise to rap music: competitive DJs began to rap while sampling, mixing and scratching music during block parties hosted by Kool Herc (Jackson & Anderson, 2009). In the late 70s artists like Afrikaa Bambaataa, founder of Zulu Nation, an organization aimed at curbing gang violence through breakdancing, provided a way for gang members to utilize their energy in a positive manner (Jackson & Anderson, 2009). In 1980, Hip-Hop became more diversified. The 808 kickdrum, an advanced rhythm machine with integrated memory, became a cornerstone of the emerging genres of electronic music and hip hop, with the release of Planet Rock by Afrika Bambaataa and the Soulsonic Force (Anderson, 2008). The mid-80s was also known as the "Golden Age" of Hip-Hop where many other popular artists began to emerge like LL Cool J, Slick Rick, Ultramagnetic MC's, Run-D.M.C., Public Enemy, Beastie Boys, KRS-One, De La Soul, Big Daddy Kane, and a Tribe Called Quest (Linhardt, 2004). With the commercial success of gangsta rap in the early 1990s, the emphasis in lyrics shifted to drugs, violence, and misogyny and early proponents of gangsta rap included groups and artists like Ice-T, who recorded the first gangster rap record, *6 N' the Mornin* (Strode & Wood, 2007). N.W.A. whose second album *Niggaz4Life* also became the first gangsta rap album to enter the charts at number one (Hess, 2010). Gangsta rap became a

platform for artists to use their music to spread political and social messages about the conditions

of the ghetto (Strode & Wood, 2007). By the late 90s, millions of magazines and records were

sold, but two of Hip-Hop's most promising artists, Notorious B.I.G. (Biggie Smalls) and Tupac

Shakur, were gunned down in the crossfire of a media-fueled battle between the so called East

and West constituents of Hip-Hop culture (Hess, 2007). In the 2000s, Hip-Hop became more

publicized with the popularity of MTV, Total Request Live (TRL), and the rise of new media

platforms and Web 2.0 as fans discovered and downloaded or streamed Hip-Hop music through

social networking sites (Hooten, 2015).

Hip-hop is currently the most listened to genre in the world, according to Spotify's

analysis of 20 billion tracks (Hooten, 2015). Artists Kendrick Lamar and Drake had two of the

biggest releases on the service in 2015 (Hooten, 2015). As the effects of Hip-Hop continues to be

felt across the globe, Rapper Nas has been educating Black students about the importance of

staying in school and getting a good education. In his popular song, "I Know I Can," Nas (2002)

teaches children to embrace their history while encouraging them that they can be successful:

Be, be-fore we came to this country,

We were kings and queens, never porch monkeys,

There was empires in Africa called Kush,

Timbuktu, where every race came to get books,

To learn from black teachers who taught Greeks and Romans (Min. 2:30)

Aldridge (2005) argues that while Hip-Hop is far from perfect in addressing the problem of

education in Black communities, it has carried the tradition of calling for African Americans to

take control of their education and to obtain the educational tools that will enable them to improve their lives. Given the social, cultural and academic relevance of Hip-Hop music, educators are finding ways to incorporate Hip-Hop into the classroom. Morrell and Duncan-Andrade (2002) contend that classrooms are becoming more diverse based upon the forecast from the *Digest of Education Statistics*, and that during the next decade, the number of ethnic minority teachers will shrink to 5%, while the enrollment of ethnic minority children in America's schools will grow to 41%. As classrooms across the country become increasingly diverse, determining how to connect in significant ways across multiple lines of differences may be the greatest challenge facing teachers today; therefore, teachers in new century schools must meet this challenge and find ways to forge meaningful relationships with students who come from different worlds, while also helping these students develop academic skills and the skills needed to become critical citizens in a multicultural democracy (Morrell & Duncan-Andrade, 2002). When people's concerns, ideas and ways of life are not represented, much less served, we expect that those people would turn to other sources of information (Torres & Mercado, 2006). This is a crucial moment for critical media literacy, which should include building counter-hegemonic alternative media accessible to many people (Torres & Mercado, 2006). For instance, Timothy Jones, director of the Teen Program at Martha's Table, a nonprofit that serves at risk communities in Washington, DC, used Hip-Hop as a literacy and educational tool by developing a program called "Analyze That," where high school students analyze themes and lyrics from contemporary Hip-Hop songs and hypothesize the impact that the songs' messages have on their adolescent development (Pride, 2007). Educators like Marcella Runell and Martha Diaz created

The Hip-Hop Education Guidebook, a comprehensive collection of lesson plans that range from mathematics, science, social justice to literacy and English Language Arts and educational resources for students in grades 5-12 that have been used by teachers across the U.S. (Pride, 2007). "Courses on Hip-Hop, books, essays and other studied accounts of the genre are being generated by a pioneering cadre of scholars, and while many people see that as notable, there's not yet widespread belief that academe has completely warmed up to the idea of Hip-Hop as scholarship" (Evelyn, 2000, p.29). Some critics say that if academe fails to find ways to connect with Hip-Hop and it's culture, then it will have failed an entire generation (Evelyn, 2000). Others argue that Hip-Hop holds Blacks back and also suggest that Hip-Hop might do more harm than good. For instance, rap group Dead Prez believes the Hip-Hop culture has a negative influence on today's youth by promoting "a dog-eat-dog, greed influenced, me-first capitalist ideology" (Is Hip-Hop Culture Harming Our Youth, 2000).

Meanwhile, former President Barack Obama became a very powerful symbol for the Hip-Hop community because he could "get with" Hip-Hop like no other president before him (Alim & Smitherman, 2012). "His familiarity with Black language and Hip-Hop's lexion is not merely symbolic. It represents a presidential first. This is part of what prompts folks to refer to Obama as the 'first Hip-Hop President' and also part of the reason why many political observers credit Hip-Hop for bringing out the largest youth vote in presidential election history" (Alim & Smitherman, 2012, p.135). When asked if his administration would explore how Hip-Hop can be effectively used to aid in issues like education and incarceration, Obama said it can "absolutely" be used in positive ways in his administration, and he demonstrated his respect for Hip-Hop by

showing that he engages directly with the culture and that he appreciates it for its complexity and political potential (Alim & Smitherman, 2012). Hip-Hop dominating the political narrative of the first Black president in U.S. history arguably establishes that Hip-Hop is the blueprint of the racial politics that African Americans and minorities need to succeed and survive in the 21st century (Richmond, 2013). Like Hip-Hop, magazine publishers have also been celebrating the identity and culture of Blacks in education for many years.

<div align="center">**Magazines**</div>

The story of the Black consumer magazine has been one of success for only a few, and those in relatively recent times (Wolseley, 1990). Beginning with the *Colored American* in 1900 failures were frequent until recent decades and for a time such magazines as *Bronze World*, *Color*, *Our World*, and the *Urbanite* hoped to stay in the consumer field but failed (Wolseley, 1990). *Our World*, an expensively produced and lavish magazine with tinted inks and printed on high quality paper, was a rival monthly to *Color* and *Ebony* when it began in 1946 (Wolseley, 1990). *Urbanite*, which was issued monthly for one year in 1961 in New York, was a magazine aimed at affluent Blacks with $52 hundred to $15 thousand incomes, and it attracted quality advertising – book clubs, cigarettes, and record players (Wolseley, 1990). Johnson Publishing Company, headquartered in Chicago, IL, began dominating the magazine field of Black journalism with its first magazine, *Negro Digest*, which began in 1942 (Wolseley, 1990). The magazine did well enough to encourage John H. Johnston, its publisher, to attempt *Ebony*, which began in 1945 with the intention of emphasizing the bright side of Black life and reporting successes by Black people in any endeavor (Wolseley, 1990). Johnson later introduced *Jet*

magazine in the late 1980s, a pocket-size weekly, lighter in advertising volume than *Ebony* (Wolseley, 1990). In August 1970, the first issue of *Black Enterprise* magazine hit newsstands (Gates & Higginbotham, 2004). Earl Graves created the magazine to address issues relevant to Black business people and raise awareness of the importance of Black consumer power (Gates & Higginbotham, 2004). The most glamour-filled Black magazine on the market was conceived when a White executive of the Shearson, Hammill firm of Wall Street Brokers encouraged a trio of young Black businessmen to launch *Essence* (Wolseley, 1990). *Essence*, first published in 1970, is a monthly fashion, lifestyle and beauty magazine for African-American women between the ages of 18 and 49, and is one of the few American magazines that focus on reaching an audience of Black women, and revolves around the Black woman experience (Woodard, 2005). However, Woodard (2005) questions whether *Essence* promotes the freedom of the black woman from the world's oppressive images of her as a member of the minority or affirms the stereotypes that attempt to define her. McLaughlin and Goulet (1999) compared the portrayal of women in White-oriented magazines (i.e., *Cosmopolitan, Us, People*) and Black-oriented magazines (i.e., *Ebony*, *Essence*) and found that women were presented in submissive poses much more often in White-oriented magazines, while women in Black-oriented magazines were portrayed as financially strong and holding occupational status. Images of single-parent families were prevalent in Black-oriented magazines, and family images were scarce in White-oriented magazines (McLaughlin & Goulet, 1999).

Gilens (1996) examined the relationship between news media portrayals and public images of poverty and discovered that weekly newsmagazines portray the poor as substantially

more Black than is really the case. In more detailed analyses of newsmagazines, Gilens (1996) noticed that the most sympathetic subgroups of the poor, such as the elderly and the working poor, are underrepresented, while the least sympathetic group-unemployed working-age adults is overrepresented. Gilens (1996) study showed the poor were much less likely to be employed than their real-world counterparts, and this distortion was greater for African Americans; 42% of poor African Americans work, but only 12% of poor Blacks shown in newsmagazines do (Gilens, 1996). "By implicitly identifying poverty with race, the news media perpetuate stereotypes that work against the interests of both poor people and African Americans" (Gilens, 1996, p.515). The fourth core concept of critical media literacy asks for a closer examination of what lifestyles, values and points of view are represented in, or omitted from the message (Center for Media Literacy, 2005). The decision about a person's age, gender or race mixed in with the lifestyles, attitudes and behaviors that are portrayed, the selection of a setting (urban, rural, affluent, and poor), and the actions and re-actions in the plot are just some of the ways that values become "embedded" in a TV show, a movie or an ad (Center for Media Literacy, 2005). What's significant about the fourth core concept is not that ideas and values are embedded in media messages but that the values of mainstream media typically reinforce, and therefore, affirm, the existing social system (Center for Media Literacy, 2005). If we have the skills to question and identify both overt and latent values in a mediated presentation, whether from the news, entertainment – or now especially from the Internet – we are likely to be much more astute in our decision-making to accept or reject the overall message which is vital for effective citizenship in a democratic society (Center for Media Literacy, 2005).

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Frank Baker (2013), a media literacy education consultant and author, has been using popular culture and in-school magazines as part of his media literacy workshops to address such inaccurate and misleading coverage. Magazines have a high student engagement factor in the classroom and are proving to be a very effective way to teach visual literacy, media literacy, and a host of Common Core standards (Baker, 2013). Baker (2013) selected three popular magazines – *Sports Illustrated*, *Black Enterprise*, and *GQ Magazine* – all featuring sports star Lebron James on the front cover, and he posed five questions he wanted educators or students to think about when analyzing and deconstructing the covers. The questions were: (1) Who is the audience for each magazine and what are the clues? (2) What one or two adjectives would you choose to describe how Lebron looks on the cover? (3) Since magazine covers are considered advertisements, what techniques do each of the publications use to sell themselves to their readers? (4) What do Lebron's non-verbal facial expressions say or reveal to you? and (5) If you could read only one of those publications, which would it be and why? In other words, which is most appealing? (Baker, 2013). In addition, Baker (2013) encouraged students to expand their critical thinking skills by investigating "who" actually benefits from the purchase of a magazine. Students also considered the first core concept of critical media literacy – all media messages are constructed, followed by the key questions: 'How was this created? Who made the message?' (in this case the magazine) (Baker, 2013). Since many magazines have shifted online and onto tablets and e-readers, students should also consider how reading from a screen differs from print, and how the producers of those magazines have altered the traditional magazine-cover design and added interactive, multimedia elements (Baker, 2013). Utilizing magazines, film and Hip-

Hop to teach media literacy in the classroom can be a beneficial way to reach students while keeping them engaged and informed.

Summary

In film, Hip-Hop and magazines the portrayal of Blacks in education can have a lasting and devastating impact on African Americans. These types of media all play a key role in the formation of the many stereotypes, misrepresentations, and unjust treatment African Americans face. Black producers, directors and writers must be informed about the messages they are portraying regarding the educational experiences of African Americans and how these messages should be aimed at being more positive, which is why researching portrayals of the African American high school experience is necessary. For instance, when dealing with race relations in America, Black entertainers must emphasize the positive aspects of Black culture and properly identify Black criminals as the minority within the Black community, while also showing the causes of these social problems (Horton et al., 1999). In doing so, Black entertainers can break down stereotypes by ensuring they do not commit the exact same errors in depicting stereotypes as White entertainers do (Horton et al., 1999). Educators, teachers and parents must also be made aware of these messages, both positive and negative, so that they can become more knowledgeable of how to educate their students. By helping educators and administrators to understand the significance of media literacy education, it may increase their knowledge and/or shape their attitudes about the media's roles and practices pertaining to race and ethnicity (Scharrer & Ramasubramanian, 2015). Educators can also be taught how to use the media to

enhance teaching and learning in the classroom; for instance, via direct instruction, active learning teaching strategies, or through student projects.

According to Kellner & Share (2007) critical media literacy allows us to analyze, assess, and evaluate the media in a critical way. "Literacy involves gaining the skills and knowledge to read, interpret, produce texts and articulate facts, and to gain the intellectual tools and capacities to fully participate in one's culture and society" (Kellner & Share, 2007, p. 4-5). In this study, critical media literacy is used to examine three different types of media (film, Hip-Hop, and magazines) through content analysis to help us better understand the portrayal of the African American high school experience. "Media literacy is emerging not only from statewide or school district initiatives but also from the bottom-up energy of individual teachers who value the way that using media, technology, and popular culture improves the quality of student motiviation, self expression, or communication, or who are passionate about helping young people understand, challenge, and transform media's power in maintaining status quo power relationships through social and political activisim" (Hobbs, 2004, p. 56). Critical media literacy plays an integral role in education and offers a closer examination of how popular African American media can influence societal beliefs, attitudes, values, and the many social issues that impact us all.

Chapter III – Methodology

This study specifically explores the points of view, perspectives and narratives of Black producers, directors and writers of films, Hip-Hop songs and magazines from 1980 to the present concerning their portrayal of the African American high school educational experience. This chapter describes the research methodology that was utilized in this study. It also focuses on the research questions, research design, document and data analysis, establishing trustworthiness and concludes with a brief summary.

Purpose Overview and Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to investigate how Black films, Hip-Hop songs and magazines portray the educational experiences of African Americans when compared to the research literature and how these messages should be aimed at being more positive. The study will also expose educators, teachers and parents to these messages, both positive and negative, making them more knowledgable and aware of how to educate students. The researcher used a critical media literacy approach to examine 10 films, 12 Hip-Hop songs and 12 magazine articles through content analysis to gain a better understanding of how these types of media portray the African American high school educational experience. "Critical media literacy is a progressive educational response that expands the notion of literacy to include different forms of mass communication, popular culture, and new technologies and also deepens literacy education to critically analyze relationships between media and audience, information, and power" (Garcia, Seglem & Share, 2013, p. 111). Along with this analysis, alternative media production is an essential component of critical media literacy because it empowers students to create their own

messages that can challenge media texts and narratives (Garcia et al., 2013). The research questions that were addressed in this study are:

(1) How is the African American experience in high school portrayed by Black producers, directors and writers?

(2) In what ways do film, Hip-Hop and magazines illustrate the usefulness of the educational experience for social mobility (financial attainment, career vocational attainment, and school attainment)?

(3) Do certain types of media portray the African American high school experience in a more positive or negative light?

Research Design

Data Collection Procedures

Document analysis, a type of qualitative research method, is a systematic procedure for reviewing or evaluating documents – both printed and electronic (computer-based and Internet transmitted) material (Bowen, 2009). Like any other analytical methods in qualitative research, document analysis requires that data be examined and interpreted in order to elicit meaning, gain understanding, and develop empirical knowledge (Bowen, 2009). Documents that may be used for systematic evaluation as part of a study take a variety of forms including: books, journals, newspapers (clippings/articles), radio and television program scripts, survey data and various public records (Bowen, 2009). Since the study's focus was geared toward understanding Black producers, directors and writers' portrayals of the African American educational experience, films, Hip-Hop songs and magazines were the most reliable sources of data.

Data for this study consisted of a sampling of 10 films, 12 Hip-Hop songs and 12 magazine articles. The films, songs, and magazine articles will be selected from the 1980s, 1990s, 2000s, and 2010s and will be chosen based on social popularity ratings. The 1980s to the present is a significant time period due to the impact that film, Hip-Hop and magazines had on the African American community. For instance, these types of media were very influential in the late 1980s and early 1990s, which was known as the "Golden Age" of Hip-Hop where a number of popular artists began to emerge (Linhardt, 2004). Black cinema also experienced a "breakthrough" as African American actors began to take on leading roles (Rose, 2016). During this time period, magazines began to proliferate, and *Essence* and *Black Enterprise* successfully reached a growing audience of young urban Americans (Danesi, 2015). Each film, song and magazine article was selected based on social popularity ratings from media outlets such as the American Black Film Festival; Black Reel Awards, or "BRAs", an annual American awards ceremony hosted by the Foundation for the Augmentation of African-Americans in Film (FAAAF); IMDb (Internet Movie Database) awards; Black Entertainment Television (BET); Rolling Stone; Billboard; Pitchfork; Performer; and All Music, an online music database. According to Newbold, Boyd-Barrett, & Van Den Bulck, 2002) sampling for media analysis consists of three steps:

> (1) selection of media forms (ie. Newspapers, magazines, radio, TV, film) and genre (news, current affairs, drama, soap opera, documentary, and so on); (2) selection of issues or dates (the period); and (3) sampling of relevant content from within those media. (p. 80-81)

Newbold et al. (2002) argue that sampling needs to be conducted in an objective way, ensuring reliability is maintained. Purposive sampling was used in this study. The main objective of a purposive sample is to produce a sample that can be logically assumed to be representative of the population (Lavrakas, 2008). This is often accomplished by applying expert knowledge of the population to select in a nonrandom manner a sample of elements that represents a cross-section of the population (Lavrakas, 2008). The researcher grouped films, Hip-Hop songs and magazine articles by decade (1980s, 1990s, 2000s and 2010s), then used a True Random Number Generator (random.org) to randomly select films, Hip-Hop songs and magazine articles from each decade. A random number generator was not used when selecting films for the 1980s since there was only one film that was purposely selected for that decade. However, three films were randomly chosen from each of the remaining three decades (1990s, 2000s and 2010s) for a total of 10 films. Three Hip-Hop songs were randomly chosen from each decade for a total of 12 songs. Seven music videos from the 1980s, 1990s and 2010s were also examined in this study. According to the Pew Research Center (2016) *Ebony*, *Essence*, and *Black Enterprise* were among the top three African American magazines with the highest total average circulation for a six-month period ending June 30 from 2006 to 2015. The researcher selected one magazine article from each of the four decades, from each of these three publications, for a total of 12 articles.

Table 1. Films selected by decade

	Film #1	Film #2	Film #3
1980s	Title: *George McKenna Story* Director: Eric Laneuville Year: 1986	Not available	Not available
1990s	Title: *House Party* Producer: Warrington Hudlin Director: Reginald Hudlin Year: 1990	Title: *Boyz in the Hood* Director: John Singleton Year: 1991	Title: *The Ernest Green Story* Director: Eric Laneuville Year: 1993
2000s	Title: *The Red Sneakers* Director: Gregory Hines Year: 2002	Title: *Coach Carter* Director: Thomas Carter Year: 2005	Title: *Remember the Titans* Writer: Gregory Allen Howard Year: 2000
2010s	Title: *Mac and Devin Go to High School* Director: Dylan C. Brown Year: 2012	Title: *Dope* Producer: Forrest Whitaker Director: Rick Famuyiwa Year: 2015	Title: *Brotherly Love* Producer: Jacob York Director: Jamal Hill Year: 2015

Table 2. Hip-Hop songs selected by decade

	Song #1	Song #2	Song #3
1980s	Title: "Hey Young World" Artist: Slick Rick Album: The Great Adventures of Slick Rick Year: 1989	Title: "You Must Learn" Artist: Boogie Down Productions Album: Ghetto Music: the Blueprint of Hip-Hop Year: 1989	Title: "Rap Summary" Artist: Big Daddy Kane Album: It's a Big Daddy Thing Year: 1989
1990s	Title: "Peer Pressure" Artist: Mobb Deep Album: Juvenile Hell Year: 1993	Title: "I Missed the Bus" Artist: Kriss Kross Album: Totally Krossed Out Year: 1992	Title: "Case of the P.T.A." Artist: Leaders of the New School Album: A Future Without a Past Year: 1991
2000s	Title: "School Daze" Artist: J. Cole Album: The Come Up Vol. 1 Mixtape Year: 2007	Title: "Revelation" Artist: D12 Album: Devils Night Year: 2001	Title: "School Yard (D.P.G.C. High)" Artist: Tha Dogg Pound Album: Tha Last of the Pound Year: 2004
2010s	Title: "Textbook Stuff" Artist: XV Album: Zero Heroes Year: 2011	Title: "Get Educated" Artist: Akala Album: Knowledge is Power Vol. 1 Year: 2012	Title: "The Show Goes On" Artist: Lupe Fiasco Album: Lasers Year: 2010

Table 3. Magazine articles selected by decade

	Ebony	*Essence*	*Black Enterprise*
1980s	Article #1 Title: "A Better Chance" Author: Lynn Norment Year: 1983	Article #1 Title: "Say Brother, I Really Believed my High School Diploma was the Way to a High-Paying Job and a Promising Career" Author: Darren Scott Johnston Year: 1986	Article #1 Title: "Degrees of success" Author: Lloyd Gite Year: 1987
1990s	Article #2 Title: "Do Black males need special schools?" Author: Charles Whitaker Year: 1991	Article #2 Title: "Two Schools: Separate and Savagely Unequal" Author: Kevin Powell Year: 1992	Article #2 Title: "Are apprenticeships the answer?" Author: Margaret C. Simms Year: 1992
2000s	Article #3 Title: "Saving Black boys: is single-sex education the answer?" Author: Tracey Robinson-English Year: 2006	Article #3 Title: "Leave No School Behind: They're fighting for high-quality education. You can too." Author: Mary Lord Year: 2005	Article #3 Title: "Saving our young black men" Author: Earl G. Graves, Sr. Year: 2006
2010s	Article #4 Title: "Black Girls and School Discipline: What's Going On?" Author: Monique W. Morris Year: 2014	Article #4 Title: "Essence Series: Teaching Our Children" Author: Francie Latour Year: 2010	Article #4 Title: "New lessons for our classrooms: improving the education of African American students will require a stronger teacher workforce. Here's what it will take." Author: Marcia Wade Talbert & Robin White Goode Year: 2011

Content from the films, Hip-Hop song lyrics, music videos and magazines will be transcribed

verbatim for diaglogue, action and sound. They will be examined for themes related to the

African American experience in education. This study did not require approval from the

University of Memphis' Institutional Review Board because no human participants were

interviewed. After receiving approval from the Department of Leadership's department chair,

content analysis began.

Data Set

Pawson (1995) identifies four approaches to carrying out content analysis: (1) formal

conent analysis; (2) thematic analysis; (3) textual analysis; and (4) audience analysis. In this

study, films, Hip-Hop songs, music videos and magazine articles were thematically analyzed to

identify themes addressing the portrayal of African American high school experience. With

thematic analysis the idea is to understand the encoding process, especially the intentions that lie

behind the production of mass media documents (Pawson, 1995). The usual strategy is to pick on

a specific area of reportage and subject it to a very detailed analysis in the hope of unearthing the

underlying purposes and intentions of the authors of the communication (Pawson, 1995).

Thematic analysis is described in more detail in the following paragraphs.

Content analysis can be qualitative or quantitative. The qualitative, naturalist approach is

used when observing and interpreting reality with the aim of developing a theory that will

explain what was experienced (Newman & Ridenour, 1998). The quantitative approach is used

when one begins with a theory (or hypothesis) and tests for confirmation of disconfirmation of

that hypothesis (Newman & Ridenour, 1998). For this study, qualitative research methods were

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appropriate since content from Black produced, directed, and written films, Hip-Hop songs and

magazines were analyzed to identify particular themes that are associated with how African

Americans are portrayed in education. The focus on document analysis is sufficient in providing

a low-cost way to obtain empirical data as part of a process that is unobtrusive and nonreactive

(Bowen, 2009). Documentary evidence is sometimes combined with data from interviews and

observations to minimize bias and establish credibility (Bowen, 2009).

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Document Analysis

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Prior to analyzing films, Hip-Hop song lyrics, music videos and magazine articles, I had

to address any biases prior to data analysis to ensure the trustworthiness of the results. I looked at

documents with a critical eye and was cautious in using documents in this study (Bowen, 2009).

I had to determine the authenticity, credibility, accuracy, and representativeness of the selected

documents (Bowen, 2009). "Document analysis is not a matter of lining up a series of excerpts

from printed material to convey whatever idea come to the researcher's mind; rather, it is a

process of evaluating documents in such a way that empirical knowledge is produced and

understanding is developed" (Bowen, 2009, p.33-34). I aimed for objectivity and sensitivity

while maintaining balance between both (Bowen, 2009).

Positionality Statement

Reflexive research requires a willingness to consider how one's background, personal

values, and experiences affect what he or she is able to observe and analyze; therefore, related to

the notion of reflexivity in field research is the positionality of the researcher (D'Silva, Smith,

Della, Potter, Talley & Best, 2016). Discussing one's position in relation to his or her research

foci, provides those who are not a part of the study yet are engaging with the research (e.g., academic audiences), with an understanding of the researcher's perspectives (D'Silva et al., 2016). I was aware of how my position in society, cultural background and experiences might influence research outcomes or interpretations (D'Silva et al., 2009). While I have worked in the television news business for more than 10 years as a producer, writer, anchor and reporter, I had to make sure my own values and opinions about the media were not reflected in the research questions, data collection methods, or findings.

I did a number of things to maintain objectivity and avoid bias. Smith and Noble (2014) argue that bias exists in all study designs, and although researchers should attempt to minimize bias, outlining potential sources of bias enables greater critical evaluation of the research findings and conclusions. "Researchers bring to each study their experiences, ideas, prejudices and personal philosophies, which if accounted for in advance of the study, enhance the transparency of possible research bias" (Smith and Noble, 2014, p.101). Therefore, I had to choose a research design that was appropriate for the study to reduce any potential biases. In addition to noting the limitations of the study in Chapter I, I kept detailed records of all research, data, and results from the study. After becoming familiar with the data, generating initial codes, and searching for themes, I read the data associated with each theme and considered whether the data really did support it (Maguire & Delahunt, 2017). I asked others to review the conclusions of the study, including my dissertation chair and a colleague who was not familiar with the study, to look for signs of bias. I included all results and findings in Chapter IV of the study, even if they didn't seem to be important.

As a qualitative research method, document analysis requires the researcher to determine not only the existence and accessibility but also the authenticity and usefulness of particular documents, taking into account the original purpose of each document, the context in which it was produced, and the intended audience (Bowen, 2009). As the subjective interpreter of data contained in documents, the researcher should make the process of analysis as rigorous and transparent as possible (Bowen, 2009).

Data Analysis

Qualitative content analysis (QCA) is a research method for the subjective interpretation of the content of text data through the systematic classification process of coding and identitying themes or patterns (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). QCA is one of numerous research methods used to analyze text data (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). Text data might be in verbal, print, or electronic form and might have been obtained from narrative responses, open-ended survey questions, interviews, focus groups, observations, or print media such as articles, books, or manuals (Kondracki & Wellman, 2002). Qualitative content analysis goes beyond counting words to examining language intensely for the purpose of classifying large amounts of text into an efficient number of categories that represent similar meanings (Weber, 1990).

This study used thematic analysis, a type of qualitative content analysis that systematically identifies, organizes, and offers insight into patterns of meaning (themes) across a data set (Braun & Clark (2012). Through focusing on meaning across a data set, thematic analysis allowed me to see and make sense of collective or shared meaning and experiences (Braun & Clark, 2012). Film, Hip-Hop songs, music videos and magazines were analyzed using

this method to gain a better understanding of how Black producers, directors and writers portray the African American experience in education. This method is a way of identifying what is common to the way a topic is talked or written about and of making sense of those commonalities (Braun & Clarke, 2012). According to Braun and Clarke (2006) thematic analysis has six phases: (1) familiarizing yourself with the data; (2) generating initial codes; (3) searching for themes; (4) reviewing potential themes; (5) defining and naming themes; and (6) producing the report.

During phase 1, I became familiar with the data by watching films, listening to Hip-Hop song, watching music videos and reading magazine articles. In addition to listening to the Hip-Hop songs, I read the lyrics to each song. I took notes on the data and highlighted portions of the data that were of interest. The aim of this phase was for me to become intimately familiar with the data set's content and to begin to notice things that might be relevant to the research questions (Braun & Clark, 2006).

In phase 2, I began analyzing the data through coding. Codes identify and provide a label for a feature of the data that is potentially relevant to the research questions (Braun & Clark, 2006). Each time I identified something that was potentially relevant to the research questions, I coded it (Braun & Clark, 2006). This was done by identifying the code name and highlighting the portion of text associated with it (Braun & Clark, 2006). Even if I was unsure about whether a piece of data was relevant, I still coded it. This made it much easier for me to discard codes rather than going back to the entire data set and recoding data (Braun & Clark, 2006). As I continued to read the data, I had to decide whether to apply the codes I had already used or

whether a new code was needed to capture that piece of data (Braun & Clark, 2006). This process was repeated throughout each data item and the entire data set (Braun & Clark, 2006).

Phase 3 involved searching for themes. A theme captures something important about the data in relation to the research questions, and represents some level of patterned response or meaning within the data set (Braun & Clark, 2006). This phase involves reviewing the coded data to identify areas of similarity and overlap between codes (Braun & Clark, 2006). The basic process of generating themes involves collapsing or clustering codes that seem to share soume unifying feature together, so that they reflect and describe a coherent and meaningful pattern in the data (Braun & Clark, 2006). I had to consider how the themes would work together in telling an overall story about the data (Braun & Clark, 2006). These themes helped to provide a meaningful picture of the data (Braun & Clark, 2006).

During the fourth phase, I reviewed the developing themes in relation to the coded data and the entire data set (Braun & Clark, 2006). I checked the themes against the collated extracts of data to explore whether the themes worked in relation to the data; and if they did not, I discarded those codes or relocated them under another theme name so that it more meaningfully captured the relevant data (Braun & Clark, 2006). Once I found a set of themes that worked in relation to the coded data extracts, I reviewed the themes in relation to the entire data set which included rereading all of the data to determine whether the themes meaningfully captured the entire data set (Braun & Clark, 2006). What I was aiming for was a set of themes that captured the most important and relevant elements of the data, and the overall tone of the data, in relation to the research questions (Braun & Clark, 2006).

In phase 5, I had to define themes by clearly stating what was unique and specific about each theme. According to Braun and Clark (2006) good thematic analysis will have themes that (a) do not try to do too much as themes should ideally have a singular focus; (b) are related but do not overlap, so they are not repetitive, although they may build on previous themes; and (c) directly address the research questions. I selected extracts to present and analyze and then identified the story of each theme with or around those extracts (Braun & Clark, 2006).

Lastly, phase 6 involved a final analysis and producing the report. Braun and Clark (2006) argue that writing and analysis are thoroughly interwoven in qualitative research – from informal writing of notes and memos to the more formal processes of analysis and report writing. The purpose of report was to provide a compelling story about the data based on my analysis (Braun & Clark, 2006). The order in which I presented the themes was also important. Themes had to connect logically and meaningfully and, if relevant, were built on previous themes to tell a coherent story about the data (Braun & Clark, 2006). Braun and Clark (2006) confirm that these six guidelines lay out the process for producing a good thematic analysis that is "thorough, plausible, and sophisticated."

Critical Media Literacy and Thematic Analysis

Critical media literacy addresses all forms of media including television, radio, newspapers, video and online content (Kellner & Share, 2007). Critical media literacy constitutes a critique of mainstream approaches to literacy and a political project for democratic and social change (Kellner & Share, 2007). "This involves a multiperspectival critical inquiry of media culture and the cultural industries that address issues of class, race, gender, sexuality, and power

and also promotes the production of alternative counterhegemonic media" (Kellner & Share, 2007, p. 8-9). Media and information communication technology can be tools for empowerment when people who are most often marginalized or misrepresented in the mainstream media receive the opportunity to use these tools to tell their stories and express their concerns (Kellner & Share, 2007). In this study, films, Hip-Hop songs, music videos and magazines were thematically analyzed to gain a better understanding of the portrayal of the African American high school experience. As explained in Chapter II, certain stereotypes that African Americans face have contributed to this as a social problem.

Trustworthiness

In this study, the examination of trustworthiness was crucial. In order for qualitative data to be trustworthy, I had to consider the following principles: (a) credibility or truth value; (b) transferability or applicability; (c) dependability or consistency; and (d) confirmability and neutrality (Klopper, 2008). To ensure trustworthiness, the role of triangulation was emphasized to establish credibility and reduce the effect of investigator bias (Gunawan, 2015). Triangulation refers to the use of multiple methods or data sources in qualitative research to develop a comprehensive understanding of phenomena (Carter, Bryant-Lukosius, DiCenso, Blythe, & Neville, 2014). In the study, I used more than one source to collect data. Films, Hip-Hop songs and magazine articles, selected based on social popularity ratings from media outlets such as the American Black Film Festival; Black Reel Awards, or "BRAs"; IMDb (Internet Movie Database) awards; Black Entertainment Television (BET); Rolling Stone; Billboard; Pitchfork;

Performer; and All Music, an online music database, were used to establish credibility while capturing different aspects of the African American experience in education.

Transferability is the degree to which the results of qualitative research can be transferred to other contexts with other respondents – it is the interpretive equivalent of generalizability (Bitsch, 2005; Tobin & Begley, 2004). According to Bitsch (2005), the "researcher facilitates the transferability judgment by a potential user through 'thick description' and purposeful sampling" (p. 85). Transferability involves applying the results of research in one situation to other similar situations. In this study, critical media literacy allows us to analyze key messages in film, Hip-Hop, and magazines by examining documents to find information that can be applied directly to different contexts. For example, readers of this research might note specifically how the African American educational experience is portrayed by the media and music. Readers can compare the research to their own environment or situation. If there are enough similarities between the two, the readers may be able to infer that the results of this research is the same or similar in their own situation. In other words, they "transfer" the results of the study to another context. Flood, Heath, Lapp, & International Reading Association (2005) confirm that one of the justifications of media literacy is that the abilities of analyzing messages and communicating with media instruments, once learned by studying popular texts, can be applied directly to different contexts; for instance, literacy skills from one genre, such as print, could be applied to other genres of audiovisual media, television, or film.

According to Bitsch (2005), dependability ensures reliability and refers to "the stability of findings over time" (p. 86). Dependability is established using an audit trail, a code-recode

strategy, stepwise replication, triangulation and peer examination (Ary, Jacobs, Razavieh, & Sorensen, 2010). To improve dependability, I created an audit trail and kept a record of all notes, song lyrics, transcripts, articles and other documents. To validate the data, I accounted for all the research decisions and activities by showing how the data were collected, recorded and analyzed (Bowen, 2009). The audit trail also established confirmability of the study. Confirmability is "concerned with establishing that data and interpretations of the findings are not figments of the inquirer's imagination, but are clearly derived from the data" (Tobin & Begley, 2004, p. 392).

Summary

This study used document analysis, a qualitative research method, to explore the portrayal of the African American high school experience in education. Thematic analysis, a qualitative analysis method, was used to identify patterns or meanings of themes found in films, Hip-Hop songs, music videos and magazines to address research questions related to how Black produced, directed and written films, Hip-Hop songs and magazines portray the educational experiences of African Americans when compared to the research literature and how these messages should be aimed at being more positive.

Critical media literacy informed this study's methodology and analysis and provided a framework that focused on understanding and critically analyzing how different forms of media work. It provided a framework to study how the media can be used to teach a variety of topics related to multicultural understanding and education (Kellner & Share, 2005). Critical media literacy teaches people to learn from the media, to resist media manipulation, and to use media materials in constructive ways (Kellner & Share, 2005). As part of the activities of critical media

literacy carried on in the classroom, teachers should help students "read between the lines" of the media messages, question the interests behind them, and learn how to look for alternative ways to be informed and/or entertained (Torres & Mercado, 2006). Chapters IV and V will discuss the study's findings, themes, and research questions in more detail.

Chapter IV – Analysis and Findings

This study looked at media depictions of African Americans by examining and analyzing content in Black produced, directed and written films, Hip-Hops songs and magazine articles. The purpose of this study was to gain a deeper understanding of how Black producers, directors and writers portray the African American high school experience in education. The researcher developed multiple themes regarding how African Americans are depicted in popular films, Hip-Hop and magazines. The discovered themes for film were as follows: (1) violence crime and drug use, (2) school discipline, (3) academic achievement, (4) poverty, (5) adequate and equitable resources, (6) truancy, (7) the victim mindset, (8) diversity and cultural competence, (9) family structure, (10) sexual content, and (11) celebration. Hip-Hop consisted of the following themes: (1) the victim mindset, (2) family structure, (3) academic achievement, (4) violence, crime and drug use, (5) poverty, (6) celebration, (7) diversity and cultural competence, (8) adequate and equitable resources, (9) peer pressure, (10) truancy, (11) school discipline, (12) sexual content, and (13) incarceration/prison. The following themes were prevalent in magazines: (1) academic achievement, (2) adequate and equitable resources, (3) diversity and cultural competence, (4) violence, crime and drug use, (5) poverty, (6) incarceration/prison (7) family structure, and (8) role models. The researcher used themes from a critical media literacy lens to organize and analyze text data which allowed the researcher to identify themes that are associated with how African Americans are portrayed in education. In this chapter, the researcher presents the study's findings and organizes the coded data by connecting them with the appropriate themes. In Chapter V, the researcher will use the findings to answer the study's

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research questions, provide implications from this study and make recommendations for further research.

Introduction to the Data

The data for this study consisted of a sampling of 10 films, 12 Hip-Hop songs and 12 magazine articles from the 1980s, 1990s, 2000s and 2010s. Official Hip-Hop music videos were only available for seven of the 12 selected songs. The researcher examined three music videos from the 1980s, three from the 1990s, none were examined from the 2000s, and only one music video was examined from the 2010s. Each film, song, and magazine article was selected based on social popularity ratings from media outlets such as American Black Film Festival; Black Reel Awards, or "BRAs"; IMDb awards; BET; Rolling Stone; Billboard; Pitchfork; Performer; and All Music. The films, songs and magazines identified and chosen for this study were all appropriate based on the study's purpose and relevance to the research questions.

Introduction to Themes

By examining films, Hip-Hop songs, music videos and magazine articles through the lens of critical media literacy, the researcher discovered multiple themes. Each theme emphasizes the role of critical media literacy as it relates to portrayals of the African American high school experience. By exploring patterns or themes in film, Hip-Hop and magazines, the researcher was able to gain insight into how our understanding, values, and beliefs of other people are constructed. The themes and examples from the data are explained below.

Film Themes

Theme One: Violence, Crime and Drug Use

The films examined in this study addressed violence, crime and drug use and its impact on African American youth and the community. For instance in *The George McKenna Story* (86) gangs fighting at the school was a common phenomenon throughout the film. The movie is based on the true story of a teacher in Los Angeles who becomes the principal of George Washington Memorial High School. The school and its students are plagued by a life of gangs and drugs. In the film, Margaret Wright, President of Parent's Community Action Committee, stated "Gangs are going to be your biggest problem. They beat up on the new members before they take them in." According to the second core concept of critical media literacy, there are certain techniques the media uses to attact its viewers' attention (Center for Media Literacy, 2005). In this film, the lights go out. It's dark. A bell rings. Chaos erupts as student start running out of class and into the hallway. Smoke fills the air. There's a fire at the school. These forms of visual communication – lighting, composition, camera angle, editing, use of props, body language, and symbols are used to influence the various meanings the audience takes away from the message (Center for Media Literacy, 2005). There is another gang fight that breaks out at school. A student by the name of Kelly is shot and killed by gunfire. Then a rival gang member approaches Eli, a student on campus. There is a heated exchange between the two. George McKenna (Denzel Washington) also shows physical aggression while confronting a gang member face to face. Later on, McKenna is seen confronting the entire gang as he tries to break up a fight.

In the movie *House Party* (90) Kid (Christopher Reid) is involved in an altercation with school bully Stab and his two brothers Pee-Wee and Zilla. During the scuffle, Stab lifts Kid up off his feet, holds him in the air, and begins punching Kid after throwing him on the lunchroom table. When Kid arrives home, he tries to convince his father, "Pop" to let him go to a party. Pop agrees at first, but when a note from school informs Pop of the fight, Kid is grounded and told he cannot attend to the party. Rather than miss the party, Kid sneaks out of the house while Pop is asleep. However, on his way to the party, Kid runs into Stab and his brothers who try to run Kid over with their jeep. While trying to escape, Kid and the bullies are captured by the neighborhood police. Kid's father is also stopped and harassed by the police while walking trying to find him.

Violence was also prevalent in the film *Boys in the Hood* (91). The movie is based on Director John Singleton's portrayal of social problems in inner-city Los Angeles. It features the lives of three friends growing up together "in the hood." The film begins with profanity, the screeching of car tires, gunshots, and a 9-1-1 call. There is audio of a child's voice screaming, "They shot my brother." The screen fades to black. Startling statistics appear in white letters on the screen. The first message reads, "One out of every twenty one Black American males will be murdered in their lifetime." The image then fades to a second screen which reads, "Most will die at the hands of another Black male." Core concept two of critical media literacy explores the format of a media message and examines the way this message of violence is constructed through the creative components that are used in putting it together – words, music, color movement and camera angles (Center for Media Literacy, 2005). Characters Ricky (Morris

Chestnut) and Doughboy (Ice Cube) get into a fight. While Ricky and Tre walk to a nearby store, they see Ferris and his gang driving around the neighborhood. Ferris' car pulls up. Ricky turns to run. The film uses movement in the way it constructs its message of violence. The camera zooms in for a closeup of Ricky as one of Ferris' men shoots him twice with a double-barreled shotgun, killing him. The video is shown in slow motion as Ricky's lifeless bloody body is seen falling to ground.

The Ernest Green Story (93) highlights the story of Ernest Green (Morris Chestnut), one of the Little Rock Nine who were the first blacks to integrate into an all White school. In the movie, violence erupts as bright lights flash into a window. The sound of shattered glass and the screeching of car tires are heard as Ernest and his mother run for cover. They hit the floor. With fear in their eyes, intense music starts playing. Suddenly a huge rock has been thrown through the window with a note attached which reads, "Dynamite Next Time". White students are later seen attacking a Black student (Jefferson) in the hallway at school knocking him to the ground, punching and kicking him repeatedly. Carrying baseball bats and other weapons, a fight later breaks out between a group of Black boys and White boys. Ernest's brother, Scott, is part of the group. Ernest runs to his brother's rescue.

Ernest: "Scott, What's the matter with you? What are you doing?"

Scott: "I'm doing what I have to do. I just want to make the streets safe for us."

Ernest: "You are not making the streets safe. You're spreading violence."

Scott: "They don't need me to spread it. It's already spreading. Turn your cheek. Turn your other cheek. So what do you do when you run out of cheeks?"

Ernest: "Come on let's go home."

In another scene there is broken glass on the floor. Bright lights and fog fill the room as Ernest and another student prepare to take a the shower at school. Ernest cuts his foot. There is a splatter of blood on the floor after Ernest cuts his foot on the glass placed there by White students as a form of retaliation.

African American students being portrayed as athletes was a common occurrence in several of the films examined in this study. In the film *Coach Carter* (05) Ken Carter (Samuel L. Jackson) accepts the job of basketball coach for his old high school in a poor area of Richmond, CA. Violence erupts as two competing basketball teams begin fighting on the court during a game at the school. The players show physical aggression against each other. Carter quickly realizes that the athletes are rude, disrespectful, and need discipline. In the gym, Carter is faced with hostility from the players and one of them, Timo Cruz, attempts to punch Carter but is quickly subdued. Cruz then quits the team in anger, along with two of the team's top scorers. Cruz and a drug dealer are later seen exchanging money on the street. The drug dealer hands Cruz a nickel bag of dope. After Carter benches his entire team for breaking their academic contract with him, Carter and another man show physical aggression towards each other after the man pulls up next to Carter's car at a stoplight. The man spit on Carter's window and taunts Carter for his decision to lock down the gym. Carter becomes irate and tries to fight the man, but Carter's son, Damien, breaks up the altercation.

In the film *Dope* (15) Malcolm Adekanbi (Shameik Moore) and his best friends, Jib (Tony Revolori) and Diggy (Kiersey Clemons), are high school students living in "The

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Bottoms," a high-crime neighborhood in Inglewood, California. While riding his bike home, Malcolm is stopped by Dom (ASAP Rocky), a drug dealer who instructs him to invite a girl named Nakia (Zoe Kravitz) to his party. Malcolm, Nakia, Jib and Diggy all attend the party. Several people are shot by an armed gang after Dom tries to purchase drugs. Gunfire and chaos erupts, the crowd screams and people start running. Outside police sirens are blaring and blue lights are flashing. Malcolm escapes as the police arrive, unaware that Dom has hidden the drugs and a gun in his backpack.

Theme Two: School Discipline

School discipline was another theme that was illustrated in some of the films. It is an issue many African American students face in the classroom. For example, in *The George McKenna Story* (86) a student was suspended for two days for threatening a teacher, Mr. Gooden. In *The Ernest Green Story* (93) a White male student approaches Minnijean, a Black female student, in the lunchroom and whispers to her "Hey chocolate girl…baby". Minnijean throws chili on the student. School officials threaten to expel Minnijean after she complains to school's principal about the student's comments to her. Minnijean is later seen getting into an argument with another White female student.

Student: "Well I hope they throw you out, Nigger."

Minnijean: "Leave me alone, White trash."

Student: "What!?"

Minnijean: "I said leave me alone, White trash."

Student: "You don't even belong here."

In the film *Coach Carter* (05) Carter learns that a student, Junior Battle, does not attend classes, so Carter suspends him for several games. After a confrontation with Carter, Battle leaves the team in anger. Afterwards, Battle's mother asks Carter to let her son back on the team. Battle apologizes; however, as a form of punishment, Carter tells Battle he has to do 1,000 push-ups and 1,000 suicides. In *Mac and Devin Go to High School* (12) Mac is expelled from school. He is called to the office to discuss his behavior with the assistant principal, Mr. Skinfloot.

>Mr. Skinfloot: "Do you know what I'm filling out?"
>
>Mac: "An order for some medium sized condoms?"
>
>Mr. Skinfloot: "No, these are your expulsion papers."
>
>Mac: "Expulsion papers. Expulsion for what?"
>
>Mr. Skinfloot: "Well, let's see. Breaking and entering. Possession of a narcotic."
>
>Mac: "Possession of a narcotic? Fool, the last time I checked the shit was legal in California."
>
>Skinfloot: "You're done mister. Your 15 year tenure at this school is over."

While research has shown that Black high school students are more than likely to get suspended than their White classmates, these movies address an important theme that is of great concern to schools nationwide.

Theme Three: Academic Achievement

When addressing academic achievement in the classroom, many of the films also focused on the gap that exists between White and Black students, which has remained a problem in

education. In *The George McKenna Story* (86) there is audio of George McKenna's voice as he talks about the school in a meeting with his staff:

> The students are innocent. They hire no teachers, publish no textbooks. Select no principles. They have nothing to say about what they are taught. The responsibility is ours. Only 20 percent of our graduates continue into educational programs. The absentee rate is 30 percent on a daily basis. The students cannot learn if they are not here. The failure and dropout rates are unbearable. We need a homeroom period every morning to check them into school and to monitor attendance. What this means is the teachers will be responsible for every child. They kids need parents away from home.

When African American students receive a quality education it can have a lasting impacting on their lives. Schools can help these students to achieve success by providing better educational outcomes for them. In the film *The Ernest Green Story* (93) African American students are not allowed to attend Central High because of their race. The students realize just how important an education is:

> Student 1: "I'll tell you right now. I'm not staying in the South all of my life."
>
> Student 2: "What are you going to do?"
>
> Student 1: "Get an education. That's the only way out."
>
> Minnijean Brown (Monica Calhoun): "With you everything is an education."
>
> Student 1: "Yes, it is."
>
> Student 3: "He's right Minnijean. You know that yourself."

Ernest: "Alright, alright. Maybe Ms. Bates can bring home our school assignments and

we can do them here while they're figuring out what they're going to do."

In *Boys in the Hood* (91) Ricky hopes to win a scholarship from University of Southern

California. During a visit from a recruiter, he learns that he must score at least a 700 on the SATs

in order to qualify. Ricky later scores a 710 on the SAT, just enough to qualify for the

scholarship. In *The Red Sneakers* (02) Mr. Seabrooke is seen walking down the school's hallway

with Reggie. Mr. Seabrooke tells him how important it is to get good grades.

Mr. Seabrooke: "Do you know what your average is in my class? A 94. That's an A. You

know how many students at my last school got an A from me?"

Reggie: "I don't know. How many?"

Mr. Seabrooke: "None. Noone. Reggie have you got any college plans?"

Reggie: "Yes, I do."

Mr. Seabrooke: "You got your applications in."

Reggie: "Not yet."

Mr. Seabrooke: "How bout we get together and do some advanced work after school,

some Calculus and stuff like that. It'll look good on your transcript and you might even

get a scholarship."

In this film, Black student athletes are portrayed as being focused only on sports and not on

academics. In fact, the students are depicted as athletes who struggle academically. Reggie hopes

to make it big in the NBA as a professional basketball player; however Mr. Seabrooke informs

him to keep college as an option:

Mr. Seabrooke: "You've got a real gift Reggie. Now if you'll just knuckle down and do some advance work like Calculus all sorts of scholarships would come crashing down on you."

Reggie: "I want to do something big time. Math isn't it."

Mr. Seabrooke: "Right, I got you."

Reggie: "I'm not saying teaching math."

Mr. Seabrook: "I know, it doesn't pay as much as pro basketball. There is not enough money or prestige and you don't make headlines doing this, huh?"

Reggie: "I'm not saying it's less important."

Mr. Seabrooke: "Reggie, if you change your mind I just want you to know I'm here to help you."

Reggie: "Thanks for the offer. I know what I'm doing."

By addressing the many challenges related to the education of African-Americans, each of these films offer insight into how academic achievement can be attained or improved for these students.

Theme Four: Poverty

The films in this study highlighted the extreme conditions many impoverished African American students face in their communities. For example, in *Boyz n the Hood* (91) the three main characters Tre, Ricky and Doughboy are from South Central Los Angeles, an economically disadvantaged area. These young Black men are not only forced to live under poor conditions, they are all being raised in a single parent household. They must deal with these and many other

negative influences that impact their daily lives. In the film *Dope* (15) Malcolm hopes to attend college but realizes the many obstacles he must overcome as a poor Black male student. His school counselor offers him some advice:

> Malcolm: "I'm from a poor neighborhood, single parent home, don't know my father. This shows that I'm creative and that I'm different. This is the kind of essay Harvard wants from their students."
>
> Counselor: "Malcolm, I'm going to be honest with you. You're pretty damn arrogant. You think you're going to get into Harvard? Who do you think you are? You go to high school in Inglewood, to a committee that don't mean shit. What's going to matter is your SAT scores, letters of recommendation, and your alumni interview tomorrow. Are you ready?"
>
> Malcolm: "I'm ready."

For many African American students getting an education, going to college or pursuing a career are a few ways they can conquer or overcome poverty.

Theme Five: Adequate and Equitable Resources

All students deserve a quality education and these films indicated how important having adequate and equitable resources are to their success in the classroom. For instance, in *The Ernest Green Story* (93) Ernest is at the dining room table with his family discussing how he wants to transfer to Central High School so that he can have access to better resources:

Everybody knows you get better classes. They have a cool physics labs. I can get my

science credits. I can get a better education. Mother, kids who graduate from Central,

they get into college. You get your diploma there, you get respect.

Later in the film, Black students attend a school board meeting where they are told they will not

have the same privileges as White kids. For instance, they will not participate in team sports, run

for student offices, attend dances, or join the school service and social clubs including the school

marching band.

Theme Six: Truancy

Truancy was another theme that was significant to the African American experience in

these films. In the *The George McKenna Story* (86) two students are seen standing by their

lockers talking. One student states to the other that he is going to cut class and head home. In

another scene, an upset parent, Mr. Rogers, shows physical aggression against his son, Mark. Mr.

Rogers wants Mark to skip school so that he can come work for the family business.

Mr. Rogers: "Didn't I tell you not to go to school today."

[Mark and Mr. Rogers began arguing]

George McKenna: "Can we talk about this?"

Mr. Rogers: "About what?"

George McKenna: About your son leaving this school. I'm George McKenna. I'm the

principal here."

Mr. Rogers: "Well, when I need him to come, he comes."

George McKenna: "No student leaves this campus without properly being signed out."

Mr. Rogers: "He's mine and don't need to."

George McKenna: "He does at this school. That's the law."

Mr. Rogers: "Well, I'm going because I don't want to hurt you."

George McKenna: "That's a good idea."

Truancy among African American students can have long term consequences. Films like *The George McKenna Story (86)* have stressed the need for school leaders, parents and the community to become actively involved in addressing student absenteeism.

Theme Seven: The Victim Mindset

The films indicated the need for African Americans to develop a victim mindset when things are not going well for them. These youth also try to blame society for their problems. For instance, in *The George McKenna Story* (86) George McKenna and Cynthia, a student, are having a conversation in the hallway between classes. McKenna is requesting Cynthia's help with starting a remedial reading program on campus.

George McKenna: "I've been waiting for you to come by my office."

Cynthia: "Homework Mr. McKenna I just haven't had time.

George McKenna: "Good. I'm glad to hear that's the reason why. I wanted to talk to the honors students about helping me to start a remedial reading program."

Cynthia: "Oh well right now I'm late for Math. Look, Mr. McKenna, I didn't come see you because."

George McKenna: "Because what?"

Cynthia: "Because it wouldn't matter anyway. Nobody listens to us."

George McKenna: "That's not true. I'll listen."

Cynthia: "I don't think so."

George McKenna: "Try me."

In *The Ernest Green Story* (93) Ernest tells his mother how White students have perpetrated violence toward Black students and how school leaders won't listen to the Black students' complaints.

Ernest: "They keep getting away with. Nobody takes our word for nothing. The rule is if a teacher or adult doesn't see it then nothing is done."

Mom: "Ms. Bates says some White kids have been suspended already."

Ernest: "Yea, but not enough."

While many African Americans have fought long and hard for equal rights, these films suggest that some African Americans have become addicted to the victim narrative.

Theme Eight: Diversity and Cultural Competence

The films indicated how important it is for the community to meet the academic needs of a culturally diverse student population. African American students may experience school differently from their White classmates. For instance, in *The George McKenna Story* (86) there is a verbal exchange between a Black student and a White teacher, Ms. Kruger, who is a new teacher at the school.

Student: "Are you going to teach or will you just be showing us movies?"

Teacher, Ms. Kruger: "I think I know how to teach."

Student: "Are you going to teach Black or White?"

Teacher Ms. Kruger: "I'm not going to teach either. I'll teach the rainbow if I could but

I'll settle for students that I can reach."

Later on in the film, there is an exchange with student EJ's father and George McKenna

regarding the new school rules/policies.

George McKenna: "We're making some changes at Washington. Just trying to get the

parents to sign the contract to show their approval and support of the changes. Things like

establishing a dress code, boosting school attendance, getting rid of gang violence on

campus."

Father: "Hey, that's alright. Where do you want me to sign man? I be telling him to stay

away from them gangs but he don't listen to me. More power to you brother. You know,

we need more good brothers like yourself because the White man don't care nothing

about our schools."

George McKenna: "Well it really is our responsibility."

In *The Ernest Green Story* (93) the entire film is centered around diversity and cultural

competence as Black students struggle for equal representation. For instance, when students were

finally allowed into Central High, they were placed into separate classrooms from Whites and

were not allowed in the same homeroom. Here is a conversation between Ernest and his physics

teacher, Mr. Loomis (Gary Grubbs):

Ernest: "Mr. Loomis. Hi, I'm Ernest Green."

Mr. Loomis: "Three weeks have gone by since school has started. You missed all those

classes. We covered the first two chapters already."

Ernest: "Yes sir, I have the books. I've been trying to study."

Mr. Loomis: "I give tests every Friday. I've already given three. You've missed them all. I'll have to give you Fs on each of them."

Ernest Green: "Well sir, I can do makeups."

Mr. Loomis: "I don't do makeups unless there is a good reason. I'm sure your absence doesn't qualify as a good reason. I'm sure you don't expect special treatment because you're a Nigger. You do want me to be fair don't you boy? That's the whole idea isn't it? To see if colored can do as well as White. Isn't it Ernest?"

In the film *Remember the Titans* (00) Herman Boone (Denzel Washington) talks to his students while they are eating in the cafeteria:

Each and every one of you will spend time every day with a teammate of a different race. You will learn about him and his family, his likes and dislikes. You will report back to me until you meet every one of your teammates. Until that time we go to three a day practices. You continue to ignore each other we'll go to four a day practices. Now is there any part of this that you don't understand?

In this scene, Herman Boone wants to ensure that his students do not develop a negative attitude toward the school because they feel discriminated against.

Theme Nine: Family Structure

Several of the films indicated that Black families may be more likely to be headed by single parents. For example, Black mothers are constructed as being single, poor and unemployed. In *Boys in the Hood* (91) the teacher asks Tre's mother if everything is okay in the

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home. The teacher then asks if she is employed. Tre's mother responds by saying, "That's really none of your business." Tre's mother then takes him to live with his father Furious Styles (Lawrence Fishburne). According to the first core concept of critical media literacy the media do not present reality like transparent windows or simple reflections of the world because media messages are created, shaped, and positioned through a construction process (Kellner & Share, 2005). This construction involves many decisions about what to include or exclude and how to respresent reality (Kellner & Share, 2005). In the film *Remember the Titans* (00) a White and Black player are having a conversation about family. The White player assumes that the Black player's father is a deadbeat dad.

> White player: "What is your daddy's name? I mean…you do have a daddy right?"

> Black player: "I have a father and his name is Eric."

> White player: "And what does he do? Wait, he does have a job right?"

Meanwhile, in *The Red Sneakers* (02) Reggie Reynolds (Dempsey Pappion), a student at Will Foster High School who is good in the classroom but not so good on the basketball court, lives at home with his sister and single mother. In *Dope* (15) Malcolm Adekanbi (Shameik Moore) lives at home with his mother who is also a single parent.

Theme Ten: Sexual Content

The films concluded that sexual content was unique to the African American experience in education, especially the way in which Black youth express their sexuality. In the film *House Party* (90) Play (Christopher Martin) arrives at Bilal's house to pick him up. Bilal is on the porch waiting with his music equipment. Play makes out with a girl in the car. In another scene, while

running from Stab and his brothers on his way to the party, Kid jumps over a fence where

Roughouse is having sex with a woman. Roughouse grabs his gun and fires shots at Kid. Later

on, Sydney allows Kid to sneak into her house, and the two are about to have sex in Sydney's

room. At the end of the movie Kid and Sydney share a long passionate kiss goodnight. Play and

Bilal watch as the couple embraces each other. In *Coach Carter* (05) Kenyon and Kyra kiss and

start making out. Kyra is pregnant. Kenyon is unsure if he can juggle basketball and prepare for

college as well as being a parent. Another character, Damien, is seen making out with a girl in

the pool. In *Mac and Devin Go to High School* (12) Principal Cummings (Luenell) and Mac get

sexually physical after Mac Johnson gets in trouble at school and is threatened to be expelled.

> Cummings: "Mr. Johnson, what have you done this time? You are such a naughty little
>
> student. What am I going to do with you."
>
> [Cummings walks over to Mac grabs him and then pulls off his jacket]
>
> Cummings: "You always make me have to punish you so severely. You always getting
>
> me riled up."
>
> [Mac stands up. Cummings sniffs Mac jacket. The two are interrupted by a sudden knock
>
> at the door]

Meanwhile, another student, Knees Down talks about how he got his name. He is seen having

sex with a girl. The girl is on top of him. She says, "You're only paralyzed from the knees

down." In another scene, Knees Down places weed in a girl's buttock after she bends over and

pulls down her pants. The girl farts. Smoke fills the room. Later on Mac and Devin visit a

massage parlor. Mac pays to have sex with a stripper. The movie ends with Knees Down having

sex with a girl in the bathroom. In *Brotherly Love* (15) Jackie is on her date with Chris who surprises Jackie by getting her studio time to record a song he wrote for her. Jackie and Chris make out. The scene ends with a quick video fade to black. In *Dope* (15) there is seductive music as the camera zooms in for a close-up of naked girls dancing on a cell phone. The video then quickly zooms out to a wide shot of Malcolm masturbating in his bedroom. According to the second core concept of critical media literacy, media messages are constructed using a creative language within its own rules (Center for Media Literacy, 2005). This creative language often includes the use of color to create different feelings, camera close-ups to convey intimacy, and scary music to heighten fear (Center for Media Literacy, 2005).

Theme Eleven: Celebration

The films indicated that African Americans love to celebrate. It is a theme that is a significant part of Black culture. The film *House Party* (90) begins with teens celebrating at a party. The music is extremely loud. It is so intense that it blows the roof off the house. The scene ends with a camera tilt upwards showing a huge gaping hole in the ceiling with the the starlit sky above. The party is in full swing when Kid arrives. Kid and Play get into a dance contest with Sydney and Sharane. They have a quick freestyle battle. In *Boys in the Hood* (91) the characters are at a neighborhood barbeque where Doughboy is celebrating his recent release from jail. Later that night people are also seen celebrating during a local street racing gathering. In *The Ernest Green Story* (93) students celebrate white attending a high school dance. In *Remember the Titans* (00) and *The Red Sneakers* (02) the crowd cheers and the band starts playing music after the team wins the game. In *Coach Carter* (05) players dance in the locker room. They are

undefeated and happy about it. In one scene there is rapid camera movement as the video sweeps

across the cheering crowd as the fans erupt into cheers after the team's final winning basket.

Dramatic music plays. A player falls to the ground. Coach Carter is yelling "It's not there. To the

hole!" With only a few seconds left, he looks concerned. The suspense builds as Damien makes

the final shot. Video of the shot is shown in slow motion as players storm the court to celebrate

the team's victory. In *Mac and Devin Go to High School* (12) Devin gives his valedictorian

speech at graduation. Students are singing and dancing. They are shouting the words "So what

we get high. So what we smoke weed. We just having fun. We don't care who sees. We just

gettin' high. That's how it's supposed to be. Livin' young and wild and free." Finally, in the film

Brotherly Love (15) teens are at the school dance partying and drinking. Sergio wins his

basketball season and June holds a surprise party in his favor. While these films have all

examined themes related to the African American educational experience, Hip-Hop has also

taught us a lot about the educational experiences of Black youth.

Hip-Hop Themes

Theme One: The Victim Mindset

A few of the Hip-Hop songs in this study illustrate the concept of victimhood as it relates

to the African American educational experience. In the song "Hey Young World" (89) Slick

Rick blames society for hardships:

> This rap here... it may cause concern it's
>
> Broad and deep... why don't you listen and learn
>
> Love, peace, happiness... that once was strong

But due to society... even that's turned wrong (Min. 0:24)

Artist Mobb Deep describes what life is like for Black teens. In his song "Peer Pressure" (93) he explains how rough things are:

Most don't understand how it is

In the world of today growin' up as a young black teen

I used to dream, of bein' a architect

Easier said than done, believe me it's hard to get

Out of the projects, without forgettin' where you came from (Min. 1:07)

In this song Mobb Deep describes success as something that is unachievable for Black teens based on peer pressure and their environment. The artist chooses to construct this message in a very negative way encouraging listeners of the song to believe that there is no hope for Blacks. According to the first core concept of critical media literacy if some words are spoken; others are edited out; if one picture is selected, dozens may have been rejected; if an ending to a story is written one way; other endings may not have been explored (Center for Media Literacy, 2005). However, in songs like "Peer Pressure" (93) the audience may not get to see or hear the words, pictures or endings that were rejected and can only see, hear or read what was accepted, or the artist may never explain why certain choices or song lyrics were made (Center for Media Literacy, 2005). The song "Revelation" (01) by D12 demonstrated how Blacks are often times labeled as the victim:

I've been praised and labeled as crazed

My mother was unable to raise me, full of crazy rage

An angry teenager, nothing can change me back

Gangsta rap made me act like a maniac

I was boosting, so influenced by music I used it

As an excuse to do shit, ooh I was stupid

No one can tell me nothing hip-hop overwhelmed me

To the point where it had me in a whole 'nother realm (Min. 1:36)

Patton, Eshmann and Butler (2013) characterize the hip hop identity as the rebellious, assertive voice of predominantly urban youth, males in particular. It is the result of a generation being reared in a Neo-liberal political economy, and growing up in a Post-Fordist context (Patton et al., 2013). "This new masculine identity is often alienated from and antagonistic toward many other aspects of American culture; and in many respects, hip hop identity has rejected the values and norms of the mainstream, while embracing and substituting oppositional values" (Patton et al., 2013). The song "The Show Goes On" (10) by Lupe Fiasco also expressed how Blacks are often mistreated:

Have you ever had the feelin' that you was bein' had?

Don't that shit there make you mad?

They treat you like a slave

Put chains all on your soul and put whips up on your back

They be lyin' through they teeth

Hope you slip up off your path (Min. 0:53)

However, Lupe Fiasco encouraged his audience to change their victim mindset and to focus on becoming productive citizens and achieving a better life in this society. While it might be easy for Blacks to become complacent, play the blame game or make excuses as to why they cannot achieve a quality education, Akala reminds students that the most rebellious thing they can do is to get educated in his song "Get Educated" (12):

> We speak of power
>
> When we speak of education
>
> Free your body, free your mind
>
> What do you think Toussaint did?
>
> Planned rebellion, that's the way to use your brain kid
>
> That's the only way we're gonna make it outta this matrix but
>
> Gotta know the basics (Min. 1:15)

Even though many Blacks remain skeptical about the educational system in America, the key is not in the music or in the culture, but in what parents teach their children (Is Hip-Hop Culture Harming Our Youth, 2000).

Theme Two: Family Structure

Hip-Hop songs also addressed the structure of family life in the Black community. In "Hey Young World" (89) Slick Rick raps about a single mother giving birth to a child and raising the child with no father:

> Times have changed... ay it's cool to look bummy
>
> And be a dumb dummy and disrespect your mummy

Have you forgotten... who put you on this Earth?

Who brought you up right... and who loved you since your birth? (0:35)

In the song "Textbook Stuff" (11) by XV the father is also left out of the picture:

Three women raised me

Famous Footwear paid me not enough to blow up

But showed up cause I ain't fuckin' lazy (Min. 0:22)

In "Hey Young World" (89) and "Textbook Stuff" (11) the listeners are left questioning where the father is. The first core concept of critical media literacy challenges the power of the media to present messages as non-problematic and transparent (Kellner & Share, 2005). The artists of these two songs construct the message in a way that excludes the male or fatherly figure from the narrative. However, in the song "The Show Goes On" (10) the father is present and is raising his son:

See, that's how that Chi-Town made me

That's how my daddy raised me

That glitterin' may not be gold

Don't let nobody play me (Min. 1:13)

Additionally, Lupe Fiasco gives a thumbs up to African-American fathers who actively defy the stereotype of the missing Black father figure:

"Two in the air for the father that's there" (Min. 2:03).

Meanwhile, in the song "Revelation" (01) D12 talks about the challenges of being raised in a disfunctional family:

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Look, my family ignores me and I don't like that

They don't even listen when I tell them I'll be right back

(Yeah whatever) This nice beautiful house ma, it don't mean shit

Cause you know daddy's a drunk and he don't clean shit

And yesterday he hit me like a grown fucking man

I couldn't stand up to him, I just ducked and ran (Min. 3:19)

In this song the audience learns about the role the African American family structure plays in a child's development.

Theme Three: Academic Achievement

The Hip-Hop songs also examined the academic performance of African Americans in the classroom. In the song "You Must Learn" (89) by Boogie Down Productions teens are encouraged to learn so they can become academically successful:

Just like I told you, you must learn

It's calm yet wild the style that I speak

Just filled with facts and you will never get weak in the heart

In fact you'll start to illuminate, knowledge to others in a song

Let me demonstrate the force of knowledge

Knowledge reigned supreme

The ignorant is ripped to smithereens (Min. 1:16)

Hip-hop has significantly influenced the values and ideologies of many contemporary urban youth (Taylor & Taylor, 2004). The potential of using urban youth culture to engage students in

more formal learning processes aimed at acquiring academic skills and critical literacies has been well documented (Irizarry, 2009). The song "Peer Pressure" (93) by Mobb Deep talks about the importance of staying the course and finishing school:

My parents told me from day one

Finish school and avoid all obstacles

But my environment makes it so impossible

For instance, build a strong social life

Without messin' up, still tryin' to live right

Like in junior high, I used to wonder why

Certain females went out with certain guys (Min. 1:21)

Hip-Hop culture can contribute to improving attitudes and dispositions towards school and improving academic performance among adolescent, urban, high risk, and secondary education students (Anderson, 2010). However, in the song "School Daze" (07) J. Cole points out that many African American students will fall short when it comes to making the grade, something he admits has become a harsh reality for some teens:

So they passing hate like, 'Damn I can't wait 'til they graduate.'

But some of my niggas will probably never make it

The S.A.T. shit man I doubt they ever take it, cause

Instead of tryna send a nigga to a tutor

Them guidance counselors tryna introduce us to recruiters, it's a set-up (Min. 1:29)

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While getting an education is important to many African American students, it may be optional for some students who might seek alternative pathways to success. According to the song "Revelation" (01) having a quality education can only take Blacks so far. The artist expressed how he made it to the top without one:

> I made my first million and counted it
>
> Now look at, a fucking drop-out that quit
>
> Stupid as shit, rich as fuck, and proud of it
>
> That's why (Min. 2:09)

This song accuses educators of not doing enough to support African American students. It not only blames schools for failing Black students, it also expresses how the entire community suffers when schools fail to meet the needs of Black students:

> Compelled me to excel when school had failed me
>
> Expelled me and when the principal would tell me
>
> I was nothing, and I wouldn't amount to shit (Min. 2:02)

Hip-Hop culture is seen as a force that competes for students' attention, which frustrates some educators who invest time and energy attempting to engage students, only to be drowned out by cultural products that often critique the very values their schools are trying to instill (Seidel, 2011). There is a need for more educators to address the academic underachievement of African American students while pushing for social change in areas that have most affected students, such as violence, crime and drug use.

Theme Four: Violence, Crime and Drug Use

Crime, violence and drug use among African American youth is another popular theme in Hip-Hop. In the song "Hey Young World" (89) Slick Rick encourages the youth to straighten up and to avoid trouble at all costs:

You're a disgust, you know someone that I can't trust, you'd

Steal mom's welfare... and you'd run and buy some dust, and

Plus, I must say... big shot, you're not

Your friends are talking and I'm hearing that your girls are what?

You didn't know? Go steal and rob

And while you're at it... go get a suit for a job (Min. 2:08)

Hess (2007) argues that Hip-Hop culture has enjoyed the best and worst of what mass-media popularity and cultural commodification have to offer. "The meteoric rise to popular fame of gangsta rap in the early nineties set the stage for a marked content shift in the lyrical discourse of rap music toward more and more violent depictions of inner-city realities" (Hess, 2007). For instance, the song "Peer Pressure" (93) by Mobb Deep describes the daily pressures Black students face while living in these impoverished areas:

Around my way there's a kid that most don't understand

How he lives, is it negative or positive?

He has a grade A average

But when he's on the streets with his friends, he's a savage

A freshman of high school, daily attendant

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He never got in trouble, never did he get suspended

Good little Kenny, who would believe?

He dropped out of school to start to smoke weed

I saw the signs but I didn't pay attention

Because he got offended every time that I would mention

The drinkin', the smokin', the low school grades

And sleepin' in class, laid back with his black shades (Min. 2:32)

When African American students are exposed to violence, crime and drugs it can have a lasting effect on their educational experience. For instance, this exposure may interfere with how students perform academically in the classroom. The song "Case of the P.T.A." (91) by Leaders of the New School addresses how violence often leads students down the wrong path:

Gum tacks on seats, five days a week

A riot in the lunchroom, I gotta get some sleep

But I didn't do it (you did it!), I'm suspended (you was with it!)

And now it's time to pay for the crime and I never got caught

Like Judge Wapner (Bam, take 'em to court) (Min. 2:25)

However, in the song "Revelation" (01) D12 blames bad parenting for a lot of the violence that teens face. D12 is not simply making up a story with a rhythmic pattern, the lyrics describe what the artist sees or may have personally experienced as a way to make the world aware of the despair and anger that is being felt (Krohn & Suazo, 1995).

All I ever seen is... (Violence, violence...)

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Told me to keep silent, stop battin' my eyelids

It's apparent that my parents weren't parents at all

That's why I blow out my brains and slaughter you all (Fuck you!) (Min. 4:19)

Meanwhile, XV talks about violence, its impact on society, and how it can lead to more dangerous situations including loss of life in the song "Textbook Stuff" (11):

In the midst of a fire pit, the gang-banging and violence

Is the sweetest song and I roam with the heart of a violin

Don't violate my patience I'm waiting, to kill a man

As I stare at the ceiling fan, as a fan of these wicked streets

If I gotta eat, I steal like a metal piece

I'm screamin' out fuck the police

I'm dealing my cards with Jokers on em

You can disown him or stone him

I'm throwing them rocks back, with the fury of bullets (Min. 2:35)

In addition to violence, the promotion of illegal drugs by artists is a major concern. Some artists seem to take pride in their illegal drug consumption and many of them have a history of drug dealing or abuse (Krohn & Suazo, 1995). Slick Rick warns about the dangers of drugs in his song "Hey Young World" (89):

And if you smoke crack... your kids'll smoke crack tomorrow (Min. 3:02)

Big Daddy Kane also encourages teens to say "No" to drugs and to focus on staying in school in his song "Rap Summary" (89):

To stop roamin the halls, and oh could we

Please, eliminate the drug situation

Stop smokin and get an education

Point blank, let's change the whole scenery

You need help? Well hey, lean on me (Min. 0:54)

In the song "Peer Pressure" (93) Mobb Deep warns students not to allow peer pressure to influence them to use drugs in order to fit in with their social group:

Now I'm smokin' buddha philly blunt style

A frustrated and confused young juvenile

King of the project blues so I choose

To take a piece of the action

But my sober state of mind won't let it happen

So, 24/7 is the number one stresser

Dealin' with the peer pressure (Min. 0:38)

This song condemns drug abuse and violence in Black communities. Artists who employ sights and sounds of inner cities in their music may be viewed in two ways: (1) they are promoting a subculture of acceptance and endorsement of antisocial and criminal behavior, or (2) they provide release from the grinding tension created by poverty and substandard schooling and housing (Krohn & Suazo, 1995).

Theme Five: Poverty

The Hip Hop songs also illustrated the many issues that are relevant to the lives of poor African Americans. For instance, Slick Rick talks about the challenges of poverty in the song "Hey Young World" (89):

Hey Mr. Bigshot... hey, don't you look fly?

But you don't have a dollar... ohhhh, my my my" (Min. 1:50).

This form of expression in commercialized Hip-Hop, despite its heavy manipulation by the record industry, is the "unadulterated truth and the literal personal experience of the fill-in-the-blank rapper; it reflects reality in the ghetto; its lyrics are the result of poverty itself" (Rose, 2008). Tha Dogg Pound also addressed the effects of poverty on a child's education in the song "School Yard" (04):

Once upon a time in the ghetto, when I was livin' low

When it was all about your cash flow

Mind over matter, money over bitches (Min. 0:16)

While breaking from the cycle of poverty may be difficult for African Americans, these songs allow for greater understanding of the true realities of Black urban poverty.

Theme Six: Celebration

Hip Hop has indicated that African Americans often express themselves by celebrating their culture. In the song "Hey Young World" (89) Slick Rick encourages the youth to take a moment to rejoice/celebrate:

You know, you know what, you know what, you know what?

We like to party, like to party

You know, you know what, you know what, you know what?

We like to party, like to party

Hey young world, the world is yours

Hey young world (Min. 3:25)

Meanwhile, In the song "The Show Goes On" (10) Lupe Fisco encourages listeners to take a moment to enjoy the show and to celebrate. Hip-Hop songs like these have concluded that as a part of their culture, African Americans will often take the time to celebrate their oneness as Black people.

Theme Seven: Diversity and Cultural Competence

Hip-Hop also addressed diversity issues that impact African American students in schools. In the song "You Must Learn" (89) by Boogie Down Productions the lyrics stress that Black students are often encouraged to accept everything they're told in school, even if they don't believe it to be true:

What do you mean when you say I'm rebellious

Cause I don't accept everything that you're telling us

What are you selling us the creator dwellin' us

I sit in your unknown class while you're failing' us

I failed your class cause I ain't with your reasoning

You're tryin' make me you by seasoning

Up my mind with see Jane run, see John walk in a hardcore New York

Come on now, that's like a chocolate cow

It doesn't exist no way, no how

It seems to me that in a school that's ebony

African history should be pumped up steadily, but it's not

And this has got to stop, See Spot run, run get Spot

Insulting to a Black mentality, a Black way of life

Or a jet Black family, so I include with one concern, that

You must learn (Min. 1:29)

The song lyrics also explain how Black students are often encouraged to abandon their dreams or ambitions and settle for more "realistic" goals; however, that might not be the case for White students.

I believe that if you're teaching history

Filled with straight up facts no mystery

Teach the student what needs to be taught

Cause Black and White kids both take shorts

When one doesn't know about the other ones' culture

Ignorance swoops down like a vulture

Cause you don't know that you ain't just a janitor

No one told you about Benjamin Banneker

A brilliant Black man that invented the almanac (Min. 2:26)

Jackson and Anderson (2009) contend that classrooms across the country are becoming more diverse. Teachers in new century schools must meet this challenge by finding ways to forge meaningful relationships with students who come from different worlds, while also helping these students to develop academic skills (Jackson & Anderson, 2009). In the song "The Show Goes On" (10) Lupe Fiasco gives teachers a high five. Lupe Fiasco shows respect to the people who are educating the youth – whether it be actual school teachers or parents/friends teaching life's lessons.

> Five in the air for the teachers not scared
>
> To tell those kids that's livin' in the ghetto
>
> That the niggas holdin' back, that the world is theirs
>
> Yeah, yeah, the world is yours, I was once that little boy
>
> Terrified of the world, now I'm on a world tour (Min. 2:09)

In this song teachers are also encouraged to be extra supportive of students of color. Though student populations are ever-changing, educators must do what they can to bridge the generation gap between themselves and their students to create an educational environment that provides opportunities for success for all students (Jackson & Anderson, 2009).

Theme Eight: Adequate and Equitable Resources

The lack of access to equitable resources for African American students has been a significant theme in Hip-Hop. In the song "Rap Summary" (89) Big Daddy Kane stresses that without adequate facilities and resources it is difficult to serve students:

> Looks to me like Eastside got problems

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Now it's time to see what we can do to solve them

Change for the better, let a

New rule be enforced in school so we can get rid of

All the bad apples in the bunch

Clean up the walls and cook better lunch

Put the students in class where they should be (Min. 0:38)

This song has expressed the need for more equity in school resources.

Theme Nine: Peer Pressure

Hip-Hop indicated that peer pressure had a major impact on African American youth. In the song "Peer Pressure" (93) by Mobb Deep students are informed that peer pressure is a choice and students must learn to make the right decisions:

As a young black teen, everyday I, deal

With the pressure and mixed up is how I feel

I walk the streets with a fuck you attitude

And when it comes to my peoples, you ain't half as rude

Follow the crowd or be a leader, take your pick (Min. 0:25)

Identity development for Black youth is complicated by notions of race/ethnicity more than for their white peers, making this a time of complexity and vulnerability, and this situation creates the need for direction and guidance from influential individuals and institutions, one of which is the school (Beachum & McCray, 2004). Mobb Deep says being accepted by their peers can be a major challenge for students:

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Then one day, it all dawned on me, yo

You gotta be down and have it goin' on, see?

I wasn't down with the mainstream or should I say their team, huh

Now I'm gettin' steamed

Gotta find a way to get accepted by my peers (Min. 1:39)

This song also addresses how negative peer pressure can affect student performance in the classroom. The task for educators is to familiarize themselves with youth culture/value systems and realize the subsequent affect on youth identity (Beachum & McCray, 2004).

Theme Ten: Truancy

Hip-Hop songs in this study noted that continued absences are a big part of the African American educational experience. The song "Peer Pressure" (93) by Mobb Deep talks about a high school senior named Kenny who has dropped out of school as a result of peer pressure:

Nowadays, you catch Kenny hangin' in the hallways

With his crew, findin' more ways

To break out of school and hit the block and get buckwild

Stay out of the way of a mad child

'Cause he's a product of hell

Kenny never fell but he's gonna fall overall (Min. 3:03)

In the song "Revelation" (01) by D12 the artist couldn't deal with the issues he was facing so he deciding to abandon his education by not going to school:

Skipping school I had to have nuts just to do it

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Got bored and became truant

When I had the gall to go I just couldn't do it

I was lured into corners by the peer pressure shit (Min. 1:11)

Many African-American youth identify with hip-hop culture in an attempt to become visible to those who deny their presence and their daily experiences (Mitchell, 2010). These youth may also develop an attitude of defiance or resistance toward learning, and this defiance can be manifested in the form of truancy (Mitchell, 2010). The song "I Missed the Bus" (92) by Kriss Kross reveals how students can fall behind if they are truant:

And said to myself if I miss school I'm ruined

But I ran down hill in a RUSH RUSH

I ran down the hill TRYIN TO CATCH THE BUS

Now I'm hopin to myself everything is cool

Standin' on my block like a fool

For (1) I'm all alone and (2) the bus is gone

(3) if I miss school, this weekend I'll be at home

Can somebody come real fast to my rescue

I'm stuck at the crib and I don't know what to do (Min. 0:40)

These songs all highlight the many barriers African-American children experience when it comes to attendance.

Theme Eleven: School Discipline

The Hip-Hop songs also addressed the many disciplinary problems Black students face at school. For instance, in the song "Case of the P.T.A." (91) by Leaders of the New School artist Busta Rhymes raps about misbehaving at school:

Busta Rhymes, the mighty infamous

Always misbehavin' and mischievous

Causin' aggravation, I'll never pause

Pushin' out spit balls through plastic straws (in class!)

Until I got caught at last for lightin' up the courtyard grass

Hey! Teacher, teacher, don't try to flex

(Busta Rhymes 'bout to get a complex)

Hey yo, in class kicked it to this girl Cheryl (whaaat?)

The teacher tried to throw me a referral (no, no, no!)

But not with detention, or nor with suspension

A child wicked and wild that carries ill styles (Min. 1:26)

According to this particular song, the experiences of African American students when it comes to school discipline are mostly negative.

Theme Twelve: Sexual Content

The Hip-Hop songs indicated various factors involving the sexual behaviors of African American students. Lyrics from the song "School Daze" (07) contain sexually explicit content along with very misogynistic views of women:

Yo, I walk another nigga girl to her class, with my hand on her ass

If he say 'what up' later, I just laugh

Real sneaky yo, gotta keep it low

Up in math, let my nigga read this real freaky note Kiki wrote, yea

Hooping up in P.E. you can't see me on this gym flo'

But damn Vanessa booty looking sick up in them gym shorts

Uh, we bag 'em up, ya'll niggas gonna have to wait (Min. 1:10)

Krohn and Suazo (1995) argue that gender equality is often hindered by a sexist society and rappers contribute to this abuse. Often these artists refer to their partners as "bitches" and "whores" and they appear to take pride in describing their abuse of power in sexual situations (Krohn & Suazo, 1995). For instance, the song "School Yard" (04) by Tha Dogg Pound also degrades women:

I gots the - cutest skirts that like to flirt

When the heat's hot, the panties droppin' to the dirt

Fly as a Maserati

What's up baby, this Daz Dillinger

And my name's Young Gotti (Min. 0:41)

Many of the Hip-Hop song lyrics in this study were disrespectful to women. Women were portrayed as sexual objects, and in some instances there were no positive images of women in the song, only negative. In addition to these misogynistic views of women, some artists showed bias against women while depicting their lives as being less powerful than men. Black women

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occupy the step under Black males because they are the product of two handicaps: their gender and their race (Krohn & Suazo, 1995). The fourth core concept of critical media literacy states that media can have embedded values and points of view (Center for Media Literacy, 2005). Sometimes media makers are careless and turn a generalization (a flexible observation) into a stereotype (a rigid conclusion); however, we should expect them to strive for fairness and balance between various ideas and viewpoints (Center for Media Literacy, 2005). In his song "Get Educated" (12) Akala implies that mainstream media tends to ignore women like bell hooks in favor of reality stars who contribute little to the minds of the youth:

Dumb celebrities say girls act like you're me

If you suck dick and film it, get a show on TV

Because we don't want too many women thinkin' like bell hooks

We want a bag of hookers that bend over and just cook

Our silicone addressers do anything to impress us

Of course a woman's life is lived just for the fellas

Much as the next man, I love a woman that's shaped up

But there's nothing more unattractive than a woman that play dumb (Min. 2:35)

Akala believes the media is afraid of the prospect of educated women just as they are afraid of an educated working class.

Theme Thirteen: Incarceration/Prison

Hip-Hop addressed the incarceration of Black men and the impact the American prison system has had on African Americans. For instance, the song "Revelation" (01) focuses on the trials and tribulations of prison life:

Far as probation, fuck peeing in cups

I violate at any time, let them see the blunt

I grew up steadily masturbating inside of cells

Young as hell, having conversations with myself

You could tell I wasn't lenient, a disobedient (Min. 2:53)

In the song "Hey Young World" (89) Slick Rick portrays Black men in a negative light. He urges these men to stop making excuses, to take control of their lives and to straighten up:

Society's a weak excuse for a man

It's time for the brothers... it's time trying to take the stand

Believe it or not, the Lord still shines on you, he

Guides you... and he watched you as you grew, plus

Past the age of... a little child, that's true

But folks your age don't act like you do, so

So be mature... and put the point to a halt

And if you're over eighteen... I wish you'd act like an adult

Don't live in a world... of hate, hate, hate

Pull yourself together... and get yourself straight (Min. 2:32)

The lyrics and themes expressed in Hip-Hop are all very significant to the African American educational experience, and when paired with video images they can convey even more powerful messages.

Music Video Themes

Based upon this study's sample of 12 Hip-Hop songs, only seven official music videos were available for the following songs from the 1980s, 1990s and 2010s: (1) "Hey Young World" (89) by Slick Rick; (2) "You Must Learn" (89) by Boogie Down Production; (3) "Rap Summary" (89) by Big Daddy Kane; (4) "Peer Pressure" (93) by Mobb Deep; (5) "I Missed the Bus" (92) by Kriss Kross; (6) "Case of the P.T.A." (91) by Leaders of the New School; and (7) "The Show Goes On" (10) by Lupe Fiasco. Content from these music videos, each approximately four minutes in duration, were analyzed for themes related to the African American experience in education. It is also important to note that these music videos were not all produced, directed or written by Black artists. The music videos in this study contained the following themes: (1) maturation, (2) dance, (3) violence, crime and drug use, (4) wealth, (5) sexual content, (6) friendship, and (7) celebration.

The music video "Hey Young World" (89) was centered around a maturation theme. One of the actors in the video is a young girl who is holding what appears to be her baby. This helps the viewer to understand one of the key messages in the African American experience – the challenges of growing up in society. The audience is able to see the developmental stages associated with childhood. There was a similar scene in the music video "The Show Goes On" (10). In this video we see images of the artist as a young boy with sunglasses. He is walking

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down a long and narrow hall on his way to the big stage. The artist later appears as an adult. This represents the artist's level of maturity where he has grown from an adolescent into adulthood.

Dance was another prominent theme that was displayed several of the music videos. In the music video "Hey Young World" (89) the video begins with a tight shot/close-up of a group of three girls dancing. The girls' bodies are gyrating to the beat of the music. In the music video for Big Daddy Kane's "Rap Summary" (89), three guys are seen dancing to music on the rooftop of a building. In Kriss Kross' "I Missed the Bus" (92) music video two teens are dancing throughout the video, especially on the school bus where the bus driver dances aggressively. Dancing was also a common occurrence in "Case of the P.T.A." (91). Actors danced throughout the video and could be seen in the hallways of the school and the cafeteria. In the cafeteria, the girls stood on tables. They were dressed in cheerleading outfits dancing and cheering in the background.

The frequency of violence, crime and drug use was another theme that appeared in the music videos. In "Hey Young World" (89) the audience learns about the dangers of youth violence and how it can affect the entire community. The camera zooms in for a close-up of guy's eye, then we see him lying in a hospital bed as the camera quickly zooms out to a wide shot of his hospital room. He is wearing an oxygen mask. The movement of the camera in this scene grabs the viewer's attention. According to the second core concept of critical media literacy learning the basics of visual communication – lighting, composition, camera angle, editing, use of props, body language, symbols – and how the use of these techniques influences the various meanings we take away from a message (Center for Media Literacy, 2005). Flashy

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gold jewelry (gold necklace, watch and ring) is worn by the artist. Female dancers wear bright multicolored clothing including denim, tank tops, and sailors caps. In Boogie Down Production's "You Must Learn" (89), the police show physical aggression against the artist who is dragged out of the classroom as he is lecturing students. Shouting erupts between the police and the artist. The artist is physically thrown out of the school and onto the pavement where a stack of papers are thrown at him. The music video "Rap Summary" (89) contains images of students fighting and displaying physical aggression against each other. In "Peer Pressure" (93) gang members hold axes and other weapons in their hands. There is a also a low angle shot of two guys smoking blunts. The two teens are filmed from below which inspires fear and awe. According to Manovich (2001) the figures looms threateningly over the spectator who is made to feel insecure and dominated. Suddenly, a beer bottle crashes to the ground with alcohol splattering onto the pavement. In the music video "I Missed the Bus" (92) the camera moves in for a close-up of the bus driver's angry face. The video cuts to another quick shot of the school bus door slamming. Physical aggression is shown by bus driver against two teens. The bus driver quickly slams the school bus door shut to prevent the students from getting on. The bus driver drives aggressively down the highway throughout most of the video. The music video "Case of the P.T.A." (91) shows several students running down the halls of the school being chased by an offer. The officer shows physical aggression against one of the students by slamming his body up against the wall.

Wealth is another theme that the music videos addressed. For instance, in the music video "Peer Pressure" (93) juveniles are seen holding money throughout the video. They play with dice

and dollar bills on the ground. The teens are into making fast and easy money. It is obvious from these images that African Americans face many wealth disparities; and therefore, must turn to the streets in an attempt to make some quick cash because their survival depends on it.

Sexual content was another theme that appeared in one of the music videos examined in this study. In "Peer Pressure" (93) there is a scene where a teen girl is staring provocatively into the camera. The sexual gesture lasts for a few seconds; however, it is unclear who the girl is looking at in the video. While many of the song lyrics examined in this study contained sexually explicit lyrics, none of the music videos actually contained sexually graphic images.

Friendship was another theme that was expressed in the music videos. In "Peer Pressure" (93) the last scene ends with video of a red piece of paper completely submerged under water next to a fire hydrant. The paper has a cartoon image on it of two guys shaking hands. This form of comraderie amongst these African American men represents unity, togetherness, companionship.

Celebration was a final theme that was displayed in the music videos. For instance, "Case of the P.T.A." (91) takes place in a happy setting with a cheering crowd. In the music video "The Show Goes On" (10) the audience is at a concert with their hands waving in the air. There is a lot of excitement. It's a party atmosphere with bright lights. The artist is on stage, the curtains come up, and cameras start flashing. The scene ends with a huge bright light flashing into the camera followed by a quick fade to black. It is obvious that this music video is trying to sell a lifestyle of celebrity and stardom to its audience. According to the fifth core concept of critical media literacy, most media messages are organized to gain profit and/or power. We must look at the

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motive or purpose of a media message – and whether or how a message may have been

influenced by money, ego or ideology (Center for Media Literacy, 2005). While music videos

often serve as a form of advertisement for the artist, the stories and lifestyles that are promoted in

them are very similar to the portrayals of African Americans that we see in magazines.

<div align="center">**Magazine Themes**</div>

Theme One: Academic Achievement

Magazines revealed that African American school achievement continues to be a major

challenge school districts nationwide. According to an article published in *Essence* magazine,

test scores indicated that about a third of Black and Latino students do not perform as well as

their White schoolmates; and even more suprising, many of the school's Black and Latino

children from affluent households also struggle academically (Latour, 2010). For instance, nearly

all of the 1,167 students who attend Henry Snyder High School in Jersey City are African

American and Latino and school officials claim that only 17 percent of students who attend

Henry Snyder High drop out and that nearly half of those who graduate will attend two-or four-

year colleges (Powell, 1992). In an article published in *Black Enterprise* magazine, Gite (1987)

stated that although there is a greater emphasis on the value of a college education, the sad reality

is that only 42 percent of Blacks who finish high school will attend college. However, Dr. Steve

Perry, principal and founder of Capital Preparatory Magnet School, says that is not the case for

his school. Established in Hartford Connecticut's lowest performing district, accommodating a

student population that was estimated to be 86 percent Black and 70 percent low-income during

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the 2010-2011 school year, Capital Prep has since its inception in 2004 sent 100 percent of its graduates to four-year colleges (Talbert and Goode, 2011).

There are many factors that may attribute to the academic success of African American students. *Ebony* magazine featured a story about A Better Chance, Inc. (ABC), a program which identifies and places talented, enthusiastic and motivated minority students in some of the nation's most academically acclaimed private and public high schools (Norment, 1983). Jessie Spikes, an African American male, entered the ABC program during his junior year where he attended a public school in Hanover, New Hampshire, and after earning a degree in literature at Dartmouth College, the student was awarded a Rhodes scholarship, which gave him an opportunity to study at Oxford University, where he earned a degree in politics and law and later earned a law degree from Harvard (Norment, 1983). However, an article in *Ebony* stated that public school districts with high concentrations of African American students tend to have racially segregated schools, suspend and expel more Black boys than Whites, and assign Black boys to special education programs that prevent them from graduating with their peers (Robinson-English, 2006). In the *Ebony* article entitled "Do Black Males Need Special Schools?" Whitaker (1991) argues that "Black males – at every level from kindergarten through 12th grade – are turning off on education in epidemic numbers, and in school districts across the county Black males are either failing or a disproportionately labeled as behavior problems, slow learners and truants" (p. 17). Studies of school districts in Milwaukee, New Orleans and Dade County, Florida are a few cities that have higher suspension, expulsion, retention and drop-out rates, and lower grade point averages (Whitaker, 1991). The Milwaukee study revealed that more

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than 80 percent of the 5,716 Black males enrolled in the city's public high schools had less than a "C" average, and 94 percent of the students expelled from the school system were Black males (Whitaker, 1991).

The fourth core concept of critical media literacy addresses the special attention that Whitaker has given to African American males. This concept focuses on the actual content of media messages in order to question ideology, bias, and the connotations explicit and implicit in the representation (Kellner & Share, 2005). In this case, the negative representations of Black male students send messages that may suggest that they are underachievers. With declining academic achievement at its lowest point in decades among African American males nationally, proponents say single-gender schools are slowly being embraced in some urban education circles to provide African American boys with more structured, supportive environments of smaller class sizes, less distractions and more (Robinson-English, 2006). Because learning gaps exist before kids walk through the schoolhouse door, educators say also having Black parents set high expectations, and live by them is crucial to kids' success, from infancy on through middle and high school (Latour, 2010).

Theme Two: Adequate and Equitable Resources

Magazines in this study also illustrated the importance of maintaining equal educational opportunities for African American students. Judith Griffin, president of ABC, stressed that the mission of her organization was to increase the number of minorities in positions of leadership and responsibility by helping them to get a quality education (Norment, 1983).

There is a private school system in this country that educates a great percentage of

our leaders, and Black people must have access to it. That is what ABC is all

about, providing these students with access to this network – and that in no way

denigrates the public school system. (Norment, 1983, p. 48)

Black Enterprise featured the story of Mark Noble, a broadcast engineer for WXYZ TV in

Detroit, who claims he didn't to go college when he graduated from Cass Technical High School

for three reasons: He lacked financial resources, he had little career direction and he didn't

believe that he was smart enough (Gite, 1987). According to Powell (1992) unequal state funding

for education means unequal public schools – and African American children are usually the

losers. During a visit to Henry Snyder High, he found the school in bad shape. The school was

not well lit, had aging, broken lockers, missing or tattered window shades, and half painted walls

(Powell, 1992). The reading material is old, a teacher explains there is not enough equipment in

the classroom, the auditorium seats are covered with graffiti, and in the gymnasium nets are

missing from several basketball rims and some backboards don't have any rims (Powell, 1992).

When students are placed at a disadvantage, their risk for failure increases. That is why Natasha

Mullen, her husband, and other parents and educators cofounded a support group called Seaford

Parents for the Education of African American Kids in Seaford, Delaware (Lord, 190). The goal

of the program is to boost parental involvement, raise student achievement and to provide

mentors and remedial instruction, while encouraging parents to get in contact with teachers every

two weeks to talk about their child's progress and behavior issues rather than wait for problems

to erupt (Lord, 190)

Theme Three: Diversity and Cultural Competence

Magazines also revealed the challeges educators face in developing cultural awareness in the classroom. *Black Enterprise* featured the story of Will Thomas, a teacher at Prince George's County Public Schools in Maryland, who from kindergarten to 12th grade never had a Black male teacher and only had one Black female teacher; therefore, he did not feel like he and other African American students were being represented in the classroom, which he says bothered him throughout his entire school experience (Talbert and Goode, 2011). But this is not the case when students are selected for the ABC program, they must first participate in a summer orientation program where a great deal of emphasis is placed on making sure students understand that they are not being deprived of their culture. "When children are invited to leave home to go away to school the message you may be leaving inadvertently with them is that their schools are not good enough, their families are not good enough and their communities are not good enough" (Norment, 1983, p. 52). Dr. Spencer Holland, an educational psychologist and director of the Center for Educating African American Males, a division of the School of Education and Urban Studies at historically Black Morgan State University in Baltimore, argues that more must be done to help African American students.

> What we have learned in the past 20 years is that White people don't care anything about educating our children. We have a stake in educating and socializing our children. But if we really expect to see a change in the current situation, men have to get involved in this process, because it takes a Black man to prepare a Black boy for whatever he is going to face out there. (Whitaker, 1991

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p. 19)

For Black students specifically, it is recommended that teachers and school leaders be trained in cultural competency, and ongoing research should be adjusted to the meet the needs of communities of color (Talbert and Goode, 2011). Parents, educators and concerned community members must also examine the ways in which educational institutions are underserving children – and pushing girls out of school alongside boys (Morris, 2014). Like their male counterparts, Black girls are subjected to punitive policies that emphasize discipline over school-based approaches that can repair relationships and harm between students and, when necessary, between adults and students (Morris, 2014). One of the most controversial reasons for which Black girls are removed from school has been student defiance, a subjective reference to bahaviors that are perceived as being in direct opposition to the institution's social norms and expectations (Morris, 2014).

Theme Four: Violence, Crime and Drug Use

Magazines indicated that violence, crime and drug use are synonymous with the African American educational experience. One article stated that in cities like Detroit and New Orleans, where the Black male murder and unemployment rates are among the highest in the nation, some all-boys schools appear to be a solution with a focus on neat dress, discipline, leadership, scholarship and citizenship (Robinson-English, 2006). For instance, established in 1951 to educate young men from Black Catholic families, the private St. Augustine High School in New Orleans has produced judges, local leaders and a long list of alumni who have returned over the years to teach the next generation (Robinson-English, 2006).

Theme Five: Poverty

Magazines also emphasized the poverty crisis that many poor African Americans face. According to Talbert and Goode (2011) there is plenty of evidence that all kids can be provided with an excellent education. For many years the prevailing view was that socioeconomic levels determined students' educational ability and outcomes, but it's clear that poverty does not necessarily determine ability. Only 8 percent of low-income kids graduate from college and 80 percent of high income kids do (Talbert and Goode, 2011). In another article, Graves (2006) expressed how real the struggle is for Blacks. "The price we pay as African Americans is enormous – measured in everything from unemployment and poverty to rates of incarceration – and amounts to significant and unacceptable diminution in our capacity to build sustainable wealth" (Graves, 2006, p. 10).

Theme Six: Incarceration/Prison

Magazines addressed the impact that prison has on the entire African American community, especially poor Black men. According to one article, the consequences of widespread, deep and systematic failture to educate African American males are well known – high unemployment and imprisonment rates, little chance to attend and graduate from college and unstable families (Robinson-English, 2006).

Theme Seven: Family Structure

Magazines illustrated the importance of Black family life in shaping the success of Black students. One article highlighted the story of fifteen-year-old freshman Terrence Murphy, who was one of 150 African American males to attend the Urban Prep Charter Academy for Young

Men. For Murphy and his classmates, the majority of whom were from single-parent, low-income families, this was an opportunity to get out of the ghetto, and overcome the stereotypes and low expectations that plague many African American males (Robinson-English, 2006). The article stressed how maintaining a two-parent, stable family structure might help prepare students for a lifetime of success. Whitaker (1991) argues that in addition to the crippling proverty, a drug epidemic, and the breakdown of the Black family, the lack of positive male role models in poor Black communities is a major concern.

Theme Eight: Role Models

Several of the magazine articles in this study concluded that role models are necessary to help inspire young African Americans. For example, Dr. Holland, is one of the most vocal supporters of the concept that Black males must be used to help teach Black males, particulary in impoverished neighborhoods where female-headed households predominate (Whitaker, 1991). Because Black males students tend to have few, if any, men in their non-school environment, it is important to show African American males that education is something they can excel in (Whitaker, 1991). Tim King, founder of Urban Prep Charter Academy for Young Men, and his team of 25 African American male teachers and adminstrators vowed to mentor each of their students until all eligible graduates were accepted into college (Robinson-English, 2006). These educators agreed that the students needed to know all of their options and they had to be exposed to other Black men who were not rappers or ball players (Robinson-English, 2006). Graves (2006) argued that the role models typically held up for Black boys, such as entertainers and athletes, rarely associate higher education as critical to success. And while there are many local

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and national programs aimed at boosting academic achievement and expectations for girls, such

programs are few and far between for Black boys (Graves, 2006). That is why improving the

educational experiences of African American high school students will not only require

educators to serve as role models, a stronger teacher workforce will also be needed. Educators

will have to teach students to perform at a higher level while preparing them for college and

beyond.

Summary of the Findings

Using a critical media literacy approach to thematic analysis, the researcher identified

numerous themes to help answer the research questions. In film, theme one: violence, crime and

drugs demonstrated how Black youth are impacted by guns, gangs and drugs and the effect it can

can have on their educational experience. Theme two: school discipline demonstrated what

happens when African Amerian students are disproportionately and unfairly disciplined. Theme

three: academic achievement demonstrated the challenges surrounding Black academic

performance in the classroom. Theme four: poverty demonstrated how poverty affects the

African American experience. Theme five: adequate and equitable resources demonstrated how

closing the gaps in equity and access can impact the success of African American students.

Theme six: truancy demonstrated the consequences surrounding truancy among Black students.

Theme seven: the victim mindset explained why Blacks see themselves as victims. Theme eight:

diversity and cultural competence demonstrated awareness, understanding and acceptance of

African American culture. Theme nine: family structure demonstrated how Black family life

affects students. Theme ten: sexual content demonstrated the perceptions and challenges African

American teens face regarding sex. Theme eleven: celebration demonstrated how African Americans celebrate their growth and success.

In Hip-Hop, theme one: the victim mindset emphasized how the victim mentality of African Americans affect their outlook on life. Theme two: family structure demonstrated the many challenges African Americans family face. Theme three: academic achievement demonstrated factors that contribute to the achievement gap of African Americans. Theme four: violence, crime and drugs demonstrated the devastation violence, crime and drugs inflicts on Black teens. Theme five: poverty demonstrated how poverty impacts African American students. Theme six: celebration demonstrated how and why African Americans celebrate. Theme seven: diversity and cultural competence demonstrated the importance of embracing Black culture and life experiences. Theme eight: adequate and equitable resources demonstrated the importance of African American students having equal access to school resources. Theme nine: peer pressure demonstrated the negative effects peer pressure can have on African American students. Theme ten: truancy demonstrated the toll that truancy can have on Blacks. Theme eleven: school discipline demonstrated the impact of school discipline on African American students. Theme twelve: sexual content demonstrated how Black teens express themselves sexually. Theme thirteen: incarceration/prison demonstrated the effects of mass incarceration and imprisonment on African Americans.

The seven music videos examined in this study contained several themes including: maturation, dance, violence crime and drug use, wealth, sexual content, friendship and celebration.

In magazines, theme one: academic achievement demonstrated the barriers to academic success in the classroom for Blacks. Theme two: adequate and equitable resources demonstrated how having equal access to educational resources might improve outcomes for African American students. Theme three: diversity and cultural competence demonstrated why schools need to learn about diversity issues and cultural awareness of Black students. Theme four: violence, crime and drug use demonstrated how Black youth are exposed to violence, crime and drugs. Theme five: poverty demonstrated how and why African Americans suffer from poverty. Theme six: incarceration/prison demonstrated the harm of Black incarceration/imprisonment to the community. Theme seven: family structure demonstrated the strength and weaknesses of African American families. Theme eight: role models expressed why role models are necessary in the lives of African American youth.

The researcher agrees these findings create an understanding of how African American high school students are portrayed in Black produced, directed and written films, Hip-Hop and magazines. The aim of this study was to answer three specific research questions; therefore, Chapter V further analyzes findings from the themes to help answer these questions.

Chapter V – Discussion

The purpose of this study was to examine Black produced, directed and written films, Hip-Hop and magazines to see how they portray the African American educational experience. The study's findings and themes were discussed in Chapter IV. The discovered themes for film were as follows: (1) violence crime and drug use, (2) school discipline, (3) academic achievement, (4) poverty, (5) adequate and equitable resources, (6) truancy, (7) the victim mindset, (8) diversity and cultural competence, (9) family structure, (10) sexual content, and (11) celebration. Hip-Hop consisted of the following themes: (1) the victim mindset, (2) family structure, (3) academic achievement, (4) violence, crime and drug use, (5) poverty, (6) celebration, (7) diversity and cultural competence, (8) adequate and equitable resources, (9) peer pressure, (10) truancy, (11) school discipline, (12) sexual content, and (13) incarceration/prison. Hip-Hop music videos examined in this study contained several themes including: maturation, dance, violence crime and drug use, wealth, sexual content, friendship and celebration. The following themes were prevalent in magazines: (1) academic achievement, (2) adequate and equitable resources, (3) diversity and cultural competence, (4) violence, crime and drug use, (5) poverty, (6) incarceration/prison (7) family structure, and (8) role models. By conducting a thematic analysis to identify themes, the researcher was able to gain a better understanding of the portrayal of the African American high school experience. Analysis of the themes confirmed critical media literacy's core concepts. The themes also addressed elements related to the research questions:

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(1) How is the African American experience in high school portrayed by Black producers, directors and writers?

(2) In what ways do film, Hip-Hop and magazines illustrate the usefulness of the educational experience for social mobility (financial attainment, career vocation attainment, and school attainment)?

(3) Do certain types of media portray the African American high school experience in a more positive or negative light?

In this chapter, the researcher will use the themes to answer the study's research questions, discuss implications, and provide suggestions for further research.

Research Question 1

How is the African American experience in high school portrayed by Black producers, directors and writers?

The study's findings revealed that the African American educational experience is one of a constant struggle for Black students where success in the classroom can be difficult to achieve. For instance, in the film Dope (15) Malcolm is confident he will be admitted to his dream school, Harvard University, but he realizes that getting accepted into a good college will be tough. Malcolm explains to his school counselor that he is from a poor neighborhood, a single parent home, and he doesn't know his father. However, the school counselor informs Malcolm that grades and SAT scores matter more than anything else in the college admissions process. In addition to academic achievement, violence, crime and drugs was another theme that appeared consistently in films across all four decades (1980s, 1990s, 2000s and 2010s). According to

Suarez (1999) the media have left this country with a misimpression of crime and of who commits most of the illegal acts:

> The exaggerated feelings of vulnerability to crime among the White middle class has helped remake the urban landscape in the last 50 years. But that feeling of vulnerability does not square with who really suffers from crime. In a country in which 70 percent of the people call themselves White, only 49 percent of crime victims are actually White. The Black population of the U.S. floats around 12 to 13 percent; crime victims are Black 49 percent of the time. (p. 244)

In Hip-Hop, Black producers, directors and writers highlighted the many daunting challenges facing African Americans in the classroom; for example, in the song "Revelation" (01) schools are accused of failing Black students. It is also important for educators to understand the influence that Hip-Hop culture has on students. Hip-Hop is an international realm for expressing feelings about politics, crime, poverty, violence, and other social issues through song lyrics (Jackson & Anderson, 2009). However, some contemporary Hip-Hop artists subscribe to an "off-culture" perspective of Hip-Hop – one that does not focus as much on political protest, peace, prosperity, and social justice as it does on creating injustices through ugly images of capitalistic, materialistic, and misogynistic ideals of masculinity and femininity (Jackson & Anderson, 2009). This off-culture perspective of Hip-Hop has been associated with an increase in crime, violence, drugs and a gangster persona (Jackson & Anderson, 2009). However, in the music video "Hey Young World" (89) Slick Rick discusses how the Hip-Hop industry can be play a positive role in the lives of youth. At the beginning of the video, the artist

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is seen shining a flashlight into the camera, a big blue ball spins across the screen. The ball, which represents the Earth, is used by the artist to inform the youth that the world can be theirs if they show respect for themselves and their parents, get a good education and stay on a straight path.

The magazines in this study indicated that the African American high school experience is very depressing for Black students who often receive the short end of the stick. For instance, in an article published in *Black Enterprise,* Graves (2006) stated how schools have allowed low expectations, apathy and mediocrity to take root in the lives of Black boys in which educators sadly acknowledge the fact that boys are far more likely than girls to be ridiculed, ostracized, and even physically assaulted for demonstrating enthusiasm for academic achievement. This negative representation of Black males may send a message that they are unintelligent, incompetent or threatening. According to the fourth core concept of critical media literacy, a person should always ask what lifestyles, values and points of view are represented in, or omitted from, the message (Dunlop & Kymes, 2007). This acknowledges the role politics, gender, race, religion and life experiences may play in constructing knowledge (Dunlop & Kymes, 2007). One of the occurrences that should be rather suspicious in this nation is the fact that Black men are highly publicized as criminals, and a high percentage of them are either in prison, on parole, or on probation (Hawkins, 1998). It is also rather suspicious that Black men are highly publicized in interscholastic, collegiate, and make up a high percentage of professional sports (Hawkins, 1998).

In addition to depicting African American students as athletes, most Black producers, writers and directors have portrayed the African American educational experience in a negative way when it comes to academic achievement, diversity and cultural competence in the classroom, and having access to adequate and equitable resources. However, Norment (1983) shares some inspiring and/or positive messages of hope. For instance, he stated that if not for the ABC program, many of the more than 5 thousand students who have been given a better chance might not have made it beyond high school. "But 90 percent of ABC's students have gone to college, with the majority enrolling in prestigious institutions like Harvard, Dartmouth, Tufts, Howard, Morehouse, Brown, Yale, Stanford, Princeton and Duke" (Norment, 1983, p. 48).

Research Question 2

In what ways do film, Hip-Hop and magazines illustrate the usefulness of the educational experience for social mobility (financial attainment, career vocation attainment, and school attainment)?

Findings indicated that getting an education is the best way for African Americans to achieve success. For instance, in the film *The Ernest Green Story* (93) the students return to Daisy Bates' (Carol Christine Hilaria Pounder) home after not being allowed in Central High by the National Guard because of their race. During a group discussion in the living room, some of the students express how getting an education is the only way out for them. African American students are also frequently portrayed as athletes who struggle academically, especially in film. In *The Red Sneakers* (02) Reggie hopes to make it big in the NBA as a professional basketball player; however, Mr. Seabrooke encourages him to keep college as an option. Mr. Seabrooke

recommends that Reggie focus on Calculus so that he can apply for scholarships, but Reggie has his mind set on playing professional basketball. Mr. Seabrooke informs Reggie that while a career in Math may not pay as much as professional basketball, Reggie should at least consider going to college and continuing his education.

A college degree may lead to a higher paying job; however, several Hip-Hop songs in this study determined that getting an education was not necessary for students to succeed. For instance, in the song "Revelation" (01) the artist expressed how he dropped out of school, made his first million and rose to the top without a degree. But Akala reminds students to stop making excuses. He claims that obtaining a good education is a way for Blacks to become stronger, more powerful and to gain freedom. In addition to encouraging the youth to use their brains, the artist indicated that the most rebellious thing a person can do is to get educated in his song "Get Educated" (12).

Meanwhile, magazine articles in this study concluded that attending college is one way for African Americans to get ahead. For example, in an article published in *Black Enterprise*, Simms (1992) argues how in the Black community, higher education has been a route to the middle class. However, people without a college degree have used high-wage manufacturing jobs as a step toward upward mobility; unfortunately, those jobs have been shrinking and joblessness or low-wage jobs are now the only alternatives for young school dropouts (Simms, 1992). Gite (1987) confirmed that while college graduates generally make more money than those who never attend, students can use their motivation, business savvy and on-the-job training to propel themselves to the top without a college degree.

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Research Question 3

Do certain types of media portray the African American high school experience in a more positive or negative light?

Based on the study's findings, Hip-Hop tended to portray the African American high school experience in a more negative light when compared to film and magazines. Many of the Hip-Hop songs focused on the depressing lives of poor urban youth who are surrounded by gangs, guns, drugs and violence in which they blame society for their ills or hardships. In the song "Peer Pressure" (93) Mobb Deep describes the daily challenges many Black students face including trying to avoid peer pressure and drugs, staying in school and maintaining good grades. In this song, the question of who is actually benefiting from this message also comes into play, especially in the music video where teenagers are seen flashing dollar bills in front of the camera. It appears the artist is attempting to sell a wealthy lifestyle image to the audience. According to Kellner & Share (2005) the fifth core concept of critical media literacy, encourages us to consider the question of why the message was sent and where it came from. "Too often students believe the role of the media is simply to entertain or inform, with little knowledge of the economic structure that supports it" (Kellner & Share, 2005, p. 376).

While Hip-Hop has focused on the struggles of Black urban life, magazines in this study have portrayed the African American high school experience more positively than film or Hip-Hop. Some magazine articles have even suggested ways to improve the African American educational experience by offering better educational tools and mentoring for Blacks. For instance, Simms (1992) challenges educators and policymakers to establish standards and to

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commit resources to serve our nation's youth. But Talbert and Goode (2011) noted that educators can't do it alone and that parents must work with teachers to develop academic achievers. In an article published in *Black Enterprise*, Graves (2006) concluded that the good news is that African Americans are more likely to finish high school and attend college than ever before.

What Do the Findings Mean?

Based on the data collected and analyzed in this study, it appears that Black producers, directors and writers portray the African American educational experience in a negative way. They often paint a very dismal picture of the African American high school experience – an environment where students face many obstacles and challenges. Overall, the findings reveal a few key takeaway points. First, African American students are portrayed as lagging behind their White counterparts when it comes to student achievement, having adequate and equitable resources, and diversity and cultural acceptance and understanding in the classroom. There is also a consistent pattern in the findings which emphasizes or depicts Black students as athletes whose lives are being plagued by violence, crime and drugs and poverty. Special attention is also given to the way in which Blacks overly express themselves sexually.

As highlighted in Chapter II, critical media literacy stresses gaining the skills and knowledge to read, interpret, and produce certain types of texts and artifacts and to gain the intellectual tools and capacities to fully participate in one's culture and society (Kellner & Share, 2005). The media plays a crucial role in the portrayal of the African American high school experience in education; therefore, critical media literacy can help make us aware of how the media might shape our attitudes, beliefs or opinions of other people. Developing critical media

literacy involves perceiving how media like film or video can be used positively to teach a wide range of topics, like multicultural understanding and education (Kellner & Share, 2005). When groups often under-represented or misrepresented in the media become investigators of their representations and creators of their own meanings the learning process becomes an empowering expression of voice and democratic transformation (Kellner & Share, 2005).

By examing the five core concepts of critical media literacy, this study allowed for a closer examination of how the African American educational experience is portrayed in Black produced films, Hip-Hop songs and magazine, especially how Black producers, directors and writers construct their media messages, the techniques they use to get the public's attention, how different people might experience the same message differently, how much bias or embedded points of view have been added, and who actually benefits from the media message in terms of profit and or power (Kellner & Share, 2005). Improving the African American educational experience has been a priority for educators, teachers and parents across the nation. By exposing them to both positive and negative media messages, they can learn how the media influences the lives of African Americans, while also becoming more knowledgable and aware of how to educate students.

Implications

There are a few major implications for educators, teachers and parents. This study's first major contribution is that it provides insight into how Black producers, directors and writers portray the African American high school educational experience. This information is important because it focuses on the the potential discrimination, unfairness and inequalities that many

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Blacks face not only by the media but also in the educational system. While previous studies have addressed the portrayal of African Americans in film, music and magazines, few studies have investigated Black producers, directors and writers and their depictions of the African American high school experience.

This study's findings revealed that African American high school students are often portrayed as violent and criminal. Welch (2007) argues that because media presumably have the power to help construct the meaning of race in our society, it is apparent that they play a significant role in defining Blacks as criminals as a result of the way they are often presented to readers and viewers. For many, this "visual representation can be assimilated to a larger, undifferentiated group, in this case the stereotype of a dangerous Black male" (Entman, 1992, p. 350). The study's findings also illustrated that African American students are poor and they are underachievers in the classroom. In addition, the study portrayed African American students as athletes. The study's findings concluded that African American students also exhibit intense sexual behavior. This suggests that educators, teachers and parents must educate students on the role the media plays in their lives. Some educators have suggested including media literacy in the K-12 curriculum. Scharrer (2003) believes that media literacy should focus mainly on examining the media critically; developing strategies to mediate the impact of the media messages; learning how media messages are created, marketed, and distributed; and developing the ability to participate in wise use of various types of media (p. 273). Valkenberg, Krcmar, Peeters, & Marselle (1999) also suggest that parents get involved through:

(1) restrictive intervention – prohibiting children from using certain media or

setting rules that limit exposure to media; (2) social co-viewing – watching

television with their children; and (3) instructional intervention – discussing

the reality status of program, making critical comments about the behavior of

characters their children witness on television, and providing supplemental

information about topics introduced by the television messages (p. 686)

This study also provides implications for Black producers, directors and writers regarding how

they portray the African American educational experience. For instance, Black filmmakers often

think that their actions are helping the Black community by exposing their faults and showing

them a better way, but because of the large crossover audience, they only contribute to the

dominate negative stereotypes (Horton et al., 1999). This implies that Black producers, directors

and writers need to become aware of the messages they are creating regarding the educational

experiences of African Americans and how these messages can be aimed at being more positive.

Although the study's finding reveal that African Americans are often portrayed negatively by

Black produced films, Hip-Hop and magazines, the findings indicate that Black producers,

directors and writers are still depicting the African American educational experience in the same

way as White entertainers. Even when Black entertainers think they are helping to eliminate

stereotypes, they must be mindful of the fact that many Whites might not understand the context

in which their social commentaries are made (Horton et al., 1999).

When it comes to race in America, President Obama's election to the White House has

also brought special attention to the many systematic challenges Blacks face within the

educational system. In 2009, Obama introduced a set of reforms to ensure that all U.S. children receive a quality education (U.S. Department of Education, 2019). However, with the election of President Donald Trump, the future of accountability in U.S. teacher education remains questionable (Cochran-Smith, Carney, & Miller, 2016). Based on the Trump administration's proposed education budget for 2018, his administration favored more state rights and less federal oversight of education, including teacher education, as well as more voucher plans and consumer choice about schools, which included more support for charter schools, alternate routes into teaching, and new schools of education unaffiliated with universities (Cochran-Smith, et al., 2016). In addition, President Trump rescinded Obama's HEA/Title II teacher education regulations and the accountability regulations of the U.S. Elementary and Secondary Education Act, which is the major federal legislation that funds elementary and secondary education in the U.S. (Cochran-Smith et al., 2016). This study could have a great impact on future research or policy decisions that are made in the field of education.

<center>**Directions for Future Research**</center>

This study examined film, Hip-Hop and magazine content to determine how African American high school students are portrayed by Black producers, directors and writers. Previous studies have investigated the portrayal of African Americans in film, music and magazines; however, few studies have focused on Black producers, directors and writers and their depictions of African Americans in education. Moore (2016) argues that it is inside media ownership where we see the starkest disparity between Blacks and Whites, across all major platforms: film, television, print and digital. Future research may allow for a closer examination of why Black

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media ownership matters and how White ownership impacts how much or little control Black producers, directors and writers have. Ownership means you can control who is hired, what messages are delivered, and how much time is allotted to entertainment versus substantive dialogue in content (Moore, 2016). Meanwhile, there are also age biases and stereotypes that shape hiring practices; for example, Hollywood producers are predominantly young, White males who tend to seek screenwriters like themselves (Bielby & Bielby, 2002). Executives really have no way of knowing which writers have a unique knack for writing scripts that resonate best with the desired audience; however, to justify their decisions to corporate management, they can explain that a series' writers are similar in age (or gender or race) to the audience (Bielby & Bielby, 2002). "That account draws on positive examples (e.g., a hot young writer that attracts a large numbers of teens) and on prevailing stereotypes; exceptions can be explained away as flukes" (Bielby & Bielby, 2002, p. 24).

While media content has increased in violence in the past few decades, violent crimes among youth have declined rapidly (Olson, 2004). According to the research, there is little evidence that links media violence to serious physical aggression, bullying or youth violence, and most of the debate appears to focus on how media violence may influence more minor forms of aggressiveness (Ferguson, 2011). However, further research could address the relationship between media violence and youth violence.

This study filled the gap in the research by exploring Black entertainers' views and perceptions of the African American educational experience. However, a limitation of the study was that the researcher only examined content from 10 films, 12 Hip-Hop songs and 12

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magazine articles from the 1980s, 1990s, 2000s and 2010s. Only seven official Hip-Hop music videos from the 1980s, 1990s and 2010s were used for this study. Although the researcher was able to make inferences about how African American students are portrayed in the educational system, further research about this topic could compare portrayals of the African American educational experience under the Obama versus Trump administration. Additional research can examine the educational experiences of African Americans from their own perspectives in comparison with the research literature. Further research could also be done to determine the actual impact critical media literacy has on students in schools where media education programs have been implemented in the K-12 curriculum. Studies could examine teachers' and students' perceptions of the curriculum.

Summary

In this study the researcher noticed many similarities and differences when comparing film, Hip-Hop and magazines and their portrayals of the African American educational experience. First, the researcher discovered five themes that were consistent across all of these types of media. The film, Hip-Hop songs and magazine articles examined in this study all contained the following six themes: (1) violence, crime and drug use, (2) academic achievement, (3) adequate and equitable resources, (4) diversity and cultural competence, (5) poverty, and (6) family structure. Second, the researcher discovered that the films examined in this study were more likely to portray Black students as athletes. In fact, five out of the 10 films depicted African Americans as athletes. Third, Hip-Hop had the highest number of themes associated with the African American experience in education. The majority of these portrayals were negative and

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Blacks were often portrayed as victims. Peer pressure was one theme that appeared only in Hip-Hop and not in film or magazines. The researcher also noticed themes like violence, crime and drug use and sexual content were more prevalent in Hip-Hop songs from the 2000s and 2010s and occurred less often in songs from the 1980s and 1990s. Fourth, official music videos were available for only seven of the Hip-Hop songs examined in this study. Three of the music videos were from the 1980s, three were from the 1990s, there were no music videos from the 2000s, and only one music video was available from the 2010s. Lastly, the magazines in this study contained the least number of themes associated with the African American educational experience. However, the majority of these themes were rather positive. For instance, the magazines discussed how having good role models could serve as a benefit for African American students, especially Black males. In fact, role models was one theme that appeared only in the magazines and not in film and Hip-Hop. While sexual content did appear as a theme in film and Hip-Hop, no sexual content was found in the magazines examined in this study.

The data collected and analyzed in this study suggests that Black produced films, Hip-Hop and magazines all portray the African American educational experience negatively. While Black films and magazines emphasized the importance of getting good grades, finishing high school, attending vocational, or post secondary school, and getting a good paying job, Hip-Hop focused mostly on blaming society for the many hardships African American high school students face in the classroom and on the streets, a situation where students are often left struggling to find their own way or place in the world.

Conclusion

This study used critical media literacy as a framework to examine how Black produced, directed and written films, Hip-Hop songs and magazines portray the African American high school educational experience. Using a thematic analysis approach, the researcher discovered numerous themes. The discovered themes for film were: (1) violence crime and drug use, (2) school discipline, (3) academic achievement, (4) poverty, (5) adequate and equitable resources, (6) truancy, (7) the victim mindset, (8) diversity and cultural competence, (9) family structure, (10) sexual content, and (11) celebration. Hip-Hop consisted of the following themes: (1) the victim mindset, (2) family structure, (3) academic achievement, (4) violence, crime and drug use, (5) poverty, (6) celebration, (7) diversity and cultural competence, (8) adequate and equitable resources, (9) peer pressure, (10) truancy, (11) school discipline, (12) sexual content, and (13) incarceration/prison. Themes identified in the Hip-Hop music videos include: maturation, dance, violence crime and drug use, wealth, sexual content, friendship and celebration. The following themes were prevalent in magazines: (1) academic achievement, (2) adequate and equitable resources, (3) diversity and cultural competence, (4) violence, crime and drug use, (5) poverty, (6) incarceration/prison (7) family structure, and (8) role models. Findings revealed that African American students are portrayed negatively when it comes to student achievement, having adequate and equitable resources, diversity and cultural acceptance and understanding in the classroom. In addition to being depicted as athletes, findings indicate that Black students are often violent, criminals, poor, use drugs, and are overly sexual. Critical media literacy served as a framework for this study in helping us to analyze, criticize and interpret these media messages.

Films, Hip-Hop and magazines are produced to inform and entertain the public. While these forms of media are similar in many ways, they are also different in how they target their messages. This means they are producing content that is meant for specific audiences or constructed to appeal to certain people. Those who produce and distribute media content see the audience of actual and potential consumers as a market (Gandy, 2000). For example, magazines like *Ebony* are highly dependent upon advertising for their success, so they develop editorials that are designed to attract the Black middle class (Gandy, 2000). According to the data collected and analyzed in this study, Black producers, directors and writers have consistently portrayed the African American experience similar to the way Hollywood or White entertainers have portrayed Blacks for many years. Black entertainers may have the power to change the narrative associated with the African American educational experience. However, there is the need to understand why they have not created more positive messages and how those messages might impact African American culture or the way Blacks are viewed or treated by society.

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From:	irb@memphis.edu
To:	Jamel Major (cjmajor); Ronald Eric Platt (replatt)
Subject:	PRO-FY2020-257 - Admin Withdrawal: Not Human Subject Research
Date:	Monday, November 25, 2019 9:14:52 AM
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November 25, 2019

PI Name: Jamel Major
Co-Investigators:
Advisor and/or Co-PI: Ronald Platt
Submission Type: Admin Withdrawal
Title: Media and Music: A Qualitative, Content Analysis of the African American Educational
Experience as Portrayed in Black-Produced Films, Songs and Print Publications
IRB ID: PRO-FY2020-257

From the information provided on your determination review request for "Media and Music: A
Qualitative, Content Analysis of the African American Educational Experience as Portrayed in
Black-Produced Films, Songs and Print Publications", the IRB has determined that your activity
does not meet the Office of Human Subjects Research Protections definition of human subjects
research and 45 CFR part 46 does not apply.

This study does not require IRB approval nor review. Your determination will be
administratively withdrawn from Cayuse IRB and you will receive an email similar to this
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Thanks,

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