Scholarship and Empowerment in the Age of the Video Vixen: Promoting Black Adolescent Females' Academic Success

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Abstract

Throughout American history, popular culture and some academic disciplines have created limited characterizations of low income, urban, Black adolescent females as hypersexual vixens who are at risk for early sexual activity and low academic achievement. The promulgation of these negative sexual myths may cause Black adolescent females to internalize these myths and perform sexually explicit roles at an early age; consequently increasing their chances of low academic achievement. The purpose of the future ethnographic/self ethnographic study is to explore the ways that cultural framers such as: families (with emphasis on Black mothers) and the media influence Black adolescent females' motivation to obtain academic success, and resist or accept negative sexual myths. The researcher will use the framing theory and expectancy value theory to explore these relationships. The study will observe Black adolescent females that attend public middle schools in urban areas within the Baltimore/ Washington, D.C metropolitan area. The researcher will consider how racial, gender, and class socialization may frame the adolescents' life experiences and the methods that they use to construct their identities, value systems, and resistance strategies to combat negative sexual myths.

Problem Statement

The media and some academic disciplines have continuously attacked Black femininity and silenced Black female voices. They have created limited characterizations of low income, urban, Black adolescent females as hypersexual vixens who are at risk for: early sexual activity, pregnancy, and low academic achievement (Lipford Saunders & Bradley, 2005, p. 299). This problem is worthy of investigation because these Black adolescent girls are "disproportionately identified as 'at risk' (Hill-Collins, 1990)" (Lipford Saunders & Bradley, 2005, p. 299). The promulgation of these negative myths and representations may cause Black adolescent females to internalize these beliefs (Lipford Sanders & Bradley, 2005, 302) and perform these subordinate roles; consequently increasing their chances of low academic achievement. The negative sexual myths made about Black femininity may also lead to the "societal devaluation of their gender" and their status as a "racial minority" (Stevens, 1997, p. 149-150).

Negative representations of Black femininity may hinder Black adolescent girls' success in educational institutions, because the literature continues to analyze adolescent behavioral and academic norms based on the lifestyles and opportunities available to White middle class students. Duncan and McCoy (2007) assert that institutions in American society "convey the implicit message to Black youth… that the White middle class norm is the standard to which they should aspire, in school and in society" (p. 41). This is problematic because this narrative labels Black cultural norms as deviant and unacceptable. When educators label students that do not conform to the White middle class American value system, they are usually labeled as "'rebellious,' 'surly,' and as having 'attitude' adjustment issues" (Duncan & McCoy, 2007, p. 41). These stereotypes create a culture of low expectations for the demographic's chances of achieving academic success and performing positive Black feminine roles.

Purpose of Proposed Research

Given the aforementioned problem statement, the purpose of the future ethnographic/ self ethnographic study is to explore the ways that families and the media influence Black adolescent females' motivation to obtain academic success, and resist negative sexual myths. The study hopes to give Black adolescent females a voice, by specifically interviewing girls that attend public middle schools in the Baltimore/ Washington, D.C metropolitan area. The researcher will consider how racial, gender, and class socialization may frame the adolescents' life experiences and the methods that they use to construct their identities, value systems, and resistance strategies.

Research Questions

Given the aforementioned purpose statement and problem statement the following research questions may be proposed for future research: How do families and the media, specifically Hip Hop & gangsta rap music videos, influence Black adolescent females' motivation to obtain academic success and perform positive Black feminine roles? The subquestions are:

1. How do Black adolescent females value education and perceive their roles as Black girls in contemporary American society?
2. What are the negative myths associated with Black femininity?
3. What strategies do adolescent Black females use to resist negative sexual myths made about them in American culture, and cope with harsh ecological conditions of urban communities?

Significance of the Topic

Analyzing the ways that families and the media affect Black adolescent females' motivation to obtain academic success, and resist negative sexual myths, may help researchers and advocates understand how these girls construct their identities. If researchers and counselors understand the "normative development and resiliency strategies" (Lipford Sanders and Bradley, 2005, p.299) used by African American girls they will be able to identify methods to help promote their interest and success in scholarship, and empower them to be confident and accomplished women. Providing Black girls with these tools will allow them to close the achievement gap and gradually combat the feminization of poverty. Advocates and policymakers can use this research to create new social programs aimed towards helping parents, communities, and the media promote the importance of scholarship in Black urban communities and increase their chances for success.

Summary of Theoretical Framework

The Framing Theory and the Expectancy Value Theory will be used in this study to explain the ways that Black families and the media frame the value of education and Black femininity in Black adolescent females' lives. Chong and Druckman (2007) state that the framing theory refers to the "process by which people develop a particular conceptualization of an issue or reorient their thinking about an issue" (p. 104). This theory emerges from the "expectancy value model of an individual's attitude (e.g., Ajzen & Fishbein 1980, Nelson et al. 1997b)" (Chong and Druckman, 2007, p. 105). It can be posited that Black adolescent girls construct their identities, attitudes, and values based on the way that the often opposing entities of the family and the media frame femininity, confidence, and the importance of scholarship. Sniderman & Theriault (2004) recognize the power of opposing frames, noting that individuals "are not exposed to just one frame of an issue… rather, they are exposed to competing frames" (Chong and Druckman, 2007, p. 111). Competing messages about Black femininity may confuse Black adolescent girls who have been "socialized" at home to believe that "the [media's representation of] unfeminine connotations attached to strength, persistence, expression of anger, and intelligence (J. F. Brown, 1993, p. 10)" are in fact "positive and functional" (Lipford Sanders & Bradley, 2005, p. 300).

Researchers debate whether individuals' attitudes are framed completely by their values, or if they are easily persuaded by contradictory frames (Chong and Druckman, 2007, p. 112). This may be even more controversial when referring to adolescents, because they are more susceptible to the

> normative changes of early adolescence, such as the onset of puberty, peer group influences, and identity negotiation, [which] often result in short-term decrements in motivation and achievement during middle school from which most students, boys and girls alike, eventually recover (Eccles & Midgley, 1989; Simmons & Blyth, 1987)" (Taylor & Graham, 2007, p. 52).

It is likely that Black adolescent girls will value academic achievement and be motivated to succeed if their family and their media references emphasize the "importance, attractiveness, and usefulness of achievement-related activities" (Taylor & Graham, 2007, p. 53). The girls' values will be shaped by their "cultural experiences" which are shaped primarily by one's family and community, and "societal influences" (Taylor & Graham, 2007, p. 53) from different media, such as Hip Hop and gangsta rap music and music videos.

Assumptions

I assume that most literature will analyze Black adolescent female development, perceptions of femininity, and academic achievement based on the lifestyles and opportunities available to white middle class students. I have come to this conclusion because limited research has been conducted to analyze the development of Black adolescent girls. I assume that urban Black girls do face barriers to receiving a quality education, and that academic achievement may not always be their first priority if they face other hardships. For the purpose of this study, I assume that the educational institutions are interested in and capable of providing Black adolescent girls with the tools to achieve academic success. I believe that family and the media can frame the way that adolescents value education and perform gender and racial roles. I do assume that there are negative sexual myths made about Black females, and that Black females are able to utilize strategies to resist these myths and emanating roles. The promulgation of these negative sexual myths may cause Black adolescent females, their parents, and teachers to internalize these beliefs; fostering a culture of low expectations, thus increasing their chances of low academic achievement and the feminization of poverty.

In reference to the future study, I assume that the girls in the study will be open to discuss their life and academic experiences if I gain rapport with them and their families. Although I assume that girls from the ages of 15-18 will be the most aware of their sexuality and academic aspirations, I believe that it is most important to conduct ethnographic research on adolescent girls from the ages of 11-14, because they are in the early stages of adolescent/ pre–adolescent development. If researchers are able to understand how they construct their identities and values, families and counselors may be able to build the girls' confidence and promote their interest in scholarship.

Limitations

The length of the McNair Summer Research Institute served as a limitation to my study. The Summer Research Institute was only scheduled for five weeks, so it was only enough time for me to create this research proposal. I was not able to cover as many of the cultural factors and structural factors that may serve as barriers to Black adolescent females' academic achievement. Most importantly, there is a limited amount of literature that focuses on barriers to Black adolescent females' academic

achievement, and how negative sexual myths created about them in academia and the media may serve as barriers. As for the future study, I will have a difficult time conducting extensive ethnographic research with a large sample, because I will be taking other courses in the fall and the spring of my senior year in college. I hope to cover this topic extensively in graduate school.

Delimitations

My study will not attempt to explain curriculum and school practices, nor will it explain the achievement gap among Black adolescent girls and White adolescent girls. I will not attempt to research the differences in academic achievement among Black girls of different social classes. This study will not compare the academic success of Black adolescent males and the negative stereotypes that they face, with those of Black adolescent females. I will not extensively explore the different structural barriers that may hinder Black adolescent female academic achievement.

Scope

My study will explore the cultural factors that may serve as barriers to black adolescent females' academic achievement. I intend to show the relationship between the way the family and the media frames the importance of academic achievement and the performance of positive Black female roles. In addition, I hope to convey how the girls' actually value academic achievement and their roles as Black females.

Definitions

This study will use terms unique to the investigation of ways that families and the media influence Black adolescent females' motivation to obtain academic success, and resist negative sexual myths that may decrease their chances of success.

Academic Success

For the purposes of this study I will define academic success as a student's ability to: work efficiently in an educational setting, gain proficiency in their academic courses, motivate themselves to do their best, learn techniques to continuously improve their skills, learn how to balance their social and academic lives, and possibly earn "B" grade point averages and above.

Video vixen

For the purposes of this study I will define video vixen as a scantily clad woman who appears in Hip Hop and gangsta rap music videos. She is usually depicted as a Black or Latino woman, and is characterized as a beautiful, vindictive, gold-digger whose "sole purpose is to look good and be desirable to men (Emerson, 2002)" (Gordon, 2008, p. 246).

Gangsta rap

For the purposes of the study I will define gangsta rap, as rap music that is characterized as violent and misogynistic (Hill Collins, 2004). This genre of music's lyrics and music videos depict the supposed lifestyles of Black and/or minority gangsters, who are usually males that reside in low income, urban areas.

Feminization of Poverty

For the purposes of the study I will define the feminization of poverty as a phenomenon that "occurs wherever there are insufficient efforts to reduce poverty either through the labor market or social welfare policies and where single motherhood is sufficiently widespread" (Schaffner Goldberg & Kremen, 1990, p. 201).

Culture

For the purposes of this study I will define culture as the traditions, values, and common lifestyles specific to a group of people. Culture is "regularly characterized by 'the publicly available symbolic forms through which people experience and express meaning' (Swidler 1986:273)" (O'Connor, 2001, 160).

Social Capital

For the purposes of this study, social capital theory is measured by the "quality and quantity of the networks that connect children and adolescents with the resources of their parents (i.e., resource capital including financial and human capital)" (Mullis, R., Rathge, R., Mullis, A.K., 2003, p. 542).

Sexuality

For the purposes of this study I will use Hill Collins's definition of sexuality: "Sexuality is not simply a biological function; rather, it is a system of ideas and social practices that is deeply implicated in shaping American social inequalities" (Hill Collins, 2004, p.6).

Black Sexual Politics

For the purposes of this study I will use Hill Collins's definition of Black sexual politics: "Black sexual politics consists of a set of ideas and social practices shaped by gender, race, sexuality, that frame Black men and women's treatment of one another, as well as how African Americans are perceived and treated by others" (Hill Collins, 2004, p.7)

Literature Review

This literature review will address pertinent issues that may hinder Black adolescent girls from attaining academic success and confidence. This chapter will address the following topics: a.) Academic Research Silencing Black Female Voices, Sexualizing their Bodies, b.) Media & Hip Hop/ Gangsta Rap Music Videos'

Influence on Black Adolescent Females c.) Families & Black Mothers' Influence on Black Adolescent Girls' Development & Academic Success.

Academic Research Silencing Black Female Voices, Sexualizing their Bodies

Since researchers have often excluded Black adolescent females' perceptions about their roles in American culture and the sexual stereotypes created about them, generalizations have been made about the girls' limited chances of achieving academic success. Lipford Sanders & Bradley (2005) note that "a discussion of African American adolescent girls must also recognize the marginal and often invisible status of African American women in the United States" (p. 302). Some scholars argue that racism and a milieu of "White privilege among counseling scholars (Robinson & Ginter, 1999)" have attributed to the "almost complete erasure of female… students from research on Black adolescent identity and Black youth culture" (Lipford Sanders & Bradley, 2005, p. 302; Duncan & McCoy, 2007, p. 42). The exclusion of Black females from this discourse may be attributed to scholars, even White female scholars, that use "similar racist and ethnocentric approaches with the assumption that gender is the primary locus of oppression for all women…(Jackson & Greene, 2000)" (Lipford Sanders & Bradley, 2005, p. 302). The limited research on this topic has "left [counselors, academics, and politicians] to draw their own conclusions about the identities and experiences of African American women and girls" (Lipford Sanders & Bradley, 2005, p. 302) from various biased media sources.

Duncan and McCoy (2007) note that the "suppression" of Black adolescent female voices contributes to the oppression of "Black communities and the larger society" (p. 42). Angela Dillard agrees with this statement, as she asserts that 'the major loser in this shifting discourse about race and identity in America…may prove to be poor blacks, who pathologized and silenced, will continue to be everybody's convenient and favorite scapegoat" (Jordan –Zachery, 2009, p. 28). Duncan and McCoy (2007) emphasize that society's acceptance of "university–trained experts" in the late 19th century, created racist and highly sexualized myths about Black men and women that "reinforced extant popular racial imagery and survive today in the public domain as commonsense notions" (p. 40). Hill Collins (2004) notes that lasting social constructions of racial and sexual differences created in academia and internalized by American society, "distinguish[es] Whites ([as]carriers of 'normal' gender ideology and sexual practices) from Blacks ([as]carriers of 'deviant' gender ideology and sexual practices)" (p.44).

The notions of racial and sexual differences were evident during the 19th century, when a Khoi woman (modern day South Africa), named Sarah Bartmann was caged and placed on display in exhibitions in Paris and London (Hill Collins, 2004, p. 27). She was displayed as a "sexual 'freak' of nature," (Hill Collins, 2004, p. 27) because of her "'grossly overdeveloped labia,' and 'enlarged clitoris,' and large buttocks" (Byrd, 2004, p.11). Researchers labeled her as the "Hottentot Venus," and declared that her oversized sexual organs and body parts proved that Black women were subject to a "'primitive' sexual desire" (Byrd, 2004, p.11). Hill Collins (2004) asserts that Sarah Bartmann's "treatment helped create modern Black sexual stereotypes of the jezebel,

mammy, and the welfare queen that, in the United States, helped uphold slavery, Jim Crow segregation, and racial ghettoization" (p.28). This detestable legacy continues today, as Black females, especially low income and urban Black females, are depicted as high maintenance, gold-digging vixens or as young, lazy, and promiscuous teenage mothers. They have been "forced to negotiate the traces left by these contaminated constructions of black female sexuality," (Byrd, 2004, p.11) and are left little room in the discourse to create new positive identities.

Media & Hip Hop/ Gangsta Rap Music Videos' Influence on Black Adolescent Females

Chong and Druckman (2007) state that "frames in communication matter… they affect the attitudes and behaviors of their audiences" (p.109). This is especially true for young children and adolescents, because they are "growing up in a media-saturated environment" (Gentile, Walsh, 2002, p.159). Black youth seem be more exposed to media forms as they have been reported to watch "an average of almost 6 hours of screen media each day (i.e., TV, videos and/or DVDs, and movies), in comparison to an average of 3 hours and 47 minutes for White youth (Roberts, Foehr, & Rideout, 2004)" (Gordon, 2008, p. 246-247). Cole and Guy-Sheftall (2003) convey that patriarchal American media influences females internalization of negative sexual roles, as it frequently represents them as "half-naked, promiscuous, man-hungry, and lacking in self-esteem" (p. 199). Since the media is very influential in the lives of Black youth, this increased exposure may greatly influence Black adolescent females' ideas of "what women are like and what their role is in society" (Gordon, 2008, p. 245).

During the past 20 years, the billion dollar Hip Hop music industry has framed many "damaging racial/sexual images" (Cole, J. and Guy-Sheftall, 2003, p. 184) of Black femininity, which can strongly influence Black adolescent females' negative construction of their identities. Hip Hop and gangsta rap popularized the image of the video vixen and refer to Black females as "'bitches,' 'hos,' 'freaks,' 'skeezers,' 'gold diggers,' and 'chickenheads'" and "malign Black women, 'decent' and 'street' alike" (Hill Collins, 2004, p. 82). Hill Collins (2004) conveys Black females' historical and contemporary roles of marginalization,

> One Black female can easily replace another and are all reduced to their bodies. Ironically, displaying nameless, naked bodies had a long history in Western societies, from the display of enslaved African women on the auction block under chattel slavery to representations of Black female bodies in contemporary film and in music videos. (p.128-129)

These prevalent characterizations of women provide Black adolescent females with limited ideas for their future roles in American society. Even if other cultural factors are present in Black adolescent girls' lives that may teach them to positively shape their identities and values, they are "simultaneously bombarded with negative media images of their racial and gender groups" (Gordon, 2008, p. 245).

Hip Hop and gangsta rap have attacked Black femininity. Its weapons of choice are misogynist lyrics and insulting music videos. These media forms have intruded the homes, televisions, and minds of "young Black boys and girls at an early age. The lyrics, images--- and attitudes that undergird them—are potentially harmful to Black girls and women in a culture that is already negative about our humanity, our sexuality, and our overall worth" (Cole and Guy-Sheftall, 2003, p. 186-187). Even more it attacks females of lower economic statuses, as it exhibits "class biases with respect to women" and a belief that "it's all right to treat *certain* women disrespectfully and label them 'bitches' and 'hos' because that's who they are and that's what they deserve" (Cole and Guy-Sheftall, 2003, p. 188). Chong and Druckman (2007) state that individuals "should be more susceptible to framing in the early stages of exposure to an issue, when they are less knowledgeable about the consequences of the issue" (p. 118). This explains Gordon's (2008) notion that "younger adolescents are more vulnerable to media messages about Black women" (p.253). In her study she found that "younger girls expressed stronger agreement with appearance attitudes, suggesting that they are more invested in societal norms about the importance of appearance" (Gordon, 2008, p.253). Ward and Rivadeneyra's (2002) analysis of mainstream Black music videos "found sexual imagery in 84% of the videos, with the most frequently occurring sexual behaviors involving sexual objectification… Seventy-one percent of women in these videos were dressed in provocative clothing or wore no clothing at all" (Gordon, 2008, p. 246). When Hip Hop and gangsta rap music videos represent Black females in these subordinate roles, the entire group is dehumanized, and provide young impressionable Black girls with a "one-dimensional image of Black womanhood" (Gordon, 2008, p. 246).

Barriers to Academic Success

The state of America's urban public education system has always been characterized by "low student-performance outcomes, student discipline problems, poor student health, and limited access to supplemental learning resources" (Lewis, James, Hancock, & Hill-Jackson, 2008, p.131). American society has often associated academic success and academic failure with race, gender, and class. Lewis, et al (2008) notes that the "African American family's culture or deficient family and community practices" (p. 128) have been blamed for causing the achievement gap between Black and White students, but many scholars dispute this factor and blame racism and structural factors. This topic is very controversial, but some scholars are beginning to realize the complexity of the intersectionality of race, gender, class, and location, and how "structure and culture operate simultaneously to affect achievement outcomes" (O'Connor, 2001, 159). An example of the importance of intersectionality is clear when examining how structural differences may be to blame for the achievement gap among "urban students…[and] suburban or rural students, [who] face the added challenge of overcoming limited access to critical educational resources and knowledge" (Lewis, et.al, 2008, p. 131), versus the cultural and ecological factors that may hinder urban students such as "the

community, family, peers, and cultural beliefs" (Mullis, R., Rathge, R., Mullis, A.K., 2003, p. 541).

Adolescents' attitudes toward school are often affected by their physical development process and their cultural framers. Taylor and Graham (2007) state that the physical and social changes that adolescents experience during middle school such as "the onset of puberty, peer group influences, and identity negotiation, often result in short-term decrements in motivation and achievement…from which most students, boys and girls alike, eventually recover (Eccles & Midgley, 1989; Simmons & Blyth, 1987)" (p. 52). Graham and Weiner's (1996) Expectancy Value theory can be used to explain students' motivation to do well in school, because it will most likely be based off of "the perceived likelihood that an achievement outcome will be obtained (expectancy) as well as how much that outcome is desired or wanted (value)" (Taylor & Graham, 2007, p. 53). They also assert that way that students value education is framed by their "cultural experiences" and "societal influences" that determine how helpful academic achievement will be to them in the future (Taylor & Graham, 2007, p. 53). It is possible that some low income, urban Black adolescent females will "perceive that racial inequality poses limits on their social and economic mobility" and they may be "less likely to believe that working hard in school will have long-term payoff" (Taylor & Graham, 2007, p. 53).

Since adolescents are easily swayed cultural factors such as the media may influence their motivation to succeed in school. Chong and Druckman (2007) emphasize that "framing can be construed in both positive and negative terms" (p. 120). Communication frames in the media often depict images of Black adolescent and adult roles in American society in negative ways. Tatum (1992) states that, "'Often, [Black] African Americans are either invisible [simply omitted from discussion] or represented in ways that are based on negative stereotypes. Absent or distorted images cannot inspire or reinforce the positive outcomes of educational and economic achievement" (Duncan & McCoy, 2007, p. 38). Tatum (1992) also noted that "curricular interventions can influence these students to gain new frames of reference that include those that view academic success as consistent with "a genuine African American identity" (Duncan & McCoy, 2007, p. 38). The media and specifically Hip Hop and gangsta rap music videos do not present images of Black adolescent girls' academic achievement. They associate genuine Black femininity with sexuality and materialism, not academic achievement. Gordon (2008) states that "the media frequently present the image that women's primary purpose is to be the young, sexy, and beautiful object of male attention, regardless of their occupation and intelligence" (p.247). If the intelligence of women, especially Black women is not promoted in American media and specifically Hip Hop and gangsta rap music videos, Black students may "adopt oppositional identities that lead them to reject academic achievement as a consequence of these cultural distortions and omissions" (Duncan & McCoy, 2007, p. 38). Gordon (2008) suggests that Black adolescent girls across socio-economic statuses who have a history of high academic achievement may not be at risk for internalizing the negative myths that the media

perpetuates (p. 253). She also asserts that these girls "may have already developed a sense of competency and self-worth that stems from their academic achievement rather than from their appearance. These girls may also view media content through a more critical lens than the average student" (Gordon, 2008, p. 253).

Families & Black Mothers' Influence on Black Adolescent Girls' Development & Academic Success

Families help Black adolescent girls frame the foundations of their value systems, beliefs, and attitudes about the importance of Black female roles and academic success. There is limited research analyzing the Black family's influence on Black adolescent girls. More specifically the available research labels "Black families as monolithic. Few studies incorporate both lower-class and middle-class Black families…" (Ferguson Peters, 2007, p.204). Mullis, R., Rathge, & Mullis, A. (2003) propose that Coleman's (1988) social capital theory noted that "family and community support are related to academic, social, personal, and economic attributes of students" (p. 542). Social capital theory is measured by the "quality and quantity of the networks that connect children and adolescents with the resources of their parents," (Mullis, R., Rathge, R., Mullis, A.K., 2003, p. 542) such as access to quality education systems, mentors, and/ or jobs, etc. In low income, urban communities, Black women are often the primary caregivers of Black children and adolescents, and most likely play a larger role in framing expectation values for Black youth. Their role is especially important, because they serve as many Black adolescent girls' first role models. These women frame their daughters' understanding of the importance of Black femininity by challenging negative cultural and sexual myths and "redefining what it means to be a black woman" (Ridolfo, 2007, p. 18) in American society. Hill Collins believes that Black women teach their daughters the value of "'assertiveness and other 'unfeminine' qualities as necessary and functional attributes for Afro-American womanhood…'" (Ridolfo, 2007, p. 18). She also states that "'black women's self valuation challenges the content of externally defined controlling images' (Collins 2004:107)" (Ridolfo, 2007, p.18) such as those from Hip Hop and gangsta rap music videos. Stevens (1997) suggests that Black adolescent girls may actually be susceptible to perceiving the "societal devaluation of her gender, but more importantly, societal devaluation of her as a member of a racial minority" (p. 149-150). Querimit and Conner (2003) agree with Hill Collins, emphasizing that Blacks have a "long history of endurance, survival, and coping. Some of the common stressors of Black youth survival are educational biases, paucity of political power, health disparities, and racism (McKenry, Everett, Ramseur, & Carter, 1989; Parham, White, & Ajamu, 1999)" (Querimit and Conner, 2003, p. 1216). They note that this history of resiliency allows "African American adolescent females [to] exhibit many strengths and personal assets even in the face of adversity" (Querimit and Conner, 2003, p. 1216). As Black mothers teach their daughters more resiliency strategies, the girls will be able to challenge negative cultural and sexual myths in American society. Furthermore, these parenting strategies stress that "Black daughters are

expected to work, to strive for an education and to anticipate their future role in supporting their families (Collins, 2000)" (Ridolfo, 2007, p. 22). These lessons will empower the girls to value Black femininity, respectability, and education.

Scholars often debate the magnitude to which a family's socio-economic status negatively or positively influences adolescents' motivation to achieve academic success and positive self development. Ridolfo's (2007) study found that "Black mothers' socialization may help protect and promote a positive self-concept during adolescence, [but] young minority girls still face a number of disadvantages based on their race and socioeconomic statuses" (Ridolfo, 2007, p. 56). Although this is true, a growing number of scholars assert that parents frame the importance of adolescents' academic success "through their expectations for achievement. Adolescents whose parents expect them to do well tend to live up to those expectations…" (Mullis, R., Rathge, R., Mullis, A.K., 2003, p. 542) and this can be independent of socio-economic status. Studies have found that "younger adolescents who enjoy supportive, harmonious, egalitarian home environments are usually better prepared to benefit from schooling (Juang & Silbereisen, 2002)" (Mullis, R., Rathge, R., Mullis, A.K., 2003, p. 541). It is clear that children and adolescents who are raised by more wealthy and educated parents will have "more advantages and opportunities for achievement," (Mullis, R., Rathge, R., Mullis, A.K., 2003, p. 541) because they have more access to social capital and financial resources. It has been noted that "parents in all socioeconomic status groups are frequently reported to value education and want their children to succeed," but more affluent parents "tend to be more active in their children's education and have higher expectations of their children's career choices (Alspaugh & Harting, 1995; Gutman & Eccles, 1999; Juang & Silbereisen, 2002)" (Mullis, R., Rathge, R., Mullis, A.K., 2003, p. 541). Some scholars suggest that affluent and educated parents who have "achieved career and economic success can be role models of achievement for their children (Wentzel & Feldman, 1993)" (Mullis, R., Rathge, R., Mullis, A.K., 2003, p. 541) and serve as a source of social capital. These classist ideologies will remain, but there seems to be a consensus that "parental monitoring, fairness, and warmth" and parental involvement in students' lives can promote "higher academic achievement" (Mullis, R., Rathge, R., Mullis, A.K., 2003, p. 541).

Research Design and Methodology

Role of the Researcher

I plan to use ethnographic research methods in the future study. During the fall I plan to interview four Black adolescent girls, from the ages of 11-14, at a public middle school in the Baltimore/ Washington, D.C. metropolitan area. I want to learn about their life experiences and how their families and the media, specifically Hip Hop & gangsta rap music videos, influence their motivation to obtain academic success and perform positive Black feminine roles.

Data Collection Strategies and Data Sources

To complete the literature review, I searched for books on the University of Maryland, College Park's library website. I used the online catalogue to search for books that were related to my research topics and questions. I used words such as <adolescent black girls>, <development>, <education>, <academic success>, <academic barriers>, <media>, and <framing theory> to conduct the online searches. Once I found the books that I needed I went to the University of Maryland, College Park's McKeldin Library, and found the books in the library stacks. I utilized the University of Maryland, College Park's library website and the Research Port to find several scholarly journal articles. I used some of the same terms listed above to find the articles.

In the future research project, I will use qualitative research methods, such as ethnography and self ethnography, to observe and analyze how families and the media frame the importance of academic achievement, and positive Black feminine roles for Black adolescent females. Caughey states that it is imperative to "explore how cultures work at the individual level and how people manage their cultural conditioning" (Caughey, 2006, p.8). Exploring the adolescents' life history narratives would reinforce the fact that race, gender, and class socialization are important factors in understanding individuals' life experiences and resiliency strategies. I will be cognizant that everyone adopts multiple cultures and lifestyles based on their life experiences.

I will conduct ethnographic interviews with Black adolescent girls, from the ages of 11-14, at a middle school in the Baltimore/ Washington, D.C. metropolitan area. I will consult the principal of the school and the parents of the possible students, and students, and ask for their permission to conduct the ethnographies. I will ask the teachers to randomly select four girls for me to interview during an afterschool program.

Data Analysis Strategies

I will analyze the data that is found from the ethnographic/ self ethnographic research through transcription analysis and thematic analysis. This will allow me to expand my conceptual framework and analyze the main topics that the girls' discussed in the ethnographies.

Strategies for Minimizing Bias and Error

Lipford Saunders and Bradley are frustrated because most research conducted in the social sciences studies low income, Black adolescent females, and help to perpetuate negative stereotypes about Black families (Lipford Saunders & Bradley, 2005, p. 299). While conducting research I will be sure to note that although the informants were raised in Black families of low socio-economic statuses, their experiences should not be used to represent the experiences of all black girls. As

bell hooks stated, "there is no one story of African American girlhood" (hooks, 1996, p. 13).

Sanders and Bradley (2005) note that "development for children of color is best understood using a multidimensional focus inclusive of gender, race, ethnicity, and social class (p. 299). I will be sure to consider all of these concepts while observing the participants and analyzing their responses. I will also utilize self ethnography to ensure that I understand how my own life experiences of being a Black girl, growing up in a low income, urban community, may affect my analysis of the girls' experiences and academic aspirations. I will also consult my mentor to make sure that I am not making biased assumptions.

Ethical Considerations

Confidentiality and respect will be essential to this study, especially because I will be working with pre-adolescent / adolescent youth from the ages of 11-14. I will be sure receive permission to conduct the interviews with the girls, from the middle school principal, parents, and the female students, and will require everyone to sign consent forms. I will make all parties aware of the type of questions that I will ask the girls, and inform them of the nature of the study. My goal is to ask age appropriate questions, but they will be personal questions, so that I can gain a better understanding of the participants' entire life stories. I will not force the girls to answer any questions that they do not feel comfortable answering.

Findings, Conclusions, and Recommendations for Future Research

Findings from the Literature

The main research question of the study was: *How do Black families, especially Black mothers, and the media forms of Hip Hop & gangsta rap music videos, influence Black adolescent females' motivation to obtain academic success and perform positive Black feminine roles?* Limited research has been conducted to answer this direct question. In fact, limited research has been conducted to analyze the way that the two entities separately frame the value of academic success and positive Black female roles for Black adolescent females.

The first sub-question is, *How do Black adolescent females value education and perceive their roles as Black girls in contemporary American society?* The third sub- question is, *What strategies do adolescent Black females use to resist negative sexual myths made about them in American culture, and cope with harsh ecological conditions of urban communities?* I did not find literature that directly addressed these questions. This is most likely because of the limited amount of research conducted on Black adolescent girls' normative development and resiliency strategies (Lipford Sanders & Bradley, 2005). I did find that Black women and mothers teach their daughters resiliency strategies, and as a result the girls are able to value education and gain a strong work ethic (Ridolfo, 2007).

The second sub-question asks, *what are the negative sexual myths associated with Black women?* I found that Black women were represented as having a "'primitive' sexual desire" in comparison to chaste white women (Byrd, 2004, p.11). Hill Collins (2004) notes that some of the "modern Black sexual stereotypes" are those of the "jezebel, mammy, and the welfare queen" (p.28). She suggests that these representations fostered an American society that supported "slavery, Jim Crow segregation, and racial ghettoization" (Hill Collins, 2004, p.28). Today these images have been redeveloped and mass produced through Hip Hop and gangsta rap music videos. These music videos have characterized Black females as "'bitches,' 'hos,' 'freaks,' 'skeezers,' 'gold diggers,' and 'chickenheads'" and "malign Black women, 'decent' and 'street' alike" (Hill Collins, 2004, p. 82). As a result, young Black females have been forced "to negotiate the traces left by these contaminated constructions of black female sexuality" (Byrd, 2004, p.11).

Conclusions Based on Analysis of the Literature

Jordan -Zachery (2009) emphasizes that race and gender are two social constructions that have been dependent on each other throughout history to segregate individuals and portray some groups as "dominant and 'normal' and others as subordinate and 'other'" (p. 26). Researchers, politicians, and Hip Hop and gangsta rap artists have continually constructed Black females as 'other' to "maintain these power relations and structures" through "cultural myths and symbols---which are often based on stereotypes" (Jordan –Zachery, 2009, p. 26). Gordon (2008) notes that the cultural myth and symbol of the "sexually promiscuous Jezebel, [was] an image created and popularized to justify the sexual exploitation of Black women during and after slavery (Patton, 2001; Simms, 2001)" (p. 246). Jordan-Zachery asserts that "overtime these multiple marginalizations have resulted in the development and redevelopment of a number of cultural symbols and icons used to represent black womanhood" (p. 26-27). Today the jezebel has transformed into one of the most ubiquitous symbols of Black womanhood, the video vixen.

The video vixen has appeared in Hip Hop and *gangsta* rap music videos for the past 20 years, but her role has been popularized during in the 21st century. This term has not been used by many scholars in recent literature, and the word is still very exclusive to the mainstream Hip Hop world. This prevalent negative sexual symbol of Black femininity is consumed by many Black adolescent girls in contemporary American society. Scholars have noted that "African American children are… susceptible to media influence because they tend to identify closely with and imitate the behavior of characters, especially Black characters (King & Multon, 1996; Stroman, 1984)," (Gordon, 2008, p.247) since there is a limited amount of Black women represented in the media. Gordon (2008) agrees and suggests that Black adolescent girls will therefore be "vulnerable to internalizing media messages that emphasize the importance of beauty and appearance for girls and women," (p.247) instead of messages of self worth and intelligence. Black adolescent girls do have the capability to resist these negative cultural myths, but they will need strong familial support systems to empower them to create their own positive identities. Ridolfo

(2007) suggest that Black women help frame their daughters' understanding of the importance of Black femininity by challenging negative cultural and sexual myths and "redefining what it means to be a black woman" (p. 18) in American society.

Since "framing can be construed in both positive and negative terms," (Chong and Druckman, 2007, p. 120) the family and the media will have a great influence on the ways that academic achievement and positive Black feminine roles will be internalized and performed by the adolescent girls. Using the framing theory, it can be posited that communication frames such as Hip Hop and gangsta rap music videos, often "[manipulate and deceive]" Black females so that they will "acquire common beliefs" (Chong and Druckman, 2007, p. 120) about their subordinate roles in patriarchal society. These media forms frame the girls' empowerment as unnecessary, mainly because they frame Black female roles as powerful, but *only* through their sexual prowess and ability to seduce men. If Black adolescent females are not valued for their intelligence and/ or humanity, they may "adopt oppositional identities that lead them to reject academic achievement as a consequence of these cultural distortions and omissions" (Duncan & McCoy, 2007, p. 38). Jordan –Zachery (2009) suggests that internalizing these subordinate racial and gender roles will cause Black females to be marginalized "in their relationships with black men" (p. 26). The symbols created in Hip Hop and gangsta rap music videos frame a future of destructive Black sexual politics. The promulgation of images of video vixen will negatively influence boys' and girls' expectations for relationships, which are built off of soft pornographic sexual fantasies, and will result in harsh realities for female empowerment. In addition, the internalization and performance of these negative sexual roles can lead to Black adolescent females' placing themselves at a greater risk of becoming pregnant, contracting STDs, HIV, and/or AIDS, dropping out of school, and living in poverty as adults. Today's adolescents will have a greater chance of being at risk of "being victimized by poverty, crime, abuse, health problems, and lack of relevant educational and employment opportunities" (Watkins and Iverson, 1998 p.169). Querimit and Conner (2003) suggest that youth can be empowered to fight the barriers that they may face to attaining academic success by teaching them to about "the social inequities and oppression" (p. 1216) that their ancestors endured in the past. If advocates and families teach Black adolescent females about the history of Black females' marginalization, in addition to Black females' success in American society, they may be able to learn resiliency strategies to combat attacks on Black femininity and barriers to their academic and economic success.

Recommendations for Future Research

In addition to the current research proposal, I would like to conduct more ethnographic research on the ways that Black adolescent females' peer groups, school environments, and communities influence Black adolescent females' motivation to attain academic success and perform positive Black feminine roles. This is important because there is currently a limited amount of research that analyzes these topics, and understanding these relationships will help advocates empower young Black females to construct positive identities and achieve academic success.

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