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The Educated Hustlers and Divas: How Black Youth Use Black Television as a Tool to Communicate While in School.

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LOYOLA UNIVERSITY CHICAGO

THE EDUCATED HUSTLERS AND DIVAS:

HOW BLACK YOUTH USE BLACK TELEVISION TO COMMUNICATE WITH PEERS

WHILE IN SCHOOL

A THESIS SUBMITTED TO

THE FACULTY OF THE GRADUATE SCHOOL

IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF

MASTER OF ARTS

PROGRAM IN CULTURAL AND EDUCATIONAL POLICY STUDIES

BY

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to determine how Black youth use television as a tool to communicate in their social interactions with their peers. The research question for this project is; In what ways do Black youth use Black television as a tool in school social settings? This study took a qualitative approach that called for the method of focus groups. Black students between the ages of 10-20 gathered into four focus groups to discuss how they use Black content to communicate with their peers.

The results of the research show that Black youth use Black television as a tool in social settings for communication. Black students adapt vernacular, and gesture from Black tv shows to address interpersonal conflicts in social settings. The study also indicates that the portrayals of stereotypical Black characters on Black television shape the way Black students see themselves and allow themselves to communicate in social settings. The findings also show that Black television is interpreted as reality to most of the focus group participants and that girls more than boys use television to communicate with their peers. The study can play an integral role in their cultural capital.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

“Any education given by a group tends to socialize its members, but the quality and the value of the socialization depends upon the habits and aims of the group.” - John Dewey

Youth are socialized by their surroundings. Culture, families, and neighborhoods are all pieces that help shape them. Media and art also help develop the socialization of youth. Black youth, in particular, use all of the above categories to help shape their socialization. Media is a substantial portion of that. Educators have even taken hip-hop as a form of the curriculum because of its massive influence in the socialization of Black youth. When it comes to other avenues of information about Black youth in education, researchers, and educators tend to focus a lot on topics and issues within the classroom. This research steps outside the classroom to explore how Black youth use television as a tool in their social settings while in school. Using qualitative research, it examines how Black youth may use television to shape their socialization among their peers while in school environments.

Background

There is much discussion of Hip Hop music and its influences on education. There are books written by hip-hop scholars and educational professionals, who say that incorporating hip-hop into the classroom has a positive effect on Black males. Books such as *Hip-Hop Genius: Remixing High School Education* by Sam Seidel and *Beats, Rhymes, and Classroom Life: Hip-Hop Pedagogy and the Politics of Identity* by Marc Lamont Hill, reflect the impact of Black media in the form of Hip-Hop music. They relate Hip-Hop to the socialization of Black males.

In *Towards a Pedagogy of Hip Hop in Urban Teacher Education*, the researchers discuss how hip-hop influences social behaviors of Black boys. “Hip Hop has been both demonized and commodified in the field of education and in broader US society.” (Bridges 2011, p.325) It is through hip-hop that many youths of color choose to exercise their power to push against the status quo. (Bridges, 2011) Hip-hop has become a guideline in education to meet Black males where they are. When it comes to female students, hip-hop falls short. It sexually categorizes women. Most research on hip-hop and education almost entirely omit female emcees and B-girls who have importance in hip-hop and have the power to be influential in class, education and social behavior research as well. Some argue that the study of hip-hop and the classroom lacks inclusiveness. “More specifically, for those invested in urban education, the devaluation of women and girl engagement with hip-hop can contribute to the marginalization of girls in classrooms and community-based education initiatives and programs.” (Lindsey, 2014, p. 53)

Although these are significant studies and make a substantial contribution to the diaspora of knowledge in understanding Black youth and Black education, there are still areas in Black media not researched, that contribute to the socialization and education of Black youth in school settings. There are several shows with Black content that Black boys and girls may use to communicate with their classmates. Television shows such as *Empire*, *The Game*, and *The Boondocks* are a few favorite shows. For educators to understand their students, they should know that they use more than hip-hop music to interact with their peers. Black television whether on cable or streaming is a tool that Black youth use in their socialization.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of the study is to get a better understanding of how Black youth use Black television as a tool to communicate and how they use it to interact with their peers in school. Studying the Black youth’s media use will help scholars understand, Black students on a social

level. When educators understand the Black students, socialization it will serve them better in the classroom. This new knowledge can integrate into our classrooms and extra-curricular school organizations.

Research Question

1. In what ways do Black youth use Black television as a tool in school social settings?

Information gathered from previous studies, focus group participants, and Black television shows ranging from 1987 to the present answers this question. This research intends to show that Black youth do use Black content on television as a tool to shape how they communicate with each other while at school. The literature review will discuss the theoretical framework, cultivation theory. It will display critical components of past research that explores the Black student, Black youth, television, and Blackness defined on television. The methodology portion focuses on the methods of qualitative research. It shows how the researcher used focus groups to conduct the study. The findings section will highlight questions asked and student response to school, peer interactions, and the content that they view on television. Finally, the thesis discussion and conclusion will wrap up how Black youth use Black television as a tool in school social settings. And steps for further research in this area.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Framework- Cultivation Theory

George Gerbner developed cultivation theory in the mid-1960s. The focus of cultivation theory is television exposure. Cultivation theory states that audiences who consume large amounts of television are more likely to believe the messages portrayed are real. “Watching a great deal of television will be associated with a tendency to hold specific and distinct conceptions of reality, conceptions that are congruent with the most consistent and pervasive images and values of the medium.” (Shanahan & Morgan, 1999, p. 3) During Gerbner’s research, mass communication theories focused on the effect of media consumption. The media consumption was mainly focusing on violent messages. With cultivation theory, heavy viewers are exposed to more violence and therefore are affected by the “mean world” syndrome, the belief that the world is a far worse and dangerous place than it actually is.” (masscomtheory.com, 2017) Television makes it easier for our minds to use the examples that we see as a way to judge what and how we react to things. This stat is true for heavy television viewers but not light television viewers. “Therefore, if people judge the incidence of crime and violence by how easily examples come to mind, the enhanced accessibility of exemplars for individuals who view television relatively more frequently should lead them to more higher estimates, which is consistent with a cultivation effect.” (Shrum, Wyer, & Oguinn, 1998, P. 448) Gerbner believed that stories carried power and were messages that exposed the point of views and social relationships.

During the mid-1960s, there was a shift from publication to electronic media. The government saw television as a way to expose viewers to their agendas. It became the United States broadest form of cultural agency. (Shanahan & Morgan, 1999, P. 9-15) Advertisers and

companies alike used mass communication as a way to effect change. Political messages were often short-lived and individualized to serve purposes just for moments. The traditional form of communication study before cultivation theory viewed change as the grounds for effect. If there was no change, then there was no effect. Because government PSA's and commercial advertisements were quick messages and often did not repeat themselves, the idea of media influencing lives had minimal impact. However, Gerbner's theory challenged these ideas. It pushed past the traditional communication idea of "effect." He argued that cultivation is not just exchange, but it is also viewers engaging in the content they watch. "Cultivation is about the implications of stable, repetitive, persuasive and virtually inescapable patterns of images and ideologies that television (especially dramatic fictional entertainment) provides." (p. 5) In other words, with cultivation theory, television viewing is a relationship, not a one-night stand. Viewers are watching the same images repeatedly over an extended period. Gerbner is not expecting viewers to watch one episode of a show and associate it with reality.

Cultivation is broken down into two levels. The general belief is about the world and specific attitudes. "Cultivation of attributes is based on attitudes already present in our society and that the media take those attitudes which are already present and represent them bundled in different packaging to their audiences." (Masscommtheory.com, 2017) The differential of the cultivation is the difference between those who are light viewers and heavy viewers. The amount of television consumed by a viewer determines how exposure to television shapes attitudes of a particular topic. One of the foundations of cultivation theory is that television does not challenge the status quo. Instead, it fosters the growth of the status quo. "Many times, the viewer is unaware the extent to which they absorb media, many times viewing themselves as moderate viewers when, in fact, they are heavy viewers." (2017)

Cultivation Theory and Youth

Cultivation theory is involved in the research of youth and television consumption. As mentioned above, higher consumption of television by viewers causes them to interpret what they see on television as reality. In this particular study by Martins and Harrison, television exposure can also determine a student's self-esteem level. (Martins & Harrison, 2011, p.340-342) The research believes that exposure to television endorsed stereotypes and perceptions of racial minorities, as well as body image. It was determined that youth between the ages of 8 to 18 spend an average of seven hours a day focused on entertainment. (p. 344-346) People model what they see on TV in their real lives. "Cultivation theory is an explanation for how white-collar jobs, the thin ideal, power, and wealth may come to be perceived as commonplace and easily achievable." (p.340) The two hypotheses for this research focus on television influence and lower self-esteem. Their findings propose that cultivation shows that heavy viewers get the idea that boys are more prominent and powerful than girls because of the images and content that they view on television. They argue that because of heavy viewing, students do not take the time to develop a different worldview apart from what they see on television.

Cultivation theory and this study

This theory is analyzed by observing individuals, and media studies. Individuals are surveyed and asked questions that focus on social reality. Beliefs, opinions, attitudes, and behaviors are measured concerning the content that is viewed. It is analyzed through messages. "Thus, cultivation analysis should always begin by identifying the most recurrent and stable patterns in television content, emphasizing the consistent images, portrayals, and values, that cut across most program genres." (Shanahan & Morgan, 1999, P. 23) With this idea, priorities, values, and relationships help shape storytelling.

This research uses cultivation theory as the theoretical framework to determine if Black children are susceptible to media messages on Black television. Children, as well as adults, can use television as a tool to learn about the world based on cultivation theory. Throughout this research, the cultivation theory is the framework to determine the hypothesis.

Black Youth and Television

Television has dramatically influenced youth at an early age. For example, shows such as *Sesame Street* have an educational agenda to teach youth how to read and count. They do this through repetition and song. There are several studies on youth and television. Research studies have shown that Black youth tend to spend more hours during the week watching television compared to any other form of media. It also suggests that Black youth consume more television compared to their peers of other races. (Ward, Day & Thomas, 2010) Black youth-heavy television consumption is a result of them consuming both Black television content as well as mainstream content. (Ward, Day & Thomas, 2010) When it comes to youth and television, the research shows both active and adverse effects of consumption. The study focused on the social and anti-social impacts of television on children. It recognized that youth are selective in what they watch and socialized by the images that they see on TV. (Stroman, 1991)

Further study suggests that Black youth are conscious of the media that they consume and readily learn from television quicker than other peers learn. (Stroman,1991) They learn from television quicker because they are heavy viewers. Their reality is based on the content that they view. They learn about sex, culture, and other adult situations quicker. There are also strong adverse effects that can create violence and anti-social behaviors. (Stroman,1991) The lack of Black representation on mainstream media may hinder the Black child in recognizing his worth. (Stroman,1991)

Martins and Harrison (2012) hypothesis that television viewing significantly predicts low self-esteem in girls and high self-esteem in boys. The research asked if there is a difference in the relationship between self-esteem and television exposure with different races. They suggest that stereotypical images of Blacks on television contribute to the self-esteem of Black youth.

“Frequent exposure to stereotypical images that portray Blacks as unprofessional and criminal may lead viewers to believe that these are true characteristics of Blacks in the real world.”

(Martins & Harrison, 2012, p. 343) Although other viewers of the mainstream content view Blacks as unprofessional and criminal, their study suggests that Blacks have higher self-esteem from television consumption. That is because Black audiences view black television content as an accurate or positive representation of their communities. “Although African American youth watch more television, Black youth report higher self-esteem than non-Black youth. An explanation for this finding could be that African Americans do not turn to the larger White society, and mainstream media, as their reference points, but turn instead to the Black community as their source of support.”(p. 344) Black youth tend to look towards Black content to gauge their self-esteem.

Further research on Black youth and television propose that black youth are more observant of Black characteristics on television. (Ward, Day, & Thomas, 2010) “Research consistently showed that Black viewers exhibit a preference for Black-oriented media and for programming that features Black characters.” (Ward, Day, Thomas, 2010, p. 70) Their research also suggests that Black youth consumed an average of five hours of television per day. Because of this, they utilize television as a tool for learning. (Ward, Day, & Thomas, 2010) Compared to their White counterparts, Black youth are more likely to learn about problem solving, behaviors, and jobs from watching television. (Ward, Day, & Thomas, 2010)

In today's culture, media images are very adult oriented. Several of the Black shows on the air in 2017, target adult audiences. However, the youth still have access to these images. Data from a survey of 176 African-American adolescent girls at the age of 15 examined the correlation of Black media and African American girls and focused on appearance. (Gordon, 2008) "Results suggest that both exposure to and identification with portrayals of the Black woman as sex objects contribute to African American adolescent girls emphasizing the importance of appearance in their own lives and for girls in general." (Gordon, 2008, p. 244) They propose that African American girls are the highest consumers of content. However, little research was provided on how they are affected by images of Black women on television. They argue that girls focus in on specific characters of their favorite television shows. The study results showed that those Black youth surveyed recorded spending more than 67 hours per week consuming Black content. Black content included sit-coms, music videos, and music. The study also found that the adolescent girls identified with both the objectified characters and less objectifying Black women characters on television. "Girls who identified more strongly with their favorite television characters were more likely to attribute greater importance to being attractive in their self-worth judgments." (p. 253) The research conducted was with a sample of African American girls from the middle class. If the sample pulled girls from lower-class areas, there is a slight possibility that the results would be different.

Blackness Defined on Television

There are two different levels of Blackness defined on television. The first level is Blackness portrayed in mainstream television and the second level is Blackness depicted in Black television content. When it comes to previous research, the levels seem to be the divide. The ideas of Blackness in mainstream media are slightly different from Blackness displayed in Black content. The area of Blackness examined in mainstream media shows its strengths in

negative portrayals of Blacks. (Fujioka, 2005) Most of the research conducted in the form of survey and public opinion does not agree with most mainstream depictions of Blacks on scripted television. Fujioka states, “Mainstream media as well as Black-oriented (ethnic) media serve as one of the influential sources of information about in-group through which African American concepts and identity are developed and negotiated.” (Fujioka, 2005, p. 451)

Black-oriented media has more effect of socialization on Black audiences than mainstream media. For Black viewers, there appears to be an invisible line between Black content and mainstream media that is seldom crossed. (Williams, 2015) when it comes to current Black shows on cable networks such as FOX, Black audiences seem to develop love-hate relationships with their portrayal. (Williams, 2015)(Walton, 2013) Recent research on black portrayals has appeared to take a shift with new age shows such as *The Boondocks*. *The Boondocks* challenged the natural state of Blackness portrayed by incorporating various ideas of what a Black person represents. (T.T.Tucker, 2014). *The Boondocks* helped to create a variety of blackness shown on television thus challenging networks such as BET, which seem to depict one form of blackness. “The Boondocks” challenged race and political thought in the Black community. Its goal was to re-shape Black thought on Blackness. (Whaley, 2012)

It is interesting to see the lack of research on portrayals of Black females. One research study took a qualitative approach and had a group of Black women study, critique, and observe the Black content they watched on television. Most of the results showed negative depictions in the mainstream than in Black content. (Walton, 2013) Black material stemmed towards educating Black women on relevant topics such as mental and physical health. Shows such as *Living Single*, *A Different World*, *Girlfriends*, and *The Game* tackled these type of issues. In the

mainstream media, Black women saw themselves depicted as jezebels, angry, and overly sexualized.

Another researcher created a “Black media message questionnaire.” Young adult girls were used to conduct this research. Within the focus groups, they focused on identifying stereotypes of Blacks in mainstream media. In the study, they presented several Black stereotypes shown on television and asked the youth to identify stereotypes. (Adams-Bass, 2014) Knowing stereotypes helps further research in this area. Students have a conscious understanding of negative and positive stereotypes on television.

The Black community has been plagued with stereotypes in Black portrayals since the early 1900s. Before a Black actor even graced the screens, Blacks were depicted in stereotypical ways in the form of blackface. Blackface is when White actors painted their skin Black to pretend to be a Black person. Several famous minstrels formed and traveled around the United States depicting blackface. A popular act of blackface was a routine with Chick and Cotton Watts. They were a married couple who performed together. (Padgett n.d., 2017) One of the first television shows that cast a full Black cast was the “Amos ‘n’ Andy Show.” Before it became a popular television show, “Amos ‘n’ Andy” was a radio show created by Freeman Gosden and Charles Correl in 1926. (Sheff, 1983) They became very popular, taking their brand to NBC radio for five nights a week as well as being the face of several products from food, candy, and toys. They created their first motion picture called “Check and Double Check” where they are depicted as Amos and Andy in blackface. (1983) For the “Amos ‘n’ Andy” television show, the creators Correl and Gosden stepped aside as actors to create the first full cast Black program.

The NAACP called for a boycott of the show saying, “In its portrayal and perpetuation of negative Black stereotypes, the series had slandered an entire race.” (Scott, 2014, p. 744) Every

character was a stereotype. The NACCP petition failed because several of the fans of the show were African American. Many viewers were happy to see faces that looked like them on television. Shows like “Amos ‘n’ Andy” helped birth the Black sitcom. Perhaps the roots of blackface play a role in how stereotypes are portrayed on Black television today.

Stereotypes are still prevalent in Black television today. When it comes to reality television, Tia Tyree poses the research question on whether historical or new stereotypes are present in reality television programs (2011). She researched ten reality shows and their characters to see what stereotypes she could find. All ten shows included at least one participant of African descent. Her results found that over half of participants that were Black on the various reality shows she studied, displayed signs of stereotypical behaviors. Some stereotypes depicted were Uncle Tom, Sambo, Coon, angry Black woman, hoochie and chicken head. (Tyree, 2011) The stereotype of an angry Black woman was found most throughout the shows. One of the first full cast Black reality shows called “College Hill” aired on BET. It depicted Black college students living in the same house in the Virgin Islands. One character from the show named Alva “peaches” was labeled an Angry Black woman. She argued with the men on the show. One incident she stated, “I’m just not one of those girls, you not going to push over me. You not going to control me. I am grown.” She was pessimistic, argumentative, used head and neck movements during verbal confrontations and on at least two occasions, threatened to become violent.” (Tyree, 2011, p. 405) With reality television becoming the format of choice for many networks, it has begun to shape popular culture. Tyree concludes, “When African Americans are framed in stereotypical ways within reality television, those actions and behaviors can be translated as “real” elements of the programming by those who engage in the people- watching

process.” (Tyree, 2011, p. 406) She proves through her research that reality television further reinforces stereotypes of Black characters.

One show that took a different approach to Blackness compared to other favorite shows during its time was "The Cosby Show." "The Cosby Show" aired from 1984-1992. It gave a different perspective on the Black experience. A study done by Lauren R. Tucker evaluates the construction of blackness on "The Cosby Show."

Historically, television critics have debated the question of whether the Black American social and cultural experiences must be portrayed as identical to that of White middle-class Americans to avoid the stereotypes that have traditionally been encouraged by more diverse and at times less than complimentary images of Black American Life. (Tucker, 1997, p. 92)

"The Cosby Show" believed to have moved Black television and Black characters in the direction of racial equality and a colorblind society. It argued that "The Cosby Show" had great success because Black Americans controlled the images of Blackness depicted on the show. There was also criticism of "The Cosby Show" for not tackling Black issues and assimilating. "Cosby may have merely been reformist at best, or perhaps even retrograde, concerning the series influence on the public discourse on race." (Tucker, 1997, p. 92) Tucker introduces two ideas in her research. The assimilationist perspective and the pluralist perspective.

Assimilationist perspective argues that Black is only a racial identity, not a cultural identity.

Because Blacks live in the United States, they share the same cultural structures of White Americans. (Tucker, 1997) The idea is that if they can stop being deviant of White America, then they will be accepted by the cultural mainstream. "According to this view, racial inequality is a temporary social phenomenon in which cultural diversity, not racial is the major culprit."

(Tucker, 1997, p. 93) With this type of mindset, Blacks will give in to the color-blind marketplace. Racial diversity is accepted not cultural diversity. The challenge of the pluralist

perspective happens with assimilation. With this point of view, blackness is a part of cultural identity. There is a shared heritage and shared thoughts of social, political, and economic resistance to racism. (Tucker, 1997) Many thought "The Cosby Show" was under fire for assimilation because it failed to focus on social and political issues important to the Black community. "The Cosby Show" was escapism. It constructed Blackness as a regular part of U.S. society. Although there were disagreements on Bill Cosby's agenda with the series, It shows a different perspective of Blackness that other Black shows did not and do not have.

When it comes to Blackness on television, research shifted to the perceived realism of Black portrayals with a questionnaire response from 412 undergraduates. Narissa M. Punyanunt-Carter's research asked if what viewers are viewing on television shape their perceptions of African Americans. This was asked about low-achieving status, occupational roles, negative personality traits, and positive stereotypes. (Punyanunt-Carter, 2008) Her results revealed that viewers perceive the occupation and personality traits of Black characters on television to be true of African Americans in real life. "On the contrary, viewers do not perceive the low-achieving roles and positive stereotypes of African Americans on television as realistic or accurate" (Punyanunt-Carter, 2008, p. 241) Out of the students surveyed, however, 24 were of African descent. Blackness defined on television is diverse. The mainstream depiction differs a bit from the Black-oriented shows. However, Black youth view the roles of Blackness on television as close to reality. Concerning this research, it is very important that Blackness and representation of Blackness are understood to grasp what Black youth view as real.

The Black Student

There are many ways to study the Black student. This research project will focus on Black student social behaviors in educational settings. The following research highlights student socialization, behaviors in school, and use of Black television.

Research suggests that Black students feel devalued in educational settings. This idea stems from the racism and stereotypes that they have to endure on a daily basis from peers and faculty. (Hope, 2014) Students indicate perceived differences in reaction to the way they act in school compared to their White counterparts. (Hope, 2014) A vast amount of research on the Black student focuses on academic underachievement based on social and cultural issues. However, there is also research on the excelling Black girl. One researcher gives an account of her school experiences using the social camaraderie of a group of Black girls in school to push each other academically. She discusses their hate for academics and often discipline issues. Despite their need to find trouble, they excelled because they wanted to succeed. Also mentioned was the lack of rewards granted to Black girls for good behavior and academics in school. (Kynard, 2010) Most research has found racial perceptions and social behaviors closely related to Black student's media use. One study examines the cultural reinforcement of Black students to manage racial socialization. (Adams-Bass, Stevenson, and Kotzin, 2014) This portion of research is essential to determine factors in socialization and behaviors of Black students.

Further research of Black students discusses colorism and discrimination effects of colorism with African American and Latino/a students. Hunter's analysis argues that school discrimination studies have left out the issue of colorism in their discussions. The research focuses on how skin tone influences discrimination in school. (Hunter, 2016) Previous research on skin stratification shows that light skin students complete more schooling than their fellow darker-skinned peers. Colorism describes discrimination within racial groups. Typically, lighter

skinned individuals experience certain privileges. (Hunter, 2016) Colorism also causes inequalities among students. The research also found that there was a difference in discrimination in gender. "Dark skin girls are more likely to experience negative teasing and name calling than are boys." (Hunter, 2016, p. 55) Peer to peer interactions is also significant in-school experiences. The culture of colorism gives peers of lighter complexion an advantage with teachers and with peer activities and interactions. The research concludes that to combat colorism in schools there needs to be a structural change by school leaders. (Hunter, 2016) It also calls for the recruitment of more teachers of color.

It is important to note that colorism on television focuses a lot on the Black female. Typically, in a Black show, the lighter skin females have more traditional or Eurocentric names. Whereas, the dark skin women names are urban. For example, in the *Proud Family*, Penny is the name of the light-skinned character, and Dijonay (Dee-Jah-Nay) is the name of the dark-skinned character. The same goes for the show "Martin" where Gina is a light-skinned sophisticated woman, and Sheneneh is the dark-skinned ratchet next-door neighbor. Gina also has a best friend named Pam who is darker skinned, loud, and obnoxious. In the article, *Black men and the Stain of Colorism*, author Joshua Adams discusses how the show *Martin* changed his perspective on beauty when it came to Black women. "When the ceremonious back and forth between Pam and Martin ensued, I thought "Wow! It's crazy to think that this show actually had me thinking that a woman as beautiful as Tichina Arnold was ugly. I wondered if portrayals like that crept into my psyche, associating darker skinned girls with all the ugly bestial names Martin called her." (Adams, 2014, p. 7)

Another important aspect of peer interaction among Black youth is the use of the Black vernacular. A big portion of the social conversation is "playing the dozens." Playing the dozens

is a tradition passed down through social interactions among African Americans since slavery. “Some of the coping and survival techniques are defense mechanisms Blacks started developing during slavery days and have perfected in order to cope with overt and covert racism.” (Foster, 1990, p.188) During slavery, the dozens were played, but it was not for fun. It was a means to stay alive. They used it as a way to cope with what the slave masters would say to them. Parents taught their children, so they could handle being taunted rather than retaliate physically or verbally back to their owners. (Lewis, 1994) The dozens are played by verbal interaction. There are typically two parties involved in the verbal battle. The basis of playing the dozens is to insult each other. This is done by throwing out jokes back and forth. The object of the game is always to play cool. If you get upset, you lose the upper hand, and all the power goes to the other player. The dozens normally involve participants targeting each other or family members. (Lewis, 1994) Some researchers call this game street corner behavior. “On the street corner, verbal ability is rated as highly as is physical strength. Most often, when men gather, a boasting or teasing encounter takes place. Verbal contest participation is an important part of peer relationships. (Foster, 1990, p. 178)

Playing the dozens is called different names in newer generations depending on geographic location. Some common names are roasting, joaning, cracking, ribbin, and toastin. In the past, it was used mainly by men. However, in recent years, women have also joined in on the game. When it comes to the dozens and school, students can be seen and heard “joanin” each other in social areas such as the playground, and the cafeteria. Joanin or playing the dozens also takes place in the classroom. Because playing the dozens is a power game, some students tend to play it with their teachers without their teacher's knowledge. Clothing is also a major part of playing the dozens. Calling out clothing is huge in winning the dozens because of the high

consumerism within the Black community. Appearance is very important. (Forbes, 2013) “A female student may have a run in her stocking and will be ribbed about it. Or, someone may rib on another student's shoes for not having high platform soles and heels. Female students are often ribbed for supposedly wearing their brother's clothes” (Foster, 1990, p.183) Television has kept the tradition of playing the dozens alive. The Black sitcom incorporates playing the dozens into every episode. In *Living Single*, Maxine and Kyle always played the dozens. They would roast each other in random conversations:

(Kyle to Maxine)

“Maxine, I am trying to help a person. You remember people. They're the ones with the torches who chased you out of the castle.” (Imbd.com/Living Single)

The same for Pam and Martin in the popular sitcom *Martin*:

Martin: Pam, is that your breath smellin' like boiled bologna?

Pam: No, that's yo feet eatin' through those shoes again. (Imbd.com/Martin)

In the show *Empire*, Cookie Lyon would often play the dozens with unsuspected characters:

“Candace, please don't start it with your bougie, coupon-shopping ass.” (Chainani, 2017)

There was little information on the socialization experiences of Black youth and their interactions with television and peer-to-peer communications. This research project aims to discuss socialization and Black television with youth using qualitative research. The research hopes to understand certain social behaviors emulated by Black youth in schools. This study will address how students apply what they see on Black television as a form of communication with their peers in the social settings of school.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

Why qualitative research?

The methodology used for the research was the qualitative research method. Qualitative research is an excellent way to gather information on human subjects to understand their behaviors and identities. Qualitative research is the go-to - method when dealing with topics of sociology. Uwe Flick defines qualitative research as using “text as empirical material, starts from the notion of the social construction of relative understudy and is interested in the perspective of participants, in everyday practices and everyday knowledge referring to the issue under study.” (Flick, 2007, p. 2) This research uses the method of focus groups for qualitative research. Focus groups identify the norms of Black students and their culture. Focus groups give an extensive overview of opinions and answers to issues that are concerning to Black youth.

Participants

For this study, the researcher conducted four focus groups. The selection of participants used a purposive sampling approach. With this sampling, there were selection criteria for the participants. Participants had to be between the ages of 10 to 20 years old. Participants also had to be of African descent and label themselves as Black. The participants also had to have lived in an urban community. The sample also had to include a mixture of both male and female students. However, the combination did not have to be equal. These characteristics were essential to the study because the research only considered Black students who attended schools in urban areas.

The goal was to recruit between ten to twelve participants for each focus group. Overall, there were thirty-four participants in the research. There were twelve male students and twenty-two female students who participated. The median age of participants was 15. There were 23 minors, in the focus groups and 11 participants of age 18 to 20.

To provide confidentiality of all of the focus group participants, the researcher replaced names with numbers during the discussions. The first focus group was located at the University of Findlay. The diversity department along with their student organization the Black Student Union hosted the focus group. Participants that attended were between the ages of 17 and 20. There were four male students and six female students apart of this focus group. The second focus group had eight participants. Four of the participants were male students. Four of the participants were female students. This focus group was in Findlay, Ohio in the basement classroom of the Church of the Living God Ministries building. The participants were members of the community of Findlay, Ohio and surrounding areas. The third focus group consisted of two male students and four female students. This focus group was at the Decatur Public Library in Decatur, Illinois. Participants were patrons of the library. The fourth and final focus group happened in Danville, IL. There was a total of three male students and seven female student participants. This focus group was at New Jerusalem Outreach Ministries. Participants were members of the community youth group.

Sites and Recruitment

Participants were recruited by contacting community organizations with high populations of Black youth. The organizations were contacted by email. The email listed in detail the purpose of the research and need to host focus groups. The emails to each organization contained attachments to the discussion group guideline, consent forms, and a flyer to post throughout their facility.

The focus groups were in both Ohio and Illinois. These two states chosen were due to the familiarity of possible research sites. The focus groups lasted for forty to fifty minutes each and were in four different locations. The directors of the facilities also voluntarily promoted the research project to its patrons and members.

Data Collection

Focus groups were the method for data collection in this research study. Data was collected from the four focus groups, as well as data obtained from previous studies of Black media and Black youth. The questions for each discussion group relied on experiences, observations, and behavior. The questions focused on issues that matched the research objective and were in a natural and familiar language that the participants could understand. All of the questions were open-ended to ensure that the participants would give valuable in-depth answers. There were also opportunities in the focus groups for the researcher to develop questions based on the participant's responses. The following tools were used for data collection: Audio recording, note cards, field notes, and transcriptions. Each focus group was audio recorded and then later transcribed. Each participant had a note card to record thoughts they did not want to share aloud. The note taker took Field notes. All of these forms of data collection helped aid in the completion of this research paper.

Data Analysis and Interpretation

The analysis of data was done using memos, content analysis, and semiotic visual analysis. This study used this approach when researching various Black television shows. These methods of data analysis were used to take notes and interpret meanings from the visual content that was researched. The pragmatic content analysis was used to analyze the data from the focus groups. With this method, the focus stays on what was said and why it was stated. This form of

analysis helped interpret the beliefs of the students concerning Black television and how they use it to communicate.

Post Data Collection

Data was explicitly used to determine the answers to the research questions mentioned in the purpose of the study section above. To understand the data of the research; the researcher had to develop themes that were discussed overall. After the data was collected from each focus group, the researcher compared the information gathered from each focus group while taking notes during transcription. The researcher handwrote the transcriptions, so the researcher was able to go over every word spoken question by question in each group. After transcribing each focus group, the researcher reviewed notes that were taken during the transcription. The researcher documented every time the same words or expressions were mentioned in each group. The understanding of the participants determined themes. They developed their thoughts about a show and used keywords such as angry and fighting to help interpret how they saw the clips and how they translated it into their personal experiences. Participants discussed the clips they viewed by listing the physical and non-physical attributes of the characters and situations on the shows. During discussions, they decided through their responses whether they wanted to identify the characters and show situations with who they were. From these discussions, the researcher was able to gather common responses from participants and develop themes for research discussion. The themes developed were aggressiveness, appearance, and vernacular. The themes considered were consistent across all focus groups because participants in each focus group discussed all three.

Procedures and Materials

During each focus group, a laptop and monitor was used to present a PowerPoint presentation. The presentation contained detailed information regarding the rules, procedures,

research question, focus group study questions, video clips and photos from Black television shows. The questions asked during the focus group discussion were developed by considering the research question, literature review, and new ideas from the researcher. Television clips for the presentation were selected based on the show's popularity within the Black community. Familiarity determined show popularity as well as researching popularity list. The list displayed some of the top watched shows within the Black community. The list included syndicated shows as well as shows currently airing. There were 40 shows listed. Among them included: *Empire*, Flip Wilson, Family Matters, The Fresh Prince of Bel-Air and more. (Staff, 2016) Each clip came from a Black television show that contained three or more Black main characters and was produced by a person of African descent. Each clip played for the duration of thirty seconds to two minutes.

The guidelines were presented to each participant at the beginning of each focus group. They were informed of the purpose of the study, confidentiality rights, the audio recording, and a reminder that the research was voluntary. Before the focus group began, all focus group participants had to turn in their consent forms. Informed consent was gained by having participants sign consent forms. Those who were considered minors were given consent forms for their parents to sign. After the rules were discussed, the participants engaged in a group icebreaker. The most efficient icebreaker involved musical chairs. Each time the music stopped, the participant without a chair had to answer a question. The icebreakers successfully created an open environment for participants to speak freely to each other. Once the icebreaker finished, the focus group discussion began.

To start research, participants were asked to define what they thought was Black television. They were requested to identify stereotypes and characteristics. The participants gave

a list of examples of stereotypes and characteristics they might see on Black television. The focus group then transitioned into the first activity. For the first activity, participants were to view photos of television cast and openly say if they had watched both shows or just seen one of the television shows listed. Each slideshow displayed two shows. The slides depicted a mixture of Black television shows as well as mainstream shows.

The first slide showed a cast photo of *Being Mary Jane* and *Gossip Girl*. The remainder of the slides for the activity displayed the following: *The Boondocks* and *The Proud Family*; *Empire* and *Modern Family*; *Instant Mom* and *K.C. Undercover*; *Love and Hip-Hop* and *Pretty Little Liars*.

After the first activity, participants were asked to state television shows they loved to watch, whether mainstream or Black content. Then participants watched clips of various Black television shows. They were asked to view the clips and give their opinions on what they saw. Participants watched clips from the following shows: *Empire*, *Queen Sugar*, *Martin*, *K.C. Undercover*, *Love and Hip-Hop*, *Black-ish*, *Girlfriends*, *Lincoln Heights*, and *Everybody Hates Chris*. These shows were selected because of popularity. After the clips, participants were asked a series of questions related to Black television and their usage.

The next portion of the focus group, participants were asked to view photos of characters from different Black television shows and give their perspectives on what they saw. They were shown pictures of characters from *The Fresh Prince of Bel-Air*, *K.C. Undercover*, *Power*, *Empire*, and *Atlanta*. The participants then viewed clips of TV shows and discussed the characteristics of the characters and whether they also associate themselves or their classmates with the characters presented. Clips from the following shows were viewed: *The Fresh Prince of Bel-Air*, *Insecure*, *The Quad*, and *Sister, Sister*. After viewing the final clips, participants were

able to give their final feedback from the images. They were asked if they had any questions that were not addressed during the focus group. To conclude each focus group, the presentation was summarized, and the researcher thanked the participants for their time and contributions.

CHAPTER FOUR

FINDINGS

All four focus groups answered a series of questions regarding Black television content, peer to peer interactions, and how they view the content they consume. The research question used to help frame the focus group discussion was: In what ways do Black youth use Black television as a tool in school social settings? While analyzing the data, the researcher discovered that Black youth use Black television as a tool to communicate with each other. To answer the research question, participants developed three themes. Those three themes are aggressiveness, appearance, and vernacular. When discussing aggressiveness, participants focused on the characters from the shows and the characteristics. Participants focused on the similarities of appearance on television to their peers and how they relate to the content. Vernacular focused on the Black vernacular on television and how participants communicate with each other.

Aggressiveness

After reviewing all of the data for the research, it is clear that many of the study participants use the situations that they see on television as a handbook to handle personal conflict with their peers. They recognize that on Black television some situations are handled with aggressive behavior. Those situations on television typically look like confrontations from one character to the next while being in an intense atmosphere that one or more characters want to leave. So, some of the participants, use aggression as a way out of certain situation. Other students who did not admit to this, said they observed other students in school handling certain situations with aggression. Aggression is displayed by fights, throwing things, yelling, and even becoming close in body proximity to one another as a way to intimidate. Students start to believe that aggressiveness is the proper way to handle these types of confrontations after viewing these

occurrences on television. In the focus groups, participants explored stereotypes that they see on television. Participants were able to correlate what they see on television to everyday occurrences in their social interactions. Two aggressive stereotypes were discussed. "The Angry Black Woman" and "The Black Thug." One show that depicted both characters was *Empire*. In the clip from *Empire*, the Mother beats her son with the broom after her son called her a "bitch." After viewing this clip, several of the youth believed that the mother was considered an angry Black woman and the boy was exuding thug-like behavior. Similar clips viewed were from shows like *Black-ish*, and *Love and Hip-Hop*. In *Black-ish* the male lead of the show discussed with viewers that Black people don't need therapy. This rant was followed by a montage of clips where the character is seen solving all of his problems by arguing yelling or using physical abuse. In "Love and Hip-Hop" participants viewed how Black women on television handle conflict. After viewing all of these clips students responded by giving their perception. When asked if students act like the characters that they see on television many of the participants said they do. They believed that students in their schools as well as themselves, handle a confrontation with aggression the same way that it is handled on television. One student stated, "When someone is confronted about a situation, or like somebody is talking about them, they are always loud about it." (Focus Group #3) A student in focus group 3 said that students talk back to teachers. "They say things like, "I ain't do this," "Get out my face, you ain't my mama." When getting frustrated at school female participants said they normally talk fast, get loud, cry, and even fight. These actions are just how their favorite characters on television behave. One participant expressed how she used television as a tool by doing similar things that her favorite characters do on their shows. "I don't really have beef with people like that. I don't have beef, but when I had beef at the beginning of the school year, I had to fight this girl, she was tryin to

test me.” (Focus Group #4) Similar things are seen on shows like *Love and Hip Hop*. Female characters often provoke each other into arguments and even physical fights. They use both verbal and non-verbal communication in their confrontation. Several of the girls in the focus groups who believed that girls used *Love and Hip Hop* as a tool to develop social behaviors, also stated that they watched *Love and Hip Hop* with their families or with friends. Two of the female participants commented that they watch *Love and Hip Hop* weekly with their moms.

After viewing the clips, participants also discussed fighting as a way that they choose to handle some confrontations. Students believed that fighting was the standard way to handle intense conflict in their schools. After watching clips from *Love and Hip Hop*, *The Quad*, and *Queen Sugar* where confrontations were handled aggressively by arguments or physical fights, one participant said the following: “It’s either fight or be fought.” (Focus Group #3) Another participant said, “There are just situations where we have to be aggressive.” (Focus Group #1)

When looking at male characters who were stereotyped as the thug, many of the participants saw them as hustlers. When viewing a photo of Ghost from the show *Power* many participants said he looked like a businessman. When participants saw the photo of Cookie from *Empire*, they looked on with admiration. They didn't view her as her mainstream angry Black woman stereotype but as someone who they admired. Many called her "auntie" and wanted to "hang" with her. Even when watching the clip from *Empire*, when some male participants stated that she was "abusive," several of the girls in the focus group defended her saying that she deserved respect. "He disrespected her; I saw discipline." (Focus Group #4) Girls even discussed how they believed boys acted just like the son in *Empire*. "A boy will walk past me and make some little comment, or he will call me out of my name and say stuff disrespectful." (Focus Group #3)

The aggressive characters that the students observed from the Black content on television correlated with how they believed Black men and women handled emotions in reality.

Several of the girls in the focus groups believed that girls in their schools who start fights and are loud are just like the characters that they view in Black content. Most focus group participants said they usually see disagreements happen between girls. "You go to my school, boys will argue with girls. But girls be starting the arguments." (Focus Group #2) Another student stated, "Most of the girls I see arguing, they are addicted to *Love and Hip Hop*. (Focus Group#3) The same happened with Black male portrayals. Several students related to knowing someone or being mistreated by someone who had similar traits to the son in *Empire* while in school.

The aggressive behaviors of the characters on television did not seem to bother the participants. They viewed using aggression to handle situations like the characters that they watch on television do, as normal. There was no protesting of what the characters did. None of the participants labeled the characters from the clips as misbehaving. On the contrary, student participants either seemed content in the actions that the characters did or laughed at the situations.

Appearance and Vernacular

Appearance and vernacular were the two other themes discussed throughout the focus groups. Appearance and vernacular are grouped in the findings because they are closely related. Just like on television, the youth participants often interlace appearance and vernacular together in their discussion. For example, when discussing the way, they talk with each other, students used slang words and terms that closely described appearance. Some words used were "dusty," "swag," and "slay." Most of the conversations that involved playing the dozens also involved

appearance. Because of this, in this research, it would be difficult to discuss one without also addressing the other. These two themes are essential to the study. Participants used television as a tool to develop their social and behavioral image through appearance and conversational style.

Student participants take trends, of hair, fashion, verbal and non-verbal speech from television and use them as a tool to interact among their peers. They believe what they see on television to be the standard of what “cool” should be amongst their peers. In the discussion, students brought up skin color, speech, and playing the dozens. Students viewed clips from *Love and Hip Hop*, *Martin*, and other Black sitcoms. One of the first clips viewed was of *Love and Hip Hop*. In this clip, one of the characters Cardi B has a conversation about making friends and going to a party. She explained to her male friend, that if a girl has “beef” with her, she would have beef with her "foreva." When discussing the conversation that took place in the clip, participants said the characters were "ghetto." When asked if participants see peers at school talk and interact like Cardi B and other characters from *Love and Hip Hop*, the overall answer was yes. One focus group participant said that it was horrible at her school. “This girl, she talk too much and way too loud. She is so ghetto. Like, if one person look at her, she’ll go, “Girl what is you lookin at? (Focus Group #3) Another student said that Cardi B reminded her of every girl at her school. “That is literally like how almost every Black girl act. You could be right there in front of the principal, and they’ll cuss you up and down and not care.” (Focus Group #2) This example given by the participant is similar to situations on *Love and Hip Hop* and other shows. Usually, the discussion happens in public areas, where on-lookers are seen as furniture rather than people. The characters frequently express themselves without thought of who is around. They use non-verbal body communication as well as Black vernacular to communicate. This form of communication is also noticed on other television shows as well. Whether it is arguing,

having a loud conversation or laughing. The characters often seemed oblivious to the environments in which they are interacting. Girls seemed to use television as a tool to develop ways to handle situations with one another by perceiving what they watch on TV to be a good source for reacting to peer situations using emotion in verbal and non-verbal communication.

Similar conversations also happened after participants viewed the clip from the television show *Martin*. In this clip, Martins girlfriend Gina was confronted by his next-door neighbor Sheneneh. Sheneneh and Gina don't like each other and continuously get into disagreements. In this clip, Gina and her best friend Pam are moving things into Martins apartment. Sheneneh comes out of her apartment to confront them. This action leads to Pam and Sheneneh to almost fighting. After viewing this clip, participants were asked to discuss what they saw. Many noted the hand gestures that were made and the Ebonics or broken English that was used in the clip. When asked if they think that there are girls that act like Sheneneh in their schools, many of the participants said yes. Most said that the girls who act like Sheneneh are the girls who “start” and “pick” arguments and fights. When asked where this usually happens, one high school student said it normally happens in the cafeteria. “Like if you look at a person and you talking, they think ya’ll talking about them.” (Focus group #3) One student said that it happens everywhere in school, including outside of the school. The clip from “Martin” as well as *Insecure* brought up more of the discussion of playing the dozens. In the clip from *Insecure*, the lead actor went to a school to do a presentation for their organization. While in the classroom she was made fun by the students. This form of joking is called playing the dozens. In different areas, there are different names for the speech. Some students called it "joining," some called it “roasting," and some called it “baking." All students agreed that it happens a lot in their social interactions. One student said, “Sometimes it just be for fun. But it still hurts some people feelings.” (Focus group

#4) Another student in focus group four said, “Sometimes they may be talking about someone’s clothes.” While another student interjected and said, “sometimes its stuff that is true.” When asked where they get their material to “bake” someone, one student replied, “we get it from TV.” On the discussion of the *Insecure* clip, one participant admitted that she and her classmates act like the students on the show. “Like if there is a girl who is disrespectful I’ll be like, well you and that stale weave can go somewhere.” If you say something disrespectful about me then most of the time, I will react. (Focus group #3) All three clips from *Martin*, *Insecure*, and *Love and Hip-Hop*, dealt with appearance and playing the dozens. Most of the participants did not react to the behaviors or the situations in these clips negatively. After each of these clips, every focus group erupted in laughter. The participants were either quoting the clips as they were playing or laughing throughout the clip. Playing the dozens is featured in every Black sitcom. Even some dramas portray characters playing the dozens. Based on the student’s reactions to the clips and the discussion had, playing the dozens has a big role in their social interaction. Students even admitted that they use Black television as a source to play the dozens in school. They observe what they believe to be cool and interpret it into their peer interactions. Also, while discussing appearance, one participant stated that he designed his style based on the style of Will Smith from “The Fresh Prince of Bel Air.” Another female participant explained how she uses physical appearance to judge how she responds to conflict. She will look at another student’s appearance and judge them. Similar to the ladies on the show *Martin*, when she gave her example of “baking” another student about their hair. Appearance does not only involve the way students used television as a reference to style. They also discussed the issue of skin color.

Specific clips brought up the discussion of color in Black television. The study focused on how the Black culture views Whiteness on Black television. Subconscious colorism among

peers was also discussed. Most students did not realize that they were being prejudiced against skin color in their conversation. The way they addressed colorism among their peers seemed to be a very normal part of life. In a clip from *The Fresh Prince of Bel-Air*, Carlton and Will were both pledging for a Black fraternity. Carlton was called out for “acting White.” After viewing the clip, some participants expressed that they had been called out in school by peers for “acting White.” “People call me little White girl.” (Focus group #3) Another stated, “Just because I dress like this does not mean that I am not Black.” (Focus Group #2) Another student admitted to calling other students in school White. “Like if they sound White to me, I’ll tell them.” (Focus Group #4) Other discussions of colorism centered on skin tone in Black content. These discussions happened after viewing the previously discussed clip from *Martin* and another show *Girlfriends*. In the episode of *Girlfriends*, Toni went on a blind date with a wealthy guy. When discussing the date with her friends, Toni exclaimed that her blind date was too “Black” (referring to his skin tone). When asked if color was an issue at school, all students in focus groups one, three, and four answered yes. Participants admitted to seeing the characters and shows handle color on television as a way that they informed their realities to handle color. “I’ve had a friend tell me he will go to talk to a girl and they act skittish around him because he is darker, and his lighter skinned friends will have better game.” (Focus group #1) One student expressed that Black television brings the issue of people thinking light skin is better than dark skin. “My sister, well obviously, I am lighter, and she is not. So, she will say a lot of times things about her skin color. Saying she wish she was lighter because people will pick on her about skin color saying the dark skin kids are burnt.” (Focus group #1) Other participants expressed the ways students use color in conversation. “I have a dark skin friend and she be like dark skin is the best skin.” (Focus group #3) Another student added, “If you Black, they’ll call you a burnt

cookie at school.” (Focus group #3) Light skin students were also targeted in the conversations. “At my school, light skins are blamed for everything. So if something falls in the lunch room, “that’s that light skin.” (Focus group #3) Another student added, “that’s that light skin stuff, everybody say that.” (Focus group #3) Focus group 2 did not discuss skin tone. However, when viewing a clip from *K.C. Undercover*, K.C. who is a teenage spy (also lighter skinned) confronted other spies (who were darker complexion than K.C.) about stealing money. After viewing the clip, one of the participants stated, “That light skin girl is childish.”

After having this discussion and viewing this clip, it is clear that colorism on television plays a role in the socialization of the student participants. Many ideas of colorism within the Black community are reinforced on Black television. As referred to in the literature review, darker skin women in Black television tend to have a complex flaw in their personality compared to their light skin counterparts that share the screen. This complex flaw is viewed and believed by students in their social settings. As mentioned above, youth have subconsciously and blatantly used the way colorism is depicted on television as a tool to establish their value of color in their social situations.

Another issue with color is the way the students discuss Whiteness. In their social settings, it is uncool to have associations to Eurocentric vernacular. After viewing the clip from *The Fresh Prince of Bel Air*, students seemed to associate “acting White” as being “lame.” In urban schools, the idea is to appear more Afro-centric in speech and appearance. Besides “talking White,” students discussed vernacular in the form of playing the dozens. They also discussed the kind of conversations that they have with their peers. Some students did say that they talk about what they see on TV. “We talk about like the newest shoes, what’s trending, we talk about what we see on TV.” (Focus group #2) Relationships were also a large part of the

discussion as well as just talking about each other. “We compare people to other people.”

Another student stated. “Yeah I talk about people, we’ll be like “hey that’s you.” Or if we are watching a movie and an animal pops up, we’ll point it out and be like “hey that’s somebody.”

(Focus group #3) One male student in focus group one stated, “me and my friends talk about girls and how crazy they are. That’s on TV too.”

Towards the end of each discussion group, participants answered three questions. These three questions were asked to get clear answers from the focus group participants regarding the thesis questions. Each question was worded similarly to the research question for this thesis. The first question: Does the content on TV influence your interactions with your peers? Most students said yes to this question. They believed that what they see is what they say. Meaning they are not just watching Black content for entertainment. They are studying the images that they see on television and using it as a way to react to things in their reality. “Because most words people say on TV they will come out and say it in real life. (Focus group #4) Some students stated that they got in trouble by parents for repeating words they heard while watching television. Others admitted to using what they see in Black content in their social interactions. “Yeah cause like I don’t remember the show or whatever, but I remember like they said a word and I just started saying that word. And then I see somebody do a hand signal, and I just start moving my hands like this and I talk like it. I’m just used to it now.” (Focus group #4) Another student in the same focus group added, “Umm I watch a lot of YouTube videos, and I pick up what they say, and I say a lot of words they use. Like do you know (inaudible YouTube channel comedian) well I say a lot of stuff that person say.” (Focus Group #4) A student from focus group one said, “I know like when I was in middle school, and The Boondocks was really popular, we’d walk around quoting that. Saying super inappropriate stuff to each other. And just like different TV shows.

Like we would reenact something that happened on a show.” Students are using Black content to entertain one another, handle conflict with one another and set a standard for what is deemed cool for Black youth.

There were a few students who felt differently. One student viewed television as just entertainment. “It is weird for me because if I see something like that on TV, it’s like entertainment for me, but if I see something like that in person, it’s just a little different. I don’t like that for real.” (Focus group #1) Another student stated that they don’t use Black content on TV to communicate at school, but other people think so. “People at school expect me to act that way since they seen it on TV. (Focus group #2)

The second question asked, “Do you that think the things you watch on TV shape how you interface with your peers? Most of the students agreed with each other and said yes. However, most also agreed that girls use television as a tool of communication with their peers more than boys. One student stated, “Girls are more influenced, girls because girls will stay inside and watch TV all day. Unlike boys, they go outside and play basketball, play football.” (Focus Group #3) This idea of girls using television as a tool to interact with their peers is deeply rooted in the cultural norm of parents keeping girls close to home. It is believed a safety concern for parents to let their daughters play outside. In tradition, girls have been commanded by parents and elders to stay close to home. Boys have been allowed to play in the neighborhoods and leave the house to explore. Another student said that a certain character on television helped shape how he communicates. “I feel like the way Fresh Prince-like acts and like carries himself, looks. This was one of my favorite shows growing up. So, when I was growing up my style and stuff came from him.” (Focus Group #2) The third question asked; "What we see on Black television, is it a reality for Black Americans or are the portrayals, False?" Many participants

said that what they see on television is the reality. One student said, “Some of em is overdramatic, and some of them really show stuff that happens.” (Focus Group#3) Others agreed that it all is familiar. One student stated, “It just continues a cycle.” (Focus Group #1) Another student from a different focus group said similar things. “I feel like it was adopted from reality to television.” (Focus group #3) A participant in focus group two answered by saying, “I think a lot of shows may have a little truth, reality. But a lot of it is exaggerated. Another student agreed by saying yes. Even with the agreement of other students, they still had concerns about the way television is interpreted. “I say yes, I think that TV makes it worse because we watch it and we think of how that’s funny or cute, and we then do it too.” (Focus group #1)

Several of the students agreed with each other in answering the three questions. These answers help the research, by giving us a better understanding of how Black youth are interpreting the use of Black television as a tool. The answers to the three questions also give us a better understanding of the theoretical framework. Just as cultivation theory suggests, participants have believed that what they see on television as being a part of their reality. Although it is not causal that television is influential in social interactions of youth, these findings could argue that students believe the way that they use Black television as a tool to communicate with their peers.

Summary of findings

These findings all help answer the research question. With the three questions presented to the four focus groups, the majority of the students answered the questions similarly. A majority of the students believe that they use what they see on television to interact with their peers. The way that they do this is by mirroring verbal and non-verbal speech and characteristics of the character they watch on Black content. They believed, The way that they dress and talk to

each other in social settings at school is a direct result of how they use the tool of television and other means outside of media to communicate. Some participants, however, argued that girls use Black content on television to communicate more than boys. Students also believed that the content they viewed on television mirrored their real life

CHAPTER FIVE

IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSION

The purpose of this study was to get a better understanding of how Black youth use Black television as a tool to communicate and how they use it to interact with their peers in school. The research asked: In what ways do Black youth use Black television as a tool to communicate in school social settings?

After completing the focus groups and analyzing the data, the results provide valuable insights into student social interactions. The research helps answer the research question. Based on responses from participants in the focus groups, television is used as a tool in social interactions among Black youth. Black youth see the portrayals of Black characters on TV as a way to communicate. The way a character handles a situation, how they dress and how they speak all aid in the way Black youth interact with each other. They communicate by dressing similar to characters that they see on television. They also communicate by mimicking hand gestures and forms of speech on television. Black students also use Black television content as a way to interpret and address interpersonal conflicts in social settings. Seeing a character handle confrontation by fights, or by laughter gives students a handbook on how to handle their confrontations. This especially rings true to cultivation theory if the students are heavy viewers of the Black shows, they are learning from the characters. They watch and are carrying those ideas into their real-life situations.

Researchers thoughts

Show a people as one thing, as only one thing over and over again, and that is what they become.” – Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie

As a Black American, growing up and watching Black television in the 1990s and 2000s I had pride. There was a diverse representation of who I could be. Much like the students in the focus groups from this research, I loved laughing at the sitcoms and talking with my friends about the shows that I watched. I even emulated my favorite characters in my social interactions with my peers and in the classroom. During that time Black television played a positive role in my life and the lives of my friends. I used television as a tool to succeed. I gathered from the shows that I watched the importance of education and being an educated woman. How my favorite characters handled conflict in school was how I learned to manage conflict as well. I modeled the way they spoke to their peers and their teachers. Today, Black media having such an impact on student social interactions and communication is both positive and negative.

The positives of Black youth seeing characters of African descent is that it lets them see people who look like them on television and it gives them a feeling of existence. They are taking that confidence that they see from the characters they watch into their social settings. This is important for Black students. They are a group of students that often feel like they don't fit in their schools and don't receive as much praise and recognition compared to their peers. Having confidence is important. The characteristics of Black characters that the student's copy give them the confidence to respond to interpersonal conflicts and social interactions.

The negative of Black students using television as a tool of communication is the role of the characters. The narrative of most of the characters that give them confidence often has stereotypical lifestyles. There is a danger in telling a single story and showing a single picture

that represents the Black community on television. Representation does matter. When students are only watching Black characters on television handling conflict with arguments and fighting, they might choose to do the same thing at school when confronting peers. When beauty is only represented as lighter complexion, students learn to praise one skin tone over another. Black stories and characters today are very similar. Right now, students have one or two choices in representation.

The results of this study have implications for potential change in the levels of education, individuals, and visual content.

Education

At the educational level, the results of this study may inform teachers and administrators how and why Black students react the way they do in conversations in school. If teachers watched some of the content or were aware of the content their students watch, it is likely that they will be able to relate to their students and even adjust the way that they react to student behaviors. Having this new knowledge could potentially lower teacher and student tensions. If teachers and administrators understand the Black culture, they will have better insight on the students that they are teaching.

Individual

At the individual level participants can evaluate their television consumption. Knowing this research, participants and other Black youth can govern themselves accordingly. Knowing that television is used as a tool to communicate, individuals now have the choice to choose wisely. Individuals may decide to view content and consume content based on the way that they want to express themselves in communication.

Visual Content

This new knowledge may help producers and writers when creating new visual content for television and film. Representation does matter. Knowing the impact on youth, creators can focus on making more youth positive images that will allow youth to have several perspectives on engaging socially. This will be beneficial and help prevent peer-to-peer social conversations where students make fun of each other for “acting white.” Producers can potentially use media to control how youth look at conflict. It can give them different ways to resolve conflict than what they are using.

Cultivation Theory

Additional implications relate to the theoretical framework chosen for this study. Cultivation theory suggested that youth who consume large amounts of television begin to see what they view on television as reality. Heavy consumption is the basis of the cultivation theory argument. Majority of students admitted to watching three or more hours of TV per day. Because of this, several agreed that they believe what they see on tv to be accurate to their realities. This research helps in the continuing knowledge of research cultivation theory. Researchers of cultivation theory can use this research to back other arguments about heavy television consumption.

Further Research

Possible areas for new research should include an in-depth look at media advertisement and how it is interpreted among Black youth. Within this research, several of the students mentioned how they look or how their peers look when discussing peer-to-peer interaction. Research on the effects of advertisement and consumerism could add to research on student socialization. Another approach to further study is to focus on the relationship between adult and adolescent Black females and their relationship with television. The previous research on Black women

giving surveys of the content that they watch and new developments in this research of girls watching television more than boys brings to the forefront consumption of television among this specific gender. Understanding the relationship of mother and daughter and how they use television to interact with each other and what they teach each other from these interactions would help further the research of how Black girls interact with their peers in school. Another advancement in this research is to test the theoretical framework in new cultures, locations, and context. Instead of focusing on Black youth, research could be focused on Latino youth in similar neighborhoods to see how the results measure up with Black youth.

Limitations

There are limitations to the research. This research only focuses on a specific demographic within the African diaspora. The findings only represent the Black youth population in the United States. Another limitation is the ratio of females to males in each focus group. Overall, there were more female participants than males. Because of this, the results may lack in the perspective of the Black male students.

Conclusion

Educators should find the results of this research insightful when developing further research. They should be able to approach thought on Black youth and socialization from a different avenue other than hip-hop. This research should help educators understand how their students are being socialized. They should be able to construct new approaches to talking with their students and analyzing behaviors because they have a better perspective on who they are teaching. This research is not the end of a subject area, but just the beginning. Schools and educators are encouraged to do further research in this area. The value of this research is that it further supports the idea of cultivation theory and all other studies before it that discuss Black

youth and television viewing. However, it helps us understand how they use what they see as a tool to communicate in their peer-to-peer interactions while at school.

APPENDIX A
FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS

1. What do you think black television is? What is your definition of black television?
2. Not necessarily a network but what do you think a black television show is?
3. Does anyone want to add anything else?
4. Before we get started, how often do you watch TV?
5. Who can give me their own definition of what stereotype is?
6. Anybody else have any other definition of what stereotypes maybe?
7. What do you think is the definition of characteristics?
8. So, what are some of your favorite TV shows?
9. Okay. So, why do we watch some of our favorite shows?
10. Alright. So, what are some things that we noticed?
11. So, it was just because he disrespected her?
12. Do we see students at school or in our family act like this? Have we seen this happen?
13. Can you give me some examples?
14. Okay. What about the boy acting disrespectful, do we see that at school?
15. What about at school? What do we see at school?
16. So what are some things we noticed in this clip?
17. Do we think that when girls are talking with their friends at school, some of these things happen?
18. What about the difference between the characters? What was Sheneneh wearing versus what the light skin character wore?
19. Okay. So, what are some things that we noticed from the clip?
20. I did not even get to ask the question yet! So, what are some things that we noticed in this clip?

21. So, do we see any of these, the way she was acting in real life? Do we see girls talking like that at school, interacting with boys?
22. In class or out of class?
23. What about the interaction between the girl and the guy? How do you all see interactions between girls and boys at your school? Are they similar?
24. Boys argue with boys?
25. So you said girls start fights with boys. Do you think they might be acting like some of the girls in the reality shows?
26. Do you guys know who Tamar Braxton is? When she first started with their reality show, a lot of the stuff she would say would be like “dot.com” stuffs like that. Did you all hear that at school? In your interactions?
27. Okay. So what are some things we noticed from this clip?
28. So, do we see this in real life?
29. What about outside of the house?
30. So, what are some things that we noticed about this clip? Is this real life or just TV?
31. So what are some things we noticed in this clips?
32. Does this happen in real life?
33. Based off some of the clips that we have seen, do you think the content on TV influences the way we interact with people and with our friends at school?
34. Do we think that black people on TV are portraying real-life situations in the black community or do we think that it is over dramatic? Not real?
35. Do you think that the way we act in school and the way we act with our friends is based on what we watch on TV? Or do you think that what we do in real life is used as materials for scripts?
36. What topics do you discuss in school with your peers?
37. So, what do you think that stems from?

38. What about school?
39. So, it is like a survival thing? You have to do it to survive?
40. So, do you all talk about clothes at all?
41. So, what about light skin/dark skin? Does that happen at all in school?
42. So, do we see that on television?
43. How do you think their personality would be? (Photos of characters).
44. So, do we see any stereotype that happens in real life in the black community?
45. Has this ever happened at school where someone made you feel like you were not black enough?
46. What about something the kids were saying in the video?
47. When she was talking about hair, do you all have issues with conversations like that in school?
48. Do we think this is reality or do we believe the clips are not real?
49. Do you think there are many black television shows on now, like this one?
50. Would you rather see more shows like this today versus the shows that we have seen already?
51. Looking at some of the black TV shows that we have seen, do we think that the images that we see on television are positive or negative? Both?

APPENDIX B
TELEVISION SHOWS

Empire

In this scene, Cookie confronts Hakeem about why he never wrote her back when she was in prison. He was angry with her and called a bitch. Upset, Cookie grabbed a broom and started to hit Hakeem with the broom.

The Fresh Prince of Bel-Air

Carlton and Will are both pledging to be a part of a fraternity. The dean of the fraternity tells Carlton that he cannot join because he is not Black enough.

Insecure

In this scene, Issa goes to a public school to promote her non-profit organization “We Got Yall” As she is explaining the organization, several students start to ask her questions and then make fun of her.

Everybody Hates Chris

In this scene, Tonya is forced by her mother to eat sausage at dinner that she does not like.

Love and Hip Hop

In this scene, Cardi B and her producer discuss her music and her friendships.

Sister Sister

In this scene, Tia and Tamera recruit a ten-year-old genius to help them study for their SAT test.

The Quad

In this scene, Band members and football players fight at a charity dinner for the University.

Black-ish

In this scene, Dre discusses therapy and the reason why he does not need to go to therapy.

Girlfriends

Toni describes her blind date experience with her friends. Exclaiming that the blind date was too Black in skin tone.

Queen Sugar

In this scene, Ralph Angel is holding a gun on the men who have come to repossess his family tractor. His son runs out to stop him.

K.C. Undercover

In this scene, K.C. confronts two other agents for laundering money.

Martin

In this scene, Gina is moving into Martins apartment. Pam is helping her when Sheneneh steps out of her apartment to confront them and discuss the rules of the building.

Lincoln Heights

In this scene, Tay goes to school and apologizes to his bully for punching him. When he apologizes, the bully threatens to sue his family.

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