UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA

Los Angeles

The Other Curriculum:
Media Representations and College Going Perceptions of African-American Males

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Education

by

Kenneth Robert Roth

2015

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

The Other Curriculum:

Media Representations and College Going

Perceptions of African-American Males

by

Kenneth Robert Roth

Doctor of Philosophy in Education

University of California, Los Angeles, 2015

Professor Walter Allen, Chair

African-American males are conspicuously underrepresented on the nation's college and university campuses, and in many highly paid and socially important professions. Prior research into this phenomenon has focused on individual- and environmental- level deficits related to college preparation, offered few interventions to increase black male success, and typically represents black males as a monolithic group whose underrepresentation is a result of its own particular characteristics. Few researchers have interrogated the cultural triumvirate of media, education, and law enforcement and the seamless way in which these domains scaffold representations of black males as second-class citizens, who are inauspicious academically, and ultimately represent social threat. To explore the implications of these cultural representations and processes on individual's college going aspirations and trajectories, this phenomenological qualitative study examined the meaning making of 20 college going African-American males to

examine how they perceive media representations of blackness and college going. We ask whether these portrayals promote, discourage or are silent about the unique gauntlet black males must negotiate to and through college. While the lack of preparation and the financial ways and means of college are concerns for all students, black males must additionally negotiate structured racism, in the form of deficit perceptions, infrequent recommendation for advanced placement, and differential experiences with school discipline and law enforcement. The study uses an ecological framework, in which the totality of student experiences is explored in the environments where they are encountered. The focus is on what strategies have worked rather than adding to the already-significant body of deficit literature. The study probed black male college going decisions and how those decisions were shaped, altered, or supported by perceptions students may have developed from mass media representations. Media act as a kind of surrogate for personal contact, which individuals use to assess and judge their social worlds. This powerful and ubiquitous curriculum, although informal, has implications for how others view black males, as well as how they may view themselves and their opportunities.

The dissertation of Kenneth Robert Roth is approved.

Tyrone C. Howard

Darnell M. Hunt

Walter R. Allen, Chair

University of California, Los Angeles

2015

DEDICATION

For the true believers:
Those who believe in and seek justice for all
While pursuing their own dreams.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

To say this has been a long and winding road to completion would be an understatement. It also wouldn't take into account the many tangents and teachers and technicalities that equipped me along the way to eventually arrive here. With that said, I start by thanking Ms. Jan Watt, my high school Journalism teacher, who in her no nonsense way prepared me for my first career as a print journalist, which has been a linchpin to this and all of my previous successes. Her Introduction to Journalism remains the only formal training I've received in writing for publication, and it was sufficient to land me my first reporting job for a metropolitan daily newspaper at the age of 20, interrupting my undergraduate degree to write for newspapers in five Western states.

During that time, I met Harold Berliner, a four-time California District Attorney, type founder, and co-author of the Miranda Warning police administer to those under arrest. Harold taught me not to wear my convictions on my sleeve, to infiltrate rather than to confront, and to tell gatekeepers exactly what they needed to hear. He also connected me to power in informal ways, with tips on court cases, and access to politicians, appellate judges and poet laureates. He provided me a behind the scenes view of judicial machinations, piquing my awareness things are not always what they seem.

When I returned to academe, there was Janet Bennett and Chuck Wilder. Janet was my academic advisor at Marylhurst College and has supported me since, while being a presence, persona and personality to admire. Chuck was my supervisor while a VISTA Volunteer working as a community organizer. His sense of justice and integrity are a marvel. Social change was always on his mind, even in his humor, and he showed me how it was done peacefully, with dignity, and with results.

Jumping forward, I thank Mark Waldrep for recommending me as his sabbatical replacement in the digital media arts department at California State University, Dominguez Hills. That temporary appointment began a domino effect that delivered me to UCLA. I received support for doctoral study through the CSU Chancellor's Doctoral Incentive Program, and after a bit of scrabble landed at GSE&IS, where I had the good fortune and now the great pleasure to have had Walter Allen as my advisor. As an older student, I needed to learn a few things on my own and Walter let me do that. He also appeared at the right time with the right words or the right type of facilitation at precisely the right moment to keep me moving forward. Some day, I hope to be remembered in the way and for the reasons I will remember him. Likewise, a sincere and humble thank you to my dissertation committee. While we didn't spend a great deal of time together, this project gained flight from the insight, experience, support and critique of Mitch Chang, Darnell Hunt, and Tyrone Howard.

Those listed here have been the brightest *luminaria* along my path; but there are many at UCLA and elsewhere that enabled and validated my work. Greg Tanaka and Fred Erickson inspired an interest in qualitative and ethnographic research. Peter McLaren plugged me into critical race theory, and Linda Sax patiently pulled me through statistics after more than a couple of decades away from math. Many thanks also to Pat McDonough, who was my first contact with HEOC and who facilitated my meeting Mitch, leading to my admission to the program. Finally, a very special thanks to Amy Gershon who indefatigably assisted and supported me in myriad ways in navigating HEOC and UCLA as a commuter student juggling a half- to full- time teaching load at another college throughout the whole of my UCLA experience.

It is with pleasure and some degree of relief I arrive here, to once again realize I have miles to go before I sleep.

VITA

1978 – 2007	Journalist: The Oregonian, Ketchikan Daily News, Oregon Journal, The (Grass Valley) Union, The Sacramento Bee, San Francisco Chronicle, Jewish Bulletin of Northern California, Tucson Weekly, RealTalkLA
1987	Bachelor of Arts degree, Communication Marylhurst College Marylhurst, Oregon
1987 – 1995	Media Producer, Spot 52 Productions, San Francisco, California
1995 – 1999	Director, Media Lab, Oregon Advanced Technology Center/Clackamas Community College, Wilsonville, Oregon
1999 – 2000	Editor/Content Developer, mucho.com, Lafayette, California
2000 – 2004	Freelance Media Producer (Spot 52 Productions, San Francisco; AIX Media Group, Los Angeles)
2005 – Current	Adjunct Instructor, Digital Media Arts, California State University, Dominguez Hills, Carson, California
2006 – 2009	Ken Roth & Associates, media consultants, Los Angeles, California
2010	Master of Arts degree: Higher Education & Organizational Change, UCLA Los Angeles, California
2011 – Current	Board Member, Long Beach Television & Media Corporation Long Beach, California
2012 – 2014	Chair, Personnel Committee, Arts Council for Long Beach, California Long Beach, California

PUBLICATIONS AND PRESENTATIONS

Roth, K., & Ritter, Z. (2015), Diversity and the Need for Cross-Cultural Leadership and Collaboration, in *Cross-Cultural Collaboration and Leadership in Modern Organizations*, edited by Nancy D. Erbe, & Anthony H. Normore.

Roth, K. (June, 2015). *The Other Curriculum: Media Representations and the College Going Perceptions of African American Males*. Paper presented at The University of West Indies Schools of Education Biennial Conference, Bridgetown, Barbados.

Roth, K., & Ritter, Z. (June, 2015). *Racial Spectacle and Campus Climate: The Intersection of U.S. Media Representations, Racial Stereotype Formation Among Asian International Students, and Cross-Racial Interaction on College Campuses*. Paper presented at The University of West Indies Schools of Education Biennial Conference, Bridgetown, Barbados.

Ritter, Z., & Roth, K. (March, 2015). *Racial Spectacle and Campus Climate: The Intersection of U.S. Media Representations and Racial Stereotype Formation Among Asian International students*. Paper presented at American College Personnel Association Conference, Tampa, FL.

Ritter, Z., & Roth, K., (2014), Realizing Race: Media Representations and the Uneasy Adjustment of International Students and African American Males on U.S. College Campuses, in *Approaches to Managing Organizational Diversity and Innovation,* edited by Nancy D. Erbe.

Roth, K. (2011). *The Other Curriculum: How Mass Media Can Shape Perceptions of College Going for African American Males*. Paper presented at the Association for the Study of Higher Education (ASHE). Charlotte, NC.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Pick up any recent recruitment brochure for college or course catalog and in vibrant four color splendor you likely encounter a Rockwellian portrait of the racial diversity of U.S. college campuses: smiling, friendly faces of nearly every color, with the college brand emblazoned on notebooks, sweatshirts, caps, coats and floating majestically above a divinely defocused background that keeps the eye trained on the diversity of individuals in the frame. This overt portrayal of diversity exists because higher education is under constant pressure to adopt practices to make it appear more effective, modern, inclusive, and desirable to attend (Birnbaum, 2000). These practices are market-driven metrics derived from the commoditization and globalization of higher education (Giroux, 2002; Van Heertum, 2009). But is this an accurate picture? These images would be politically remiss if they didn't represent African-American students, yet African-Americans males remain absent in representative numbers on U.S. college campuses (Harper, 2009; Harris, 2003). In fact, the percentage of black males on U.S. college campuses as a percentage of the nation's student body *hasn't changed* since 1976 (Harper, 2008). For educators, politicians, researchers and democratic others, this seemingly inexplicable constant should be a call to action: to ascertain how against the backdrop of an expanding population and growing economy for more than 40 years black males remain underrepresented among all racial groups on college campuses, and their time to degree, should they complete one, the longest (Harper, 2010).

At the same time, news and other media representations conjure for audiences images of how dangerous black men are: imperiling our collective safety – wearing hoodies and cruising communities –, disproportionately representing prison populations due to *just* convictions, which

is a significant driver in the breakdown of the black family (Western, 2009). Of course, there also are positive images of black men in mass media, such as a twice-elected U.S. President; great athletes and great musicians; publishers, producers, directors and film stars; but these are often represented, albeit in subtle and not so subtle ways, as exceptionalism (Sears, Fu, Henry, & Bui, 2003). Black males, as a group, encounter a level of generalizing by others unlike any other group and those generalizations often focus on the least positive of the field, misrepresenting the group as a whole, and allowing little or no account for individuality, unique experience, or character (Harper, 2008). These generalizations can influence others without direct contact or experience with black males and foster negative perceptions and portrayals of the group as a whole.

For these reasons, this qualitative study sought to examine the underrepresentation of African-American males on U.S. college campuses. The purpose of this study was to explore with 20 college-going African-American males their meaning making of media representations of blackness, particularly around representations of black men, and whether these representations promote, discourage, or are silent regarding college going. It is anticipated the knowledge developed from this inquiry may present fresh understanding as to why black men are conspicuously absent in representative numbers from the nation's college and university campuses, and so inform higher education practice. This research employed a phenomenological methodology to address the meaning making of participants around media representations and college going, as well as the way they believe others generally perceive black men, potentially due in part to their representation in mass media. This chapter begins with an overview of the background and context that frames the study, and is followed by the problem statement, the statement of purpose and accompanying research questions. The chapter concludes with a

discussion of the rationale and significance of the study.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

The underrepresentation of males in higher education has drawn inquiry since the late 1970s when traditionally male-dominated colleges and universities experienced a population shift to a female majority (Buchmann & DiPrete, 2006). This trend has persisted in higher education and has now trickled down to the high school level nationwide.

In addition, Swanson (2004) found considerable disparity across race. Students from historically disadvantaged minority groups (i.e., Native Americans, Latinos/as and African Americans) have little more than a 50-50 chance of graduating high school, in contrast to whites and Asians who graduate at rates of 75% and 77%, respectively. Further, male students graduate at an 8% lower rate than female students, and students who attend urban schools where poverty and segregation are present lag as much as 18% behind peers (Swanson, 2004).

These statistics have implications for male representation on college campuses in general, but are glaring when the dearth of college-bound African-American males is considered. In 2002, African-American males accounted for 4.3% of the national college student body – exactly the same percentage as in 1976 (Harper, 2008). In 2004, only 36.4% of African-American undergraduates were male, and even today more than two-thirds of those who start college do not complete a degree within six years, which is the lowest completion rate among all races and across gender (Harper, 2010, 2008).

Previous research into this phenomenon has primarily focused on individual, familial, and community discrepancies as reasons for black male underrepresentation on U.S. college campuses. While these may be important contributing factors, they only tell part of the story. Fewer studies have sought to examine structural and institutional factors, and fewer still have

explored ongoing racism in a deeply ingrained white supremacist culture.

For instance, Harris and Allen (2003) report California incarcerates more black men in state correctional institutions than it enrolls in the state's colleges and universities. In fact, African-American males and Latinos are overrepresented at every major step in the state's juvenile justice system (Leiber, 2002). Further, California youth of color comprise 59% of the state population, yet represent more than 80% of the state's prison population, and 71% of its juvenile penal population (Snyder, 1999).

California is home to 2.5 million African Americans, the second largest black population in the U.S. behind New York (U.S. Census Bureau: State and County Quickfacts, 2012). The state also enrolls the largest number of African-American college students (Allen, 2002b). But, of the 76% of African-American students that graduate high school in California, only 14% persist to and receive degrees from either the University of California (UC) or the California State University (CSU) (Allen, 2002b). Nearly a 20% decrease in African-American admissions at the UC in the wake of a statewide ban on Affirmative Action in 1996 reduced the number of black students from 5,796 in 1989 to 4,749 by 1998 (Harris, 2003). Yet, despite minority youth (African American, Filipino, Latino) constituting the majority of school-age children in California, they only represented 15.4% of all college students in 1998 (Allen, 2002b). In short, minority males are significantly overrepresented in the state's incarceration rates, while significantly underrepresented on the state's college and university campuses.

African-American enrollment patterns at the UC, the CSU, and the California Community Colleges (CCC) over more than a decade have shown a downward shift, what some researchers have referred to as a *cascade effect* (Allen, 2002b). Black student enrollments at the UC, as already mentioned, have certainly declined, especially in the wake of Proposition 209,

California's statewide initiative to prohibit Affirmative Action (Proposition 209: Prohibition against Discrimination or Preferential Treatment by State and Other Public Entities: Initiative Constitutional Amendment, 1996). But even black students who qualified for automatic admission to the UC defied econometric models of college choice (Beattie, 2002; John, 2005; Perna, 2000; Teranishi, 2008) and instead opted for more costly private schools to avoid what some students reported felt like an unfinished debate at UC campuses on whether blacks were academically qualified to study there. At the same time, the CSU experienced a slight increase in black student enrollment and the CCCs remained about the same (Allen, 2002b).

This cascade effect did not eliminate black male opportunities to pursue college education in California but it did delimit them by essentially removing the top tier UC opportunity from the student's choice calculus (Harris, 2003; Hoxby, 2012).

What seems to be emerging is a bifurcated higher education system where whites and Asians attend top schools, and students of color are relegated to less selective and open universities in California and elsewhere. In fact, Carnevale and Strohl (2013) found the racial and ethnic segregation in education opportunity that begins in the K-12 system has been efficiently reproduced on the nation's best college and university campuses. White students are increasingly concentrated in the nation's 468 best-funded and selective four-year institutions while African-American and Hispanic students are increasingly concentrated in the least-funded, less selective two- and four-year colleges and universities (Carnevale, 2013). The result is the emergence of a dual system of racially separate and unequal higher education opportunities, despite greater access to college systems by minority populations (Carnevale, 2013).

In addition, this combination of less funding and less selectivity places students studying at second- and third- tier schools at greater risk of dropping out, due in large part to these

structural characteristics (Hoxby, 2012). Students need access to classes and services to complete certificates and degrees and if these are unavailable, student success likely suffers (Hoxby, 2012).

So, even when black males negotiate unequal primary and secondary education opportunities to persist to college, they face further unequal opportunity.

Research shows diversity and a sense of acceptance of difference are tantamount to a positive learning environment for all students (Chang, 2010; Cuyjet, 2006; Hurtado, 1992, 2000, 1998). Further, interaction with cross-racial groups has positive outcomes for student retention, satisfaction, and intellectual development (Chang, 1996, 2010). The U.S. university is thought to be the locus of America's promise of equality, global citizenship values (Green, 2012), and democratic principles for promotion to future generations (Gutmann, 1999). However, if ongoing efforts to increase structural diversity on campuses to maximize learning outcomes does not also seek to represent the nation's racial diversity, then America's institutions of higher education become little more than sites of reproduction for the centuries old racial hierarchy that stalwartly has relegated African-American men to the lower rungs of society.

Something else to consider is the increasing rapidity with which human action and interaction is globalizing (Chua, 2003; Lieber, 2002; Olzak, 2011; Van Heertum, 2009). These beg for an associated increase in cultural sensitivity and acceptance across a growing multicultural community and work force (Dillard, 2001; Kellner, 2011; Leonardo, 2005; Nemetz, 1996). Given the likelihood many future jobs and professions have not been conceived of as yet, the need for increased cooperation across continents, culture, and color has never been greater. For these reasons, it is imperative black men have equal access to higher education opportunities.

Finally, if America's public learning institutions are to truly live up to their diversity

mission statements, they must continue to interrogate explanations why certain groups are underrepresented on college campuses and consequently in the higher echelons of society, and create new knowledge to address these disparities on college campuses, in corporate boardrooms, and in communities across the United States.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

This study explored 20 college going African-American males attending two Southern California universities and their meaning making of media representations of blackness, particularly around representations of black men, and whether these representations promoted, discouraged, or were silent regarding college going. Previous perception studies of visual media suggest news does not simply provide information about events, and individuals take in and interpret information selectively (Blackman, 1977; Gilliam, 2000). Further, Tobolowsky (2001, 2006) showed prime time television had implications for minority women's perceptions of what to expect from college campus life, and both Postman (1979) and Horn (2003) concluded media possess the elements of curriculum and, arguably, should be viewed as such, given their ability and purpose to train, inform, inspire, enlighten, entertain or otherwise engage the mind of an individual. These findings are consistent with Kretch and Crutchfield (1973) who argued individuals perceive and interpret information in terms of their "own needs, own emotions, own personality, own previously formed cognitive patterns" (p. 251).

Stack (2006) further noted the pervasiveness of media in our daily lives and its potential as an informal pedagogy to surpass the effects of formal pedagogies, placing citizenship at risk of being reduced to mere consumerism. In addition, media possess a profound and not completely understood form of cultural pedagogy, teaching us about gender, discussing race, and contributing on almost every level to what we think, feel, believe, fear and desire, as well as

those indulgences we know we should strive to avoid (Kellner, 2011). In short, from our first to our last breath, individuals are ensconced in a media and consumer society that requires understanding, interpreting and critique (Kellner, 2011).

The study also sought to explore to what extent, if any, black males found ways to negotiate or contest non-affirming representations in what has been called a Eurocentric discourse "full of lies about African Americans and other people of color" (Au, 2005). The media system, like the education system, is one of society's key institutions and cultural practices (Masterman, 2001), and some researchers have asserted this system is the conduit between ourselves and how we envision our social world (Couldry, 2003). In this context, the media system describes the collage of distribution mechanisms for music, television, cinema, video, and print, with the addition of handheld devices, game boxes, Internet, and animated billboards, to name a few of the more prominent distribution mechanisms.

Audience-centered critical media research argues viewers and readers construct their own meaning from texts, but disparate audiences do not decode messages uniformly, in the direction critics might suggest, or even as authors may have intended (Condit, 1989; Hall, 2011, 2003b). To reach the largest possible audience, media must be polysemic and flexible (Condit, 1989; Fiske, 1987). Polysemic texts are capable of bearing multiple meanings because of intertextual relationships they carry, in addition to the varying constructions or interests of receivers (Condit, 1989).

This position represented a linguistic and cultural turn in the interpretation of media texts, from a fixed message and fixed audience position to one that was mutable, pregnant with potential for alternate interpretation, and available for contestation at any point (Kellner, 2010, 2011). What is significant here is cultural meanings, derived from shared language and

potentially shared interpretation of events do not reside only in the head, or even in the text themselves. They tend to take on a *liveness* all of their own (Couldry, 2000). As a result, these cultural meanings tend to organize and regulate behavior and have real and tangible outcomes (Hall, 2003b). In effect, they are frameworks for interpretation that have implications for action, in part because of the way we give meaning to and represent experiences, perceptions and other daily practices (Hall, 2003b).

Further, media make present particular codings in the public space. While British researchers have focused on the variety of decoding possible from a single text or message (Fiske, 1986, 1987; Hall, Janes, Mackay, & Negus, 1997), American researchers (see Gray, 2005b; Kellner, 1990, 1995, 2010; Nichols, 2005; Roth, 2015b) have emphasized the ideology of messages. The latter results in a disseminated public vocabulary favoring certain interests and groups over others, if only to consolidate the dominant audience by privileging their particular codes (Condit, 1989).

However, while espousing awareness of a seemingly polysemic mass media, recent research seems to be performing "a form of sociological quietism" regarding media power (Corner, 1991). Current emphases on microviews of audience relations underprivilege study of the political economy of mass media, or in Corner's (1991) words, the "macrostructures of media and society" (p. 269).

Still another area of inquiry in this study is the extent to which, if at all, black men perceive a need to modify behavior, or speech or other social enactments (Blumer, 1998; Harper, 2006; Kendon, 1990; Stewart, 2008, 2009) in order to distance themselves from particular media representations or stereotypes individuals might perceive based on media representations. Likewise, do black men perceive these same media representations informing or flavoring their

self-perception or perceptions of other black men?

All of this becomes particularly salient in the realm of media consumption, given the role of media in framing the public and the private, the global and the local, and "articulating global processes of cultural imperialism with local processes of situated consumption – where local meanings are often made within and against the symbolic resources of global media networks" (Morley, 1993, p. 17).

While media scholarship has moved away from monolithic interpretations of what media texts *mean* and how they are read, there appears consensus on the pervasive nature of mass media and its ability to facilitate pleasure (Ang, 1985); set agenda and define issues (Morley, 1992); teach (Horn, 2003; Postman, 1979; Tobolowsky, 2001, 2006); maintain a distinction between itself and ordinary people (Couldry, 2000); create spectacle and advise individuals as to what is cool, positive, or socially unadvisable (Kellner, 1995, 2011; Roth, 2015b); and, seemingly contradictorily, provide space for social action (Couldry, 2000), all the while being "inexhaustible, and coextensive with reality itself" (Houston, 1994).

These media characteristics may have implications for perceptions formed by African-American males about college going, as well as perceptions they form about themselves, and perceptions others may form about them.

STATEMENT OF PURPOSE AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore with 20 college-going African-American males their meaning making of media representations of blackness, particularly around representations of black men, and whether these representations promote, discourage, or are silent regarding college going. Through a better understanding of how black male students make meaning of media representations, it is anticipated a deeper understanding

will be gained of the issues and challenges they encounter to and through college, given their often negative representation in media. It also is anticipated by gaining insight into how black male students successfully navigate academic ambitions despite myriad social and cultural challenges, strategies may surface which other college-aspiring black males may employ to be successful. Further, the perceptions of students successfully navigating college going may also help to identify potential ways and means in terms of resources and programs colleges and universities can devise or support to assist in recruiting and retaining underrepresented minority male students in a post-Affirmative Action era.

To shed light on these issues, the following research questions were addressed:

1. In what ways, if any, do black males perceive media representations flavoring relationships with and perceptions of themselves by others?

2. To what extent, if any, do college going black males perceive media representations informing self-concept, college going and career aspirations?

3. How, if at all, do black males negotiate or oppose media representations that are dissonant with aspirations, personal experience, or beliefs?

RATIONALE AND SIGNIFICANCE

The rationale for this study emerged from an interest to identify impediments to college going as perceived by black males, and to examine ongoing media representations of black men and the extent to which these often deficit representations perpetuate negative stereotypes that are remnants from America's long and often tortured inner struggle with slavery, endangering still the full and equal citizenship of black males.

The study sought to make contributions to the field of higher education in several ways. First, while African-American males are one of the most studied groups in education, much of previous research has focused on black male deficits in order to explain the achievement gap between African-American students and their white counterparts, as well as for black men's

underrepresentation on the nation's college campuses. This study follows on the emerging shift away from deficit explanations to examine how persistent racist beliefs and structural inequalities (Harper, 2009) such as segregation and limited residential mobility (Massey, 1990), racially targeted law enforcement (Davis, 1997; Risse, 2004; Wu, 2005), differential judicial sentencing (Alexander, 2010; Kitwana, 2002), ongoing focus on Western European curricula (Cabrera, 2009; Pattillo-McCoy, 1999), and the dearth of positive media representations of black men outside of professional athletics or other entertainment venues may have implications for black men's post-secondary academic ambitions.

Second, increased understanding of the college trajectory of successfully persisting black males, who have navigated all of the previously researched obstacles impeding college going, may help to increase black male representation on college campuses, in addition to potentially identifying still-remaining obstacles black males encounter throughout the education pipeline, and society in general.

Third, the study sought to explore the lived experiences of African-American men and their college going choices, and how they perceived those choices were shaped and realized within a dynamic ecology in which they were not always in control of events or habits or practices commonly recognized as necessary for a successful post-secondary academic trajectory.

Finally, the study sought to identify the origin and implications of potential alternate choices black males perceive are offered them outside of college attainment as a means to viable participation in society. Given the university is considered to be the locus of America's promise of equality, meritocracy, and pursuit of happiness, and evidence is overwhelming that college is an excellent investment, even for those who seek jobs where a degree isn't required (Leonhardt,

2011), what are some of the reasons black men might perceive for choosing not to go to college?

If we are to perpetuate the American promise of success to anyone who seeks it and works hard to achieve it, then higher education must find ways to accommodate current constituencies, including black males. The absence of black men in representative numbers on college campuses, and their subsequent absence from a broad spectrum of meaningful positions of contribution within U.S. society, can only draw attention to ongoing mechanisms of injustice and inequality, and should cause the rest of us to ponder how this nation, founded on the rhetoric of freedom and justice for all, can seriously claim to have attained these goals when it continues to systematically withhold these rights from a singular group – a group that has struggled since the formation of the nation to attain what others take for granted as the foundation of their citizenship.

Extending the examination beyond the previous deficit-based interrogations into why black males continue to be underrepresented on the nation's college campuses, and including the voices of black men who have successfully negotiated the education pipeline and have steered clear of social and academic obstacles, provides educators and institutions with an updated toolkit to cultivate student bodies reflective of the diversity of U.S. communities. Additionally, a reflective diversity tends to assure all communities, regardless of color or creed, benefit from America's renowned system of higher education; reflects the U.S. commitment to its ideals of equality and justice for all; and affirms college opportunity are accessible to all Americans.

SUMMARY

This chapter identified and described the phenomenon of the underrepresentation of African-American males on U.S. college campuses, and how this research intended to explore with 20 college-going African-American males their meaning making of media representations

of blackness, particularly around representations of black men, and whether these representations promote, discourage, or are silent regarding college going. Specifically, I sought to understand how college going black men successfully negotiating academic careers and consciously preparing to make social contributions perceived media representations of black men that often stereotype them into narrow career choices or lives of crime. I also sought to learn ways college going black men negotiate, interrogate, or contest negative media representations they feel may reflect on them, or flavor their relationships with others. The chapter also outlined the critical components necessary to set up this research study: problem, purpose and research questions. Further, the chapter illustrated the interconnectivity of these components to underscore they are the core of this research. Together, these elements outline how this dissertation undertook the study of media representations of black men and the implications of these representations for college going. The methodology underlying the study is interpretative phenomenology, or the meaning making by individuals of the world around them, and how they believe that world pertains to them (Creswell, 2003; Holstein, 1998; Moustakas, 1994). Given college going is a process that begins well in advance of admission, the study employed an ecological framework, wherein experiences and perceptions of individuals are examined as an adaptation to the environments in which they are experienced (Bronfenbrenner, 1976, 1977, 1979, 1994). Finally, in addition to explicating these essential components of the study, the chapter also outlined the study's rationale and significance. A list of definitions of key terminology used throughout the study is attached [Appendix A].

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

OVERVIEW

To engage in this study, I began a critical review of literature at the outset and this review continued during data collection, data analysis and synthesis phases of the study. My review of literature initially focused on the well researched and mostly deficit views of individuals, families, and communities traditionally used to explain the ongoing underrepresentation of black males on college campuses. However, individuals, families and communities do not exist in a vacuum, so I broadened my review to examine institutional, structural, political and cultural linkages that also may have implications for individual life trajectories. Notably, these include differential education experiences throughout the education pipeline, differential law enforcement encounters and outcomes, and often-negative media representations. At this distance from the individual, the web of interconnectivity between these various dimensions became clear, and I chose to conceive the study as an ecological investigation, examining the adaptation of the individual to these interconnected systems that tend to influence human development. Each of these systems, in their own way, forms a *curriculum*, where individuals learn how to be and how to engage society. Each of these *schools* offer their own lessons in how to live, what to avoid, who to become, and to great extent what to think about the experience.

To conduct this literature review, I used multiple information sources, including books, online resources, dissertations, periodicals, professional journals, court decisions, motion pictures, personal conversations, newspapers, broadcast news, and Internet memes. These resources were accessed by purchase, in person, from lending libraries and online through jStor, Google Scholar, ProQuest, multiple universities, periodicals, and other online databases. No

timeframe was set for this search, given the historical relevance of early media representations, previous and evolving forms of racism, past and current underrepresentation of black males on college campuses, the devaluing of inner-city schools and communities, a commensurate increase in segregation along racial and socioeconomic lines in the U.S., and the globalizing nature of the education project. The number of topics to review grew, as additional dimensions of the study became known.

Throughout this review, I sought to indentify gaps or omissions in the literature, and to examine and discuss contested topics or issues. The literature review is divided into a number of subsections and the chapter concludes with an interpretative summary of how the literature has informed my understanding of the multivariate issues involved in the study, and the way the literature review informed the development of a conceptual framework that scaffolds the study.

This review begins with an examination of the socio-economic (SES) context underpinning the black male college trajectory, and then moves on to explore structural and institutional implications within the education pipeline, in order to address the human and social capital explanations ascribed to these contexts. I then focus on the college context, including student enrollment and college choice processes, campus climate issues, and ongoing racial stratification.

While it is likely students encounter law enforcement, the court system, and both positive and negative media representations of blackness well in advance of college going – and these encounters likely have implications for a variety of later life decisions, including college going –, these contexts are addressed toward the end of the review as a summation of the totality of experiences, perceptions, beliefs and understanding black males may encounter to and through college. The intent here is to capture a vivid and thorough portrait of how the literature depicts

black male college going decisions and the inherent challenges encountered well in advance of the student's receiving a letter of acceptance to college.

The Worth of the Individual

Since the enslavement of Africans for the purpose of growing the U.S. plantocracy hundreds of years ago, efforts in the U.S. have persisted to justify difference across race, and in particular to subordinate black to white. These efforts were initially supported by pre-evolutionary forms of scientific racism (Gould, 1996), in order to justify treating humans as property in an alleged democracy that rhetorically decried equality for all. But even after the legal end of slavery (The Emancipation Proclamation, 2013) and multiple, though usually tepid structural and institutional attempts at redress in education, housing and voting (Allen, 2002a; Anti-Discrimination Legislation and International Declarations as Evidence of Public Policy against Racial Restrictive Covenants, 1946; Civil Rights Act of 1964, P.L. 88-352, 78 Stat. 241, 1964; Shelley v. Kraemer, () 100 U.S. 1, 1948; Voting Rights Act of 1965, PL 89-110, 1965), some voices have continued to trumpet innate and inherited difference by race, particularly in the areas of intellect, morality, and character, to explain achievement gaps between blacks and whites (Herrnstein, 1994; Jencks, 1998). Of course, when race is used as a measurement, this level of generalization does not allow for an examination of individual and varying degrees of resiliency, hope, and determination; nor does it address multiple intelligences, moral outlook, or substance of character (Allen, 1995; Gentry, Peelle, & ebrary Inc., 1994; Gould, 1996; McCubbin, 1998; Stanton-Salazar, 2001). In fact, these characteristics are but a few of the many traits typically absent from studies measuring black male academic performance and success. Further, Pritchard and Wilson (2003) found stress, self-esteem, coping skills, and emotional health are determinants in an individual's ability to academically persist, and these factors were

not consistent across individuals. Likewise, Borman and Rachuba (2001) note poverty and status as a racial minority may place students at greater risk of non-persistence. The extent of an individual's capacity for resilience, then, which may increase or decrease over time, may be a significant factor in students' abilities to persist against adverse situations and conditions (Borman, 2001; Cavazos Jr., 2010; Connell, Spencer, & Aber, 1994; McCubbin, 1998; McMillan, 1994; Spencer, 2007; Spencer, 1997). This notion of resiliency – the degree to which individuals and families have resources to call upon to overcome challenges and unexpected hardships in life (McCubbin, 1998) – is not insignificant to the life trajectories of all individuals, and especially not to the advance of black males, given the additional work they may have to engage to avert the consequences of ongoing racism and what some have characterized as racial battle fatigue (Allen, 1999; Cavazos Jr., 2010; McMillan, 1994; Smith, 2007, 2011; Spencer, 2007). Further, this additional workload, in and of itself, can have implications for black male health, success and academic persistence (Antonovsky, 1979; Smith, 2007, 2011; Wilson-Sadberry, 1993; Zajacova, 2005).

Research shows black males are the most vulnerable U.S. racial-gender group for almost every health condition monitored by medical researchers (Smith, 2011). In addition to disease, black men are victims of premature death by homicide and fatal accidents (Allen, 1999; Alvarez, 2013; Clarke, 2014; Egelko, 2013; Medical Examiner Rules Eric Garner's Death a Homicide, Says He Was Killed by Chokehold, 2014). What still seems to be lacking among social, educational and professional institutions, and the society at-large, is an understanding gendered racism has significant emotional, psychological and physiological costs, and these costs have significant implications for the rise and presence of black males in higher education and beyond (Smith, 2007, 2011; Spencer, 2007; Wilson-Sadberry, 1993). In this context, one might argue the

absence of significant numbers of black men matriculating at college or making significant social contributions is due in large part to the additional – and intrinsically unnecessary – work they must do to succeed. Implicit in this argument is the realization of a higher standard of performance for black males than is expected from any other U.S. gendered or racial group, which is in conflict with the rhetorical precepts on which this nation was founded.

Family Matters

Variations in family structure, such as single-parent and two-parent households (Heiss, 1996), race and class variations (Allen, 1979, 1995) and the construction of alternate frameworks with which to study black families (Allen, 1978) have been used in an attempt to explain effects on school attitudes and behavior among African-American students. While parental involvement correlated strongly with successful outcomes, parental involvement and family structure were only weakly linked, so a student raised in a mother-only household can achieve academic success if the single parent is significantly involved in the student's academic trajectory, while a student from a two-parent home lacking significant parental involvement in support of education goals may be disadvantaged (Heiss, 1996).

Much of early research on black families was poorly conceptualized, ideologically biased, glossed over within-group differences, such as racial and ethnic identity, class, SES and geography, all of which when critically examined adequately dispel monolithic, stereotypic and inaccurate portrayals of black families (Allen, 1978, 1995; Celious, 2001; Harper, 2008). In addition, Stewart (2006) used an ecological model to study family characteristics that contribute to academic achievement. The ecological model of human development, as conceived by Bronfenbrenner (1976, 1977, 1979, 1994), identified the interconnected nature of systems influencing human development. Further, Herndon and Hirt (2004) identified the types of

support all students need for success: academic, emotional, social and financial. However, black students who attend Predominantly White Institutions (PWIs), rely more heavily on familial support than their white counterparts (Herndon, 2004).

The family also prepares and sustains the student well in advance of college attendance, and the absence of this preparation may seriously limit student opportunities for collegiate success (Allen, 1995; Heiss, 1996). However, low SES and the finding many African-American households often lack the material and human resources necessary to create a positive academic environment within the home, suggest these factors may in part account for some disparity in academic achievement when compared to other groups (Stewart, 2006). Additionally, parents must be aware of their influence on children in terms of their understanding of race (Allen, 1979, 1995; Heiss, 1996; Knight, 2004; Stewart, 2006). The efforts made by parents and relatives to help children understand how to succeed as a minority in a majority culture will help children to persist in higher education (Allen, 1981; Herndon, 2004).

Beyond Family

Still another factor in generating and maintaining college aspirations is motivation and one motivator for precollege students is having role models (Connell, Spencer, & Aber, 1994; Herndon, 2004; Pintrich, 2004). This assessment has significant ramifications, given a dearth of male role models in SES-challenged communities due to high unemployment and mass incarceration (Alexander, 2010; Kitwana, 2002; Western, 2009), in addition to the absence of African-American male teachers in elementary and secondary schools (Black Male Teachers Scarce in Classrooms, 2009). Research shows having more black male teachers improves academic outcomes for black male students (Dogan, 2010; Williams, 2012).

Three groups outside of the home who can help to instill college expectations are current black college students, alumni, and those who recruit African-American students to college (Allen, 1998; Herndon, 2004; Thomas, 1992). This means introducing programs to families with elementary and secondary school children so precollege events and experiences can be incorporated into a successful college going trajectory (Light, 2002). These events and experiences have the potential to instill education values and aspirations (Connell, Spencer, & Aber, 1994; Howard, 2003b), and require parents to familiarize themselves with college going resources so children can avail themselves of these resources when opportunities or difficulties arise. In the absence of access to such resources, black students' academic persistence may be in jeopardy long before college going begins (Herndon, 2004; John, 2005).

Similarly, the neighborhood context can exert influence on college aspirations (Brooks-Gunn, 1993; Short, 1965; Stewart, 2007). Framed by Wilson's (1987, 1996) theory of neighborhood effects, a study of the extent to which neighborhood disadvantage predicts college aspirations among African-American adolescents, showed concentrated neighborhood disadvantage exerts a significant influence on college aspirations (Brooks-Gunn, 1993; Pattillo-McCoy, 1999; Stewart, 2007).

'Who's School is it Anyway?'

Arum (2000) examined the changing relationship between school and community as part of the role neighborhoods play in reproducing social inequality and generating crime. Public schools in the U.S. initially emerged at the local level and well into the 20th century were largely controlled and funded locally (Arum, 2000; Mare, 1981). As a result, early research examined tensions between community control and the effective organization of educational practice (Cohen, 1998; Rudolph, 1977; Thelin, 2004).

However, by the 1950s and 1960s, functionalist accounts of schools argued education practice mirrored the needs of a larger society and schools were not, as such, embedded in the community (Arum, 2000). These accounts led many researchers to assert schools did not vary significantly based on community setting, and schools had their own organizational culture (Birnbaum, 1991; Peterson, 1990) and were only "loosely-coupled" (Weick, 1976) to other organizations in their environment. From this perspective, school communities are not made up simply of those who attend them or who live nearby but rather by the institutions within the school's *field of organization* (Meyer, 1983), namely other schools, and the increasing number of institutional actors, such as state and federal governments (McGuiness, 2005; Proposition 209: Prohibition against Discrimination or Preferential Treatment by State and Other Public Entities: Initiative Constitutional Amendment, 1996; Walters, 2001), as well as law enforcement (Yamaguchi, 2004) and the justice system (Grutter v. Bollinger (02-241) 539 U.S. 306, 2003; Yamaguchi, 2004; Yun, 2006), that influence school activities. This line of reasoning produced arguments of coercive, normative and mimetic pressures existing within school environments, and these pressures worked to produce a common yet distinct set of organizational forms (DiMaggio, 1983).

Arum (2000) evaluated this reconceptualization of the school-community relationship across six domains – neighborhood effects, racial segregation, resource inequality, curriculum variation, school-to-work transitions, and school discipline – to illustrate although local settings are most often where students reside, schools are shaped by institutional aspects of organizational environments (DiMaggio, 1983), and many features of schools are increasingly controlled by remote, external actors (Arum, 2000; Bracco, 1999; Harcleroad, 2005; Pfeffer, 1978).

By unpacking the school context from the neighborhood context, questions and issues of institutional quality (Arum, 2000), resource allocation (Santos, 2007; Tolbert, 1985), teacher quality, and ultimately student performance (Qian, 1999; Schmidtlein, 2005) become less a reflection of the community and its members and more a reflection of remote decisions made by external actors (Arum, 2000; Harcleroad, 2005). These external actors and their distant oversight may account for some of the structural and institutional challenges faced by low SES students whose families may lack the residential mobility (Massey, 1990; Pattillo-McCoy, 1999) or insight to seek higher quality education resources elsewhere were mobility not at issue.

Perpetuating racial injustice. Given this reality of remote oversight, and a lack of residential mobility in low-SES communities, race relations within a particular school site may not reflect community practices. Chesler (2000) described American race relations as complex, contradicting and confusing, allowing a history of racial injustice to continue through contemporary institutional practices and policies. If individual moral choices around race relations are difficult, then similar choices are even more complex within organizations (Feagin, 2006; Pfeffer, 1974; Tierney, 1988; Tolbert, 1985; Winant, 2000).

One cause of this greater difficulty is organizations propagate frameworks where individuals make choices and engage in formal and informal behaviors (Chesler, 2000; Peterson, 2004). Some organizations have explicit agendas, such as schools systems, where students learn to make decisions in line with the values of earlier generations. In this context, when the complexities of organizational life are comingled with the confusing and often-contradictory nature of race relations, they can discourage, detour or derail the academic aspirations of African-American males (Cornell, 2007; Feagin, 2006, 1996; Light, 2002; Mills, 1997).

The apparent invisibility of racism to most white people makes it difficult to perceive, interpret and empathize with the realities of organizational life for African-American males (Cabrera, 2009; Cuyjet, 2006; Harris, 1993; McIntosh, 2008). Chesler (2000) argued growing up white in America presupposes "ignorance, indifference and fear or antipathy toward people of color" (p. 438), while Harris (1993) posited whiteness, initially constructed as a form of racial identity, has evolved into a form of property, historically and currently acknowledged and protected by U.S. law. For U.S. society to maintain its illusion of democracy and justice, people in oppressed positions must be perceived to be there as a result of their own inadequacy. These mechanisms are deeply embedded in the psyches of elites and in institutions, and in "the structure of social, political, and economic relationships" (Chesler, 200, p. 439). Further, like all forms of human behavior, racism cannot not persist as an individual behavior unless there are social mechanisms in place to reproduce and perpetuate the behavior (Bourdieu, 1977).

There are five organizational factors contributing to and maintaining racism in organizations. These factors include mission, culture, power, structure and resources (Chesler, 2000). This is just one of several typologies of complex organizations (see Baldridge, 1975; Meyer, 1983; Perrow, 1982; Tinto, 2012, among others). Taken together, these organizational dimensions can either strengthen long-held institutional biases, or obstruct their easy replacement with more equitable ones. However, even when structures are not intended to cause inequality, they may nevertheless do so due to the reproduction of informal organizationally prescribed or community-prescribed behaviors disguising normalized and virtually invisible forms of white privilege (Allen, 2005; Harris, 1993; McDermott, 2013; McIntosh, 2008).

I'm white and you're not. Students of color, and particularly black males, historically have performed lower academically than their white counterparts, and this underperformance is both well documented and frequently seen in the math classroom (Corey, 2005; Fogliati, 2013; Steele, 1997, 2010). Previous research has identified contrasting cultural norms and beliefs among black male students and their typically Caucasian female teachers (Carter, 2006; Cook, 1998; Corey, 2005; Ford, 1996; Harris, 1993), which may set up and maintain an environment that is not conducive for learning among black male students (Gay, 2000; Howard, 2010; Howard, 2008). Corey and Bower (2005) assert many teachers remain unaware of or unconcerned about cultural differences between themselves and some students, so they often do not take into account or interrogate their values, orientation and expectations, and likewise do not modify their pedagogical approach, when teaching across culture (Harris, 1993; Howard, 2010; Howard, 2008).

Using a critical race theory (CRT) in education framework, a study focused on two issues: institutional and structural racism, and property rights, where the property was twofold: *whiteness* as property and intellectual property (Corey, 2005; Harris, 1993). The focus on whiteness as property interrogates the assumption modeling the cultural practices of whites is property that is desirable to own (Harris, 1993; Leonardo, 2009), and the intellectual property in this scenario was the acquisition of math skills (Corey, 2005). While only a single case study with one black male participant, Corey and Bower (2005) found the student preferred the online environment over the classroom environment for a number of reasons: 1) The self-paced, independent nature of online learning addressed the student's concerns with the rapidity with which the in-class lessons were given and the language used to explain them, 2) The online environment allowed the student to learn algebra without having to alter speech, conduct or

appearance to be accepted by other students, and 3) While in class, the student fell victim to stereotype threat (Steele, 1997, 2010) by not pursuing questions he didn't fully understand for fear of appearing less intelligent.

In classrooms with increasing numbers of students from varied backgrounds, researchers have argued for the use of culturally relevant norms and forms of speech (Au, 2005; Howard, 2003a; Ladson-Billings, 1995), which is elucidated in greater detail in the following subsection.

Aren't there any black people in your history? The *positionality* of both curriculum and teacher can be potential impediments to learning among students of color (Howard, 2003b; Howard, 2010; Howard, 2008; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Milner, 2004). Successful examples of cross-cultural learning often have been achieved only within a nexus of speech and language patterns (Ladson-Billings, 1995), using language that more closely approximated the student's home cultural pattern (Carter, 2006; Hale-Benson, 1986; Ladson-Billings, 1995).

Along the same lines is the need to tailor curriculum for *cultural relevance* (Howard, 2003a; Howard, 2010; Howard, 2008; Moses, 2001). By situating classroom lessons within students' cultural milieu, where they possess significant knowledge, and allowing them to be themselves in dress, language and interaction, black males are engaged and other students who regard them highly as a result of their popularity see academic engagement as cool (hooks, 2004; Ladson-Billings, 1995). Moses (2001) adopted a particular cultural relevance in teaching mathematics by using the Boston Subway to mathematize *which way* and *how many* around number concepts. By learning *in situ,* students used *people talk* to express, for instance, Park Street Station is three stops inbound from Central Square, and Harvard Square is four stops outbound from Park Street. Student realization of these formulas expressed in simple ways

engaged their everyday experience and knowledge and supported why *which way* and *how many* are valuable and meaningful to their worlds (Moses, 2001).

Teacher interaction and curricular structures can influence engagement and outcomes of students of color, and teachers must be aware of the need to enter the student world (Au, 2005; Howard, 2003a) since their own world is likely foreign due to a dearth of teachers of color in the nation's primary and secondary schools (Ford, 1996; Smith, 2006). Only about 7% of all primary and secondary teachers are black (National Center for Education Statistics. Fast Facts: Teacher Trends, 2013), and despite an obvious culture gap, few teachers receive multicultural training to examine their own biases and stereotypes in relation to African-American students (Ford, 1996; Gay, 2000; Howard, 2010; Howard, 2008).

This lack of teacher diversity and multicultural training education should be of major concern, particularly for increasing the rates of academic success among an ever-increasing student population of color, and specifically among African-American males (Gay, 2000; Howard, 2003a, 2003b; Milner, 2004). For African-American students, classroom environment and particularly teacher-student relations, significantly influence educational outcomes and engagement (Ford, 1996; Gay, 2000; Howard, 2003a, 2008). Smith and Whitmore (2006) argue unless teachers can enable students to retain their identities from the communities in which they are full members, disengagement and failure likely increase. African-American students that feel understood, accepted, and respected by their teachers are more likely to have positive school experiences (Howard, 2010; Howard, 2008; Ladson-Billings, 1995). These positive experiences lead to increased teacher expectations and student motivation for achievement (Phalen, 1994).

White teachers, even in urban school districts, typically teach black students (Ford, 1996). Coupled with these racial differences, it also is typical most urban teachers do not live in

the community where they teach (Arum, 2000), and data has shown an ever-increasing cultural gap between black students and teachers, the latter of whom are mostly white (85%), and predominantly women (75%) (Darling-Hammond, 1994; Education - The 2012 Statistical Abstract, Table 255 2012; Gay, 2000; Howard, 2010; Howard, 2008; National Center for Education Statistics. Fast Facts: Teacher Trends, 2013). The lack of multicultural training and unfamiliarity with the surrounding community by mostly white female teachers likely contributes to an environment where students, for fear of being misunderstood, or being perceived as lacking intelligence, disengage from the learning process due to stereotype threat.

I know this even though you don't think I do. Steele (1997, 2010) examined how *stereotype threat* may affect black students' abilities to achieve high scores on standardized tests, which are widely believed to measure aptitude and intelligence, and are an essential ingredient in the college admission calculus. This psychosocial threat arises when one is confronted with a situation where a negative stereotype about one's group applies (Fogliati, 2013; Steele, 1997, 2010).

In terms of this study, African-American males are often stereotyped as less academically focused or in the extreme less intelligent than other students (Cook, 1998; Cuyjet, 2006; Herrnstein, 1994; Iyengar, 2010; Jencks, 1998). Steele (1997) asserted in order to attain school success a student must be associated with school success as part of their identity. For this element of identity to form, students must believe they have good prospects, and possess the skills, resources and opportunity to prosper within the domain (Steele, 1997). If this perception does not form or is broken, achievement or motivation may suffer. One particularly frustrating aspect of stereotype threat is it usually affects those who Steele (1997) refers to as the *vanguard* of the group – students who possess the skills and self-confidence to meet academic

requirements. However, this group is most susceptible to stereotype threat, not from internal doubts, but from the potential of being stereotyped (Steele, 1997). Thus, the *fear* of supporting negative stereotypes about ability interfere with academic engagement, and lead to a downturn in academic performance, specifically among African-American males (McMillian, 2003; Nasir, 2009). In an effort to protect their self-esteem, black males may avoid academic domains they consider too rigorous (hooks, 2004). This avoidance of difficult academic domains represents a form of disidentification, which is a sort of reconceptualization of the self and one's values as a way to place distance between the self and the stereotype threat (Steele, 1997). In other words, if students perceive they are not expected to do well, and there is something they perceive inherent about them that these lowered expectations are based on, the likelihood of their engagement diminishes, and they are likely to *disidentify* with the domain out of a form of identity preservation (Carter, 2006; Chavous et al., 2003; Cornell, 2007; Stewart, 2008, 2009). When the domain is education, this adaptation can be a costly detour in life opportunities.

So far, I've focused on the socio-economic and environmental contexts often experienced by black males well in advance of their college going decisions. In the following subsections, I examine the college going process, from the decision to attend college, through college selection processes, and to campus experiences, including the campus climate, and ongoing racial stratification.

Going to College

Perna (2000) studied the college enrollment decisions of African Americans, Hispanics and whites using an expanded econometric model of college enrollment to include measures of social and cultural capital as markers for expectations, preferences, tastes and uncertainty. Typically, econometric models compare the present value of perceived lifetime benefits against

the present value of perceived lifetime costs (Beattie, 2002). Such models posit individuals make decisions based on a comparison of the costs for all possible alternatives and then selecting the alternative with the maximum net benefit, given personal taste and preference (Hossler, 1989). Perna (2000) found to manage these cognitive decision-making demands students typically adopted strategies of *satisficing* (Simon, 1957) or bounded rationality (Arthur, 1994). Satisficing is a compound word originating from *satisfy* and *suffice*, meaning given the choice between reaching an ideal outcome, or not, or finding an outcome that generally meets the needs, preferences, and expectations of an individual, but is by no means ideal, results in a satisficing outcome (Simon, 1957). Bounded Rationality (Arthur, 1994) is similar: beyond a certain level of complexity human analytical capacity can no longer cope, and individuals at some point stop evaluating new information and base decisions on delimited information they are comfortable with, resulting in a bounded rationality.

Individuals considering pursuing higher education and who lack certain required cultural capital may: lower their educational aspirations or opt out of a particular education opportunity because they are unfamiliar with the requirements; over-perform in an attempt to compensate for their lack of cultural resources; or accept smaller rewards from their educational investment (Bourdieu, 1977; Perna, 2000).

Perna's (2000) findings follow earlier research showing decision processes to attend a four-year college vary among African Americans, Hispanics and whites. While social and cultural capital are important contributors to attending college for all groups, the relationship between social and cultural capital and college going appears to vary by race and ethnicity (Borjas, 2001; Moschetti, 2008; Small, 2004; Yosso, 2005). African Americans tend to have less

access to information and knowledge about achieving academic goals, and as such it could be argued they possess less cultural and social capital (McDonough, 1998b; Perna, 2000).

When asked what black high school students felt was their greatest barrier to college going, Freeman (1997) found in addition to students' uncertainty about their ability to repay the short-term costs of attending college, they also questioned whether the long-term economic benefits would exceed the costs. But other factors beyond mere economics also were present. Freeman (1997) found psychological barriers to college going among high school seniors who didn't feel supported by parents, teachers or school administrators. Ogbu (2003), and others (see Carter, 2006; Cook, 1998; Fordham, 1986; Harper, 2006), have asserted the burden of *acting white* in order to succeed academically discourages some students from pursuing higher education. These findings cut across class divisions, signaling cultural views, such as behaviors, values and frames of reference, outweigh class differences (Freeman, 1997).

What do I need to know? Similarly, McDonough (1997) examined the opportunity structure of college choice for differentially-situated students and found outcomes based on status group theories, intergenerational status transmission and organizational theories of decision making. Status group theories showcase the differences in attainment rates of different socioeconomic groups (Johnson, 2008), and organizational theories provide a lens for how and why a particular school context may influence individual behavior (Morgan, 2006a, 2006b; Scott, 2007; Smircich, 1983).

Following Bourdieu and Passeron (1977), McDonough (1997) located high school students' college-choice processes within their social, cultural and organizational contexts to evaluate the role of values, as embedded in everyday living, in college-going decision making. Bourdieu (1977) observed students with high levels of cultural capital have substantial

knowledge as to how much and what kind of education is necessary for success. Student interest in school is necessary to retain cultural capital as a symbolic social good, since cultural capital has no intrinsic value. Its importance stems from its conversion into a socially prized purpose or resource (Bourdieu, 1977). Parents tend to be the transmitters of cultural capital by instilling children with the value of and the process to acquire higher education, and its likely and eventual conversion into higher quality lifetime employment (Bourdieu, 1977).

However, this cultural capital can be constrained by habitus, which Bourdieu (1984, 1977) characterized as a deeply internalized, permanent set of experiences, beliefs and expectations about the social world which an individual encounters and comes to accept from his or her local environment. Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992) also referred to habitus as a metaphoric *sense of the game* – "an unthinking reasoning, learned within repeated doing but without reflective awareness" (Erickson, 2004, p. 121). At the center of this theory is the notion individuals are social actors engaged in their immediate environment, and as social actors move from one field of activity to another. As they move across fields, they must acquire a new sense of the game for each new field in which they operate (Erickson, 2004). McDonough (1997) sought to extend this theoretical notion of habitus to show its presence not only in families and communities but also in organizations. McDonough (1997) investigated the organizational contexts of high schools and their various status cultures. The study focused on how the broader school climate created an organizational habitus that constrained the constellation of possible college choices for high school seniors (McDonough, 1997, 1998a). While cost and academic ability are always factors for most students, differential resources has contributed to the reproduction of class-based, or place-based stratification in college opportunity, belying the

meritocratic ideals generally thought to scaffold college opportunity (Johnson, 2008; McDonough, 1997).

In sum, McDonough (1997) found students made college choices based on available information and guidance but students from low SES backgrounds had less access to information and a smaller network of friends, family and informed others to assist in or guide decision making. Further, because students from low SES households differ in their habitus from other students, and schools as a field tend to resonate more readily with students from middle-class backgrounds, then schools can be viewed as systemic producers of ongoing inequality, where those already ensconced in privilege remain privileged and those who are disadvantaged remain so (Au, 2009; Bourdieu, 1977; Feagin, 2006). Additionally, over generations, schools may not be true sites of significant social mobility, in that they are a system that reproduces rather than transforms (Erickson, 2004). Just what this system reproduces is heavily dependent on the college campus climate, which is the next area of examination.

Today's racial forecast is expected to be… The campus climate literature has explored racial tensions between groups on campuses (Bowman, 2010a, 2010b; Hurtado, 1992; Locks, Hurtado, Bowman, & Oseguera, 2008), and has identified four dimensions that comprise campus climate: 1) Institutional historical legacy, 2) Structural diversity, or the statistical representation of diverse groups on campus, 3) The psychological climate, namely perceptions and attitudes between groups, and 4) The behavioral climate, which include types of intergroup relations (Hurtado, 1998).

When structural diversity is increased – by altering the percentage of students of diverse backgrounds – without considering how structural change may engage the other dimensions of campus climate, problems may arise (Milem, 2001; Ritter, 2014; Roth, 2015a, 2015b). However,

while an increase in campus diversity may raise issues of intergroup relations, there is little doubt diversity is both important and desired and with globalization, unavoidable (Astin, 1993; Bowman, 2010b; Chang, 1999, 2010; Denson, 2009; Gurin, 2004; Locks, Hurtado, Bowman, & Oseguera, 2008).

Rovai, Gallien Jr. and Wighting (2005) assessed cultural, communication and learning style characteristics and the conditions and practices at PWIs to show norms were inconsistent with learning and communication styles practiced by African Americans. While persistence of the achievement gap between students of color and white students remains to some degree a mystery when objectively approached (Gould, 1996), there are both cultural and classroom explanations which further our understanding of this continued issue (Gay, 2000; Howard, 2003a, 2003b; Howard, 2010; Howard, 2008; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Milner, 2004).

One example within the cultural realm is the devastating effect the Reagan Administration had on black inner-city communities through its social policies, which rolled back much of the Johnson-era *Great Society* programs to ameliorate centuries of racial injustice (Pattillo-McCoy, 1999). At the same time, groundwork was laid for an assault on Affirmative Action efforts aimed at leveling the playing field, particularly in relation to higher education access (Gratz v. Bollinger 539 U.S. 244, 2003; Grutter v. Bollinger (02-241) 539 U.S. 306, 2003).

In the classroom context, many black students who persist at PWI campuses show a marked decrease in performance from their high school experiences beyond what might be expected from adjustment to college-level work (Allen, 1985). While all students attending college must adjust to institutional culture in its various forms, classroom culture at PWIs in the U.S. is often incongruent with the culture and learning styles of many African-American students

who may have been raised and educated in predominantly-black communities and may have limited exposure or contact with whites (Carter, 2006; Fordham, 1986; Harper, 2006; Kozol, 2005; Rovai, 2005). Students of color may blame themselves for their apparent lack of understanding in classrooms and can develop hostility toward the teaching environment (Hale-Benson, 1986). In most cases, if black students fail to complete their degree, it is usually for reasons which have little or nothing to do with innate ability (Allen, 1985).

However, even when black males have earned their place on college campuses through academic rigor, and conform to campus culture in terms of dress, speech, and behavior, they still experience hyper surveillance by campus and local police, are not afforded the same access to campus and surrounding spaces, and encounter questioning *micro aggressions* as to whether they truly belong (Smith, 2007).

Further, the transition from high school to college is both challenging and more complex than previously understood (Nguyen, 2003). An essential component to transitioning to college and new social and academic environments is a level of comfort and confidence to successfully compete (Cuyjet, 2006; Steele, 2010). Black males have the added burden of experiencing and navigating the campus racial climate (Hurtado, 2000; Ritter, 2013, 2014; Solórzano, 2002; Teranishi, 2008). What potentially makes these navigations difficult is black males shoulder the burden of two negative social identities: one as a person of color, and the other more specifically as a black male (Smith, 2007). Both identities place black males at risk for stereotyping and marginalization (Steele, 1997, 2010), racial micro aggressions (Solórzano, 2002, 2000; Sue, 2007), and ultimately racial battle fatigue (Smith, 2007, 2011). While black males likely have encountered raced and gendered experiences throughout the education pipeline, these

accumulated experiences can be especially detrimental to college achievement and persistence (Smith, 2007).

Campus climate issues adversely affect all students because of their long-term effects on race relations in the larger society. Solórzano et al. (2000), among others (see Chang, 2005; Chang, 2010; Hurtado, 1992; Hurtado, 2000, 1998; Locks, Hurtado, Bowman, & Oseguera, 2008), examined campus racial climate and its implications for understanding college access, persistence, transfer and graduation. In addition, substantial research shows a sense of acceptance of difference is tantamount to a positive learning environment (Cuyjet, 2006; Hurtado, 1992, 2000, 1998). Yet, exposure to these potentially positive outcomes may have significant cost for black males (Smith, 2007, 2011). Black males are often seen as *being out of place* in campus and public spaces, and experience increased surveillance and policing (Davis, 1997; Smith, 2007; Wu, 2005). This hyper vigilance has social (Sheridan, 2006; Sidanius, 1991), psychological (Pierce, 1974; Spencer, 1997), and physical repercussions (Antonovsky, 1979; Smith, 2011; Zajacova, 2005). The resulting racial battle fatigue (Smith, 2007, 2011), coupled with a threat in the air (Steele, 1997, 2010), and perceptions by others based on media representations of likely black male criminality (Bjornstrom, 2010; Gilliam, 2000; Ritter, 2014; Roth, 2015b), pose significant obstacles to black male academic success.

But these impediments to academic growth and inclusion do not only affect black males. An incident at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) Law School, where less than 40 of its 1,100-member student body are black, demonstrated women of color also are targets of racism, micro aggressions, and discomfort from the perception by others they do not belong (Byng, 2014; Hing, 2014). Still other groups, such as East Asian international students, also may

suffer from adverse stereotypes (Ritter, 2013), and these experiences can have effects well beyond individual discomfort.

Studies within the U.S. have shown white students (68%) often think their universities are supportive of minority students, while only 28% of African-American and Latino students consider their campuses supportive (Rankin, 2005). This perceptual disparity along racial lines may be attributed to differential experiences of white students who may have had less exposure to students of color prior to college (Radloff, 2003), while minority students have more than likely already encountered racism (Tatum, 1997). Too, racial prejudice among administrators also influences whether students attempt to formally address campus racism, especially among African Americans (Gilliard, 1996; Tanaka, 2007). But perceptions of discrimination are not limited to students of color. White students' college persistence also can be influenced by negative racial campus climates (Nora, 1996). Perceptions of discrimination affect all students, just as increased diversity has benefits for all students (Chang, 2005; Chang, 2010). Therefore, it is incumbent on institutions to make extraordinary efforts to create a campus climate that is fair, tolerant, and peaceful (Hurtado, 1998).

All too often, universities do not have programs in place to generate cross-racial interactions, and these interactions, if and when they do occur, do so by happenstance (Hurtado, 1998; Pascarella, 2005). White students who have had limited social interaction with students of different racial backgrounds are less likely to have positive attitudes about or to support multicultural campus efforts (Globetti, 1993). Conversely, white students who attend diversity workshops or interact with a mix of racially diverse students, are more likely to value racial tolerance (Milem, 1998).

Beyond these enriching attributes of positive campus climate, studies also show

interaction with diverse student groups has positive outcomes for retention, satisfaction with college, and intellectual development (Chang, 1996, 2010). In deciding the outcome of *Grutter v. Bollinger* (Grutter v. Bollinger (02-241) 539 U.S. 306, 2003), a case challenging Affirmative Action practices at the University of Michigan Law School, Supreme Court Justice Sandra Day O'Connor cited a "compelling interest" in assuring the diversity of law schools since many future leaders are derived from law schools. There appears to be no doubt campus climate and diversity lead to a variety of positive outcomes (Chang, 2010; Denson, 2009; Herzog, 2010; Hurtado, 1999; Zuniga, 2005).

You have to be an athlete, right? Racial micro aggressions (Constantine, 2007; Solórzano, 2002, 2000; Sue, 2007) can be unconscious, subtle, yet pervasive forms of racism that have been understudied. They can be used to scaffold racist beliefs, which Marable (1992) described as a "system of ignorance, exploitation, and power used to oppress African Americans, Latinos, Asians, Pacific Americans, American Indians and other people on the basis of ethnicity, culture, mannerism and color" (p. 5).

These micro aggressions usually are brief, commonplace daily slights in language, behavior or environment that, whether intentional or no, communicate hostile, derogatory or other insult toward people of color (Sue, 2007). Perpetrators of these racial indignities often are unaware of their communication slights when engaging in communication with people of color (Sue, 2007).

Pierce (1974) described how African Americans and other people of color live in a mundane extreme environment, where subtle racism and oppression are constant, ubiquitous and ordinary daily encounters. Two decades later, President Clinton's Race Advisory Board reported racism is one of the most divisive forces in our society and is premised on racial legacies that

continue to shape current practices and policies (Advisory Board to the President's Initiative on Race, 1998; Sue, 2007). The board concluded racial inequities are so normalized in U.S. society they are nearly invisible, and most White Americans are unaware of the privileges they enjoy, or how their actions and attitudes unintentionally discriminate against others (Advisory Board to the President's Initiative on Race, 1998; Sue, 2007).

Solórzano et. al (2002) expanded Pierce's description of micro aggressions and relabeled them Mundane Extreme Environmental Stress (MEES): mundane in that they are daily recurring incidents, and almost taken for granted; extreme, in terms of their impact on how those targeted perceive themselves, behave and relate to others; environmental because they are environmentally situated, produced and reified; stress, because the outcomes have impact, are distracting, and consume energy.

Sue et al. (2007) created a taxonomy of racial micro aggressions in everyday life based on a review of the social psychological literature and numerous personal narratives of therapists, both white and those of color, identifying three forms of micro aggressions: micro assault, micro insult and micro invalidation.

The power of these racial micro aggressions is they can exist in situations and environments where overt racism is not permitted (Solórzano, 2000; Sue, 2005). Typically, it is in subtle and covert ways racism manifests itself, and these seemingly innocuous forms of racist behavior are micro aggressions (Solórzano, 2000). While Pierce (1974) asserted these mini-assaults may seem harmless, a lifetime accumulation of micro aggressions can have deleterious health effects. Further, black males not only experience racial micro aggressions, but also experience racial macro aggressions (Smith, 2007), often as the result of highly publicized and racially charged traumatic events, including the televised deaths or news accounts of Oscar Grant

(Egelko, 2013), Michael Brown (Clarke, 2014), Trayvon Martin (Alvarez, 2013) and Eric Garner (Medical Examiner Rules Eric Garner's Death a Homicide, Says He Was Killed by Chokehold, 2014) – all unarmed black men who met violent and premature death at the hands of police or other security personnel.

Solórzano et al. (2000) also examined how conforming to negative stereotypes might be enough to undermine African-American students' performance. The study investigated linkages between racial stereotypes, cumulative racial micro aggressions, campus racial climate, and academic performance, finding racial micro aggressions have real consequences, resulting in black students struggling with self-doubt, frustration, and isolation (Solórzano, 2000). So, even when black males have competed successfully to attend college, not only must they maintain good academic standing, as do all students, but they must do so while negotiating near-constant negative perceptions of themselves and their group of origin by others (Bjornstrom, 2010; Ritter, 2014; Roth, 2015b; Steele, 2010). In this regard, racism is a systemic, powerful and ubiquitous form of pain and stress in the lives of black men (Feagin, 2006). This added burden likely has implications for life opportunities and perceptions of those opportunities (Smith, 2007, 2011).

Back to the past. Analyzing some 4,400 U.S. institutions of higher education, Carnevale and Strohl (2013) found racial stratification permeated these two- and four-year colleges and universities. Also striking was the growing polarization in the nation's most selective institutions and its least selective open-access schools. White and Asian students concentrate in the nation's 468 best-funded and selective four-year institutions while African-American and Hispanic students increasingly concentrate in the least-funded, less selective two- and four-year colleges and universities, resulting in a dual system of racially separate and unequal higher education opportunities, despite greater access to college systems by minority populations (Carnevale,

2013). Further, this systemic polarization is significant because the top 468 schools spend as much as five times per student than do schools with fewer resources, and these greater expenditures translate into higher graduation rates, greater access to graduate school programs, and more lucrative outcomes in the labor market (Carnevale, 2013).

In effect, wealthy white students and prestige-seeking colleges and universities are ascending to the top tiers of selectivity while minority students, often regardless of capability and GPA, are filling low-tuition, less selective two- and four-year schools, resulting in higher spending per student at the selective schools and overcrowding and reduced resources at less selective schools (Carnevale, 2013). The outcome is a bifurcated U.S. system of higher education that systematically reproduces white racial privilege across generations (Carnevale, 2013; McDermott, 2013; McIntosh, 2008).

Additionally, Teranishi (2008) found a decrease in admission attempts to The University of California by African Americans in the wake of passage of Proposition 209, a state constitutional initiative to eliminate what it referred to as discriminatory practices, such as Affirmative Action (Proposition 209: Prohibition against Discrimination or Preferential Treatment by State and Other Public Entities: Initiative Constitutional Amendment, 1996). Within one year of the passage of the initiative, which received 54% of votes cast, black first-time freshman enrollment dropped 43% at UCLA, and 38% at The University of California, Berkeley (UCB) (Teranishi, 2008). It wasn't that students were opting out of college, but they were making choices associated with where they perceived they were more welcomed. In the two years following the passage of Proposition 209, black student applications to California private colleges and universities rose by 27% (Teranishi, 2008). Beattie (2002) and others (see John, 2005; Light, 2002) have asserted students make rational decisions based on costs and

returns. Teranishi's (2008) study challenged the econometric model of college choice with regard to African American college going, at least in California and at a specific time, in that students qualified to attend UC were selecting higher-cost private schools in place of California's flagship university system based on perceived campus climate issues. These perceptions of an unwelcoming environment in an already stressful process of college choice caused some students to struggle with feelings of self-doubt and frustration, and affirmed earlier findings (see Allen, 1998; Freeman, 1997) that the college choice process for black students includes an additional burden of stress associated with racism that can alter aspirations, choices and plans for the future (Teranishi, 2008).

These are just some of the differential circumstances black males encounter and must negotiate to and through college. The review now turns to differential law enforcement along racial lines.

The Constitutional Right to Discriminate

Since the election of President Reagan in 1980, a significant shift in federal drug policy took hold, characterizing drug use and drug sales as among America's gravest social problems. At the time Reagan undertook this campaign, less than 2% of Americans felt drug use was one of the most important issues facing the nation (Alexander, 2010). However, the lethal drug overdose of University of Maryland basketball star, Len Bias, just days after he signed an NBA contract with the Boston Celtics, and the ensuing national media frenzy erroneously identifying crack cocaine as the drug that killed him, were key to the passage of The Anti-Drug Abuse Act of 1986 (The Anti-Drug Abuse Act of 1986, 1986; Vagins, 2006). Once the act was passed, federal law enforcement agency budgets soared almost overnight (Alexander, 2010). Sentences for drug convictions were lengthened (The Anti-Drug Abuse Act of 1986, 1986), and *three strike*

laws were passed in some two dozen states, including California, resulting in repeat offenders, despite the severity of their crimes, being sentenced to 25-years to life after *any* third conviction (Three Strikes Basics, 2013). Coincidentally, what we refer to today as the for-profit prison industry – prisons owned and operated by stock-traded, private companies that contract with state and federal governments to house convicted felons –, also emerged at this time (Shapiro, 2011).

There can be little doubt the practice of racial profiling (Durlauf, 2006; Rose, 2002; Wilkins, 2008; Williams, 2008; Wu, 2005) by police is likely responsible to some extent for the disproportionate representation of black men in the California penal system for non-violent drug crimes. The crux of racial profiling is the apparent global acceptance that – at least before September 11, 2001 – African Americans and Latinos were more likely to commit crime in general, and to commit particular crimes, than other racial or ethnic groups (Gross, 2002b). Racial profiling, on its face, may seem distantly situated from the academic aspirations of African-American males, but the fact remains young black men encounter more frequent traffic stops by police, go to jail more frequently, and their sentences are invariably longer than their white counterparts (Alexander, 2010; Brewer, 2008; Davis, 1997; Kitwana, 2002; Shapiro, 2011; Wheelock, 2006).

This combination of a war on drugs and a national practice by law enforcement of racially profiling those to be investigated for possible crime involvement has culminated in the largest prison population in world history, and a population decidedly male and predominantly black (Alexander, 2010). But current levels of mass incarceration could not have been achieved without the facilitation of the U.S. Supreme Court, which has repeatedly diluted civil protections under the 4th Amendment of the Constitution regarding the reasonableness of police searches,

seizures, and probable cause (Alexander, 2010; Florida v. Bostick 501 U.S. 429, 1991; Ohio v. Robinette, 519 U.S. 33, 1996; United States v. Sokolow, 1989; Whren v. United States 517 U.S. 806, 1996). These examples of Constitutionally sanctioned racism illustrate yet another institutional dimension with implications for the underrepresentation of black men on U.S. university campuses.

The War on Drugs. Beginning in the 1980s, a war on drugs campaign shifted the fight against drug use from one of rehabilitation to punishment (Alexander, 2010; Brewer, 2008; Shapiro, 2011; Wheelock, 2006). The Omnibus Crime Bill of 1984 was labeled the most significant anticrime measure in more than a decade (Taylor Jr., 1984). The bill narrowed the insanity defense, provided for the seizure and forfeiture of assets generated from organized crime and drug operations, and also stiffened sentencing for racketeering, drug trafficking, and the use of a firearm in the commission of a federal crime (Taylor Jr., 1984). The Anti-Drug Abuse Act of 1986 and The Omnibus Anti-Drug Abuse Act of 1988 followed.

The 1986 Anti-Drug Act (The Anti-Drug Abuse Act of 1986, 1986) imposed differential sentencing for possession of the same amounts of crack cocaine and powder cocaine. This differential sentencing was significant: possession of 5 grams of crack cocaine triggered the same prison sentence as possession of 500 grams of powder cocaine (Vagins, 2006). The United States Sentencing Commission, founded in 1984, to develop fair sentencing guidelines, urged Congress on three separate occasions to reconsider the mandatory minimum penalties for crack cocaine, given there is no appreciable difference in chemical composition or physical reaction among users between powder and crack cocaine (Vagins, 2006). To this day, Congress has steadfastly maintained this arbitrary distinction and as a consequence the disparate sentencing

scheme, while apparently denying the similarities of these two forms of the same compound, and instead focusing only on their differences.

The main difference between crack cocaine and powder cocaine is cost (Alexander, 2010; Kitwana, 2002; Vagins, 2006). Due to its availability in smaller amounts and its relatively low cost, crack cocaine is more accessible to poor Americans, including many African Americans, while powder cocaine is more expensive and tends to be consumed by more affluent Americans (Vagins, 2006).

But the Anti-Drug Act of 1986 was only the beginning of what appeared to be a sharp turn toward law and order with differential outcomes based on race. Congress revisited drug enforcement two years later with The Omnibus Anti-Drug Abuse Act of 1988 (The Omnibus Anti-Drug Abuse Act of 1988, 1988), which also was extraordinarily punitive by extending beyond traditional criminal punishment to include new civil penalties for drug offenders (Alexander, 2010). These new civil penalties included zero tolerance prohibitions against drug use or knowledge of drug use in public housing and ordered the eviction of tenants who allowed any form of drug-related activity on or near the premises (Alexander, 2010). Other penalties included the denial of student loans for anyone convicted of *any* drug offense, as well as imposing new mandatory minimum sentences for drug offenses, including a five-year mandatory minimum sentence for simple possession of cocaine base, even without evidence of intent to sell (Alexander, 2010; The Omnibus Anti-Drug Abuse Act of 1988, 1988).

The brunt of these new civil penalties and increased mandatory sentences fell disproportionately on the poor and specifically on poor blacks (Kitwana, 2002; Vagins, 2006). By 2006, 1 in 14 black men was behind bars as compared to 1 in 106 white men (Alexander, 2010). Black men continue to be sentenced to state prison on drug charges at rates 13 times

higher than white men, despite a National Institute on Drug Abuse study reporting white men are more likely to use cocaine, more likely to use crack cocaine, and more likely to use heroin than black men (Alexander, 2010). However, whites are less likely to be prosecuted; when prosecuted, often are acquitted; and when convicted, rarely serve time (Vagins, 2006). Black men, on the other hand, comprise 15% of the country's drug users, 37% of those arrested on drug charges, 59% of those convicted of drug crime, and 74% of those serving drug-related prison sentences (Vagins, 2006).

In 1986, before mandatory minimum sentencing for crack cocaine offenses, the average federal drug sentence for African Americans was 11% higher than for whites (Vagins, 2006). By 1990, the average sentence for a drug conviction was 49% higher (Vagins, 2006). As the federal government focused its drug interdiction more keenly on crack cocaine, a dramatic shift occurred in the overall incarceration trends of African Americans, transforming federal prisons into increasingly dedicated institutions for the African-American community (Vagins, 2006).

In 2000, Human Rights Watch reported at least 7 states where African Americans constituted 80% to 90% of all drug offenders sent to prison (Alexander, 2010). In at least 15 states, African Americans are sentenced to prison on drug charges at rates 20 to 57 times greater than for whites (Alexander, 2010). Largely driven by drug convictions, the number of black women behind bars has increased by 800% since 1986, compared to a 400% increase for women of all races during the same period (Alexander, 2010; Vagins, 2006). Of course, the official explanation for these numbers is crime rates, but rates and patterns of drug crime cannot account for racial disparities in the criminal justice system, given people of all races use and sell drugs at remarkably similar rates (Alexander, 2010). In addition, American crime rates are well below the

international norm, yet incarceration rates in the U.S. are 6 to 10 times greater than those of other industrialized nations (Alexander, 2010).

So, even if *The War on Drugs* was not intended to be racist, it has taken on the specter of a race war, pitting the white majority against the black minority (Hart, 2013; Kitwana, 2002). It also has disproportionately dashed the life opportunities of black men and black women, and has had catastrophic effects on the African-American family (Vagins, 2006).

The first link of injustice. Davis (1997) and Kitwana (2002) have asserted both law enforcement and the criminal justice system are impediments to college going for African-American males. Through police use of racial profiling, black men are overrepresented at every point in the criminal justice system, effectively lowering their numbers for potential representation on the nation's college campuses (Alexander, 2010; Gross, 2002a; Harris, 2003; Risse, 2004; Rose, 2002; Wu, 2005).

The practice of racial profiling has come under attack for a variety of reasons, and is more aptly described as police-initiated action that relies on race, ethnicity or national origin rather than behavior or information about an individual who has been identified as having been engaged in criminal activity (Gross, 2002b; Risse, 2004). This definition contrasts the use of race with the use of other information, and this contrast may suggest racial profiling serves purposes other than upholding the law.

The association of criminal threat with the presence of blacks is nothing new in America though in recent years this perception has taken on iconic proportions (Alvarez, 2013; Bjornstrom, 2010; Chiricos, 2001). This perceived threat is routinely invoked to justify the fatal shooting of a 27-year-old unarmed and autistic black male in downtown Los Angeles (Song, 2010), the shooting death of Michael Brown, a teenager in Ferguson, MO (Kearney, 2014), the

suffocation of Eric Garner, a Long Islander accused of selling untaxed cigarettes (Medical Examiner Rules Eric Garner's Death a Homicide, Says He Was Killed by Chokehold, 2014), in addition to the absence of taxicabs or pizza delivery in predominantly black neighborhoods.

However, Durlauf (2006) argues racial profiling has no identifiable benefits. The difference between an annoying lecture and a speeding ticket versus a police expedition to find drugs is significant when the latter can leave the innocent suspect feeling violated and emotionally undone (Davis, 1997; Durlauf, 2006; Rodriguez, 2012).

African Americans find the most prominent reminder of their second-class citizenship is police (Risse, 2004). Profiling, in part, and perhaps largely, illuminates a racist reality in America, which many scholars see as systemic (Brown, 2003; Feagin, 2006; Kitwana; Oliver, 1995; Omi, 1994; Takaki, 1979; Wilson, 1987; Winant, 2000).

Likewise, Davis (1997) sees the racially-profiled traffic stop as a tear in the fabric of the Constitution, by allowing discriminatory behaviors to infect the criminal justice system. The racially motivated traffic stop is the first link in a chain of "racially lopsided decisions by officials within the criminal justice process" (Davis, 1997, p. 8). The direct impact of these dimensions on academic aspirations among African-American males are understudied but they do hint at a rigorous and pervasive gauntlet of systemic law enforcement and criminal justice practices African-American males must negotiate that are differential to the experiences of college-going males of nearly every other race, with the exception, possibly, of Latinos, whose representation on college campuses is even more dismal than African-American males.

Racially profiled traffic stops codify an abuse of the probable cause standard when race, either consciously or no, imbues the investigatory trajectory (Davis, 1997; Howell, 2004; Persico, 2002; Wilkins, 2008). The Supreme Court has allowed officers to stop and briefly detain

suspects for investigative purposes if the officer's suspicions are supported by "specific and articulable facts" the officer believes indicate either himself or others may be under some form of threat (Terry v. Ohio, 392 U.S. 1, 1968). However, in 1989, the Supreme Court ruled despite individual behaviors or characteristics appearing consistent with innocent behavior, they did not have to be excluded from consideration by police in an overall determination of whether a "totality of circumstances" constituted suspicion or probable cause (United States v. Sokolow, 1989). Davis (1997) points out among other *innocent* characteristics in some criminal profiles are race and ethnicity.

While the abuses caused by racial profiling must be rectified, simply stopping profiling will do little to change the underlying racism in law enforcement and courtroom adjudications across the nation. Neither will it alter attitudes among police that lead to abuse, and which are reproduced and promote forms of racism at other levels of the criminal justice system (Alexander, 2010; Risse, 2004). This is an area where further civil rights protections may need to be enacted; however, in the current racial climate, it is unlikely redress will occur in the near future.

Historic deprivation of freedom. The United States of America imprisons more people, both in absolute and per capita numbers, than any other nation in the world, including Russia, China and Iran (Alexander, 2010; Brewer, 2008; Shapiro, 2011). The growth in America's penal population has been fueled by The War on Drugs, which is the single most significant cause of soaring rates of incarceration, along with mandatory minimum sentences for drug crimes and some other felonies (Alexander, 2010; Brewer, 2008; The Omnibus Anti-Drug Abuse Act of 1988, 1988). Current incarceration rates increasingly deprive historic numbers of Americans of their freedom, over represent men and women of color, and have done little to increase public

safety (Kitwana, 2002; Shapiro, 2011). Roughly 25% of the adult U.S. population have state or federal records, and roughly 7 million adults are under some form of correctional supervision (Brewer, 2008). More than 4 million are either on probation or parole, and another 2 million are currently incarcerated (Alexander, 2010; Brewer, 2008). Approximately one-quarter of the two million prisoners under federal and state authority are serving time for non-violent drug offenses, and approximately 80% to 90% of all drug offenders *sent to prison* are African American (Alexander, 2010).

While male prison populations have tripled in the past 20 years, there also has been significant growth in female populations, representing a tenfold rise in the same period, and African-American women are 3 times more likely than Latinas and 6 times more likely than white women to go to prison (Alexander, 2010; Brewer, 2008). While these levels of incarceration seemingly targeting a single racial group are at the very least unsettling, the resulting damage to the black community as a whole is devastating, even before accounting for what Mauer and Chesney-Lind (2002) refer to as invisible punishments. One such invisible punishment of interest to this study is the disqualification from receiving federal financial aid for the pursuit of higher education if convicted of a drug crime (The Omnibus Anti-Drug Abuse Act of 1988, 1988). When 1 in 3 African-American males between the ages of 20–29 are under some form of supervision by the criminal justice system (Alexander, 2010; Kitwana, 2002; Mauer, 2002), the number of black males available to pursue college going in general, and those able to pay the full cost of a college education without federal assistance, is significantly diminished.

Another distressing aspect of mass incarceration has been its privatization (Hendrichson, 2012; Pelaez, 2013; Shapiro, 2011). Before The War on Drugs, private, for-profit prisons for adults had not existed in the U.S. since experimentation with The Convict Lease System

following the Civil War (Shapiro, 2011). This *substitute for slavery* took hold in the South, and while state and local governments managed the prisons, the inmates were leased out to companies or individuals (Pelaez, 2013; Shapiro, 2011). By the end of the 19th century, states began to outlaw convict leasing, and Congress forbade the leasing of federal prisoners as early as 1887 (Shapiro, 2011). By the turn of the century, virtually all governments worldwide had assumed management of their penal facilities and this remained the standard practice in the U.S. until the 1980s when there was a reemergence and dramatic expansion of private incarceration (Shapiro, 2011). By 1990, private prisons had established a firm foundation as contractors to the U.S. penal system: some 67 private facilities were in operation and held approximately 7,000 prisoners (Alexander, 2010; Shapiro, 2011). However, the real explosion in private incarceration occurred between 1990 and 2009, when the number of people imprisoned in private facilities soared 1,600%, so by 2011, roughly 130,000 inmates and as many as 16,000 civil immigration detainees were held in private, for-profit prisons on any given day (Shapiro, 2011).

This type of continued growth requires a constant influx of new felons and the U.S. Supreme Court seemingly has been a willing participant in the expansion of the prison industrial complex.

The visible hand of the Supreme Court. Since its ruling in *Terry v. Ohio,* in 1968, the Court has successively diluted the right of Americans to be secure against unreasonable searches and seizures by police, as outlined by the 4th Amendment of the Constitution.

Alternately known as the stop and frisk decision, the *Terry* case made it constitutionally permissible to stop, question and frisk a person, even without probable cause, if police had "reasonable articulable suspicion" a person could be involved in criminal activity and was dangerous (Terry v. Ohio, 392 U.S. 1, 1968). However, articulable suspicion is nothing more

than the ability to describe a concern for personal safety by police, and this justification – the mere pronouncement an officer feels endangered – is routinely sufficient to rationalize the use of lethal force, such as in the fatal shooting of 27-year-old unarmed and autistic Steven Eugene Washington in downtown Los Angeles (Song, 2010), the shooting death of Oscar Grant at a San Francisco Bay Area transit stop (Egelko, 2013), and the shooting death of teenager Michael Brown in Ferguson, MO (Clarke, 2014), to name just a few of the growing number of cases across the U.S.

In addition, there are at last four other rulings by the U.S. Supreme Court that have weakened individual protections and have had differential impact on communities of color. In *Florida v. Bostick*, the Court ruled a search and seizure is not illegal if police, without articulable suspicion (Terry v. Ohio, 392 U.S. 1, 1968), ask questions of an individual, check their identification, and then request to search their belongings and the individual consents, as long as the police do not convey compliance is required (Florida v. Bostick 501 U.S. 429, 1991). However, how many individuals, particularly black males, would feel comfortable in saying no to such a search and walking away unless expressly told they could do so?

In *Whren v. United States*, the Court determined the temporary detention of a motorist who the police had probable cause to believe committed a traffic infraction – a turn without signal – was not inconsistent with the 4th Amendment's prohibition against unreasonable search and seizure (Whren v. United States 517 U.S. 806, 1996). During the stop, and a search, police found contraband.

That same year, the Supreme Court heard *Ohio v. Robinette* to answer the question whether a lawfully seized defendant must be told he is free to go before consenting to a voluntary search (Ohio v. Robinette, 519 U.S. 33, 1996). The Court ruled he did not.

In these cases, the Supreme Court ruled anyone could be searched at any time without probable cause if police can articulate the person being searched may pose a threat to police or others. However, this threat does not have to be real and there is no test to determine if police actually feared for their or others' safety outside of their own statement. The Court also upheld regardless of the mindset of police prior to a traffic stop, the stop is legal as long as there is probable cause, however infinitesimal. Further, searches and seizures by police during such stops or other activity are legal as long as a suspect gives consent for the search, and police are under no obligation to inform suspects they can refuse such a search. But even when a suspect refuses a police search, the suspect can still be detained, arrested, and then searched as a result of a warrantless arrest (Alexander, 2010; Atwater v. Lago Vista (99-1408) 532 U.S. 318, 2001).

In *Atwater v. Lago Vista*, a mother of two toddlers, Gail Atwater, was operating a pickup truck in Texas wherein she was not wearing a seatbelt, and neither were her children, ages 3 and 5 (Atwater v. Lago Vista (99-1408) 532 U.S. 318, 2001). Observed by Officer Bart Turek of the City of Lago Vista Police Department, she was pulled over, at which time Turek found Atwater was not in possession of a drivers license or proof of insurance (Atwater v. Lago Vista (99-1408) 532 U.S. 318, 2001). Atwater was handcuffed, taken into custody, booked, and forced to surrender personal belongings, such as eyeglasses and jewelry (Atwater v. Lago Vista (99-1408) 532 U.S. 318, 2001). Afterward, all charges but the seatbelt violation were dropped and she paid a $50 fine (Atwater v. Lago Vista (99-1408) 532 U.S. 318, 2001). The Supreme Court eventually heard the case to determine whether a warrantless arrest for a minor offense, which typically was punishable only by fine, was inconsistent with the 4th Amendment's prohibition against unwarranted search and seizure. The Court determined it wasn't, finding the arresting officer had probable cause since Atwater committed a crime in his presence, and police accordingly are

authorized, though not required, to make custodial arrests without having to balance the costs and benefits or determine if Atwater's arrest was necessary (Atwater v. Lago Vista (99-1408) 532 U.S. 318, 2001).

In all of these cases, with the exception of the *Atwater* case, the suspects were black males. In all cases, the suspects were convicted of felony drug crimes and sentenced to prison. In all of these cases, the convictions hinged on suspect stops, searches and seizures that warranted review by the highest court in the land, and that court dismissed concerns for police over-reach and ruled investigations based almost solely on race or a peace officer's hunch were legal, and did not encroach on citizen rights outlined in the Constitution's 4th Amendment.

While this section of literature examined how the law views black males, and some of the ways these views may have implications for life opportunities, the next body of literature looks at how black males are portrayed in media, and the way others may view them based on those representations.

Media representations: You say tomato, I see avocado

Let's consider mass media as one participant in a dialogue. While the day has not come where a *media text* can alter itself in real time in response to verbal or physical cues from viewers or listeners, mass media are polysemic and capable of carrying and transmitting multiple meanings simultaneously (Condit, 1989; Fiske, 1986). The importance of these various meanings is dependent on where we, as the viewer or listener, are *situated* (Harding, 2004) in relation to the content of the media text, both in terms of its representation of the world and the affinity to us of the world it represents (Bourdieu, 1984; Condit, 1989; Fiske, 1986; McDonough, 1997; Scahill, 1993). So, ultimately, the meaning of an object, person, or thing, is not held intrinsically by the thing, or even in the word that describes the thing, but rather it is our meaning making

that, after awhile, makes the way we view things seem natural, obvious, and inevitable (Hall, 2003b). In this way, a shared language system and codes that govern relationships of translation allow members of a culture to share ideas and concepts that all members agree upon (Hall, 2003b).

For this reason, among possible others, discussions of race and media may need to be approached as ideology, since a main sphere of media operation tends to be the production and transformation of ideologies (Hall, 2011). These ideologies do not consist of separate or isolated concepts but are articulations of a variety of signifiers in a chain of meanings that are uttered and naturalized as personal statements or statements of nature (Hall, 2011, 2003b). However, while ideological statements are made by individuals, the ideologies behind them often are not the product of individual intentions (Hall, 2011). Instead, we formulate intentions within ideologies that pre-date us, as part of the determining circumstances to which we were born and learn to live with until the day we die (Bourdieu, 1977; Hall, 2011; Kellner, 2011). These ideologies tend to disappear as their underpinnings become seeming idioms of common sense. Since race, like gender, stems from nature, racism is one of the most naturalized of all ideologies (Hall, 2011).

Gray (2005b) has argued contemporary media representations of race continue to be shaped discursively by representations which began in the early years of television. However, even Thomas Edison's peepshow nickelodeons enacted stereotypical and negative representations of African Americans as early as the 1890s (Vera, 2003). The formative years of television (1948–1960) and its representations of race and ethnicity served to define the cultural and social terms in which representations of race appeared and continue to appear in media and popular culture (Gray, 2005b). These representations were necessary for the ongoing legitimization of a social order built on racism and white supremacy (Cabrera, 2009; Gray,

2005b; Harris, 1993; Olson, 2008; Vera, 2003).

As a more constructivist view emerged (Patton, 2002), representation took on the role of forging links between people, events and experiences (Hall, 2003b), and in effect became a contested terrain (Kellner, 1995, 2010), where interpretation could be delimited by SES, gender, politick or race (Morley, 1980, 1992, 1993). Bourdieu (1977) examined the addition of power relations and how most of the time, though not all of the time, the message or purpose of both media and other public pedagogies corresponded with the interests of dominant groups and classes. This argument raises interesting questions around the ongoing racial conflict in the U.S., and the often media-driven assessments or declarations of a post-racial America.

Shared meanings through media representations have been said to define who we are, and where we belong, and are constantly being produced and shared in all personal and social interaction in which people take part (Hall, 2003b; Kellner, 1982, 1995, 2011). But these actions and reactions are often constrained by social forces in advance of individuals enacting their own interpretations. Boyd (1997) has claimed hip-hop and "gangsta" culture, as popularized in mass media, may contribute to a greater apathy and alienation among African-American males in a misdirected attempt at reaffirming culture and identity. Too, in media, and particularly in visual media, African-American males are often associated with violence and crime (Gilliam, 2000; Gray, 2005b; Hunt, 1994, 1997) or otherwise caricatured as less than full citizens (Harper, 2009). Characterizations of successful African-American males outside of entertainment and sports are sparse (Jackson, 2005; Jackson & Moore, 2008), and in many media representations, which some researchers have asserted are "coextensive with life itself" (Houston, 1994), African-American males simply aren't there *at all*. What is not held within the media frame tends to lose its "liveness" and ceases to exist in the public eye (Couldry, 2000).

Training Day: "Why the black guy always got to be the evil bastard?" Scholars argue remnants of racism from America's slavery past are contained in many of our produced and exported media representations of American life, as well as in our daily interactions (Bogle, 2003; Everett, 2000; Gray, 2005b; Guerrero, 1993; Smith, 2003b). While many of the overt representations of a two-tiered racist society have fallen out of favor (Chandler, 2013), others persist. One example is the differential representation of violence across race (Gray, 2005b; Hunt, 1997). The circulation of an image across the Internet of the uncovered dead body of 17-year-old Trayvon Martin, an unarmed teenage black male who was fatally shot by a neighborhood watch vigilante, comes to mind (Alvarez, 2013). Like front page newspaper accounts of the lynching of black men and women well into the middle of the 20th century (Chandler, 2013), Martin's body was splayed out uncovered on a lawn, his legs and arms akimbo, and his lifeless eyes staring upward into the night (Nyasha, 2013). Representations of dead persons are usually reserved for news items excoriating foreign dictators, or other *evil* tragedies, occurring outside of the U.S., Yet, the lifeless body of a 17-year-old black male was circulated far and wide without remorse, and the associated news accounts told a story of a hoodie-shrouded black man with trace amounts of marijuana in his blood, outside his own neighborhood, likely seeking to cause harm, to righteously rationalize his demise. This example is not an isolated incident. The body of Michael Brown, another black teenager, who was shot by police, was left lying uncovered in the middle of a public street for more than four hours (Clarke, 2014). Brown was represented in media as a huge man, animalistic, who charged at a much smaller peace officer in the last moments of his life. Even the police officer's portrait was taken in such a way to make him appear diminutive in comparison to descriptions of Brown. However, as one publication pointed out, while Brown carried more weight than Officer Darren Wilson,

the two men were the same height, and both equally formidable (Halpern, 2015). Ironically, despite both of these black teens being victims of violence, their media portrayal was one of inciting racial fear (Chiricos, 1997, 2001).

Since media representations are primarily concerned with the production and exchange of meanings, what meanings are we to derive from these media spectacles (Hall, 2003b; Roth, 2015b)? Remember, such meanings, in effect, define who we are, where we belong, and what we believe (Kellner, 1995, 2011). In both the Martin and Brown examples, the shared representations overwhelmingly seem to communicate a blatant disregard for the lives of young black males, and the necessity to take extreme measures to contain them (Chiricos, 1997). These meanings are constantly produced, shared, and reproduced in all personal and social interaction in which people take part (Bourdieu, 1977). Such representations, and the persistence of these representations, suggest an ongoing racial project in the U.S. that overwhelmingly favors whites over blacks (Harris, 1993; Olson, 2008), and this project is indefatigably supported by media representations that pit people against one another, based solely on the superficial difference of skin pigment (Hunt, 2005). Clearly, if the message conveyed in these representations is the lack of value of young black lives, then aren't we also likely to disregard the importance of their education, and any opportunities that education might afford him?

A single portrait for every story. From its inception in the 1890s, with the advent of peep show nickelodeons, commercial U.S. media has sought to portray African Americans in subservient social roles (Guerrero, 1993). D.W. Griffith's, *The Birth of a Nation* (1915), is generally viewed as the first U.S. feature-length film and its representations of African Americans the template for the construction of a variety of stereotypes, including the *Tom*, the *Coon*, the *Tragic Mulatto*, the *Mammy* and the *Brutal Black Buck* (Bogle, 2003). But some of

these stereotypes already were in use in the shorter films of a nascent film industry. The *Tom* was introduced in Edwin S. Porter's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (Musser, 1979; Porter, 1903), a 13 minute film version of the Harriet Beecher Stowe novel, and was the preferred type of black character. Porter's *Tom* was one of many accommodating and socially acceptable black representations, where no matter what the circumstances, even after a lashing, the *Tom* character remained loyal to his master (Bogle, 2003). The *Coons*, on the other hand, were buffoons and in 1905 were portrayed as stumbling and stuttering newlyweds in *Wooing and Wedding of a Coon* (Bogle, 2003). The *Coon* stereotype evolved into more blatantly degrading stereotypes, such as "those unreliable, crazy, lazy subhuman creatures good for nothing more than eating watermelons, stealing chickens, shooting crap, or butchering the English language" (Bogle, 2001, p. 8). The *Tragic Mulatto* is seen as early as 1912 in *The Debt,* the story of a southern slave owner whose black mistress bears his child at the same time his wife gives birth (Bogle, 2003). *The Mammy* makes her debut in 1914 (Bogle, 2001). This often handkerchief-headed *Aunt Jemima* character came to be the dominant representation of black women onscreen and was made iconic by Hattie McDaniel's Academy Award winning performance as *Mammy* in *Gone with the Wind* (Fleming, 1939). But it was Griffith who defined the Brutal Black Buck for film audiences, and this character was always big, bad, oversexed, prone to violence, and savage (Bogle, 2001).

Hollywood has produced more than 70 plantation genre films, all of which more or less perpetuated a mythic and idyllic South, with exaggerated representations of blackness similar to those depicted in *The Birth of a Nation* (Guerrero, 1993). It wasn't until the release of *Mandingo* (Fleischer, 1975), moviegoers saw America's slavery past on the big screen from the slave's point of view. *Mandingo* opened on the buying and selling of human beings, essential to the existence of the slave trade, but which was rarely, if ever, a part of earlier plantation narratives.

The film also dispelled the myth of a slave's undying devotion to their master, and their disdain for freedom (Guerrero, 1993). *Mandingo* further challenged the white supremacist notion of the purity and sanctity of white womanhood so prominently displayed in the plantation genre films through portraying explicit interracial sex scenes (Fleischer, 1975; Guerrero, 1993). It was only in 1967 movie audiences first glimpsed an interracial kiss in *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner* (Kramer, 1967), and that glimpse was through the rearview mirror of a taxicab, with the black driver disdainfully staring off into the distance.

Unfortunately, this shift in perspective was not motivated by any efforts to promote a more positive representation of African Americans or even a more accurate depiction of history in American film. The film industry was near bankruptcy in the 1970s and films like *Mandingo* came to be known as Blaxploitation films, an effort by Hollywood producers to bolster sagging inner city tickets sales by producing films for a black urban audience (Guerrero, 1993). However, despite these efforts to downplay long-depicted racial hierarchies in American entertainment, Hollywood found new ways to represent blackness and its other than first-class status in more nuanced ways. *Gone with the Wind* (Fleming, 1939) was a significant step in muting overt racism on the silver screen and Hollywood became increasingly adept at maintaining a white supremacist lens without depicting plantation narratives or burning crosses on lawns.

Of Lott's (2003) four eras of black cinema, from early silent films (1890 – 1920), early soundies and race films (1920 – 1945), postwar problem films (1945 – 1960) and contemporary films, the contemporary era is notable for its more nuanced theatrical racism, and one quite remarkable example is the Tony Scott film, *True Romance* (Scott, 1993). Dennis Hopper, a white retired policeman turned security guard, is interrogated by a white Sicilian mob boss,

Christopher Walken, regarding the whereabouts of Hopper's white son, Christian Slater, who has stolen drugs from Walken (Scott, 1993). There isn't a black person in the frame and yet during the interrogation, when Hopper realizes he must give up his son or die, he begins his own racial project in which he reminds Walken dark-skinned Spanish Moors conquered Sicily, intermarried with Sicilians, and therefore Walken was a *nigger* because his grandmother laid down with *niggers* (Scott, 1993). Both men heartily and exaggeratedly laugh at Hopper's audacious speech and, still laughing, Walken turns to an assistant, whispering a request, then returns to Hopper, produces a pistol, and shoots him dead (Scott, 1993). Here, the message conveyed is blackness is undesired and worth killing over if openly applied to one's character. Similar to *Gone with the Wind* and its more refined use of Griffith's stereotypes, *True Romance* is yet another benchmark in Hollywood's ability to perfect the art of suggestion (Guerrero, 1993), wherein representations of blackness are coded in such ways they don't require discussion or even being seen, and yet they are still signified (Hall, 2003b).

Still, the film industry is not the only media outlet where this ongoing racially divisive imagery is represented. The news industry, with its focus on sensational stories, has been instrumental in the reproduction of racial stereotypes and creating fear.

"I didn't do it," he says, and he throws up his hands. Visual media, such as television, film, online parodies and other representations, arguably are the principal window from which most world citizens develop their perceptions of each other and the world in general (Blackman, 1977). America is a global leader in the production and export of media, generating more than one-third of nearly $90 billion in global motion picture revenue annually (PwC, 2015; Theatrical Market Statistics, 2011). The representations of the world produced by these exports often define, supplant or augment global citizens' perceptions of the U.S. beyond personal experience,

or the experiences of family and friends (Cornbleth, 2002; Hunt, 2011; Ritter, 2013, 2014; Rodriguez, 2012; Roth, 2015b).

In the U.S., due to competition for viewership, local news organizations have focused on an action news format, which centralizes attention on crime, accounting for as much as 75% of all news coverage in some cities (Bjornstrom, 2010; Gilliam, 2000; Henkin, 2008). These local images are often transmitted worldwide due to global fascination with their sensationalized content (Bjornstrom, 2010; Dixon, 2003; Roth, 2015b). Given the visuality of these media, and the importance of a suspect in the standard crime news *script*, reportage or filmic depictions of crime stories often are imbued with racial imagery. Of the two essential elements of crime news – degree of violence and the presence of a suspect –, Gilliam (2000) found it was the presence of a suspect that had more influence on public opinion, and served to substantiate negative attitudes about racial minorities, since African Americans comprised the largest percentage of minority suspects depicted in news media despite not having committed the majority of violent crime (Alexander, 2010).

Similarly, Hunt (1997) attempted to bridge critical media studies and race by deploying both qualitative and quantitative methods in the analysis of how differently *raced* groups interpreted media coverage of the 1992 Los Angeles riots ("Outrage at Verdicts Sweeps L.A.," 1992). The three groups comprised five Hispanic, five black, and five white participants. Hunt (1997) found the black group generated the greatest opposition to the news account's assumptions, while Latinos weakly and whites strongly supported the hegemonic (Gramsci, 1971) assumptions of the news representations. Further, Latinos and whites were opposed to the looting and arson and overwhelmingly supported the arrest of participants. Blacks, on the other hand, were ambivalent to these issues (Merelman, 1998).

Media act as a kind of surrogate for personal contact, and supply people with information they use to assess and judge their social worlds (Blackman, 1977). Amid the specter of *bad news*, or negative portrayals of others, Blackman, Hornstein, Divine, O'Neill, Steil and Tucker (1977) found individuals discriminated both perceptually and behaviorally in favor of others who were presented as similar to them. Hornstein (1976) reported good news causes the boundaries of *we* to expand and individuals are less likely to gratuitously judge others as *they*. Both this outward looking aspect of the individual as social actuary (Blackman, 1977) and the inward looking one of altering thoughts and behaviors based on what we perceive about ourselves from media (Kellner, 2011) may have implications for the college aspirations of African-American males, given their more-often-than-not negative portrayal or typical absence from positive media representations.

Them and us. Given this back-story, the standard U.S. crime news script is "no mere journalistic device; instead it is a powerful filter for observing daily events" (Gilliam, 2000, p. 564). Further, the predilection to consume sensational examples of criminal human experience also permeate entertainment media, the largest of America's media exports (PwC, 2015; Theatrical Market Statistics, 2011). While there are positive examples of men of color in blockbuster American films – the like of Will Smith and his son, Jaden Smith, Denzel Washington, Morgan Freeman, Danny Glover, Cuba Gooding, Jr., Sidney Poitier, Laurence Fishburne, and Samuel L. Jackson, among others – there are an equal or greater number of roles portraying black men as gangsters, thugs, drug dealers, pimps and murderers. In fact, many of the actors listed for playing positive roles can be and often still are cast in films as people caught up in serious wrongdoing. Morgan Freeman as the character, "Red", a convicted murderer serving a life sentence behind bars in *The Shawshank Redemption* (King, 1994), is just one such

example. Wesley Snipes as a fugitive from alleged corrupt government in *U.S. Marshalls* is another (Baird, 1998). *Enemy of the State* (Scott, 1998b), starring Will Smith as an attorney targeted by a corrupt federal bureaucrat, is yet another. These three examples also demonstrate another trend: portraying black males as if they are on *the other side*, altogether different, and in opposition to the rest of us, and *our* established way of life, even when our way of life is shown to be perverse and corrupt.

Part of the reason for this deficit portrayal of black males in media is due to racial stereotypes that grew from a social construct of race (Feagin, 2006; Mills, 1997; Winant, 2000) that was embraced from the outset by a nascent film industry (Guerrero, 1993; Vera, 2003). Still another reason for this deficit portrayal, in particular, of black males, is a general neglect to view black men outside of established stereotypes, as a heterogeneous group of individuals (Celious, 2001; Harper, 2008). Both Nelson (2003) and Gatewood (2000) have chronicled known heterogeneity among African Americans since the formation of the United States. So, in order for these negative representations and stereotypes to remain prescient, their reification is required by and through institutional and cultural agents, the latter including mass media. This apparent black-white racial framework provides a way to assign social meaning to otherwise arbitrary physical differences based on the surface of the human body, such as skin color and curly hair (Hunt, 2005). For black men, these physical features have been used to signify a form of social threat (Bjornstrom, 2010; Chiricos, 2001; Howell, 2004), resulting in their hyper surveillance by law enforcement and their being feared by others in public spaces (Smith, 2007).

The Televisual Teacher. Mass media as an education system has been under study for some time. Postman (1979) contrasted television and traditional education, identifying the latter as one of the few remaining information systems organized around pre-electronic patterns of

communication. Letter writing, smoke signals and semaphore are other examples of pre-electronic information systems. Their modern counterparts, mass media, and in particular televisual media, while seen as information systems, generally are not viewed as *curriculum*. But there is little doubt that, like education, media has a way of organizing time and space; encoding messages in a variety of forms for delivery at various times and rates of speed; defining knowledge; making assumptions about what learning is and how it works; and having its own special requirements for attention (Postman, 1979; Poyntz, 2006; Stack, 2006; Tobolowsky, 2001, 2006; Vines, 2009). hooks (2009) adds cinema and other visual representations assume a pedagogical role, and even though audiences have the ability to pick and choose, there are "certain *received* messages that are rarely mediated by the will of the audience" (pp. 3-4).

Viewed this way, televisual media is not only a curriculum but constitutes the major education enterprise in the U.S. today (Horn, 2003; Postman, 1979; Tobolowsky, 2001, 2006). If we assume the average student attends approximately 2,340 days of school over a 13-year period, totaling some 11,500 hours of instruction, there are only two other activities that occupy more time in a student's life, and those are sleeping and consuming media (Postman, 1979). While levels of media consumption have increased since Postman's study, he estimated students, ages 5 to 18, consumed approximately 15,000 hours of television alone, excluding other mass media forms, such as cinema, and radio, making media consumption a full one-third more in terms of time commitment than time spent in school. Some 20 years later, Tobolowsky (2001) found children consuming more than 16,000 hours of television by age 11, roughly 28 hours per week since birth. While these numbers alone are significant, imagine the inclusion of cinema, the Internet in all its forms, in addition to motion billboards and other mobile media available today. The time exposed to and learning from media sources significantly eclipses the time associated

with in-class formal curriculum. Curriculum, in this context, is a "specially constructed information system whose purpose, in its totality, is to influence, teach, train, or otherwise cultivate the mind and character of our youth" (Postman, 1979, p. 163). Popular culture itself has been referred to as a "bizarre alternative curriculum" (Masterman, 2001). Given these assessments, what are the implications for sense- and decision- making practices for current and future student groups associated with this ever-increasing array and consumption of media forms?

Limited research has shown popular media has implications for student expectations and perceptions of higher education. Tobolowsky (2001) conducted a qualitative study including content analysis of prime-time television programming portraying college going themes, and interviews with 20 10th grade Latinas to examine preconceptions of college going experiences and how television viewing may have contributed to those perceptions. The study was supported by Goffman's *Frame Analysis* (1974) and Williams' *The Impact of Television: A Natural Experiment in Three Communities* (1986).

Goffman (1974) theorized each of us maintains a frame of reference and it is through this frame we make meaning of the world around us. These frames are self constructed, and help us to interpret what we see and hear, while at the same time reflecting our own views (Goffman, 1990; Tobolowsky, 2001). Further, these frames illustrate how we accept or reject televisual representations based on our attitudes and beliefs (Hall, 1981; Kellner, 1982, 1995, 2011), and how televisual representations in turn contribute to the formation of our attitudes and beliefs (Gray, 2005a, 2005b; Hunt, 1994; Ritter, 2014; Tobolowsky, 2001). Finally, Goffman (1974, 1990) argued these frames are developed early in life which makes difficult pinpointing how attitudes and beliefs develop.

Williams (1986) studied a town in British Columbia that received its first television transmission in the mid-1970s, and used as comparison two nearby towns that had received television transmission 7 years and 15 years earlier (Tobolowsky, 2001). Williams' study is significant for a couple of reasons: 1) It is perhaps the only study where a community was examined before and after access to television programming, and 2) Williams suggests television helps to shape *schemata* among audiences that serve as frames of reference which individuals use to process new information (Blackman, 1977; Tobolowsky, 2001). From this foundation, Tobolowsky (2001) argued people interpret new information by comparing it to previously-held beliefs, and these beliefs are in part shaped by media. Further, she argued the mere televisual appearance of a relationship, viewpoint, or type of action, gives that representation a kind of stamp of approval, and establishes a norm from which the public measures itself against the world (Bjornstrom, 2010; Blackman, 1977; Tobolowsky, 2001). These schemata, like stereotypes, are difficult to change because they operate mostly unconsciously, and become more deeply entrenched as images, messages, or points of view are stacked one upon another in our understanding of the world (Tobolowsky, 2001).

While Tobolowsky (2001) found the level of student commitment to college going, in addition to the availability of other information resources, tended to mute or increase students' reliance on media images, she also found a number of ways televisual representations of college had influence on student expectations of college. Further, the study found links between students' college expectations and their recollections of televisual representations of college going. These images may have served to reinforce already-held views, or helped to inform views, but televisual representations tended to contribute to student perceptions of the college experience (Tobolowsky, 2001).

In addition, Stack (2006) sees media as "public pedagogies" to which researchers and educators need to pay closer attention. Echoing Postman and Tobolowsky, Stack (2006) affirmed public pedagogies might be surpassing formal pedagogies of schooling in terms of how we form citizens. Stack (2006) also noted there has been a massive increase in the amount of media directed at children in the past 20 years. In 1983, advertising and marketing aimed at young people totaled about $100 million annually in the U.S., but by 1997 the total spent on advertising to children and young people topped $12 billion (Stack, 2006). As a result, students inundated by commercial messages, both in school and at home, learn citizenship depends less on understanding and participating in democracy than it does on consumerism (Stack, 2006). But while the public debate has focused primarily on the effects of media on children and young people, what's left largely uninterrogated is how media influences adult perceptions of young people, particularly young people of color (Jackson, 2005; Stack, 2006). Youth crime and disengagement dominate mainstream media (Jackson, 2008; Kitwana, 2002), while youth participation in civil society barely gets mentioned, or the potential reasons why kids develop cynicism toward politics and social policies that affect their daily lives (Stack, 2006).

In general, most of us seem disinterested in or unwilling to accept media influence as one of the ways we come to know others and ourselves (Kellner, 1995, 2011; Stack, 2006). We like to believe we develop and hold our own opinions, and critically weigh what we see and hear; but media are the linchpin through which our society and culture are created (Couldry, 2003), maintained (Stack, 2006), and even contested (Kellner, 1982, 2010).

Did you see that? I don't believe that. Ideological influence is crucial in the maintenance of social control and power in societies today (Lill, 2011). Antonio Gramsci, the Italian intellectual and dissident, has been credited with the concept of hegemony, which he

expanded from materialist Marxist theory (Lill, 2011). Gramsci's inspiration for the notion of hegemony is derived from a passage of Marx and Engel's *The German Ideology*: "The ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas" (Erickson, 2004). Hegemony is a learned phenomenon and akin in its socialization explanation to Bourdieu's (1979, 1977) habitus.

These ideologies are validated and strengthened through an interlocking web of information agents distributing taken-for-granted social interactions that infiltrate every aspect of social and cultural moments (Lill, 2011). Support for these taken-for-granted social practices come from a variety of social actors, including schools, business, political organizations and processes, unions, religious groups, and the military, dovetailing seamlessly and ideologically with mass media messages (Lill, 2011).

But hegemony is an incomplete process requiring "renewal and modification through the assertion of power" (Lill, 2011, p. 35). Popular black culture, by definition, is a site of contradiction and contestation (Kellner, 1982, 1995); but despite what forms blackness takes in media – how it is incorporated, deformed, or transmitted –, the repertoires on which it draws – its musicality, production of counter narratives, attention to the vernacular and the local, among other features – have managed to surface in mainstream culture as a discourse that is different than the dominant one (Hall, 2003a; Kitwana, 2005). Further, it is this mark of difference within accepted forms of popular culture that has come to signify the black community, where these traditions have been preserved, and the struggles for their survival have persevered (Hall, 2003a).

But counter-hegemonic responses or actions do not only present in texts. They can be found in communication processes, interpretations, social circulation, and in mass media (Lill, 2011). Lill (2011) uses the appropriation of shopping carts by the homeless to transport belongings and the use by soldiers of gas masks as a delivery system for ingesting marijuana as

examples of reinventing institutional messages to purposes well beyond the creator's intention. These re-expressions of dominant ideologies can assert alternate, contradictory and resistant messages, all of which nibble away at dominant views (Gramsci, 1971; Lill, 2011). Hegemony and other forms of dominant social control fail when the ideology is weaker than accumulated social resistance (Gramsci, 1971). Therefore, the containment of ideas is essential for the maintenance of power and social control in modern societies. But, for many media consumers, these are not daily debates, and require an exposure to the possibility and opportunity to contest dominant visions of social projects. How can media consumers be prepared to contest or rearticulate dominant representations without the understanding of the necessity or ability to do so?

A Window on the World. The media are the primary vehicle through which most of us come to know others and ourselves, and these media representations are embedded in our daily lives and their power naturalized through repetition (Blackman, 1977; Hall, 2011; Stack, 2006). While we can be skeptical and challenge representations, even our skepticism is a process of comparing media narratives rather than experiencing life without them (Kellner, 1995, 2010; Traube, 1996). Education plays a central role in providing individuals with the ability to dissemble every day media narratives in ways that can assist them to become sophisticated citizens rather than merely sophisticated consumers (Stack, 2006). But what is good and bad about media can be attributed in large part to the power of audiences, and the decisions they make and the information they use on which to base their decisions (Couldry, 2000; McChesney, 2004). However, this power to mediate media messages by audiences is limited. The process of choice occurs at the point of consumption, rather than production, which substantially masks the very real *lack* of choice media consumers have, given distributed content is generally determined

at the point of production well in advance of viewers weighing in with their preferences (Masterman, 2001). These characteristics of mainstream media allow the perpetuation of various social inequities through well-maintained media representations.

For these reasons, Kellner (2011), and others (see Mahon, 2000; Morley, 1992; Newman, 2009) argue for a cultural studies approach to media literacy. This critical and multicultural approach provides a myriad of ways to examine a variety of cultural artifacts, from the superstardom of Madonna and Michael Jackson to pornography, TV news, or election irregularities. A cultural studies approach can enable individuals to resist media representations and manipulation and to foster freedom and individuality, assisting them to gain sovereignty over their culture and to struggle for alternative outcomes through political change (Kellner, 2011). Stack (2006) adds media literacy should go beyond inoculation to potential negative media influences to the preparation for understanding and participation in examining media culture. Students and educators need to recognize and understand media representations, such as news, are shaped to fit a particular format, are framed by a particular perspective, and are aimed for consumption by particular audiences (Gans, 2003). In addition, the ratio of information to entertainment in the media sphere has been shifting for some time, blurring the divide between the two (Gans, 2003). So, what prior to 1980 was considered news and quite possibly could be taken at face value was a completely different format than entertainment, with different rules and expectations, both in its presentation and its reception (McChesney, 2004, 2010). These lines, in the meantime, have blurred to the point where a news format is often used for the purpose of entertainment by parodying news practices and forms (O'Neil, 1996).

This type of programmatic blending calls for a critical interrogation of media texts: Who is paying for this spectacle? Who is its intended audience? What does it suggest they do? Who

benefits from their action or inaction? How is race represented? These interrogations should and must be engaged by educators, since education is meant to assist individuals to make sense of their social worlds. The ever-increasing role media consumption plays in our lives (Horn, 2003; Stack, 2006; Tobolowsky, 2001), and the ever-increasing sophistication and potency of media culture and its associated spectacles (Couldry, 2000; Kellner, 1995, 2011; Roth, 2015b), call for a heightened media literacy among citizens, and educators must find ways to integrate and interrogate media representations across disciplines.

SYNTHESIS OF LITERATURE

The literature review began by surveying the long-established explanations why black males are underrepresented on the nation's college and university campuses. These explanations overwhelmingly focused on black male deficits, concluding individual, familial and community shortcomings to explain underrepresentation. Some of these deficits were genetically-ascribed (Herrnstein, 1994; Jencks, 1998), decades after genetic explanations had been debunked. However, these more recent attempts at genetic explanations provided a narrative closely aligned with a conservative political agenda. Even at this early stage, it became clear there were complex aspects to college going by black males, as there is for many students. Yet, as the review of literature developed, it identified unique circumstances differentiating college going among black males, including psychosocial issues associated with ongoing racism, a bright line intersection with law enforcement, and media representations that reinforce long-held biases and stereotypes about black males, crime and violence.

Within the institutional realm, research showed high school graduates are increasingly diverse by race and ethnicity, yet the K-16 pipeline has not changed significantly to accommodate the needs of students with diverse socio-cultural experiences and academic

abilities (Allen, 2009). Hoxby and Avery (2012) found high achieving, low income students of color simply didn't apply to elite schools, despite their qualifications. Lacking sufficient college knowledge (Beattie, 2002; McDonough, 1997), students made choices that were *under matched* with their abilities, resulting in less social mobility upon graduation, if in fact they persisted to graduation (Belman, 1991; Jaeger, 1996).

The dearth of elementary and secondary teachers of color, or culturally relevant curriculum also has had a disengaging effect on students in their early academic years. These findings, coupled with Steele's (1997, 2010) notion of stereotype threat, and its effects over time (Smith, 2011), from the perception of a near-constant evaluation by others as to whether blackness is academically capable, or whether it is perceived merely as a social threat (Chiricos, 1997, 2001), can establish a steep challenge for black males in terms of college going. However, even when black males succeed and achieve elite college admission, they remain under hyper surveillance, and are incessantly questioned as to whether they belong in certain public spaces (Smith, 2007).

These issues and others exposed an intersection between college going among black males and law enforcement (Davis, 1997), since nonviolent misdemeanor crimes can prevent students from receiving federal aid (The Omnibus Anti-Drug Abuse Act of 1988, 1988). Racial profiling, The War on Drugs and minimum mandatory sentencing initiatives have resulted in forms of Constitutional racism substantially contributing to the marginalization of black males, so in many cases, college going may not even be an available option (Harris, 2003).

Still other explanations focus on *gangsta* culture (Rovai, 2005; Smith, 2003a), black men's *cool pose* (Majors, 1992), and the inherent danger pursuing education may have on what has become a kind of social capital across race (hooks, 2004).

Still, these studies do not fully address the unique gauntlet black males encounter to and through college. Many are still silent with regard to ongoing racism and racial inequities due to *de facto* segregation that is the result of limited residential mobility (Massey, 1990), separate and unequal primary and secondary schooling (Kozol, 2005), and the infrequent recommendation of black males for inclusion in Advanced Placement or honors courses (King, 2001).

Further, much of this research has examined black males, college going, and outcomes, in at least three similar ways: 1) Measuring a shortcoming in African-American males without situating that *deficiency* in relation to what has been described as a general decline in performance by males in society (Jackson, 2008; Sax, 2006), 2) concentrating on documenting, and to some degree, justifying the lack of black male success without offering solutions to their education problems (McGuire, 2005), and 3) representing black males in general as a homogeneous group, with little or no allowance for within-group differences, such as SES (Callinicos, 1993; Moses, 2001), skin color (Celious, 2001), or geography of communities of origin, i.e., rural, urban or suburban communities (Harper, 2008).

We further reviewed literature interrogating media representations and their implications for the formation of citizens, and how media mechanisms may develop, reinforce and disseminate long-held racist stereotypes of blacks while simultaneously elevating whites (Gray, 2005b; Guerrero, 1993; Vera, 2003). In addition, we examined whether these invented portrayals incrementally alter personally-held beliefs about oneself or about others (Blackman, 1977; Roth, 2011a). We also reviewed historic media representations of blackness and examined how black males in general are routinely represented negatively, even today. Despite notions of a post-racial society in the Obama era, many of these representations are not positive, and more often

are ambivalent, negative or non-existent in linking African-American males with success in general, outside of professional athletics and entertainment, or with college going specifically.

We also examined the implications of the action news script in television (Gilliam, 2000), interrogated whether mass media, particularly visual media, is a kind of competitive curriculum to formal education (Horn, 2003; Postman, 1979; Tobolowsky, 2001, 2006), and scholarly accounts of these representations as contested terrain, following the work of Gramsci (1971), Hall (1981; 2003b), and Kellner (1982, 1990, 1995, 2010). This prompted an interrogation of media literacy (Horn, 2003; Masterman, 2001; Poyntz, 2006; Semali, 2003; Stack, 2006) and the deconstruction of media representations, both contemporary and historic, to equip individuals and marginalized groups to exercise greater levels of contestation in countering racist, deficit, exotic, or other difference configured into otherness. Together, this review of literature provides a multivariate and more nuanced view of African-American males' trajectory to college and may provide further explanatory power as to why black men remain underrepresented on U.S. college campuses.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK AND THEORY AND METHODS OF STUDY

The review and critique of literature, and the researcher's own experience and insights, have been incorporated into the development of a conceptual framework for the design and conduct of this study. This conceptual framework assisted in focusing the inquiry, and shaping the research process by informing the methodological design and the data collection tools used. This framework also provided the basis for and informed the various iterations of a coding scheme used in interpreting collected data. As such, the framework provided a structure both for reporting the study's findings and guiding the analysis, interpretation and synthesis of these findings.

An Ecological View

Taken together, this research forms an ecological view of the college trajectory available to some African-American males. An ecological view is complex, interdependent and intensely political (Weaver-Hightower, 2008). The concept of ecology has gained acceptance in a number of fields attempting to understand complicated systems, including education (Weaver-Hightower, 2008).

Bronfenbrenner (1977) conceived of an ecological experiment as an investigation of the "progressive accommodation" of a growing human and its environment through a contrast with two or more environmental systems. Following Bronfenbrenner, Renn (2003) applied the ecology model to higher education and multiracial student development, identifying the domains of Person, Place, Context and Time. For purposes of this study, Renn's domains are attractive for

framing an investigation of mass media (context) having implications for college-going (place) trajectories (time) of African-American males (person).

This phenomenological study examined the meaning making of college-going African-American males regarding media representations of blackness and in particular representations of black males by situating that meaning making within an ecological frame to interrogate the array of environmental systems African-American males must navigate en route to and through college. How individuals see, hear, understand and intuitively experience everyday phenomena defines meaning for them (Grbich, 2007). The selection of students already enrolled in college and satisfactorily persisting operationalized three divergent aspects of this study when compared to earlier research.

First, by attaining and maintaining college enrollment, study participants have experience in lived ways to avert obstacles to educational aspirations identified in previous studies, and likely possess valuable skills in navigating social and institutional bias that may have significance for successful academic trajectories of other African-American males.

Second, by approaching the study from an Antideficit Achievement model (Harper, 2010), the focus is on what has worked, and departs from existing literature that repeatedly looks at individual-level deficits rather than structural or institutional ones.

Third, following Celious and Oyserman (2001) and Harper and Nichols (2008), the study acknowledged differences among a similarly raced and heterogeneous group rather than seeking generalizable data, in an attempt to mitigate mass media representations that often portray African-American males as all cut from the same stone.

Anti-deficit Achievement Model

Evaluating data collected from 219 students at 42 colleges in 20 states, Harper (2010)

highlighted institutional agents, policies, programs, and resources that helped black men achieve desired educational outcomes across a range of institutional contexts. By not dwelling on the resources and social capital and pre-college educational privilege some participants lacked, the study devoted energy to understanding how participants acquired information and developed networks. These findings were not insignificant, given 56% of participants were from low-income and working class backgrounds. The focus, then, was on understanding how African-American males perceived their success and the reasons for it rather than adding to the wealth of explanations already acquired as to why many fail.

Based on these findings, Harper (2007) asserted "Attempting to understand how college affects students without asking them…will leave many urgent questions about education effectiveness unanswered." As a result, the current study probed participant perceptions of home, community, prior education and personal attributes they believed helped them to succeed. In other words, the actual spatial and temporal experiences of getting to college, along with the memories, feelings, beliefs, and "multivisual pictures" associated with college going, thereby comprising a holistic view (Grbich, 2007). However, these experiences and perceptions also contained challenges, and success ultimately depended on how participants addressed them.

Within-group Differences

Few previous studies do much to explain within-group differences among African-American males and how these differences impact "experiences, dynamics, relationships, and interactions" (Harper, 2008). In fact, the majority of the reviewed research treats African-American men "as a monolithic or homogeneous group" (Harper, 2008). Harper and Nichols (2008) assert within-group differences resulting from SES, family background, academic experiences and expectations, as well as communities of origin (rural, urban, suburban), all of

which have been only trivially considered in the higher education literature. For this reason, Harper and Nichols (2008) employed a Heterogeneous Race Model (Celious, 2001) to acknowledge how within-group differences and distinctions among individuals of the same race can influence daily interactions, experiences, and perceptions of each other, which may have implications for larger social interactions.

Further, the higher education literature also lacks substantial investigation into how and why some African-American males have been able to navigate these well-documented obstacles and achieve collegiate distinction while others haven't. Harper and Museus (2007) noted researchers have identified racism and stereotypes experienced by African-American males at PWIs (see Bonilla-Silva, 2006; Cabrera, 2009; Feagin, 2006; Harper, 2006; Solórzano, 2000; Winant, 2000; Yosso, 2004); the neutralizing effects of race-specific organizations on these campuses; the benefits of diversity training during orientation for both domestic and international students (Ritter, 2014; Roth, 2015a); and confirmed findings that Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) have consistently provided a more nurturing and outcomes-rich environment for students (see Allen, 2002a; Tobolowsky, 2005). Taking a qualitative approach in this study is less about identifying individual behaviors than it is about identifying individual actions, which carry with them intentions and meanings and may also lead to consequences (Miles, 1994). Some actions may involve impression management, which some individuals may deploy to manage how they want others to see them (Miles, 1994). This likely results in added work for individuals to achieve vivid or ephemeral goals.

Resiliency

Based on the scholarly work of medical sociologist Aaron Antonovsky (1979, 1987) and his interpretation of the *salutogenic* approach to health and illness, McCubbin et al. (1998),

examined the resiliency of African-American families. The salutogenic approach underscores the importance of a sense of coherence (Mattiuzzi, 2007) as a vital ingredient in the worldview of individuals and families in their interpretation of their surroundings and the extent to which their lives are comprehensible, manageable and meaningful (McCubbin, 1998). This sense of coherence supports particular behaviors and other competencies individuals and families rely on under stressful or adverse circumstances (McCubbin, 1998). Much of previous research into African-American families has typically sought to measure them against norms constructed for white families, which likely don't recognize or appreciate the unique strengths and capabilities of African-American families (Herndon, 2004; McCubbin, 1998; Pattillo-McCoy, 1999). For these reasons, the current study sought to examine the degree to which resiliency played a role in study participant's persistence to and through college. While resiliency often is viewed as an individual trait, the resiliency model focuses on the family's relational processes of adaptation and its appraisal of processes associated with ethnicity and culture to facilitate new patterns of functioning while promoting the well-being and development of its members (McCubbin, 1998). Identifying with one's ethnic culture and traditions appears to increase resiliency in individuals and families, reinforcing what anthropologists have suggested is "characteristic of the survivor found in cultures struggling to adapt and endure in the face of domination" (McCubbin, 1998, p. 333).

Similarly, Cavazos et al. (2010) studied 11 Latina/o college students to gain insight into how students developed a sense of resilience. Drawing on the five factors of resilience as identified by McMillan and Reed (1994), Cavazos et al. (2010) found resiliency played an integral role in student achievement and goals, through support and encouragement from parents, intrinsic motivation, an internal locus of control and high self-efficacy. The study employed the

definition of resiliency offered by Hassinger and Plourde (2005) as an ability to address adversity and overcome challenging circumstances.

In summary, the study's conceptual framework recognizes individuals as social actors who move through many and various ecologies that may have implications for life trajectories. Rather than focusing on the upsets or barriers or other impediments of these ecologies, this study sought to identify the methods and mentors that girded successful college trajectories among African-American males. The study also recognized any group is comprised of individuals and while these individuals may share certain characteristics with others in a group, in this case, skin color, there are many distinguishing facets between individuals, including life experience, family relationships, SES, ambition and ability, to name just a few. One particularly distinguishing individual feature of interest to this study is the degree to which personal and familial resiliency played a role in assisting individuals to bounce back after life and school challenges to persist toward college going and degree aspirations.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Figure 3.1 Ecological View of College Going Trajectory

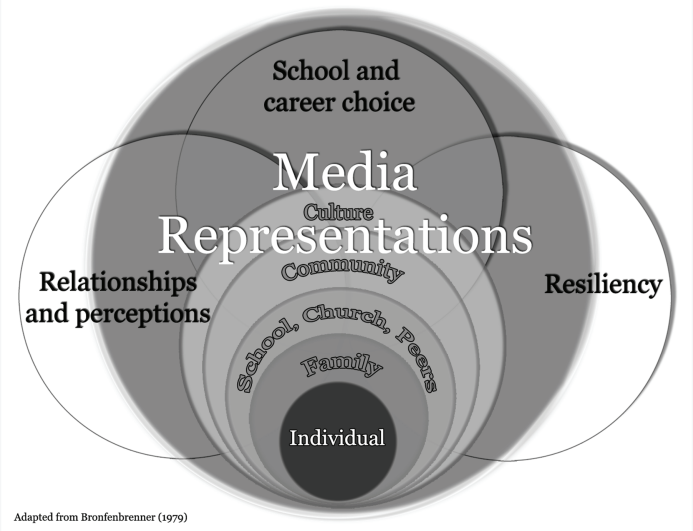


Figure 3.1 visually renders the conceptual framework by situating the individual and his

ecology, relationships and perceptions with others, school and career choice, and individual resiliency within the pervasive shadow of media representations. The individual's experience and perceptions are of primary interest as they move through the layers of Bronfenbrenner's (1977, 1994) concept of an ecology of human development. Additionally, the individual encounters interactions with and perceptions by others in the pursuit of college going and career choice, and these experiences may have positive or negative outcomes, both before and after admission to college. These outcomes may necessitate the individual to shift academic direction, seek alternate methods of college preparation or other learning institutions that for whatever reason seem more favorable to positive outcomes. This process draws on the resiliency of the individual, which may be influenced by the sights and sounds he perceives through his being in the world and his consumption of media representations.

PURPOSE AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore with 20 college-going African-American males their meaning making of media representations of blackness, particularly around representations of black men, and whether these representations promote, discourage, or are silent regarding college going. To initiate this inquiry, the following research questions were formulated:

1. In what ways, if any, do black males perceive media representations flavoring relationships with and perceptions of themselves by others?

2. To what extent, if any, do college going black males perceive media representations informing self-concept, college going and career aspirations?

3. How, if at all, do black males negotiate or oppose media representations that are dissonant with aspirations, personal experience, or beliefs?

In the sections that follow, I describe the methods and rationale for this qualitative study, including the sample procedures, description of research sites, data collection and report findings

from a pilot study. I also outline my process for analysis, the validity measures used, describe study limitations and identify the researcher's positionality.

DESCRIPTION OF METHOD

I chose qualitative methods for the conduct of this study for the following reasons: First, I wanted to gather descriptive data on how black men perceived media representations of blackness and to what extent, if at all, these representations promoted, discouraged, or were silent regarding college going. A major feature of qualitative research is its focus on naturally occurring ordinary events in natural settings (Miles, 1994). Qualitative research is exploratory and seeks to understand the meaning individuals or groups assign to a social or individual problem (Creswell, 2003). Further, if the researcher wants to understand a phenomenon and uncover its meaning for those involved, or describe how things happen, then a qualitative design is appropriate (Merriam, 2002). On the other hand, quantitative inquiry seeks to describe trends, attitudes or opinions of a group by studying a sample of the group, with the intent of generalizing findings to a larger group (Babbie, 1990). This study is less interested in generalizing findings and rather is focused on identifying the variability of experiences among a group often represented as monolithic and homogeneous. Second, black males have been extensively studied and these studies have consistently found individual, family and community level deficits as explanations for black male underrepresentation on U.S. college and university campuses, with much less investigation into structural, institutional and cultural obstacles. Students already successfully persisting at college are arguably "best positioned to offer personalized data and perspective on how they are affected by something within the learning environment" (Harper, 2007, p. 58). Random probability samples cannot get at how mass media representations of black males may have implications for individual decision-making and particularly individual

perceptions of college going. Neither can random sampling explain what works and what doesn't work as perceived by those affected by a phenomenon along their college going trajectory. Neither can quantitative work explicate how an individual perceives being perceived, and how these perceptions may influence choice due to a "threat in the air" (Steele, 1997, 2010). The significance, contribution and insight provided by a qualitative approach result from information rich interviews and the analytical and observational capabilities of the researcher (Patton, 2002).

In short, a quantitative approach likely would not supply the depth and detail acquired by qualitative methods (Patton, 2002). The current study sought to understand and examine the lived experiences of college going black males and used as its unit of analysis significant statements and other meaning making by participants, in keeping with an *interpretive* phenomenological inquiry (Creswell, 2003).

Edmund Husserl conceived of phenomenology as a method in 1913, referring to it as a science of the essence of consciousness (Grbich, 2007; Husserl, 1981). The focus of this method is first-person experiences and the concept of intentionality: how these experiences interact with the world, and establish a way of seeing (Grbich, 2007). Unlike the typical definition for intention, which is an aim or goal (*Illustrated Oxford Dictionary*, 1998), intentionality is a descriptor for how a thing manifests or presents itself in human consciousness (Vagle, 2014). For instance, while the concept of love can have a galaxy of meanings to a universe of individuals, the concept has an essence for humans in their intentional relations with each other (Vagle, 2014), and this essence is what Husserl conceived phenomenology would investigate (Grbich, 2007; Husserl, 1981). However, more recent explanations of the phenomenological approach have sought to de-essentialize *essence* and re-imagine phenomenology in relation to aspects of post-structural philosophies (Vagle, 2014).

Today, phenomenology is in dialogue with the constructivist worldview, in which research seeks to understand and aggregate multiple participant meanings within social, cultural, and historical contexts and from these attempts to generate theory (Creswell, 2003). Constructivism stems from the notion the human world is unlike the natural and physical world and as such must be investigated differently (Guba, 1990). Social constructivism holds individuals seek to understand the world in which they live and work and they develop varied and multiple meanings from their experiences, leading the researcher to be presented with a complexity of views, rather than a narrow set of categories or ideas (Creswell, 2003).

Crotty (1998) identified a few assumptions inherent in the constructivist approach: Meanings are constructed by human beings and researchers employing this worldview tend to use open-ended questions to provide participants latitude in which to share their views; humans interact with and make sense of their world within their own historical and social contexts; researchers interpret what they learn from participants by and through their own backgrounds; and making meaning is always a social activity and a product of interaction.

Miles and Huberman (1994) define four aspects typically found in this kind of qualitative inquiry: setting, actors, events and processes, which correlate with Renn's (2003) dimensions of an ecological study: place, person, context, and time. A phenomenological approach gets inside the lived experience of an individual or group and describes how they experience and make sense of their experience relative to the phenomenon (Holstein, 1998).

Constructivism and phenomenology, then, are closely aligned with the postmodern discourse, which asserts no truth or absolute meaning about any aspect of life is possible, it can only be constructed (Patton, 2002). The cornerstone of the postmodern argument is science and all other human communication or enactments, are embedded in language and cannot provide a

window through which to truly examine reality because language itself is a social construction derived from the assumptions and worldview of the social group from which it was devised and the culture in which it is embedded (Patton, 2002). The postmodern perspective places emphasis on deconstruction, the taking apart of language and other texts, to expose their assumptions and ideology, since it is likely they are devised to serve someone's interests (Patton, 2002). Ideal to the substance and purpose of this study, Denzin (1991) argued when deconstructing mass media representations, the analysis "give a voice to the voiceless" (p. 153), and popular media texts are likely and convenient sites for the reproduction of stereotypes of others who are not propitiously situated to contest those representations.

However, phenomenological qualitative research is often critiqued for the lack of precise description of what form of phenomenology was employed in a study, as well as an absence of a linkage between the method used and the philosophical underpinnings that guide the method (Lopez, 2004). Another critique of phenomenology has been its focus on *essence*, that there is an essential structure to a phenomenon and the intentional features characterizing the phenomenon (Vagle, 2014).

Husserl's (1981) traditional or descriptive phenomenology calls for *bracketing* or a phenomenological reduction. Bracketing is the process of excising the researcher's presuppositions about the phenomenon under study and quite nearly demands rendering non-influential the researcher's previously-held knowledge about a phenomenon (Vagle, 2014). Traditional phenomenology further asserts a pre-interview literature review and specific research questions can bias subsequent participant interviews and the study as a whole (Lopez, 2004). Giorgi (1989) argued past interpretations can bias the study of current phenomena and as such detour it from rigorous research standards. Another assumption associated with descriptive

phenomenology is there are features of lived experience which are common to all persons who have the experience (Lopez, 2004).

Heidegger (1962), a student of Husserl's, challenged the viability of bracketing and argued the virtual impossibility of a researcher to rid their mind of the background of understandings leading to their interest in undertaking a topic of study. Heidegger is credited with the grafting of phenomenology and hermeneutics (Vagle, 2014). The etymology of hermeneutics stems from the name of the Greek god, Hermes, who was responsible for interpreting messages between other gods (Lopez, 2004). A hermeneutic or interpretive approach views the researcher as the primary instrument for data collection and analysis (Merriam, 2002). This interpretive approach also strives to go beyond merely describing core concepts or essences and looks for meaning embedded in life enactments (Lopez, 2004). Given we are born into an existing world and assume meanings already taken on by that world, and then interact with those meanings and project what we will do based on those interactions, an interpretation of lived experience is vital for understanding (Conroy, 2003). This understanding is an end in itself and is not an attempt to predict future events but rather to understand the setting, what it means to participants, and what the world looks like to participants in that setting (Patton, 1985).

While some scholars argue the human instrument is rife with shortcomings and biases, others argue rather than eliminate these subjectivities, it is important to identify and monitor them in relation to how they may shape the collection and interpretation of data (Merriam, 2002). Rather than seek purely descriptive categories of the perceived world in participant narratives, the interpretive phenomenologist focuses on describing the meaning individuals perceive of "being-in-the world" and how these influence the choices they make (Lopez, 2004).

Interpretation emancipates the way meanings occur in context, and also implicates how

researchers make sense of data by drawing on their own subjective understandings and life experiences (Finlay, 2012). It is the researcher's knowledge that leads to ideas of the specific way the study should proceed to produce useful knowledge (Lopez, 2004).

While there are other hybrid forms of phenomenology, the distinctions made here between traditional and interpretive forms provide some specificity as to the philosophical underpinnings of my choosing an interpretive approach.

Sampling Procedure

I solicited participants for the study using a combination of criterion (Creswell, 2003) and snowball sampling (Babbie, 2007). The criteria for participation in the study were:

1. Completing at least one year of study at current university
2. Maintaining university requirements to remain enrolled
3. Identifying as a black or African American male

An email message identifying the study and the criteria for participation was sent from the Registrar's office of two public Southern California universities to all students identified in records as black males. Student organizations and faculty also were consulted and once some students responded with interest, they in turn shared their knowledge of and experience with the study with other potential participants, resulting in an additional snowball sample (Babbie, 2007).

At the outset, I sought to engage up to 40 participants, thinking approximately 20 participants from two locations might be the necessary minimum to provide for sufficient variability. However, after conducting a pilot study with 10 participants in 2011, and then interviewing another 15 participants, I began to reach the point of saturation, in which additional participants began to share information I had already heard from earlier participants. Seidman

(2006) noted a number of researchers have determined at least two criteria for what constitutes a reasonable sample when conducting qualitative research: The first is *sufficiency* in terms of enough participants to reasonably reflect the range of participants and sites so others outside of the study might recognize or resonate with the experiences expressed by participants; and the second criterion is *saturation* of information, when the interviewer begins to hear duplicative stories and is learning nothing new. One experienced researcher cited by Seidman (2006) has gone as far as to indicate from his own work he begins to experience information saturation at approximately 20 interviews. While Seidman (2006) is reluctant to concur with a particular number, he indicates enough is an "interactive reflection of every step of the interview process," and the "practical exigencies of time, money, and other resources", especially in doctoral research (p. 55). Patton (2002) also takes a tentative stance on what a valid sample is in a qualitative investigation. He argues Piaget contributed major breakthroughs to understanding how children think by observing his own children, a sample of 2; Freud developed the field of psychoanalysis with only 10 cases; and the widely followed 8 principles for organizational excellence came from a sample of less than 70 companies worldwide. Of more importance is to judge the sample size by the purpose and rationale of the study (Patton, 2002). For these reasons, I felt comfortable winnowing my 25 interviews to 20 cases, many of which ran nearly two hours in duration, and provided sufficient data with enough variability in experience and insight that others not involved in the study would be able to identify with or recognize at least some of the array of experiences and perceptions offered by participants. The selection of 20 cases from the 25 interviews was based on 10 cases already included in the pilot study, and included all cases from one site (7), which had a lower response rate than the second site. The remaining cases were selected based on completeness of the demographic and pre-interview questionnaire.

Description of Sites

Participants attended two Southern California universities, Red University and Blue University, and response rates were higher at Red University than at Blue University. Red University generated a 3:1 ratio of participants to Blue University, for which there may be at least three explanations: First, I have been an adjunct instructor at Red University for 10 years and may have been granted greater access to faculty and administrators, and as a result more avenues for participant recruitment than at Blue University, where I was allowed to distribute my solicitation by email through the office of the Registrar, and by flyers circulated to the more limited number of faculty and campus organizations personally known to me. Second, given the difference in academic rigor between "less selective" Red University and "most selective" Blue University, it may be many students simply could not allocate the necessary time during the school year for participation. This assumption is supported by the fact nearly half of students who expressed interest in the study at Blue University eventually did not participate, whereas more than three-quarters of those who expressed interest in the study at Red University participated. Third, Blue University is a large, renowned, research institution where students are solicited regularly for study participation, so participation is not novel. In fact, about half of participants from Blue University who participated in the study had previously participated in other campus research, and at least one of those students also had participated in research at another university at a much earlier age.

Red University, on the other hand, is smaller and typically has significantly fewer on-campus research activities in which students can participate, so research participation is a less frequent opportunity, and as a result possibly of more interest. Further, the researcher did not fully recognize the importance and expectation of some form of compensation for respondent

participation, and given the familiarity with research protocols among students at Blue University, and their concomitant expectation of some form of compensation, the lack of compensation also may have affected response rates on the campus. One Blue University participant even indicated in his interview he thought twice about participating since there was no compensation.

Blue University is a "Large, four-year, primarily residential" institution while Red University is a "Medium, four-year primarily non-residential institution (The Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education, 2005). Additionally, Blue University is characterized as having a *most selective* admissions process, is urban in character, and has a campus diversity index of .65, indicating roughly two out of every three students are of a different race or ethnicity (Morse, 2009). Red University is *less selective*, is considered a suburban campus, and has a diversity index above .70, resulting in three out of four students having a different race or ethnicity, and making it one of the most diverse campuses in the U.S. (Morse, 2009). The degree of diversity on these differentially situated campuses offered a rich sample of experiences, backgrounds, communities of origin and perceptions among participants. Despite these two universities being situated in the same geographical region, that region is arguably one of the most diverse in U.S., and by further diversifying participants by campus setting and academic selectivity by campus, the sample was broad and varied within a similarly-raced group.

Sample

Approximately 36 potential participants responded to an email they received from the Registrar's office on their home campus soliciting participation in the study. Due to confidentiality concerns, all potential participants were contacted directly by the Registrar's

Office and that office on both campuses did not provide the number of potential participants who received the initial research solicitation. If a potential participant expressed interest in the study by contacting me via email, I answered specific questions contained in their response, and then sent back a demographic questionnaire and release form. Twenty-five respondents (7 from Blue University and 18 from Red University) between the ages of 19 and 41, who were seeking their first baccalaureate degree, returned questionnaires and release forms, resulting in nearly 70% of those expressing initial interest in the study completing the study. Of the 25 respondents who returned documentation and completed a semi-structured interview, 20 were held for analysis, in an effort to more evenly divide the number of participants between the two sites, given there already was a 3:1 differential response rate between Red University and Blue University.

TABLE 3.1: High School and Current GPA, Area of Study, Post-Graduate Plans, and Age

	Participant	H.S.	Current	Major	Post-Grad Plans	Age
1	RYAN	3.00	2.90	Business Administration	Graduate Study	26
2	NOAH	4.20	2.90	Psychobiology	Graduate Study	21
3	ANOMALLY	3.40	2.60	English/Global Studies	Uncertain	22
4	JEFFREY	3.50	2.40	Music/Guitar Performance	Work in profession	24
5	LEX	3.00	3.10	Television Arts	Work in profession	39
6	DAVID	3.00	3.10	Music Tech./Businesss	Work in profession	21
7	JUSTIN	3.00	2.79	International Business	Other	29
8	AUGUST	3.70	3.70	Criminal Justice	Work in profession	20
9	TAYLOR	3.70	3.06	Anthropology/Math	Graduate Study	20
10	CLARK	3.80	3.40	Digital Media Arts	Work in profession	22
11	TITO	2.40	2.30	N/A	Uncertain	24
12	JOE	3.50	3.50	Digital Media Arts	Work in profession	21
13	BLANCO	0	0	Film Studies	Graduate Study	41
14	KNOW	3.30	3.30	Digital Media Arts	Graduate Study	38
15	ALAMO	3.5	2.5	AFAM Studies	Work in other field	23
16	RITCHIE	0	3.49	Film/TV	Work in profession	36
17	EUGENE	3.49	2.819	Undeclared/Social Sciences	Grad Study/Work	20
18	ALONZO HARRIS	2.8	3.15	Public Administration	Work/Peace Corps	21
19	JAMES ELBA	0	2.7	Business Management	Work in profession	25
20	KWAME	3.00	3.70	World Arts/Culture/Dance	Travel/Research	27
		3.31	**3.02**			**26**

0 and N/A = No Report

The median age of participants was 26 years, skewed upward by four participants who were over 30 years of age, and another four participants who were 25 to 30 years old. High school GPA ranged from a high of 4.2 to a low of 2.40, with an average of 3.31 for the 17 participants who supplied high school GPA. Current college GPA ranged from 2.3 to 3.7, with an average of 3.02 for the 19 participants who reported college GPA.

Half of participants (10) indicated plans to enter the workforce upon graduation, while 5 participants reported plans to pursue graduate education. Two participants were uncertain about post-graduate plans, and 3 expressed other interests, including travel/research and other. One of those intending to work upon graduation included Peace Corps as a potential employer.

Roughly one-third of participants (6) grew up in an urban setting, roughly one-third (6) grew up in a suburban setting, and 1 participant grew up in a rural setting. Seven others did not respond to this question. In addition, about 80% (16) reported homes within 80 miles of their current university campus. One (5%) participant reported home within the state but roughly 400 miles from his current campus, 1 (5%) participant reported a family home in another state (Alaska) and 2 (10%) others reported family homes outside of the U.S. (Great Britain, Nigeria).

TABLE 3.2: Current Grade, College Distance from Home, Neighborhood Setting, and High School Type

	Name	Ethnicity	Year in School	College 1st in Family	Home Setting	Distance from Home	High School Type	Current College
1	RYAN	NIGERIAN/AFAM	JR	No	Urban	15-20	Private/Religious	Red
2	NOAH	BLACK	SR	Yes	Urban	30	Private/Religious	Blue
3	ANOMALLY	AFAM	SR	No	N/A	10	Public	Blue
4	JEFFREY	N/A	JR	No	N/A	13	Private/Religious	Red
5	LEX	AFAM	JR	No	Suburban	Out of State	Private/Religious	Red
6	DAVID	OTHER	JR	No	N/A	10	Public/Charter	Red
7	JUSTIN	AFAM	SR	No	Suburban	10	Public	Red
8	AUGUST	AFAM	SO	No	N/A	15	Public	Red
9	TAYLOR	BLACK/INDIAN	JR	No	Suburban	50-60	Public	Blue
10	CLARK	AFAM	SR	No	Urban	8	Public	Red
11	TITO	AFAM	SR	Yes	N/A	5	Public	Red
12	JOE	BLACK	SR	No	Urban	10	Public	Red
13	BLANCO	AFAM	JR	No	N/A	30	Public	Red
14	KNOW	BLACK	JR	No	Urban	5	Public	Red
15	ALAMO	BLACK	SR	No	Suburban	25	Public	Blue
16	RITCHIE	HAITIAN AMER	SR	No	Rural	Out of US	Public	Blue
17	EUGENE	NIGERIAN AMER	JR	No	Suburban	80	Private/Religious	Blue
18	ALONZO HARRIS	NIGERIAN AMER	JR	No	Suburban	400	Public	Red
19	JAMES ELBA	BLACK	SR	No	N/A	Out of US	Private/Religious	Red
20	KWAME	AFAM	JR	No	Urban	50+	Public	Blue

Nearly three quarters of participants (14) attended pubic high schools, while 5 attended religious-affiliated private schools, and 1 participant attended a private boarding school outside of the U.S. Only 2 participants reported being first in family to seek a college degree. Nine participants identified as seniors (45%), 10 as juniors (50%) and 1 as a sophomore (5%).

At least 1 parent in more than half of participant households (12) earned a Bachelors degree or above, and in 8 households both parents held BA degrees. One or both parents in 4

households earned graduate degrees. More mothers had at least some college (16) than fathers (13) but more fathers earned graduate degrees (4) than mothers (2).

Eight participant households reported annual income of $60,000 or less; 7 had income of $60,000-$99,999, and 3 had income between $100,000-$149,999. Household income for two participants was not collected.

TABLE 3.3: Parents' Education and Household Income

	Participant	Mother	Father	Income
1	RYAN	BA	BA	<$39,999
2	NOAH	HS Diploma	HS Diploma	$40-$59,999
3	ANOMALLY	Some College	Some College	<$39,999
4	JEFFREY	BA	BA	$60-$99,999
5	LEX	BA	AA	$60-$99,999
6	DAVID	BA	BA	$60-$99,999
7	JUSTIN	Some College	HS Diploma	$40-$59,999
8	AUGUST	HS Diploma	HS Diploma	<$39,999
9	TAYLOR	BA	BA	$60-$99,999
10	CLARK	AA	Some HS	<$39,999
11	TITO	HS Diploma	HS Diploma	<$39,999
12	JOE	AA	BA	$60-$99,999
13	BLANCO	BA	Graduate	N/A
14	KNOW	Graduate	Graduate	$60-$99,999
15	ALAMO	Some College	AA	$100K-$149K
16	RITCHIE	Elementary/less	Elementary/less	N/A
17	EUGENE	Graduate	Graduate	$60-$99,999
18	ALONZO HARRIS	AA	Graduate	$100K-$149K
19	JAMES ELBA	BA	BA	$100K-$149K
20	KWAME	BA	N/A	$40-$59,999

N/A = No Report

Given the importance to the study of probing how if at all media representations had implications for college going perceptions, a request for the amount and kind of media consumed by participants was added to the demographic questionnaire after the pilot study. Where possible, participants of the pilot study were contacted and asked to supply information about the types of media they routinely engaged and the amount of time they estimated they engaged those media.

The questionnaire broke out media into 5 categories: Online, Television, Music, Film and Other. A probable lack of clarity exists in this question because it did not account for how these formats were delivered and consumed. For instance, beyond television, which is the most specific category, all other formats could have been consumed online, through mobile devices,

game boxes, in theaters, from discs, computers, etc. So, while the quantity of media as perceived by participants may be determined from responses, the delivery mechanism cannot, making permeable these delineations, and as a result providing less than as clear a snapshot as intended in determining participant media consumption.

TABLE 3.4: Participant Report of Time Spent and Kind of Media Consumed

#	Name	Online	TV	Music	Film	Other	Individual Totals
1	Ryan						0
2	Noah	15	7	25	6	10	63
3	Anomally						0
4	Jeffrey						0
5	Lex	10	14	5	2		31
6	David	6	2	5	0.5		13.5
7	Justin	98	6	98	8		210
8	August						0
9	Taylor						0
10	Clark	6	12	2	4		24
11	Tito	2	3	6	4		15
12	Joe	56	28	10	14	20	128
13	Blanco	21	10	20		14	65
14	Know	45	35			85	165
15	Alamo	20	20	0	0	15	55
16	Richie	20	10	1	4		35
17	Eugene	16	5	14	4	0	39
18	Alonzo Harris	22	10	15	4	6	57
19	James Elba	4	3	0	2		9
20	Kwame	8	0	4	4		16
		349	165	205	56.5	150	925.5
		38%	18%	22%	6%	16%	

Three-quarters (15) of participants reported estimates of weekly media consumption. The remaining 25% (5) were among pilot study participants and were either unreachable or did not respond to requests for additional information after their in-person interview.

Of note, 15% of participants (3) indicated media use well-above 100 hours per week, and one of those participants reported over 200 hours. Since there are only 168 hours in a seven-day week (7 x 24), these participants reported engaging media representations virtually all day, every day. In contrast, 40% (8) of participants reported using media of all kinds less than 50 hours per week, and the remaining 20% (4) estimated their media use at more than 50 hours but less than 70 hours per week.

Data Collection

To examine my research questions, I relied on multiple sources of data (Creswell, 2003), and my data collection techniques were designed to elicit four types of information typically found in qualitative studies: Contextual, Demographic, Perceptual, and Theoretical.

Contextual information, in this study, situates participants in two spheres of interest: their personal ecology, and what I refer to as their community of media consumption, since as Lewin (1935) observed culture and environment may influence behavior. Further, Lewin's (1935) fundamental proposition, similar to Bronfenbrenner (1979), was behavior is a function of the interaction between an individual and their environment. While the characteristics of participants' college institutions were described earlier and are based on third party evaluations, I sought to learn participants' communities of media consumption by requesting in the demographic questionnaire descriptions of recently consumed media, with the intent of attempting to situate viewing practices with perceptions during 1:1 interviews.

The questionnaire also solicited demographic information. I intended to use this information, in part, to explain what may be underlying some participant perceptions. Bourdieu (1977) and others have argued SES and other demographic features inform and in some cases delimit individuals' perception of life scope and opportunity, in part due to habitus.

The third type of information I collected, perceptual information, is of particular interest to this study, and data was collected at three points: 1) In the pre-interview questionnaire, 2) during the observation of participants viewing videos on a web site of various depictions of black males, and 3) during the 1:1 interview. The information sought here was participant descriptions of media encounters, and their meaning making associated with viewing and examining these media representations.

The last type of information I collected was theoretical information. This information, girded by my literature review, supported my methodological approach, the theoretical underpinnings of my research questions, my conceptual framework, the way I approached interpretation and analysis, and the conclusions and suggestions I have offered.

I sought to capture each of these types of information through the following steps in my data collection methodology.

Demographic questionnaire and media representations. All participants completed a demographic questionnaire and consent form prior to or during the first few minutes of our initial meeting. The demographic questionnaire requested age, high school and current grade point, and proximity of home to college, family size, household income, demographic characteristics of home, neighborhood and high school, among other environmental factors. Once these documents were completed, participants were directed to a website (Roth, 2011b) where images and videos depicted black men in media representations: as news commentators and other subject matter experts; as actors and directors in media productions; as a two-time elected U.S. president, and as the topic of discussion with regard to education attainment, stereotypes, media portrayals, and incarceration rates. Participants were advised they could view some or all of the video clips, in any order. I observed participants and took notes as they viewed the video clips, and noted which clips they chose to view and the order in which they viewed them, and any particular verbal or non-verbal reactions they had during their viewing. While the video clips in no way were exhaustive in their representation of black men in media, they did represent black men as both the subject of debate as well as the debaters, explainers, and critics on various issues, in news coverage and in talk show discussions associated with black men in everyday media portrayals. These portrayals also included a televisual debate on police action after a black Harvard

professor had misplaced his keys and attempted to enter his home at night and officers arrived to investigate and arrested him after he expressed indignation.

Given the constrained scope of these representations, I considered this portion of the participant contact as more of a sensitizing activity, to visually explicate in advance of our interview what I meant with regard to media representations of blackness, of which these were only a small sample, that participants may or may not normally encounter in their own media consumption. The idea was not to limit or to skew their perceptions of black representations by the samples provided, but rather to have these viewed as some of the representations of blackness and black men they may encounter, and to stimulate their identification and evaluation of media examples they encounter in their own media consumption.

Semi-structured 1:1 Interview. A 1:1 semi-structured interview followed, was recorded, and began by my asking a general question about the participant's perception of the video clips they had just viewed. While these initial remarks by participants were of interest and varied in ways I could not have predicted in advance of the interviews, I viewed this portion of the interview process as more of a rapport building exercise, where I had the opportunity to gain insight into a participant's level of comfort with me and my questions, before commencing with more formal questions.

Patton (2002) found semi-structured interviews allow for simultaneous data collection and participant reflection. Further, open-ended questions and accompanying probes typically yield data-rich responses about experience, perceptions, feelings, opinions and knowledge (Patton, 2002). While a standard list of questions and interview protocol were used, interviews frequently evolved conversationally, allowing participants to reflect on their comments and to augment or amend as they wished. The interviews were recorded using professional audio

equipment to provide media-rich data that can be evaluated and presented in multiple forms beyond this and other textual depictions.

I entered each interview with seven categories of questions, to include: growing up and home life, including relationships with parents, siblings, fictive family and community; individual and family media consumption; aspiration development, and influences that shaped aspirations and worldview; favorite media and artists and why; when college going was first considered and what stimulated that consideration; positive and negative media representations of blackness and black men, and why participants felt these representations were either positive or negative; and finally, whether participants believed black men were underrepresented on college campuses and on what they based that belief [Appendix B].

This variety of questions provided rich and multi-faceted responses from participants, offering glimpses into a wide range of lived experiences, perceptions, and meaning making.

Pilot Study. A pilot study, UCLA IRB#10–001532, involving 10 of the current participants from the same two Southern California public universities was conducted in Spring 2011. Criterion and snowball sampling were used to develop the sample.

Findings from the pilot study included: 1) Participants reported often perceiving negative representations of black men in media that were dissonant with their own knowledge and beliefs, 2) They also identified few images of incentive within the media sphere to encourage black men to pursue education and even pointed to media representations that ran counter to college going, 3) Participants felt younger African-American males are steered away from education opportunities at least in part by some of these media representations, including the popularity of *hip-hop* and *rap* music, as an alternative avenue to success, and 4) Participants believed some negative media representations were intentional and supported ongoing racism through

differential treatment in news coverage, and some of these representations were dehumanizing, particularly with regard to capital punishment and violent crimes, when these representations included black men.

The results of the pilot study suggested the need for additional interviews and a broader scope in the interview. Additionally, I determined the demographic questionnaire also needed expansion, in an attempt to situate participants' impressions of media representations based on their own consumption before being shown examples supplied by the researcher. Questions added to the demographic questionnaire after the pilot study included: 1) A request to list all media formats the participant regularly and *consciously* consumed, 2) A breakdown of the number of hours per week the participant estimated they regularly consumed various media formats (e.g., Online, TV, Music, Film, Other), 3) An example or examples of recent media consumption where participants felt the representations of blackness or black men were positive or negative and why, and 4) A list of up to 10 examples of recent media consumed, in an effort to give the researcher a snapshot of participants' *typical* media consumption in advance of viewing the representations associated with the media clips supplied by the researcher.

In requesting this additional data, the researcher described consciously consumed media as television and cinema, web browsing, interacting with a computer/handheld device/phone, during which participants focused some degree of attention for some amount of time as opposed to merely glimpsing a passing billboard along a freeway or reading the message on a blimp as seen from the beach, even though these examples of media also may have their own significance.

Analysis

To begin my analysis, I carefully read and reflected on my notes taken during face-to-face interviews, and whenever possible reviewed the audio recording made during the interview

immediately following its conclusion, and then again after transcription. The initial review of the interview served two purposes: to identify subsequent questions that may be asked, if possible, and to consider patterns to participant responses, what Blumer (1998) referred to as sensitizing concepts. These sensitizing concepts did not provide strict interpretations allowing me to assign every particular utterance to a particular category. Instead, as Blumer (1998) argued, definitive concepts are not possible when dealing with the subjective social world. Sensitizing concepts, then, provided a glimpse into how observed samples may fit into conceptual categories under investigation, and this is an important starting point and may inform either emergent categories for analysis or an emergent theory (Blumer, 1998).

Researchers analyzing qualitative data strive to understand a phenomenon as a whole. This effort requires a holistic approach (Patton, 2002). Framing data analysis in this way, again, is complementary to the study's ecological framework, which views instances and actions in relation to other instances and actions occurring within or around those under investigation. By attempting to understand the whole as a complex system greater than the sum of its parts, the researcher seeks a *gestalt*. Gestalt theory also allows for the break up of the whole into the elements from which it is comprised (Humphrey, 1924).

The recorded interviews were transcribed and each segment of data reviewed and its relevance to the study dimensions assessed. I used HyperResearch, a computer database program specifically designed for use in categorizing and analyzing qualitative data, to organize my data for review and comparison. The seven categories of questions formed an open coding scheme (Corbin, 2007; Strauss, 1998), which was little more than a list of the interview questions with a signifier such as FL for Family and Home Life and a numeral indicating the number of the

question under that heading in my interview protocol. For instance, there were three questions under the FL heading, five questions under the M heading for Role of Media at home, and so on.

These data were compared with other segments of data using a constant comparative method (Glaser, 1965). This method has four stages: comparing incidents to each category; integrating categories and their properties; delimiting theory; and writing theory (Glaser, 1965). The constant comparative method assisted in determining the range and variation of any given category, and it also helped to illuminate mutual relationships and internal structures of categories (Glaser, 1967). Goetz and LeCompte (1981) posited "this method combines inductive category coding with simultaneous comparison of all social incidents observed" (p. 58). I continued this process across categories, and as events were constantly compared with other events new and convergent relationships emerged.

These new relationships became the basis for my findings. By grouping, comparing, regrouping, and comparing, emergent themes became obvious. However, in interpretive phenomenology, theory is not used in a formal way to generate hypotheses to be tested (Lopez, 2004). Instead, a theoretical approach may be used to focus the inquiry and to make decisions about sample, participants and questions to research, as well as to make explicit the assumptions that drive the study, and the researcher's frame of reference (Lopez, 2004). The concept of co-constitutionality deserves explication here. Derived from Heidegger (Koch, 1995), the concept asserts the meanings to which the researcher arrives are a blend of the narrative of the participant and the meanings the researcher assigns to them. This process has been referred to as a fusion of horizons (Gadamer, 2008), a metaphor for intersubjectivity (Lopez, 2004).

When individuals interact, in an attempt to understand one another, this understanding is bound by a personal horizon of experiences and meanings that intersect with the other, in this

instance, the participant and researcher (Geanellos, 2000). While there is no single true meaning produced by an interpretive study, the meanings asserted in the research findings must reflect the realities of research participants, and must be plausible and coherent within the study's framework, according to Annells (as cited by Lopez, 2004, p. 730).

Trustworthiness

The issues of credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability of qualitative findings from people-oriented inquiry are often held suspect without significant explication into the method and efforts used to determine validity. Lofland (1971) asserts people-oriented inquiry has at least four mandates: 1) The researcher must get close enough to the people and situation to personally understand in depth the detail of circumstances associated with the study, 2) The researcher strives to capture what actually takes place and what people actually say when observing and interviewing them, 3) Qualitative people-oriented inquiry is rich with pure description of people, activities, interactions and settings, and 4) Qualitative findings must include direct quotes from participants, both in terms of what they say, and what they write down.

Guba and Lincoln (1998) used the terms credibility, dependability, confirmability and transferability instead of validity and reliability which are more traditionally associated with quantitative studies, arguing the trustworthiness of qualitative research needs to be evaluated differently than quantitative work. To examine the credibility of qualitative findings suggests examining whether they are accurate and credible from the standpoint of the researcher, participants, and the reader (Creswell, 2000). Member checking (Schwartz, 2012) is one method of testing credibility by having those who participated in the study review findings to determine

if the researcher has accurately described the process, interaction, and findings of the study in a way that is consonant with participant recollections and perceptions.

Reliability is another quantitative expression regarding the replication of findings (Guba, 1998). In quantitative terms, if findings can be replicated by other, similar studies, then they are reliable. But, qualitative studies generally do not have the expanse of participants or degree of variability to provide a substantive degree of reliability, so Lincoln and Guba (1985) argue what becomes more important is whether the findings are consistent and dependable with regard to the data collected. Dependability becomes a measure of how well the researcher documented their procedures and consistently followed them. I asked three colleagues to read and code one of my interview transcripts to test inter-coder agreement (Creswell, 2003). This process seeks to determine the reliability of the researcher's coding scheme by not only having others less familiar with the transcript code the same section, but also use the same code as the researcher (Creswell, 2003). Some researchers recommend a consistency rating across two reviewers and the researcher of at least 80% (Miles, 1994).

The notion of confirmability relates to the alleged objectivity inherent in quantitative studies. The assumption is findings are the result of research and not the biases or worldview of the researcher. While qualitative researchers recognize objectivity is unlikely in their work, Lincoln and Guba (1985) argue for an audit trail, including ongoing reflection through journaling and memoing (Birks, 2008), providing the reader the means by which to assess the findings of the study.

Finally, while qualitative research does not seek generalizable findings, the study does seek to identify whether and to what extent the phenomena reported here can transfer to other particular contexts (Lincoln, 1985). With this in mind, the researcher sought to provide thick and

rich descriptions of participants and their perceptions, as a basis for the claim this qualitative account may have relevance in some broader context (Schram, 2003). These descriptions may transport the viewer to the setting and give the discussion a characteristic of shared experience (Creswell, 2003).

From February 2011 through September 2013, I personally interviewed all of the participants in this study, and these interviews ranged in duration, from 35 minutes to more than 120 minutes each. Before and after the initial interview, I developed and maintained telephonic or email communication with all of the 20 study participants, wherein we communicated on several occasions in advance or after the initial interview, or in some cases, at both intervals, and in some cases, continue to do so. While most of these communications were primarily of a logistic context, there oftentimes were opportunities and moments of life experience or perception shared, including the difficulty of scheduling a convenient time for an interview, or to answer supplementary questions, etc.

Further, during the formal interviews, I recorded our conversation with professional digital recording equipment, and took notes, both during the interview and afterward. The high quality recording of the interviews assured a foundation for high quality transcription and where there were instances in the course of dialogue where, either the interviewer or the interviewee interjected a comment on top of the comment of the other, it was fairly easy for me to return to the original recording and decipher the cross-talk, given I was in the room at the time of the recording and fully understood the context of the conversation and in many cases had made a note in my journal at or around the time the comment or difficult-to-understand utterance was made.

Given the high quality of these recordings and the depth and expanse of interviews and the wide-ranging answers covering myriad perceptions and perspectives, my findings are laden with direct quotations from participants.

These aspects of my methodology alone provide other researchers the capability to examine my findings and compare them against the raw data that is encapsulated in the 20 participant interviews spanning more than 22 hours. But this is just one aspect of validity – the integrity and connection of the raw data to the findings. Another aspect of validity is the degree to which the findings are interpreted in the *correct* way (Kirk, 1986).

To confirm findings were accurately interpreted, they were shared with study participants who volunteered to member check my findings (Creswell, 2003; 2000). Member checking is the practice of having study participants check the accuracy and agreement of the findings based on their own involvement in the study and their own interpretations (Braud, 1998). Just under half of all participants agreed to member check findings, and they unanimously agreed the findings were consistent with the questions asked, tasks performed, and accurately reflected their statements and perceptions associated with the study. Comments from these reviewers were received as email communications. I asked reviewers to place their comments in email so the variability of my interpretation of their remarks would be primarily constrained by the words and descriptions they used, and not by some *laissez-faire* personal process of interpretation associated with note taking during a telephonic or other conversation that might result in researcher effects (Miles, 1994).

Research Limitations

There are at least four limitations to this study. First, despite the structural and institutional differences between the two sites involved in this inquiry, both are located in the

same state and geographical area and may not fully represent the variability that might be found if sites were situated differentially across a larger portion of the U.S.

Second, the study examines the perceptions and meaning making of students at public institutions and does not take into account students who attend private colleges or universities, or Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), which, again, may add some additional variation to findings. Studying student perceptions in these other venues was originally intended but due to difficulty receiving IRB approval at other campuses, budget and time constraints, the study was scaled back to its current configuration.

Third, both research sites are located within 30 miles of Hollywood, California, which without doubt is a recognized global media hub, and for that reason participants who live and educate themselves in and around Hollywood may be either more or less media savvy or may have a greater acceptance or aversion to media representations as a result of near constant exposure. In addition, 13 of the study participants were involved in a media- or entertainment-related course of study, to include: music performance and technology (3); world arts and dance (1); television production (7); film/TV (1); and film studies (1). As a result, these participants may have a heightened awareness of media representations and the messages they perceive they carry. Further study with participants from a broader range of academic disciplines who are not so closely situated to a global media hub may determine differential perceptions of media representations than those found here.

Finally, the study concentrated on perceptions of college going black males, for reasons mentioned earlier. However, an investigation into the perceptions of black males who choose not to go to college and the reasons why would likely provide a rich comparison to the perceptions and meaning making shared by these college-going students. Attempts were made to coordinate

with church and other organizations in predominantly black communities to assemble a roundtable of college-age students who chose not to pursue higher education and these efforts were challenged by the investigator's lack of connection to these communities, in addition to the reality that black males who choose not to attend college do not necessarily congregate in any specific area or within a specific organization, so ways to identify members of this group did not readily present themselves.

Researcher Orientation

I did not approach this study without a point of view. Not only am I an adult with three decades of professional experience, that experience has involved the creation of both visual and printed media, as a documentary filmmaker and newspaper reporter, as well as years as a secondary and post-secondary classroom instructor, teaching media production techniques and media deconstruction.

My professional career began as a print journalist at the age of 20 at a West Coast metropolitan daily newspaper. Over the next decade, I wrote for another half-dozen newspapers in five western states, most often focused on government, law enforcement and the courts, and have since maintained a periodic presence in journalism in California, Arizona and Oregon. I've produced, directed, photographed, or otherwise worked in the production of award-winning broadcast and festival-presented film and video documentaries, and I have worked as a political press secretary for state and national candidates. As a result, I have a keen regard for the reach and influence of media.

For the past 10 years, I have lectured and taught production courses in digital media at a state university, and I am frequently wowed by how students accept media representations without interrogating them.

Further, and in hindsight, I wished I had investigated at least a couple of instances at the outset of interviews for this study where it appeared my racial identity as a white male took participants by surprise, which is how I interpreted what I perceived as their wide-eyed double take when we first met. I should have examined these first impressions but at the time consciously chose not to acknowledge any racial difference or distance between us unless it was by the participants' prerogative. At various times, and in numerous interviews, participants shared very personal aspects of their lives, including drug use and criminality, police encounters and parental abuse, all of which led me to believe I had gained their trust and they felt at ease in our encounter, even when retelling events and activities they could have omitted since they were not directly addressed by my questions. I also considered whether participants were taking me on a virtual ride of their lives, striking at times, what hooks (2004) and others (see Majors, 1992) refer to as a cool pose. I ruled out this possibility for the most part based on my previous interviewing experiences as a journalist and filmmaker, engaging individuals as diverse as presidential candidates and street people, from distraught parents of a daughter swept down river to jetliner crash survivors minutes after their plane crashed in a frost-bitten Pacific Northwest two days after Christmas. I felt the same level of authenticity in the participant interviews that comprise this study. In fact, I feel as if my identity as a white male actually may have increased the amount of information participants shared with me, in that they may have felt they had to be as thorough and forthright as possible, as a way of ensuring I shared their perceptions and portrayed them accurately.

As a journalist in Portland, Oregon, I wrote about the continued importance of HBCUs from graduates' perspectives, given their perceptions of ongoing racism in the late 1970s, and routine police improprieties in predominantly black neighborhoods. As a filmmaker in San

Francisco in the 1980s, I was sensitive to deficit representations of people of color and strove in my depictions to decenter some of the media stereotypes around teenage pregnancy, and other issues. As a high school media teacher in Tucson, Arizona in the 1990s, I sought institutional ways to promote my Native American and Latino students' work using the campus television system and studios. I hope this study follows the same path of listening to voices often unheard. I feel privileged to be part of the discussion contained here, and to promote the value and importance of diversity in all spaces and in all lives.

SUMMARY

This chapter described the methodology and rationale used to examine the meaning making of 20 African-American males around media representations of black men, and whether these representations promote, discourage, or are silent about college going.

The chapter described methods used in phenomenological research, how phenomenology fits in to the qualitative tradition, and the units of analysis needed to conduct a successful phenomenological study. I also provided a rationale for choosing phenomenology as my method and how quantitative methods were not suited to identifying the variability of experiences among a group oftentimes represented as monolithic and homogeneous. Further, random probability samples cannot get at how mass media representations of black males may color perceptions and those perceptions college-going decisions.

Phenomenology is an element of the constructivist worldview in which individuals seek to understand the world and make meaning from their experiences, leading researchers to interpret significant statements and aggregate multiple participant statements into meaningful interpretations or emergent theories.

Both constructivism and phenomenology align with the postmodern argument that no truth or absolute meaning can be derived from any aspect of life it can only be constructed. The linchpin of the postmodern argument is all human communication and enactments are embedded in language and because language itself is a social construction, derived from the assumptions and worldview of the social group that devised it, it cannot be objective. As a result, postmodernism places emphasis on deconstruction, to expose underlying assumptions and ideology.

I also described how the study sample was developed, provided extensive description of the research sites and identified the data collection methods, to include a demographic questionnaire, participant observation while viewing media representations, and a semi-structured 1:1 interview as my primary sources of study data. Other data included notes, memoing, and journaling I generated while examining, reviewing and working with the primary sources of data. Throughout the data collection phase of the study, I sought to examine four types of information typically found in qualitative studies: Contextual, Demographic, Perceptual, and Theoretical.

This chapter also provided findings from a pilot study and outlined my analysis procedures and associated assumptions. All interviews conducted during the study were recorded. Once transcribed, I used a computer program designed for qualitative research to organize, review and compare my data using a constant comparative method. I also outlined the steps I took to address issues of credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability of qualitative findings. These four terms supplant the traditional quantitative terms of validity and reliability in assessing the internal logic of research design, methodology, and the credibility of findings. I addressed the limitations of the study, and the researcher's orientation in relation to

the study, as a means of offering a *transparency of method* (Merriam, 2002). While Merriam's (2002) primary concern was the importance of maintaining an audit trail through journaling and memoing to include detailed accounts of how data were analyzed and interpreted, the idea of a transparency of method also can be applied to the researcher's thoughtful examination and interpretation of study limitations, in addition to identifying their own experiences, perceptions, and beliefs that may come into play in the interpretation of findings.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore with 20 college-going African-American males their meaning making of media representations of blackness, particularly around representations of black males, and whether these representations promote, discourage, or are silent regarding college going. The researcher believed an understanding of how black men perceive their representation in media and consequently in other domains of society may more adequately inform educators of the unique gauntlet black males encounter to and through college. In addition, the insights gained by participant perceptions of their own pre- and in- college experience also may provide a glimpse into what institutions might do to further promote black male persistence and success. This chapter presents key findings obtained from 20 black males successfully persisting in college, including the paths, experiences, perceptions, and practices they believed enabled their college going aspirations. Six emergent findings, ranked in order of frequency, resulted from the study:

1. Participants perceived media representations flavoring how black males are generally viewed in society
2. These perceptions raised questions about how participants viewed themselves and their place in the world
3. These perceptions had implications for relationships with others
4. Media typically don't associate black males with college going
5. Participants struggle with identity and relied on resilience in their education efforts
6. Participants reported a high degree of selectivity in media consumption, often instilled early by parents who directed or restricted media consumption

The presentation and explication of qualitative findings follows no specific canon. There are no fixed formats and the way data are analyzed and interpreted continue to grow in their variety (Miles, 1994). This is nowhere more evident than in phenomenological studies. Current modes of phenomenological analysis indicate this approach is very flexible (Grbich, 2007). Willis (2004) argues traditional forms of description can dull the lived experiences of phenomenological accounts and he advocates for the use of metaphor and a range of literary approaches to draw the reader closer to the experience. For instance, Moustakas (1961) introduced autobiographical stories and reflections in his description of loneliness while caring for his daughter during serious illness. For these reasons, I have chosen to use the form of a feature news story and the metaphor of the researcher as reporter to present these findings. This approach is attractive for a number of reasons: 1) News is emergent, as are these findings, 2) News is differentiated by theme, such as breaking news and feature news, 3) Breaking news tells the reader the basic facts of an incident, while feature news tells and *shows* the reader what has happened, and in many cases provides a degree of interpretation, and 4) News is a compelling media form, and this study sought to examine how media representations may have implications for personal actions, so what better way to examine the persuasive capabilities of media than by employing a media form to present these capabilities?

Further, the metaphor of the researcher as reporter, and specifically, a feature news reporter, implicates the inter-subjectivity of the phenomenological approach, and the interpretive nature of the account by way of the observations, perceptions and experiences of the reporter. A feature news approach also allows for the presentation of findings by way of thick descriptions (Denzin, 2001; Geertz, 1973). Such descriptions do more than merely record what a person is saying or doing, and go well beyond mere fact and superficial appearances. Thick description

seeks to provide a broad range of experiences so the reader can enter into the findings and have a more realistic understanding of study participants. Throughout, the emphasis here is on allowing participants to speak for themselves, and to capture the richness and complexity of their perceptions. Direct quotations from interviews seek to portray the multiplicity of participant perceptions and perspectives they may or may not collectively share. Where appropriate, data from the pre-interview questionnaire, personal notes made during interviews and analysis, and my own reflections, are interwoven with perceptions and descriptions of experience provided by participants, although these personal insertions were held to a minimum.

The findings are divided into two sections. The first section discusses how black males perceive their representation in media in general, and how they feel these perceptions may influence self-concept, and relationships with others. The second section reviews some of the outcomes black males perceive are associated with representations, such as when, if at all, black males are associated with or encouraged toward college going; the role of support and resilience to succeed to and through college; and the need to be selective with media consumption to avoid distractions to goals. These findings are presented in the feature story below:

MEDIA: THE QUESTION AND ANSWER TO THE WORLD

Leaning back in a swivel chair in a small office on his Southern California university campus, his baseball cap pushed back, and the brim kicked to one side, Joe muses alternately about how he sees black men like himself portrayed in media, and the times he's been approached by police while hanging out with friends.

"Well, certain media always portrays a bad light on black people, mainly," he says. "Because, like, if you watching the news, they always be a black person committing a crime, but they won't show other ethnicities that committed crimes."

Joe is one of 20 college-going black men attending two Southern California universities who volunteered for a research study into media representations and college going perceptions of black males.

"Not really much positive," he continues. "Or, like you watch a movie that they bring in all of these stereotypes….Such as a time when I was hanging out with my friends in high school, and we got to catch the bus. My friends were mostly black. So, while we're walking police pulled us over 'cause they thought we were up to no good at the time. But we wasn't we were just talking, just trying to go home. Just from a day at school. So they just had a stereotype: *'Oh, there's a bunch of black people here so they must be gang members,'* and yeah we got pulled over a few times because of them [stereotypes]."

Joe's story reminded me of a police encounter I had on the street in my early 20s. It was after a friend's bachelor party, the night before his wedding, and a group of 10 or 12 of us, mostly white, were standing on the sidewalk in a downtown city park with an open case of beer at around 1 a.m. when a police cruiser rolled up. Two officers got out of the car and approached our group. Everyone had an open container in hand and as I think back we were probably fairly loud.

"You can't be drinking in this park," one of the officers said, politely but directly.

"It's a friend's bachelor party," someone piped.

"That's fine but you can't be drinking alcohol in this park," the officer repeated.

One in our group offered an apology and said, "it's getting late and we should all be getting home anyway."

"That's a good idea," the officer said.

As we finished our beers, the best man challenged the officers: "Come on, we're just celebrating," he said. We all tried to quiet him, as did the officers, but he kept pushing. By now, we had emptied our cans and put them in a nearby trash bin. The best man kept chipping. I was standing next to him, telling him to let it go, but he didn't, and the officer finally reached in, turned him around, and said, "You're going to jail." I still can see him sitting in the back of the police car, mouthing off through the closed window. The rest of us got into our cars and drove away: no ID checks, no sobriety test, just a "you gentlemen have a good night" from the officer as he got behind the wheel of his cruiser and drove our friend to jail.

Joe is in his senior year and will graduate in four years. Before attending college, his life goal was to be a fireman "because they save people. 'Cause I wanted to do something more heroic, so I could leave at least a legacy in my past time and maybe I'll be on the news or something or on TV where people remember me for my good deeds."

After high school, Joe thought he'd take the test to become a fireman but "the test wasn't showing up before I decided to go to college, so that kinda changed my perspective," he said. "I can't completely rely on being a fireman 'cause it might not happen so maybe I should just go to college, so I can have a backup plan. Just in case the fireman thing never works out."

I ask him for another media example.

"There are many kids movies…a good example is *Madagascar* where Chris Rock is just a zebra. And you look at the animated movie, *Shrek*, and Eddie Murphy is a donkey. Like why

can't he be a human?" he asks [laughing]. "I can never understand why they can never be human."

He pauses a moment to collect his thoughts.

"And then one time I was at a cousin's house and we watched *The Princess and the Frog*. That particularly has black people only in the beginning but the majority of the movie they turn into a frog, which once again is an animal and didn't have much of a human form."

So portraying blackness as something…

"Less than an equal, for certain commercials in TV and also TV shows. They always have one token black person in there too. That I notice a lot. There should be more than at least one."

Blanco was born in Brazil but his grandfather grew up in Angola and his grandmother in Lake Charles, Louisiana. His parents got together in Brazil during college when his mom returned there to attend school. Before he was two, his parents moved to South Central Los Angeles, "more deep East Los Angeles, east side of West Los Angeles," he explains. Then he offers even more detail: "Off of 41st and Avalon where my family was very influential in the neighborhood because my grandfather built, or caused to be built, more than 10 houses on the block. He was a carpenter by trade…he had seven kids with my grandmother – my mother being the second to the youngest."

Even before our interview, Blanco indicated in his questionnaire he recalled recent negative media portrayals of blackness. The question asked for an explanation and he wrote five words in capital letters in the center of the space allotted for his answer: "COPS, FIRST 48, ALL VILIFY."

When asked a similar question during the interview, he started this way:

"I think what people are being fed is negative all the way around," he said. "They have a reality show about gypsies now. And they're just sluts, drunk and drug dealer sluts. And then you got the *Housewives of Beverly Hills* who are just promiscuous, old, um, ambulance chasing, you know, ex-Penthouse models or whatever they used to be. So it's not just about black people. You asked me about black people. There is negative representations of everybody."

Born in 1971, Blanco is one of the older students in the study, and he reported in his questionnaire previously attending a community college in Washington State and a University of California campus from which he transferred to his current campus.

"You know, there's a lot of positive stuff but you just have to look for it," he says. "But the negative aspect of the media and I watch this show faithfully because I like…the entertainment value and the reality of it, ah, it's humorous to me, sad, informational, and a few other things at the same time, is called *The First 48*...I was going to get on change.org and put a petition against it because I believe they are vilifying black people."

He adds: "It's, you know, the clutch, purse clutching, the door locking, it's when you're bombarded with the imagery of negativity on anything you begin to subscribe to it. I love it for entertainment value perspective. It cracks me up. But I think it's sad too. It makes me think about somebody's regressing because of this. It's like crime doesn't happen in white communities and it only happens, you know, 30% of the time in a Latin community and the other 70% of the time it's in a black community, you know."

Blanco has two sisters and a brother. "My brother – actually, this is funny – my brother has been in prison since 1985 for a crime he didn't commit," Blanco admits. "His crime partners, the people he supposedly committed the crime with, one is out, and one could have been out. But

because my brother protested his innocence, he didn't take the deal, and he was given the most time. He was with my sister at the time that it happened and they didn't believe my sister's story and they sent my brother to jail. He has 32 years-to-life."

Blanco's brother is the oldest, his two sisters are in the middle "and me the baby," he explains.

Overall, I ask, how do you think black males are represented in media?

"I think it's 50-50," he says. "Because you can find just as much positive stuff as you can negative stuff. And I think the negative stuff drives the feed, the feed me machine, the feed me media machine, for excitement and edgy and cutting-edge and racy, you know, confrontational content. But there are also good shows."

Do you have an example?

"I really, really, appreciate the positivity that Barack Obama's getting and I appreciate it because it lets everybody know, not just young African American kids, but young Latinos, gays, lesbians, that you can do whatever you want to do if you put your mind to it," Blanco says. "It's a country that is not the same as when Barack Obama, when we put him in the best job in the country. There's a change and a shift in thinking in the culture. So it signifies to me that the road ahead is good…There's going to be some bumps like everything but I like how the media has portrayed him and put him in the situation to make a really, really nice change."

Alamo remembers media consumption as an independent activity while growing up, sort of like dinner: "You know, we rarely ever really sit together at the table and eat anyway," he said. "It's kinda like, dinner's fixed, sit at the table. Some times you might be there at the same time but usually when you finish, you go to your room. You have homework, watch TV…"

Alamo is completing a degree in African American studies in four years.

"I'd say for like about the last year or so, I haven't listened to, like, I rarely even listen to radio," he said. "Um, just because, like, I really am disappointed and I feel helpless when I listen to hip-hop now on the radio, just because a lot of it is really commercialized and it depicts African Americans in like really negative light…or you know, people who really aren't as sophisticated in their lyrical content, say, like Ludacris or Tupac or Eminem."

Alamo grew up in Los Angeles, "not too far from Baldwin Hills Elementary," he says. Before then, he and his mother lived closer to the downtown area, along the Wilshire corridor. "I never really had a whole lot of contact with my father," he admits. "And, um, since then, it's been like zero." At age 7, when his mother remarried, they moved to the Leimert Park area, and when he was 11 to Carson, where he's lived since, except his freshman year when he lived on campus.

"I just really don't like seeing the negative images out there, you know, especially I would say, maybe, I used to, like, maybe not be as averse to it but now that I've been an African American Studies major, I see the images and what role they play in society, like it just kind of disgusts me now," he explains. "So, you know, I can't really watch or listen to a lot of that stuff now because I see the damage it's done and continues to do."

Usually, Alamo says, the images you see of African Americans are "some kind of sinister or like negative character." He sees a prevalence of those images in mainstream music today.

"A lot of rappers talk about how they used to sell drugs, or you know, they're living in a mansion in Beverly Hills now but in their music they're still talking about hustling and that's kinda weird to me," he says. Because the "African Americans I've seen are really articulate, they have definitely demonstrated like a really thorough knowledge of whatever they're presenting,

especially as it pertains to politics," he adds. "I remember I was watching coverage on election night and they had one African American guy on there – can't remember his name – but it was like him, Wolf Blitzer, like some other people and they were kind of looking at the different counties and how they were voting and things like that. And, he was really – of course they had Democrats and Republicans on there – but he was definitely like holding his own against some of the other guests on the show and like you know that's something I really enjoy as well because it showed that, you know, it showed like an African American, you know, really intelligent, holding his own against, you know, his other white peers and things like that."

While these examples touch on general perceptions of how black men are portrayed in media, the next section examines more personal views: how media representations as perceived by black males may influence self-perceptions.

The Media and Me

James Elba is an international student from Great Britain. He arrives at our interview wearing a green *futbol* jersey emblazoned with a club insignia, which he admits being an avid player of and coach. He was born and raised in London by Nigerian immigrants. Our discussion turns to music and he admits having interests in 80s new wave bands, such as *Duran Duran*, *Depeche Mode* and *New Order*, to name a few.

"I had a craze for new wave," he says. "I've always been, I'm pretty much the odd one of my family in that sense, but I just liked new wave, that was just my thing. I was just listening to it now," he adds, holding up the thin white cable to two ear buds slung around his neck. "I had my niche, and my kind of, that was who I was, that was my identity, that was what I liked. Kind of a self-expression: I was able to express myself through my music and set my stand down and be an individual in a sense."

Say more about that, I say.

"It enabled me to become tailor made in the way that I spoke, because I wasn't, I always listened to music that I knew no one else really would expect me to, and not because of any other reason or rebellion, but that was just me, and I realize when I noticed how many other people listened to it, it kind of made me who I was. So instead of being ashamed of not liking this sort of music, because it wasn't in vogue with what the image people placed on me, it just kind of made me proud of who I was, because I was just a person on my own, I didn't need some textbook."

So in a way, you sort of dispelled stereotypes around what a young man would listen to?

"Yeah, definitely. I was a black man who wasn't into hip hopping, R&B, I listened to music I liked, and it was like *'Oh wow!'* I didn't really fit into any category and I, you know, I mean, I didn't dislike R&B and rap, I just preferred these ones more, just by nature," he explains. "You could keep putting it down to the fact that my parents exposed me to so many different types of music, you know, my dad liked *The Beatles*, my dad liked, you know, Frank Sinatra, Nat King Cole. My mom liked *The Carpenters*, so for me, I was always color blind…That democracy that they gave us…I was able to, *'Oh, I like this one more than I like this one.'* I got to choose and select and be free."

Talk about movies.

"*Guess Who's Coming to Dinner* – personally was a really good movie because, um, in my past, when growing up, you know you were always told…Well, one thing my parents always told me, *'just stick with your own,'* but I really didn't see why," James Elba said. "You know, I date every type, I was equal opportunity as far as dating and I don't prefer one type or the other. And growing up in a white neighborhood, predominantly white neighborhood and a white,

Caucasian school, you date Caucasian women and even though my family – my father had an issue – I did it. And watching that movie which was made like 20 years before I was born, was able for me to realize, that I can date anyone I wanted and that, you know, ultimately, therefore, people have to accept who I was as a person. It was really, you know, coming of age of, this is who you are and you, you're not judged by the color of your skin but just who you are, you know, you're an individual. Ah, that movie in particular, I enjoyed it because it was able to show me who I was."

James Elba is one of two participants in the study, both in their 20s, who cited *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner* as an important film. He went on to describe another film that had significance for how he views himself, and why.

"*Malcolm X*, which I watched a few times, was able to show me my own personal identity, because it wasn't particularly restricting me to anything that I, you know, liked or you know this is who you are...for me even, even though I don't see myself as a black man, there was a history behind me being able to do and act the way I am, so free and open…people had to sacrifice some parts of their lives so my life could be better, and that movie was an informative and educating one, about my lineage."

When he was 11 years old, James Elba told his father he wanted to be a fiction writer. In fact, he wanted to be a ghostwriter because he felt it would afford him the opportunity and privileges of living a quiet, personal life. He recalls his father's reaction: "Now wait a minute, don't you think you need to go to school?" After thinking a moment, he replied, "yeah, suppose so." This admission transported me to a similar place in my childhood. I also wanted to be a writer and knew as much at 10 or 11. When my mother asked what I wanted to do when I grew up, I hastily admitted my passion for writing. She unswervingly asked, "but what will you do for

a living?" I never understood her delineation. My father's response was more practical: "You'll need to get a raincoat with deep pockets," he'd say, "so that you can carry a can of applesauce and sardines, and maybe pin a clean white shirt on the inside of the coat flap."

Finally, James Elba concludes our discussion this way:

"Well, media is just around, you can't hardly avoid it everywhere you go. It just definitely probably makes you more conscious about who you are, and how you look at yourself in the mirror. It makes you wanna do things you don't wanna do…It always makes you feel guilty when I binge or eat too much. I constantly feel like I'm always trying to fit the image of what the media is trying to portray sometimes. Yeah, it's always there, it's always been in my face…I'm a very spiritual person so I definitely feel spirituality keeps me in check when the media gets very vocal in my face…I'm aware of it, and I'm still influenced by it but I'm not losing myself."

Ritchie is a Haitian-American who grew up in Port Jervis, New York. Like most immigrants, his parents, with little education, came to America for a better life. He recalls how the family relied on media to assimilate.

"One of the biggest things I can remember about family times, uh, specifically, was entertainment," he says. "Um, so, the way the family got together usually revolved around television, especially because they were immigrants trying to learn the American culture. They learned it through television, radio, and movies, and that's how I developed my affinity for entertainment... But, um, it served as, uh, bigger conversational piece, such as the world around us, um, certain topics, news events, things that happen. You know, television was like a major hub for us to discuss these things and be somewhat of a family unit. I would say radio is another,

just popular music and just how my folks assimilated into a culture and liking musical artists – you know, black ones, white ones, you know, whoever they liked."

Ritchie attended a community college before transferring to his current university. His questionnaire and interview stand out for a couple of reasons. First, he was one of four participants whose original questionnaire and consent form was "lost", requiring him to fill out a second set of paperwork. Second, his interview was conducted outside on a bench on a chilly December afternoon during the campus Winter break because all of the buildings were locked and we couldn't get to the office in which the interview was planned.

The lost questionnaires and release forms were eventually found but not until the four participants involved filled out new paperwork. What was interesting was the answers given in the two sets of questionnaires were different in certain areas. For instance, in Ritchie's case, he reported different levels of education for his parents from his original questionnaire to the replacement questionnaire and also a slight change in his own GPA. Originally, he reported his mother had some high school and his father only elementary school or less, and in the second set of paperwork that both parents had elementary school or less. His GPA in his major in the first document was 3.9 and in the second document 4.0. Likewise, his indicated media consumption dropped from 35 hours per week to under 20 hours per week. There were other differences in his paperwork, as well as that of other participants who filled out a second set. Upon reflection, I wondered if having completed the interview and gotten to know me Ritchie and the others provided *truer* answers in the second questionnaire. Although, in one case, the participant had kept a copy of his original and produced that once notified I had misplaced earlier copies of the documents. In that case, answers to questions in both sets of documents were identical. The

emergence of these outcomes may be reason for a separate examination along methodological lines.

Ritchie, a film and television major, has since graduated and is working in the industry. At the time of our interview, he described what he believed were reasons for his interest and pursuit of a career in media.

"I don't think it was necessarily like a known goal, but a lot of the films my [two, older] brothers watched were especially comedy films and stuff with Eddie Murphy or whatever. It almost in some type of form or fashion made me want to be a comedian or an actor or something of the sort that dealt with entertainment," he explained. "When I was a kid I liked to be the class clown – just to get a reaction. So I guess to a certain extent, I felt like that's what I wanted to be…And I think it's just because of the heavy consumption of, uh, media that I digested as a kid. I mean, I feel like, you know, I watched a lot of TV shows. I watched a lot of movies and there were so many that I liked, that I associated myself with a lot of those characters, with a lot of those shows, you know, a lot of that just became a part of my psyche to an extent."

These interests motivated him to leave New York for Los Angeles in order to pursue acting. But, once here, he discovered, "I'm much more comfortable behind the scenes, creating the content as opposed to being, um, like a piece of the content," he explained.

He adds, "First and foremost, just being a teenager you have a lot of angst of some sort and you wanna be heard about how you feel and the best way to get that out you know…(is) through just telling how I felt and telling, you know, my story, and my situations, and scenarios. Of course, in the very beginning they're very inflated and exaggerated and you know whatever. I think as time went on they really became very personified and closely in line with what I've been through."

For David, the television and music that tends to resonate with him requires a degree of audacity. The junior is an accomplished pilot and musician [He invited me to a gig at the *House of Blues* in Hollywood in which he was a featured act], and seeks to push the edge in his creative work.

"I remember watching *The Simpsons* because I was into animation to a certain degree… And I like that type of humor. I like sarcasm. I like seeing the bad kid and those scenarios. That is very funny to me because often I'm not too far from those," David said. "I guess I would do what I got to do in my own way."

Another favorite is *South Park*, "just because of the audacity that was shown," he says. "It was like those kids were in elementary school and they had audacity to do so much. That was very funny to me and empowering to a degree."

But when it comes to representations of blackness, "I think there's a void in the media," David suggests. "I think the media is, from my observation, the media projects a certain amount of images of people who look like me, black men, and they're really narrow."

Yet, David sees and appreciates the same type of boldness of *The Simpsons* and *South Park* in the music of Timbaland, Pharrell and Michael Jackson.

"Their energy resonated with me from whatever the type of stuff that they would speak about in their songs," he says. "Audacity again, cause all those guys I mentioned…Like just the untraditional-ness in their self-expression and the expression of their music, very untraditional, you know, very unique."

David identifies with taking an untraditional path. Before attending his current campus, he spent time at Loyola University in New Orleans and American University in Washington,

D.C. After our interview, he took off a year, telling me, "I'm done with that." A year later, I saw him back on campus, finishing up General Ed requirements in order to graduate.

Growing up in Southern California, David recalls living in San Bernardino until the first grade, and then moving to Los Angeles with his parents, who have been married for 24 years. He has a younger sister.

"The first school that I attended out here in Los Angeles was very different," he recalls. "It was called Marcus Garvey Elementary School and it's a private school, and the curriculum is just, it exposes you to, exposes their students, which are predominantly black, to our ancestral origins, if you will."

After a year at Marcus Garvey, David attended a public school on 54th Street that, again, was predominantly black and very different. "Just hanging out with those kids, they were more aggressive," he recalls. "Like they had, you know, they were cussing in second grade, things like that. It was just, it was more *street* to say the least."

David attended yet another elementary school, Windsor Hills Elementary. While it wasn't too far from 54th Street, "Windsor Hills is a different crop of kids. It was a magnet school, aerospace science magnet school…you had more upper middle class versus 54th Street, being more like a lower to middle class type thing," David recalls.

The conversation turns again to media representations and those media representations include Will Smith.

"Will Smith…Like, he's the best of both worlds…He's from the streets and he's a corporate guru now," David explains. "So, you have this guy who's in this cast, with all of these corporate gurus, but these dudes genetically come from somewhere else. They don't come from what I come from...They're not from the streets. So him being that drop of chocolate, if you will,

in the sea of non-chocolate, that was dope… I'm like, yeah, I see this guy, yeah, he's doing perhaps some things that I want to do in my life and it resonates more 'cause he's black."

While these participants found mostly positive ways for media representations to reflect on their self-perceptions, each of them also discussed negative self-perceptions from media representations, as did others. Given we look at how black males perceive being viewed by others in the following section, and most of those depictions have negative connotations, according to participants, the descriptions offered here were an opportunity to share positive impressions.

Is That Really How You See Me?

Lex grew up in Fairbanks, Alaska, which he described as predominantly white but because of a military presence, "I remember some of my friends were from Samoa and Puerto Rico," he said. "It was mixed more by class, like you just had poor, middle class and rich."

His neighborhood wasn't racially mixed, "like you have in the bigger cities." School was a predominantly white, Catholic school and church was predominantly black.

"So, I always shifted back and forth…almost like two different worlds that never really touched that much, you know?"

His mom was a teacher and his dad a construction worker turned preacher. Lex was an only child, and another of the older participants in the study. At the time of his interview, he was 38.

One of the video clips he viewed from a website of media representations of black men showed a young, well-dressed black male who enters an elevator occupied by a white female, and as he enters she moves to one side and obviously wraps her arm around her purse. The black male turns to the camera and says, "Hi, every 40 seconds a black man enters an elevator and

some stupid white bitch clutches her purse for dear life…" This is a staged, comedic and well-circulated Internet meme that drew laughter from virtually all participants who viewed it, including Lex. However, Lex is one of a handful of participants who spoke about it in his interview.

"That was funny and it rang very true," Lex admits. "I've seen that scenario in elevators, parking lots, airplanes, just anywhere, where I may not be dressed as nice as in another situation or…if I have a hat on or when I had braids, whatever."

Lex is over six feet tall, trim not stocky. He projects a calm and smiling demeanor.

"So when they see me in the elevator, like that guy, they figure he's like dressed, I'm dressed in a football jersey and jeans. So if I got on the elevator, someone would be a little more apprehensive about me versus if I had a suit on and a nice buttoned-up shirt. But then, now you can be someone who'd be scared of me even with the buttoned-up shirt [laughs]," he said. "That's what's funny….you're scared of me and I'm probably the person that would help you."

Growing up, Lex recalls *The Cosby Show* as depicting "the first kind of upper league mobile black family on TV…Both parents are educated, both parents are in the house, the kids were just regular kids and they lived in a nice house, had friends," he said. "And so that was kind of just either your life or that was the life that you wanted to see, like kinda like *Leave it to Beaver*, or an ideal household but it wasn't something that was a fairy tale 'cause, yeah, I did know some rich black families so it was nice, it was just nice to see that on TV. Because at that time, you just didn't see a lot of positive images of yourself on TV."

Returning to his description of experiences in elevators and airports, he says: "The person just looks at me and just makes a pre-judgment based on if I'm dressed in sweats or whatever…Like I said, we, yeah, we do notice but it's something that I guess African

Americans, certain things you just see and you just kinda put up with, just a norm. It's something that we make jokes about, something that's kinda like the blues, you make fun of it so it's not so hurtful or it's not so sad. But yeah, we make jokes about you can't get a cab and all kinds of stuff."

So mass media may exaggerate characterizations of black men?

"I don't feel that negative stuff should be shown all the time 'cause that's the only newsworthy thing," he says. "I mean, that happens and that is a part of life but that's not all that's in life and that shouldn't be all that we're interested in to watch... I wanna watch people who have something that's gonna inspire me and tell me something versus I wanna see other people's pain and suffering. Me personally, I just don't wanna see that…I don't like seeing images that make people think that I'm like that 'cause all they see on TV is this image."

For Jeffrey, many of the stereotypes associated with black males in media representations have slowed him down and affected some relationships, but not for the reasons you might expect.

"A lot of the messages that you would get from media, especially in high school, that African American males don't necessarily graduate from high school…that would drive me to undo that," he said. "But I think a lot of that message kept me from really thinking about my future. I want to prove them wrong. Okay, I graduated from high school. What's the next step?"

Jeffrey, a fifth year student, has changed his major five times: from computer science to child development, then English, physical therapy and finally music education.

"I dibbled and dabbled," he says. "I haven't wasted a lot of time though…but that has a lot to do with me not giving much thought to my future when in high school. Growing up, it will

be such an achievement just to get into college so I didn't give it much thought."

Jeffrey says not being perceived as a media stereotype is important to him. "Not just because I don't want to be but just because it just doesn't feel right to me…I just really want to put out into the world what I want back," he adds.

He admits he's bothered when he sees an individual or group acting out a stereotype "to a T."

"I don't know, maybe you go somewhere and in a nice quiet environment…Or, in my neighborhood for instance, I hate this…But to me…If you want respect or you don't want the world to think of stereotypes, you can't act on those stereotypes," he says.

Jeffrey admits he's one of the few kids he grew up with that stayed in his South Central neighborhood. Most moved out to go to school or start work. Then one of his old friends moved back, the former president of the Black club, and he thought, "OK, he moved back. Everything will be the same."

But that's not how it turned out.

"They park with the music loud and stay up all night partying and cursing and with a belligerent attitude and stuff like that. And, it's stuff…that furthers the stereotype where if a Caucasian or somebody will drop by, like, 'See, I was right,'" he says.

"A lot of who I am currently today has to do with not so much the experiences that I had as a child but I would say the experiences that I didn't have," he continues. "Not getting into drugs or not getting into trouble. I've only been pulled over once. That was because it was like one o'clock in the morning and I made a U-turn in the middle of the street 'cause I was looking for an apartment."

One of the media forms he says he really dislikes is reality TV.

"It's an oxymoron," he says. "Like it's not real. I think when it started, like with *Survivor* and stuff, they might have been. But now, like shows like *Bad Girls Club*, for instance…It gives women such a negative depiction to everyone…I try not to watch brain-numbing things, or expose myself to brain-numbing things."

On the positive side, he talks about the *'Will Smith aspect of everything.'*

"It's funny," Jeffrey says. "He's like the shining light almost for the black race…He's a great candidate, he's somebody I definitely look up to…But there's more out there than just Will Smith, or the Spike Lees, or the Bill Cosbys."

Ryan's pretty specific when he talks about media representations of blackness and their implications for relationships with others.

"You know, I've been saying this - I've been saying this for a while," he says. "A lot of stuff you see…is a modern day minstrel show and I think that a lot of people are laughing at blacks because of the way they're shown."

The 6 foot 8 inch tall Southern California native shows up for our interview in coat and tie. I come out of a classroom on his campus and he's got a cell phone against his ear. He's dialing me to find out where I am.

Minstrelsy is a form of entertainment developed in 19th Century America that consisted of comedic skits, variety acts, singing and dancing, originally performed by white people in blackface makeup, according to The PBS *American Experience* website. After the Civil War, black people in blackface makeup performed it. Ironically, minstrelsy is the origin of the American entertainment industry.

"It's either a negative connotation or it's comedic," Ryan continues. "And, in the

comedic, it's like - and people - the thing about the comedic connotation is that's what gets me most because that's the modern day minstrel show that I was talking about. That's what I mean. When you have, you know, these urban references to black people that are, *'Ha, ha, ha, it's funny,'* but if you read more into it, no. It shouldn't - it shouldn't be funny. I mean…we don't have anything that's more serious, that's less comedic, something that we can refer to that just depicts blacks in an upstanding way. There's nothing."

Like other research participants, Ryan has an interesting back-story. He grew up in Southern California, and from an early age lived with his mother and two sisters. His father, a Nigerian immigrant, left the home when Ryan was two or three years old. When he was young, Ryan suffered from asthma, and was frequently hospitalized, and that placed a financial burden on his mother. He and his two sisters moved around a lot with their mom, from staying with friends and relatives in South Los Angeles to moving to Palmdale. Ryan felt the strain, and when he reached his teenage years and he shot up in height, everyone around him suggested he play basketball.

"In my head, I'm thinking: You know what, I'm going to play basketball professionally and that's how I'm going to make my money," he explains. "It's that really narrow mindset because, although you don't need to explicitly say that to yourself or to say it to anybody else…everything that surrounds you tells you what you're going to be or what you are not going to be…Because that's what portrayed on television. And to this day, I get people tell me, *'Why don't you play basketball? You're so tall. Play basketball. Play basketball. Play basketball*.'"

For years, that's exactly what Ryan did. Basketball got him into a few private boarding schools, and a couple of full-ride college scholarships, although things didn't always work out. It wasn't grades, it wasn't school, but it was Ryan and who Ryan wanted to be.

"It's like what you see everyday forces this thing on you that this is what you should be," he says. "This is what you ought to be. So I think the problem is a lot of kids don't have any guts to do anything other than what is being forced on them."

There were pulls back at home too. One time, Ryan came home from school and his mom and two sisters were living out of a car.

Ryan has since graduated with a Bachelor's degree in Business Administration and is just finishing law school.

"If we have more movies showing educated black men and just harping on that…I think that will be a huge step for us," Ryan says. "But see, for some reason or other, that's not popular. And the media does what's popular. But then, why isn't it popular? Why is the black drug dealer such a popular role? Why is that?"

In the second section of this article, participants discuss and examine how these perceptions have implications for college going, and the personal strengths and other support needed to persist to and through college, while avoiding media messages perceived to be limiting or inaccurate.

MEDIA ISN'T SHOWING BROTHERS AND SISTERS AT LIBRARIES

Clark says he doesn't want to necessarily blame media portrayals for the underrepresentation of black males on college campuses, but he's quick to follow with, "I think one of the things that is stopping people is the fact that no one is saying they can go to college."

Clark's statement gives me pause to reflect: Before and during my early college going, I remember the iconic advertising campaign proclaiming, "A mind is a terrible thing to waste." That campaign, begun in the 1970s, helped raise more than $4 billion and contributed to the

college graduation of more than 400,000 black students, according to the UNCF website. While the campaign is still used for fundraising, the messaging is seldom if ever seen in today's media rotation.

"You have like ballplayers, they go to school, but if you get an offer for $40 million, who is going to turn that down?" Clark asks. "So I kind of think there's less black males on campus because there's less people saying go to college."

How about students who aren't athletes, I ask.

"Unless there's people showing them how to go to college, more specifically like I was in AVID," Clark says, "black males will continue to be underrepresented."

"AVID [an advanced placement and college preparatory program] showed us how to fill out the forms, where to take the SATs, they showed us how to deliver those forms and you know when you get the acceptance – the letters – and what to do with them," Clark adds. "There are people telling these black guys *'Oh, yeah, you can go to college'* but no one's showing them how to go to college. And once there, no one is showing them how to study. So you have a person who may have gotten all Cs and suddenly happens to get into college and then they don't know how to perform there so then they drop out."

So, while you don't think it's the absence of media representations linking black males to college, you see the lack of representation elsewhere as an issue?

"I believe that if we… if there are more chances… more people telling them how to get there instead of telling them just to go there, there would be a lot more on campus," Clark says. "There's not enough role models. You have the President of the U.S. but there's not enough role models in the immediate community to help them. You know, even if you go to the store, it's like a local business, and that person is not necessarily black... So I think at the core there's not

enough immediate representation."

Clark is the youngest of five children. He has two sisters and two brothers and grew up with both parents in Long Beach, a south bay suburb of Los Angeles. His two brothers and one sister are more than 10 years older, so much of what he remembers happening around the house as a child involved him, his parents and one sister.

Watching television was a family past time, as was preparing dinner, he says.

"Like we always came together and cooked," Clark said. "Because of the age difference with my brothers and sister, like there was only a certain amount of us at a certain time so like my mom and sister and me and my dad, we just, we just like cooked dinner. You know, especially around holidays, but pretty much a couple of times every week."

As we return to the topic of media representations and college going, Clark says, "we just don't need someone saying, *'Oh, yeah, it's the Man,'* you know. There is that, but there's also other people holding you back."

Can you say more about that?

"I kind of think if there was a lot more core businesses, if someone could walk up the street and see like this black guy in a suit, you know, filling out paperwork they might be like, *'Oh, what is this guy doing?'* So I kind of think if there was more of that, there would be more going to college and more [black males] on campus 'cause they'll say *'Hey what you do?' 'Oh well, I'm a manager.' 'Oh well, how did you do that, did you just work your way up?' 'Oh no, I went to college and I got a degree in business management.' 'Oh, and what college did you go to?' 'I went to this'* and that leads to the whole conversation of how you do it… But, then again, there has to be someone to take the risk to be that representation."

Noah remembers wanting to be a doctor from a young age, and for a particular reason, but it wasn't because he saw images of people like himself in those positions in media representations.

The 22-year-old grew up in Compton with his mom, a younger sister, and his grandparents. His father was around until Noah was 10, and then he was murdered. He was a Hollywood drug dealer.

Noah remembers reading an article in second or third grade about Dr. Benjamin Carson, "and I wanted to be just like him when I grew up," he said. His uncle gave him a book by Carson, entitled *Gifted Hands*, "and I read that and I really sort of wanted to pursue that."

That interest grew and when both of his grandparents were diagnosed with cancer at the same time while he was in high school, "I wanted to do something," he said. "So that was something that sort of motivated me to the next level of being a doctor, but between that…I knew that to be a doctor you had go to college and those things to prepare."

But, once Noah got to college, "the courses sort of tracked me in a different way," he said. "I had a faculty mentor in the Public Health Department. That sort of steered me toward wanting to work in black communities and with health disparities…so it kinda changed my focus."

I steer the conversation back to media representations and whether they link black males to college.

"Are you familiar with the Tyler Perry movies?" Noah asks.

I nod.

"I think the black community, they sort of like those types of movies," Noah says. "And people see that and they really think that, you know, every black family is like that…I don't see

those as positive at all."

Noah pauses a moment and then continues.

"Also, on different shows, there's always like…a token black person and people sorta see that [and think that] every black person must be like that person," he says. "I know right now, there's a [MTV] *Real World Update* where they have a black guy, he's like a big strong, like a *BIG* black guy. And I think to myself like, you know, does everyone see him as what every black guy is? What he shows on TV do they think of me as that same person?"

Noah sees these representations as disheartening, "'cause I know a lot of other black males who aren't like that. So, it's like, we've come so far, I guess, from the Civil Rights Movement and to still have that sort of stereotype going on."

So how does this affect black males and going to college?

"I definitely think it has an impact on sort of young black males 'cause I know I have a cousin who's, I guess, he's 17, he's graduating this year and one of the things that he told me awhile ago was *'Why go to college if I can, you know, if I can just rap or do this…I can get money just the same way,'*" Noah explains. "So I do think it has an influence. And you have…there's younger ones that think the same thing…They wanna be that guy on TV that has all the women, you know, being funny…and they don't know how he got there."

Alonzo Harris agrees there's not a lot of media images of black men and college going, and the images he sees of college going aren't that inviting.

"When you think about college life, you would think like about schools, like, oh it's Ivy League: Harvard, Yale," he explains. "Me, I couldn't see myself at any of those schools just because the people who I would be around wouldn't be anything like me. So that's why, that's

mainly part of like…That's the reason why I chose [the school I did]. I knew if I came here I would have people who I have, will have a lot in common with, as opposed to going cross the state or cross the country to predominantly white schools and having to change myself to be able to fit in."

Alonzo Harris was born at UCLA Medical Center, and then his parents, Nigerian immigrants, moved him and his older sister to Sacramento. They lived there for a couple of years before moving to Galt, a Sacramento suburb. A younger brother came along later.

"In Galt, it was, I would say, it was predominantly white and Mexican," Alonzo Harris says. "Black people were definitely the minority and mainly all the black people who went to or were in Galt knew each other…because we knew…there wasn't too many of us."

When it came to considering college, Alonzo Harris did a lot of his own research. But he also had an older sister who had done a number of campus tours and for a couple of them he went along.

"I saw from there like I was judging the school, you know…I'm like, *'would I, you know, would I do this?'*" he recalls. "Maybe it'll work but where would I feel more comfortable getting my degree, where would I want to stay to get that degree?"

Looking back, I ask, did he make the right decision.

"I could have made a better decision," he says.

How so?

"The amount of programs offered," he explains. "The amount of, the thorough, what's the word, the thoroughness of the programs offered. Like if you offer a program, you need to offer all of the classes for that program here instead of me having to go [somewhere else] or something like that. So that would have been something I would have looked into more [in

hindsight], to make sure that all the classes I needed were here and I didn't have to branch out too much to get my degree."

Being unable to get the classes he needed to graduate resulted in Alonzo Harris changing his major. When he was younger and at home, he took things apart, and made them work again. Given his aptitude, his mother pushed him to study engineering.

"My parents are both in the medical field," Alonzo Harris explains. "They wanted me either to be in the medical world, or an engineer. Typical, it's a typical Nigerian thing. I'm like – *I don't want to do, you know – I don't want to be the norm*."

So he became a business major.

Clearly, these participants did not report media representations insisting or even suggesting they go to college. In most cases, the messaging was either quite the opposite or nonexistent. However, each of these young men had formal or informal support for their college going plans. In the next section, we look more closely at support mechanisms, within the family, or through outside others, as well as how moments of resiliency kept college going expectations moving forward even when participants struggled with their identity and perceived place in the world.

Luckily, I Had My Older Brother

When Anomaly arrived for his interview, he explained he chose his pseudonym because he was an *outlier*. "What interests me the most, and something I will thank higher education for, is that I know a lot more about statistics now," he said.

Anomaly is one of two certified *crack babies* in the study. His mother was using during her pregnancy and Anomaly talks about the *mark* that's followed him throughout his 22 years. At one point in school, his teachers gave him a battery of tests in what he remembers was an attempt

to send him to remedial courses. When he tested off the chart, he was placed in advanced courses.

Still, his challenges remained. His mother kept using off and on and Children's Protective Services would take him and his sister away, and they would live with grandmas and godmothers, and Anomaly eventually landed at his father's home, living with a half brother. Most of these experiences weren't good ones.

"I was thinking of running away and *shit*," he explains. "Luckily, I had my older brother. He always knew I was a smart kid. This is my brother on my dad's side, so we share the same father. The story behind us living together is that his mother passed away, so he had no choice but to go live with my dad, so my father always felt like nobody chose him, it was by circumstance that we moved in with him."

Anomaly tells a story about cleaning out the kennel of his dad's prized pit bull. His father told him to make sure not to let the dog out, but while he was cleaning the kennel, the dog dug underneath the fence and ran away.

"After that my father treated me like *shit*, literally treated me like a piece of *shit*," Anomaly explains. "He would do things. He got a new dog, he would do things like – my daddy used to drink every now and then, and he was kinda, very physical, to say the least, and I remember my dad, he came home – he's like, *'it's training time.'* It's midnight; I have a class the next day. I would have to get up, put on tattered clothing and let the new dog, he got to jump on me, and pull on my clothes because that was training!"

Other times, his dad would say, "cook for me."

"And I'd say, dad, I'm doing my homework and he says, *'I don't care.'* Thank God I had my big brother there," Anomaly said. "After dad would leave I'd go cook. [My brother would

ask:] 'Are you going to finish your home work?' I'm tired. 'Just finish it, man.' I'd do [my home work] with my brother sitting at this chair…looking over at me…making sure I got my homework done."

Anomaly suffered other abuse. While he lived with his father, he never had a key to the house, or a bed to sleep in. When he got an after school job, his father would take his checks and he would see only a fraction of his earnings. Even when he got a scholarship to Blue University, his father took some of his money.

"It was just like, no matter what you do you're damned if you don't, you're damned if you do, and so that mentality when you impose that on someone who looks like they have no hope, they…pardon the vernacular, pardon the vulgarity, there's a *fuck it* mentality," Anomaly explained. "And a lot of black men have a *fuck it* mentality, but it's how you utilize it. I have a *fuck it* mentality in a sense that *fuck* what the world is saying, *fuck* what you're telling me, *fuck* the media, I'm gonna succeed as an educated black man, probably go on and earn another degree from another reputable institution, so the *fuck it* mentality is good. However, in the 'hood, where I'm from, the other *fuck it* mentality is a lot of my friends got babies, or are gang members or might be locked up. So, one thing that I've noticed is it's not the individual, and this is something that there is much literature written on, it's the environment."

Like Anomaly, Kwame's mother had a drug addiction. He was a ward of the state at the age of one, and bounced from foster home to foster home until he was three, when he was adopted by a Mexican American woman and her Japanese American partner.

"Well, he didn't' live with us," Kwame explained. "But he's been a part of my life ever since I was adopted. I consider him my father. He's always supported me, either by giving me

money if I needed it or driving me to any of the activities I was involved with growing up. So yeah, he's always been there."

Living along the border between Oakland and Berkeley in the San Francisco Bay area, Kwame admits, as he got older, he realized he likely couldn't have grown up in a better place.

"That's one of the things that I love about the Bay is that, you know, there's non-traditional everything [laughs]: in politics to families to, you know, culture, cultural practices and so I think that it's probably the best place that I could have been brought up in regards to feeling okay about my family."

Still, Kwame wrestled with his identity growing up. He speaks fluent Spanish, and when he tells others he has family in Central Mexico, they're like, *'what, you have family where?'* Too, he's made at least a couple of tries to find his biological parents. The first time was too emotional and he gave up, vowing not to try again. Then, in a second effort, "I found out my natural father was one of the first members of the Black Panther Party in Oakland and he did a lot of community work with Berkeley High students. He lived 10 minutes away from my house actually and I never knew that," he said.

But, his need to know more about his biological parents placed strain on his relationship with his adoptive mother.

"I feel like in the last couple of years we've grown apart, you know, emotionally," Kwame explained. "One of the reasons why I decided to locate my biological family is because as I've gotten older, the need to know has only gotten stronger. At the same time, I'm still struggling with sharing that need to know with her and fear that I'll hurt her…I'm still trying to find my, that intersection between doing this work while developing our relationship…it's difficult…and I think, you know, we could definitely use a lot more time together."

When he was younger, he played the saxophone and his mother, and his stepfather, played music together. “You know, my mom played bass, David played, my stepfather played piano, and I was on saxophone.” They’d play jazz standards, everything from Lee Morgan to Coltrane to Bill Evans. At 13, his mother took him out of school and they spent a year traveling around the world: Morocco, Mexico, Spain, and Cuba. Still, there were times when Kwame didn’t feel he had a sure footing of where he belonged.

Returning from his yearlong trip, Kwame found school boring and he started hanging out with a different crowd that resulted in a brush with the law.

“I even got caught up in an unfortunate misdemeanor where we stole a shotgun from another student’s house in Alameda and, you know, they were gang affiliated, and so by virtue of the fact that I was with them, you know, that became a huge problem,” Kwame admits. “It was a big turn, you know, and it really freaked my mom out…We spent this year together, we became really close, and once I got back, we totally kind of separated, you know, our relationship was really strained and she didn’t feel she knew me.”

These were difficult times for Kwame. He said he often knew what was influencing him but he couldn’t stop himself from getting involved.

“Like I understood that, you know, black men are criminalized in society and that we have a statistically higher chance of going to prison,” he said. “But I also, you know, was just really struggling, feeling like I didn’t fit in, and never fully felt like I was an authentic black person if I didn’t go through these things, so I put myself in a lot of these unfortunate situations.”

Still, he had an interest in getting involved with younger kids, teaching them the Afro-Cuban music and dance he was exposed to in Cuba, as well as developing his own cultural arts performance.

"So I started getting involved in Black Student Union, the *Latinos Amigos*," he explained. Also, I formed a student group called *Salonga Salsa*. In Cuba, I learned how to dance *salsa*, so I bridged the connection between the Black Student Union and *Latinos Amigos* because, you know, I was identifying as an Afro Latino person, speaking Spanish and growing up with a Spanish Mexican family."

Learning choreography and using the power of performing arts to build community "kind of brought me out of it," and redirected his interests away from just doing "a lot of this reckless stuff."

Looking back, Kwame admits, "It's hard for me to accept…I can't acknowledge my being at [Blue University] without wondering if I'd be here had I not been adopted…You know, did it take for me to be brought out of my, you know, biological family setting and be put in a family of a non-black mom and dad to be at [Blue University]? I wonder about those things…could I have beaten the odds, so to speak, on my own?"

Justin was a little put out when his mother sent him from his home in Brooklyn, New York to stay with an auntie in California. After all, he had his older brothers and cousins to hang out with. But looking back now, he realizes it was for the best.

"My mom, she raised me mostly early on," Justin explains. "But I would say work, she couldn't balance work and monitoring me. I was a straight-A student until 10th grade. I would say that's probably the first time I was away from my mother, where I had free control and I would say I got around the wrong crowd."

Justin has a mixed heritage: his mom is African American, his father, who he doesn't remember, was Hispanic. As he got older, he spent a lot of time with his cousins, since he'd stay

with them in Brooklyn while his mother worked. The family was tight. Every Friday, his mom would take him, his older sister and two older brothers out to dinner and then to a movie. "A lot of family barbeques and things like that" happened on weekends.

"When I think about it, it was just something my mom wanted me to get away from," Justin says. "My cousins, how they weren't doing well in school and doing things that weren't appropriate, so she sent me here to my auntie, and it kind of, I can say, was the right thing 'cause it carried me to school."

One of Justin's early goals was to play pro basketball. He grew up watching the New York Knicks and remembers either in 1993 or 1994 when Spike Lee followed the team on the road and was always courtside cheering them on, all of which really spurred his ambitions.

"But then, I would say, after my 10th grade year, they [ambitions] started to fade, just from the influences of other people and hearing people talking, like the hip-hop influence, about gangs," Justin explained.

"At that age, you just start thinking, 'Why am I listening to my parents?'" Justin said. "I guess that influenced me and that's when I can say I actually started watching more video, music videos and stuff…I still watched basketball and I still had a passion for it; but I don't know, I wasn't really thinking, *'I can really make it,'* 'cause you would hear about someone…that they're gonna go and then they can't go because of this or that. I kind of felt that way."

What happened, I ask.

"I can say I became, I don't know, instead of softened and gentle as I used to be then, I became, in my heart, I started to get hardcore, like I didn't care about anything," Justin explained. "It wasn't until after I graduated [high school] that I started analyzing and like, *'Okay, what am I doing?'*"

That self-examination continued on other occasions, when he felt he was following someone else's lead, and wasn't doing what he wanted to do. He recalls the opportunity to play football at a community college but by then he had a job, and he liked the money.

"Then watching, I guess, TV, just seeing everybody, hearing about people getting money and seeing it," he adds, and "you just hear about all these people up and coming and it kind of influenced me."

Still, after a couple of years of work, "my mind just shifted back to analyzing what I was doing again," Justin explained. By now, a cousin was working in the entertainment industry, on the production side, and was encouraging Justin to get involved.

"It was like I always tried to do something different outside of what my normal, for myself, different from what [others] expected from me," he said. So, with his cousin's urging, Justin returned to school but instead of focusing on media production, he majored in International Business, "'cause I was doing some research and I found out that most of the money that got made through media is overseas now so it made me think about the world, not just making [media] for the U.S.… but starting to brand out."

Each of these young men credit others with supporting their college going, and each also describes times of self-doubt and struggles with identity and who they believed they wanted to be. While these participants describe the thinking and ambitions that helped bolster their college-going aspirations, this next section looks at ways participants monitor and manage their consumption of media and cultural portrayals they feel might impede their college and other plans.

I Look. I Don't Necessarily Take What They Give Me

As another of the older participants in the study, Know didn't grow up with 500 channels

of cable TV and what media he did consume growing up, at least early on, was either suggested or monitored by his parents.

"There was no TV during the week for me," Know explained. "And my parents would wait until I went to bed until they watched TV. I think I was fortunate because my parents, though they were very into church, they believed that you have to make your own choices, so I was encouraged to read a lot."

That reading included the Koran, the Tao and the Bible. Later on, his reading included *The Isis Papers*, *Soul on Ice*, *A Taste of Power*, and authors like Octavia Butler, Walter Mosley, and James Baldwin.

"I always felt that TV was fake," Know admits. "So, I never kind of took it to heart and I remember my stepfather did broadcasting school. He was a DJ for a little while and they showed the Associated Press – this is old school but the old teletypes – but when [reports] would come up, some stuff would come up blacked out and so I was like *'how you going to read the news if you can't read the news?'* And he was like, *'Oh, no, no. The news is what they say the news is'*…So early on I understood that like not even, you know, Peter Jennings was telling the whole truth…I don't know if that makes me jaded or realistic but it was just like, yeah, TV is entertainment."

But film and music were big in the home. Know's mom was an avid moviegoer, taking him to the theater at least twice a week. His stepfather collected albums and still does, "so there was a lot of music and that was the free thing that could be done at all times," Know said. "So, a lot of Motown era music. A lot of funk. A lot of gospel, and that kinda pushed me into jazz. Music was a much bigger part in the home."

At some point, Know's musical interests turned to rap, "so when I first started to bring

rap home, it was a little abrasive for the parents, but they were open," he said. "And they challenged me to find rap worth listening to, which was easy to do in the golden era of rap, 'cause there was so much conscious music, and then you combine conscious rap with books that they were referencing in the music, so then I'm bringing home literature so it was really a positive experience."

Coming from this perspective, Know is much more critical of the content in the media sphere today.

"Okay, I do look and I don't necessarily take what they give me," Know said. " And I think that we have to understand at this point before we go to mass media, which is really crappy for the most part…most of the good stuff isn't for the masses. There are going to be a whole lot more McDonald's than Ruth Chris [Steak House]…so we have to stop looking at the McDonald's of mass media. We have to begin to look for quality…we gotta go to Ruth Chris. We have to begin to look at the Whole Foods of media….Too, maybe we should stop looking for black movies and start looking for American movies with black people in them. Going back to what I said earlier, if we're 13-17% of America, it's a little masochistic or maybe sadistic to always expect to see us in everything because then you have an unrealistic view of the world."

Eugene talks about the fictitious American Dream represented by much of mainstream media and how, thankfully, it doesn't really fit with him.

"Even I have known that the American Dream, it's like, you know, you get like different perspectives," he said. "And it's funny how movies…like *Paid in Full* and *Scarface* and *Good Fellas*, all those gang movies, really correlated to more like the rap game of the 90s."

He sees Jay-Z and Nas and some of the East Coast rappers and producers, "especially P.

Diddy and the rest of Bad Boy Records, that they would have that mafia type of mentality with their labels and all the people they'd be associated with. And I know…as a Nigerian American, I can't really live like that."

Eugene is the youngest of four sons of Nigerian immigrants. Like his three older brothers, he spent one year of high school in Nigeria and it's likely the family will eventually return there. His oldest brother was a walk-on football player at University of California, Berkeley and his two middle brothers received football scholarships at another University of California campus and Stanford University. His oldest brother let football go to pursue medicine but his two middle brothers both tested the NFL draft but weren't successful. Eugene walked on at Blue University and red-shirted his first year, but his parents suggested he drop the sport and concentrate on academics when he didn't receive a scholarship the following year.

"I know that in my culture, even though like today I know we want – some of us want – to live nice and things like that, but it's more just like maintaining and just wanting to live nice on our standards," Eugene said. "It's not really trying to go into that lifestyle because as you can see by those movies as well, things never truly, truly, they don't really end well, if anything, for those guys."

Growing up in San Bernardino, media consumption was tempered in his home. His parents watched CNN News and eschewed what they referred to as sensationalist Fox News. Occasionally, his parents would have friends or family over and watch a Nigerian film, and as Eugene got older, they were able to receive daily news from Nigeria, and other international programming. Eugene and his brothers, for the most part, watched sports, and given that he was the youngest, Eugene watched and listened to what his parents and older brothers selected. Even now, unless he's in his own car, he defers to others in the family.

"When it comes to today's music, you know, my general tastes are like really diversified…which I know these are the type of things my mom wouldn't really listen to at all and some would have negative standpoints, especially like, you would think that most of the music today is not exactly the type of things I know she would really want to hear…So I know when it comes to like – any radio stations, if I'm the one choosing – I just have to be careful of the more popular top 40…I want to respect her…and especially, I don't want her to really go and truly think that I'm just really into this music. She'd be asking different types of questions…and honestly, I don't have time to really go and answer when it comes to that type of music," Eugene explained.

Just like when his mom told him she had six weeks to go to graduate from high school and chose not to, when Tito sees negative representations of black males he doesn't necessarily believe what's shown, and his reaction is "Naw, this ain't [true]."

Like many other study participants, Tito grew up in South Central Los Angeles. When it came time for high school, he had the opportunity to attend Fairfax High in Hollywood, and he took it. It was really his first time out of the neighborhood and before going he remembers seeing Hollywood on TV and questioning how it was depicted.

"You look at the stars and stuff…you look at TV like 'Naw, this ain't Hollywood,'" he said. "Then you go up there for four years straight…and I was like *'wow!'* [laughs]. So things I see on TV that's what I see in my eyes: I mean, everything. It's more like a cultural shock. You know how like, like Hollywood has, you know, AIDS and transvestites and all that stuff. I saw that and I was like [laughs], I was like, *'hmmmm*.'"

But when he watches an Atlanta news report about a strong-arm murder that shows

unrelated surveillance video of two black males making purchases at a convenience store as *persons of interest*, Tito asks, "Do ya'll have any proof? Like where's the proof? They said persons of interest and I was like that is ridiculous, and that makes me mad the most, 'cause, okay, I see the murder thing and I don't see no proof of anything, and that's the part I don't like."

In many ways for Tito, it's seeing the outcomes and hearing the back story that lead to his opinions.

"People make poor choices, people do wrong things, and even though my parents did the wrong things back then, they taught me that, like, that's not the right way for you to go, and I took that…and used that as an inspiration for me to do something positive," Tito said.

"I was blessed to have both parents who raised me and my brother very well because overall if it weren't for that we'd be in the exact same place where other people is at…they put me in the right place because I was raised in the wrong area."

Tito may know but doesn't make the obvious connection in our interview between the media he consumes and how it reflects his own experiences or what he observes as true. In talking about favorite music artists, he mentions Bone, Thugs and Harmony, and his favorite song is, *First of the Month*, "because they talk about what they do every first of the month, they tell their stories and, you know, they [talk about] what I'm seeing when I was little," he said.

Another example is the television sit-com *Married with Children,* "because their family is similar to our family…and because it's basically like, how it represents how real families is, you know, we not like the *'goody two shoes'*…we just keep it really real."

Still, another example is the film, *Set it Off*, "because I like how women had their own point of view and they took matters into their owns hands in their own way," Tito explained. "And what I like about it is, um, each of [them] were very different."

Here, we've seen how black males moderate their consumption of negative media representations through decisions around what they consume. In addition, when media of any type present a questionable representation that isn't consistent with perceptions or beliefs, participants contest it, questioning its underlying assumptions.

SUMMARY

In this chapter, I presented key findings from a phenomenological study obtained from 20 black males successfully persisting in college, and the practices and perceptions they believed enabled their college going aspirations. Six emergent findings were identified. These findings were divided into two sections, the first of which concentrated on how black males perceived their representation in media and the implications these perceptions had for representations of black males in general, self-concept and relationships with others. The second section examined the role of media in promoting college to black males, the degree to which familial and other support, along with individual resiliency, were essential to maintaining a successful college trajectory, and why selective media consumption also was essential to continued academic success.

In addition, given the absence of a fixed format for the presentation of qualitative findings, and a concern that typical presentation of empirical findings limits the reader's ability to climb into a story to get closer to knowing the experiences of participants, these findings were presented as if facts and impressions drawn by a news reporter from witnesses interviewed during a feature news story. This approach allows the audience to be drawn into the narrative, as well as highlights the emergent nature of the findings, and the inter-subjectivity of the participant-researcher relationship. Throughout this presentation, the focus was on significant statements made by participants and these are featured in thick, descriptive quotes from

interviews, and where appropriate, reflections of the researcher, to expand the examination of the meaning making process. The outcome is a detail-rich portrayal of black male perceptions of media representations and the ways they may imbue decision-making processes associated with college going.

CHAPTER V

ANALYSIS, INTERPRETATION AND SYNTHESIS OF FINDINGS

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this multicase phenomenological study was to explore with a sample group of college-going African-American males their meaning making of media representations of blackness. Of particular interest were their interpretations of representations of black men, and whether these representations promote, discourage, or are silent regarding college going. The study also sought to examine whether and how black males perceived media representations as having implications for self-concept and relationships with others. Further, the study asked the extent to which, and how they went about, contesting portrayals perceived to be negative or inaccurate.

Twenty black males attending two Southern California public universities engaged in a pre-interview questionnaire seeking demographic information and media consumption practices, navigated a web site containing a variety of motion media depictions of or about black males, and subsequently participated in a semi-structured interview where they discussed impressions of representations they viewed on a web site, in addition to home life, neighborhood and school experiences, media consumption, and life aspirations, among other topics and interests, including favorite media, and why they were favorites. The data were coded, organized, and analyzed, initially using an open coding scheme and then by categories and then by themes that were guided by the conceptual framework, as illustrated in Chapter III.

An overwhelming finding of the study revealed a unanimous perception among participants that media representations had implications for how others viewed black males, and how those views most often negatively flavored relationships. This finding scaffolds subsequent

findings and potentially identifies what may be additional and arguably differential work black males must engage to pursue and get through college. The notion of increased workload due to race and gender, and its concomitant potential for fatigue, perceptions of injustice, and fear of diminished returns, may substantively address our initial question of underrepresentation of black males on U.S. college campuses. Still, there are likely additional insights from these successfully persisting students that may provide similarly situated college aspirants and the institutions they hope to attend with a revised vision with which to address ongoing obstacles to black male college success.

This chapter analyzes, interprets and synthesizes findings within the same analytic categories used in the previous chapter identifying them. These thematic categories include:

1. Participants perceived media representations flavoring how black males are generally viewed in society
2. These perceptions raised questions about how participants viewed themselves and their place in the world
3. These perceptions had implications for relationships with others
4. Media typically don't associate black males with college going
5. Participants struggle with identity and relied on resilience in their education efforts
6. Participants reported a high degree of selectivity in media consumption, often instilled early by parents who directed or restricted media consumption

These themes are aligned with the study's research questions, and also emerged as final categories to code data. During analysis, the researcher seeks to identify and explicate emergent patterns within these analytic categories and themes, and then to tie in relevant theory and research to compare and contrast these findings with existing literature.

In Chapter IV, I presented findings by organizing data from various sources into thematic categories to produce a coherent narrative emphasizing participant voices. In this chapter, I will lend interpretive insight to these findings. While the purpose of the previous chapter was to break out or separate chunks of data with which to tell a story of the research, this chapter follows what Vagle (2014) refers to as the last step in a whole-part-whole sequence to reconstruct the data to provide a more holistic understanding. Human experience is based on interpretation and understanding by the individual engaged in the experience, and language is the commons of being (Heidegger, 1962). Further, experience is forged through this interpretation of the world, and the environment and interpreter govern all interpretation. In short, the unit of analysis is the relationship between an individual and environment and the emergent meaning making from the interaction (Heidegger, 1962).

Throughout the analytic process, the elements framing these findings were (a) the experiences of participants, (b) the significant statements participants used to make meaning and explain these experiences, (c) anticipated and unexpected ways these experiences and perceptions appear to be connected, (d) their explanation or lack of explanation when compared to existing theory and literature, and (e) the ways in which the data transcend, complement or fill in gaps in the literature.

This discussion takes into account literature from varied contexts, including socio-economic, higher education, and cultural, to include law enforcement and media representations. The implications associated with these findings are meant to expand the understanding of the underrepresentation of black males on U.S. college campuses and potentially identify ongoing obstacles potentially buttressed by practices or structures along the academic trajectory. The scope of the study in this regard remains broad in keeping with the study's ecological approach.

As we assert here, there appear to be social and cultural practices that seem far-flung from college going choices by black males that seem to have substantive effect on college outcomes, which we examine here. The chapter concludes by addressing the significance of these findings, in addition to a summary that acknowledges the possibility of researcher bias in the interpretation of these findings.

Analytic Category 1: Participants perceived media representations flavoring how black males are generally viewed in society.

This first theme identified how black males perceive being viewed in media representations and the implications these representations may have across a variety of social domains, including the pursuit of higher education. Participants indicated perceiving media representations that were often negative, stereotypical, and representing black males as a homogeneous group. They also indicated a seeming preoccupation by media to connect black males with crime and to a lesser degree sports and entertainment. Far less frequently seen, according to participants, are successful community projects or individual achievements outside of sports and entertainment. One participant, Anomaly, reflected this view when he remarked: "Popular media encompasses all of the country, and the fact that you only see most of the crimes, if you will, publicized as being African American-perpetrated, attests to the fact that there is a slant in the media."

This close association with crime and violence likely results in increased surveillance by police, both on and off college campuses. It is not unusual and may be increasingly frequent for black males to be stopped and questioned for activities on or near college campuses that wouldn't draw attention by law enforcement if engaged in by white male students. For black males, walking to the library on the weekend or playing touch football in a group in a campus

field can result in police investigation, either because an individual "fits the description" of a potential crime suspect or a gathering of black male students is misconstrued to be possible gang activity (Fantz, 2015; Smith, 2007).

Gray (2005a, 2005b) argued current representations of race and ethnicity are rooted in the formative years of American film and television, and these served to justify a bifurcated society based on race. The advent of widespread television consumption in the 1950s relied on historic representations of blacks in subservient and stereotypical roles originating in 18th and 19th century literature and other emerging media. These representations were necessary for the ongoing legitimization of a social order built on racism and white supremacy (Cabrera, 2009). But television is far from the only media reproducing long-held racist views. Early silent films, such as *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (Porter, 1903) and *The Birth of a Nation* (Griffith, 1915) introduced racist stereotypes to the silver screen and these were reproduced in more than 70 films well into the 1970s (Guerrero, 1993). Pioneering film director D.W. Griffith introduced moviegoers to the *Big Black Buck*, a hyper-masculinized and oversexed and typically violent black male of strength and temper and this iconoclastic stereotype has persisted since the days of a nascent film industry. Repetitive representations of male blackness as a social threat also has implications for how black males view police and respond to them. Anomaly described one of a number of off-campus encounters with police:

> Some would say whenever I hear a siren I look like, I'm not scared, but it's my environment and it's kinda like, I remember one time I was on the bus and me and this [other] black guy got on the bus and [police] went by, and me and him were the only ones that looked. I was like *'Okay, that's really interesting.'* Being at college, you can't help but analyze every fucking thing you see! I'm like, yeah,

him and I were the only ones who looked, everybody else was *'doo dah, doo dah doo,'* so that's always in the back of the mind: like, damn, I'm a black guy, remember that. But at the same time I've noticed that if you don't act like you've done anything wrong, they won't really come at you.

Some might conclude media representations are simply a reflection of being-in-the-world and depictions of black males as disproportionate perpetrators of crime are sufficiently supported by criminal convictions and prison populations. However, starting in elementary school, black males are often treated differentially, with regard to teacher expectations and severity of discipline.

Graybill (1997) reviewed a number of studies showing the importance of teacher expectations and relationships for student performance, and their increased importance across race, especially when the teacher is white and the students African American. In fact, Graybill (1997) found teacher expectations and relationships were second only to parental expectations in terms of promoting student success. But if teacher expectations are tempered by media representations depicting black males as disengaged, angry, or incapable, then it is unlikely these students will be given the same encouraging attention given to seemingly more receptive students. Harris and Allen (2003) argue this early gate-keeping by teachers is the first step in a chain of events resulting in the overrepresentation of males of color in the criminal justice system and an underrepresentation in higher education. Along these same lines is the practice of racial profiling by police (Myers, 2002; Risse, 2004; Wu, 2005). Given street-level discretion by police and the likely improbability officers can cite every infraction they see, even a modest focus on potential criminality by black males results in their disproportionate representation in the criminal justice system (Durlauf, 2006; Risse, 2004; Wu, 2005).

While racial profiling may seem distantly situated to the college going aspirations of African American males, there can be little dispute black males encounter more frequent traffic stops, go to jail more frequently, and are sentenced to longer prison terms than similarly-situated white males (Alexander, 2010; Brewer, 2008; Davis, 1997; Kitwana, 2002; Shapiro, 2011; Wheelock, 2006). If these traffic stops result in a search of the driver's vehicle and a discovery is made of even a minute amount of drug contraband, a conviction can have far-reaching outcomes for financing college, since any drug conviction prohibits the receipt of federal student aid (Alexander, 2010; The Omnibus Anti-Drug Abuse Act of 1988, 1988).

These narrow and pervasive representations of male blackness have other implications, most notably an *othering*, or portrayal of foreignness, that tacitly relegates black men to second or even third class citizenship. From the early depictions of black men in *The Birth of a Nation* as whisky drinking, women ogling and itinerant to more modern representations such as *Enemy of the State* (Scott, 1998b), *U.S. Marshalls* (Baird, 1998), and *New Jack City* (Peebles, 1991), black men often are shown in juxtaposition to the legal system or other accepted social constructs. This is nowhere more prevalent than in broadcast news where a report of a black man being killed by police or other security personnel somewhere in the U.S. occurs every 28 hours (Hudson, 2013). These representations depict the black community, in general, and black males specifically, as a source of "never-ending, intractable problems," including crime, drugs, violence, welfare, hopelessness and dependence (Guerrero, 1993). No other racial or gendered group is so routinely dehumanized in media representations. This dehumanization can take a variety of forms. In news reports of homicides, it is not unusual to see the uncovered body of a black male who died by gun or other violence.

The highly publicized Trayvon Martin and Michael Brown homicides are notable

examples. Martin's uncovered body was photographed and images traversed the globe via broadcast and Internet sharing of his sprawled out body and lifeless eyes staring into the night (Alvarez, 2013). Brown, another black teen shot by police, was left lying uncovered in the middle of a street in his Ferguson, Missouri neighborhood for nearly five hours in the midsummer sun, visible to all who passed (Clarke, 2014). Like photographs of the lynching of black men and women on the front pages of newspapers well into the mid-1940s (Chandler, 2013), the imagery of the inert bodies of these teens communicates a stark disregard for their humanity. Taylor described a similar revelation when he was recently called to jury duty:

> I thought it was gonna be, oh, a traffic ticket or something. It was a drive by killing. A guy, 18-year-old…had shot in the head an 8-year-old child in a car. And I was just like, what is this? Where am I? And this judge, because, you know how in jury duty they go around talking about like, oh, why can't you be a juror…And so, I was telling [the judge], I go to [school]. I'm really sad that I couldn't be a part of the case but I was like, yeah, I can't. And he was like, *'Oh, [Blue University], the football team. Are you guys ever gonna start winning? Like, I went to [Blue University], gosh, you know'*, blah, blah, blah. And he's making all these jokes and I'm just like…stop making jokes, it's not funny. Like, okay, whatever [Blue University], like this guy is about to die maybe... And it was weird because everybody was so into themselves… That's a definite thing, the dehumanization of people, I think the media does a very good job of doing that, [and we're] desensitized to it.

Hall (2011) might argue this dehumanization is intentional since "media's main sphere of operation is the production and transformation of ideologies" (p. 81). In this regard, ideology

refers to the images, concepts or frameworks through which we make sense of a facet of our social existence. Hall (2011) points to three important aspects of ideology to frame his argument: 1) ideologies do not consist of isolated or separate concepts but are an articulation of distinctive elements into a chain of meaning, 2) the ideologies that are active in our society provide us with the means of making sense of social relations, and 3) media construct for us a definition of what race is, what meanings imagery of race carry and how the *problem* of race is understood to be.

But this is not to say media "uniformly and conspiratorially" adhere to a single interpretation of race, since there also are good, liberal or humane representations of race in media based on open-mindedness and tolerance (Hall, 2011). Still, the frameworks of understanding media representations provide can strengthen, support or reproduce racial injustice through contemporary practices and policies in other domains, including higher education (Chesler, 2000).

Chesler (2000) argued the complexity and confusion often associated with interpersonal race relations in the U.S. can present greater challenges when they permeate organizations. Like media representations, organizations propagate frameworks where individual actors make choices and engage in formal and informal behaviors (Chesler, 2000; Peterson, 2004). When the complexities of organizational life comingle with the often-contradictory nature of race relations, the outcomes may discourage, detour or otherwise derail the academic endeavors of African-American males (Cornell, 2007; Feagin, 2006, 1996; Light, 2002; Mills, 1997). Chesler (2000) sees an institution's mission, culture, power centers, structure and resources all having implications for the maintenance of systemic racism. Taken together, these organizational dimensions can either strengthen long-held institutional biases, or obstruct their replacement with more equitable ones. Further, even when institutional structures are not intended to cause

inequality, they may nevertheless reproduce informal organizationally-prescribed or community-prescribed behaviors that disguise and normalize forms of white privilege (Allen, 2005; Harris, 1993; McDermott, 2013; McIntosh, 2008).

In this way, by articulating or framing race relations in particular ways, media representations reverberate across culture, and potentially reify long-embedded racial structures that likely have implications for the equitable movement through cultural structures by non-white members of society, notably black males. The next two analytic categories examine how media representations may have implications for black male self-perceptions and relationships with others.

Analytic Category 2: These perceptions raised questions about how participants viewed themselves and their place in the world.

This second theme identified how participants perceived media representations having implications for self-perceptions and structuring perceived life opportunities. The perceptions of an overwhelming majority of participants in the study suggest media representations may play a significant role in how they perceive themselves. Participants routinely made significant statements such as: "I don't see much of anything these days that's just like, 'Wow, man, this makes me proud to be a black man,'" or "We're bombarded by so much media all the time and you know it has an effect on how we see ourselves."

While some participant perceptions are positive – what a few participants referred to as the *Will Smith effect of things*, given the actor's broad, global popularity and Hollywood bankability –, most participants identified a limited number of positive representations within particular contexts, which they felt confined black male capabilities. Kwame reflected this way on the implications of such representations:

> We're often shown at our best – and you know I use quotation marks [around] at our best –, in the entertainment industry. We're often shown, either marketing something or you know involved in the mass arts or sports entertainment, and you know that has its rewards and its consequences. I think in one way it can limit the trajectory of young black children in terms of what they can achieve, what's achievable, and at the same time, you know, it does create some [achievable] representations to some extent. You know, like Latino people, who are indigenous or who ostensibly are indigenous do not have the same kind of representation in the mass media that black people have. Even though they constitute a much larger population in this country…and we know that because the media is so consumed, to see a representation of yourself in it could definitely affect how you see yourself, how you see others, and so you know I think that…there's something to say about that, [given] other groups aren't represented at all.

From helping to forge our identities and sense of selfhood, to our notions of gender, class, ethnicity, race, nationality, sexuality and personal values, media representations help shape our view of the world, whether good or bad, positive or negative, moral or immoral (Kellner, 2011). Those who uncritically adopt these dictates of media culture tend to mainstream themselves and conform to dominant fashion, values and behavior (Kellner, 2011). A number of researchers (see Carter, 2006; Cook, 1998; Harper, 2006) have suggested the burden of students of color mainstreaming themselves, or adopting what might be perceived as white middle class values, may force letting go of community and home culture for the likely more foreign values and practices associated with school.

Likewise, others place us in their worldview in much the same way, by assessing who we

are and quite possibly what we're capable of based on their interpretation of our identity through their own perceptions and media experiences (Blackman, 1977). Even when black males at elite colleges don the coded uniform, speak the coded language, and adhere to all other campus codes, they may and likely still are singled out and questioned as to the likelihood they are somehow out of place (Ogbu, 2003; Smith, 2007).

Research has asserted each of us maintains a *frame of reference* (Goffman, 1974) through which we make meaning of the world. These frames are self-constructed and assist us to interpret what we see and hear while also illustrating how we accept or reject representations based on our own attitudes and beliefs (Kellner, 2011). However, while we may self-construct these views of the world, the process of construction is bounded by our experiences, the way we were brought up, our family's position in terms of SES, and quite possibly the degree to which we are exposed to the world, in part through media representations (Carter, 2006; Ford, 1996; Kozol, 2005; McDonough, 1997, 1998a; Stewart, 2008). In effect, what Bourdieu (1984, 1977) refers to as habitus, a sort of metaphorical sense of the game: an unthinking reasoning, learned from repeated doing, within a specific field, without awareness or reflection. Further, Williams (1986) suggested media representations help to shape *schemata* among audiences that act as frames of reference through which individuals process new information. This new information is compared with previously held beliefs, also in part, shaped by media and habitus, and helps to establish a norm from which individuals and groups measure themselves against the world (Bjornstrom, 2010; Blackman, 1977; Tobolowsky, 2001). These mechanisms often are difficult to alter or escape since they operate mostly on an unconscious level, and have become deeply entrenched as layers of images, messages and points of view are stacked one on top of the other in our understanding of the world (Tobolowsky, 2001).

Consider for a moment, then, how these mechanisms may have implications for college going among black males. First, there is the limited array of identities and available life opportunities black males perceive from media representations. As we have heard from participants, these identities and opportunities are often presented as fitting limited, specific domains of success, such as sports and entertainment, or the broader domains of crime, violence and incarceration. Second, through the repetition of representations of black males either as a social threat (Chiricos, 2001), or as academically inauspicious (Herrnstein, 1994), black males are more likely to be singled out early in school as a discipline problem rather than a candidate for Advanced Placement courses. These outcomes may be attributed in part to an absence of culturally relevant curriculum (Howard, 2010; Howard, 2008; Ladson-Billings, 1995), or the potential for stereotype threat (Steele, 1997), when an individual fears the appearance of inadequacy for requesting information from teachers perceived to be something other students already know. For these reasons, teacher interaction and curricular structures can directly influence student engagement, and given the dearth of black male teachers in primary and secondary schools (Black Male Teachers Scarce in Classrooms, 2009; Dogan, 2010) to model black male success, the burden of having to accommodate often unfamiliar values and codes in the classroom (Carter, 2006; Fordham, 1986), and the likely absence of curriculum that draws on students of color own cultural repertoire, black males likely must manage how they present themselves and to the extent they can manage how others perceive them. This can have a variety of outcomes. Alonzo Harris described the situation this way:

> Like if you look at yourself as…okay I'm an American in America but the other part of me isn't, has roots in Africa, so I see myself as black. But you're always thinking in your head, '*what do they see me as?'* Like do they see me as

> American, do they see me as African, do they see me as a thug, do they see me as, you know? It's always in your head like, *'Okay, maybe they don't think of me as highly as I think of myself.'*

Still, within the admittedly narrow media representations of black males, participants found aspiration, and a sense of identity, often as a result of music lyrics or portrayals that pushed back against dominant discourses and injustice in the U.S., which participants felt denigrated them as a group. Many of these positive media representations are not recent, emanating from what most participants referred to as the Golden Age of Hip-hop (Green, 2004), or the wave of 1990s black cinema that included directors John Singleton (1995), Spike Lee (1989, 1994, 1995), The Hughes Brothers (1993), Leon Ichaso (1993), Mario Van Peebles (1991), Darin Scott (1998a), Nick Gomez (1995), and Eric Dickerson (1992). In the same way the film, *Mandingo* (Fleischer, 1975), reframed the plantocracy and slavery narrative from the slave's point of view, these directors flipped the script on inner city violence and in many cases represented an alternative view of the *American Dream*, in much the same way as *Goodfellas* (Scorsese, 1990) and *Scarface* (DePalma, 1983) idealized immigrant criminality as a way for newcomers to socially uplift in America. Violence, racism, injustice, poverty, and education were viewed through a different lens that spoke to communities of color in different ways than typical dominant U.S. perspectives. Ritchie offered these observations:

> To me, it was like a 1990 to like a 1996 period where it was just a cluster of these types of films. I'm missing some and there's a bunch of others that were fantastic, and great but it was that period of time that really spoke to my core, and I felt like the films did feel genuine. They didn't feel contrived. It didn't seem like they were, um, studio sugar-coated and you know – they might have been studio

backed like you know what I mean [but] they were black filmmakers that made these films to the most extent that really spoke to me.

Boyd (1997) argued this media moment was in fact revolutionary, especially against the backdrop of a decade of increasing criminalization of drug use and communities of color, and the prevalence of the media narrative of blackness as the pinnacle of gangster. While black directors expanded representations and interpretations of blackness, many of which study participants applauded because of their multifarious and increasingly authentic depictions, still other representations perpetuated stereotypes that can adversely affect sites of engagement, including college campuses. Anomaly shared this story:

> I remember one time, this kid was drunk, so I'm not mad at him for this because he was drunk out of his mind, so he was looking at me, [and] he was like, *'Dude, you're fucking buff as shit,'* [and] he was like *'So what position do you play, you running back?'* I was like, 'No, dude', [and] he was like *'you have to be an athlete.'* I was like, 'No man, I got here on academics.' He was like '*No, you didn't, you have to be an athlete.'* I was like *I had to be an athlete*. Okay, so I was just like, 'Man.' but you know, it's all good.

Situations like these are what Solórzano (2002, 2000), and others (see Smith, 2011; Sue, 2007), identify as micro aggressions – subtle, often unconscious, yet pervasive forms of racism that are usually brief, commonplace daily slights in language, behavior or environment. They may not be intentional and still communicate hostility or other insult toward people of color. They have been understudied and as we will see in the next analytic category add to black male workload, both as part of being in the world, and pursuing higher education and other life goals.

Analytic Category 3: These perceptions had implications for relationships with others.

Media representations have been referred to as a surrogate for personal contact (Blackman, 1977). If you have not traveled to Rome and experienced the style of driving there, your perception of it is likely determined by what you have read, heard or perceived, through the perceptions and experiences of friends and family, or media representations. If those representations were overtly negative, and you perceived Italian drivers as very different from American drivers, chances are when you do visit Rome you will make arrangements to avoid driving or personally encountering Italian drivers. Blackman (1977) found individuals discriminate both perceptually and behaviorally when another appears dissimilar or unfamiliar to them. Further, Hornstein (1976) found good news usually extended the boundaries of *we* and individuals were less likely to summarily judge others as *they*. Consider these distinctions in terms of broadcast news, and representations of black males and communities of color. David discusses such a scenario:

> Let's just say a drive-by or something like that, something that's just such a big deal to the news happens…the way that they put the drive-by on the screen…cultivates this whole perception of the area that the drive-by happened in. So, me, personally, being a human being walking around that area all the time, it's like 98% of the time there's no drive-bys…98% of the time you don't see a gun…98% of the time some woman's not getting her purse snatched …But when you have 90% of the news…that has to do with a black man in those particular areas highlighting those things…people who don't live in those areas are like, *'Man, I'll never go to that area'…* Also, it creates fear in the people… It's showing you that your own area has an abundance of evil going on… So you're

> gonna have people in the neighborhood like grandmothers who watch that stuff about their own neighborhood…they're gonna be driving with their windows up. They're gonna see all kinds of people dressed very similar to those people who are committing those crimes on TV and associate at a subconscious or conscious level whatever you want to call it, with crime offenders…They're gonna do that and they do do that. Man, that disconnects the older generations from the younger generations because it only connects them [around] a certain topic.

Again, while such media representations are seemingly situated far from college going and campus climate, Ritter (2013) found family, friends and media representations helped to shape East Asian international students' perception of African Americans long before students arrived in the U.S. Further, these students lacked knowledge of historical race relations in the U.S., and they relied on media representations and the perceptions of friends and family to make meaning of racial interactions while on college campuses (Ritter, 2013). This reliance on media and other representations led international students to stereotype African Americans as "criminals, athletes, and music artists" (Ritter, 2013). Using Stereotype Change models (Rothbart, 1981) and Contact Theory (Allport, 1954), Ritter (2013) found positive interactions with domestic students of color increased acculturation and reduced racial prejudice. However, one limitation of Rothbart's (1981) Stereotype Change models is their lack of explanatory power of brief acquaintance encounters on the formation of stereotypes or their reduction. Brief acquaintance encounters in public spaces may have potential to strengthen or defuse stereotype formation. For instance, an unsavory encounter on mass transit or in a theater queue may be transmitted in terms of negative perceptions to the next encounter involving the same racial group. Ritter (2013) also found the magnitude of and time between positive or negative

encounters also had implications for perceptions of cross-cultural experiences.

Still, when individuals interact with other individuals and engage with them equally, despite previously held stereotypes or negative media representations, many of the racial issues on college campuses facing students today disappear (Roth, 2015b).

Although, study participant James Elba feels some racial tensions with regard to media representations have been institutionalized, and for particular reasons. He discusses how those who control production maintain particular racial hierarchies in media representations:

> Obviously, the media is clearly, because it is, controlled by Jews and Caucasians, it's gonna always give black men a subjugated view; because if you're subjugated and mentally you're watching this subjugation, it's going to influence the black people themselves, it's going to influence Caucasians and how they act towards black people. It's going to keep you in a perennial cycle or like a treadmill, so you're not going to progress as much because the opportunities that you would have gotten are being affected by those in power. So society's influence affects how we as black people act and how those other, quote unquote, ethnicities react to us, or any sort of formal change.

Feagin (2006) used Newton's Law of Motion to suggest how ongoing social mechanisms of oppression and exploitation are maintained: An object at rest continues at rest, while an object in motion will continue moving in the same direction until an unbalancing counterforce is applied. In this instance, then, social mechanisms of oppression will obtain until a major force challenges that oppression. Drawing on data collected from black experiences of discrimination in business and education settings, Feagin (2006) found ongoing covert forms of racism, which include the collective forgetting by whites of historical racism. From this perspective, a

collective remembering is needed to resist the social reproduction (Bourdieu, 1977) of systemic oppression (Feagin, 2006).

Still, the relegation of people of color to subservient or negative representations in media is a social construction (Omi, 1993, 1994). Racial projects of varying kinds are ubiquitous in society, where citizens learn certain rules of racial classification, whether conscious or unconscious, that are driven by various social, political and economic forces, including media representations (Hall, 2003b; Omi, 1993, 1994). These hierarchical representations are mirrored in other social dimensions, such as class (Callinicos, 1993); and through popular ideas, practices and representations, adhere to the dominant group's ideology, which remains a white supremacist one (Harris, 1993; Omi, 1994). However, by including subordinate groups, even in hierarchical media representations, white supremacy legitimizes itself through Gramsci's (1971) notion of hegemony, for which he drew on the 1883 preface of the *Communist Manifesto*: "…the structure of society of every historical epoch necessarily arising therefrom constitute the foundation for the political and intellectual history of that epoch" (Marx, 1967). While this Marxian axiom hints at change over time, current racial dynamics are a byproduct of colonialism (Omi, 1994), and the founding fathers created the U.S. with specific provisions to sustain white supremacy and privilege for generations (Feagin, 2006).

Yet another way media representations negatively frame blackness is by displaced racism, where blacks discriminate against blacks. Like the scenes in the 1967 film, *Guess Who's Coming To Dinner* (Kramer, 1967), first between a maid and star Sidney Poitier, and then between Poitier and his screen father, media representations often portray blacks mistrusting other blacks, or using racialized name-calling for intended slight. This cinematic device has been in use since the nascent days of the U.S. film industry, and shows no signs of falling completely

out of favor (Guerrero, 1993). Justin made these observations of current media portrayals:

> They make it seem every black person shares a beef with another black person just to be a part of drama. And then if they have a problem with a white person then they…dig up all his dirt only trying to make the black person look negative and the other person look like, *'Oh, he didn't do anything wrong.'* But if it's black on black then it's okay, we're gonna go full stream with it 'cause it brings drama and that's what they make it seem: That all black people are just drama. And that's truly not how it is. But then, when people see that image in their mind, they're saying, *'Well, that's how they look at us so that's how we should act*', and that's not how it should be. It should be if that's not what you want to be then you should be right.

Justin's observation illustrates another differential representation across race in media portrayals. As hooks (2004) and others (Heitzeg, 2015) note, when white males act violently, media accounts begin their scrutiny by exploring psychological issues as possible explanations for antisocial behavior. However, when black males act out, the media representations are of a flawed, inherently evil perpetrator (hooks, 2004). Even in the most gruesome of cases, or when the accused has taken multiple lives, medical mediation of white deviance is typically the rule (Heitzeg, 2015). The polar opposite is the usual case with black crime. During the trial of O. J. Simpson for the murder of his estranged wife and a friend, media accounts delved into his childhood growing up in and around San Francisco. This wasn't to paint a sympathetic psychological profile, but instead to demonstrate he was always a killer in the making (hooks, 2004). Likewise, when black men are killed by police or others, as soon as media outlets are able to determine if the victim has a criminal record of any kind, that information leads the story,

even when the victim is unarmed and shot in the back (Swaine, 2015). So, even in death, in cases where there is little legitimate reason for taking a black man's life, he is held to blame for ongoing racial inequalities (Feagin, 2006), and media representations tend to reify this narrative of a flawed human being whose character finally caught with him. This perspective is advanced, even when confronted with countervailing information. In his interview, Ryan asked rhetorically why the black drug dealer is such a popular representation of black men, given there are alternatives, even among the limited representations of blackness on which media rely. Hall (2011) likely would argue media representations of race may need to be viewed as ideology. These ideologies do not consist of separate or isolated concepts but are articulations of a variety of signifiers in a chain of meanings that are uttered and naturalized as personal statements or statements of nature (Hall, 2011, 2003b). However, while such statements are made by individuals, the ideologies supporting those statements pre-date individuals and are not the product of individual consciousness or intention (Hall, 2011). Such ideologies tend to disappear as their underpinnings become naturalized as common sense (Hall, 2011). In this way, the black drug dealer becomes a natural representation because it has been signified and reified so often its use is normalized.

In the next analytic category, I examine perceptions by study participants of media representations in regard to promoting black male college going.

Analytic Category 4: Media typically don't associate black males with college going.

The perceptions of study participants reported in this category begin to show how complex media representation is and the many levels on which it operates. Hall (2003b) sees these representations as frameworks for interpretation that have implications for action. Couldry

and Curran (2003) argue contrary to the *illusion* media only mediate what goes on in the rest of society, media representation is one of society's main forces in its own right, and may be increasingly central to power dynamics in modern societies. Condit (1989) asserts media disseminate a public vocabulary favoring certain interests and groups, if for no other reason than to consolidate dominant audiences by privileging their particular codes. Each of these interpretations may answer questions about the perceived dearth of media representations addressing black males and college going.

It is true, there are few televisual representations associating black males with college, and the few there are don't necessarily paint an auspicious picture. In *Community* (Shapeero, 2009), a broadcast situation comedy about a fictitious community college in Colorado, Troy Barnes, the only regular black male character, played by Donald Glover, lost his scholarship to be quarterback at a top tier school after purposely injuring himself because he couldn't handle the pressure of his college future. Granted, this is a situation comedy, and not a serious examination of the character Glover portrays; but it is telling. Despite Troy Barnes' innate skills and previous success, at the college level he is portrayed as somehow unfit for the path he has chosen.

There also are popular music lyrics that speak to black men and college going in a variety of voices, and again most but not all are negative. Too, an interesting observation pointed out by study participants is many of the performers who tend to rap on college in popular music are all college educated. Know poignantly addresses this irony:

> It's just like Lil' Wayne graduated like with honors and he's like the number one rapper in the world, and not necessarily because he's the most thug. It's because he's the most educated, and he understands how to market himself and he was

> trained classically in a university to figure out how to work this system. Now, he'll never say that in his albums, he'll talk about selling crack, raping grandmothers and all of this stuff and it's unfortunate but it's real… Like what do you do? Do you be a starving artist who makes a point, or are you a paid idiot that's basically a new school *Step and Fetch it*?

Know's assessment aligns with Ryan's earlier perception that a large part of entertainment in which blacks are represented is a modern day minstrel show. On one hand, Hall's (2003b) assertion media representations are frameworks of interpretation and may prompt action provides some explanatory power to why many black males see hip-hop as a viable career path. However, the declaration by August's cousin, *"Why should I go to school when I can just rap?"* doesn't acknowledge the business and other acumen today's hip-hop artists acquired *in college* before their successful music careers. That oversight by young black males of the role college played in the success of hip-hop artists also may validate Couldry and Curran's (2003) argument of the formidable influence of suggestion media representations may possess. In this instance, what media don't suggest. As Know points out, the artists themselves, for the most part, are not discussing the importance of college going in their own success trajectory, and neither are the representations produced about these artists. In addition, with few exceptions, popular music in the hip-hop genre seems to focus on hustling. Alamo offered this observation:

> You know, in a lot of music or a lot of the visual images you see of African Americans today, you know, they're hustling to get by. Hustling is kind of defined by selling drugs or gang banging, it's not, you know, hunching over a book at 10 o'clock at night studying for midterms or something like that.

These messages also support Condit's (1989) point of view of a public vocabulary

privileging particular codes. Entertainment in general and hip-hop specifically are recognized and accepted domains where black males are expected to be seen; however, college, as represented by *Community*, apparently, is not, or to a much lesser degree. Too, in this one of few prominent broadcast portayals of a black male going to college, Troy Barnes is 1) represented as an athlete, 2) he sabotaged himself and wound up at a lower-tier school because he couldn't take the pressure of top-tier competition, 3) at the start of the series he is shown acting cool and tough, and 4) as his persona changes, he becomes a goof and the class clown.

Couldry (2000) argued what is held within the media frame takes on a liveness of its own, while what is absent from the frame ceases to exist in the public eye. Within this framework, there seems to be an overwhelming acceptance of black male presence in music and sports performance; however, when black men are associated with college going, their portrayal is that of an individual somehow out of place. Further, not only are black males portrayed as seemingly out of place, but also deep down even the on screen characters come to this same conclusion. Troy Barnes is represented as recognizing how out of place he was at a top tier school, *due to the pressure,* and he opts for a less competitive alternative (hooks, 2004). Given he is the only representation of male blackness on the show, it's not completely a stretch to imagine in the viewer's eye likely other black men may be expected to act similarly, reifying a stereotype of black male inferiority.

However, among hip-hop performers with college degrees, there are some who actually focus on the college experience, from a black male point of view. Joe described his favorite:

> Well, the current music I listen to is a guy who's name is Jay Cole. He's mixed with white and black. So his message is, you know, his songs be/are kinda commercial just to get radio play but the rest of his album will be more about

> talking about college life, and how it is, as for everyday black man's struggle to go through there, but in a positive light. He's not trying to say anything negative. He's not putting down college, he's telling people to go to college, 'cause he graduated from St. John's University in New York.

Jay Cole's drawing positive attention to college going may be an exception in the hip-hop world, or it may be the start of a trend. Still, as Joe explains, these positive messages around black males and college going are not typically the lyrics that get the artist airplay. They come from the *rest of the album*. This is similar to the popular Hollywood genre, *buddy* film, where black actors are paired with white *chaperones* to ensure box office success and to avoid the film from becoming *too black* for mass audiences (Guerrero, 1993). As a result, the black buddy, with few exceptions, is relegated to a supporting role, and it seems this same formula may be at work with Jay Cole's musical messages about black males and college going. This work isn't getting airplay but it is still on the album, and in that way, one can't argue there are no positive representations of black males and college going. They are rare, but they do exist. This explanation also is consistent with the concept of hegemony (Gramsci, 1971), which features the dominant ideas and interests within a society, while still acknowledging less dominant interests. In this context, we may construe these dominant ideas and interests represent black success in terms of innate musicality and physical prowess exhibited in entertainment and sports achievement. The latter, physical prowess, also dovetails with the ongoing narrative associating blackness with violence (Chiricos, 2001). Arena sports, such as football, are really only a few steps away from a street brawl. They are contained violence and superior physical prowess packaged as entertainment. The imagery of violence in hip-hop music, while initially a critique of how blacks, particularly black males, were treated in U.S. society, has been overblown to the

point of caricature, reducing any discussion of class struggle and inequality to mere spectacle (Boyd, 1997). In this way, the counter-hegemonic discourse of most rap and hip-hop has merged with the demands of the marketplace (Boyd, 1997). At the same time, the caricatured violence and overt consumption displayed in popular music lyrics and film representations actually serve to maintain and strengthen the very institutions and practices they initially sought to displace (Guerrero, 1993). In short, these media representations and portrayals of black males mirror – or may even conjure – long-held and deeply-ingrained social views that stereotypically contain them to certain professional venues and remind us on some level they pose a threat to peaceful social interactions if we don't remain on guard.

Given the pervasiveness of media in our daily lives (Stack, 2006), and its assessment as an informal curriculum often defining what we know, who we are and what we think (Kellner, 1995, 2011; Postman, 1979; Tobolowsky, 2001, 2006), the absence of positive media representations of black males and college going, and a plethora of representations associating them with crime and violence, almost assure most media consumers will see black males as out of place when encountered in academic spaces. This is likely the guiding rationale when campus or other police stop and question black males entering campus buildings on weekends, or walking through neighboring communities late at night. The lack of media representations of black males as scholastically engaged and the counter perceptions of others that they either don't belong or are out of place on college campuses is yet another differential obstacle black males encounter to and through college. This is long before and without addressing campus climate issues once they arrive on campus, or many of the other already well-documented challenges they are perceived as encountering leading up to college going. The next analytic category addresses how perceptions of this additional workload raise questions of black male identity, and

the type of support study participants need to be resilient and maintain their college going goals.

Analytic Category 5: Participants struggle with identity and relied on resilience in their education efforts.

Throughout the study findings, participants reported moments of questioning their identity en route to and through college. They also reported consistent threads of support, mostly from family or fictive family and fewer examples of institutional support by and through individual teachers or programs. They reported relying heavily on this support during indecisive and challenging times. Several participants spoke of a "little break down," "that just halted me," having to "override a block in [my] life," struggling to "figure out all these complicated problems [my]self," "be[ing] comfortable in [my] own skin," "I'm kinda in the rebuilding stage this past year," "It's an uphill battle," and "I think struggle will immediately put into perspective what your strengths are."

These statements may all be symptoms of racial battle fatigue (Smith, 2011). Black males are the most vulnerable U.S. racial-gender group for nearly every health condition medical researchers monitor (Smith, 2011). Our social, educational, and professional institutions, in addition to society-at-large, must come to realize the enormous physical, emotional and psychological costs of gendered racism. These experiences shape identities, motivations, dreams, activities and the psychological and physiological well-being of men and women of color (Smith, 2011). Know places these assertions in poignant perspective:

> We might need to start talking about mental health. That's a bad thing to say in the black community. Like, you know, it's almost like a cliché for a white person to say my parents fucked me up so I'm going to a psychiatrist. Like, if a black person says I need to go to a psychiatrist, like *'nigger what's wrong witchu?'* Uh,

> let me see, between the helicopters and the sirens, the gunshots, the shitty neighborhood, I mean I may need to get some of this off my mind. And there have been studies that's saying there's more post traumatic stress in the black community than like among Iraq vets. So it's like, we gotta talk about that. I mean I'm scared for young black men… That's when I know I'm a grown ass adult. I'm like oh my God, you mean to tell me you got shot just for loitering? Like I could say I'm not going to wear this color. I'll dress like a skater so I won't look like a gangbanger. I'll wear this type of clothes and then I can separate myself from that unit. Nowadays, it don't even matter.

The pervasive quality emerging from nearly every participant's pursuit of higher education has been the ability to shift direction, seek additional resources, embrace opportunities, tune out negative representations, steer clear of serious trouble, and reframe expectations. In short, be resourceful and resilient, and able to call on personal and familial resources to overcome challenges and unexpected hardships (McCubbin, 1998). But, at what cost?

In high school and even earlier, peers often challenged participants at a cultural level for pursuing education. As a result, participants perceived having to straddle identities to maintain some peer relationships (Carter, 2006). Alamo describes this recollection from high school:

> You know, I always got the best grades, was on good terms with most of my teachers and so, you know, a lot of my peers, especially African American peers, although they kind of saw me like the smart guy and you know always reached out to me if they needed help with something…I did get playfully teased a lot…so I mean even in that kind of joking manner, just kinda like that culture of you know seeing education as something that's white – not necessarily associated with

> blacks. It's evident even in middle school and high school… So if you are perceived as a black intellectual, you're essentially not black.

hooks (2004) argues media representations have had deleterious effects on perceptions of black males, both within and outside their community, to the point a black male is likely to be more highly regarded for appearing dumb and may even risk punishment for appearing too smart. Often, in some black households, as well as among peers, the boy who likes to read may be suspected of being a *sissy* (hooks, 2004). The acceptance and reproduction of these negative messages are an example of internalized racism, when those who have been oppressed begin to believe in their own inferiority and that of others in their group (Harper, 2006). What Alamo described as being "playfully teased" is part of a conscious or unknowing reproduction of oppression through communicating essentially racist and counter-productive messages to others within one's group (Harper, 2006).

An example of this type of media messaging was articulated in rapper Kayne West's (2004) debut album, *The College Dropout*. The album provides an example of the commoditization of internalized racism, given it was marketed primarily to a black audience and millions consumed the messages of college as overrated and lacking cultural value (Harper, 2006). Still, this internalized racism is merely an adjunct to more broadly assumed stereotypes of black male intellectual deficiency. James Elba speaks to the scarcity of blacks at the boarding school he attended and some of the associated outcomes:

> I was one of those maybe less than five percent…and everyone else was Caucasian or Asian origin and that, yeah, I did feel that I was being kinda pigeonholed and picked on because I was just plain different. And I feel that at that age when you're just trying to find yourself it really shapes and molds you

> when you're in a society that is, ah, makes Caucasian, white people, the benchmark so everyone's chasing that and that can affect the way we act…My parents were with me all the time, giving me that focus and that mindset to go to school. But if you don't have that environment, that founding background, you're not likely going to do that.

In addition to supportive parents, some participants recall overt acts by teachers and others they believed set the tone for their primary and secondary education, in addition to making college seem attainable. Alamo recalls a second grade teacher who offered special quizzes in class and students who scored well were rewarded with a dinner with the teacher at a restaurant along with other recognized students. Tito was given the opportunity to attend a high school outside of his neighborhood, and even though the change in schools separated him from a number of his friends, the new school better prepared him for college. Clark's pursuit of college was supported by teachers and administrators involved in the AVID program in which he was admitted. AVID (Advancement Via Individual Determination) is a non-profit organization providing training to educators to improve college readiness for all students, particularly underrepresented student groups (What Is AVID?, 2014).

While some of these participants would have attained college admission by and through their own efforts with the support of family alone, others received an added push or confirmation from teachers and counselors along the way, reinforcing their college aspirations. Still, most participants didn't realize this affirmation from school or other actors outside of family or fictive family.

Analytic Category 6: Participants reported a high degree of selectivity in media consumption, often instilled early by parents who directed or restricted media consumption.

Most study participants admitted to an increased selectivity in their media consumption over time. Most also reported their parents monitored, restricted or directed their media consumption when they were younger, and this guidance may be responsible in part for participants' media consumption practices. David's mom referred to the television as the idiot box, "so even if we were watching television, she was just like, *'Oh, something, something, the idiot box.'* Or, she would call it the nipple, the electronic nipple. So, it was always this tainting about television, and I was just exposed to calling it what it is."

In Lex's home, there were age limits. His father was a preacher and so his house was devoutly Christian. "When I was younger, they kinda put a watch over it and there were a few programs they were like, *'No, we don't want you watching that, or we're not sure about that.'*" As he got older, he was able to make more decisions, and if there were questions, "there might be a discussion if there's a reason for me to watch or if I said it's not as bad or it doesn't have what [they] think or something," Lex explained. "But outside of that, if they were adamant about it, then that's how it was." Those consumption practices have pretty much stayed with Lex: "I don't feel that negative stuff should be shown all of the time 'cause that's the only newsworthy thing. [They] should show more positive things of people being successful, not just people going to court and people getting robbed. I mean that happens and that is a part of life but that's not all that's in life and that shouldn't be all that we're interested in to watch… Me personally, I don't wanna watch that."

Noah had something of a personal revelation at the end of his interview: "This actually made me think a lot about you know what I see every day on TV. And I think as a community we should advocate for more positive images of black males or black people on TV. And recently, I've been thinking BET – Black Entertainment Television – I think that's just what it is.

Black entertainment is not really sort of putting up a positive image of black people. It's just entertainment for black people.

Noah said he's come to a similar realization around popular music:

> I know that I do like rap music but I know… there's also other messages in rap music, sort of objectifying women and things like that. I have listened to those songs… I like some of those songs but it's not… it's something that I… think I can do a favor to myself by sort of drawing back from that music. It sounds good so you know, you listen to it but I do think that people think that every black man is out there to get every single woman, and have sex with every woman that he sees.

Blanco vividly recalls his mother forbidding him to watch *Charlie's Angels* and he remembers really wanting to watch the program. When he got older, he asked her why and "she said it was because they were glorifying white women," Blanco explained. "She didn't want white women to be glorified, she wanted me to make my own decisions and not be controlled by media… She allowed me to make a lot of decisions but one thing I recall is that my mother never let me watch *Charlie's Angels*." He attributes that experience with making him aware of media messages, to be discerning in what he consumes. He adds, "To my thinking [there's] just a lot of stuff on TV now that I mean I think is culturally negative and culturally impacting, and personally not for me but for people that are susceptible to being led by their noses. Those types of people you know, they're doomed. They're doomed to be close-minded and backwards and slow thinking."

Kwame had a similar experience. "TV played like zero role in the household," he said. His mom "was really adamant" about not watching TV because as an educator, "she understood,

you know, some of the implications of, you know, that it has for children's psyches." Kwame said she would never explain her rationale to him but whenever he wanted to watch TV she'd say, *'No, we're going to do something else.'* As a result, he grew up with a perspective of television "that my other friends didn't have. You know, they'd reference TV shows and I wouldn't know what they were talking about. Or, they'd say, um, let's go watch TV or you know this show at my house after school and, like, part of me would want to because I never had the chance to but then I'd also wanted to do something else. I'd genuinely want to either, you know, go ride bikes or be physical, you know, something like that."

These accounts tend to confirm assertions by Kellner (1995, 2011) and Tobolowsky (2001, 2006) and Hall (2011, 2003b) that media representations have implications for perceptions of self, expectations of college going, and the frameworks through which decisions about both are made. Parents in many participant homes managed media consumption, or provided critique of media representations, and so participants didn't merely consume these messages at face value. This distance or aloofness to media consumption likely tempered implications of media representations participants did consume. Too, by having media consumption monitored and critiqued by parents, participants were less likely to view themselves in ways in which black males were portrayed in media, or to accept representations of college going as an insignificant endeavor, since many parents offered a counter-narrative to what participants were perceiving from media representations. Still, this distance from media consumption did not entirely inoculate participants from media effects, in that others likely still made judgments about black males based on their own media consumption and those judgments possibly could have negative outcomes when aimed at study participants. As Jeffrey pointed out, he felt he did not spend sufficient time planning for his college course of study due to a

preoccupation with proving wrong media representations of black male underachievement by using himself as an example. Proving his point had Jeffrey expending energy in directions other than his own academic trajectory, further suggesting black male workload to begin and maintain college going is differential when compared to other student groups. This observation begs for the attention of educators to find ways to analyze media representations, critique them, and assist students to develop counter-narratives to mainstream media representations that may cause "representational harm" (Stack, 2006).

This analytic category also illustrated the importance of parental input and interpretation of media representations during family media consumption in the pre-collegiate years. While not all participants reported parental supervision of their media consumption, some did report a kind of self-policing practice, suggesting if parents were aware of some media they consumed they wouldn't approve, and as a result participants avoided consuming such media, or at least made sure to consume it outside of the home, to avoid disappointing or disrespecting parental wishes.

Still other participants admitted to a clear understanding media representations were not necessarily a true and correct view of the world and for that reason they paid little or no attention to some media messages. Others admitted to an emerging comprehension of how media representations might influence their thinking or opinions if not critically examined. This was clear in Noah's realization about BET. Alamo discussed his changing level of tolerance for certain media representations and suggested the change was due to his African American Studies major, where he had become sensitized to how certain media representations reflected on communities of color and their implications for uplift. Know and Kwame attribute their parents' encouragement to read and develop their own opinions, as well as finding engaging activities other than media consumption in which to spend free time, as ways to strengthen their ability to

critique media representations and avoid simply accepting the ideologies, imagery, and messaging contained in representations.

Many of these perceptions are valuable interpretations of the intersection of media representation and college going among black males. There seems to be a serious neglect in the examination and critique of media representations throughout the education pipeline, and the findings and interpretations of black male perceptions associated with media representations and college going evident in this study deserve greater attention, and may also identify the need to deconstruct such representations for other student groups. These findings are not insignificant, and I more fully address the significance of these findings in the following section.

SIGNIFICANCE OF FINDINGS

The findings presented here portray a compelling relationship between media representations and college going perceptions of black male study participants. First, even if black male perceptions of college going and life opportunities are not influenced by media representations, those opportunities may still be influenced by perceptions of others based on their interpretation of media representations of where black men are seen or should be seen. However, these perceptions are not confined solely to college going and appear to have implications for a broader range of life experiences. Second, these findings strongly suggest media representations have implications for how black males are generally viewed in society, and identify ways these views may impact the success trajectories of college going males. It appears additional work is required by black males in order to achieve similar outcomes in relation to other groups. This additional work may require a near constant vigilance to avoid behaviors or actions that may be construed as well-represented media stereotypes. Still, despite this vigilance, black males remain subject to a level of generalization and association with

negative representations well beyond the experience of other groups. The overt association in media representations of black males with crime and violence compromises virtually all encounters black men may have with others, from walking between campus buildings and being stopped by police for seeming out of place, to others crossing to the other side of a dark street to avoid contact. Both of these examples have implications well beyond college campus climate, and interaction in the globalizing workplace.

Another outcome of how media portrays black males is their apparent relegation to limited career choices, since they are not frequently viewed positively in domains outside of music, entertainment and sports. Media representations also may create an environment where black males are in near-constant dialogue with themselves around how others see them, which may be in conflict with personally held perceptions and result in racial battle fatigue (Smith, 2011). This dissonance in perceptions likely has implications for establishing and maintaining relationships with others, especially with others who have had limited contact with black communities. A case in point is East Asian and some other international student populations that harbor negative perceptions of African Americans long before they have actual on-ground contact in a campus context (Ritter, 2012, 2014; Roth, 2015b). These perceptions are formed in part by exported U.S. media representations that informally codify the U.S. racial hierarchy and America's long struggle with race, often portraying African Americans as second-class citizens (Ritter, 2014; Roth, 2015a, 2015b). This finding calls on student affairs leaders to seek ways to mitigate perceptions of incoming student groups that are for all intents and purposes fostered to great extent by media representations rather than personal experience. Given the desirability and inevitability of increased diversity on college campuses, media portrayals of black males in close association with crime or other antisocial activities may complicate campus diversity initiatives,

and this suggests diversity initiatives address media representations across culture to examine their implications for stereotype formation, cross-racial tensions and, as a result, campus climate (Chang, 2010; Hurtado, 1992; Ritter, 2014; Roth, 2015b).

In addition, the absence of black males in televisual representations of college going does a disservice to younger children of color because not seeing positive examples of college going students who look like them does little to encourage their own collegiate ambitions. The scarcity of such media representations also in part reproduces their absence in that what is not held within the televisual frame ceases to exist (Couldry, 2000). Media production and televisual storytelling is a mimetic enterprise. This is how the genteel and pastoral plantocracy was reproduced in more than 70 motion pictures. Media makers tend to examine how stories have been previously told and build on the storyline or imagery by elaborating or intensifying earlier representations. In this way, if black males are absent from particular media representations in the telling and retelling of particular stories, then their absence becomes normalized and a rationale likely developed to support their absence, *if necessary*. In most cases, black men's absence from certain venues and their overrepresentation elsewhere seems to go unquestioned. The absence from society of black men and their concentration behind bars only recently gained prominence as an issue of concern in the public mind (Alexander, 2010; Brewer, 2008; Shapiro, 2011; Western, 2009).

The same sort of absence operates among the teaching ranks in primary and secondary schooling. While not discussed in detail in the explication of findings, a number of study participants lamented the lack of teachers of color in the primary and secondary systems, the lack of outside mentors of color who visit schools to encourage college going, and the lack of support from high schools or other institutions around the process of how to go to college. First

generation, low-SES, and underrepresented student groups need more exposure to the college going process – and support once they arrive on campus – to alter the current trend of underrepresentation. Most study participants had significant support from family members who made special effort to connect them with college going. In some cases, though not many, there was a teacher who took special interest and recommended a student's placement in college preparatory courses or more challenging classrooms, providing a platform to become college ready. This support is essential for all student groups, but given ongoing underrepresentation of black males, this support is especially important and apparently has not been sufficient to alter ongoing underrepresentation. More research may be needed to examine what challenges first-generation and underrepresented students perceive as ongoing obstacles to college success.

However, even when black males do attain admission to higher performing classrooms or college preparatory courses, with the support of family and teachers, they often must straddle identities in order to maintain neighborhood and community relationships, while developing new academic relationships. This is an area where institutions might examine ways to reduce the exotification of college going among communities of color so college-minded students don't feel they must make choices between longtime friendships and pursuing higher education. One way is by drawing attention to successful hip-hop and other highly regarded and visible social actors who have graduated from college and through a critique of media representations separate the entertainment aspects of their performance from their professional and business acumen gained from and honed in higher education.

Finally, given the pervasive nature of media, educators at every level and across every student group must integrate cultural studies and media critique into the curriculum to pull back the curtain on media representations and the role they likely play in prompting particular action

or inaction among consumers. This is important to participatory democracy, race relations, and as evidenced by this study, college going. Student perceptions that some groups are rewarded within the media sphere while others are not must be acknowledged, and educators need to find ways to encourage this interrogation so students can make sense of obvious disconnects they perceive between their own knowledge and the dissonant representations they may encounter in media portrayals. These findings also are significant beyond examining remedies of black male underrepresentation on U.S. college campuses by implicating a need to enhance and preserve the democratic principles of equality and access. These principles are currently under siege; a siege often tacitly supported by the perceived authenticity and veracity of globally disseminated media representations that often place groups and individuals in hierarchical relationships, where there are likely more losers than winners. More often than not, these representations are ideologically based, and it is important students be encouraged to examine ideologies supporting images and newscasts and storylines. The ideologies embedded in media representations have been in large part responsible for collective action, including support for The War on Drugs, retaliation in the aftermath of terrorist attacks against the U.S., and the global mobilization against sovereign nations due to their perceived threat to the international community through alleged possession or dissemination of weapons of mass destruction.

For many of these reasons, future research should examine the relationship between media representations and choices not to go to college among black males. The current findings suggest an additional workload for college going black males and it may be interesting to have a comparative view from similarly-aged black males who choose not to go to college. Are some of the challenges college going males identify reasons why some black males choose not to even attempt college going? This question deserves further attention and further research with black

males who choose not to go or to postpone college may shed additional light on the perceptions and insights provided by the college going participants in this study.

In addition, these findings may shed new light on the power of media representations when such representations are accepted without critique. Researchers have spent considerable effort to examine media representations in terms of micro views of audience preferences, and audience power in contesting them (Ang, 1996; Couldry, 2000; Hall, Janes, Mackay, & Negus, 1997; Morley, 1992, 1993). However, given the increasing ubiquity of media and the seamless way in which messaging is entwined across delivery platform and format, from news to entertainment, it may be time once again to reexamine media power, the real lack of media choice, and the likely ideologies that scaffold media representations.

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this multicase qualitative study was to explore with a sample of college-going African American males their meaning making of media representations of blackness, particularly around representations of black men, and whether they believed media representations promote, discourage or are silent regarding college going. The findings from this study substantively answer the research questions that framed the study. Findings indicate 1) Black males do perceive media representations flavoring relationships with others as well as self-perceptions, 2) They also suggest media representations have implications for college going and career aspirations, especially when there are so few portrayals associating black males with college going, and 3) In most cases, black males negotiate media representations they perceive as dissonant with aspirations, personal experience or beliefs by choosing not to consume them.

The assumptions discussed in Chapter I guiding this inquiry, namely media representations conjure adverse images of black males, black males experience a level of

generalizing unlike any other racial or gendered group, and the underrepresentation of black males on U.S. college campuses may be due to more than the long-trumpeted individual, familial and community deficits reported in previous research, all seem to have been addressed by the study findings. These findings also strongly suggest the portrayal of black males in media representations have at least some influence over the opinions of others who have had little or no direct contact or experience with black males, and these opinions potentially have negative outcomes for black males across a myriad of domains. These opinions based on media representations rather than actual contact seems to have an ancillary outcome for black male self-perceptions. Regardless of how black males see themselves, most study participants expressed outcomes involving others' perceptions that were in conflict with their own. This dissonance resulted in self-questioning, behavioral adjustments, and some degree of code switching (Carter, 2006; Harper, 2006; Stewart, 2008) in order to meet others' expectations, adding to college going workload.

Further, while study participants did not over stress media representations having implications for their own college going and career choices, they did see implications for younger family and fictive family members and younger black students in general. This assertion seems to be embedded in the assumption younger students are even more steeped in media culture than many of the study participants, who were shielded in many ways by parents who monitored their media consumption, or regularly critiqued media representations and encouraged study participants to find other leisure time outlets outside of media consumption. In addition, there has been a significant increase in the intensity and positioning of media representations aimed at increasingly segmented youth audiences (Stack, 2006). There also has been a proliferation of media deployment platforms. One cannot use a public restroom or make a

purchase at a supermarket or ride public transit without encountering near-constant media messaging, and that messaging is similar across delivery forms, so there is little opportunity to avoid dominant and pervasive media messages.

Participants also voiced concern about the presence of anti-college messaging in televisual and popular music representations and asserted younger students may not realize the artists associated with these messages are in most cases college graduates, from which they likely learned skills to exploit the professional opportunities given them. Kayne West's debut album, *The College Dropout* is a case in point. Marketed to an overwhelmingly black audience, the theme throughout the album asserts the lack of cultural value of education. The album has been described as an example of internalized racism (Harper, 2006; hooks, 2004). If we agree with the assertion despite improvements America remains a staunchly white supremacist nation, what better way to reproduce and inculcate those beliefs among dominated others then by promoting media representations that promote those beliefs? Tobolowsky (2006) asserted anything packaged for broad distribution takes on an air of authenticity and validity. Within this framework, *The College Dropout* promotes an anti-intellectual ideology among impressionable listeners, and this message was aimed at a particular racial audience.

Similarly, much of media portrayals relegate black males to limited career paths and this likely has implications for younger students when evaluating life opportunities. Not seeing successful images of individuals resembling themselves may discourage students from pursuing careers in areas in which they conclude they don't belong. Kellner (1995, 2011) argues media inform us who we are and how to be, what we think about race and gender, and what we should avoid. Even study participants at times expressed a degree of surprise when remarking on positive media representations they encountered in domains where black males were generally

seldom seen. These surprise representations are examples of the fluidity of media representations, and suggest the need for additional research into the frequency of either positive or negative representations of black males or other groups against the backdrop of changing or emerging public policy, or other potential cultural transformations. It is interesting after a decade of The War on Drugs in inner city communities there was a renaissance and global recognition of black film and music forms that were at once emancipating and contesting dominant views while defining new ways black males in particular were different, and likely a social threat to some audiences.

Finally, study participants shared ways in which they contested media representations they felt were dissonant with personal beliefs. The responses were varied and at one end had participants striving to make themselves an example of exception to media stereotypes and at the other of simply tuning out or avoiding messaging they perceived to be inaccurate or non-affirming. A number of participants also acknowledged a growing awareness and increased monitoring of how media often negatively portray black men in subtle ways. This awareness in many cases was due in part to participant's course of study in school, illustrating the importance of across the curriculum deconstruction and critique of media representations. Other participants discussed making the dialogue more public by challenging media representations through social media venues and petitions against unbalanced portrayals. These perceptions and intentions were expressed through significant statements that were the unit of analysis in this interpretive phenomenological study. In this approach, the researcher is the instrument of analysis, both through the selection of participant perceptions to examine and making choices how to interpret them. This interpretation seeks to understand the meaning making of participants through a fusion of horizons (Gadamer, 2008) with the researcher and their meaning making in the analysis

of phenomenological data. Given this inter-subjectivity between participant and researcher, a different researcher may have collected and analyzed different significant statements and meaning making based on their experiences, perceptions and beliefs. For this reason, these findings are likely not generalizable, nor did the study seek to describe trends, attitudes or opinions of a group by studying a sample of the group, with the intent of generalizing findings to a larger group (Babbie, 1990). This study was less interested in generalizing findings and rather focused on identifying the variability of experiences among a group often represented as monolithic during a similar pursuit of getting to and through college. Participants shared a variety of experiences and perceptions in a variety of settings that provided insight into the factors they believed had implications for their own college going. These insights and perceptions may be beneficial to the college going pursuits of other black males, and likely have implications for efforts promoting college going among underrepresented groups.

APPENDIX A: DEFINITIONS OF KEY TERMINOLOGY USED IN THIS STUDY

These definitions serve as the meanings intended for these terms whenever they appear in this document.

Cascade effect – The idea that black students who are not qualified for admission to the UC System will move down to a lower tier in California's higher education system. This reality may in turn push lesser-qualified students pursuing these lower levels to lower levels still, or out of the system completely.

Constructivism– A worldview wherein research seeks to understand and aggregate multiple participant meanings within social, cultural, and historical contexts and from these then attempts to generate theory. Social constructivism holds that individuals seek to understand the world in which they live and work and that they develop varied and multiple meanings from their experiences (Creswell, 2003).

Deficit theorizing – The theory that the low performance in schools by students is due to a problem with the student and not the result of structural and institutional deficiencies within the institution (Yosso, 2004).

Disidentification – Is a cognitive way of reconceptualizing yourself and your values to place distance between yourself and a stereotype threat (Steele, 1997).

Fictive family – Trusted others that are not blood relatives or related by marriage.

Habitus – A deeply internalized and permanent set of experiences, beliefs and expectations about the social world that an individual encounters and comes to accept from his local environment. In a metaphorical sense, a sense of the game: an unthinking reasoning, learned from repeated doing, and without awareness or reflection (Bourdieu, 1977; Bourdieu, 1992; Erickson, 2004).

Homophily – While segregation is usually the forced separation of one group from another, homophily is a less coercive, and usually voluntary grouping of *like with like*. The so-called *white flight* to the suburbs that began after World War II is an example of homophily, when middle class and wealthy whites moved out of urban areas to escape what then was referred to as urban blight (Quillian, 2006).

Micro aggressions – Racial micro aggressions are unconscious, subtle, yet pervasive forms of racism that have been understudied. The power of these racial micro aggressions is that they can exist in situations and environments where overt racist acts are not socially accepted (Solórzano, 2000).

Phenomenology – Describes a type of qualitative approach where the researcher seeks to examine "the essence of human experiences about a phenomenon as described by participants" (Creswell, 2003). Phenomenology assumes there is an essence to shared experience and that these essences make up the core meanings of a phenomenon when mutually experienced (Patton, 2002). Phenomenology also focuses on the descriptive details of what people experience and how they come to experience what they experience (Patton, 2002).

Polysemy – Refers to the coexistence of multiple possible meanings for a text or image or other media product (Condit, 1989; Fiske, 1986). These multiple possible meanings derive from certain intertextual attributes within a media product, and the inevitability that receivers don't always decode messages as creators intended.

Positionality – An element of Standpoint Theory (Harding, 2004) that refers to a person's view of the world, along with the biases that help to shape that view. These biases may result from education or lack thereof, as well as personal experience that may shape a person's perceptions. The point is that one's position is framed and constrained by one's experiences,

education, gender, religiosity, etc., and the position of these characteristics in relation to others.

Stereotype threat – A psychosocial threat that arises when one is confronted with a situation where a negative stereotype about one's group applies. Steele (1997) asserted that in order to sustain school success a student must be identified with school success as part of their self-identity. For this element of identity to form, a student must believe they have good prospects of success, that they possess the skills, resources and opportunity to prosper within the domain. If this perception does not form or is broken, achievement or the motivation to persist ultimately may suffer.

APPENDIX B – One on One Interview Protocol

Thank you for meeting with me today. Before we begin, I want to introduce myself and tell you about this study. My name is Ken Roth and I am a researcher from UCLA's Graduate School of Education and Information Studies.

The purpose of this study is to understand the college going experiences of African-American male undergraduates at two different Southern California universities. The study is designed to explore some of the factors you believe either helped or hindered your college going aspirations, with a particular focus on messages you may or may not have received from mass media, including television, music, film, Internet, etc. I will ask that you recall some pre-college information and experiences, such as how media was viewed in your home, how often, who selected programming and what programming you may recall that introduced you to, confirmed, or discouraged your college going aspirations. Your participation in this research study (or your non-participation) will not in any way affect your relationship with UCLA.

Please feel free to share whatever you wish during this interview. If you would rather not respond to a particular question, simply say, "I pass." At any time you may excuse yourself from the interview without consequences of any kind, including your standing as a student.

I have a consent form that you will need to review and sign indicating you have freely given your permission to participate in this study. I will give you a few minutes to look over the form and will answer any questions you may have about it. By signing the form, you are confirming your interest in participating. I also will ask for your permission to tape record your interview and to take notes during the time we spend talking to each other. In order to protect your identity, I will transcribe conversation and assign a fictitious name to your transcript. Your identity at all times will remain anonymous.

Now, before we get started do you have any questions regarding the information I just explained to you?

All right, then, let's get started with a few questions about the media clips you just reviewed. Would you please take a moment to describe what you watched and any thoughts or comments you'd like to share regarding these media clips?

Okay, now let's focus on your home life and what it was like growing up.

Family and Home Life

1. Tell me a little bit about your background: your community, family, and relationship with parents.

(**prompts**: so you lived in the city, described the community in a bit more detail; your parents were/have been married for how long? further describe your relationship with your parents/guardians)

2. What was it like growing up in your house?

3. Talk about the activities that the family engaged in together in the home, say, after evening mealtime or on weekends.

(**prompts**: particular "rituals" like game night or homework study after dinner or other regular events that members looked forward to?

Role of Media at home

4. What role did television play in your home?

(**prompts**: on all of the time, off at dinner, on at dinner, group watching, viewing particular programs and discussions afterward?

5. What about other media forms like music and movie going?

(**prompts**: did your family listen to music together and if so what kind? Did you often see movies as a family?)

6. If watching television was a family activity, how was what was watched selected?

7. If music listening or movie going was a family activity, how was what was listened to or watched selected?

8. If there were ever conflicts in making selections, how were these conflicts resolved?

Favorite TV, musical artists and movies

9. Would you name three television programs you watched growing up and some of the reasons you remember for watching them?

10. How about three of your favorite musical artists you listened to growing up and why you liked them?

11. Now, how about three movies that stick out in your memory and why?

12. Are there other memories of growing up you would like to share that I haven't asked about?

Childhood aspirations and where they came from

13. Let's shift gears now and talk about the dreams or goals you remember having as a child. What's the earliest life goal you remember (e.g., being an archeologist or ship captain) and where do you recall that goal came from?

14. Looking back now, were there particular events or specific experiences or other influences you believe helped shape those early dreams and goals?

15. When you got a little older, say, in high school, did your dreams and goals change, and if so, how or why did they change?

16. If your dreams and goals have changed again since then, talk about what you think has motivated these more recent changes?

17. Talk a bit about what you remember most about your growing up and when those memories surface what if anything triggers them?

(**prompts**: I'm wondering if a certain song or movie or television reference recalls a particular so that each time you see or hear it you're transported to a place of good or bad childhood memories?)

<u>Positive and negative media images</u>

18. Okay, let's switch gears again and now focus on any strong feelings you have about messages you've received from media that you felt were particularly positive or particularly negative, and why?

(**prompts**: these can be related to news or entertainment, whatever. They can affect you personally or present a position you haven't considered before, or that you think is incorrect, based on personal experience. The point is how if at all do certain messages affect your thinking?)

19. How do you think being black or blackness is generally portrayed in media? Give any specific examples you can think of, and the types of media where you experienced these impressions.

20. Talk about positive and inspirational images or messages you receive from media you consume, whether music, film, television, etc.

21. Finally, what do you think contributes to the under representation of black men on college campuses today?

Thank you for your time.

APPENDIX C: CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

The Other Curriculum: Do mass media have implications for college going?

You have been invited to participate in a study examining the college going experiences of African American male undergraduates at two Southern California universities. Ken Roth, a Ph.D. student at UCLA's Department of Education, under the faculty sponsorship of Professor Walter Allen, will conduct this study. Please read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to participate in the study.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY
The study is designed to explore some of the factors you believe either helped or hindered your college going aspirations, with particular focus on messages you may or may not have received from mass media, with an emphasis on television.

PROCEDURES
If you consent to participate in this study, you will be asked to complete a brief questionnaire and participate in a one-on-one interview lasting approximately one hour. During the interview, you will be asked about your own educational aspirations, and some of the factors you believe either helped or hindered your decision to attend college. This will involve recalling experiences and memories relating to your perceptions of education, your early goals and dreams, and influences such as family, community, peers, music and television, that you may recall either promoting or discouraging your future plans. We are also interested in how you dealt with messages that conflicted with your dreams. Your interview will be tape recorded and later transcribed.

POTENTIAL RISKS AND BENEFITS
This study poses minimal risks. We will ask that you recall some pre-college information and experiences, such as how television was viewed in your home, how often, who selected programming and what programming you may recall that introduced you to, confirmed, or discouraged your college going aspirations, if any. In reflecting on your experiences you may become uncomfortable with difficult or challenging experiences you may have had. This may be emotionally distressing. You may elect at any time not to answer any question, which you feel uncomfortable with and still remain a participant in the study.

You may not benefit personally from your participation in this study; but this research addresses issues important to African-American male students, which may help inform recruitment, retention and other institutional and classroom practices. In addition, you may experience personal benefit by reflecting on your own perceptions and lived experiences, and sharing them in a way that may benefit others.

PAYMENT FOR PARTICIPATION
There is no fee or other compensation for participating in this study.

CONFIDENTIALITY
In any report that may be published, no information will be included that makes it possible to identify any participant. We will code the interviews and use fictitious names for participants in all transcripts and reports. Research records will be secured and kept under lock and key. Only

researchers will have access to any data generated during the interviews or submission of questionnaires. Audiotapes will be erased or altered to exclude all identifying information; however actual voice recordings may be preserved for additional research purposes, which, again, will avoid all identifying characteristics of participants and will maintain at separate secure locations all data and coded links to data respectively. As a research participant, you have the right to review the recording made as part of the study interview to determine whether it should be edited or erased in whole or in part.

PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary and will not affect your current or future relations with your institution. You are under no obligation to answer any questions or discuss any topic that you have no inclination to answer or discuss. If you choose not to answer specific questions, you may still remain in the study. You are free to withdraw at any time.

CONTACTS AND QUESTIONS

The researcher conducting this study is Ken Roth. If you have any questions or concerns about the research, you may contact the principal investigator (PI) at kroth@ucla.edu or the faculty sponsor, Walter Allen, at allen@gseis.ucla.edu.

RIGHTS OF RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

You may withdraw your consent and discontinue participation in this study at any time without any consequence or penalty. You are not waiving any legal claims, rights or remedies because of your participation in this study. If you wish to ask questions about your rights as a research participant or if you wish to voice any problems or concerns you may have about the study to someone other than the researchers, please call the Office of the Human Research Protection Program at (310) 825-7122 or write to Office of the Human Research Protection Program, UCLA, 11000 Kinross Avenue, Suite 102, Box 951694, Los Angeles, CA 90095-1694.

STATEMENT OF CONSENT

I understand the procedures described above and all of my questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I agree to participate in this study and I have been given a copy of this form.

_____

Name of Subject

_____ _____

Signature of Subject Date

SIGNATURE OF INVESTIGATOR OR DESIGNEE

In my judgment the subject is voluntarily and knowingly giving informed consent and possesses the legal capacity to give informed consent to participate in this research study.

_____
Name of Investigator or Designee

_____ _____
Signature of Investigator or Designee Date

APPENDIX D: PRE-INTERVIEW QUESTIONNAIRE

University of California, Los Angeles

The Other Curriculum: Do mass media have implications for college going

Student Information Sheet

Please complete the following survey by marking your most appropriate responses for each question.

Name:_____

Email:_____

Date of Birth:_____

1. Sex: O Female O Male

2. Please tell us how you racially/ethnically identify_____

3. What year are you at your college or university?

O Freshman O Sophomore O Junior O Senior O 5+

4. Did you transfer to your current institution from another college? O Yes O No

If yes, please indicate your former institution: _____

5. What is your area of study?

Major_____ Minor_____

6. Generation/Citizen Status (Please select one)
O Your grandparents, parents, and you were born in the U.S.
O Either or both of your parents and you were born in the U.S.
O You were born in the U.S., but neither of your parents were
O You are a foreign born, naturalized citizen
O You are a foreign born, resident alien/permanent resident
O None of the above applies to you

7. What was the approximate combined income of your parents/guardian before taxes last year?

Include taxable and nontaxable income from all sources. *Mark one*.

Less than $39,999	O	$100,000 to $149,999	O
$40,000 to $59,999	O	$150,000 to	O

$60,000 to $99,999	O	$180,000 $180,001 or more	O

8. Indicate the highest level of education completed by your mother/guardian and father/guardian. *Mark one in each column.*

	Mother/Guardian	Father/Guardian
Elementary school or less	O	O
Some high school	O	O
High school diploma	O	O
Some college or postsecondary education	O	O
Associate's degree	O	O
Bachelor's degree	O	O
Some graduate or professional study	O	O
Graduate or professional degree (e.g., MA, PhD, MD, JD)	O	O
Other: Please specify _____	O	O
Unknown	O	O

9. Are you the first in your family to attend college? O Yes O No

10. How would you describe the neighborhood where you grew up?

    a. O Racially Diverse O Predominantly White O Predominantly Black

    b. O Urban O Suburban O Rural

11. Approximately how many miles away from this university do your parent(s)/guardian live?

    _____

12. What High School did you attend? _____

    City: _____ State: _____

13. How would you describe your high School?

    a. O Public O Private non-religious O Private Religious OCharter School O Boarding School

    b. O 1-199 students O 200-699 students O 700-1,199 students O1200-1,999 students

O 2,000-2,999 students O 3,000 or more students

c. O Racially Diverse O Predominantly White O Predominantly Black O Other:

Explain: _____

14. Please list organizations in which you were involved while in high school?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

15. What organizations have you become involved in since entering college and what year were you in school when you became a member?

_____

_____

_____

16. What was your high school grade point average? _____

17. What was your SAT score, if applicable?

Verbal: _____

Math: _____

Writing: _____

Did not take SAT test _____

18. Did you take honors or Advanced Placement (AP) courses in high school? If so, how many?

_____

19. What is your college grade point average? _____

a. What is your GPA in your major: _____

20. What are your plans immediately following completion of your undergraduate degree?

O Begin graduate study (i.e. Masters or Ph.D.)
O Begin professional work in my field of study
O I am unsure whether I will complete my undergraduate degree
O Other:
Please Explain _____

21. Please indicate which media you regularly use (List all that apply): O Internet O Television O Film OMusic "Radio" O Other:

Explain_____

22. Please break down your media use by type and number of hours per week: (For instance: TV, 3 hrs, music, 10 hrs, Internet, 15 hrs, film, 3 hrs): _____hrs Internet _____hrs Television _____ hrs Film _____hrs Music _____hrs Other:

Explain_____

23. Please recall a recent media example in which Blackness or being Black was portrayed and indicate whether the images, descriptions, presentation, and topic were:

O Positive O Somewhat Positive O Neutral O Somewhat Negative O Negative

24. Based on your answer in #23, explain briefly why you rated this portrayal the way that you did:

_____

_____

_____

25. Please list examples of recent media you have consumed, such as movies, video shorts, television programs, topical web sites, etc. to give the researcher a snapshot of your TYPICAL media use:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____
7. _____
8. _____
9. _____
10. _____

Thank you for your time.

APPENDIX E: INITIAL CODING SCHEME

Family and Home Life

FL1. Tell me a little bit about your background: your community, family, and relationship with parents.

(**prompts**: so you lived in the city, described the community in a bit more detail; your parents were/have been married for how long? further describe your relationship with your parents/guardians)

FL2. What was it like growing up in your house?

FL3. Talk about the activities that the family engaged in together in the home, say, after evening mealtime or on weekends.

(**prompts**: particular "rituals" like game night or homework study after dinner or other regular events that members looked forward to?

Role of Media at home

M1. What role did television play in your home?

(**prompts**: on all of the time, off at dinner, on at dinner, group watching, viewing particular programs and discussions afterward?

M2. What about other media forms like music and movie going?

(**prompts**: did your family listen to music together and if so what kind? Did you often see movies as a family?)

M3. If watching television was a family activity, how was what was watched selected?

M4. If music listening or movie going was a family activity, how was what was listened to or watched selected?

M5. If there were ever conflicts in making selections, how were these conflicts resolved?

Favorite TV, musical artists and movies

FM1. Name three television programs you watched growing up and some of the reasons you remember for watching them?

FM2. How about three of your favorite musical artists you listened to growing up and why you liked them?

FM3. Now, how about three movies that stick out in your memory and why?

FM4. Are there other memories of growing up you would like to share that I haven't asked about?

Childhood aspirations and where they came from

CA1. Let's shift gears now and talk about the dreams or goals you remember having as a child. What's the earliest life goal you remember (e.g., being an archeologist or ship captain) and where do you recall that goal came from?

CA2. Looking back now, were there particular events or specific experiences or other influences you believe helped shape those early dreams and goals?

CA3. When you got a little older, say, in high school, did your dreams and goals change, and if so, how or why did they change?

CA4. If your dreams and goals have changed again since then, talk about what you think has motivated these more recent changes?

CA5. Talk a bit about what you remember most about your growing up and when those memories surface what if anything triggers them?

(**prompts**: I'm wondering if a certain song or movie or television reference recalls a particular so that each time you see or hear it you're transported to a place of good or bad childhood memories?)

<u>Positive and negative media images</u>

PN1. Okay, let's switch gears again and now focus on any strong feelings you have about messages you've received from media that you felt were particularly positive or particularly negative, and why?

(**prompts**: these can be related to news or entertainment, whatever. They can affect you personally or present a position you haven't considered before, or that you think is incorrect, based on personal experience. The point is how if at all do certain messages affect your thinking?)

PN2. How do you think being Black or Blackness is generally portrayed in media? Give any specific examples you can think of, and the types of media where you experienced these impressions.

PN3. Talk about positive and inspirational images or messages you receive from media you consume, whether music, film, television, etc.

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