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Learning Wakanda: Assessing the Responses of African-American Children and Their Caregivers toward Concordant Educational Media

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by

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Caregivers toward Concordant Educational Media

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This dissertation written by Cameron Coleman, under the direction of the Dissertation Committee, is approved and accepted by all committee members, in partial fulfillment of requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education.

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I believe that the completion of this work, particularly at this time in my life, was only by the grace of God, to whom I owe the deepest thanks for His mercy and ordering my steps.

I also believe that this work is but one culmination of the collective intergenerational vision of my ancestors. As their vessel, I am conscious of and grateful for the influence and impact of the descendants of Minnie Mae and Richard Nero. I hope I have done well by them.

Thanks to my mother, Valerie Coleman. Death-defying. Nearly bionic. Mom, you are a Wakandan superhero. In spite of the Vibranium in your bones, mirrored in your unbreakable spirit, it was your rare vulnerability during the writing of this dissertation that inspired me to finish my doctoral journey.

Thank you to my grandmother, Gwendolyn Houston. Grandma, you are the epitome of grace, relentlessly compassionate, and always encouraging. Your nurturing, humor, (and cooking) pushed me through some of the toughest times in this journey. This work is a testament to the power of family priming—your calling me Dr. Coleman as early as age four certainly left its imprint on me!

To Minnie Mae Nero, my great-grandmother, you were my first and best methods class— hearing your stories, teaching me to braid my own hair, and doing the Mini Page together are some of my fondest memories. Thank you for teaching me lovingly while sharing your craft.

Thanks to Dr. Rebecca Stephenson, my Committee Chair. You put in more time and effort than I could have asked for, and I am thoroughly honored to have been your first advisee. Thank you for believing in me and inspiring me to do more, pushing further and delving deeper into a passion of mine.

DEDICATION

On a cloudless, brisk, palm-tree lined Los Angeles morning in January, 2015, I stood at the intersection of Vernon Drive and Crenshaw Boulevard, eagerly awaiting the start of the Martin Luther King, Jr. Day parade. As I took in the sights and sounds of the day, noting the ethnic diversity of the parade goers and the variety of food trucks nearby, an six-year-old boy eagerly approached the corner holding his mother's hand. This child had exited the family car excitedly, but gradually became uneasy as he approached the ideal parade viewing spot, beginning to flail and cry ever more with each step. Upon reaching the curb, the boy seemed inconsolable. When his mother inquired about his emotions, he pointed at a group of uniformed policemen standing straight ahead of him and said, "They are going to get me." Parade goers within earshot immediately deflated, as unfortunately, we all realized that this child's monsters weren't imaginary beasts under the bed, rather, they were real, they were large in stature, they traveled in large groups, and easily identifiable with their uniforms.

Five years ago, it was shocking and saddening to discover definitively that this African-American child had accurately decoded the reality of racism expressed through police brutality and murder. It is the rest of the world which has now caught up to what Black families, some children included, have known, that is, the magnitude and frequency of interpersonal and systemic racism. The majority of this dissertation was completed in July, 2020 in the midst of a global reckoning with systemic racism, catalyzed by events in late May, 2020—viral footage of a thinly veiled lethal threat by Amy Cooper against birdwatcher Christian Cooper and, two days later, the murder of George Floyd, an unarmed Black civilian, at the knees of Derek Chauvin and the hands of other complicit police officers.

I dedicate this dissertation to every Black child who, like the child at the parade, has lost any sliver of childhood joy in recognition of the reality of anti-Black racism. I hope that this work, and all of my work, creates a more proud, just, and beautiful tomorrow for you.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES

LIST OF FIGURES

ABSTRACT

Learning Wakanda: Assessing the Responses of African-American Children and Their

Caregivers toward Concordant Educational Media

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Screen-based educational media, as an extension of the schooling process whose history has mirrored brick and mortar institutions, have traditionally espoused narratives of Eurocentricity, shifting relatively recently to multicultural yet simultaneously raceless narratives. While many viewers have learned from and been inspired by these media, the enthusiastic response to the film *Black Panther* (2018), as demonstrated by financial earnings and sustained social media energy, revealed an intense yearning in the Black community for media positively centering the strengths and successes of Black lives. Launched from the sociocultural fervor for Black concordance in media, and extending concordance into the educational media landscape, this qualitative study sought to assess responses from African-American children, ages 3-8, to educational media concordant to them, and contextualize these responses in recognition of race socialization patterns within the home. Children's responses to the media ranged from acknowledgment of skin color as well as hair texture and style, to full identification with and enthusiasm for animated protagonists. Caregivers responded positively to the samples while self-reporting varying degrees of race socialization. These responses demonstrated promising potential for identification with concordant educational media based on phenotypic resemblance, particularly for children approximately 8 years of age.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

I am a child of the 1990s, the golden age of Black television. On a daily and weekly basis, I saw reflections of my present and an idealized version of my future projected onto a screen before my eyes. The women who defined the 1990s for me—Maxine Shaw, Claire Huxtable, Hilary and Ashley Banks, Gina Waters, Rolonda Watts, and Oprah Winfrey to name a few—grew to hold an authoritative position in my mind through their trendy fashion sense, flawless beauty, quick wits, professional success, and self-assured power. In short, because these women were on screen, a familiar window and prescient mirror, a medium that showed a reality so close yet so far away, they became my icons.

The television became my crystal ball, a crystal cube as it were—the regular appearance of and pretended engagement with my icons made the reality of a successful future nearer with each viewing. It was not uncommon for me to pretend to be a character on *Martin* (1992-1997) or hold a hairbrush and pretend to co-host talk shows, or just happen to be wearing the emblem of my independent school uniform while watching reruns of *The Fresh Prince of Bel Air* (1992–1996). Where my future was reflected in television's talk shows and primetime entertainment, my present reality was depicted and explained on the educational programs of PBS, often affirming my experiences in contexts of school, recreational activities, and home. When I think back, it was Beverly Mickins, a cast member on *Square One TV* (1987–1992), an educational math-focused show produced and distributed on public television, whose impact resulted in everyday, measurable successes for me. While I paid attention to the entire program, I may have paid more attention to Beverly's segments which, by virtue of her presence as a Black woman,

seemed more accessible and likable for me. Just as I held the hairbursh and wore the sweater, I also grabbed pencil and paper and played along at home to the math quandaries, puzzles, and games presented. My improvement in math was noticeable, and my sense of capability and belonging in a math-based world increased.

I have often wondered if my engagement with media in the 1990s was due to my status as an only child, or was it, perhaps, a true sense of validation in the present and a bright future—at the least engaging with media was an exciting and affirming episodic fiction. Certainly, all possibilities may be true —I thoroughly enjoyed seeing a potential version of myself participating in the world impactfully and powerfully while reflecting aspects of African-American culture with which I identified. That Black women existed powerfully in the world of mathematics was immediately and directly fulfilling—truly, the only thing more fulfilling would be meeting these icons in person or versions of them, realizing that the screen did not belie their existence. And so, one can imagine my surprise when I learned in 1995 that the Geometry teacher listed on my 9th grade syllabus, Ms. Hamilton, identified with her Black lineage. I credit the influences of Ms. Mickins and Ms. Hamilton as significant hallmarks in my enjoyment of math—it is likely no accident that I have served as a math teacher for the past 17 years.

I know I am not unique. The power of concordant media, media where the race/ethnicity of the primary character of a television show matches the viewer (Njoroge, Elenbasas, Myaing, Garrison, & Christakis, 2016), is now undeniable, demonstrated most recently and powerfully by the monetary success of and continued enthusiasm for *Black Panther* (2018) and the incredible world of Wakanda. As of May 9, 2020, *Black Panther* (2018) was the twelfth highest grossing film of all time (IMDB, 2020), and research by Green, Holman, and Sakoui (2018) indicated that

cities comprised of a majority Black population contributed greatly to its economic success. In

further support for *Black Panther* (2018), between the film's release in 2018 and Fall, 2020, the

hashtag #wakandaforever was used 1.3 million times, and WakandaCon, an annual festival in

celebration of all things *Black Panther* (2018) and Afro-futurism, was founded in Chicago in

2018 (Maloney, 2018). Wakanda, as a place, culture, and legacy is significant and affirming for

many reasons, as the founder of this conference, Dave Barthwell, stated regarding his own

personal and social need for a visual representation of a victorious and assured Black reality:

> This is something we all needed. . . . I know the wages we pay to the world outside of this
> space. Out there, they try to take so much from you. They try to tell you that you don't
> matter, that the dreams and hopes that you have don't matter. That you're weird or
> broken or wrong. And after a while, you start to believe it. But not here. Not this
> weekend. (Maloney, 2018, n.p.)

Wakanda tributes also took the form of homage videos centering children. "M'Baku

Challenge Day" proved to be the most popular of these, garnering over ten million views,

according to ABC News on March 20, 2018. Particularly striking in "M'Baku Challenge Day"

was the precision of the child's reenactment, having demonstrated two constructs by Bandura—

observational learning, the imitation of observed behavior to which one has attended selectively

(Bandura, 1977); as well as identification, one's perception of similarity to an entity (Bandura &

Huston, 1961). Research has shown the centrality of identification to learning, most

demonstrably through the performance of divergent process (Calvert, Strong, Jacobs, & Conger,

2007), as well as through increased attention, which can serve as a conduit toward building

parasocial relationship (Calvert et al., 2007; Richert, Robb & Smith, 2011). My own experience

with hairbrushes and sweaters, the response of Black Americans to *Black Panther* (2018), and

research by Fisch and Truglio notwithstanding, have demonstrated the importance of gender and ethnicity match for media enjoyment and impact (Fisch & Truglio, 2001).

Catalyzed by the memory of my own experiences, as well as the historicity of and enthusiasm toward *Black Panther* (2018), this study examined the responses of African-American children and their primary caregivers toward a sample of concordant educational media specifically created with cultural identity development, academic concepts, and recognition of Black historical figures in mind. Responses were analyzed in light of (a) social learning theories originated by Bandura (Bandura, 1977) which have been tested in relation to both prosocial content and including academic content; (b) Critical Race Theory (Delgado & Stefancic, 1993); (c) the Encoding/Decoding Theory of Communication by Stuart Hall describing the interaction of cultural background with media message decoding (Hall, 1974), and (d) the Bronfenbrenner Bioecological Theory of Human Development (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

Statement of the Problem

Functioning as an extension of an educational system which has historically privileged Eurocentricity and uninterrogated multiculturalism, the lack of concordant educational media centering African-American children has deprived this community of the opportunity to see their pasts wholly and positively reflected, their presents lovingly affirmed, and their futures victoriously projected. Because ethnically concordant educational media centering African Americans has not been produced on a widespread level, assessing responses to these media has proven difficult.

Although many have cited a growing number of African-American characters on television and in media, a numerical presence has not ensured the positive affirmation and

reflection of Black lives. Roberts (2004) repeated this sentiment in questioning whether changes in number of Black representations has actually led to a positive effect on Black children. Clark (1969) noted that these representations are not always accompanied with respect, and Dr. Cheryl Grills and colleagues, powerfully extending the argument, contended unequivocally that the African-American community is, "subjected to narratives where race is present, but it is "deemphasized, silenced, or negatively reframed to the discredit of African Americans" (Clark, 1969, as cited by Fitzgerald, 2010; Grills et al., 2016, p. 344). As media influence has been widely researched formally and informally, the impact of these narratives, as related to visual media, is not insignificant. Not only has Bandura (2001) declared mass media highly influential upon thoughts, actions, and affect, but Calvert, Strong, Jacobs, and Conger (2007) asserted that ethnic minorities suffer from limited access to role models who are able to guide identity development and influence behavior. Regarding impact, parents have also agreed—a recent study published by the Joan Ganz Cooney Center found that parents of African-American children, often mediators of children's media consumption in the home, cited interactive media as a source of learning for their children in higher proportion than their White and Hispanic-Latino counterparts (Rideout, 2014). Thus, while the research of Fisch and Truglio (2001) asserted the role of concordance in media enjoyment, research has suggested that concordant media is particularly impactful on multiple fronts—toward African-American children's enjoyment, validation, and learning.

Purpose Statement

In 1933, Carter G. Woodson (1933) argued that African Americans have been victimized by a Eurocentric educational system, intended to oppress and devalue the contributions of

Africans and African Americans. In light of Woodson's words, taken alongside the clear enthusiasm for *Black Panther* (2018) shown by the Black community, this study sought to extend the power of concordance to educational media, assessing and contextualizing its impact, having attributed the lack of concordant educational media to a history of anti-Blackness and Eurocentricity in educational materials, problematic for the lack of positive identification which encourages learning, and its racism via subscription to raceless colorblindness whose neutrality, according to the tenets of Critical Race Theory (CRT), have masked the societal realities of race (Delgado & Stefancic, 1993).

Research which assessed African-American children's attitudes toward concordant educational media had hitherto not been conducted on a widespread level, thus, this study uplifted the voices of African-American children and their responses to a media sample created with their cultural validation in mind, as they have historically been underrepresented in research.

Research Questions

The following questions guided the current study:

1. Do African-American children, ages 3-8, identify with ethnically concordant educational media? What factors signify identification with these media?

2. In light of the responses of primary caregivers, to what extent are race identity conversations present in the child's home atmosphere? Does the presence and nature of these conversations correspond with children's identification with concordant media?

Significance

Particularly salient to the current study was the work of Njoroge and colleagues, namely, her studies regarding the influence of television programs on prosocial play in preschoolers (Njoroge et al., 2016), as well as further research discussing parental consideration of media upon race identity development. Uplifting these findings, the current study allowed primary caregivers of African-American children to hear, in real time, their children's processing of ethnically concordant media messages, potentially illuminating their recognition of encoded racial messages in media as well as prior beliefs about race. By centering the voices of Black children and their caregivers, both minoritized populations, the current study was also significant in its research design, upholding Critical Race Theory principles in its challenge to dominant narratives.

Key Terms

The changing nature of the topic, media, and current definitions and redefinitions of identities have necessitated an understanding of how key terms are used in this work.

Affordance: That which is offered or furnished to the being (Gibson, 1982); attributes, described by utility and relationship which can shape possibilities for human action in relation to an object (Hutchby, 2001)

African-American: A person of sub-Saharan African ancestry descended from those enslaved in the Americas during the Transatlantic Slave Trade (Agyemang, Bhopal, & Bruinzeels, 2005).

Black: A person with African ancestry encompassing numerous ethnic and cultural backgrounds (Agyemang et al., 2005).

Concordant show: A screen-based program containing primary characters who match the viewership via phenotypic appearance and languages spoken by the viewers (Njoroge et al., 2016).

Educational Media: Content which, according to parents, "is good for your child's learning or growth, or that teaches some type of lesson, such as an academic or social skill" (Rideout, 2014); "the channels of transmitting information to learners" (Omodara & Adu, 2014)

Ethnicity: a term referring to shared ancestry, beliefs, culture, language, practices, and beliefs (American Sociological Association, n.d.); shared origin, culture, or tradition leading to the creation of a sense of identity upheld intergenerationally (Agyemang et al., 2005).

Race: a grouping of humans into categories which are socially accepted, and generally based on shared physical or social qualities (Barnshaw, 2008); physical differences treated as socially salient (American Sociological Association, n.d.); not relevant scientifically, race is the similarity of phenotypic features with respect to biological comparability (Agyemang et al., 2005).

Screen Time: time spent viewing TV, DVDs, videos, computers and video games (Njoroge et al., 2016).

Theoretical Frameworks

Having recognized the ubiquity and importance of media communication as well as the personal and social reverberations of racial realities for both caregiver and child, this study explored the research questions through intersections between four theoretical frameworks: Critical Race Theory, the Bronfenbrenner Bioecological Theory of Human Development, Social Learning Theory, and the Encoding and Decoding Theory of Communication.

By engaging both Critical Race Theory and The Bronfenbrenner Bioecological Theory of Human Development, this study situated race on both a personal and systemic level, acknowledging societal and historical conditions; Social Learning Theory and the Encoding and Decoding Theory of Communication conceptualized child responses relative to concordance.

The following sections will describe these frameworks, expounding upon their relevance in greater detail.

Bioecological Theory of Human Development

According to the most recent iteration of the Bronfenbrenner Bioecological Theory of Human Development, proximal processes, defined as the frequent and complex interactions between a human and the persons, places, and objects in the most immediate external environment which become increasingly complex over time, are the most salient factor in and catalyst of human development (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998; Tudge, Mokrova, Hatfield, & Karnik, 2009). This theory also describes the importance of process, person, context, and time in driving human development, abbreviated PPCT. According to Tudge et al. (2009), any study which has properly applied the Bronfenbrenner Theory has accounted for each element in its design, not simply reducing the theory to an acknowledgment of individual location within ecologies.
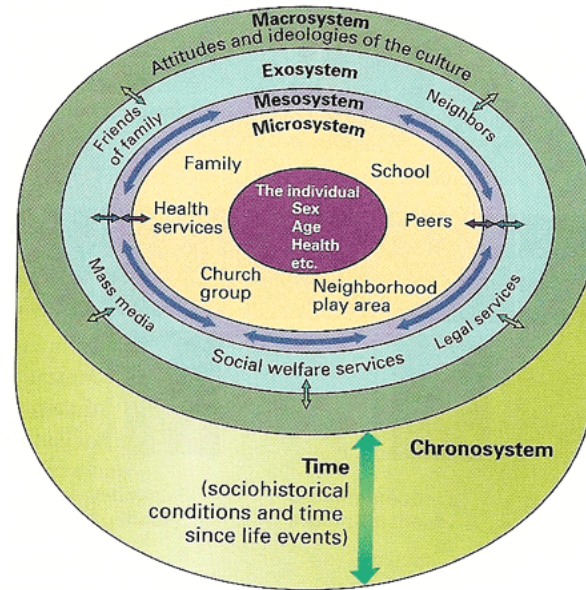
Figure 1: Bronfenbrenner Bioecological Theory of Human Development. Reprinted from *Child Development (12th Ed)*., p.33, by J. W. Santrock, 2008,. New York: McGraw Hill Companies, Inc. Copyright 2008 by McGraw Hill Companies. Used with permission.

Applying PPCT: Process. According to Tudge et al., Bronfenbrenner provides examples of proximal process in "learning new skills, solitary play, reading" (2009, p. 200). These examples are classified as regularly occurring events, able to drive development because they encourage a person's understanding of the world and his place in it. This study treated the viewing of screen-based educational media as a solitary play activity, having applied the Bronfenbrenner concept of process in its regular occurrence in the lives of many of the research subjects. The activity of screen viewing, as it has pertained to the definition, also encouraged situational understanding within more expansive contexts.

Applying PPCT: Person. Where process describes activity, the second aspect of the theory, people, is classified according to three characteristics: demand, resources, and force (Tudge et al., 2009). Demand characteristics act as an immediate stimulus to other individuals, such as "age, skin color, gender, and physical appearance, and have the power to effect

interactions because of the expectations immediately formed" (Tudge et al., 2009, p. 200).

Resource characteristics are not as visually salient, but sometimes deduced, fairly or not, based on a reading of demand characteristics. Examples of resource characteristics include past experiences, skills, intelligence, and access to social and material resources. Force characteristics regard differences in temperament, motivation, and other psychological factors that can drive or stall development as it relates to proximal processes (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998).

As racially concordant media is defined as media containing at least one primary character who shares the race or ethnicity of the viewer, the current study reified the concept of demand through the person element of the PPCT model, as Black children viewed the media sample which centered Black children (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998; Njoroge et al., 2016; Tudge et al., 2009). While both racial concordance and demand depend on visual assessments, the media sample used in the current study also aimed to match resource characteristics, as the video samples featured children with access to children's basic survival needs such as primary caregivers, shelter, and food.

Applying PPCT: Context. Through interviews with children and their primary caregivers, this study acknowledged the context level of the PPCT process, that is, the environments in which individuals spend a significant amount of time actively engaging. A brief description of the model's widening contextual levels follows. Microsystems include home, school, and/or peer group (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998; Tudge et al., 2009). Mesosystems are interrelations between microsystems, and exosystems are comprised of settings in which individuals are not directly situated, yet have an indirect influence on development. The macrosystem encompasses smaller contextual spheres and includes phenomena - culture, for

example - which describe those elements shared between groups espousing the same values and belief systems.

The research design of investigating individual responses to media, and contextualizing these responses within the nature of race identity conversations in the home aligned with the premise of the theory that lasting impact of any element depends on its alignment within one or more microsystems (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998; Tudge et al. 2009).

Applying PPCT: Time. In acknowledgment of the increments of time in a human's lifespan, Bronfenbrenner graduates time measurements from Micro-time, the brevity of a singular interaction; to Meso-time, that is, events which maintain some consistency in the environment; and Macro-time, referring to the major historical contexts of a person's life. This study fulfilled these Bronfenbrennerian defintions—microtemporal interaction occurred with the viewing of the media sample; assessing mesotemporal events occurred through an interview with children regarding regular viewing habits. As the current study examined child responses regarding race identity socialization through the lenses of family, presenting the study to participants during the Martin Luther King, Jr. Day parade, and employing a questioning protocol which acknowledged *Black Panther* (2018) viewership, this study engaged historicity on a macro-time level.

Overall, this study contributed to the body of literature regarding educational media concordant to African Americans, captured the recent experience of digital media, grounding subsequent studies.

Critical Race Theory (CRT)

Where the Bronfenbrenner Theory of Bioecological Human Development approaches race from a temporal perspective, CRT examines the enduring social intersections of race, racism, and the American law while critiquing the dominant norms present in various institutions, including schools, families, and the media (Crenshaw, 2011). Originating in the 1970s, the body of research related to CRT has expanded considerably to include other social arenas including education, yet has maintained foundational themes including, but not limited to, the following:

1. The critique of liberalism as expressed as colorblindness and/or racial neutrality;

2. The importance of telling one's own story, as many of the popular narratives around race discussions originate from a majoritarian narrative;

3. The focus on recognizing intragroup diversity and the varied experiences of oppressed people, rebuffing essentialism and anti-essentialism,

4. The acceptance of cultural nationalism and separatism, holding space for the idea that people of color may be able to promote their own interests more effectively through separation from the American mainstream. (Delgado & Stefancic, 1993)

Borne from the CRT grounded sensibilities of the researcher, an African-American woman, this study from inception to finish, ensured that African-American voices and experiences were centered both digitally and physically; the design of the study centered the experiences of African-American children and their caregivers, and cultural and phenotypic elements were reflected in the media stimuli, actively countering Eurocentricity and colorblind encoding.

Social Learning Theory: Attention and Identification

While this work engaged many aspects of the work of Albert Bandura, Social Learning Theory (SLT), which proffers that behaviors are learned primarily through the following of an observed example, was a salient feature of this work. Bandura's theory outlines four precepts—attention, retention, reproduction, and motivation—required for successful social learning (Bandura, 1977). While the design of the study did not measure attention, the beginning of social learning, the media samples used in this study fulfilled the precept through use of numerous production techniques and design practices, ideas highly researched as it pertains to young children. Enhanced reality, evidenced through the bright color palette of the video, and the centering of child characters were encoded with the intent to sustain attention (Alwitt, Anderson, Lorch, & Levin, 1980). Additionally, production techniques such as zooms, pans, special effects; sound effects and music; as well as pace, action, and scene changes, known as formal features, were intentionally encoded, effective in steering the viewer's attention, according to research, through their ability to change, move, surprise, and/or demonstrate complexity and intensity. (Huston-Stein & Wright, 1979)

In its proximity to concordance and its definition as perceived similarilty to an entity, identification, as defined by Bandura, was engaged heavily in this study, used as another device to encourage attention (Bandura & Huston, 1961). Encoded into the media samples through animated physical similarity to African-American children through diversity in hair style, texture, and skin color, concordance, as a form of identification, agrees with Cohen's finding that operational definitions of identification have become more nuanced and context-specific particularly as they relate to media characters. (Cohen, 2001)

Encoding/Decoding Model of Communication

Presented by Stuart Hall, a person of color, in 1973, the Encoding/Decoding Model of Communication describes a cyclical process of encoding and decoding of the television medium. Summarized by the following diagram, this model presents television programming as a discourse loaded with signs and symbols to be perceived and interpreted by the viewer:
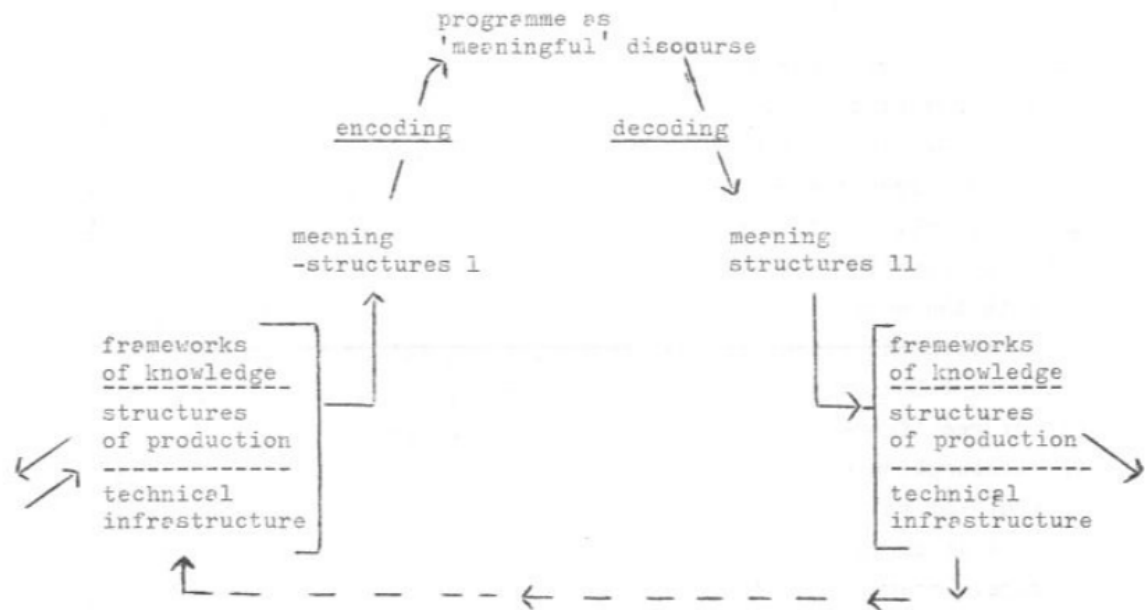
Figure 2: Process of Encoding and Decoding. Reprinted from *Encoding and Decoding in the Television Discourse* by S. Hall, September 1973, Council of Europe Colloquy on "Training in the Critical Reading of Television Language." Conference conducted at The Council and the Centre for Mass Communication Research, University of Leicester, United Kingdom. Retrieved from https://www.birmingham.ac.uk/Documents/college-artslaw/history/cccs/stencilled-occasional-papers/1to8and11to24and38to48/SOP07.pdf. Copyright 1973 by Stuart Hall. Used with permission.

Successful media consumer decoding depends upon a common cultural understanding of the structures and symbols within the message, the perception of meaning, and agreement in underlying frameworks between creator and the encoded messages. (Hall, 1973)

Research Design

Research subjects for this qualitative study were identified through an informational table at a popular Leimert Park coffeeshop, and through a mass email from a South Los Angeles preschool. The eight families and eleven children, ages 3-8, who participated self-identified as African Americans; completed all necessary consent forms; and viewed three 1-minute racially concordant, animated, educational media samples, each reinforcing the letters A, B, and C of the alphabet while protagonizing African-American children.

To encourage identification with viewers, these protagonists, African-American children, were (a) animated with a variety of hair styles and textures, and numerous shades of brown skin, and (b) physically centered in each scene, experiencing events and settings steeped in African-American history while encountering prominent African-American figures from the past and present. Common sight words, the names of the historical figures, short phrases, and culturally relevant monosyllabic words appeared on screen intermittently over the course of each of the three videos. In short, by featuring sight words appropriate for a K-2 audience alongside concordant visual touchstones, these media samples were designed to engage and support academic content and race identity development simultaneously.

Children were then interviewed in a semi-structured format while their caregivers quietly observed the interview; sibling pairs of children were interviewed together. Each interview was audio recorded and lasted approximately 30–40 minutes in total with the child's interview lasting approximately 15–20 minutes. Subjects were asked the following questions, crafted using an adaptation of common media questioning protocol for children regarding identification as a guide (Calvert et al., 2007) (See Appendix A):

1. How do you feel about this video? What was your favorite part of the video?

2. How much did you like the people in the video? What did you like about the people in the video?

3. How much are you like the people in the video? What makes you say that?

4. How much do you want to be like the people in the video? Why?

5. What are your favorite shows? What do you like about those shows?

Following the children's interviews, caregivers were asked the following questions (See Appendix B):

1. Did you see the film Black Panther (2018)?

2. Did you see it with your children? As a family?

3. What made you want to see the film?

4. What did the children think of the film?

5. Do you think the children picked up on the race aspect of the film?

6. Is the choice to see Black Panther (2018) reflected in other choices in media for your family? In what ways?

7. Does the issue of race arise in your household?

8. What do you think of these videos?

Data were transcribed verbatim by the researcher and analyzed according to *in vivo* coding methods.

Positionality

As an African-American woman who has taught math for over 16 years in public, charter, and independent school contexts, I love education, media, and educational media. Feeding my

interest in media, I have also served in numerous capacities in media production, including Grip, Character Graphics Operator, Camera Operator, 1st Assistant Director, and Assistant Producer on several telecasts, commercials, and documentaries based in Los Angeles. As seeing one's experiences reflected in the moving image on screen, has always validated me and, I suspect, my students, I have made a point of integrating educational media viewing into my teaching praxis. Thus, I have approached this research as one who has intentionally oscillated through the spaces of enthusiastic media consumer, media viewing mediator, and media producer.

I have also approached this study having interrogated my experiences and contexts informing the ecologies in which I was placed. Thus, I extend this positionality, as the research design does, toward the context of intergenerational patterns, and thus a brief exposition of the experiences of my sole caretaker, my mother, follows.

An academically talented student, my mother attended her neighborhood high school and enjoyed her experience largely because her school and neighborhood peers were "Black, proud, close-knit . . . the cool kids" (V. Coleman, personal communication, April 24, 2018). When she was uprooted from her neighborhood school to attend a newly integrated one, her grades fell sharply because, having been separated from her peers, she felt out of place. Her sense of belonging at school was facilitated by a few observant and caring teachers who noticed her discomfort and made a point of validating her academic talent. At the time of the study, my mother, 66 years old, fondly recalled Madame Brunstein, a Holocaust survivor and experienced French teacher, who spent numerous after school hours with her, taking an interest in her life and asking her to grade her peers' papers due to her fast acquisition of the language. Madame Brunstein's impact was not insignificant—my mother excelled at French and History, eventually

studying International Studies and French for both her undergraduate and graduate degrees, yet she never forgot the experience of her separation from her community, a theme which continued in her media consumption life as well.

The absence of Black protagonists in culturally relevant contexts had not escaped my mother's notice. Although she fondly remembered *Howdy Doody* (1947-1960) and the opening soundtrack to *The Many Loves of Dobie Gillis* (1959–1962) as salient features of her childhood and adolescence, her focus has shifted recently. As a part-time model throughout her 40s, and now in her retirement, an actress who has appeared in numerous network television shows, she has often pointed out Black female protagonists in television commercials and said, "That's going to be me." That the centered, protagonized, and culturally relevant reflection of ethnicity has had such a lasting impact, especially when considered against the history of media experiences rendering minorities invisible, is not insignificant, and has strongly contributed to the current study. Similarly, where I had distanced my own media experiences from my educational ones, in recognition of the enduring persistence of racism in numerous arenas, I have assessed the possibility of reconciling the false dichotomy drawn between ethnic identification and education through this study.

Assumptions

My personal experiences and recent positionalities have given rise to assumptions embedded in both the approach and design of the current study. The goal of exploring Black intradiversity in educational media was built upon my personal experience with concordant educational media and its potential to impact learning just as powerfully as, if not more than, school, family, and mainstream educational media. Additionally, that the research design has not

conceded comparisons between media samples created and distributed through different platforms, has created a second assumption—that the subjects' responses to concordant educational media presented digitally would not differ from mainstream, non-concordant media. It also assumed that the media samples are viewed as academically meaningful by parents and children, and thus seen as valuable by the subjects.

Limitations

Considering the treatment of race, Zeus Leonardo proffered that definition and experience of one's race cannot be examined without an understanding of the relationship between race and socioeconomic class (Leonardo, 2013). Departing from this position, this study asked adults to reflect upon racial realities independently of socioeconomic class, with respect to visual representations of identity and culture in educational children's media. Also, the usage of both purposive and convenience sampling created variability while limiting the population of potential subjects, limiting the study. Additional major limitations were the small sample size of the study, as well as the lack of generalizability based on the use of a non-random sample.

Delimitations

Delimitations to this study included the choices to (a) limit the sample to African-American children and their primary caregivers; (b) aggregate all visual media, disregarding differences in affordances between television, film, and digital media; (c) use one-minute brief media samples created specifically for this study to represent concordant educational media, and (d) conduct interviews in proximity to the Martin Luther King, Jr. Day Parade in Los Angeles.

Organization of Dissertation

Spanning five chapters, this study examined the responses of African-American children and their caregivers to educational media which centers Black children. A brief overview of each chapter follows.

Chapter 1 introduced the study while describing the factors affecting the study and outlining its components. In an effort to historicize the study itself, as well its results, the second chapter begins with a literature review delineating a brief history of educational media in the United States within the historical context and tradition of Eurocentricity in American schools; the literature review concludes with a review of current research at the intersection of media and education as it pertains to African-American children. The third chapter details the research design, and the fourth chapter discusses findings. Chapter 5 interprets those findings in light of aforementioned theories, and makes recommendations for future studies as well as media practices for parents, educators, and educational media creators.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Somebody told a lie one day. They couched it in language. They made everything Black ugly
and evil. Look in your dictionaries and see the synonyms of the word black. It's always
something sinister, degrading, and low. Look at the word white, it's always something pure,
high, and clean. Well, I want to get the language right tonight. I want to get the language so right
that everyone will cry out, "Yes, I'm Black, I'm proud of it. I'm Black and I'm beautiful!"

–Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. (King Center, 2007)

The enduring phenomenon of anti-Black racist ideas, namely, ideas designed to convince

Black people of their innate inferiority and White people of innate superiority, has been well-

documented, often implicating media as a primary perpetuating vehicle (Burrell, 2010). A

thorough examination of these ideas requires consideration of the sociopolitical context which

birthed them, thus, this literature review begins by briefly clarifying a historical throughline of

anti-Blackness in educational, child-centered media, beginning with the Transatlantic Slave

Trade, continuing with the centering of Whiteness and marginalization of African-American

identity in children's printed educational media, and ending with an demonstration of its

progression into screen-based educational media. This review continues with an outline of

several fields of research, namely research situated at intersection of the identity development of

African-American children; research regarding children's acknowledgment and understanding of

race; and research regarding the family context of African-American race socialization. The

review then concludes with a discussion of studies which demonstrate the frequency and efficacy

of children's media viewership through the lens of race.

Race in Schools and Educational Media

Omodara and Adu defined educational media generally as "the channels of transmitting information to learners" (Omodara & Adu, 2014). Stephenson further expounded, putting forth that these media serve as explicit teachers of academic concepts designed to orient children toward the practices and concepts which will be reinforced in school (Stephenson, 2018). Engaging the Critical Race Theory lens in viewing both the schooling process and, by extension, educational media as knowledge instruments, necessarily means examining the role of both institutions in conveying racist ideas (Delgado & Stefancic, 1993).

Speaking to the normalization of racism as an organizing factor of societal systems, Dr. Carter G. Woodson, in his 1933 book *The Mis-education of the Negro*, described the ways in which African Americans have been robbed of a sense of identity by a Eurocentric educational system—a system which miseducates by omitting, minimizing, and devaluing the contributions of Africans and African Americans (Woodson, 1933). With respect to Woodson's statement, this section undertakes two goals: (a) to discuss the influence of school and mass media by extension as socializing factors; and (b) to analyze literature and historical documents regarding schooling and educational media, connecting both to structures which promote Eurocentric, anti-Black messages.

Hidden Curriculum

In describing impressions left upon children by school norms not explicitly stated but learned nonetheless, Robert Dreeben's work, "The Contribution of Schooling to the Learning of Norms" originated theories of *hidden curriculum* (Dreeben, 1967). Giroux and Penna defined hidden curriculum more recently as "the unstated norms, values, and beliefs that are transmitted

to students through the underlying structure of meaning in both the formal content, as well as the social relations of school and classroom life" (Giroux & Penna, 1979, p. 22). It is not only the content of the curricula, but also the depictions of African Americans within these curricula which have continuously affirmed Woodson's (1933) assertions. Ligorio generalized Woodson's claim toward identity-building in all students in her position as follows,

> Learning is not only a cognitive and social experience, but also an identity experience. Who we are, what we are able to do, and what we will be, based on what we learn, are constantly challenged when we attend learning situations. (Ligorio, 2010, p. 97)

Regarding educational media as a socializing institution not immune to mechanisms of racism, and regarding the media as a learning situation as it is labeled by Ligorio, susceptible to the reality of hidden curriculum, the next section very briefly clarifies the historical throughline in educational media of Eurocentricity and anti-Blackness, based on phenomena typifying the age, and privileging printed educational materials and screen-based instructional media.

A Brief History of Racist Representations of Black Children in Printed Children's Educational Media

1700s: Slaving Reference in the First Popular Children's Book in Europe

Rooted in explanations for differences in skin color and culture, the historical origins of the marginalization and dehumanization of two identities, Black and child, predate colonization of the United States. Numerous authors contributed to anti-Black ideas—human hierarchies revering the color white and demeaning the color black—including Ibn Khaldun, a Tunisian intellectual who authored *The Muqqadimah* in 1377 (Ibn Khaldun & Rosenthal, 1958), and Gomes Eanes de Zurara, a Portuguese author who, in 1453, published *The Chronicle of the Discovery and Conquest of Guinea* (de Zurara, Beazley, & Prestage, 1899). All of these,

however, are variations on the Aristotelian themes of racism comprised primarily of two themes: the climate theory, which proposed that extreme hot or cold climates produced "ugly" people, who lacked the ability to self-govern due to their intellectual, moral, and physical inferiority; and curse theory, i.e. that black skin results from the sins of Ham detailed in the Bible (Kendi, 2016, p. 20).

Having gained momentum through the Transatlantic Slave Trade, the lie of Black inferiority arrived to the United States by way of the Puritans in 1607, who, believing themselves to be chosen and superior, promoted Black inferiority through sermons and printed literature for families to justify slave holding practices (Kendi, 2016, p. 22).

A culture of physical punishment, designed to reinforce self-control and avoidance of sin for Puritan children developed alongside a culture of anti-Black ideas. Donning uncomfortable clothing and experiencing corporal punishment in schools, Puritan children learned to couple behavior correction with oppressive bodily pain–a cultural norm reflected in one of the first popular children's books in Europe, *A Little Pretty Pocket Book* by John Newbery (Berk, 2012; Suzuki, 1994). Although the stated purpose of the text was to "teach children use of the English language by way of diversion" and to combine "instruction with delight" (Newbery, 1744, p. 1-2), small pincushions with red and black sides, red for good behavior and black for bad —would enumerate the number of times a child would be "whipt as often as they are found there" (Newbery, 1744, p. 17-8). Specifically, the poem for the letter "O" makes mention of including a slave in a game of boys (Newbery, 1744, p. 58). Thus, through its inclusion in a children's primer, the relationship of slave and master, as well as physical punishment is memorialized, normalized, and communicated intergenerationally.
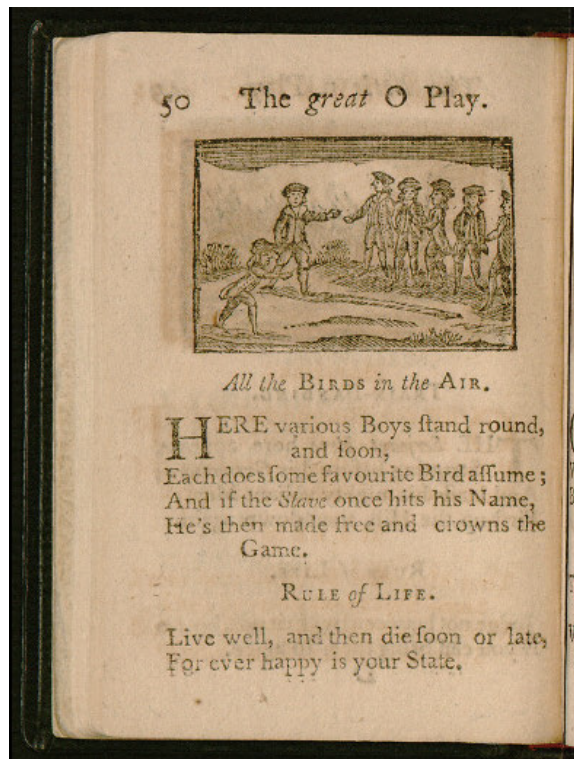
Figure 3. Letter O. Reprinted from London edition of *A Little Pretty Pocket Book* by John Newbery, 1744. London. Retrieved from https://www.loc.gov/item/22005880/.

1800s: Travel Writing Translates to Textbooks

Travel and travel writing. With the prevalence and singularity of Eurocentrism and racist ideas during the slavetrading of the 17th and 18th centuries permeating numerous aspects of American life, travel writing, ranging in content from essays and confabulations to overt fantasy in America (Wood, 2003) accelerated in popularity, transforming into an educational medium as well as forum for the continued othering of people of African descent. Promoting travel as education, *Of Travaile* by Francis Bacon in 1601, one of the earliest examples of travel writing opened as follows:

> Travel, in the younger sort, is a part of education, in the elder, a part of experience. He that travelleth into a country, before he hath some entrance into the language, goeth to school, and not to travel. (Bacon, 1601, p. 1)

Other highly influential travel writings turned cultural phenomena have included

Robinson Crusoe published in 1719, and *The Universal Traveller* by Charles Goodrich in 1838

where disdain for Black identity is found in sentences regarding the people of Central African

Kingdom of Bornou such as: "The women are particularly cleanly but not good looking; they

have large mouths, very thick lips, and high foreheads . . . the manner of dressing their hair is

also unbecoming. . . . " (cited in Wood, 2003, p. 58). In its detailed corporeal racism, *The*

Universal Traveller couched its Eurocentric judgments and observations as a work whose

purpose was to "enlarge and enrich the mind" (cited in Wood, 2003, p. 58). Educational

declarations of an author's purpose such as these eased the repurposing of travel essays and

writings into early American geography textbooks (Antonelli, 1970), a transition which further

cemented racist anti-Black images and ideas into American educational canon.

Anti-Black 19th-Century American Textbooks

Cultural trends during the Age of Imperialism signified a shift from amateur authors to

those proclaiming topical expertise, enabling a new academic veneer for the continued

pathologizing of people of African descent (as cited in Gursel, 2018). Textbooks are of particular

import because, according to Sleeter and Grant (2011), they serve as the standard-bearing

framework for normalcy and culture, providing legitimacy and dominant status for the groups

positively represented, while rendering the relationships depicted as "natural" and "proper"

(Sleeter & Grant, 2011, p. 184). Provenzo, Shaver, and Bello (2011) continued this argument,

presenting textbooks as a major arbiter of a child's understanding of and relationship to

schooling. In noticing the intergenerational impact of anti-Black White supremacist textbook,

Baker (2006) affirmed the assertions of Sleeter and Grant (2011), and Provenzo et al. (2011),

having described a generation of White children who, reared on a worldview of racialized hierarchies, used this knowledge in their adult positions of statesmen and "shaped national policy as well as the nation itself" (Baker, 2006, p. 135).

Racist Ideas Across Genres

Now considered academically acceptable and culturally normalized, anti-Black racism spanned numerous literary genres, including children's books, significant for their power to influence a child's self-perception and understanding of their immediate and global ecologies (Santora, 2013). Exploring the propagation of anti-Black themes and depictions, the following section samples three authors of culturally significant works whose racist ideas transmuted into enduring symbolism either featuring children and/or consumed by children.

Harriet Beecher Stowe: Author of Textbooks and *Uncle Tom's Cabin*

In her authorship of both *Primary Geography for Children*, first published in 1833 and revised for reprint 1855, and the cultural phenomenon *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, Harriet Beecher Stowe (1852) provided a famous example of cross-genre anti-Black, White supremacist text. An analysis by Ben-Zvi revealed the racist trend in Stowe's educational texts including an emphasized disparity between White and Black identity citing Aristotelian climate theory (Ben-Zvi, 2012), and the centering of White children in their local and national environment thus communicating a birthright to and leadership of the United States (Ben-Zvi, 2012).

In creating the character of "Topsy" in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, Stowe (1852) originated the media stereotype of "pickaninny,"defined by an inability to perceive and fathom pain, a lack of worldliness, a preoccupation with devouring watermelon, the performing of indoor or outdoor chores, partial or full nudity, existence in proximity to animals physically and/or mentally, and

sometimes the performing bodily functions in public but never expressing pain or sustaining wounds in a way that mirrors human reactions (Bernstein, 2011). Thus, Stowe's (1852) origination of the "pickaninny" stereotype further racialized traits of childhood, aiding and abeting the lie of Black inferiority across generations. In delineating the enduring of the traits of the stereotype and noting its commercial success, Bernstein summarized the widening racial disparity in defining childhood, recognizing the coupling of human innocence with White childhood, and the aforementioned traits, in addition to cognitive simplicity and shiftlessness with Black childhood (Bernstein, 2001, p. 33-35).

Exacerbating this false dichotomy, the work of Charles Darwin bolstered the continued justifications for the Transatlantic Slave Trade and Black dehumanization. In his 1877 work, "A Biographical Sketch of an Infant," Darwin focused on classifications differentiating humans from animals most demonstrably through the development of language, locating the concept of "child" within the larger discourse of environmental experience and genetic makeup (Darwin, 1877). In representing children as "pre-human" and nearer to nature by virtue of their youth and "lack of (Western) civilization," (Burman, 2017, p. 15), Darwin equated pre-humanity and "animal" qualities of babies and children. When the "pickaninny" narrative met Darwinian theories linking childhood and evolution, the narrative about and representation of Black children negatively impacted this population doubly by virtue of their heritage and age. This dehumanization was summarized by the author William Cowper Brann in 1898, "There is nothing on earth 'cuter' than a [n-r] baby; but like other varieties in the genus 'coon,' they are not considered very valuable additions to society" (cited in Bernstein, 2011, p. 35).

E.W. Kemble and *A Coon Alphabet*. Racist representations across literary genres

continued to seep into children's media through the work of E.W. Kemble, illustrator for an 1891

print of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852) and the first edition of *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*

(Twain, 1855). In authoring and illustrating *A Coon Alphabet*, published in 1898 and reprinted in

1978, Kemble buffooned African Americans, depicting their engagement in extreme acts of

violence, rendering them not only subhuman but also subanimal through illustrations of animals

laughing at their plight (cited in Holt, 1986). In an analysis of Kemble's work, generalizable to

the numerous racist depictions in children's media at the time, Holt problematized the centering

of Black dehumanization in a genre treated as instructional for pre-school aged children and

satirical for adults; the revered social station of textbooks and the reality of limited contact

between Black and White people as factors affected the perpetuation of anti-Black stereotypes

(Holt, 1986). In further analysis of Kemble's work as it related to the time, Sonstegard cited

Kemble's popularity as a proof of a Eurocentric and anti-Black master narrative (Sonstegard,

2009, p. 499).

Dr. Seuss. As of 2001, Theodore Geisel, writing as Dr. Seuss, was one of the world's

most popular children's book authors, with his books comprising 10 of the top 50 bestselling

children's books of all time (Roback, 2001). Although Seuss' children's books have been lauded

as "anti-racist" and "promoting tolerance," Ishizuka and Stephens (2019) critically read 50 of his

59 children's books and catalogged an extensive litany of oppressive themes occurring

throughout Seuss' works. Subservience, caricature, dehumanization, and exotification typified

Geisel's portrayal of people of African descent, when they were represented in books at all. In

contextualizing Seuss' work, Ishizuka and Stephens (2019) noted Geisel's prior history as a

cartoonist, discovering these themes in works both predating and continuing throughout his history as a children's book author.

Anti-Blackness in Screen-Based Educational Media

Clarifying the intersection of anti-Blackness, Eurocentricity, and education, the authors cited in the previous section operationalized anti-Black educational narratives as those which omit, minimize, devalue, dehumanize, render people of African descent intellectually, morally, and physically inferior. Historically, these perjorative narratives have accompanied White narratives of American exceptionalism and fervent White nationalist identity.

Where the previous section briefly revealed a historical progression of anti-Black cultural phenomena specific to printed children's educational media, the following section briefly interrogates the treatment of Black identity in screen-based educational media, having expanded Ligorio's (2010) position to include screen-based educational media in the learning situation, uncovering parallel methods of embedding, and thus teaching, anti-Black narratives in educational media designed for children. The current study aggregated screen-based media, yet the current section, for historical reasons, will expound first upon television.

Stroman (1991) has described television as a method of "vicarious socialization" in its ability to depict ideas and images which influence a child's behavior, attitudes, and beliefs (Stroman, 1991). Gerbner (1998), originator of cultivation theory, intensified this statement, identifying television, in addition to school and its underlying structures, as the "primary source of socialization" given its ability to communicate messages and common images in spite of literacy and mobility, while providing a daily, repetitive, steady stream of mass-produced images which, like textbooks, condone and normalize the social structure for viewers (Gerbner, 1998, p.

178). Too, Gerbner's cultivation theory engaged human development in acknowledgment of impact, age, and exposure, positing that television, as early as infancy, is able to cultivate "dispositions and preferences that used to be acquired from other primary sources" (p. 177). In consideration of Gerbner's assertions, and with respect to the ecological reaches of screen-based media, educational media are extremely potent as they operate within two socializing institutions, television and school, to execute a schooling process at the earliest stages of human development.

To continue historically grounding this work while defining the tradition of anti-Blackness in accordance with Critical Race Theory, the following section will recapitulate the structure and intent of the previous section, briefly and chronologically pinpointing historical educational televised cultural phenomena which align with aforementioned demonstrations of anti-Blackness.

The Beginning of Educational Television in America

While child-centered programs—usually those of a news, sports, puppetry and musical nature—were embedded into the fabric of early American television, airing from 6:30–8pm nightly, educational programs truly flourished in the 1950s and 60s, motivated by post-war nationalism and influence from public, private, and foundation entities (Levin & Hines, 2003; Paik, 2001). With a new Federal Communications Commission allocation of 242 television frequencies for educational purposes in 1952, large investments followed; the Ford Foundation earmarked $2.5 million dollars toward classroom television instruction in the 1950s, and $6 million dollars toward a National Educational Television network, thus birthing the genre of children's educational programming (Levin & Hines, 2003).

With Whiteness now (a) standardized in mainstreamed educational texts, and (b) tethered to the concepts of humanity, rectitude, childhood innocence and nationalism, the earliest televised educational programming and rendered invisible or marginalized non-White identities. *Ding Dong School* (1952–1956), a popular pre-school program airing in 25 major markets in 1952, solely protagonized Miss Frances, of Austrian descent (Davis, M., 2008). Howdy Doody, for whom the eponymous television show, (*Howdy Doody*, 1947-1960), was named, and the number of whose freckles represented each state in the Union, embodied the racist dichotomy of centering Whiteness and buffooning others, performing alongside a clown, Clarabell, whose existence hearkened to the tradition of minstrelsy, and Chief Thunderthud who embodied an offensive representation of Native Americans (Davis, J., 2002; Davis, K., 2009; Davis, M., 2008). In spite of overt racism exhibited through racist representations and Black invisibility, these shows were treated as entertaining and educational, embraced by millions of families. These programs centered Whiteness while providing no positive reflections of Black people, who comprised approximately 10% of the population according to the 1940 and 1950 Census respectively (U.S. Census Bureau, n.d.).

Equality of educational opportunity: The Coleman Report. The impact of programs such as *Ding Dong School* (1952–1956) was well-received nationally as demonstrated by television ratings and *The Coleman Report*, which, published in 1966, affirmed the importance of linking affective education with academic skills, justifying the marriage of entertainment structures with educational television programs (Cain, 2017). Coleman's findings stated that student achievement levels were linked to family socioeconomic status and educational level,

leading researchers, policymakers, and others to consider the impact and reach of television on

disadvantaged children (Cain, 2017).

  Sesame Street **and race.** Supported by the commissioner of *The Coleman Report* (1996),

and catalyzed by a Carnegie Corporation wish to expand its reach into underserved communities,

Sesame Street (1969–present) became the first children's television program with clear

instructional objectives and goals for children (Cain, 2017; Davis, M., 2008). To optimize

content for the target audience, a group of scholars, educators, and professors was convened.

Among them was Dr. Chester Pierce, Harvard professor and founding president of the Black

Psychiatrists of America, who advocated for extending social realism past the reflective locus of

New York City inspired brownstones, and into the reality of race relations, specifically wanting

to the show to "prepare [his] three-year-old daughter to react properly to the first time somebody

calls her a n-r" (Lesser as cited in Davis, M., 2008; Harrington, 2019). As a father, psychiatrist,

and early childhood professor, Pierce observed the phenomenon and impact of early childhood

television on many systemic levels having coined the term "microaggression," duly noting the

perjorative impact of television on Black children in the following statement to his colleagues in

1970:

> Many of you know that for years I have been convinced that our ultimate enemies and
> deliverers are the education system and the mass media. We must without theoretical
> squeamishness over correctness of our expertise, offer what fractions of truth we can
> make educational and mass media serve rather than to oppress the Black people of this
> country. (Pierce as cited by Harrington, 2019)

Pierce's unequivocal comments may or may not have been heeded by *Sesame Street*

(1969–present)*.* While Davis' (2008) research reported a raceless approach from *Sesame Street*

(1969–present)*,* jettisoning his proposal for direct treatment of anti-Black racism in favor of a

raceless narrative, masking the intentional celebration of culture and discussion of racial realities in favor of universal messaging of kindness, respect, and tolerance for all, Harrington's (2019) findings, conversely, credited Pierce with infusing race and culture into the life of *Sesame Street* (1969–present) (Harrington, 2019). Further research on *Sesame Street* (1969–present) suggested that racial attitudes towards minorities had improved as the show grew in popularity, nonetheless, critics, both internal castmembers and external viewers from marginalized groups, decried the lack of engagement with cultural identity in spite of the racial diversity of human Street residents, as well as the racialization of Muppets (Borgenicht, 1998; Davis, M., 2008).

Recent events have demanded a more pointed approach to discussions of anti-Black racism. *Sesame Street*'s response, "Coming Together: Standing Up to Racism," a nationally televised *Sesame Street* (1969–present) Town Hall which aired on June 6, 2020, provided a forum for family-based discussion of anti-Black racism. Approaching the topic of anti-Black racism from a child's understanding of fairness, Louie, the father of a popular Muppet, Elmo, explained to the viewership, "Racism is when people treat other people unfairly because of the way they look or color of their skin. People of color, especially in the Black community, are being treated unfairly. . . ." (CNN, 2020).

Although *Sesame Street* (1969–present) and *Mr. Rogers' Neighborhood* (1968–2001) were among the first children's television shows to feature recurring Black characters, positive Black representation in the form of recurrence, however, has not translated into the centering as, according to Common Sense Media (2020), television is still lacking in Black concordance for young audiences (Common Sense Media, 2020).

Black Children's Understanding of Their Race

With the privilege of adult perspective and historical hindsight, the aforementioned section briefly detailed names and defined forms of anti-Blackness in children's media. That the topic of this study explored child identification with concordant media compels an examination of the extent to which African-American children (a) are aware of their identity as African-Americans, and (b) assign importance to this identity as it pertains to media consumption. In continuing to interrogate and clarify the numerous societal structures which impact both identity and academic development, the following section will address identity development of Black children; and findings related to race awareness, media preferences, and consumption, beginning first with a discussion of the literature regarding African-American parental race socialization.

Race Socialization Patterns Within African-American Families

Hughes and Johnson (2001) defined race socialization as the ways "parents shape children's learning about their own race and about relations between ethnic groups" (Hughes & Johnson, 2001, p. 981). Murray, Stokes, and Peacock (1999) specified further for Black children, stating that raising emotionally healthy Black children necessitates the buffering of messages about race (Murray, Stokes, & Peacock, 1999). In selectively reviewing literature on race socialization in Black families, Lesane (2002) identified several essential questions, namely: Who is transmitting messages about race? At what ages are race messages being actively transmitted to children? What is the content of these messages, and on what does the content depend? Are there patterns in race messages depending on geography, marital status, educational level, etc.? If race is not being addressed, why not? Lastly, Lesane investigated the posture of racial messages, static or dynamic, over prolonged time periods (Lesane, 2002).

Lesane's (2002) review uplifted the work of Bowman and Howard (1985), whose seminal study delved into socialization and academic achievement in multi-generation families, identifying four major themes of Black race socialization, namely, (a) ethnic pride, (b) self-development, (c) race barrier awareness, and (d) egalitarianism. Ethnic pride encompasses teachings about heritage, Black unity, and instilling positive feelings towards Black people; self-development focuses on individual excellence; barrier awareness emphasizes knowledge of and coping strategies toward discrimination and inequities; and egalitarian messaging is self-explanatory, emphasizing egalitarian values (Bowman & Howard, 1985; Lesane, 2002). Findings from Bowman and Howard's research also suggested that proactive race socialization which addresses racism prior to a first racist encounter contributed positively to academic achievement (Bowman & Howard, 1985; Lesane, 2002). Echoing facets of Bowman and Howard (1985), Hughes and Chen (1997) isolated three facets of socialization in Black families: cultural socialization, that is, teachings about heritage; preparation for bias; and promotion of mistrust, finding that as children progress in age from 4-14, Black parents socialized progressively more frequently for bias preparation along age bands while cultural socialization was reported significantly more frequently for children ages 12-14 (Hughes & Chen, 1997; Lesane, 2002).

Traditional socialization theories have placed parents in the primary role as they provide children with rules on social norms (Glass, Bengston, & Dunham, 1986; Lesane, 2002). It is worth noting, however, that while the process of race socialization may influence identification, these processes may not coincide. In light of this alignment, the following section will address literature on racial identity development based on developmental context.

Clark Doll Study and Developmental Contexts for Race Identification

Widening the scope of factors affecting racial identity development, Murray and Mandara (2002) uplifted the importance of sociohistorical conditions and cognitive developmental stage, noting findings which revealed age distinctions in ethnic development. As cited by Murray and Mandara (2002), both Black and White children between the ages of 3 and 6 demonstrated White-biased choice behavior, whereas older Black children began to demonstrate Black preferences, confirming findings of the seminal study conducted by Drs. Kenneth and Mamie Clark in 1939 which would come to be known as the Clark Doll Test.

Data from the Clark Doll Test indicated that Black children between the ages of 3 and 7, during a time of integrated schooling in New York and segregated schooling in Washington DC, preferred White dolls to Black ones, assigning positive characteristics such as "nice" to White dolls and "looks bad" to the Black doll. Specifically, 59% of the subjects identified the Black doll as "looking bad" and 58% of the subjects identified the black doll as resembling them (Clark & Clark, 1939; Fox & Jordan, 1973; Katz & Zalk, 1974). Drs. Clark and Clark attributed their findings to the larger social structure of Jim Crow segregation and other related negative societal messages and judgments about Black people (Clark & Clark, 1939). A 2005 documentary (Davis, K., 2005) recreated the conditions and structure of the Clark Doll Test, asking kindergarten students to identify the dolls with positive attributes such as "nice," and negative attributes such as "looks bad." The passage of time had not changed the results, as 15 of 21 Black children demonstrated preference for the White doll (Davis, K., 2005).

Arguably, the Clark Doll Test was one of the earliest works of research illustrating the early impact of the ecologies in which Black children are situated, having suggested greater

importance of sociohistorical patterns than parent socialization. Although the methods have been widely critiqued, the findings of Clark and Clark (1939) have also been hailed as benchmark research; their attribution of identity construction to acknowledgment of larger social structures has outlasted criticism, firmly supported by recent research investigating the onset of racial recognition briefly described in the following paragraphs.

According to Kelly and colleagues (2005), there was no evidence of race-based differentiation at birth; nonetheless, research by Singarajah and colleagues (2016) suggested involvement of a larger social environment in the recognition of and attention to race by eleven months of age. That subjects paid greater attention to out-group faces implied that race-based recognition is linked to a child's immediate social environment, but race-based attention was connected to their observation of the larger population along the lines of race (Kelly et al., 2005, Kelly, Liu, et al., 2007, Singarajah et al., 2016). An earlier finding by Katz and Kofkin (1997) suggested that attention to out-group faces may even begin as early as six months of age (Katz & Kofkin, 1997, p. 55 as cited in Winkler, 2009), too, the work of Bigler and her colleagues affirmed the involvement of environmental factors in the development of biases as the absence of adult instruction still rendered ingroup and outgroup biases in preschoolers (Bigler & Liben, 2007; Patterson & Bigler, 2006).

These findings reported critical ages suggesting the onset of race recognition, and the impact of the larger social structure upon race recognition and the development of bias. In light of findings which have emphasized the importance of wider social structures upon biological development, as well as the Bronfenbrenner Bioecological Theory, a framework employed by this study locating family and schooling as socializing factors, further consideration of race

socialization studies in the African-American community is necessary, as these data may contextualize the self-perception and media preferences of children. The positioning of educational media as a socializing factor, alongside parental racial socialization necessitates a review of children's perception of media messaging as well as parent perception of media.

Enhancing the Impact of Educational Media in Black Families

While parents are regarded as the primary agents of racial socialization (Glass et al., 1986; Lesane, 2002), media, too, is also regarded as an influential, socializing instrument (Gerbner, 1998). Recent data from the Joan Ganz Cooney Center has measured the impact of these major socializing factors, having suggested that Black parents are significantly more likely than their White and Latinx counterparts to report that their children have learned "a lot" or "some" about both academic and social skills from educational media. Black families have also reported, more than their White and Latinx counterparts, to have taken an action as a result of educational media (Rideout, 2014). The following paragraphs will describe additional factors, within the perview of media and family, as they pertain to Black families, which leverage the impact of educational media.

Coviewing. Recent research has suggested the positive impact on academic achievement through educational media viewership, as studies have shown that children who use educational media learn more in the short term (Penuel et al., 2009) and perform better in school later on compared to children who do not (Anderson, Huston, Schmitt, Linebarger & Wright, 2001). Leveraging the power of educational media, co-viewing, the viewing of media between people, has also emerged as a helpful practice for learning. Findings have proposed joint media engagement as an important enhancement to the impact of educational media, particularly when

parents ask questions and repeat key lessons (Ball & Bogatz, 1970; Reiser, Tessmer, & Phelps, 1984; Takeuchi & Stevens, 2011).

Co-viewing, however, requires time, which, according to research, has varied inversely with age. Findings by Rideout (2014) suggested that parents spend a larger proportion of time using media with their younger children, and in increasingly smaller proportions as their children age —65% of TV watching time among 2-4 year olds is spent co-viewing with a parent, compared to 51% among older children. Mobile devices were excepted. Data demonstrated that Latinx parents spent 43% of their children's mobile media time in joint engagement compared to 25% for White parents and 21% for Black parents (Rideout, 2014).

Social realism. In summary of the aforementioned research, Black children displayed White-biased choice behavior between the ages of 3 and 6 (Clark & Clark, 1939; Murray and Mandara, 2002), perhaps in observation of larger social dynamics, while Black parents were more likely to culturally socialize as early as age 4 (Bowman & Howard, 1985; Rideout, 2014). Research by Rideout (2014) also suggested Black parental faith in the impact of educational media, with Black parents reporting strong belief in academic and social skill takeaways of programs.

The social realism of the media characters presented another factor impacting learning. Although a 2016 study by Schlesinger, Flynn, and Richert (2016) which tested preschool children's comprehension and transfer found that children would be more likely to transfer from the screen to the real world if the character was presented as socially real, a survey of children's programs by Rideout (2014) revealed a fading of socially real characters from the mainstream in children's programming. Surveying children's programming tailored towards children 12 and

under, Lemish and Johnson (2019) noted this decline, with creators instead preferring anthropomorphic animals, robots, mythical creatures, and the like.

Race. Too, Lemish and Johnson (2019), found that the majority of human characters on children's television programs, a sample of which included educational networks, have been Caucasian; and that females have been more likely than males to be portrayed as people of color or racially ambiguous, stopping short of explicitly classifying the races of the characters.

Further, data have shown that children who had greater trust in the main character were more likely to transfer information into a different context (Schlesinger, Flynn, & Richert, 2016), and although ethnicity was not named as a factor in character trust, Njoroge, Elenbasas, Myaing, Garrison, and Christakis (2016) found that non-Hispanic White children spent two-thirds of their television viewing time watching programs with only White characters; while racial and ethnic minority children watched more concordant shows and shows with non-White characters than shows with only White characters, finding, in short that race and ethnicity significantly predicted the proportion of time spent watching concordant programming (Njoroge et al., 2016).

According to Common Sense Media (2020), television viewing has sustained a lack of Black concordance for young audiences (Common Sense Media, 2020), a phenomenon which, according to research, has the potential to impact self-esteem. Extensive research has supported this idea; most recently, a study by Martins and Harrison (2012) demonstrated the profound consequences for this lack of representation, suggesting that television decreases self-esteem in children, except White males (Martins & Harrison, 2012; Stroman, 1991)

Summary

Taken together, these findings illustrate the massive potential impact of educational concordant media with centered, protagonized, socially real characters for young Black children towards race socialization and academic achievement. The Joan Ganz Cooney Center (Rideout, 2014) as well as Lemish and Johnson (2019), summarize the research in their exhortation to media creators to begin writing shows with main characters reflective of anticipated population trends toward racial diversity.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

In her book *Deconstructing Developmental Psychology*, Dr. Erica Burman reminded

readers that it was Jean Piaget who commented, "Child psychology is a branch equally of

sociology and psychology, since the social environment is an integral component of

development" (Burman, 2017, p. 9). Burman also reminded her readers of a profound comment

from Goodnow and Collins (1990), regarding the emergent study of parenting cultures, namely:

> For us an exclusively child-centered focus is limited. . . . Moreover, parents are
> interesting in their own right. Their experiences, satisfactions and development are topics
> to be explored without any necessity to justify the exploration on the groups of effect on
> children. (as cited in Burman, 2017, p. 9)

With parents, media, and educative space intermingling as socializing agents upon

children, the study of educational concordant media is particularly urgent in light of several

factors, namely, African-Americans having led media consumership (Nielsen, 2015); the

persistence of data initially gleaned from the Clark Doll Test; trends in educational media

Eurocentricity; increasing access to media through multiple platforms and devices; and repeated

efforts to address an academic achievement disparities in schools.

Research Questions

Thus, this research examined the following questions:

1. Do African-American children, ages 3-8, identify with ethnically concordant

   educational media? What factors signify identification with these media?

2. In light of the responses of primary caregivers, to what extent are race identity

   conversations present in the child's home atmosphere? Does the presence and nature

of these conversations correspond with children's identification with concordant media?

Rationale for Qualitative Approach

This research aimed to glean responses from African-American children and their families about their enjoyment of and identification with three one-minute educational media samples. The samples were designed to be visually and culturally concordant with African-American children and depict contexts, at once familiar, historical, and aspirational. In locating this study within a history of anti-Blackness in educational media, both the creation of the media by the researcher, a Black woman, as well as the qualitative data-gathering method supported the critical principle of counternarrative. As this study particularly pertained to African-American families and the principles of Critical Race Theory, the words of Tyrone Howard (2008), as cited in Ishizuka and Stephens, resonate—counter-storytelling creates narratives which can "counter much of the rhetorical accounts of their [Black] identities that frequently describe them as culturally and socially deficient, uneducated, unmotivated, prone to violence, and anti-intellectual" (Ishizuka & Stephens, 2019, p.10). Qualitative research has historically captured the candor and depth of the underrepresented voices of African-American children, currently uplifted through their intentional centering in this study. Too, by its design, this study has allowed for the contextualization, and thus the enhancement, of these children's voices by engaging the caregiver description of the home ecology.

Method

To address the research questions, I conducted interviews of African-American children ages 3-8, and their primary caregivers. In the sections that follow, I provide details about the participants, setting, data collection, and qualitative analysis.

Participants

Participants were African-American children, ages 3-8, whose race was identified by their parents/caregivers, and the African-American parents/caregivers themselves.

Procedures

Participant recruitment. Provided permission from the business owners, participants were recruited through an email blast sent from a South Los Angeles preschool and a poster hanging in the main street-facing window of a popular Leimert Park coffeeshop in Los Angeles, California on the morning of the 2020 Los Angeles Martin Luther King, Jr. Day parade. These settings had previously been identified as spaces where the researcher noticed family attendance and mobile media viewing by African-American children.

One family, identifying as African-American, self-selected into the study based on the preschool email blast. Upon response from this family, an interview appointment was set. The family was comprised of one 3-year-old girl, one 4-year-old boy who did not participate in the interview, and their mother. The interview took place in an office at the preschool. The other participant families were recruited by a verbal approach from the sidewalk by the researcher as they walked past the coffeeshop before, during, and after the Martin Luther King, Jr. Day parade in Los Angeles.

When caregivers identified themselves and their children as African-American and agreed to participate, they were given a packet of consent and informational forms, and escorted to a table allowing for seating of the parent/guardian and child. A laptop for viewing the media samples, pens for completing paperwork, and a folder containing all pertinent data and files, were visible on the table as the subjects approached the tables. Subjects were then informed of audio recording, which began after an introductory script was read to both the caregiver and child regarding the purpose, events, and anticipated duration of the total interview time, which was approximately 20 minutes for children and 20 minutes for caregivers.

In total, 11 children and eight adults representing eight distinct families, participated.

Media sample. After consent forms were completed, families viewed the media samples on a laptop. The alphabet-based media clips were storyboarded by the researcher, then drawn and animated by Neyah Barbee, a 2019 graduate of the Animation program at Loyola Marymount University.

Each of the three videos was approximately one minute in duration and centered African-American children in stories reflecting African-American history, hair types, and skin colors; iconic and accomplished figures in Black history; popular songs by African-American musicians; and culturally relevant words in the proper case. The sample conformed to common researched formal features of children's programming design which sustain a child's attention (Huston-Stein & Wright, 1979). Formal features guide viewers through a program and influence a child's attention through perceptual salience, demonstrated through objects that change, move, surprise, and/or demonstrate complexity and intensity (Huston-Stein & Wright, 1979). In sustaining attention and conforming to common elements of children's programming, the videos

also encoded enhanced reality, evidenced through the bright color palette of the video, and the centering of child characters (Alwitt et al., 1980).

Data Collection

  Researcher approach to interviews. In line with critical precepts, the researcher was mindful of sociohistorical conditions and the temporal and physical proximity of the Martin Luther King, Jr. Day parade; believing each respondent as they told their own stories, and therefore, mindful of prompting for both children and adults. To that end, during the parent and child interviews, approximately 30-40 minutes in total per family, the researcher was mindful of facial expression and vocal inflection so as not to approve or disapprove of responses. In many cases, if participants did not delve into a topic, for example, not explicitly mentioning race, the researcher did not persist, instead moving onto the next question.

  Child interview. First, children were engaged in brief conversations about their day to encourage comfort with the interview process. Following the brief chat, the children watched three one-minute videos in succession without prompted conversation. Caregivers were encouraged to watch the videos quietly alongside the children. When viewing finished, children were interviewed in a semi-structured format while the caregiver, sitting or standing in close proximity to their children, listened to the children's responses. The questions asked of the children were derived from the questions asked of the participants in Calvert et al.'s 2007 study, and a study by Henry, Mashburn, and Konold (2007) designed to assess preschool identification with characters and attitudes towards school and education (Calvert et al., 2007; Henry, Mashburn & Konold, 2007). When children responded, the researcher repeated the child's

responses verbatim, or with a short summary back to the child. Children were asked the following (See Appendix A):

1. How do you feel about this video?

   a. What was your favorite part of the video?

2. How much did you like the people in the video?

   a. What did you like about the people in the video?

3. How much are you like the people in the video?

   a. What makes you say that?

4. How much do you want to be like the people in the video?

   a. Why?

5. What are your favorite shows? What do you like about those shows?

Caregiver interview. After watching their children view the videos, and listening to their interview responses, caregivers were interviewed. Caregivers were asked the following (See Appendix B):

1. Did you see the film *Black Panther* (2018)?

   a. Did you see it with your children? As a family?

   b. What made you want to see the film?

   c. What did the children think of the film?

   d. Do you think the children picked up on the race aspect of the film?

2. Is the choice to see *Black Panther* (2018) reflected in other choices in media for your family?

   a. In what ways?

3. Does your family ever talk about race?

4. What do you think of these videos?

Conclusion of interview. All subjects were then thanked for their participation, and children were given a 12 pack of skin-color shades of crayons, hitherto not visible to the children, which signified the end of the interview. After interviews, the recording ended. All interviews were collected before they were transcribed verbatim by the researcher.

Analysis Plan

In transcribing the interviews verbatim, the researcher then identified participants by pseudonyms; caregiver and child data were linked with an identifier. Actual names will never be used in any public dissemination of these data (publications, presentations, etc.) All research materials and consent forms were stored in a private, locked file on the researcher's personal computer.

All interviews were transcribed by the researcher into one transcript labeled according to names, without ages. Qualitative data was coded according to the principles of *in vivo* coding, a method used to encourage researchers to acquaint themselves with a subject's manner of communicating, in addition to worldviews, beliefs, and perspectives (Saldaña, 2009). In its use of participant language, and not researcher language, this method aligned with Critical Race Theory, particularly the precept of telling one's own story to allow one's lived experiences and perspective to remain undiluted by analysis.

Following the verbatim transcription, the first phase of analysis was the close reading of the total transcript record and subsequent highlighting of common phrases and themes stated by the child participants, followed by the highlighting of common phrases and themes for adult

interviews. The coding of these themes was not limited to one question or concept, rather common themes emerging from the participants' own words.

The second stage of analysis encompassed reading each participant's interview and labeling the extent of race identity identification where applicable for children, and necessarily for adult responses. Race identity identification could have been expressed directly, or through race identity negation.

The concluding stage of analysis identified patterns illuminated by the codes of the first two phases according to the identifiers of the participants, for example, age and gender.

Limitations

The study was limited by several factors including the ability of and willingness/ability of children to respond given the qualitative questions. Another limitation was the time period on both a macro level– that there was a surge in concordant media based on the success of *Black Panther* (2018) may be anomalous, thus limiting replication–as well as a micro level, that some families were eager to finish the interview and continue to enjoy the day limited the depth of the responses. As the study was confirmatory, responses were not triangulated, another limitation.

Validity/Trustworthiness

Ensuring credibility came from member checking with the child, respondent validation with the caregivers, that is, reading back what each child said and confirming it with the parent and participant to ensure honesty, as well as iterative questioning with the children. In repeating responses to confirm them, it was hoped that children would develop consistency and solidify their responses toward the media sample.

Delimitations

The choice to study young children and provide the setting for children to speak their opinions allowed for follow-up questions. Including their parents/caregivers in the viewing session was an intentional choice to support the need for parental consent to participate in the study, as well as a way to help young children feel comfortable in participating in the study. Asking the parents to listen while the children spoke achieved the goal of comfort without overt verbal influence or prompting.

While the videos were educational in nature, the choice to limit the interview settings not only encouraged participant recruitment but also supported responses to questions regarding racial salience.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

Seeing everything with Lupita, I mean, that encouraged me to feel more confident about myself and more confident in my chocolate skin and my natural hair.

—Kiki Layne, *If Beale Street Could Talk* actress, referring to Lupita Nyong'o (Alt A Review, n.d., para. 1)

In light of the proliferation and popularity of media concordant to African Americans, including but not limited to the success of the film *Black Panther* (2018), this study explored the responses of African-American children, ages 3-8, to educational concordant media, as contextualized through interviews with their primary caregivers. This study also explored the possibility of a relationship between the existence and nature of race identity conversations the home environment and children's responses to the media sample.

Self identified African-American participant groups were shown three 1-minute media clips specifically designed with cultural and personal idenfication in mind, having (a) embedded academic content within cultural and historical contexts of African-American history, (b) protagonized African-American children with a variety of hairstyles and shades of brown skin and (c) visually centered these children, locating them within past and present settings steeped in African-American history while encounterng prominent African-American figures in their fantasy, one of several potential purposes of children's television viewership according to Maccoby (1954). Common sight words, the names of the historical figures, short phrases, and culturally relevant monosyllabic words appeared on screen intermittently over the course of each of the three videos, centered around the letters A, B, and C. In short, by featuring sight words appropriate for a K-2 audience alongside concordant visual touchstones, these media samples

simultaneously engaged viewers and supported academic content and race identity development. The research questions addressed follow:

1. Do African-American children, ages 3-8, identify with ethnically concordant educational media? What factors signify identification with these media?

2. In light of the responses of primary caregivers, to what extent are race identity conversations present in the child's home atmosphere? Does the presence and nature of these conversations correspond with children's identification with concordant media?

Organization of Chapter

To contextualize and humanize the respondents, this chapter begins with a brief description of the participants and their families. Following these descriptions are data summaries, grouped first into three emergent universal themes: identification with hair type/style and skin color; positive response to theme; and formal features of the video highlighting text. A discussion of sub themes follows. This chapter concludes with findings from adult respondents, focusing on their responses toward concordant media and self-reported race socialization patterns in the home.

Participant Profiles

Michael and John

Michael, age 7, participated in the interview at the coffee shop with his brother, John, a preschool teacher. At the time of the interview, Michael was a foster child, and lived in a home with his brother, and his grandmother, Michael's legal guardian. Michael cited *PJ Masks* (2015–2020) as his favorite show, particularly the character of Gekko, whose superpower is

disappearance and *The Rocketeer* (2019– present) as his favorite movie, given his interest in space. John, a teacher at a pre-school located in South Los Angeles, quickly identified the formal features used in the video to highlight the academic content. According to John, the topic of race had not been explicitly discussed in their home, as Michael's caretakers chose to obliquely broach the subject in reference to Michael's being a foster child. John reported that he and his family have frequently reminded Michael about the privileges of being a Black child in a Black foster home, pointing to speculation that foster families of other ethnicities might not treat him as well, recognize his talents, or offer him extracurricular activities.

Michael did not discuss race in his response to the video, instead focusing on fantasy elements of the video, namely space and clowns. This response was consistent with his favorite programs; *PJ Masks* (2015- 2020), a superhero ensemble show revolving around animals who disappear, fly, etc.; and *The Rocketeer* (2019–present). According to John, Michael's daily routine, and thus media consumption was highly regulated—in his household, Michael's afterschool routine involved eating dinner at the same time nightly and reading one book before bed every night. Television watching was treated as a intermittent reward.

Camille and Amira

Camille, age 5.5, participated in the interview at the coffee shop with her mother, Amira, a professional filmmaker whose work, solely focused on elevating African-American voices and perspectives, has been shown on major streaming platforms. Camille and her mother saw *Black Panther* (2018), but were only able to stay for the first five minutes, as Camille found the film too violent. When asked about race discussions in the home, Amira reported that at age 3, Camille came home from her Topanga Canyon preschool asking to be White because "it would

make things easier". At that point, Amira, who believes that White supremacist messages are regularly encoded into mainstream media, removed Camille from the preschool and started discussing race more explicitly with her daughter. Camille stated that she had been told by her mother to "watch out if [she] has a friend that's White." At the time of the study, Amira was mediating Camille's media exposure, allowing her only to watch media centering African Americans or ostensibly raceless mythical creatures.

Camille was an enthusiastic subject, noticing without prompting that the "letters popped up right away" and summarizing that "all of [the videos] are fun" before any questions were asked. Camille also noted quickly that the protagonists were "the same color as [her]." At the time of the interview, Camille's favorite show was *Ask the Storybots* (2016–2019) because it "explains the things around you." She became agitated and shy during the interview when her mother invited her to explain media viewing rules in the home, namely, that she is only allowed to watch mythical creatures and Black protagonists. At first, Camille said "I can't tell her [the rule]," but later responded angrily when her mother mentioned her liking of *My Little Pony* (2010–2020), exclaiming loudly within earshot of customers, "BECAUSE THERE ARE NOT EVEN ANY PEOPLE. NO COLORS, JUST RAINBOW COLORS LIKE PURPLE AND PINK OR ANYTHING LIKE THAT."

Amira reported mediating Camille's media consumption highly, and openly discussing race issues in the home. Amira clearly stated her philosophy toward media viewing in her belief that media impacts self-esteem "more than school . . . more than anything" and "you can't learn without self-esteem."

Lauren, Cole, and May

Siblings Lauren and Cole, ages 7 and 8 respectively, and their stepmother, May, who initially identified as African-American and later qualified her identity as West Indian, participated in the study. In reference to a question about having seen *Black Panther* (2018), May, at first, self-reported a high degree of racial socialization in the home, commenting that their household is "Wakanda Forever . . . or as close to Wakanda as we can get," but later softened her commitment to concordant media, encouraging the children to watch all kinds of media because "the world isn't like that." Cole reported his favorite shows as *Scooby Doo* (2002–2006) on Netflix, and *Power Rangers* (2019–present) —his favorite was the Red Ranger. Lauren reported enjoying *Teen Titans Go!* (2013–present).

Cole responded quickly and enthusiastically to viewing children playing basketball, a sport he reported enjoying. He and his sister picked up quickly on gender attributes in the video; Cole noted that he tries to play with his sister but she does not always catch the ball, unlike the female protagonist in the video. Similarly, Cole's sister, Lauren, quickly noticed the protagonist's hairstyle which matched hers. Both children took interest in the astronaut scene of Dr. Mae Jemison in the *Letter A* video, and were visibly surprised to find out that Dr. Jemison is still alive.

Quinton and Dyan

Quinton, age 6, and Dyan, his grandmother, were interviewed outside of the Leimert Park coffee shop. At the time, Quinton wore his hair in braided cornrows, exactly like one of the characters in the media sample, and reported enjoying healthy foods, particularly apples, one aaspect of the video for letter A. He immediately noticed letters and spelling in the videos, and

read every word aloud as it appeared on screen. After the interview, Dyan mentioned that Quinton was confused about both his race and his skin color in that he believed himself to be White, in spite of her explanations that their skin is brown and he is Black. Quinton confirmed this when he accepted the skin toned crayons after the interview; when Dyan matched his skin to one of the crayons, he, again, proclaimed himself to be White. Dyan reported that race issues arose in the home, and her response was not to address those topics. She attributed Quinton's race confusion to the fact that he had many Mexican-American friends through his school. At the end of the interview, having seen Quinton's latest race identity negation, Dyan, exasperated, asked the researcher, "I have no idea what to do. What should I do? Do you have any books? Ideas?"

Allison, DJ, and Justine

At the time of the interview, siblings Allison and DJ, ages 4 and 6 respectively, lived with their mother, Justine; their father, Richard; and their 14-year-old brother, Brandon, in Simi Valley, California. According to Justine, race was a common discussion in their home with their son Brandon, given their residence in Simi Valley, site of the 1991 acquittal of the four police officers who brutally beat Black motorist, Rodney King. Thus, Justine viewed talking about race with Brandon as "a necessity."

DJ immediately noticed the drum major in the video and proclaimed his dancing and uniform to be "ridiculous." He believed that the men in the videos were not like him, but did notice the braided hairstyle on a male character and declared it "cool." His younger sister, Allison, mostly agreed with his comments, only diverging from her older brother when discussing a female character in the video—Allison noticed her skin color, calling it "pretty."

Allison reported enjoying "Kid Youtube" in her spare time, particularly slime-making videos. Justine, their mother, reported a moderate mediation of media consumption and a high degree of race socialization in the home, as her children, including her 14-year-old son, have seen events on newscasts and asked questions which she would answer. Their whole family dressed up in Wakanda-inspired clothing to attend *Black Panther* (2018).

Vivienne and Ashley

Vivienne, age 6, and her mother, Ashley, were interviewed at the coffeeshop. Vivienne cited *My Little Pony* (2010–2020) to be her favorite show. Although Vivienne attended *Black Panther* (2018), her mother reported that race is discussed in their home frequently but briefly, and only in reference to people on TV who resemble them phenotypically. According to Ashley at the time of the interview, Vivienne was allowed to watch whatever shows to which she gravitated.

Vivienne took wait time before responding. She initially noted the physical activity of the child protagonists, and later specified her favorite parts to be action-based, such as when the protagonist was handed a camera, and when the instruments in the parade appeared on screen in the videos for letters C and B respectively. Both of these instances involved female characters. She noted similarity between herself and a character "with short hair like [Vivienne]."

Zora and Mary

Zora, age 3, and her mother Mary, agreed to be interviewed based on an email from the South Los Angeles preschool Zora attended. They were interviewed at the end of the school day while Zora's younger brother looked on quietly. Mary reported that her family is not only proud of being Black, but they are also a comic book family as they made a point of seeing *Black*

Panther (2018) together dressed as characters from the comic book. Mary explained that Zora attributed all cartoons with Black female protagonists to be "Princess Tiana" cartoons, alluding to the character in the Disney film *The Princess and the Frog* (2009), and, therefore, Zora did not like the media samples as they were not based directly on Princess Tiana. During her interview, Zora initially did not waver from liking Princess Tiana cartoons, at one point explicitly saying, "I see Tiana so I want to be Tiana." When asked about princesses in general, however, she mentioned that truly her favorite princess is Belle from *Beauty and the Beast* (1991). Upon this revelation, Mary's jaw dropped, and she quietly whispered, "I can't believe she's saying that." According to self-report, Mary's surprise stemmed from a high degree of race socialization in the home, most demonstrably indicated in her statement, "I love everything [featuring Black people]." She also reported intentionally mediating media consumption in the home, firmly stating, "I am particular about wanting them to see themselves." When Mary conveyed shock and surprise nonverbally, as well as through three sotto voce proclamations, Zora reverted back to Tiana as her favorite princess. At the end of the interview, Mary asked Zora, "Zora, do you know that you are a Black girl?" to which Zora exclaimed, "I am not a Black girl!"

Kimberly and Porsha

Kimberly and Porsha, both 8 years old, interviewed with their grandfather, Louis, at the coffeeshop. Both girls reported enjoying the show *Raven's Home* (2017–present), and summarized that they tend not to watch TV shows rooted in fantasy although they both saw *Black Panther* (2018) sans grandfather. Porsha stated enjoying playing basketball like the protagonist in the *Letter B* video.

Unprompted, Kimberly mentioned liking the character's hair while Porsha discussed the names of the characters, and the basketball. Their grandfather reported a high degree of race socialization, citing the girls' questions regarding current events on televised news. He also mentioned the reality of racism being reflected in their demeanor as both girls are polite when in public.

Summary

The participant group was comprised of 11 families—11 children and eight caregivers were interviewed. Children reported favorite programs across platforms not limited to television, while caregivers universally reported positive feelings toward educational media including the media samples shown The next section will continue to explore child and caregiver responses to media samples.

Summary of Findings: Child Responses

Table 1 shows a summary of child responses. All children attended to the videos, without needing reminding to watch or asking to leave. Most of the children responded positively to the video samples, as evidenced by their responses to and identification with specific aspects encoded into the media, namely hairstyle, skin color, video theme, and formal features of on-screen text. All 8-year-old respondents reported enjoying the media samples specifically because of visually concordant aspects. All the children interviewed, except Zora, attributed their enjoyment of the media sample due to one, or a combination of: formal features, themes addressed, and concordant aspects. These responses were coded with the word "positive" if children were able to find any aspect in the videos which resonated with them.

As there were themes common to all, too, there were common traits for most of the participants. All of the children saw the entirety of *Black Panther* (2018), with the exception of Camille, who left the theater after the first five minutes finding the movie to be too violent. All of the children viewed media regularly and cited entertainment-focused, non-concordant shows as their favorites—the two exceptions were Camille, who cited *Ask the* S*torybots* (2016–2019), an educational show; Porsha and Kimberly cited *Raven's Home* (2017–present), a show centering a Black family, concordant through the main characters' skin tone, as their favorite.

Only holding true for a few participants was race identity negation. As mentioned in the background information, three of five respondents ages 6 or under experienced instances of Black identity negation—these anecdotes were explained by family members or the children themselves over the course of the interview. For two of these three children, their caretakers attributed the instances of Black identity negation to their school settings at the time. All respondents who negated their Black identity lived in homes where, as a result, race identity discussions occurred more frequently; for two of these three families, concordant media viewership was treated as a remedy, and thus, promoted more in the home. Only one child, Michael, did not acknowledge race concordance at all throughout the interview.

Specific responses are outlined in Table 1 below.

Table 1

Summary of Child Responses: Overall Positive and Negative

Name	Age	Gender	Media Response	Reason for Response
Michael	7	M	Positive	Space theme
Camille	5.5	F	Positive	Letters popped up, skin color
Lauren	7	F	Positive	Likes all, third video female hair
Cole	8	M	Positive	Basketball theme, all concordance, all of videos
Quinton	6	M	Positive	Spelling, foods, noticed hair concordance
Allison	4	F	Positive	Female hair and skin
DJ	6	M	Positive	Male braided hairstyle
Vivienne	6	F	Positive	Themes—camera and instruments
Zora	3	F	Negative	Princess Tiana was not in videos.
Kimberly	8	F	Positive	Way characters are made—hair, "all of it."
Porsha	8	F	Positive	Way characters are made—hair, "all of it."

Child Responses to Characters

Identification is defined by Bandura as one's perception of similarity to an entity (Bandura, 1977). Concordance is conceptually similar yet more specific, defined as a race/ethnicity match between the primary character of a television show and the viewer (Njoroge et al., 2016). Studies have found that identification can figure prominently in learning as demonstrated by divergent process performance (Calvert et al., 2007), and as a conduit to building parasocial relationship which in turn increases attention to the character, thus encouraging learning (Calvert et al., 2007; Richert et al., 2011). Thus, the media sample used in this study was designed with visual concordance to African-American children in mind, most demonstrably encoded through a variety of hair textures, hair styles, and skin colors.

In addition to centering a variety of African-American phenotypes, the media samples placed these protagonists in various environments, including those historically steeped in African-American culture. The *Letter B* video (ayyo! TV, 2020), for example, centered two Black males, later identified in the video as brothers, whose variance in hair styles, hair textures, and skin tones encoded visual concordance. While the video contained many everyday activities for children, such as eating breakfast and awakening from bunk beds, the characters entered a barbershop in their letter "B" journey, encoded to encourage identification beyond appearance. According to research by Shabazz (2016), Hart and Bowen (2004), and Linnan et al., (2010), barbershops have historically served as sites of socialization and identity construction for African Americans; thus, a barbershop was chosen as a culturally relevant setting.

Figure 4. Two brothers awaken from bunk beds. Still image captured from *Letter B* video by C. L. Coleman, January 16, 2020, ayyo! TV. Copyright 2020 by ayyo! TV. Used with permission. Retrieved from https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCmc-WsFtBr3w28YGv-O5hkQ

Figure 5. Two brothers visit the barbershop. Still image captured from *Letter B* video by C. L. Coleman, January 16, 2020, ayyo! TV. Copyright 2020 by ayyo! TV. Used with permission. Retrieved from https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCmc-WsFtBr3w28YGv-O5hkQ

The *Letter B* video also included the boys' participation in a marching band from an unidentified Historically Black Colleges and University (HBCU), evidenced by the showmanship of a drum major.

Figure 6. Two brothers play bass drums. Still image captured from *Letter B* video by C. L. Coleman, January 16, 2020, ayyo! TV. Copyright 2020 by ayyo! TV. Used with permission from ayyo!TV. Retrieved from https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCmc-WsFtBr3w28YGv-O5hkQ

As it is with barbershops, so too it is with HBCU marching bands and their unique connection to the African-American community. According to Clark (2019), Black participation in American marching bands is derived from the 1738 mandated conscription of "free mulattos, Blacks, and Native Americans." Out of a fear of insurrection, minoritized groups were given instruments instead of arms; the usage of which extended into the formation of Black colleges and universities (Clark, 2019). Participant familiarity with the tradition of HBCU marching bands in HBCUs was not guaranteed, therefore the storyboard intentionally encoded marching band to encourage curiosity for the uninitiated, and ignite identification for familiar viewers.

Figure 7. Drum major from HBCU marching band. Still image captured from *Letter B* video by C. L. Coleman, January 16, 2020, ayyo! TV. Copyright 2020 by ayyo! TV. Used with permission. Retrieved from https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCmc-WsFtBr3w28YGv-O5hkQ

The *Letter C* video (ayyo! TV, 2020) singularly protagonized a female character whose story transcended time as she encountered African-American icons, past and present while interacting with plot-relevant objects beginning with the letter "C". The character's journey across the ages encapsulated themes and scenes intended to encourage present-day viewer identification, and connect these present realities with African-American icons from the past.

Figure 8. Female protagonist looks at the letter C. Still image captured from *Letter C* video by C. L. Coleman, January 16, 2020, ayyo! TV. Copyright 2020 by ayyo! TV. Used with permission. Retrieved from https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCmc-WsFtBr3w28YGv-O5hkQ

Whereas *Letter B* encouraged identification through scenes steeped in African-American history, action for *Letter C* video was driven by interaction with people and objects. For example, the protagonist first met noted photographer Carrie Mae Weems, and was gifted a camera.
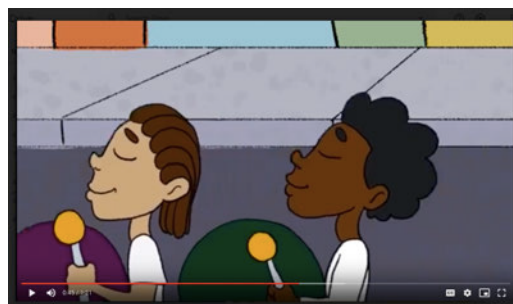

Figure 9: Carrie Mae Weems gifts camera to character. Still images captured from *Letter C* video by C. L. Coleman, January 16, 2020, ayyo! TV. Copyright 2020 by ayyo! TV. Used with permission. Retrieved from https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCmc-WsFtBr3w28YGv-O5hkQ

Later in the video, WNBA player, Candace Parker threw a basketball to the protagonist.
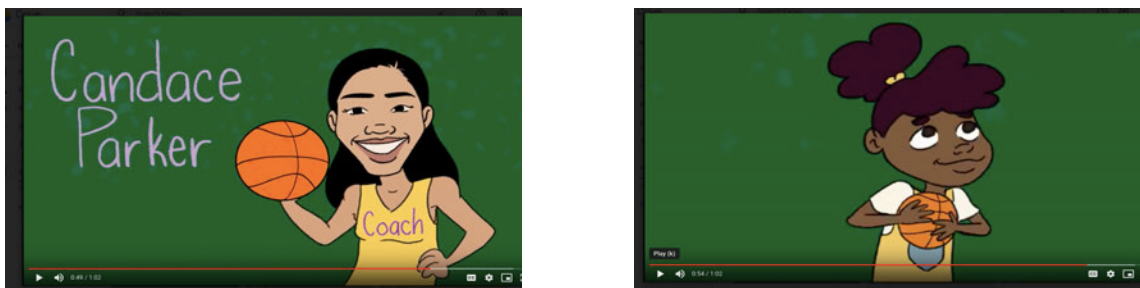
Figure 10: Candace Parker, an African-American WNBA player for the Los Angeles Sparks, throws a basketball to the female protagonist in the *Letter C* video by C. L. Coleman, January 16, 2020, ayyo! TV. Copyright 2020 by ayyo! TV. Still image captured from *Letter C* video. Used with permission. Retrieved from https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCmc-WsFtBr3w28YGv-O5hkQ

67

Participant responses. Seven of the 11 children, either as a first response to the media, or an emergent theme later in the interview, mentioned recognition of self-reflection through hairstyle and/or skin color of the main characters. For example, after watching the *Letter B* video (ayyo! TV, 2020), Cole commented, "It looks just like me! It feels like it's me doing stuff." Based on Cole's enthusiastic exclamation in identifying with a male character, Cole demonstrated the highest impact of concordance, not only respondng to the skin color and hair type, but in fact feeling as though he himself was actually performing the same actions as the protagonist, illustrating the influence of identification upon divergent processes. Cole also responded enthusiastically to the *Letter C* video (ayyo! TV, 2020) because he plays basketball with his sister, Lauren. Thus, Cole self-identified, and identified his sister through an image and a theme. Cole's quote reflected how closely the video captured elements of his life and environment.

Other respondents were similarly enthusiastic based on concordant aspects in their primary response to the first interview question, "What did you like about the videos?" Lauren responded positively to all of the videos, yet specifically and most enthusiastically identified with the main character of the third video whose hairstyle exactly resembled her own. Specifically, Lauren commented, "I like all of them but the third one because the girl with the balls looks just like me." Similarly, Porsha expressed, "I like the way you made the characters . . . the hair is pretty. . . . I like it all." Both Kimberly and Porsha also mentioned liking the videos based on hair, although neither was specific about a favorite particular moment. DJ and Allison reported liking particular people in the video based on hair and skin.

Lauren commented in reference to the aspects of the videos that she liked, particularly hair. Later in the interview, she identified with the theme, appreciating the *Letter C* video (ayyo! TV, 2020), as she herself likes to play basketball, as mentioned by her brother. Other subjects responded immediately to theme, referring to concordant features secondarily.

Liking the Characters

Not in response to the initial question, but after dialogue about the videos and their content, other children reported liking concordant aspects of the videos, that is, near reflections of themselves. These respondents appreciated singular aspects of the characters, but did not apply this enjoyment widely to other aspects of or the content of the video. DJ, for example, commented that the drum major's dancing which occurs early in the letter "B" video was "ridiculous." As the interview progressed, however, he noted specific aspects of the video which resonated with him, stating for example, "I like the dude with the braids . . . because he looks cool." At the time of the interview, DJ's hairstyle was braided in exactly the same style as this character.

Vivienne, who first responded to the instruments in the *Letter B* video (ayyo! TV, 2020), also commented later in the interview, "[She was like me because] she had short hair." Like Lauren, Vivienne's hairstyle matched the protagonist in the *Letter C* video (ayyo! TV, 2020), contributing to her enjoyment of the sample.

Enjoyment Based on Formal Features

As defined by Huston-Stein and Wright (1979), formal features of media are production techniques—zooms, pans, special effects; sound effects and music; as well as pace, action, and scene changes—which guide viewers through a program. One way in which formal features

69

influence a child's attention is through perceptual salience, demonstrated through objects that change, move, surprise, and/or demonstrate complexity and intensity (Huston-Stein & Wright, 1979). Where the aforementioned children responded initially or secondarily with specifically concordant aspects of concordance which contributed to their enjoyment of the media samples, other children initially responded to the formal features related to the words, letters, names, and themes. When asked what she liked about the videos, Vivienne commented, "I like when she [Weems] handed the girl the camera . . . and the instruments." These were deliberately encoded as moving objects in the sample holding Venus' attention; the people interacting with those objects moved across the screen as well. In her interview, Vivienne did not mention musical or photographic lessons or hobbies—the motion served as an initial stimulus and visual concordance invested her attention further.
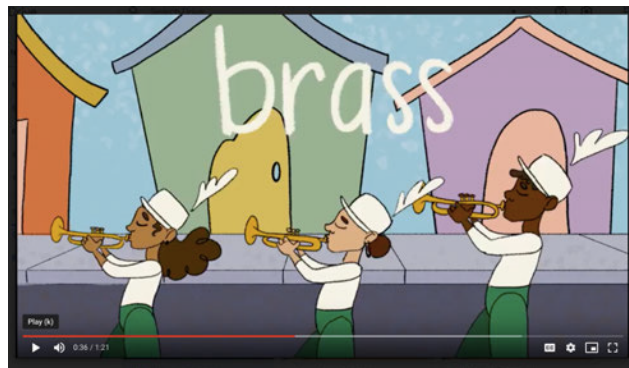
Figure 11. Characters Play Instruments in a Marching Band Held on a Residential Street. Still image captured from *Letter B* video by C. L. Coleman, January 16, 2020, ayyo! TV. Copyright 2020 by ayyo! TV. Used with permission. Retrieved from https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCmc-WsFtBr3w28YGv-O5hkQ

Responding to the theme of space, Michael commented that he enjoyed the video for letter A because of the setting, later mentioning that *The Rocketeer* (2019–present) was a favorite television show of his. Michael did not comment on any visually concordant aspects at all throughout his interview, choosing instead to focus on shows which share a common theme of

70

having a high degree of movement—his favorite television character exercises a disappearance

superpower through episodes of *PJ Masks* (2015–2020).

Figure 12. Rocket Traveling Through Space. Still image captured from *Letter A* video by C. L. Coleman, January 16, 2020, ayyo! TV. Copyright 2020 by ayyo! TV. Used with permission. Retrieved from https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCmc-WsFtBr3w28YGv-O5hkQ

A formal feature of the *Letter C* video (ayyo! TV, 2020) on which Camille commented,

was onomatopoetic text, and common sight words beginning with the letter C. Before noticing

that the characters were "the same skin color as me," Camille noted about the text, "The first

letter always popped up everywhere!"

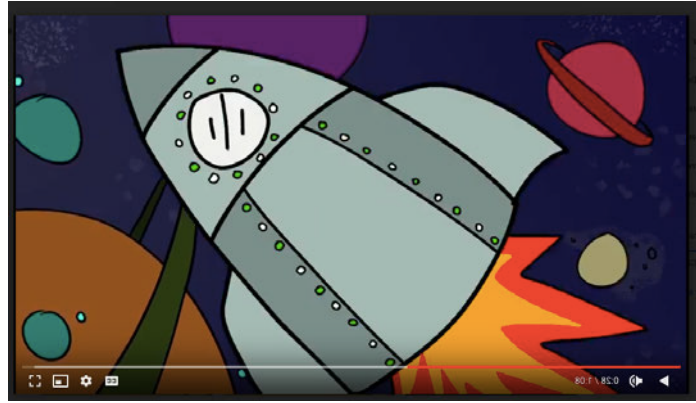*Figure 13*. Carrie Mae Weems Takes Picture—Click! Appears on Screen. Still image captured from *Letter C* video by C. L. Coleman, January 16, 2020, ayyo! TV. Copyright 2020 by ayyo! TV. Used with permission. Retrieved from https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCmc-WsFtBr3w28YGv-O5hkQ

The camera theme allowed for surprise text which aligned with the imagined sound of a shutter. Couched in the camera theme, many words appeared on screen alongside their image, surprising the viewer. Camille particularly enjoyed the formal feature of surprise.

Subthemes by Age Band

In addition to the aforementioned blanket responses, subthemes emerged based on the researcher's re-reading the data and noting patterns which did not carry throughout the entire population of children. Upon locating these sub-themes, age related patterns emerged which will be described in the following sections.

Action/doing versus fantasy in ages 6-8. While fantasy is a common element in many children's television shows; namely settings and events diverging from socially real themes, settings, and events; some children commented on the characters' actions; a testament to the social realism of the videos as shown in the table below. The children who commented comprised half of the participants ages 6-8; the other half of the participants within the age band focused on the fantasy theme of the videos, hairstyles, or words on screen. Specifically, Vivienne, age 6, when asked what she thought about the videos responded positivelty that her favorite parts were "the instruments and when the lady gave [the girl] the camera." When asked the same question, Cole, age 8, described many of the basketbally scenes, as did Porsha, age 8. DJ responded primarily to a drum major's dancing in the videos, labeling it initially as "ridiculous."

Black preference and identification in 8-year-olds. All of the children who responded positively and immediately based on concordance were eight years of age—their enthusiasm was unprompted, and their preference for direct concordance was apparent in their entertainment

choices. Cole's exclamation of "I feel like I'm in it!" and his enthusiasm for his household life of "Wakanda Forever", as well as Kimberly and Porsha's unprompted comments of "I like it all", and their choice in watching *Raven's Home* (2017–present) was likewise coded as Black identification and preference.

Racism and race identity negation in ages 6 and under. Of the six children ages 6 and under, namely Quinton, Zora, Camille, and Allison, DJ, and Vivienne, three had denied their race at some point in their young lives by demonstrating White preferenced behavior. Camille, as described in the participant profile, expressed to her mother that, "being White would be easier." Similarly, Zora expressed after the interview that she was "not a Black girl," and, most consistently, Quinton did not believe himself to be Black, in spite of repeated skin-color matching activities and explanations of race from his grandmother. During race discussions, both Camille and Zora displayed agitated behavior as Zora deflected the conversation, while Camille shifted in her chair after her mother asked her to try staying still, eventually raising her voice in support of a show that "only has rainbow colors." Allison, the exception, never discussed examples of racism of race identity negation—in fact, she described a brown-skinned female protagonist as having "pretty" skin.

Summary of Findings: Caregiver Responses

Attitudes of caregivers trended toward approval of the video samples, a wish for their children to have access to more concordant, educational media like the samples, approval of concordant media in general, and viewership of *Black Panther* (2018). These data aligned with the desire for positive onscreen Black representation shown by the tremendous turnout of African Americans for *Black Panther* (Green, Holman, & Sakoui, 2018). All parents, with the

exception of one, reported discussing racial identity in the home. In line with research by

Bowman and Howard (1985), reasons for discussing racial identity in the home included cultural

pride, and coping with minority status at school and in public.

Most surprising was the inconsistent emphasis on concordant media viewing. All parents

expressed visual concordance as a factor in choosing to attend *Black Panther* (2018), yet this

desire for and emphasis on concordance did not extend into media viewing choices in the home.

More specific responses are summarized in Table 2.

Table 2
Summary of Caregiver Responses
all caregivers saw Black Panther (2018), *and, responded positively to the media samples*

Name	Relation to Child Participant	Reported Race Conversation in Home	Impetus for Race Conversation	Reason for *Black Panther* Attendance?	Race Informed Media Choices?	Reason for Media Choices
Louie	Grandfather of Kimberly and Porsha	Yes	News Stories	Concordance	Yes	Child Choice
Amira	Mother of Camille	Yes	Racist Incident at School	Concordance	Yes	Concordant Media for Self-Love/Cultural Pride
May	Mother of Lauren and Cole	n/a*	n/a*	Concordance	Yes/No	No concordance because not real world, concordance is somewhat important
John	Brother of Michael	Yes	Foster system, adoptive family cultural perceptions	Concordance	No	Child choice
Ashley	Mother of Vivienne	Yes	Television concordance	Concordance/ Comic Book Interest	No	Child choice
Mary	Mother of Zora	Yes	Cultural pride	Concordance	Yes	Yes, concordant media whenever available
Justine	Mother of Allison and DJ	Yes	Perception of racist history of city of residence	Concordance	No	Child choice
Dyan	Grandmother of Quinton	No—comes up but tries not to address it	Identity confusion due to school friends	Concordance	No	n/a*

Degrees of Family Race Socialization

Race socialization was coded as low, medium, or high, depending on the type of socialization, impetus, and the frequency of discussion in the home. Although socialization activities included attending the Martin Luther King, Jr. Parade as well as *Black Panther* (2018), these events were episodic, necessitating a closer look at self-reported, frequent patterns in the home. Degrees of racial socialization were labeled according to explicitness in discussing race and Black identity, and frequency of race-related discussions (See Table 3).

Table 3

Indicators of Degrees of Race Socialization

Caregiver	Degree of Race Socialization	Evidence
Kevin	Moderate	Discusses race as it arises on news, is aware that his granddaughters see racist dynamics in world and react by being polite
Amira	High	Discusses race and racism frequently in home, requires concordant media for self-esteem, career is committed to uplifting African-American voices on film
May	Moderate	"Wakanda Forever" but that isn't real life, does not discuss race frequently with children
John	Moderate	Race obliquely mentioned through foster care references
Ashley	Low	Does not openly discuss race in home, only responding if children bring it up
Mary	High	"I love everything [regarding Black people]."
Justine	High	Discusses racism with 14 year old son knowing that children can overhear
Dyan	High	Repeated explanations of brown skin color

Participant responses. All caregivers, with the exception of one, who did not want to discuss race with her grandchild at an age she deemed "too early," reported discussing race identity in the home for the following reasons: cultural pride, coping with minority status at school, residence in cities perceived to be hostile to Black identity, identity negation/confusion, news stories, concordance outside of news stories, and perceived differences in parenting styles along racial lines.

Where most parents discussed racial identity in the home with different degrees, and for different reasons, all caregivers reported that concordance was the primary reasons for choosing to attend *Black Panther* (2018), and choosing for their children to attend as well. Two caregivers commented on specific reasons for seeing *Black Panther* (2018) with their families. May stated, ". . . our house is Wakanda Forever." Similarly, Mary commented, "I love everything us," referring to the African diaspora. These remarks indicated cultural pride, aligning with research by Bowman and Howard on race socialization in the African-American community (Bowman & Howard, 1985).

Concordance, commonly known as representation, was also the primary reason for caregivers' enjoyment of the media sample. John, a preschool teacher, commented specifically on representation, having not noticed its absence from the educational media space until his participation in this study. Whereas he initially thought that the encoded concordance was incidental, as the videos progressed, he realized the intentionality of the intradiversity of appearance as well as the cultural referents, "Yeah, so that's why I was like I'm catching on! I'm catching on! I like where this is going as far as your research because it wasn't even a thing I had thought of as representation in cartoons."

As was the case with the children, some caregivers commented specifically on the hair styles and skin tones. For example, Ashley commented, "I like the videos . . . how they had the people in the videos weren't just all one color, they were different shades of black and brown people so I really like that." Two parents mentioned the animated icons, for example, Mary's comment, "I love them. I saw countless people I know." Additionally, May commented, "The

representation is great. And I like the characters. I like the real characters. There actually is a black woman astronaut."

Although all caregivers appreciated the concordance of the videos, cited concordance as the reason for *Black Panther* (2018) viewership, and reported the existence of racial identity conversations in the home, these aforementioned factors did not translate into regular viewership of concordant media for approximately half of the caregivers (See Table 2). Reasons for not viewing concordant media regularly included lack of availability, parents giving children their own media choices, and children not choosing concordant media. One parent, May, did report that concordant media, and by extension physical spaces that are predominantly Black, "does not reflect the real world," in spite of being interviewed in a coffee shop frequented at the time by a predominantly Black clientele (See Table 3).

Child choice and race identity development comprised the two reasons for regular concordant media viewership (See Table 2). For two of the participant groups; Mary and Zora, and Camille and Amira; concordant media viewership was seen as an exercise in race identity construction in the face of a race identity negation incident, and cultural pride building. Kimberly and Porsha, both age 8, reported that they chose to watch concordant media without parental mediation.

Conclusion

In summary, 11 of the 12 children responded positively to aspects of the concordant educational media samples. All children, except one, noted concordant aspects, yet six of the eleven respondents specifically noted concordance as one of the primary reasons for liking the videos. Other respondents noted the themes, text, and formal features as reasons for liking the

samples. Of the children six years of age and under, three of six reported Black identity negation. Two of these three children cited the school environment in engendering Black identity rejection; the parents of these two caregivers reported high frequency of race identity discussion in the home and concordant media viewership. For these same two families, both with children under the age of 6, regular concordant media viewership was used as an instrument to express cultural pride and build race identity in the face of race identity negation.

All caregivers responded positively to the media samples. All caregivers also noted that they would want their children to see more videos such as the samples. All caregivers also saw *Black Panther* (2018). Chapter 5 will discuss these findings in relation to aforementioned theoretical frameworks, and suggest further studies.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

This qualitative study served two purposes; (a) to identify the responses of African-American children, ages 3-8, toward concordant educational media samples, and (b) to explore the existence and nature of any relationship between racial identity conversations in the home atmosphere and the viewing of concordant media on a regular basis. Overall, child responses toward the media samples trended positively based on hair types, textures, and styles; skin color; content themes; and formal features; caregiver response data revealed a modicum of relationship between the existence of race discussion in the home and children's positive responses.

The upcoming chapter will interpret the findings of each research question through the lens of research and theories, namely, the Bronfenbrenner Bioecological Theory of Human Development (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998); Critical Race Theory (Delgado & Stefancic, 1993); Social Learning Theory as it relates to media effects outlined by Bandura (Bandura, 1971); and the encoding and decoding theories of Stuart Hall (Hall, 1973). Following an interpretation of findings, recommendations for future research and practice will be suggested.

Research Question 1: Understanding the Responses of African-American Children toward Concordant Educational Media

The first research question of this study elicited responses from African-American children, ages 3-8, toward a sample of concordant educational media. As noted in Chapter Four, all of the child participants responded positively to the concordant media sample based on the concordant features of hair type, styles, and textures; skin color; formal features of the media sample; and the themes addressed in the media sample. All four of the respondents who were

eight years of age reported enjoying the media sample, based mostly on visually concordant aspects. Two of the three children who had experienced Black identity negation also found positive aspects in the concordant media sample presented.

That children attended closely to these salient physical attributes aligns heavily with the theories proffered, namely 1) Bandura's Social Learning Theory which presents attention as a foundational precept for learning (Bandura, 1971), 2) Bronfenbrenner's Bioecological Theory which predicates development upon interactions based on person, process, context, and time, (Tudge et al., 2006)., and 3) the seminal work of Stuart Hall who incorporates cultural background into the cyclic communication between encoder and decoder. A further investigation into these theories follows.

Bandura's Social Learning Theory: Attention

Bandura's Social Learning Theory puts forth the idea that behaviors are learned primarily through the following of an observed example, requiring four necessary elements—attention, retention, reproduction, and motivation (Bandura, 1971). Of these, attention to the characteristics of the model observed aligns the most closely with the responses from the child subjects, as eleven of twelve children recognized and attended to a physical similarity between on-screen characters and themselves, through hair type, style, texture, and skin color.

That child subjects attended to physical attributes not only speaks to attention, but also to Bandura's definition of identification, defined as one's perception of similarity to an entity (Bandura & Huston, 1961). Although operational definitions of identification have become more nuanced and context-specific particularly as it relates to media characters (Cohen, 2001), identification as it relates to perceived similarity, and requires attention, has been demonstrated

to figure prominently in learning as demonstrated by divergent process performance (Calvert et al., 2007), and as a mechanism for building parasocial relationship, resulting in increased attention to the character (Calvert et al., 2007; Richert et al., 2011).

According to Fisch and Truglio, children who find a gender and ethnicity match in the primary character of a media, that is, concordant media, enjoy those media (Fisch & Truglio, 2001). This finding, in addition to Bandura's (1971) definition of identification, as well as research demonstrating the profound impact of a dearth of media role models, affirm the popularity of the Instagram reenactment of *Black Panther* (2018) as well as data from the current study. According to Calvert et al, the paucity of concordant media characters for minority children equals and portends a lack of figures to guide identity development and influence behavior (Calvert et al., 2007). Responses in the current study such as Cole's, "I feel like I was doing stuff . . . " as well as the aforementioned Instagram reenactment showed the immense power of the converse: that is, the quick response to and adoption of divergent process behavior in the wake of concordant media viewership.

Contributing to attention were formal features, production techniques which, according to Huston-Stein and Wright (1979), guide viewers through a program and can influence a child's attention through perceptual salience, demonstrated through objects that change, move, surprise, and/or demonstrate complexity and intensity (Huston-Stein & Wright, 1979). In the media samples, the formal features were comprised to numerous elements noticed by the participants. The characters themselves, as well as their facial expressions, revealed emotions and walked through different scene changes. Camille's remark that "the letters popped up everywhere", as

well as Vivienne's enjoyment of the moving parade illustrated the power of formal features to draw viewers in, and direct their attention.

Bronfenbrenner Bioecological Theory of Human Development

Specifying the numerous ecologies in which the individual child finds himself embedded is critical for conceptualizing the findings of this study. The Bronfenbrenner Bioecological Theory (2006) systematizes the environments in which an individual is located; acknowledges process, person, context, and time, (PPCT); and elevates the frequent and enduring bidirectional interactions between person and environment, proximal processes, as the primary drivers of human development (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998; Tudge et al., 2009).

Process. The current study examined African-American children's interactions with a concordant, educational media sample, and interrogated the existence and nature of race identity conversation in the participant's home environs. Bronfenbrenner codified these interactions as proximal processes based on his definition,

> Especially in its early phases, but also throughout the life course, human development takes place through processes of progressively more complex reciprocal interaction between an active, evolving biopsychological human organism and the persons, objects, and symbols in its immediate external environment. To be effective, the interaction must occur on a fairly regular basis over extended periods of time. Such enduring forms of interaction in the immediate environment are referred to as proximal processes. Examples of enduring patterns of proximal process are found in feeding or comforting a baby, playing with a young child, child-child activities, group or solitary play, reading, learning new skills, athletic activities, problem solving, caring for others in distress, making plans, performing complex tasks, and acquiring new knowledge and know-how. (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006, p. 797)

Considering the child's situation in the ecologies of solitary play and conversation with primary caregivers, these events applied the definition of proximal process. A study by McHale, Dotterer, and Kim concurred, contending that the Bronfenbrenner ecologies apply to the study of

youth and media viewing with the potential to impact youth development when taken as a molar, daily, activity (McHale, Dotterer, & Kim, 2009).

Person: Demand characteristics. In continuing to center the individual and factors which impact interactions with his ecologies, Bronfenbrenner acknowledges the person and his attributes, and their power to affect the direction and power of proximal processes. Demand characteristics, one of three types of person characteristics, act as an immediate stimulus to other individuals, such as "age, skin color, gender, and physical appearance, and have the power to effect interactions because of the expectations immediately formed" (Bronfenbrenner & Morris (1998) as cited in Tudge et al., 2009, p. 200). Seven of eight of the children in this study self-recognized their own physical attributes, their own demand characteristics, through their reflection in the media sample demonstrating, as Bronfenbrenner theorizes, the immediacy of the stimulus, verbalized by DJ in noticing a hairstyle that resembled his own, "[I like] the dude with the braids . . . because he looked cool." Appearance was not the only factor contributing to children's enjoyment, as children noted concordance at different times in their interview, nonetheless, that seven of eight children mentioned hair and skin speaks to, as Bronfenbrenner notes, variations in direction and power of the proximal processes urging development (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998).

That hair type and skin color were also noticed and reported as such by the respondents aligns with challenges to race identity research which state that race itself is not a stimulus for in-group identification, rather phenotypic race markers are noticed. A study by Dunham, Stepanova, Dotsch, and Todorov (2015) suggested that prior studies on race categorizations may have conflated the heuristic of skin color and race, and that children rely on the heuristic of skin color,

rather than the underlying facial physiognomy of race to create race-based categorizations.

(Dunham et al., 2015). Participants named skin color readily, but did not name race, suggesting

an affirmation of this study.

In the Bronfenbrenner model, the characteristics of person are listed twice, both as a

component of the PPCT model, as well as a developmental outcome, revealing the outcome of

the continuous process described by the model itself (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998). The

emphasis on the dual entity of product and producer is an idea repeated and reified by Stuart Hall

(1973), whose concepts of encoding and decoding will be presented in the next section.

Encoding and Decoding

As Bronfenbrenner underscores the importance of reciprocity and bidirectionality, so too

does Stuart Hall, through an emphasis on the cyclical nature of symmetry between encoder and

decoder (Tudge et al., 2009). Through comments such as Cole's "It felt like I was . . . doing

stuff", child participant responses in this study made plain the reciprocal processes between child

and media to drive development, codifying an idea regarding the power of technology expressed

by Hutchby,

> At the same time, there are ways in which the technological artefacts themselves can be
> seen as 'participants' in the interaction, at least in the sense that their outputs (such as
> words or pictures on a screen) can become oriented to as 'contributions' which are the
> subject of mutual, active and collaborative sense-making on the part of humans.
> (Hutchby, 2001, p. 1).

Extending the concept of observational learning while interrogating the message delivery

method of media, the seminal work by Stuart Hall, *The Encoding and Decoding of Television*

Discourse, informed data from the current study (Hall, 1973). According to Hall, television

programming, as a discourse, is loaded with signs and symbols to be perceived and interpreted

by the viewer. Given the semiotic nature of television and the translation of television images into story form by the viewer, television is able to convey messages about the images projected. Before televised messages can impact the viewer, two major precepts must be fulfilled, that is, 1) encoded messages must be perceived as meaningful, and 2) there is a symmetry between and agreement in underlying frameworks between creator and consumer for encoded messages to be decoded as they were intended (Hall, 1973).

Several aspects of the study may have contributed to the value of the media—the parental endorsement of participation in the study, their own viewing of the media, and the expressed definition of the media as educational. Further aligning Hall's work with the study was the symmetrical response of encoder and decoder; concordance was encoded in the very physical attributes on which children commented (Hall, 1974). Hall's theory further contended that messages may not necessarily be received as a direct call to action, nonetheless, these messages which pertain to the content are received. With respect to the current study, that children noticed aspects of themselves reflected on screen demonstrated that children attended to these salient features, and thus decoded messages about people who are not them exactly, but who did resemble them. The use of hair as a cultural referent, then, speaks to ideas supported by Hall regarding cultural background and perception of screen-based messages. According to Clarke, the viewing of media through one's cultural lens engenders connection between viewer and media (Hall, 1974; Clarke, 2015).

Research Question 2: Contextualizing the Responses of African-American Children to

Concordant Educational Media through Caregiver Interviews

The second research question, "Do these responses relate to the existence and nature of race identity conversations in the home environment?", attempted to contextualize child responses through the lens of ecological impact. All caregivers responded positively to the concordant media sample, reporting the presence of race identity talk, to varying degrees and candor, in the home environment. While all caregivers and their children saw the film *Black Panther* (2018) specifically to enjoy concordance, this preference for concordance did not reliably translate into active management of, or preference for their child's habitualized concordant media viewership.

Applying the Bronfenbrenner Bioecological Theory

As previously noted, the Bronfenbrenner Bioecological Theory has systematized the environments in which an individual is located, acknowledging process, person, context, and time, (PPCT) and elevating proximal processes, as the primary drivers of human development (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998; Tudge et al., 2009).

Family, school, and relatives comprise the Bronfenbrenner microsystem, which is most immediate to the child where most person-to-person interactions take place (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998). Impacting both systems is the mesosystem, which represents overlap between aspects of microsystems. Education systems, as well as political and economic systems lie within Bronfenbrenner's exosystem, followed by the last encompassing systems, the macrosystem defined as overarching beliefs and values, and the chronosphere, the dimension of time. An application of the PPCT model to the study as it relates to caregiver interviews follows.

Process: Race socialization conversations in the family microsystem. The current

study suggested some relationship between the existence of race identity discussion in the home

and children's positive attitudes toward the sample of concordant educational media.

Conversations between caregiver and child exemplified proximal processes; some of which may

have been race-related, referred to as "race socialization" in literature. According to Lesane-

Brown (2006), race socialization is defined as, "specific verbal and non-verbal messages

transmitted to younger generations for the development of values, attitudes, behaviors, and

beliefs regarding the meaning and significance of race and racial stratification, intergroup and

intragroup interactions, personal and group identity." (Lesane-Brown, 2006). According to

seminal literature, race socialization is of particular importance in most African-American

families (Sanders Thompson, 1994; Stevenson, 1995).

The multi-dimensionality of race socialization in the African-American community has

been reflected in research; conversational themes in the literature have emphasized achievement

and hard work; race restrictions and how to cope with minority status; respect for other cultural

groups; as well as race pride and heritage, along the following categories: 1) ethnic pride, 2) self-

development, 3) race barrier awareness, and 4) egalitarianism (Bowman & Howard, 1985;

McHale et al., 2006).

Caregivers in the current study aptly affirmed the themes presented in research literature

through their approach to race-related conversations and their reasons for *Black Panther* (2018)

viewership. For example, in alignment with cultural pride socialization messages, Mary

explained her reason for the family viewing of *Black Panther* (2018) and reading of the *Black

Panther* comic book as, "Because I love everything us". Ashley's comment in reference to home

conversations, "We live in Simi Valley, so of course" alluded to direct lessons to her Black sons in coping with minority status. May's remark that concordant media "doesn't reflect the real world" revealed an egalitarian narrative. Self-development characterized Dyan's attempts to encourage racial self-identification in her grandson, Quinton. In response to the presence of race-identity conversation in the home, Quinton's grandmother, Dyan, reported an ongoing conversation with her grandson to disabuse him of a false racial identity, and prove his race to him using skin color matching activities.

The processes of these conversations, through *Black Panther* (2018) viewership and/or concordant media viewership illustrated the nature and presence of race conversation. These reports from the caregivers, by design of the study, were informed by context in which the study occurred.

Context. In this study, caregivers were asked to comment on the existence of race-based conversation in the home, a context for both socializing conversations as well as daily media viewership. While the home served as a context of note for comment, too, the two interview sites were noteworthy. Zora's interview was conducted at her pre-school, a school of 15 children located in South Los Angeles, where personal student-chosen affirmations are recited daily. This practice was designed to encourage agency and personal development, thus, according to the preschool director, who was interviewed in April, some children chose to base their affirmations on their racial identity. The remainder of the interviews were conducted at a popular Black-owned Leimert Park coffeeshop on the morning of the Martin Luther King, Jr. parade. Thus, all of the interviews were conducted in places owned and actively, visibly managed by African Americans, and in an atmosphere of celebration of Black identity.

Both of these affirmative contexts were relevant to the research question; as they allowed for unspoken support of race reflection in the home environment, contributing to the pattern of child responses corroborating caregiver report. In the coffeeshop, John described oblique mentions of race through speculative comparisons of Black and non-Black foster families and extracurricular activities; not surprisingly, his younger brother made no mention of race at all throughout his interview. Conversely, during Amira's description of the explicit conversations with her daughter and new media viewership guidelines, designed to counteract Camille's anti-Black identity sentiments, Camille interjected frequently, "I can only watch the things that look like me," and, "My mommy told me to watch out if I have a friend who is White . . . ." The sites themselves supported conversation about Black identity as race socialization dialogues were sometimes mirrored and enhanced by child input during the interview.

These contexts, too, and perhaps the demand characteristics of the researcher within these contexts, may have skewed caregiver report of race-related conversation, and child response. While May reported initially that her household was "Wakanda Forever" a phrase used throughout *Black Panther* (2018) to signify cultural pride in and loyalty to Wakandan nationalism, May's comments shifted toward a rejection of concordant media, commenting that these media "do not reflect the real world." Similarly, the youngest participant, Zora, had hitherto expressed unwavering preference for "Princess Tiana cartoons", yet, over the course of the interview confided that Belle, the White female protagonist from *Beauty and the Beast* (1991), was her favorite. Zora's mother, Mary, indicated shock through surprised facial expressions and whispered disbelief approximately three times, at which point, Zora reverted

back to a preference for Princess Tiana. At the interview's end, Mary asked Zora pointedly, "Zora, do you know you are a Black girl?" to which Zora replied, "I am not a Black girl!"

These locations, physical centers of emancipatory dialogue, maintained an outsized symbolic presence when located in proximity to celebratory episodes such as the Martin Luther King, Jr. parade and the cultural zeitgeist symbolized by the success of *Black Panther* (2018). The Bronfenbrenner Bioecological Theory has accounted for measures of time such as these, from minute and incidental to enduring phenomena; their influence on data from the current study will be explored in the next section.

Time. Bronfenbrenner's Bioecological Theory has defined this construct along a continuum of duration and frequency, contending that all events can potentially impact the trajectory of development. Bronfenbrenner and Morris stated:

> Microtime refers to continuity versus discontinuity within ongoing episodes of proximal process. Mesotime is the periodicity of theses episodes across broader time intervals, such as days and weeks. Finally, Macrotime focuses on the changing expectations and events in the larger society, both within and across generations, as they affect and are affected by, processes and outcomes of human development over the life course. (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998).

Shown on a large screen, and centering Black people with incredible technological capabilities borne from awesome intelligence, the financial success of and social response to the film *Black Panther* (2018) created an event measured in Macrotime, the duration of which has paled in comparison to the history of White-centered, anti-Black narratives encoded in American educational media briefly detailed in Chapter 2. Housing this study in the wake of *Black Panther* (2018) created conditions in which participants were able to name the construct of representation, synonymous in literature with identification and concordance, and, therefore,

launch into conversation around Black identity, enhanced by the meso-temporal backdrop of the Martin Luther King, Jr. Day parade.

These conditions solidified the foundations from which to ask caregivers, who, unanimously responded positively to the film *Black Panther* (2018) and to the concordant educational media about race-based conversations in the home. John, thinking aloud, realized in the course of watching the concordant media sample, that the push for representational media had overlooked educational media, having specifically noted, "I like where this is going as far as your research because I hadn't even thought of, as far as representation in cartoons or stimulating a child's mind, um, educationally from cartoons."

John's comment attested to the normative treatment of race blindness in educational media, an idea challenged by the tenets of Critical Race Theory, described in the next section.

Critical Race Theory

In response to dominant narratives governing multiple systems in which all participants are situated, Critical Race Theory, CRT, has emphasized 1) the critique of colorblindness; the importance of telling one's own story, 2) the challenging a majoritarian, master narrative; 3) a focus on essentialism and anti-essentialism, recognizing that while all oppressed peoples share common traits, there is diversity within intragroup experiences (Delgado & Stefancic, 1993).

The media samples created for this study adhered to CRT foundational tenets by actively rejecting a colorblind narrative, and focusing on intragroup diversity within the African-American community. The creation of these samples by the researcher, an African-American woman, also approached the tenet of counternarrative. In its reflection of the diversity of African-American phenotypes, and the social realism of predominantly African-American spaces

93

as a locus for learning, the media samples uplifted the cultural capital of African-American culture, actively rejecting the colorblind narrative (Yosso, 2005).

In line with tenets of Critical Race Theory, this study acknowledged the presence of race and racism by asking children and caregivers about their attitude toward educational concordant media, and the prevalence of race dialogue in the home as it may have related to media choices.

Limitations

Variation in respondents arose from the sampling method, a combination of purposive and convenience sampling. Further, the attempt to randomize participants at the coffeeshop venue led to shorter interview times, limiting the depth of conversation, and the ability to interview individual children in the absence of their siblings. Although shorter interviews, thirty and forty minutes, allowed for unadulterated and immediate responses, these responses often led to larger conversations which time did not permit.

Data for seven of eight respondents was collected mostly during the official Los Angeles Martin Luther King, Jr. day parade, the historicity of which may have impacted responses, as described earlier in the current chapter.

Recommendations for Future Research

The qualitative research design and grounded theory approach undertaken by this study was chosen to uplift and center the voices of young Black children, a population whose voice has been historically absent from research literature, and whose identity and depiction in American educational texts has historically been decentered, buffooned, and minimized, as outlined in the second chapter. This study sought to interrogate the impact of these works with the principle of counternarrative in mind by creating a concordant educational media sample, and the responses

of African-American children in light of race identity development within the home. Although the qualitative design leant itself to critical research paradigms, future research might shift the interview protocol into one which reveals attitudes, while interrogating their intensity through the lens of race identity conversations in the home.

While a major finding is that Black children pinpointed aspects within the samples that encouraged a positive attitude toward their identity, it is noteworthy that within the sample, three of five respondents, all under the age of 6, had negated their Black identity in relation to the school environment, a pattern aligning with aforementioned experiments by Clark and Clark, and Baron and Banaji (Baron & Banaji, 2006; Clark & Clark, 1939). These instances suggest future research regarding the child's reasoning for such distancing, and an exploration of any relationship between race identification and success as a learner in school, as well as the caregiver response as it relates to media viewership in the home environment. Future research along these lines may also interrogate the impact of concordant educational media viewership in the school environment.

Additionally, where this study sought to assess responses toward concordant media, learning and academic takeaways from the media themselves were not assessed. Future studies may seek to uncover the importance assessed to concordance as it relates to learning by comparing academic takeaways between concordant educational media and non-concordant media.

<center>**Implications for Caregivers**</center>

The findings which showed negation of Black identity prior to age 6 in three of five respondents suggested that caregivers can begin talking openly and explicitly with their children

<center>95</center>

about the perception of race-influenced school experiences. Where pride in Black identity may be chipped away in school settings, it is worth pursuing the efficacy of concordant educational media to intervene upon the disaggregation of Black identity and the learning that occurs in school. As was the case with Camille, when faced with instances of race identity negation, caregivers of Black children may want to begin unpacking these instances of racism with their children, using concordant media which centers Black children, and specifically and positively affirms and mirrors skin color and hair color, texture, and style. Camille's interview also summarily demonstrated the lasting impact of specificity in the conversations with Black children; these dialogues, as reported by Camille's mother, encouraged her to be more observant and critical of the media she consumes, and more positive about her own identity as a Black child. Essentially, these concepts exhort Black caregivers of children under age 6 to examine the concept of media as a public pedagogy (Luke, 1994), challenging findings which show a lack of parental consideration for race and culture messages in media, and further explore the burgeoning field of Critical Media Literacy, possibly engaging children as early as age 3, regardless of gender, in dialogues encouraging critical media literacy to support both race identity development and academic goals.

The findings from 8-year-old participants suggested that even without parent mediation of media choices, this age group enjoyed the concordant media samples enthusiastically or chose to view concordant media in their leisure time. Because age seemed to impact the enjoyment of, appreciation for, and the self-seeking of concordance, caregivers may want to acknowledge the interaction of this particular age upon cultural identity development, asking children about their media preferences and mediating media viewing, helping them choose media which specifically

reflects their appearance and centers them specifically. Where specifically concordant media choices may not readily be available, the proliferation of smart phones, computers, and mass media platforms have democratized media production. As children within this demographic are able to become media producers themselves to validate their own agency while reflecting their realities, children may find agency and validation in telling their own stories for education as well as entertainment and edification—the impact of child media creation in live action format was lightly suggested by Allison, age 4, who mentioned enjoying YouTubes made for and centering children, which she deemed, "Kid YouTube."

Implications for Educational Media Producers

These findings have suggested that the intentionality and markers of concordance such as hair type and texture, as well as skin color, should also be considered equally alongside the encoding of formal features and theme for all children. Enthusiasm for concordance also implies that attention be paid to research regarding the development alongside research on academic development, in addition to specificity toward age group—as children 8 years of age were the most enthusiastic about concordant media, seeking it out in their leisure time in the case of Porsha and Kimberly. Media producers looking to reach this particular age group educationally may want to consider the impact of centering, as well as skin and hair reflections, in addition to the enjoyment of the live action format reported by both Porsha and Kimberly, also validated by Cole in his direct application of the theme of basketball to his own life, and Vivienne's comment about a child receiving a camera. Data from these children have suggested a positive and large impact when children see themselves centered on screen, with their skin and hair types reflected in action whether in animated or live action format.

Findings from the current study also suggested that children ages 6 and under responded to skin and hair concordance, as well as story settings, content themes, protagonist activities, and formal features of the media samples. Thus, for this particular age group, attention should be paid to all of the aforementioned aspects, recognizing the continued pattern of race identity negation borne from children's current observations of the world and a potential lack of specific race socialization conversation in the home.

While children did not readily respond to the historical figures depicted on screen, their parents noted their presence in several interviews, suggesting the positive impact of coviewing and parental mediation for imparting positive historical and culturally relevant facts to children. Parents also paid a large role in taking children to see *Black Panther* (2018), recognizing the positive impact of centering and concordance, while stewarding messages of cultural pride to their children. Given universal parental support of *Black Panther* (2018) and resonance of centering and skin and hair reflection for children, producers may want to consider the impact of centering Black children, and reflecting appearance on screens of all kinds, as these media are able to begin or continue race socialization conversations in the home, potentially affirming data which suggest a relation between positive race identity development and academic success.

Conclusion

The first research question sought to explore the responses of African-American students, ages 3-8, toward ethnically concordant educational media. The findings showed seven of the eight respondents responded positively, specifically to hair style and texture, skin color, content themes, and formal features of the video sample. The second research question questioned the presence of a relationship between child attitudes toward concordant media, and the presence of

racial identity conversation in the home. Data from this second research question suggested that while concordance was important to all of the families when asked in the context of *Black Panther* (2018) viewership, and while parents reported the presence of race identity conversations, these factors did not always translate to daily media choices for children unless 1) parents who highly valued concordance sought out concordant media choices, and subsequently regulated media consumption, or 2) children themselves chose concordant media. Five of the eight parent respondents attributed the presence of race identity conversation in the home to interpersonal interactions at school and stories on television media, showing the impact of microsystems on the home environment, a site of identity construction. In these cases, the countermeasures against overtly negative messaging and toward positive identity construction included changes in home media philosophy and practice.

Bronfenbrenner and many other theorists have posited the importance of the media upon the microsystems. Overt examples leading to the disruption of positive Black identity formation included interactions at school and news media, yet, more subtle have been the messages contained in many educational media, a segment of narratives to which Black children are subjected where race is "deemphasized, silenced, or negatively reframed to the discredit of African Americans" (Grills et al., 2016, p. 344). A brief history of these narratives in educational media was outlined in the second chapter.

Parent and child responses demonstrated a positive response to and appreciation for concordance in educational media; research has confirmed the need for concordant educational media, as the lack of concordance has been shown to stunt identity development by restricting access to concordant role models who can potentially guide behavior and actions (Calvert et al.,

2007). Although attention paid to race in educational media may have become more muted over time through the misapplication of multiculturalism, the benefits of emphasizing and celebrating racial identity have continued to be discussed, most recently and openly in the struggle toward adopting Ethnic Studies curricula in public schools.

During this Macrotime season of *Black Panther* (2018)*,* this study sought to isolate media viewership as a daily event and apply the nearest ecologies of children, harnessing both the importance of education and narratives promoting academic concepts, while examining the potential for the positive trajectory of identity development. In the face of narratives which have negatively reflected Black identity, these data showed the parental wish, and child appreciation for concordant educational media. These data also demonstrated the need for intentional parental management of media consumption to maximize the efficacy of concordant media in counteracting the negative identity messages Black children, unfortunately, continue to face.

Lastly, these data demonstrated the potency of reflection and concordance from a three-minute concordant educational media video sample, for stimulating divergent process, and encouraging identity-constructing conversation between caregivers and children—truly, this study demonstrated that it does not require a blockbuster movie on a large screen to have a positive, energizing, and affirming impact on Black children. In fact, in an examination of Black representation in children's programming, Roberts (2004) proffered that educational media specifically has a greater potential to impact Black children positively in its influence on cognitive and social development, in addition to self-concept and self-esteem (Roberts, 2004).

Furthermore, the findings of the current study demonstrated the immense potential of a media diet for Black children, rich in powerfully and positively centered, reflective images not

only for self-affirmation in the present, but also to counter the impact of current racism as well as a history of multigenerational racism, which, as noted in the second chapter, has been passed down through all forms of media, normalized through the frequency of exposure to these media, and codified by the gravity assigned to learning situations. If Black children were acutely aware of police brutality five years ago, likely bringing questions and doubts about the outside world into the classroom with them as they built their identities as learners and scholars, they likely have been absolutely aware of the unjust and untimely deaths of Ahmaud Arbery, George Floyd, and Breonna Taylor, as well as the psychological trauma of racist dogwhistles spoken by Donald J. Trump against the Black community. In light of this research, it is patently clear that all concerned about Black children must engage the topic of race and racial justice with children, as they are aware of the world in spite of the wishes of many to shelter them. The recommendation of this work is for caregivers to teach children to become critical media consumers by asking them to name events in media which they have seen, and reflect on these events, as well as the intentions of the media creator. We, too, the teachers of a formal and informal nature, must also select, coview, and generally, consume media critically, especially for children at the earliest ages. The final recommendation is for caregivers of Black children and Black children themselves, to harness our creativity and create humanizing, concordant, engaging, educational media as an act rooted in love, and as a manifestation of justice.

(A.Kim Designs, 2020)

APPENDIX A

Questions for Children

1.) How do you feel about this video?

    a. What was your favorite part of the video? (Explanation)

2.) How much did you like the people in the video?

    a. What did you like about the people in the video?

3.) How much are you like the people in the video?

    a. What makes you say that?

4.) How much do you want to be like the people in the video?

    a. Why?

5.) What are your favorite shows? What do you like about those shows?

APPENDIX B

Questions for Caregivers

1. Did you see the film *Black Panther*?
    a. Did you see it with your children? As a family?
    b. What made you want to see the film?
    c. What did the children think of the film?
    d. Do you think the children picked up on the race aspect of the film?
2. Is the choice to see *Black Panther* reflected in other choices in media for your family?
    a. In what ways?
3. Does your family ever talk about race?
4. What do you think of these videos?

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