Critical media literacy and Black female identity construction: A conceptual framework for empowerment, equity, and social justice in education

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ABSTRACT

This paper addresses the issues of knowledge production, which interrogate and disrupt dominant narratives that subjugate Black females related to their identity. We contextualize our discussion through the lens of critical consciousness and critical media literacy by exploring the role of popular media in identity development/imposition for Black females. We outline issues of Black female identity politics by framing them through the description of critical media literacy as a 21st century literacy, with Black Feminist Theory as our theoretical lens. Similar discussions have remained centered in the field of Media Studies and there has been inadequate attention to these issues in the education realm, particularly as they relate to Black females and their self-concept and self-empowerment.

Keywords: *black feminist thought, critical media literacy, black females, critical consciousness, empowerment.*

When I was young,
all the fairytale princesses had long blond hair. When you
are Black, you just don't feel like it could be you.
(Roslyn Rozbruch's Donna Brown Guillame,
co-producer, Home Box Office Series,
Happily Ever After: Fairy Tales for Every Child, 1995)
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INTRODUCTION

Life does not exist within a vacuum. The development of one's identity and sense of self throughout the life course occurs within the context of a collective and dynamic set of experiences and interactions with the environment (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). Environmental contexts often shape and inform conceptions of the self in relation to others and are an essential part of becoming a mature person – an adult. Moreover, identity is socially constructed on the basis of various experiences, affiliations, and personal characteristics. A complex process – identity development, in particularly for people of color, and even more so for females of color, has been identified and contextualized in the academic literature in terms of ethnic identity development (Phinney, 1989), feminist identity development (Downing & Rouch, 1985), womanist identity development (Helms, 1990), racial identity theory (Cross, 1971), and a phenomenological variant of ecological systems theory (Spencer et al., 1997). For Black females, the collision of the environmental context and the continuum of identity formation are critical as their identity is formulated across various axes of oppression (Crenshaw, 1989) including those of race, gender, class, and sexual identity.

The purpose of this conceptual paper is to leverage the increasingly media-dominated nature of society as the environmental context for deconstructing the ways in which the identities of Black females are shaped, negotiated, imposed, and narrated. Therefore, this paper seeks to address issues of knowledge production perpetuated through the media and to interrogate and disrupt dominant narratives that subjugate Black females as it relates to their identity. Through the lens of Black feminist theory, we contextualize the importance of critical media literacy as a tool for positive identity development for Black females. Critical media literacy as a 21st century literacy goes beyond the traditional or normative approach to literacy. While popular culture and media are recognized as a key influence on people's lives and shaping of their identity (Brown & Gary, 1991), the discussion has remained centered in the field of Media Studies (Jenkins, 2006; Watkins, 2009; Watkins & Emerson, 2000) and there has been limited, however emerging attention to these issues in education, particularly as they specifically relate to Black females and their self-concept and self-empowerment.

To structure the paper, we first present our theoretical lens, *Black Feminist Theory,* followed by a discussion of 21st Century literacy skills. In this discussion, we outline the concept of critical media literacy (CML), as a required 21st century literacy and its relationship to critical consciousness. Next, we present our conceptual framework, to guide our understanding of how Black females are portrayed in the media. This analytical tool underpins our argument of Black female identity issues in terms of stereotypical media images and other challenges related to how Black females' identities are shaped through the media. Through this discussion, we present a clear argument for developing critical media skills and critical consciousness to break the perpetual cycle of subjugation of Black females, particularly as it relates to their identity. We conclude the paper with a discussion of the implications for key stakeholders: parents, educators, media producers, consumers and others concerned with the overall condition of Black females.

Black Feminist Theory

Black Feminist Theory (BFT) (Collins, 2009) is the theoretical lens upon which our discussion and conceptual model is premised. BFT, is a critical social theory that identifies and deconstructs epistemologies that negate the lived experiences of Black females, and serves, in this instance, as a platform to support the development of critical literacy and more specifically, critical media literacy skills to resist these dominant ways of thinking about Black females' identity. The goal of Black feminist theory is the realization of justice and empowerment for U.S. Black women and other groups that are similarly oppressed within society (Collins, 2009). Culture and popular media perpetuate images of the ideal model of beauty to be a Eurocentric model typically characterized by long straight blond hair, narrow noses, thin lips, slender bodies, and flawless skin with a light complexion (Bond & Cash, 1992; Jones, 2004; Lindberg-Seyersted, 1992; Okazawa-Rey et al., 1987; Nichter & Nichter, 1991; Robinson, 2011; Thompson et al., 1999). BFT, which has its roots in Afro-centric philosophy, feminist standpoint theory, sociocultural theory, and critical race theory, as well as postmodernism and the sociology of knowledge "illustrates the everyday experiences of Black women and seeks to address issues of race, class, and gender as

it affects the everyday lives of Black women" (Holmes, 2003, p. 50) making it ideal to frame our thinking about how Black women are portrayed in the media as well as critical consciousness and critical media literacy.

BFT centers on the idea of women's emerging power as agents of knowledge and highlighting BFT's insistence that both the changed consciousness of individuals and the social transformation of political and economic institutions constitute essential ingredients for social change. Through the lens of BFT, critical media literacy skills as a twenty-first century literacy skill can be developed to help empower Black females and to guide their meaning-making processes as it relates to their own identity.

21st Century literacy skills

Researchers agree that the field of literacy has experienced a reinvention over the past several decades (Alverman & Hagood, 2000; Beach, 2014; Luke & Elkins, 1998), and much of this reinvention can be attributed to technological advancements and the complex set of multiliteracies (skills) that these advancements demand (The New London Group, 1996). Traditional definitions of literacy tend to center on the ability to read and write and on numeracy. However, other literacies such as racial literacy, political literacy, cultural literacy etc. have emerged as non-traditional literacies. In the Critical Literacies Advancement Model (CLAM), Robinson (2020) describes a framework for organizing a critique of social problems according to various non-traditional critical literacies categorized as, foundational literacy, sociocultural literacy, technological and informational literacies, psychosocial and environmental literacies, and social justice literacies. Critical Media Literacy, as described in the model, is an important technological and informational literacy, which, as a set of practical skills, has the potential to lead to informed behaviors and actions leading to positive social change.

New (21st century) literacies, grounded in the field of New Literacy Studies, do not negate the importance of traditional literacy skills, but they include other skills such as critical thinking and even scientific reasoning (data literacy) (Wagner, 2008). New Literacies Studies, of which critical media literacy is a part, represents an epistemological shift from a psychological to a social approach to literacy (Baynjam & Prinsloo, 2009; ADAMS, n.d.) According to the National Council of Teachers of English (2013), "Literacy has always been a collection of cultural and communicative practices shared among members of particular groups...[and] active, successful participants in this 21st century global society must be able to [among other things] ...create, critique, analyze, and evaluate multimedia texts" (para. 2). This statement underscores the importance of critical media literacy and critical consciousness. So we argue for the development of these skills early in life as the media reflects and reinforces society's values and ideals from very early age in the life course.

The calls for critical media literacy, especially in light of the many new forms of media communication, are not new. Watkins and Emerson (2000) provide an important foundation to the literature concerning Black feminist media criticism, which challenges the culture industry's misrepresentation of Black women. Meanwhile, The Connected Learning Alliance which was "launched by the Digital Media and Learning Hub of the University of California Humanities Research Institute with support from the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation's Digital Media and Learning Initiative" has provided a wide range of research publications on the topic (Connected Learning Alliance, n.d.). Pinkard et al.'s (2017) program Digital Youth Divas supports the digital identity construction of Black and Brown girls by pushing back against pejorative narratives at the intersection of computer science, engineering, and digital literacy.

In describing the widespread and influential role of media, Robinson (2011) suggests, "popular culture and the media strongly influence and disseminate messages of cultural domination which often requires a high degree of cultural and media literacy to detect and resist" (p. 15). Further, Brown and Gary (1991) explain that, the media, through various ways, influences identity and development and, as Lester (2010) indicates, "American media, literature, and other popular and material culture consumed by both children and adults continue to glorify and to conflate beauty, fame, fortune, and desire with whiteness" (pp. 294-295). What these authors mean is that there are dominant covert and overt messages that are propagated in the media that influence the identity of both children and adults.

Some of these messages are distributed by way of racial and gender-based microaggressions and stereotypes. Allen (2012) contends, "Microaggressions affect all marginalized groups and are felt through environmental cues as well as verbal and nonverbal hidden messages that serve to invalidate one's experiential reality and perpetuate feelings of inferiority" (p. 175). This perpetuation of feelings of inferiority for Black females can have deleterious long-

term effects (Torres et al., 2010). The impacts of microaggressions are particularly poignant in such domains as mental health and well-being (Donovan et al., 2013; Henfield, 2011; Nadal, 2010) as well as self-concept and identity development (Allen et al., 2013; Moore & Owens, 2009), particularly for Black females. Stereotypes, like microaggressions can be hurtful and are based on bias. Simply put, a stereotype is a "behavioral trait you expect from someone based on that person's appearance" (Andry, 2010, p. 1) and this notion stems from how the person of a particular sub-group has been portrayed over time, especially in the media.

Because "media is influential and pervasive…[and] effective in disseminating both implicit and explicit messages related to skin color" (Robinson, 2011, p. 16), we argue for developing critical thinking and critical media literacy skills particularly for those who are especially vulnerable to messages that promote dominant power structures. Black girls need the tools to recognize, critique, and push back narratives that oppress and dominate (Jacobs, 2016). On this premise, we argue for the need for critical thinking and critical media skills that can lead to critical consciousness.

Critical consciousness

Critical consciousness (Freire, 1970, 1973) is an in-depth awareness of and ability to perceive social oppression, including socio-political, and economic oppression. It includes several components, including "social group identification, discontent with the distribution of social power, rejection of social system legitimacy, and a collective action orientation" (Kelso et al., 2014, p. 1237). Critical consciousness goes beyond the idea of being able to identify issues of social oppression and to critically think about them (critical thinking) but to develop a keen focus on an intellectual analysis of the circumstances leading to social transformation. The Freirean notion of critical consciousness involves both reflection and action, which occur through the development or transitioning through various stages of consciousness (See Figure 1). In the first stage of *semi-intransitive consciousness,* individuals are unable to recognize existing structural barriers, attributes, and outcomes to supernatural forces or to their own personal shortcomings. The second stage of *naive consciousness* is when an individual begins to reflect on one's own problems and on society but oversimplifies both personal and social problems. And the final stage of *critical consciousness* is when individuals reach an in-depth understanding of the ways

in which social, political, and economic oppressions and history of these oppressions operate to affect individuals and society. Furthermore, at this stage, individuals take action against oppressive elements of society (transformation).
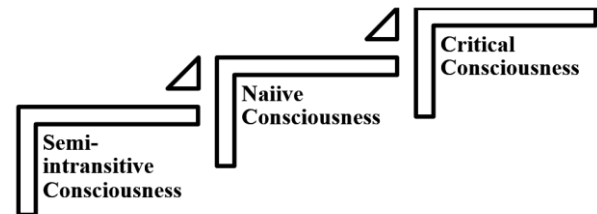

Figure 1. Stages of critical consciousness (Freire, 1970, 1973)

The transformation or liberation that occurs at the final stages of critical consciousness is one that hooks (2010) describes as an ongoing process and contends that we are:

> bombarded daily by a colonizing mentality (few of us manage to escape the received messages coming from every area of our lives), one that not only shapes consciousness and actions but also provides material rewards for submission and acquiescence that far exceed any material gains for resistance, so we must be constantly engaging new ways of thinking and being (p. 26).

Additionally, these new ways of thinking should include thinking critically about the messages portrayed in the media, which signals the development of critical consciousness through critical media literacy. Freire's work on critical consciousness is critiqued for being decontextualized with sweeping claims and not focused on the patriarchal nature of contemporary society (Weiler, 2001). It is for this purpose that we use critical consciousness in conjunction with Black Feminist Theory to reflect on critical media literacy and its relevance for Black females.

The case for critical media literacy

Critical media literacy (CML) involves creating, critiquing, analyzing, and evaluating multimedia texts (NCTE, 2013) as a means of decoding and deconstructing messages one receives in the media. Baker-Bell et al. (2017) define CML as "the educational process that makes young people aware of the role that media play, both positively and problematically, in shaping social thought" (p. 139). Keep in mind, as Tisdell (2008) suggests, the media are controlled and driven by money and those who make media operate based on their perception of class, race, and gender.

Further, critical media literacy expands the notion of literacy to include different forms of mass communication and popular culture as well as deepens the potential of education to critically analyze relationships between media and audiences, information and power. It involves cultivating skills in analyzing media codes and conventions, abilities to criticize stereotypes, dominant values, and ideologies, and competencies to interpret the multiple meanings and messages generated by media texts. Media literacy helps people to discriminate and evaluate media content, to critically dissect media forms, to investigate media effects and uses, to use media intelligently, and to construct alternative media (Kellner & Share, 2007, p. 4).

This is significant for understanding the politics related to the identity of Black women especially because of how they are portrayed in the media.

Black women have endured the dominant beauty narrative that white skin, a narrow nose, thin lips, and long, straight hair are the standards for beauty to which all women should aspire (Awad et al., 2014; Okazawa-Rey et al., 1987; Russell et al., 2013). Analyzing visual cues and making complex social assessments are part of our everyday lives, and this has implications for how Black women are perceived based on media representations. Negative caricatures of racist, sexist, and often, inaccurate depictions of African American women have been perpetuated through media outlets. Historical images, racist troupes, and stereotypes of culture (Scwarzbaum & Thomas, 2008) have often relegated African American women to identity frameworks of over-sexuality, anger, defiance, and non-feminine portraits (Allen, 2016). Black females in the media are often compared to modern day Mammies, Jezebels, and Sapphires (Thomas et al., 2013; Townsend et al., 2010). These typical portrayals of Black women in the media are disturbing and Black women are often "omitted from the array of positive images in popular culture" (Brittian, 2012, p. 4).

Through digital and print media, supported by the cosmetic industry, Black women have been portrayed as sexual, rather than beautiful (Caldwell, 2004) and Black women are invariably likened to a White model of beauty. Unfortunately, the media perpetuates this impractical definition and beauty standard (Harrison et al., 2008). Given that the media symbolizes the ideal notions of beauty, in particularly through advertising (Baumann, 2008) and that it reproduces and distributes the messages of the dominant culture and set of ideals in overt and covert ways, critical media literacy is an essential 21st century skill. As such, the development of critical media literacy can be leveraged as a tool for informed behaviors and actions that lead to positive social change (Robinson, 2020) and in this instance, more specifically, Black female positive identity construction. Next, we discuss some of the complexities related to Black female identity and in the context of today's media-saturated environments.

Black female identity

Skin color (more precisely colorism) and hair texture are two obvious (visual and prevalent) contentious aesthetic issues related to Black females' identity. In fact, physical appearance seems to be the most important predictor of self-evaluation in female college and high school students (Jackson et al., 1994). Skin color and hair texture are key areas of physical appearance and of the politics related to Black women and their identity, especially as it relates to notions of beauty. Despite the longevity and pervasiveness of colorism in the United States, little is known about how messages about beauty, skin color, and hair factor into socialization messages about race (Brown et al., 2016; Lesane-Brown et al., 2008; Stevenson et al., 2002). Further, only a small amount of research has addressed types of racial socialization messages that are specifically conveyed to Black girls and young women regarding the meaning and importance of their skin color (colorism) and hair (Leonard, 2009).

By no means are we arguing that skin color and hair texture are the only complicating issues related to Black female identity that are messaged through the media, but by exploring skin-tone bias (colorism) and hair texture bias in this context, we provide an avenue for critique and disruption of dominant narratives that subjugate Black females as it relates to their identity. This also creates a space for broadening the discussion toward practical ways to help encourage positive and healthy attitudes as it relates to Black identity in females.

Colorism is a global ideology that denigrates darker skin and tightly coiled hair, two unmistakable physical traits associated with African heritage (Adams et al., 2016; Awad et al., 2014; Burke, 2008; Greene, 1994; Hill, 2002; Hunter, 2007; Patton, 2006; Thompson & Keith, 2001). The bias toward lighter skin tones among people of color describes the concept of colorism. Burke and Embrich (2008) define it as "the allocation of privilege and disadvantage according to the lightness or darkness of one's skin" (p. 17). Unlike the traditional anti-racist debate, which explores skin color prejudice in

terms of the Black V. White binary, colorism centers on the privilege extended to light skin, particularly among people of color.

This has implications for Black females as research shows that individuals with lighter skin tones receive preferential treatment in many areas of life, including education, housing, courtship and marriage, economics, and health (Herring, 2002; Hunter, 1998, 2005; Telles & Murguia, 1990). Studies conducted over decades and across multiple fields of study have demonstrated that colorism has measurable consequences for Black women in the United States (Choma & Prusacqyk, 2018; Drake & Cayton, 1945; Fischer & Shaw, 1999; Golden, 2004; Haizlip, 1994; Parham, 1989; Thomas et al., 2011). On average, women with darker skin colors have poorer mental health, physical health, self-esteem, and lower socio-economic status than their lighter skinned counterparts (Adams et al., 2016; Mathews & Johnson, 2015; Sweet et al., 2007). Further, there is evidence in the academic literature that shows a perceived greater social status for Black women with lighter complexions (Hughes & Hertel, 1990; Hunter, 1998; Hunter, 2005; Keith & Herring, 1991; Maddox & Gray, 2002). Robinson (2011) describes light skin color as a socially constructed status symbol and a "hallmark of beauty" (p. 68) while Hunter (1998) describes beauty as a kind of social capital, and this social capital/beauty serve as impetuses in the skin lightening industry.

The preference to have light skin drives the skin lightening industry, a multi-billion-dollar global industry (Glenn, 2008) and the increasingly popular skin-bleaching phenomenon (Robinson, 2011). Generally, impractical beauty ideals are illustrated in the media, song lyrics, social club acceptance, and so on. These notions demonstrate that skin color and hair texture play a significant role in how Black people are viewed by others and even how they view themselves.

The implications of skin color and hair has been documented in relation to 'light skinned with good hair' (Snider, 2011, p. 204) and this is significant because hair has been particularly meaningful for women of African descent. Historically, hairstyles in Africa have been considered as a reflection of a person's social status, political or religious affiliation, age, marital status, and sexuality (Rosado, 2004). Today, people of African descent in the United States still place much emphasis on hair maintenance and on what their hair says about their identity. Yeoman (2014) reported that marketing firm, Mintel, suggested that the value of hair care products for Black consumers in 2014 was worth approximately $774 million, and that was not inclusive of other popularly used products such as wigs, hair extensions, and weaves. Further, Opiah (2014) noted that if these and other components of the Black hair industry were included, these estimates could reach some half trillion dollars. Byrd and Solomon (2004) suggested that, in contemporary society, Black women still spend a lot of time and money on beautifying their hair in order to achieve social acceptance. This kind of desired acceptance is also seen in the professional environment.

Natural hair, unless recently and still in many workplaces, has been considered to be unprofessional, unattractive, and unfeminine, and is associated with various negative socio-professional outcomes (e.g., lower incomes, harsher workplace condition (Greene et al., 2000; Hall et al., 2012; Mic, 2018; Thompson, 2009; White, 2005). Tate (1983) stated, "Sisters, tell me [...] that when they go out for jobs they straighten their hair because if they go in with their hair natural or braided, they probably won't get the job" (Tate, 1983, p. 141, as cited in Collins, 2000, p. 91). This shows that Black women are concerned because they perceive that they may experience discrimination in professional and social settings depending on their skin tone and hair texture. This problem has historical roots dating back to the 1700s when Black hair was likened to wool and compared to animals (Byrd & Tharp, 2001) underpinning the exclusionary and racist messages related to the demonizing description of Black hair.

A conceptual framework for positive black female identity

Black feminist theory, critical media literacy, and critical consciousness provide a useful starting point for critiquing and theorizing the ways in which the identity of Black females is shaped and narrated in public discourse and through the media. Critical media literacy is a critical literacy or set of skills that can be developed to support Black females with the necessary tools to build a positive identity. Herein, we have situated our above discussion on the ways in which media and social constructions of beauty, especially related to skin color and hair texture, can shape the identity development of Black females to develop a conceptual framework for the ways in which critical media literacy can lead to the process of critical consciousness and ultimately positive identity construction for Black females.

A Conceptual Framework for Positive Black Female Identity (See Figure 2) is a framework that represents a cultural-ecological perspective of Black female identity

formation (Ogbu, 1981) that therefore takes hold of the intersectional identities of race, class, gender, and sexuality of Black females (Allen, 2016; Collins & Bilge, 2016) in tandem with the imperative of critical consciousness development. It is via this perspective that Black females can interrogate negative messages and inaccurate portrayals of Black females in the media through critical media literacy.

Critical media literacy serves as a tool that supports the deconstruction and rejection of inaccurate images, personas, and caricature representations of Black females. It serves as a filtering mechanism that can be utilized to examine a myriad of media outlets including films, TV, radio, Internet, magazines, newspapers, and social media, and to reconceptualize and reframe the Black female narrative.
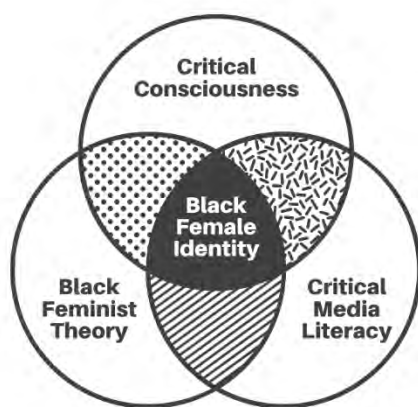

Figure 2. A conceptual framework for positive Black Female Identity

Thus, critical media literacy serves as a conduit by which Black females can be ever aware of how to best 1) *decode*, 2) *analyze*, and 3) *deconstruct* the negative and unfruitful messages perpetuated through media outlets. Thereafter, Black females can utilize the skills and mindsets developed through critical media literacy to a) *Reject* and negate inaccurate, racist, and sexist portraits of Black females including negative narratives of skin tone and hair bias, b) *Replace* the negative and stereotypical images and representations with opposing viewpoints and positive representations of Black females including celebrating the hybridity of skin tones and hair textures amongst Black females, c) *Reframe* and redefine positive images and definitions of Black girl/womanhood as it relates to her identity including skin tone and hair texture.

As her critical media literacy skills are sharpened, so is her self-perception. She will progress to higher levels of critical consciousness: from semi-intransitive, to naive, to a place of true critical consciousness. At the onset of higher levels of critical consciousness, Black female identity can be positively constructed and developed, resulting in strong self- concept, self-esteem, and self-empowerment.

Teachers should consider early implementation of The Critical Media Literacy Framework for Positive Black Female Identity. All students will benefit from the framework, but we are most concerned with counteracting the negative impact that imaging has on Black female identity formation. As early as preschool, teachers should show, discuss, and promote positive imaging through books, play, and media (including cartoons, games, and movies). This process aligns with Piaget's view of intellectual growth as a process of adaptation (adjustment) to the world (McLeod, 2018). Teachers can use this time to foster diversity and begin the process of teaching students how to *decode* the messaging they receive in school and in this world.

Just as curricula builds upon itself, so does the teaching and implementation of this framework. Once students receive ample practice with decoding and they progress in age and maturity, they can move forward with *analyzing* and *deconstructing* those images and media. By fourth grade students have learned to *reject* negative imaging and begin *replacing* and *reframing* those images with positive ones. By the time students have entered middle school, they may have had repeated and sustaining practice utilizing The Critical Media Literacy Framework for Positive Identity Formation; young Black females being the prime benefactor. When the framework is implemented during the elementary school years, students will enter middle school more aware of their personal identities just as many of them are entering Erikson's psychosocial stage of identity versus role confusion (McLeod, 2018); therefore, having a lasting, positive effect on their identity formation.

This framework in and of itself cannot eradicate all negative messages and images that Black females face. We acknowledge that there are several other environmental factors such as home, school, peer-influence, parental relationships, and socioeconomic status that have a bearing on the identity of Black females. We have conceptualized a framework for the ways in which positive Black female identity can be constructed. Through the development of critical media literacy skills, the development of critical consciousness can lead to a stronger self-concept, self-esteem, and self-ideal for Black females.

Discussion and conclusion

Downing and Roush (1985) described a model of feminist identity development for women, partially based on Cross' (1971) theory of Black identity development. Like Cross' model, this model involves various stages through which women must "acknowledge, then struggle with, and repeatedly work through their feelings about the prejudice and discrimination they experience as women in order to achieve authentic and positive feminist identity" (p. 695). By drawing parallels between the identity development stages for women and for Blacks, we outline stages that result in a move from a passive acceptance to a consolidated feminist identity that brings about commitment to meaningful action. It is this meaningful action that we propose is relational to the concept of critical consciousness, as we suggest can come through developing critical media literacy skills. The implications of a positive feminist identity as described by Downing and Roush (1985) and critical consciousness, developed through critical media literacy has several implications, especially as it relates to having high self-esteem, which is the central component of having a positive or strong self-concept, particularly for Black women.

We understand that Black women are not a part of a monolithic entity. However, situating them in the context of the broader culture we find that they exist as a marginalized, sexualized, and fetishized group. By specifically focusing on how Black women are portrayed in the media and what messages they learn, starting early in life, especially as it relates to the shade of their skin and texture of their hair, we can engage in a broader discourse that challenges these notions and assists in the development of a positive identity for Black females and even other women of color. We argue, having a positive identity development experience results in a positive self-concept. As Baumeister (1997) described, "Self-concept refers to the totality of inferences that a person has made about himself or herself" (p. 681). Judge et al. (1998) explain,

[I]ndividuals with a positive self-concept evaluate themselves positively, and are likely to make favorable inferences about themselves and be accepting of their identity. Children form the basic elements of their self-concept very early in life and, although changes in self-concept do occur, the initial formation of self-concept probably has lasting consequences for the individual. (p. 168)

This positive self-concept is important and the way it can be developed is through offering critique to the current Black women identity politics discourse. By critiquing current Black women identity politics, we are rejecting their stereotyped representations in the media and investing in more positive typologies that place those representations at the forefront of the public sphere.

As Black women occupy these marginalized spaces, they are faced with questions related to their legitimacy and worth. Developing critical consciousness through critical media literacy has implications that are far reaching. Since meaning making and negotiation of identity done through a critical lens result in a deeper level awareness of oppression and other kinds of injustice, some of which tend to be portrayed in covert ways through the media and popular culture, on a global basis, it can assist males in developing a greater understanding of the need for them to be supportive of Black women in light of the challenges they face.

Additionally, for Black women, an active resistance to the prejudices and challenges they face may be related to positive mental health, through the notion of positive self-concept and self-esteem (Allen, 2016; Ramseur, 1991). This is important in terms of one's social and cognitive development (Wigfield et al., 2002) and in the overall perceptions that African American females and women will develop in relation to themselves, their agency, efficacy, and self-esteem.

Our bodies serve as the vehicles by which we demonstrate some aspect of our identity and our attitudes towards them reflect our ideologies and even how we position ourselves in contrast to each other. As academics, facilitators of learning, parents, colleagues, and anyone interested in the well-being and healthy identity development of Black females, we can all support the development of critical thinking, critical consciousness, and critical media literacy skills to address various complex issues related to the racist and biased ideologies of skin color and hair texture. Taking an anti-racist and anti-sexist standpoint can lead to empowerment, equity, and social justice for Black females. Moreover, we posit that a framework for positive Black female identity formation can be nurtured at the intersection of Black feminist theory, critical consciousness, and critical media literacy.

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