The Black Film Boom of the Early 2000s:
A Critical Analysis of the Depiction of Race,
Class, Gender and Educational Access

by

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ABSTRACT

Media is a powerful tool used to reflect and affect change in society. Within this study, a brief historical context is provided of roles African Americans in film were traditionally cast in. By employing Critical Race Theory (CRT), cultural capital, and NewBlackMan frameworks, I analyzed how Black male film directors and producers depicted race, class, gender within the Black film boom of the early 2000s. I examined the depictions of educational outcomes of the characters within films utilized in this study. My results display progress that still needs to be made in breaking down traditional gender roles, how race needed to be more critically examined, and how educational outcomes of the characters were not realistic. I also provide suggestions for conducting media studies through the discipline of education in the future.
DEDICATION

To my family: Thanks for all of your love and support!
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Chapter 1

Study Overview

This Master’s thesis was a study focusing on Black male representation in Black films. In this study, I reviewed films written and directed by Black men, and that had a majority Black cast. In this film analysis, I will explore how race, class and gender were depicted in the Black film boom of the 1990s and of the early 2000s. Within the study, I also sought to discover if educational outcomes of Black male and female characters were realistically depicted. The purpose of the study was to identify how media, specifically film has addressed issues regarded to race, class and gender and suggest changes to future film studies done in this area. Specifically, this study addressed two questions. First, how were race, class which is defined as the attainment of career success, and gender depicted within the Black film boom of the early 2000s? Second, were educational experiences among Black men and women portrayed accurately?

As is the case with many entertainment industries, the Black film industry has experienced many peaks and valleys. There was a boom in the Black film industry during the early 1990s and just a few years later, the number of films targeting Black audiences decreased significantly. In the early 2000s however, Black film production increased again. Taking the place of” hood films”, which

1 Although Black films usually refers to movies that were directed by African Americans, for the purpose of this study, I am defining the phrase as films that have primarily all Black casts and Black target audiences.
are defined as coming of age stories, usually focused on young Black men in urban neighborhoods (Fisher, 2006), the new millennium marked a new genre in Black cinema. Directors such as Malcolm D. Lee, Rick Famuyiwa, Kwyn Bader and Booker T. Mattison gained popularity and took the place of directors such as John Singleton, The Hughes Brothers and The Hudlin Brothers. One website, Blackfilm.com, an online forum for filmmakers, scholars and organizations to present information about diversity in filmmaking, comments regularly on cinematic trends. In 1999, Blackfilm.com commented on this thematic change in Black cinema noting: “This month blackfilm.com celebrates this New Generation of filmmakers as they bring us some new style. Thanks for bringing us more than the old-school, gang-bangin in the hood flicks” (Metcalf, 1999). The cinematic shift that occurred at the turn of the twenty-first century is a focal point of my study.

**Hood Versus Buppie Films**

During the 1990s there was a boom of films aimed toward Black audiences, depicting urban life, and primarily written and directed by Black men. Films made during this period brought to light the frustration and anger felt in urban communities while allowing Black actors opportunities to work during a time when few roles outside of playing a sidekick to leading White actors were available (Guerrero, 1993; Collins, 2005).

The Black film boom of the early 1990s also came in the wake of the Rodney King beating and acquittal of four White police officers. The decision,
made by an all-white jury, caused a public outcry and provoked fury in the predominantly black neighborhoods of south-central Los Angeles. According to BBC On This Day: “Fierce rioting has broken out in Los Angeles following the decision by a jury to acquit four white police officers accused of beating black motorist Rodney King” LA in flames, 1992. The outrage within the Black community poured into the streets of Los Angeles, California. Guerrero (1993) brings the point into perspective by stating, “for the most part, black rage has lost its political focus in this violent apartheid environment; it has become an internalized form of self-destruction expressed as gang and drug warfare” (p. 159). How, then, was this outrage translated into film? Fischer (2006) asserted hood films added great depth to the image of violent black youth that appeared in the news. In some ways, hood films explained conditions and ways of life in segregated urban communities to the mainstream, while situating viewers in the relative comfort of a movie theater. Although various literatures focus on the “hood era”, there is a lack of literature that focuses on the dynamic shift in thematic issues in the films of the 2000s period that I describe as the “Buppie era”. Buppie is a reference to the Black version of yuppie; young upwardly mobile urban professional. My study aims to be one of the first film analyses to focus on Black male representation during the hood and Buppie transition eras.

Argument

There is an ongoing debate about whether media reflects or affects change in the world. Throughout this study, I argue that both actions happen concurrently. It is important for media to serve as an educational catalyst,
showcasing the issues and conditions presently affecting Black communities. However, media can also be used as a way to highlight changes that still need to occur. One reason films written and produced during the hood era (1990s) gained popularity was because they captured the frustration felt within urban communities (Guerrero, 1993; Fischer, 2006). Films produced in the Buppie era (early 2000s), however tried to combat negative stereotypes by focusing on images of positive Black men and power couples. Both hood and buppie eras failed to capture a balanced portrayal of Black America. For instance, hood films focused on issues of Black masculinity and overlooked women and social class. The buppie films emphasize upward mobility but fall short of exposing knowledge issues of race (Harris, 2006; Edmondson, 2007).

Current data released with regards to educational advancement within Black communities tells another story however. In the summary from data gathered at a four day dialogue hosted by The College Board to discuss educational challenges that are facing minority males today, a Third America was described:

“This is an America that is almost totally ignored by mainstream society. This America is often captured in popular television documentaries and newspaper stories and includes frightening statistics about unemployment, poverty and high rates of incarceration…These men (men of color) now live outside the margins of our economic, social and cultural systems. They are the byproduct of many societal failures-including the failure of our nation’s schools” (College Board Advocacy & Policy Center, 2010).

Data provided at the conference demonstrated that only 26 percent of Blacks hold at least an associate degree. Black women are outperforming Black
men by 9 percent with regards to graduation rates from high school, and the high school dropout rate is almost three times as high for Black men as it is for Black women. The College Board Advocacy & Policy Center, (2010) also listed factors that contribute to the low retention rate of young minority men and things such as lack of role models, searching for respect outside of the educational world, the loss of cultural memory in shaping minority male identity and pride, challenges of poverty, and community pressures were among the issues panelists felt affected this particular group of men.

With regards to young Black men, some questioned if desegregation of schools really served to benefit young Black men in the end. Since the teaching profession is comprised of mostly middle-class White women (according to the National Center for Educational Statistics only approximately 6.5% of the teaching force are Black), various scholars question if this has led to students of color being more harshly punished. Having a lack of role models in the school setting has led to a disconnect between this group of students with their teachers, and at times, teachers have not been competently trained to teach this population of students (Ladson-Billings, 1999; Ladson-Billings, 2000; Lyons & Chesley, 2004; Milner & Howard, 2004).

The projection that the youth are becoming more ethnically diverse as an older White population starts reaching retirement, showcases the fact that it is not acceptable that the high school graduation rates for Black men have remained stagnant at approximately 86 percent (this percentage includes those who obtain a GED). The low graduation rates illustrate that the quality and access to
education for young Black men has not proved to be equitable (College Board Advocacy & Policy Center, 2010). Also, scholars such as Shawn Harper (2008) acknowledge Black male enrollment rates at the collegic level are alarmingly low as well. According to Harper (2008), 4.3% of Black males were enrolled at the collegic level in 2002, the same percentage as in 1976.

Within both eras, these movies do not take into account the intersectionality that race, class and gender play in regards to educational success (Manatu, 2003). My thesis highlights thematic limitations which occur within these films, and I suggest alternative ways films can seek to be multi-dimensional with their message.

**Methodology**

For the purposes of this study, I analyzed films that had a Black target audience, a majority Black cast, and were written and directed by Black men during the late 1990s and early 2000s. I chose movies that were written and directed by Black men to hone in on how they depicted the turn of the century. I was able to analyze whether the writers successfully combated traditional stereotypes of African American within movies, and if portrayals were accurate with what was currently going on in Black communities at the time. The films analyzed in this study include:

*The Best Man* (1999) written and directed by Malcolm D. Lee

*The Wood* (1999) written by Rick Famuyiwa and Todd Boyd, directed by Rick Famuyiwa
Two Can Play That Game (2001) written and directed by Mark Brown

The Brothers (2001) written and directed by Gary Hardwick

Brown Sugar (2002) written by Michael Elliot and directed by Rick Famuyiwa

These films highlight thematically what movie writers were focusing on during the turn of the twenty-first century. Although some of the films incorporated information or scenes from true life events, all of these films were ultimately fiction. These films were also not based around existing books.

This qualitative study employed a textual analysis. O’Shaughnessy and Stadler (2005) discuss methodologies that can be used when analyzing various forms of media. Textual analysis methodology originated from the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS) in the United Kingdom at the University of Birmingham (“The Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (1963 - 2002),” n.d.). CCCS was created in 1964 by Richard Hoggart followed by director and well known scholar Stuart Hall, who is known for his work within cultural studies. Hall declared, “there is something at stake in cultural studies, in a way that I think, and hope, is not exactly true of many other important intellectual and critical practices” (Hall, 1992, p. 278). Although CCCS closed in 2002, CCCS brought together approaches from Marxist, feminist, structural linguistic and critical race theory, to study representations of groups within media and the affects this had on the audience. By utilizing a textual analysis, I viewed how certain events were interpreted through film. I discovered how accurately certain eras and events were depicted through film, making this method ideal for this study.
Other common methods employed while conducting film studies are content analysis and audience studies. These methods allow the researcher to measure what is being interpreted within media. For example, one would be able to measure how often women playing sports are shown in television. This form of analysis relies heavily upon quantitative methods. While a content analysis can be a useful tool for some studies, I found that textual analysis was best for this study since I focused more on how certain themes were depicted within film.

Another common lens is an audience study. Through this method, one is able to determine how an audience is interpreting the message within media that is being viewed. The goal of this research was not to answer how viewers are interpreting these films, but to critically view how certain messages to be portrayed on screen.

While analyzing the buppie era films, these highlight the top earning or “Aristocrat” (Dyson, 2005) group of young professional Blacks. These movies inform White America what the Black elite portray as the “correct” message to be captured about African Americans. The films were viewed at least four times to gain a deeper understanding of the characters and their different situations. It was important for me to draft movie reviews for each film, so I could have a written account of what took place in each film and to make sure important scenes were not missed or discarded. Once the first phase of the study was completed, a table was created based upon my research questions, which allowed me to properly categorize each film and providing the time in minute and second format when the example took place. Categories used in coding the films were: scenes involving Black and White characters, relationships, male friendship, how Black
masculinity is displayed, sexually charged comments, gender stereotypes, Black women and sexuality, education used to advance life opportunities and cultural, aspirational and navigational capital examples. The codes were developed through grounded theory and developed over time. In the beginning of my study, the codes were broader and became more specific over the course of my analysis. These categories were chosen as they would help provide examples in each film of race, class, gender and education.

**Theoretical Frameworks Relied Upon in Study**

I used a critical race theory framework to interpret the depiction of events within urban communities outside a majoritarian viewpoint (Chapman, 2008, p. 158). Critical Race Theory (CRT) was developed out of Critical Legal Studies (CLS) in the 1970s with the work of Derrick Bell. Ladson-Billings (1998) acknowledges CRT an outgrowth of a separate entity from Critical Legal Studies (CLS). CRT argues that cultural experiences and contexts need to be considered rather than merged with the dominant discourse. Counterstories are crucial in CRT scholarship because they offer alternatives to the grand narrative. When navigating within a CRT framework, allowing different cultural narratives is pertinent. Only through different voices and viewpoints can narratives from marginalized groups of people be taken into account. CRT also recognizes that racism is common in society. By utilizing a CRT framework within this study allowed me to bring critical awareness to the readers of the depiction of issues
related to race, class, gender, and educational outcomes of African Americans in film.

A second framework I drew from was social/cultural capital theory. As I studied the role class played within the five films I found Yosso’s work on capital extremely beneficial. Yosso (2005) critiques the traditional definition of capital as it does not take into account the various forms of capital communities of color possess. Minorities are often seen as lacking the norms and cultural capital needed for social mobility.

The third framework utilized was developed by Mark Anthony Neal (2006). This framework allowed me to critically view the representation of Black masculinity/bodies and the interaction of Black men and women within these films. Neal’s NewBlackMan offers the theoretical framework necessary to move away from a limited and somewhat outdated perspective into one that reflects Black men in the Black community today. Neal’s notion of a “new Black man” seeks to deconstruct the Black community’s patriarchy, while embracing the diversity in the present Black community and uses knowledge derived from the hip hop generation. Neal (2006) wrote:

“NewBlackMan is not so much about conceiving of a more “positive” version of black masculinity…but rather a concept that acknowledges the many complex aspects, often contradictory, that make up a progressive and meaningful black masculinity. The words “new,” “black,” and “man,” are literally scrunched together here to reinforce the idea that myriad identities exist in the same black male bodies: in my case the thug-nigga intellectual, the homeboy-feminist, the recovering homophobe, the doting daddy of two brown-skinned little girls, the loving husband, and the God-fearing thirty-something black man who damn sure appreciates a fine ass on a woman.” (p. 29).
My thesis researches how movies written and directed by Black men released in the early 2000s have changed thematically to the films that were released during the hood films boom. These three frameworks allowed me to critically view the depiction of race, class, and gender in film within the buppie era, and suggest changes to future film studies.
Chapter 2

Introduction

Race, class and gender are all major tenets that intersect one another. While some film analyses may focus on one or two of these points, this study explored all three. The first chapter of my thesis provided an overview of the study and introduced the research questions that guided this study. The first research question explored how race, class and gender were depicted in the Black film boom of the early 2000s (buppie film era). Then I questioned whether educational outcomes of the Black male and female characters were depicted realistically. This chapter begins by first providing the reader with historical context of Blacks and entertainment. Then I will review scholarly work that is closely aligned to my study. I then state what currently stands within the literature, and what changes still need to be made with regards to this topic. I also demonstrate how my research is useful in bridging the gap between film and educational studies.

Blacks in Entertainment

*Sambo was, in his lengthy stay in American culture, the enduring comic image. Mirth and merriment were his trademark in a society in which entertainment came to assume major proportions in the lives of the people* (Boskin, 1986, p. 4).

Film is one medium to gain awareness about historical or current issues. In this study, I hope to increase awareness about the depiction of race, class,
gender and educational outcomes within Black film. The roles that Blacks had in the entertainment industry were limited due to the fact that Blacks were typecast into certain roles. (Mapp, 1972, p. 30-31) created a list of nineteen stereotypical roles Blacks were cast in within film and entertainment. Jackson II (2006) also referred to these roles within his research. These were the roles:

1. The savage African
2. The happy slave
3. The devoted servant
4. The corrupt politician
5. The irresponsible citizen
6. The petty thief
7. The social delinquent
8. The vicious criminal
9. The sexual superman
10. The superior athlete
11. The unhappy non-White
12. The natural-born cook
13. The natural-born musician
14. The perfect entertainer

15. The superstitious churchgoer

16. The chicken and watermelon eater

17. The razor and knife “toter”

18. The uninhibited expressionist


One of the most famous Black figures in entertainment was Sambo, a character that originated from Helen Bannerman’s child tale *Little Black Sambo*, written in 1900 about an East Indian boy who outwitted tigers. Others believe the name Sambo originated from a Latin American place name.

“In 1501 Rodrigo de Bastidas reached the Puerto de Zamba along the Caribbean coast of Columbia. As a nickname among black people, Sambo suggests an African origin, including the Congolese nzambu, a type of monkey; the Foulah sambo, “uncle”; the Hausa sambo, “second son”; or Bantu samba, “to give comfort” (Herbst, 1997, p. 201).

To examine the history of Black men in film, I first explored the history of Blacks in entertainment. The name Sambo has its roots in African and Hispanic culture and in the 1800s the name was used to refer to people of mixed ancestry i.e. Black/Indian, Black/Mulattoes. There were five main portraits of Sambo:

1850s - Plantation Darkies

1860s – Minstrel Man

1890s-1900s – Negro Jokes
1920s – Postcard Buffoon

1930s – Movie Chauffeur

Boskin (1986) states that Sambo was what Walter Lipmann described as the “perfect stereotype.” Although in the 1960s-70s the Black Power movement had the name Sambo eliminated from popular culture, this character would be forever embedded in American society never to be forgotten. What was it that made this character so unforgettable? Sambo afforded White audiences with slapstick humor and comedy. Smith (2008) noted: “the laughing Black male was used as proslavery propaganda that implied slaves were happy with their brutal plantation existence” (Smith, 2008, p. 252). His buffoonery ways were what was conceived as an accurate representation of Black life. Blacks being placed into a role of that as entertainer started with the journey during the slave trade. On the ship to pass time and also to serve as a form of communication during the long trip, slaves were brought on deck to entertain the shippers through dance and sports. Holland (2002) described how dance and sports was used as a way to exercise the slaves, “Forced to obey their tormentors, those in irons were ordered to stand up and make whatever motions they could…These movements were used as a basic form of exercise for slaves on board crowed slave ships” (p. 49). One of the things that seemed to perplex Whites was the fact that Blacks could have such fun even though they were enslaved. Because of this, Black life became somewhat of a novelty to Whites. There was this sort of fascination from Whites who would hear laughter coming from the slave quarters and who would go peer at what they were engaged in to see what could possibly be so entertaining that they could
have that much fun. Humor and laughter among slaves became an important and therapeutic way to soothe their anguish and cope with their anger (Carpio, 2008). Although some of the slaves would be beckoned to the main house to entertain the master and on many occasions the guests, that was the only time Whites were accustomed to seeing slaves in an entertainment aspect. What was interesting was how bothersome it was to Whites to hear slaves laughing and enjoying themselves in their private time. Boskin (1986, 1997) asserted it was the laugh, the raucous laugh, and the energy that propelled it, that most jolted Whites. Of all the slave’s characteristics, this appeared to have been the most perplexing and extremely grating.

Childs (2009) discussed how Whiteness itself was placed as a polar opposite to Blackness to ensure that Blackness was seen as something to be feared. Harris (1993) stated, “Whiteness as property is derived from the deep historical roots of systematic white supremacy that has given rise to definitions of group identity predicated on the racial subordination of the ‘other,’ and that has reified expectations of continued white privilege…” (p. 1). In the North, especially in New York, Blacks really became known for their various forms of entertainment. There were even advertisements for skills such as being a great whistler and it was thought to be a fact that a horse or ox would not respond until they heard the whistle of the Black driver. The Catherine Market which was a well known space for trading and for having boxers and jockeys would often be filled with Blacks in the streets singing and dancing for the White patronages (Lhamon, 1998).
Black inferiority was later translated into minstrel shows. Minstrel shows, in the original form were Whites in blackface and it was their depiction of Black life since Whites considered themselves experts on the Black way of life. It was important for the shows to portray Blacks in the stereotypical “happy slave” routine and usually bumbling around with no real direction. Boskin (1986) stated components needed for a successful minstrel show were: shuffling, buffoonery, and low comedy.

When Blacks began acting in movie roles, they were typecast into five major roles: The Tom, The Coon, The Tragic Mulatto, The Mammy and The Black Buck. Bogle (1992) described the interactions between Tom and Massa as “hearty, submissive, stoic, generous, selfless, and oh-so-very kind” (p. 6). Because this still fit into the stereotype of the “happy slave” white audiences grew to love Tom. The Uncle Tom role refers to “a culturally unconscious, submissive individual who does not identify with any Black community, but instead prefers to see himself as a White-identified, cultureless, raceless, independent American citizen who can achieve the American dream without attaching himself to a Black community as long as he has God” (Jackson II, 2006, p. 32). He first made his debut in 1903 in the movie Uncle Tom’s Cabin. As was common in this era, Tom was played by an unknown white actor in blackface (Jackson II, 2004). During the silent movie era, The Uncle Tom emerged as a role for Black men with the focus being on the “Good Negro” who was forever faithful to Massa. Uncle Tom’s Cabin was released again in 1927 were Uncle Tom was played by the first Black male actor to make it to the film; James B. Lowe (Bogle, 1992; Smith,
1997; Butters, 2002). Some Blacks hoped that since Tom was being played by an actual Black man that it would add depth and character to the role, but Lowe still came off as the faithful servant to the White massa. White critics loved his portrayal as noted in press release sent out by Universal in regards to their colored star:

“James B. Lowe has made history. A history that reflects only credit to the Negro race, not only because he has given the “Uncle Tom” character a new slant, but because of his exemplary conduct with the Universal company. They look upon Lowe at the Universal Studio as a living black god…Of the directors, critics, artists, and actors who have seen James Lowe work at the studio there are none who will not say he is the most suited of all men for the part of “Tom.” Those who are religious say that a heavenly power brought him to Universal and all predict a most marvelous future and worldwide reputation for James B. Lowe” (Bogle, 1992, p. 6).

Due to such rave reviews, Lowe was sent to England to promote the film, making him the first Black actor to be sent on a promotional tour by his studio. While the role of Tom was to be faithful and loyal to Whites, the role of the coon was to provide humor and buffoonery and to keep Whites entertained.

There were two major types of coons: the buffoon and the pickaninny. The four main characters identified by Bogle (1996) are: the pickaninny, Rastus, Stepin Fetchit, and Uncle Remus. Pickaninny when looked up in Britannica online is described as often offensive: a black child (n.d.) In Encyclopedia Britannica online. Retrieved from http://www.britannica.com). These were the first roles for Black child actors. The buffoon and pickaninny roles emerged in the early 1900s and were usually not speaking roles. The children were in the film to exhibit buffoonish type behavior which usually included their eyes rolling
into the back of their heads, “whose hair stood on end with the least excitement,
and whose antics were pleasant and diverting” (Bogle, 1996, p. 7). Not only was
the pickaninny famous within film, pictures of the pickaninny could be seen on
advertisements, posters, and postcards. Usually, in that form, the pickaninny was
photographed eating watermelon with huge red lips. By far, the most famous
example of a pickaninny was Farina. He was a small Black boy with wide eyes,
and his hair was usually styled in twisted plaits all over his head. He made his
grand appearance on the Little Rascals, and was “unwittingly the butt of all the
kids’ jokes, so he would simply laugh when they laughed” (Jackson II, 2006, p.
27).

In reference to the coon, the most widely recognized Black fool was
Stepin Fetchit, born Theodore Monroe Andrew Perry. His name was derived
from the act of Step and Fetch It and he made his debut in 1927 in the film In Old
Kentucky. An Ebony article published in 1971 titled, Whatever Happened to
Lincoln (Stepin Fetchit) Perry?, brought to light that Theodore Perry (Stepin
Fetchit) is known to be the first Black millionaire actor. Although cast in
stereotypical roles during his time, he has been hailed as a Black film pioneer who
opened the door for Black actors in the film industry today (Clark, 2005). Bogle
(1992) describes what made him so popular among white audiences was his
ability to play the role of the lazy, no-account, good-for-nothing, forever-in-hot-
water, natural-born comedians role that was not quite captured in the Uncle Tom
role. As Bogle (1992) states, “He popularized the dim-witted, tongue-tied
stammer, and the phenomenal slow-lazyman shuffle. He was so convincing that
audiences actually thought he could not run” (p. 39). Clark (2005) adds to Fetchit’s character analysis:

“Fetchit’s real power came from denying the audience access to his soul... Fetchit, for the first time, made many whites aware that there was a black man’s soul even to be denied. The African-American audience understood Fetchit’s masterful trick. They knew the existence of the secret and separate self” (p. 3).

The tragic mulatto is defined as a woman of mixed ancestry usually Black and White is considered tragic because although you are light enough to maybe “pass” for White, you are still viewed as a Black person. She suffers greatly in life as she is not accepted really by either race and she must decide within herself if she would be better off rejecting her Blackness and try and pass as a White woman (Jackson II, 2006). This role was introduced to the big screen in 1912 in the movie The Debt. The most notable woman who played the role of the tragic mulatto was Nina Mae McKinney who was first introduced in 1929 in the movie Hallelujah. In this role, McKinney created movements that would become stock in trade for black leading ladies: “the hands on the hips and the hard-as-nails brassy voice” (Bogle, 1992, p. 33). Before she began acting in independently produced all-black movies, her skin would sometimes be darkened for roles to make White audiences understand the tragedy of her mixed heritage. Since Black women were given roles in film, the few small parts that they could play were reserved for light-skinned Black women as White audiences were intrigued to watch “sassy” Black women whom they could sympathize with since their lives would have been much easier had they not been plagued by their Blackness. However, one of the most classic and widely recognized films telling the story of
the tragic mulatto was *Imitation of Life* (Sirk & Fisher, 1999; Staggs, 2009).

Originally released in 1934, the most popular version of this film is the 1959 screenplay starring Lana Turner and Juanita Moore. *Imitation of Life* has been hailed as one of the 25 most important films on race (The 25 Most Important Films on Race, 2008).

The mammy as described by Jackson II (2006) was a way for Whites to recreate nostalgia for the antebellum south. In many ways, her character closely resembled that of Tom for she was loyal to massa.

“By definition, a mammy was a heavy-set complacent Black woman servant, who often was a maid or cook in addition to a surrogate mother of a White family’s kids. She usually wore an apron and a cotton dress that came down to her ankles, and her hair was always pulled back and tied...her character could often be seen embracing next to her bosom a weeping individual who had expressed some tribulation. One never got the sense the mammy had any problems of her own, but only ones inherited from others toward whom she was helplessly empathetic” (Jackson II, 2006, p. 38-39).

Visibly, Hattie McDaniel was the greatest recognized mammy who made her debut in *Gone with the Wind* (1939). She became the first Black to win an Academy Award for Best Supporting Actress. Mammy usually is cast as religious and very superstitious and resembles the Uncle Tom character in her undying loyalty to her massa. The image of the mammy is still present today with images such as Aunt Jemima and Ms. Butterworth.

The fifth and final role I will discuss is the Black Buck/Brute. This image became White America’s worst nightmare. Bogle (1992) showcases the minimal but distinct differences between the buck and the brute. “The black brute was a
barbaric black out to raise havoc…bucks are always big, baadddd niggers, oversexed and savage, violent and frenzied as they lust for white flesh”. Brought to life by the movie *The Birth of a Nation (1915)*, Griffith created a film that showcased his bigotry and the message that there can only be order in the world when Whites are in control. Racking in record-breaking revenue, (to this day the exact amount of money this movie made is still unknown), this movie told the story of “the Old South, the Civil War, the Reconstruction period, and the emergence of the Ku Klux Klan” (Bogle, 1992, p. 10). However, after the Civil War ended, Jackson II (2006) points out how the Ku Klux Klan began lynching Black women and men killing around 120 people between the year 1900 and 1901p#. The role of the Buck, Gus was filled by a tall dark-skinned, athletically built Black male who the audience never really sees donning a shirt throughout the entire film. His goal is that to steal the White woman away and rape her as he has no control over his sexual desires.

“He showcased two major fears of White men: first, theft of his woman by a maniacal, heathenish, and inherently violent Black male body, and second, the possibility that she might be masochistically excited by his sexual nature and accept him despite his flaws, which might lead eventually to miscegenated offspring, hence defying the code of White racial purity” (Jackson II, 2006, p. 41).

Have Black film writers/directors been able to step outside of these traditional roles that Blacks have been cast in and frame Black actors in a different light?
Spatial Use in Hood Films

Hood films have been categorized as the genre of movies released during the early 1990s that served as a coming of age story about young Black urban males dealing with their environment. Fisher (2006) defined hood films as “any film that emphasized life on the street. The content is specific to urban environments. These films are overwhelmingly male oriented, often telling the story of gang members and low-level drug dealers” (p. 9). These groups of films were usually filmed in areas such as South Central, Watts, Flatbush, Brooklyn and Harlem. Produced by young Black men, the message was usually surrounding topics such as police brutality, drugs and gang violence. However, by the mid 1990s, the popularity of movies surrounding this theme seemed to have come to an end (Antonio, 2002). Because this genre was so popular during its time, many scholars have studied hood films to uncover how these films differed from Blaxpolitation films, and to determine the reason hood films garnered so much popularity among mainstream America. Massood (1996) argued that hood films were appealing to audiences because the “gangsta” rap was crossing over, and because the films highlighted issues surrounding inner city communities. Because of this sudden highlighting of the hood, Massood (1996) studied the aspect and history of city space for Black communities, discussing how most hood films during this era “placed their narratives within the specific geographic boundaries of the hood” (p. 85).

Her study covered the beginning of the emergence of the city as an important space within Black lives dating back to the 1920s. This was during the
Harlem Renaissance era where Harlem was seen as the Black cultural center. This was described by Massood as “a city within a city” (p. 86). While at its peak, Harlem was the center of Black creative thoughts and ideas, which created the city inside of New York City. However, during the Depression and after, Harlem became known as a city of despair and poverty. Another large city portrayed in hood films is Compton. Sides (2004) discussed how commonly held beliefs pertaining to certain urban cities today are promoted through music and film even if the information is not particularly true. With the example of Compton, many view the city as urban; primarily Black populated, and dilapidated. However, this was not always the case, and as of today this is still not entirely true.

Compton is a city commonly used in different hood films, and is portrayed as an all Black city, and extremely dangerous. However, beginning in the 1920s through the 1950s, Compton was primarily an all white city, and was slowly becoming integrated by middle class Black families. Blacks as a whole viewed Compton as a city to obtain employment and live a peaceful existence. The median income of Blacks living within Compton was twice that of those living within Watts (Sides, 2004). Because of the city’s reputation in the 1950s and even the 1960s, Sides (2004) noted that Black families living in the neighboring cities of South Central and Watts resented Black families that lived within Compton, feeling as if they had left the poorer Blacks behind. One Watts resident commented that “our middle-class Negroes who move out to Compton…don’t care about us” (p. 590). After the Watts riots, however, Compton started to
experience White flight from the neighborhood which caused businesses to close down. Sides (2004) noted “Although the unemployment rate remained much lower than neighboring Watts and Willowbrook, it (Compton) crept from 8.7 to 10 percent for black men between 1960 to 1970” (p. 593). High unemployment rates and high property taxes were the beginning of the decline of Compton in the 1970s. While no longer living in a city that was considered middle class, Black teenagers began to voice their frustration through street gangs.

Use of Hip Hop in Films

One key element in studies focused around spatial use, is the employment of hip hop music by the director. In movies such as Dangerous Minds and Freedom Writers, that is the signal to the audience that they are within an urban area, as the teachers try to utilize rap music and icons to “connect” with students of color. Also, in Boyz n the Hood and Freedom Writers, a couple of the main characters are actual performers within the hip hop/ R&B genre of music (Ice Cube in Boyz n the Hood, and Mario in Freedom Writers).

By 1969, Compton had the highest population of young people than any other Southern California city. Perhaps this demographic influenced the formation of two rival gangs, the Crips and Bloods. While already segregated in their respective cities, the Crips which were founded in 1969 at Fremont High School, the Bloods were founded in Compton at Centennial High shortly after. Due to the rate of Black youth gang violence within the city, Compton started to garner national attention. This was not lost on rap music and media. As has been noted by various scholars, hood films were able to gain popularity from both
Black and White audiences due to the push of rap into the mainstream (Guerrero, 1993; Henry, 2002; Sides, 2004; Fischer, 2006). NWA (Niggas With Attitude) was one rap group in particular that took advantage of the stereotype of Compton for commercial purposes. Although the members of the group themselves were not necessarily living the lifestyle promoted in the album *Straight Out of Compton*, they helped sell this image of Compton as a horrible slum in Los Angeles in mainstream White America. Sides (2004) studied how this then made “the perception of Compton arguable became more influential to the city’s destiny than its own real history” (p. 584).

Sides (2004) maintained that Compton then was used by various filmmakers to market this image of the city. In particular Sides explores John Singleton’s use of Compton in the film *Boyz n the Hood*. While one of the main characters “Furious” takes two young men into Compton, they are nervous about being there since they are from South Central. When the camera pans across the neighborhood, the audience see gang bangers standing outside homes which appear to be run down, in sharp contrast to the neatly kept homes in South Central. Sides (2004) argues that while Singleton wanted the audience to be aware that low middle class Black families reside in Los Angeles, he did not deviate from the misconception of Compton held by many viewers. Another example Sides cites of film upholding preconceived notions of Compton is in the film *Menace II Society*. During the movie, a reference is made by a local thug “Chauncy” that he should send a White man asking him to steal a car down Compton Avenue at night. As the White male scurries back to his car, the
audience is left once again with the impression that no one would be able to
survive in a place as horrible as Compton Avenue. Sides (2004) concluded that:

“...the novelty of hood films of the 1990s was their naming and
claiming of specific places, and in this sense the genre served as
the visual counterpart to the hip-hop music era. These films also
served as urban geography lessons-no matter how flawed-for white
audiences both eager and fearful to know of the hood” (p. 599).

This critique of city space differs from that of Massood (1996) who argued
the use of cities within hood films, specifically Boyz n the Hood and Menace II
Society serve to showcase the Black experience within an American city. Her
study critiqued how the inner city (which in this case consists of Watts, Compton
and South Central) serve as a catalyst to either guide young Black men into
upward mobility or serve as a trap they cannot escape. Massood utilized stop
signs and one way street signs as indicators of this theme. Borrowing from the
work of Charles Scruggs (1995) who stated that mobility within urban
communities is more often illusionary than real, Massood viewed the footage of
the 1965 Watts Riots shown in the beginning of Menace II Society as a way to
“signify and map out the specific boundaries of the hood” (p. 92). While
Massood asserted that filmmakers during the hood film era succeeded in making
urban areas visible to Hollywood and White audiences, Sides (2004) would urge
that the representation of these areas must be accurate to fully serve its purpose
and not just feed into previously held stereotypes. Although Massood
acknowledges these two above mentioned films are shot through a “masculinist
agenda…and render invisible the condition of African American women,” minus
one footnote where she addresses this issue at the end of the article, no other
mention is made of the gender tensions and representations within these two films.

*Urban High Schools*

Another popular genre that utilizes urban space within film is the use of urban high schools to depict minority youth. Johnson’s (n.d.) article *Through Viewers’ Eyes: Watching Race, Space, Place and the Hood Motif in Urban High School Genre Film*, discussed how media constructs the “other” as those who live within ghettos. Johnson analyzed the use of urban high school within films such as *Dangerous Minds* and *Freedom Writers*. While the above studies believed inner cities were used in film to sell an image or to display barriers for upward mobility, Johnson (n.d.) asserts “inner city space as one rift with hopelessness and drugs positions its subjects…from a racially urban Black and Latino space into a white civilized space” (p. 6). As the focus is on urban high schools, the students positioned within the classrooms are almost always Black and Latino, failing all of their classes and show resistance to learning. Numerous stereotypes are played out in these two feature films such as loud Black girls, to dressing in baggy clothes and designer tennis shoes, all references to young people in urban schools (Johnson, n.d.; Henry, 2002; Morris, 2007). When students are shown in the honors classes, an indicator to audience of this is the majority of students in the class are White except maybe one Black student. Also, the attire chosen for the students in honors classes are khaki pants and polo shirts.
Gender and Media

Several scholars studying Black films focus on gender representation and Black masculinity, specifically exploring how Black women are portrayed on screen. Henry (2002) analyzed the representation of Black men within the original and remake of the film *Shaft*. This movie was chosen due to the fact that it was originally produced during the Blaxploitation era and garnered a lot of popularity. Also John Singleton produced the remake in 2000 and had already established a name for him for the work done in films such as *Boyz n the Hood*. Henry contends that it is important for readers to be aware of the political backdrop surround the original film *Shaft*. This was during the time of the Black Power movement as references were made to it within the original film. Wiegman (1993) asserted that this movement was male driven upholding the patriarchal framework, “masculinity is thus clearly defined by sexual prowess and male conquest…” (p. 116). While sexuality seemed to be a main focus within the original *Shaft*, Henry (2002) argued that film produced by John Singleton is focused primarily on Black male violence, which emphasized a “low sexual quotient of the film and the high level of violence” (p. 116). This plays into the stereotype that Black masculinity is something achieved through violence, which many scholars have argued is perpetuated through the popularity of rap music (Guerrero, 1993; Henry, 2002; Sides, 2004; Fischer, 2006, Brooks and Hebert, 2006).

While Sides (2004) focused on the representation of Black masculinity within film, Brooks and Hebert (2006) focused on media constructions of Black
femininity. The framework employed for their study was grounded in cultural studies and Black feminist theory which allowed them to analyze topics surrounding race, class and gender. While the beginning of their article stated the focus will be on all three tenants, gender was the key concept discussed. The article contended that although Black independent films are trying to free themselves from White subordination, this does not necessarily mean that gender subordination is not upheld within the Black community in media representations. Yet again, an important theme mentioned that has played a major role with Black female imaging is hip hop music. This article focused on the framing of Black women as sexual jezebel objects within Black music videos. Different scholars argue the disturbing key in hip hop music videos is the fact they are primarily created by Black men (Edwards, 1993; Jones, 1994). Manatu (2003) conducted a film analysis of movies written by Black and White filmmakers during 1986-1995 and 1997-2001. Her study also primarily focused on gender, more specifically the representation of Black women and sexuality within cinema. The films utilized within her study were: *She’s Gotta Have It, Poetic Justice, New Jack City, Jason’s Lyric, Devil in a Blue Dress, Mistress, The Josephine Baker Story, The Last Boyscout, The Bodyguard, Zebrahead, Love Jones, The Best Man, Loving Jezebel, Jackie Brown, Swordfish* and *Monster’s Ball*. Her findings were not written in a way for the reader to identify exactly which film she was referring to unless prior knowledge was already held about particular films. Manatu determined that Black women were more often than not portrayed by Black filmmakers as just sexual beings incapable of sustaining meaningful relationships.
As her study is mainly focused on the sexual act itself, Manatu removes certain scenes from their original context not allowing the reader to truly determine if the filmmakers were making a broader statement that just showing Black women engaging in sexual encounters. This study runs the risk also of removing the agency of Black women to express their sexuality unless done so in a conventional manner. Collins (2004) urges scholars to not take away sexual agency from Black women, by labeling her within terms of “ho” for expressing a more sexual side. She argued that what is important is for Black women to be comfortable showing multiple layers of sexuality within rap music and film. Because of the complex nature of addressing gender especially within media targeting audiences of color, Brooks and Hebert (2006) urged future cultural studies to employ a Critical Race Theory (CRT) lens. They acknowledge the fact their study does not properly address race, class and gender and contend a (CRT) framework would take into account the “human difference which would offer enormous potential for understanding our multicultural world” (p. 310). The importance of bridging the gap and learning from different concepts within the fields of Education, Sociology, and legal studies will serve as a useful catalyst when media studies are conducted to unpack issues surrounding race, class and gender.

**Black Romance**

While extensive research has not been conducted on the topic of Black romantic films of the early 2000s, there is one study by Belinda Edmondson that
addressed Black romance in novels and film that I find imperative to address before I discuss how my study adds to this body of literature. Edmondson (2007) sought to uncover the growing appeal of Black romance within novels and films both within the United States and in the Afro-Caribbean culture. As was discussed in the section on Blacks in Entertainment earlier, Edmondson reviewed the common roles of Black women within traditional love stories and films in relation to their White counterparts. Usually, the romantic stories unfold with Black women devoid of sexuality (Gone With the Wind) or Black men as beastly and violent (Birth of a Nation). Missing from the storyline is the idea that Black couples can embrace their sexuality and also find love among each other. Edmondson (2007) refers to this idea as the combination of agape and erotic love. Her standpoint is that Black filmatic productions of the early 2000s targets Black women and Black upward mobility. This differs from typical White romance formula where, “a lower-status heroine finds love and social mobility with a higher-status man, in black romances the high status of black people, and in particular black women, is the foundation of the romance itself” (Edmondson, 2007, p. 203). By maintaining this framework, Black women do not move out of their current community but are representations of marriage and Black professional life. She asserts that since Black romance movies are centered on middle class lifestyles, characters are shown giving back to their community usually by volunteering their time at local community centers. Edmonson celebrates the fact that these Black romance productions show White audiences that Black people are capable of true love, and professionalism.
The importance of films displaying Black couples in love is a positive and important image, as it deviates from the traditional roles usually assigned to Black actors and actresses. What needs to be addressed at this point is the knowledge and opportunities needed for this type of success to be achieved, and if this display merely a romantic notion, or a true reflection of the African American community today. Accordingly, the representation of Black women in cinematic productions allowed to express their sexuality is equally important as Black men not only being cast in violent roles and as sexual objects. While the above studies I have reviewed have provided me with important information in regards to the use of urban cities to the display of Black masculinity and young Black couples and upward mobility, my research is warranted as it addresses the intersection of race, class and gender present within the buppie era. I utilized Critical Race Theory (CRT) as my overarching framework, because it allowed me to critically view the films chosen for this study. Not only did I rely on previous work done within cultural studies, but also about concepts used within educational and sociological studies. The next chapter describes the methods employed for my study, and will provide an in depth explanation of the frameworks utilized within my study.
Chapter 3

Introduction

In the first chapter, the topic of my thesis was introduced along with the purposes for conducting this study. The main focus of this research is to showcase how race, class, and gender were depicted in the buppie era of the early 2000s. I also questioned whether educational outcomes of Black men and women were properly depicted within the films chosen for this study. The importance of these questions being answered is to highlight how films should seek to be multidimensional within the messages being portrayed. This chapter will introduce the frameworks employed to conduct this study. The research was grounded in three frameworks: Critical Race Theory, NewBlackMan, and social/cultural capital theory. Within this chapter, I will unpack all three frameworks used and highlight key concepts that I focused on for the purposes of this study. While these frameworks vary in focus, they all offer a critical lens to analyze the films selected for my thesis.

Methods

My qualitative study employed a textual analysis. O’Shaughnessy and Stadler (2005) discuss methodologies that can be used when analyzing various forms of media. Textual analysis methodology originated from the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS) in the United Kingdom at the University of Birmingham (“The Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (1963 - 2002),” n.d.). CCCS was created in 1964 by Richard Hoggart followed by director and well known scholar Stuart Hall, who is known for his work within cultural
Hall declared, “there is something at stake in cultural studies, in a way that I think, and hope, is not exactly true of many other important intellectual and critical practices” (Hall, 1992, p. 278). Although CCCS closed in 2002, CCCS brought together approaches from Marxist, feminist, structural linguistic and critical race theory, to study representations of groups within media and the affects this had on the audience. By utilizing a textual analysis, I viewed how certain events were interpreted through film. I discovered how accurately certain eras and events were depicted through film, making this method ideal for this study.

Other common methods employed while conducting film studies are content analysis and audience studies. These methods allow the researcher to measure what is being interpreted within media. For example, one would be able to measure how often women playing sports are shown in television. This form of analysis relies heavily upon quantitative methods. While a content analysis can be a useful tool for some studies, I found that textual analysis was best for this study since I focused more on how certain themes were depicted within film.

Another common lens is an audience study. Through this method, one is able to determine how an audience is interpreting the message within media that is being viewed. The goal of this research was not to answer how viewers are interpreting these films, but to critically view how certain messages to be portrayed on screen.

While analyzing the buppie era films, these highlight the top earning or “Aristocrat” (Dyson, 2005) group of young professional Blacks. These movies inform White America what the Black elite portray as the “correct” message to be
captured about African Americans. The films were viewed at least four times to gain a deeper understanding of the characters and their different situations. It was important for me to draft movie reviews for each film, so I could have a written account of what took place in each film and to make sure important scenes were not missed or discarded. Once the first phase of the study was completed, a table was created based upon my research questions, which allowed me to properly categorize each film and providing the time in minute and second format when the example took place. Categories used in coding the films were: scenes involving Black and White characters, relationships, male friendship, how Black masculinity is displayed, sexually charged comments, gender stereotypes, Black women and sexuality, education used to advance life opportunities and cultural, aspirational and navigational capital examples. The codes were developed through grounded theory and developed over time. In the beginning of my study, the codes were broader and became more specific over the course of my analysis. These categories were chosen as they would help provide examples in each film of race, class, gender and education.

**Critical Race Theory (CRT)**

A Critical Race Theory (CRT) framework was employed for the purposes of this study. While some studies that utilize CRT are within an educational discipline, this is important within a film study as my topic is centered on issues related to race. I strictly focus on films that had a Black target audience, a majority Black cast, and written and directed by Black men. Given the specific
focus on race, CRT allowed me to critically examine and analyze the depiction of race, within the films used for this study. The five films chosen offered a perspective to issues plaguing Black communities different from television or print media. Therefore, I found that CRT helped guide the analysis by deviating from the “grand narrative” and to allow for other, less commonly told stories to be heard.

CRT developed out of Critical Legal Studies (CLS) in the 1970s. The original founders of CRT are identified as Derrick Bell, Richard Delgado, Charles Lawrence, Mari Matsuda, and Patricia Williams. Bell (1995) brought to light the attitudes of Whites comfortableness with the idea of Black inferiority, “the critical race theory perspective offers blacks and their white allies insight, spiked with humor, as a balm for this latest insult (The Bell Curve), and enables them to gird themselves for those certain to follow” (p. 898). Race was a key component highlighted in hood era films, and was often showcased as tension within Black and White citizens.

Ladson-Billings (1998) acknowledges CRT as an outgrowth of a separate entity from CLS, which refers to as a leftist legal movement that, challenges the traditional legal scholarship. According to Ladson-Billings, CRT deviates from CLS as it questions the notion that the Civil Rights Movement is a long steady process that is moving toward social transformation. Much of the CLS ideology emanates from the work of Gramsci and depends on the Gramscian notion of hegemony to describe the continued legitimacy of oppressive structures in
American society (Ladson-Billings, 1998). I also relied upon Derrick Bells, (1995) explanation of CRT:

Critical race theory is a body of legal scholarship…a majority of whose members are both existentially people of color and ideologically committed to the struggle against racism particularly as institutionalized in and by law…The work is often disruptive because its commitment to anti-racism goes well beyond civil rights, integration, affirmative action, and other liberal measures…critical race theorists are highly suspicious of the liberal agenda, distrust its method, and want to retain what they see as a valuable strain of egalitarianism which may exist despite, and not because of, liberalism. (p. 898-899).

The major critique about the dominant legal scholarship is the upholding of meritocracy by not using or exploring the ideals of how racism is embedded in the making of our society, thus as it stands, the legal system can never be viewed as fair. Racism is defined as a set of beliefs and ideologies that are held about a group of people who are believed to be inferior, and is driven by the notion of superiority. When a group is discriminated against, those in power always have been able to find justification as to why their oppression was necessary, thus causing history to be rewritten to fit the ideals of the majorative group. The six major tenets of CRT (Dixson and Rousseau, 2005, pg. 9) are outlined as follows:

1. Critical race theory recognizes that racism is endemic to American life.

2. Critical race theory expresses skepticism toward dominant legal claims of neutrality, objectivity, colorblindness and meritocracy.

3. Critical race theory challenges ahistoricism and insists on a contextual/historical analysis of the law…Critical race theorists…adopt a
stance that presumes that racism has contributed to all contemporary manifestations of group advantage and disadvantage.

4. Critical race theory insists on recognition of the experiential knowledge of people of color and our communities of origin in analyzing law and society.

5. Critical race theory is interdisciplinary.

6. Critical race theory works toward the end of eliminating racial oppression as part of the broader goal of ending all forms of oppression.

While CRT has developed a strong following of renowned scholars, it has also developed its share of critics. Randall Kennedy, for instance, argues that there is no reason to pay close attention to a nonwhite voice within academic scholarship. Kennedy states this action would ultimately injure the cause of social justice.

Kennedy’s main critique against CRT is as follows: he does not believe there is a nonwhite voice and if there is, it is not unfairly excluded from legal scholarship. This differs greatly from CRT, which argues that all people of color speak from a base of experience that in our society is deeply structured by racism (Delgado, 1990). Kennedy also claims minority voices will ultimately silence non-minority voices. Delgado brings to light that what CRT requires is that minority voices be permitted to be heard and not ignored or silenced. In other words, Delgado argues, inclusion does not mean another group has to be excluded. Bell (1995) addresses Kennedy’s critique by stating:

When a black scholar at a prominent law school tells anyone who will listen that other folks of color are deluded about being excluded on the basis of their race…when a black scholar contends
that there is no hidden “white” normativity or perspective but rather a meritocratic normativity; when a black scholar says these things, all who rarely listen to scholars of color sit up and take notice. And take notes. And turn those notes into more fuel for the legitimacy debate that has always attended renegade movements…At a time of crisis, critics serve as reminders that we are being heard, if not always appreciated. For those of us for whom history provides the best guide to contemporary understanding, criticism is a reassurance. (p. 908).

CRT challenges the notion of color-blindness. Given the context of this study on Black films and their representation of Black males, CRT provided a framework with which to ground this study. Its interdisciplinary nature afforded me the unique opportunity to study Black males within education and film studies, two separate, yet related fields. CRT’s emphasis on cultural experiences and contexts made it the ideal framework for this study.

Counterstories

Counterstories are important in CRT scholarship as they offer alternatives to the dominant narrative. Delgado (1989) contends that the purpose of counterstories is to “shatter complacency and challenge the status quo” (p. 2314). Narratives are crucial when working with a CRT framework because only through different voices being heard and different viewpoints being taken into account can marginalized voices be legitimized. Delgado (1989) also makes clear that:

Stories and counterstories can serve an equally important destructive function. They can show that what we believe is ridiculous, self-serving, or cruel. They can show us the way out of the trap of unjustified exclusion. They can help us understand when it is time to reallocate power. They are the other half—the destructive half—of the creative dialectic. (p. 2415).
Provided is the following example of what would be considered a grand narrative told by members of the dominant group. John McWhorter stated in Kretovics & Nussel, (1994),

“On average, Black students do not try as hard as other students…these students belong to a culture infected with an anti-intellectual strain, which subtly but decisively teaches them from birth not to embrace school-work too whole-heartedly.”

Yosso (2005) describes this as resistance capital which will be discussed in further depth within the cultural capital framework. Solórzano and Yosso (2002) maintain the importance of education within and outside the classrooms needing to move away from the “dominant racial positions” currently being upheld which is used as a tool of subordination for minorities.

These reasons account for why counterstories must be told and kept alive. Not only to know the other side of historical accounts but so that action is taken to change the current situation. Dixson and Rousseau (2005) shared how the dominant group tells stories, “these stories are designed to remind it of its identity in relation to outgroups and provide a form of shared reality in which its own superior position is seen as natural” (p. 10). Without knowledge of the racist and oppressive past, there can be no true call to deconstruct white supremacy.

Capital

Social Capital
This section will discuss the tenets of social/cultural capital and explain capital was extremely beneficial for this study. The buppie era touched on issues surrounding capital on several occasions. While social/cultural capital traditionally is discussed within fields such as sociology and education, film studies should also utilize a capital framework when analyzing race and class. The definition of social in the phrase social capital sometimes referred to as human capital will be defined later in this section. I mentioned in the first chapter, media is a tool used to reflect and affect society. In this study, I explored how capital was accessed in each film.

Coleman (1988) describes the two main intellectual streams used to discuss social interactions. In reference to sociologists, most see “the actor as socialized and action as governed by social norms, rules and obligations” (p. 95). With regards to economists, most view “the actor as having goals independently arrived at, as acting independently, and as wholly self-interested” (p. 95). Social capital was derived from these two intellectual streams of thought. According to Coleman (1988), social capital is defined by its function:

It is not a single entity but a variety of different entities, with two elements in common: they all consist of some aspect of social structures, and they facilitate certain actions of actors—whether persons or corporate actors—within the structure…social capital is productive, making possible the achievement of certain ends that in its absence would not be possible (p. 98).

Social capital varies from other forms of capital as it relies on the relationships between and among people. Norms must exist among group actors to make sure individual interests are bypassed to support what would be best for
the collective group. Problems arise in a situation where norms differ among
groups of people. Also, there must be closure of the social structure for norms to
be effective (Coleman, 1988). Historically, those establishing relationships to
build capital have blocked minorities out of these networks. By combining
human (which relates to the certain skills a person can contribute) and social
capital together, productivity is promoted, however, only in situations where trust
has already been established within social groups.

Laureau (1987) and Anyon (1980) focused on how middle class families
have access to social and cultural capital that may not be available in working
class families. These studies focused on perceptions of teachers on the level of
parental involvement provided to the students. Teachers mistook working class
parents’ lack of involvement as a sign they did not care about the educational
success of their children. However, parents were uncomfortable providing help
with homework since many were high school graduates or high school dropouts,
and did not hold advanced degrees. Also, many held jobs and were not readily
available to provide assistance. In middle class households this was not a
problem. Many of the parents possessed advanced degrees, and were able to
provide outside resources such as tutors or exposure to cultural resources.

While different African American scholars (Harper, 2008) highlight
Blacks that were able to gain access to networking within White America, the
average minority does not have these social recourses important in mainstream
America. Morris (2004) argued that because minorities are excluded from White
social networking groups, “Black people developed their social capital (Black
social capital) for survival and success in a segregated world bounded by the omnipresent forces of racism and discrimination” (p. 102). However, this still slows down the process of social mobility within Black communities since the same networking opportunities are not made available among minorities.

*Cultural Capital*

Within media, representations of Blacks are drastic. On one end, media portrays characters with over exaggerated facial features on black women such as enlarged lips, or hyper-sexualize Black women. On the other end of the media spectrum, television shows such as the *Cosby Show*, emphasize notions of meritocracy, spiked with the belief that anyone can achieve if they work hard.

Tara Yosso (2005) critiques the traditional definition of social capital. Through a CRT framework, she argues the traditional framework, like Coleman’s; assume minorities are lacking the social capital needed for social mobility. She also drew on the work of Bourdieu (1977) to critique the assumption that White middle class values are the norm and all others operating outside of this framework are “culturally poor” (Yosso, 2005). While *Brown vs. Board of Education* served to promote racial integration in schools with the hope of improving educational opportunity for Black students, scholars including Lani Guinier, Derrick Bell and Tara Yosso argued that Brown actually served to reenergize white racial consciousness while providing little in the way of integrated or improved education facilities.

I urge the importance of employing a cultural capital framework within film studies to acknowledge various cultural groups. Yosso (2005) focused on
minority students within school settings, and how US schools are set up to view these groups as deficient thinking without “normative cultural knowledge and skills,” (p. 75). As Bell (1988) noted, even for those poor whites, there is the comfort in knowing that there is a certain “property right in their whiteness.”

Yosso’s article *Whose culture has capital? A critical race theory discussion of community cultural wealth* (2005) outlines six forms of capital communities of color possess. She stresses how these are not to be seen as static or mutually exclusive, but rather should build upon one another:

1. **Aspirational capital** refers to the ability to maintain hopes and dreams for the future, even in the face of real and perceived barriers.
2. **Linguistic capital** includes the intellectual and social skills attained through communication experiences in more than one language and/or style. This reflects the idea that Students of Color arrive at school with multiple language and communication skills. These students typically are engaged in a storytelling tradition, making them skilled in memorization, paying attention to detail, dramatic pauses, comedic timing, facial affect, vocal tone, volume, rhythm and rhyme.
3. **Familial capital** refers to cultural knowledge nurtured among familia (kin) that carry a sense of community history, memory and cultural intuition. This form of cultural wealth engages a commitment to community well being and expands the concept of family to include a more broad understanding of kinship.
4. **Social capital** can be understood as networks of people and community resources. These peer and other social contacts can provide both instrumental and emotional support to navigate through society’s institutions.

5. **Navigational capital** refers to the skills of maneuvering through social institutions. Historically, this infers the ability to maneuver through institutions not created with Communities of Color.

6. **Resistant capital** refers to knowledge and skills fostered through oppositional behavior that challenges inequality. This type of capital is grounded in the legacy of resistance to subordination exhibited by Communities of Color. Parents of Color are consciously instructing their children to engage in behaviors and maintain attitudes that challenge the status quo. When students of color are not engaging in critical consciousness however, resistance may take a form such as self-defeating actions that back into the system of subordination. Transformative resistant capital includes cultural knowledge of the structures of racism and motivation to transform such oppressive structures (p. 77-81).

**Black Elite**

Having to battle with current representations of Black masculinity which has almost become synonymous with the idea of fear, aggression, and violence, the elite Black community has tried to distance themselves as far as possible from what would translate into the poor/hip hop African American community. In an
attempt to distance themselves from the hood lifestyle displayed in the 1990s films, many Black elites remain aloof to poor Blacks. Looking at the income of Blacks in America, there is clearly a divide that has been caused between middle/upper class Blacks and working/poor Blacks.

_Talented Tenth_

There have been many calls from intellectuals for the Talented Tenth, a phrase coined by W. E. DuBois (1903) to reclaim their place in society today. “Talented Tenth” defined as the elite group of young, college educated Black men whom are meant to contribute leadership to the Black community. Usually these young Black men were second-generation college students and came from affluent backgrounds (Turner, 2000). The idea behind the formation of the Talented Tenth was “The desperate conditions African Americans faced mandated the formation of an elite to oversee a community in crisis, a community whose majority he did not then trust to provide its own leadership” (James, 1997, p. 20). According to Turner, young Black men today lack the incentive to become involved within their communities. He attributes this to the consumption of hip hop music and attraction to “street life” by college students since they may lack involvement on their college campuses. This claim is in stark contrast to Alexander-Snow (1999) who argues Turner fails to consider the fact that not all Black students are fully accepted into college life. Since the Talented Tenth framework is geared exclusively towards upper middle class, college-educated Black men, scholars have questioned its validity since it ignores the great
scholarship of varying social class and Black women (Dyson, 2005; Neal, 2006). Neal (2006) asserted:

Lost in much of this process is that the very sexism, homophobia, and misogyny that circulates within hip hop culture and becomes part of the context in which black males of the hip hop generation are demonized within in mainstream, are expressions of the very same patriarchy that the so-called “talented tenth” posit as part of a normative and necessary black masculinity. (p. 10).

One of the major misconceptions from elite Black America is the interpretation of the phrase “Talented Tenth.” Although DuBois was calling into action the top percent of Black male intellectuals, his overall goal was for them to go back to the poorer Black communities and help elevate others. James (1997) noted DuBois’ hoped that male graduates, especially those from Morehouse College in Atlanta, Georgia would serve as a buffer between lower income Blacks and white society. In his later years, DuBois became one of the biggest critics of his original notion of the Talented Tenth. He later spoke about not wanting the Black community leaders to only be trained university intellectuals, but also social justice agents dedicated to Black development.

To further describe the Black elite, Dyson (2005) coined the phrase Afristocracy to describe those who have the ability to promote social justice within the Black community. This group is composed of “lawyers, physicians, intellectuals, civil rights leaders, entertainers, athletes, bankers.” Within this elite group, public meetings and outlets are used to discuss “the pernicious habits of the black poor…” (p. xiv). The opposite group which would be defined by the term Ghettoocracy or better known as the working poor Blacks are described as
those African Americans who are either unemployed or underemployed due to the economy which leaves many trapped in menial jobs. However, this group does not just consist of the poor as this term can be used to describe Black athletes and entertainers due to their values and habits if they came from meager beginnings. Dyson (2005) also clarified that “class in black America has never been viewed in strictly literal economic terms; the black definition of class embraces style and behavior as well” (p. xv). Also important to point out the tone of the Afristocrats has drifted down to younger Black generations.

Bill Cosby is a prime example of the Black elite, having now become widely known for the speech he gave in 2004 at the fiftieth anniversary of Brown v. Board of Education. As Cosby accepted an award for his philanthropic work, he used this platform to publicly berate the poor Black community.

“And these people are not parenting. They’re buying things for the kid. $500 sneakers. For what? And won’t buy or spend $250 on Hooked on Phonics…Just forget telling your child to go to Peace Corps. It’s right around da corner. It’s standing on da corner. It can’t speak English. It doesn’t want to speak English. I can’t even talk the way these people talk. I don’t know who these people are…I can’t stand algebra, I can’t stand…and what you, why you wanna, with holes in them…It’s horrible. Basketball players, multimillionaires, can’t write a paragraph. Football players, multimillionaires, can’t read. But where are we today? It’s there, the white man, he’s laughing, got to be laughing. 50 percent drop out, rest of em in prison…These are people going around stealing Coca Cola. People getting shot in the back of the head over a piece of pound cake! And then we all run out and we’re outraged, ‘Ah, the cops shouldn’t’a shot him’. What the hell was he doing with the pound cake in his hand?”

Looking at the above excerpt from Cosby’s speech, there are clearly some problematic issues with the way he addressed the Black community. To publicly
refer to young Black children as “It” and to use terminology such as “these people” only causes to further drive a social class wedge within the African American community. Also, Cosby’s social status allows for him to attack low income Blacks without giving them an opportunity to defend themselves. In essence, Cosby’s speech highlighted the Black elite’s distaste of the Black working poor. As Dyson (2005) also pointed out, Cosby’s speech brought to light in White America the “huge generational and class divide in black America” (p. 56). By employing a NewBlackMan framework for my thesis, I have been able to view the representation of Black masculinity in context with varying social classes and interaction with Black women to decipher what films can do to move the African American community toward the phrase coined by Joy James (1997), “New Tenth.”

NewBlackMan

According to notable scholars within media studies O’Shaughenessy and Stadler’s (2005) *Media and Society an Introduction*, the key elements marking masculinity are social power, wealth and influence. Historically, Black men have not had access to these three elements. Within a White male centered framework of masculinity, Black men are viewed in relation to White men instead of within the African American community. Until the late 19th century, Black men were prohibited exhibiting masculine traits or possessing power and wealth. This, coupled with the fact that Black men and women did not have literacy or suffrage rights, secured the Black community a position in the lowest social and economic
classes. Black men withstood a great deal of physical pain, but what is less
discussed is the emotional pain they suffered when separated from their families.  
Broken families, hearts and spirits left many Black men and their masculinity
vulnerable. Some scholars suggest that this de-humanizing experience has led to
a psychological state of mind referred to as hyper-masculinity. Stuart Hall (1997)
suggested that Black men combated historical demasculanization (think of images
such as Sambo and the Black brute) with hyper-masculinity. “Through such
collective, historical experiences, black men have adopted patriarchal values such
as physical strength, sexual prowess and being in control as a means of survival
against the repressive and violent system of subordination to which they have
been subjected” (p. 262). Even within media today, images of gangsters and
thugs are used to portray Black men.

As gender is an important lens in this study, I relied on a third framework
developed by Mark Anthony Neal (2006) *New Black Man*. Exploring and
understanding Black masculinity within media was important in deconstructing
traditional views held surrounding this topic. In his framework, Neal is honest
about how he evolved into what he considers a Black male feminist. Neal
asserted:

NewBlackMan is not so much about conceiving of a more
“positive” version of black masculinity…but rather a concept that
acknowledges the many complex aspects, often contradictory, that
make up a progressive and meaningful black masculinity. The
words “new,” “black,” and “man,” are literally scrunched together
here to reinforce the idea that myriad identities exist in the same
black male bodies: in my case the thug-nigga intellectual, the
homeboy-feminist, the recovering homophobe, the doting daddy of
two brown-skinned little girls, the loving husband, and the God-

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fearing thirty-something black man who damn sure appreciates a fine ass on a woman. (p. 29).

An important aspect showing how employing this framework was useful, was Neal focusing on the differences within Black masculinity and not trying to fit all Black men into one certain mold.

Black Feminist Theory

The above framework from Mark Anthony Neal relied heavily on Black feminist thought. According to Patricia Hill Collins (2000) to truly understand Black feminist theory, one must understand that African American women were brought to the United States as slaves and under oppression to be used for labor. Even today, many Black women still hold labor-intensive jobs and live in poverty. Collins (2000) stated:

African American women’s social location as a collectivity has fostered distinctive albeit heterogeneous Black feminist intellectual traditions that I call Black feminist thought…Black feminist thought’s core themes, interpretive frameworks, epistemological stances, and insights concerning empowerment will reflect and aim to shape specific political contexts confronting African-American women as a group. (p. 17).

When employing the term “intellectuals” within this context, it is important to note that Collins (2000) is not referring solely to women within academia, “Black women intellectuals are neither all academics nor found primarily in the Black middle class. Instead, all U.S. Black women who somehow contribute to Black feminist thought as critical social theory are deemed to be ‘intellectuals’” (p. 14).

Under the Black feminist framework, it is made clear that Black women do not just want to be the Black female version of “The Talented Tenth.” Rather,
the goal with the Black feminist framework is to allow for diverse viewpoints and to advance social justice efforts. Although history does acknowledge accomplishments made by some Black women scholars such as Zora Neal Hurston, Angela Davis and Alice Walker, many times, issues of Black masculinity have caused for the voices of women within the African American community to be silenced. Because of this, scholars such as Manning Marable (1983), Cornel West (1993) and Michael Eric Dyson (1996) have moved to acknowledge their male privilege within the Black community and make room for Black women scholars (Collins 2000).

However, there has been some resistance within the Black feminist community with labeling Black men as feminists and using them as alliances within the struggle for equality. Although DuBois was known for speaking up about the social injustices of others especially Black women (most notably in his essay titled The Damnation of Women), some Black feminists criticized his sexist work. One scholar, Morton (1991) argues that DuBois’ “contributions paradoxically reproduced male elites or gendered black intellectualism…and he failed to reconstruct black women as full human beings in history” (p. 64). If male feminists exist within the current patriarchal structure, Black men can then stand to become the “experts” of Black feminism. Acknowledging these concerns, Michael Awkward (1995), a male feminist presented the below manifesto:

Black womanism demands neither the erasure of the black gendered other’s subjectivity, as have male movements to regain a putatively lost Afro-American manhood, nor the relegation of
males to prone, domestic or other limiting positions. What it does require, if it is indeed to become an ideology with widespread cultural impact, is recognition on the part of both black females and males of the nature of the gendered inequities that have marked our past and present, and a resolute commitment to work for change. In this sense, black feminist criticism has not only created a space for an informed Afro-American male participation, but it heartily welcomes—in fact, insists upon—the joint participation of black males and females as comrades. (p. 52).

Awkward (1995) proceeded to argue that what can be gained from joining alliances with male feminists is the forming of new constructions of family and Black male sexuality. Neal (2006) states, “The real value of feminism to black men comes from the ability to literally transform our worldview, particularly in response to our acceptance of very rigid versions of black masculinity” (p. 63).

In moving the Black feminist movement forward, some scholars argue that men and women must “comply with the illusion,” a phrase coined by Ronald Jackson II (2006). In essence, Jackson is suggesting for images of Black masculinity to change, but first, Black men cannot buy into the prescribed scripts and stereotypes. Ikard (2002) agrees that “before black men can productively engage black feminists on the issue of black masculinity, they must accept that their victimization in America as black men does not exempt them from participation in patriarchy” (p. 10).

By employing all three frameworks in my study, I critically analyzed the depiction of race, class, and gender within the buppie film era. The importance for using theory to analyze and view films was that I was able to unpack messages that were being sent to viewers and not just take the movies at face value. These frameworks gave me the ability to see if these films challenged the status quo in
society today, or merely worked to uphold race, class and gender constraints within Black America today. The next chapter is my findings chapter where I will lay out each research question, my claims, and provide my data and analysis for each film.
Chapter 4

Introduction

The previous chapters provided the reader background information on Black film. This chapter focuses on providing data which answers my research questions, which are as follows:

1. How are race, class and gender depicted within the Black film boom of the early 2000s?
2. How are the educational experiences among Black men and women portrayed?

As a reminder, the five films relied upon in this study were: The Best Man, The Wood, Two Can Play That Game, The Brothers and Brown Sugar.

Findings

RQ #1: How is race depicted within the Black film boom of the early 2000s?2

Claim #1:

Characters of different races are shown in small supporting roles, in a way silencing the “other.”

In the films The Best Man, The Wood, Two Can Play That Game, The Brothers and Brown Sugar, little to no references to other races are made. The Best Man is a film centered around a weekend where old college friends come together to celebrate a friend’s wedding. In The Best Man, Harper and Lance are

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2 Films not mentioned in this section did not have any references of characters of other races.
shown in college talking about Lance’s conquests while he was travelling with the football team:

Harper: What happened in Pittsburgh?
Lance: Dog, twins, two sets. They were waiting for me in the hotel room. These Asians had these two sets big ass titties like punching bags.
Harper: Praise the Lord and pass the panties.

Harper is a writer, and in the beginning of the film his first novel, *Unfinished Business*, is going into print. Harper references how White men were in awe of Lance’s athletic and sexual abilities:

Lance: White boys admired his prowess on the hard wood and his reputation with the ladies. They secretly deemed him the ebony humper.

As Lance reads this line out of Harper’s novel, he begins laughing and confirms this to be a true depiction of his years spent in college. *The Best Man* upholds and confirms the stereotype of Black men being viewed as sexual objects.

*Two Can Play That Game* is a film which portrays the dynamics between Black men and women dating experiences. It was also the only film in this study that portrayed a diverse work environment. Shante’s boss is a White male, and when scenes are shot at the law firm where Keith and Tony work, White colleagues are present in a business meeting held by Keith. In the beginning of the film, Shante is shown stopping by Tracey’s apartment to pick her up. She and her boyfriend just broke up, and can be heard arguing from the hallway. As Tracey and her boyfriend are yelling, Shante comments on the situation:

Shante: Why must Mexicans and Black people cause so much ruckus in the White man's apartment building? Now I hate that I
had to say that but you have to admit minorities tend to get a tad bit louder than White folks.

As Shante makes the above statement, she walks away from the camera then comes back to justify her comment by trying to coerce the audience into believing that people of color tend are naturally louder than Whites. In *The Brothers*, Brian has treated Black women badly in the past, and in the beginning of the film he decides he will no longer date Black women:

Brian: As of right now I'm through with sistahs. You know Carla right? She locked me up because she's a evil bitter Black woman. Nothing you ever do is good enough from them. I'm tired of the fake hair, oh that's my baby father and the excess weight. It's like they're giving out government cheese sandwiches with fake hair and babies.

Terry: Man, you a dumb ass, you giving up on sistahs is giving up on yourself.

Although his friends try and argue with his logic, he is still not convinced that dating Black women is the way to go.

Brian: My point is we're the best and sistahs ain't up to the job.

Brian begins to date a White woman Jesse that he has known for awhile, but had never thought about dating until recently:

Jesse: So you've known me for awhile and you finally asked me out. What took you so long? Brian: Let’s just say I was looking for love in all the wrong places.

Jesse: Look Brian I know this is sort of spur of the moment but if you ever want to hook up again call me.

As Brian and Jesse continue dating, they run into Carla, a woman that Brian used to date while they are having lunch one afternoon:

Carla: Hi, I'm Judge Carla Williams.
Jesse: Hi I'm Jesse. What's her problem?
Carla: Excuse me? What did you say?
Jesse: I said, what's your problem?
Carla: My problem is tired ass men like him and women like you who get the whole world handed to them but no, no, no you have to have our men too.

Jesse and Carla proceed to get into a physical fight, and the store owner kicks Brian and Jesse out of the restaurant. When Brian goes to visit his mother one afternoon, she begins to complain how her ex-husband left her for a non-Black woman:

Helen: Oh, don't even bring up that fool to me, left me for a White woman.
Brian: She's Hawaiian.
Helen: If she's not Black she's White.
Brian: See that's what I'm talking about mama that's just ridiculous. Latino women?
Helen: A White woman with a taco.
Brian: Oh Asian women?
Helen: A White woman who don't speak no got damn English.

Brian begins to realize his issues with Black women are rooted in the fact that he never felt affection from his mother when he was growing up:

Helen: You know, the both of you are just like your daddies, full of it.
Brian: I done heard that my whole life. How long are you gonna look at us and see them? Can we get a little love?
Helen: I raised you that's love.
Brian: Oh really, then prove it mom. Can you give your son a kiss and a hug?
Helen: You acting crazy just stop it.
Brian: Mom when is the last time you gave me a hug, ten years ago when Tyrell's dad left? Ten years is a long time for a hug.

By the end of the film, Brian and his mother work out their unresolved issues, and he is seen approaching a Black woman at Jackson’s parents wedding. Jackson’s sister Cherie is framed as a free spirited young woman on her way to college, who is willing to date outside her race much to her mother’s chagrin:
Cherie: Well I'm not limiting myself to brothas. I'll consider all men even those who are not Black.
Louise: Like hell you will, who taught you that?
Cherie: Life, brothas date all type of women all the time. Why should we sit around like idiots waiting for them to bestow their favors upon us? Screw that, a White man has all the equipment and twice the cash.

The above comment goes along with the White male centered framework of masculinity which is validated through career success and not marked by their sexual prowess. In these two scenes mentioned above, race is mentioned in this film in relation to Black male sexual ability. When Jackson breaks up with Denise, he and his friends run into her at the club with another man:

Brian: Is he White?
Derrick: No I think he's Asian.
Brian: Maybe he's like Latino or one of those Indians.
Derrick: What difference does it make what race he is?
Brian: So Jackson can know how pissed off he should be.

*Brown Sugar* can be described as a hip hop love story. The film highlights the growing friendship and love between Sydney and Dre over the years. When Dre proposes to Reese, Syd is supportive of his decision and attends bridal shower. During the shower, the women sit around playing games and eating:

Reese’s Aunt: What is Dre's middle name?
White Woman: Fine!

Millennium Records, the record label Dre worked for, sign a hip hop Dalmatian duo:

Ren: Yo Dre, I'm Ren and I'm Ten the hip hop Dalmatian. You get it? White with Black spots representin that whole unity thing.
This leads Dre to realize he does not like the direction Millennium Records is going with hip hop and he quits his job to start his own record label, Brown Sugar Records.

While the films in my study discuss race, instead of using stories of African American characters to tell counterstories, the stories take on the form of a grand narrative. In Belinda Edmondson’s (2007) article titled *The Black Romance*, she argued that the Black romantic film informs audiences that Black couples are “equal citizens…we are lovers, we too are erotic-and professionals” (p. 207). I agree that it is important to showcase Black people as professionals and lovers, however, the movies in my study do not realistically address issues surrounding being a person of color in the 2000s. The audience is left with the assumption that characters were able to properly navigate through White spaces and institutions successfully with little to no problems.

**RQ#2**: How is the class (the attainment of career success) depicted within the Black film boom of the early 2000s?

**Claim #1:**

Social capital is built through networking with friends, providing support for their career goals and by providing opportunities for career advancement when possible.

In *The Best Man*, the opening scene is Harper arriving home after a business trip with great news to share with his girlfriend Robin:

Harper: Oprah Winfrey wants my new book *Unfinished Business* for her January book of the month club show…We go into print next month... I'm on my way girl.
Murich is also an old college friend or Harper’s. Although Murich is not in any of the flashback scenes that gives the audience a glimpse of college life, references are made in conversation that Harper and Murich were friends in college. Murich picks Harper up from the airport when he arrives in New York, Harper talks to Murich on the ride into the city about his career decisions:

Harper: How are your kids?
Murich: They’re fine, they’re young. I had to take a gun away from one kid last week.
Harper: A gun, oh hell no! Dammit Murich didn't that firm you work at last summer offer you a six figure salary?
Murich: Yeah…
Harper: So what's up?
Murich: I have to pass the bar first.
Harper: Listen brother, all I'm saying is if you're going to be stressed, get paid for it man.

When Murich and Harper arrive at the television station Jordan works for, her boss asks if they can host him on BET since he is an up and coming novelist:

Jordan’s Boss: Harper can we get you on Teen Summit or profile you on Tonight with Tavis?

These were shows that once aired on the network channel BET that went off the air in 2002. The purpose of the show was to deal with issues affecting young Black teens, and frame them in a positive light. Tonight with Tavis was also a showed which aired on BET until 2001 where the host Tavis Smiley discussed political issues affecting the Black community. The only mention of television shows in The Best Man are those which place the Black community in a positive
light. As Jordan and Harper spend the weekend, catching up, they talk about how their respective careers are going at this point in their lives:

Harper: So do you have any social life going on?
Jordan: No, not really. My professional and personal life cross over so much I don’t know where to draw the line anymore. But I'm fine with that because sacrifice is the name of the game.
Harper: You can't let work consume you.
Jordan: Please Harper, that doesn't even sound like you.
Harper: Maybe I'm maturing…
Jordan: No maybe you're full of shit. I know how badly you want that limelight, I see it, and I recognize it in myself.

Jordan is portrayed as trying to help Harper recognize there is nothing wrong with wanting success in life. Another important aspect that is implied within this scene is mentioning sacrifices must be made to attain success in life. In *Two Can Play That Game*, Shante introduces herself at the beginning of the film:

Shante: Do you like my house? Not bad for a girl from Compton, huh? By the way I'm Shante Smith senior advertising executive at Parker and Long and if you haven't noticed I'm a sistah. An educated strong sistah. Who remembers where she came from but knows where she's going.

When Shante walks into her home, she introduces her friend Karen who is depressed because she and her boyfriend just broke up:

Shante: This really saddens me; Karen is a top executive at a big engineering firm. The youngest executive in the company period. Black, white, female, male she's the youngest. Strong, young, very impressive.

Shante then introduces her boyfriend Keith, who works at a law firm:

Shante: Oh, did I neglect how accomplished he is?

As she says this, the camera spans across Keith’s office and shows all of the accolades and awards he has won over the years. Shante is then shown at her
advertising firm doing a presentation in front of her colleagues regarding how to have positive advertising in communities of color:

Shante: We should focus our attention on after school projects, thereby helping the community. Look at all this people, do you notice anything different? Me. I'm 28 yrs old, a sistah and still made partner.

Jackson in *The Brothers* is a doctor. He works with children, and all of his patients are Black:

Jackson: Ok, she'll just need to take her medicine and her throat should be fine.

Outside of work, Jackson also spends quality time with his patients. When he meets Denise, he is at the playground, playing with the children:

Denise: Do you know that little girl?
Jackson: She's one of my patients, I'm a doctor.
Denise: Why did you say it like that? Like, I'm a doctor, like you're Zeus or something.
Jackson: I didn't mean it like that.
Denise: I know, yeah, I'm just a free lance photographer, but I guess you can see that.

At their weekly basketball game, Brian comments on how they all are doing well in life:

Brian: Let's keep it real fellas, we're single Black, professional men, we're the cream of the crop.

In *Brown Sugar*, Syd is a hip hop writer for the Los Angeles Times in the beginning of the movie. Dre calls her weekly to get the review in the Times newspaper of music artists signed to Millennium Records. He is too impatient to wait until the newspaper is released. When Syd moves back to New York to be the new editor of XXL, Dre has her go watch Cav perform to try and sign him to Millennium Records:
Cav: I remember you man, you used to hang up posters at Def Jam.
Dre: Yeah that was a long time ago. Have you thought about signing with Millennium Records? Cav: To be honest man I don't know if Millennium is really ready for what I'm doing it’s on a different tip. I've seen some of your artists…no diss.

This is the same night Dre finds out Millennium Records signed the hip hop Dalmatian duo, Ren and Ten. When Dre goes into work the next day and talks to his manager about signing a group that has no talent:

Dre: I mean these guys have no skill they're straight up wack. Now this mc I saw last night, he came with the real, real hip hop.
Manager: I don't give a damn, I'm trying to sell records to people who are actually buying them. So I need someone that will give me that MTV rotation baby.

Dre leaves the office upset, and goes to Syd’s house to vent about how unethical Millennium Records is and how he is not doing what he has always wanted to do with his career; make good music:

Dre: And I was ready too. I was ready to leave Millennium; you know to give them my high and mighty speech and just bounce. Then I started thinking about the money, the upward mobility, the suits, and I punked out.
Syd: Dre, we all sell out a little in our career, that’s how you survive the business.

When Dre cannot stand working at Millennium anymore, he leaves and decides to start his own record label:

Dre: I'm thinking I can start my own label, make music I wanna make, music I think should be out there.

Syd is very supportive of his idea, and even gives him the start up money he needs:

Syd: Look you are my best friend, there's nobody that believes in you more than me so you're taking this check and you're starting that label. It's gonna be hot.
Her financial and emotional support pays off, as his artist Cav has his song featured on the radio by the end of the film.

The characters in these films are middle class, and are in positions to help their friends whether it is financial or through emotional support. Syd stating everyone has to sell out in their careers to survive, brings to light this same idea discussed in CRT. By acknowledging selling out being the only way to achieve career success, is legitimizing structures in society that are oppressive to people of color (Ladson-Billings, 1998). The above examples provided from the films for this claim indicate through hard work and dedication, anyone can lead a successful life. While it is important to portray and tell stories of Black people making positive decisions within their lives, the stories told in these films lend to feeding into the idea of meritocracy. This idea goes against one of the six tenets of CRT which is expressing skepticism toward dominant legal claims of neutrality, objectivity, colorblindness and meritocracy (Dixson and Rousseau, 2005). The common theme is through hard work and dedication (meritocracy) there is no excuse not to be successful.

Claim #2:

Navigational capital is used in these films to navigate Black spaces, not White spaces.

When Mike moves to Inglewood, California from North Carolina, Mike and Slim teach him how to navigate the streets of Inglewood:

Slim: Nigga are you cuz or blood? Rule #1 in the Wood, either you gang bang or play ball.
Roland: Yeah, or you could be a pimp like me.

One night, before Mike, Slim and Roland head off to their school dance, they stop by the local corner store to buy a couple of items:

Slim: Ay man you got to take that hat off.
Mike: Why?
Slim: Cause it’s got blue in it. Man that shit ain’t cool around here.

While properly navigating Black spaces is important, sharing the stories of those who were not able to successfully navigate Black and White spaces are more important to learn what needs to be changed within the current social structure. This lends to the idea that everyone was afforded the same opportunities in life and took advantage of these opportunities. The goal in CRT is to move away from viewing communities of color as culturally deficient and lacking resources. However, with all characters leading middle class lifestyles, this replicates the idea that White middle class values are the norm. Yosso (2005) claimed, “The main goals of identifying and documenting cultural wealth are to transform education and empower People of Color to utilize assets already abundant in their communities” (p. 82). These films do not focus on utilizing skills that are taught in communities of color, rather they just emulate White normative values.

RQ#3: How are gender relations and sexuality depicted within the Black film boom of the early 2000s?

Claim #1:
Women in these films are portrayed as having the ability to express their sexuality, however, women who become engaged or get married by the end of the film are the characters that are more sexually reserved and portray loyalty to their partners.

Utilizing the Black feminist framework, I point to attempts that either push the movement forward, or in some unfortunate cases, prevent the movement from progressing.

In the *Best Man*, there are four female characters that impact the lives of the male characters. I will first describe the portrayal of the two women who are married or engaged by the end of the film, then I will describe the two that remain single. Mia, the fiancée of Lance Armstrong, is portrayed as a well-rounded woman who would be considered by most standards as traditional and conservative. When she is first introduced in the movie, the characters are in college, and this is the interaction between Lance and Harper when she walks away from them:

Lance: Who is that? Is that you player?
Harper: No man we're just friends, word has it she's saving it.
Lance: Man, you got to hook me up.

As the film progresses, and the wedding day draws close, the men ask Lance how he envisions married life with Mia:

Lance: Man when me and Mia get married her only job is being my wife and raising our kids.
Harper: She's gonna be content with that?
Quentin: Are you kidding? Mia is straight up old school. She can't wait to drop this Mandigo's babies.
When Jordan, the maid of honor, questions Mia about if the number of sexual partners she has had, she is coy in her response:

Jordan: So?
Jordan: Bitch, don't make me hurt you.
Mia: What we shared was as sweet as endearing as a forehead kiss. It was what I needed, what I wanted, he was a gentleman and a friend, and I will always love him for that.

By the end of the film, Lance is able to forgive Mia for her one sexual indiscretion even if it was with the best man because she has taken him back all the times he was unfaithful to her thereby proving her loyalty to him.

Robin is the girlfriend of the best man, Harper Stewart. In the beginning of *The Best Man*, despite the fact they have been in a committed relationship for two years, Harper is not quite ready to take the next step, marriage. There are also no scenes of Robin with her being overtly sexual. In the beginning scenes, Harper returns from a business trip and as they relax and share a bath together, Robin expresses her feelings to Harper but are not returned by Harper:

Harper: I felt you getting your freak on a couple of minutes ago, that’s what I felt.
Robin: Only with you boo.
Harper: That’s what I like to hear.
Robin: I could be like this with you forever.
Harper: What?
Robin: Relax, all I mean is that I love being with you. You love me don't you?
Harper: Of course but it’s not that simple…

Robin voices her concerns to Harper about their relationship and he brushes them off calling her insecure:

Robin: I'm not insecure, I just have doubts sometimes.
Towards the end of the movie, Robin realizes her doubts were valid when Harper confesses to her that he was going to sleep with Jordan, the maid of honor, the night before and the wedding might be called off due to Lance finding out he slept with Mia. When Robin lets him know she will not be attending the wedding and tries to go back to Chicago, Harper tells her:

Harper: Robin, I need you! I cannot do this alone, please don't leave me now.

Robin stays with Harper despite the attempted infidelity, and this display of loyalty is rewarded with Harper proposing to her at the end of the film and she accepts. *The Best Man* does not attempt to offer a non-traditional lens of women and dating. By casting Mia and Robin as women who are willing to remain in relationships with men that either have cheated or planned on cheating on them, plays into the stereotype of men will be men. The next two female characters discussed in this section from *The Best Man* are Jordan and Shelby which are viewed as the non-traditional women in the film.

Jordan Armstrong is portrayed as a business minded woman who is focused on her career, no matter what that may cost her in her personal life:

Jordan: So we'll let the station buy us lunch tomorrow, I'll pick you up around 11.
Harper: Splendid Ms. Armstrong it fits very well into my schedule, I'll call to confirm.
Jordan: Oh, so what, a sistah can't be professional?
Harper: Oh, here we go, I guess some things never change.
Jordan: Change is overrated.

Harper and Jordan have unresolved sexual tension since their college days.

During college, the two friends were study buddies, and always kept each other
motivated and in the top of their classes. This is displayed in a scene in the film where Harper explains that he and Jordan never dated because he went to graduate school after undergraduate, and Jordan received an internship in California. During the wedding weekend, Harper and Jordan spend time catching up. While Harper is intrigued by Jordan, even when he complains about committing to his girlfriend Robin, he never initiates sexual contact with Jordan. As Jordan hears Harper voice his concerns about relationships and marriage, she can only come up with one positive side, having sex:

Jordan: "Well at least you're getting some on the regular.
Harper: What? You ain't getting none?
Jordan: Listen, six months and counting and longer than that if you're talking about good sex.
Harper: Well you know what they say, all work and no play makes…
Jordan: Jordan a horny nut basket.

Once Jordan realizes that Harper is attracted to her, she suggests one night together despite the fact that Harper’s girlfriend will be arriving to New York in the morning for the wedding. So she expresses her feelings at the wedding rehearsal:

Jordan: I want to make love to you tonight. I feel like our opportunity has presented itself again and I don't want us to miss out on it twice. I know this is a bit much but I was just hoping you would say yes.
Harper: Wow, um how do you expect me to react to something like this?
Jordan: I know, I don't even know what I expect right now but I know what I want and what I need. Let's just have out night and we'll see.
Harper: Umm Robin's coming tomorrow... (Jordan leans in and kisses Harper).
Jordan: You know you don't have to decide right now, you can think about it.
After the rehearsal dinner, Jordan again tries to convince Harper they should have their one night together because he still seems to be a bit hesitant:

   Jordan: So are you gonna come over after all that lap dancing and drinking and stuff?
   Harper: Yeah, umm I'll call you when I get back to the crib.
   Jordan: Harper look, don't have me waiting all night cause this is our night, and I feel it and I know you feel it too...and I hope you wore those boxers I like (laughing).

In this scene, Jordan is demonstrating that she is aware of Harper’s girlfriend by making a joke about the boxers Robin bought for him. When Harper does come over to Jordan’s house after the bachelor party, she immediately realizes things will not go as planned. Harper has been beat up by Lance as he discovered Harper slept with his fiancée, Mia. Jordan decides against sleeping with Harper because he blames her for Lance finding out. Although Harper then tries to smooth things over by telling her they are still friends (two peas in a pod), she yells at him because she is sexually frustrated and goes to bed:

   Jordan: You know, maybe if I had the luxury of getting my ass whooped I could be calm now. But I have been drinking tequila shots, my hormones are raging out of control, I'm emotional and horny and I don't wanna hear about no got damn peas. Fuck you, goodnight!

By the time of the wedding reception, Jordan realizes her moment with Harper has passed, and that he and his girlfriend have something worth preserving:

   Jordan: I saw you grabbing for that garter. But you know what? I don't blame you, she's a beautiful woman, she's the one. Just don't blow it. I love you Harper.

Jordan then leaves to go dance with Lance’s elderly uncle since there are no other single men in attendance at the wedding.
Shelby is the fourth and final female character I will discuss from *The Best Man*.

She and Julian have been dating for seven years, and she is portrayed as domineering, manipulative, controlling, money hungry, and never wants him to spend time with his friends. The night Harper arrives into town, she know the groomsmen have arranged to spend the night hanging out and catching up.

However, she insists that Julian goes shopping with her instead:

Shelby:  Julian honey, drive me to Saks would you?  I can't decide what to wear to the wedding.
Julian:  But I told you I had plans that I'm hanging out with the guys tonight…
Shelby:  Oh honey, that can wait you have all weekend for that, this will only take a few hours. Oh, I see its “gang- up on Shelby day.” Fine if you would rather be with them than me that's fine. Am I being that unreasonable?

As Julian rushes to her side, to console her, the group of friends all start laughing, commenting on how this dynamic has been going on forever. At the wedding rehearsal, Shelby begins to harass Julian on how he should stop working with inner city children and take a job at a law firm:

Shelby:  Why didn't you call and tell me how the tuxedos fit?
Julian:  Quentin's phone wasn't working…
Shelby:  You guys are wearing Hugo Boss right?
Julian:  Yes.
Shelby:  You cannot wear American cut, it does nothing for your frame.
Julian:  Shelby…
Shelby:  While we're on the subject, are you taking the job at the firm?
Julian:  How is that on the subject?
Shelby:  Hugo Boss, prestigious law firm, need I say more?
Julian:  Shelby, listen honey, I just don't know.
Shelby:  Listen, you cannot keep babysitting these ghetto children forever, you've got to get a real job.
Julian:  I do not want to talk about this right now; I am not going to talk about this right now.
Later on that night after the rehearsal dinner, Shelby tries to convince Julian not to attend the bachelor party:

Shelby: You don't even care about how I feel. So are you going to this juvenile bachelor party?
Julian: Of course I'm going and it’s not juvenile.
Shelby: Oh come on, you know your boys from the hood would fit right in.
Julian: Shelby, you really need to stop talking about my kids that way.
Shelby: You really need to stay with me tonight Julian there's some unresolved issues and I think we should tackle them now instead of giving them time to fester.

However, Julian does not fall her controlling tactics and decides to attend the bachelor party. He even takes the advice of his friend Quentin and does not go home to her later that night. When Shelby meets him at the wedding, she decides to make an attempt at being civil towards Julian so they can work out their relationship issues. Even Shelby’s attempt at an apology is seen as a way for her to gain control over Julian. It is not out of her loyalty or support of Julian and the way he has chosen to live his life:

Shelby: Julian, before you say anything, I just want you to know I forgive you.
Julian: You do?
Shelby: Yes, I know you were just succumbing to that testosterone peer pressure. You wanted to be with me last night, and it ate you up that you couldn't. It just made sense that you should continue to suffer and think about the jeopardy you put our relationship through rather than let you have your own way.

This makes Julian realize that him and Shelby are not meant to be together. The last clip of Shelby is of her and Quentin realizing the night after the wedding, they slept together.
In *The Wood*, there are two female characters that make a strong impact on the male characters. Alicia and Mike, childhood sweethearts first meet when Mike and his family from North Carolina to Inglewood, California. He thinks Alicia is beautiful, and when his new friends Roland and Slim bet him to grab her butt, he takes the bet as a personal challenge. When he does this, Alicia is not pleased with him:

Alicia: Nigga you crazy? You do not know me. Don't you ever but your stankin hands on me like that again. Oh and I will tell my brother. Bet on that punk.

Once Mike and Alicia move past this incident, they become close friends in high school. Although Mike has a girlfriend and Alicia has a boyfriend, they are both still virgins and Mike confides in Alicia one day as they study in the library that his girlfriend will not have sex with him:

Alicia: You need to find a girl who wants it as bad as you do.

When Alicia says this statement, the two leave the library and go to her house, since her mother is still at work. Once in her bedroom, they lose their virginity to each other. Although Mike really has strong feelings for Alicia, he does not pursue a relationship with her after high school because she moves to New York for college. They are reunited at the end of the film at Roland’s wedding, and Mike lets her know he is considering moving to New York to see if they can be together. With Alicia moving to New York for college, this portrays her independent spirit, as she is willing to relocate across the country, away from family and friends. While Alicia is comfortable expressing her desire for sex, it
does not end with her and Mike being together until he is older and realizes he may have missed out on a great opportunity.

Lisa is the fiancée of Roland, and the only time she is shown in the film is the day of their wedding. Roland has avoided her all day because he is having doubts about getting married:

Lisa: Hell, if he doesn't want to do this, I'm not gonna force him. Call it off then...
Mike: Lisa just stay calm.
Lisa: I am calm.
Mike: Then why are you yelling? Look I'm gonna go get Rol because obviously you have some things to discuss.
Lisa: No, wait its bad luck to see him.
Mike: Bad luck? I thought you wanted to call it off.
Lisa: Mike, look at me, would I be standing here in this dress if I didn't want to marry him? But I'm not going to if he has doubts.

Mike and Slim talk to Lisa, and give her the ticket stub of the concert where Roland first met her that he had saved. She realizes he really loves her, and after all the hesitation, they get married. With Lisa allowing Roland to have doubts the day of the wedding but still wanting to marry him, proves her devotion and loyalty to him, and not once does she ever question if she wants to be married to him. In the film *Two Can Play That Game*, Karen, one of the female characters, gets engaged at the end of the movie. Karen and Shante, are best friends, and at the beginning scenes, Karen is shown having problems with her financially unstable boyfriend Michael:

Shante: She cleaned him up, fixed his hair and even straightened out his crooked ass teeth. I mean she's a down sistah, she'll work with a brotha, ya know?
As Karen is shown crying on Shante’s couch, having not showered in days and still in her pajamas, Shante decides to give Karen advice on what she did wrong in her relationship:

    Shante: The best way to a man's heart is through his stomach and sports, not your wallet baby.
    Karen: Shante, I know, but I was just trying to help.
    Shante: I know honey, listen, a man is like a stray dog, you feed a stray dog one day and if he comes back, you got him hooked.

As the film progresses, the audience learns that Karen takes Shante’s dating advice, and all of her hard work and dedication pays off in the end. As Karen and her friends are shopping in the mall, she shows off her engagement ring:

    Karen: Wait I have an announcement; you know I finished my ten day process, bam!

While all of her friends are excited for her, Shante can only show slight excitement because she is having her own share of problems in her relationship.

Shante is the narrator of the movie, and can be described as sassy, independent, and thinks she has her man and relationship under control:

    Shante: Me? I don't have a problem with my man, he behaves very well.

As she talks about her boyfriend Keith, Shante is then shown stopping by his office in the middle of the day to have sex with him. When she leaves his office, she quickly explains this action:

    Shante: There's nothing like love in the afternoon. I know some of you may be surprised that I just did a freaky deaky drive by, but let me explain something to you real quick. Keith is my man and has been for awhile...So you see, Keith is special, you don't do that for everybody, just your man. Now if you forget everything I tell you remember this, men want a woman in public and a freak in private.
However, the same night after this occurs, Keith cancels dinner with Shante because he is working late. When Shante and her girlfriends go out to dinner, they see Keith on the dance floor with another woman. Because of this, Shante decides to put Keith through her rigorous ten-day dating process to punish him, and convince to beg for her forgiveness. During this time period, Keith starts dating Conny, who is described as a woman who uses her sexuality to get what she wants out of life. When Conny is first introduced in the film, Shante has nothing positive to say about her:

Shante: Conny Spalding, Vice President of Marketing and a bonafide hoe… Ok every girls got a little hoe in them but Conny; she's a different kind of hoe. She's a lay on your back, do whatever it takes to get your man, kind of hoe… I don't know how she got that big executive job, but three months after she got hired her boss got a divorce. You make the call.

Conny is so sexual that at times Keith is even a little put off by it. At a work event she is very aggressive with Keith, and he even pulls his best friend Tony aside to complain:

Keith: Man she's all trying to rape me on the dance floor and shit.  
Tony: You say that like it's a bad thing.  
Keith: I know she's fine but we're on the dance floor in front of all these people trying to grab my stuff and putting her titties on my back and stuff.

Tony convinces Keith to still give Conny a chance since Shante is playing games. Keith agrees, and escorts Conny to a weekend work event where Shante is in attendance. When Shante notices them together, she is livid. She pulls Conny aside to talk to her:

Shante: Conny, what are you doing here with Keith? You know he's my man.
Conny: Oh, well if he's your man he's certainly not acting like it.
Shante: Will perhaps he would if he didn't have a little hooch like you running behind him all the time.
Conny: I don't appreciate your tone, and why are you calling me names? C'mon Shante, it’s a little junior high don't you think? Keith is here with me because he wants to be here with me. I didn't force him, I'm not twisting his arm, it's his decision. So, don't take your frustrations out on me if you can't control your man. Ok?

Shante realizes she is quickly losing control on the situation. To make Keith jealous, she meets a man and leads Keith to believe she is going to sleep with him:

Shante: So the situation is getting hot. It’s time for the coupé de gras. That's French term for "fuck him up" (She drops a condom on the ground).
Keith: What the hell is this for?
Shante: No reason.
Keith: What you mean no reason?
Shante: I'm just carrying it just in case.
Keith: Just in case what?

As Keith walks away upset, he goes and informs his friend Tony about the situation. Tony tries to calm him down by telling him Shante is just bluffing and assures him she would not sleep with a man she just met:

Tony: Keith you're overreacting. Everyone has condoms nowadays.
Keith: Yeah, why does she have one in her purse?
Tony: Who knows? Maybe for decoration. She's not gonna use it. Did she sleep with you on the first date?
Keith: Yes.
Tony: Oh…

Keith then pulls Shante aside and uses Conny to threaten her:

Keith: Let me tell you something, if you walk out that door with him, I'm going home with Conny tonight.
Shante: Keith, if you feel you have to control me by going home with Conny tonight, go right ahead, do what you gotta do.
Shante: You're taking a huge gamble here, he might actually go ahead and sleep with Conny, but my guess is he won't. He'll be at your house tonight waiting for you, so take your time.

When Shante arrives home later that night, she realizes Keith is not waiting for her. As the camera shows her sitting in a bar having a drink, she comes to the realization that there are no rules to love and her games did not work. She notices Keith sitting at the other end of the bar and apologizes to him for her actions, and they decide to try work things out in their relationship.

As was stated in chapter three, the goal with the Black feminist framework is to allow for diverse viewpoints and to advance social justice efforts. Having the lived experiences and thoughts of Black women from varying walks and social backgrounds acknowledges the intersectionality of race, class and gender. The above examples provided for women and sexuality still feed into a male centered framework of women and sexuality. The women in these films are all living middle class lifestyles, which goes against the Black feminist framework of hearing stories of women from varying backgrounds. Utilizing the Black feminist framework, I point to attempts that either push the movement forward, or in some unfortunate cases, prevent the movement from progressing.

The female characters depicted in *Two Can Play This Game*, validate and uphold the stereotype that women should be sexually reserved. This is displayed by Karen being the only character to be engaged by the end of the film. Although Shante is shown as independent, this ultimately does not work out well for her in the end of the movie, and she must change her actions to save her relationship.
In the film *The Brothers*, one of the women characters, Shelia, is married to Derrick and is portrayed as a controlling woman:

Derrick: Yes Shelia, I am meeting the brothas after work for our game. Yes we are going to the club afterwards. How is my baby gonna miss me if she's sleep?

However, Shelia is very uptight when it comes to her love life with her husband to the point that she does not believe in performing oral sex because her mother told her good girls don’t do those sort of things:

Shelia: No, I'm just not ready.
Derrick: Not ready? You promised!
Shelia: I know, but I'm not ready, it's nasty.

Sexual differences are the basis to their problems, and by the middle of the film, Derrick has had enough of her controlling ways:

Derrick: You just don't get it do you? We are married this is not just about sex it's about the way we feel about each other. You mean everything to me Shelia, what do I mean to you? No this is about the way I have let you control this relationship and this family and that's over now.

Although Shelia wants to make things right in her marriage, her pride will not let her do that. Because of this, Shelia and Derrick decide to file for legal separation.

Towards the end of the film, Shelia goes to the club with her girlfriends and she realizes what a good man she had all along:

Shelia: And they started telling me stories about their exes, and baby these women had been disrespected in ways you couldn’t imagine. And I'm sitting there thinking all my husband wanted to do was make love to me and take care of his mother, and I just felt so stupid.
Derrick: What are you saying Shelia?
Shelia: I'm saying that I was wrong Derrick and I love you, and you mean the world to me and I didn't realize how much that was worth.

Since Shelia was able to admit her mistakes they are able to work out their problems and decide to stay married. Jackson’s mother Louise remarries his father by the end of the film. Louise and Fred Smith were married for 25 years before he filed for divorce. Fred has moved on, but Louise still holds on to the idea that they are meant to be together. When he brings a young Black French woman, who doesn’t speaks English, to their daughter Cherie’s graduation party, Louise is not thrilled:

Louise: So, you don't speak no English, huh? So the words ‘stank hoe’ wouldn't mean anything to you then. Dead hoe, ignorant hoe, French hoe…bringin that bitch up in here…

However, even after this incident occurs, everyone can tell Louise is still waiting for Fred to realize what a good thing they had together. When Louise volunteers to host BeBe’s bridal shower, Cherie decides to talk to her mother about her behavior:

Cherie: And while we're on the subject of other men mama, you really need to get yourself a man and stop pining away for daddy. Louise: Okay, that's enough, you've had too much to drink. Cherie: This is a new century; women are saying goodbye to dependency. I don't need a man, I have myself. Louise: Oh see, until this moment I didn’t know for sure that my baby is still a virgin.

One night, Jackson stops by to visit his mother and she is all dressed up and setting the dinner table:

Louise: Your father's coming by here tonight. Jackson: How long has this been going on?
Louise: Since your sister's party. He came back to apologize for bringing that girl and you know I was lookin good...
Jackson: Mom, you're gonna have to stop seeing Daddy.
Louise: And do what? You're gone, your sister's leaving; I'm throwing parties here every other night just to have people around. Your father and I are comfortable with each other Jackson....
Jackson: Now I know you still love him, but you're gonna have to let him go.
Louise: No, I won't let him go. We had a marriage, love and children and nothing is stronger than that.

By the end of the film, Fred realizes that he and Louise belong together, and the final scene of the movie is the two of them being remarried. Louise is portrayed as the loyal wife, although her husband Fred had the option to leave his marriage once and date other women. By patiently waiting for Fred to sow his wild oats, sends the message that the sign of a strong Black woman is being able to endure all the hardships of dealing with her man and supporting him nonetheless.

BeBe is engaged in the beginning of the movie; however, her engagement to Terry is called off by the end of the film. BeBe has been dating Terry for a couple of months and they decide they want to be married. When the news breaks to his friends, they are all shocked due to the fact he is a well-known womanizer. When BeBe meets up with Terry and his friends at a bar, she makes it clear she is not going anywhere:

BeBe: Look Brian, you and I have never liked each other, ok that's cool, but understand this. I will not take any shit off of you. I'm at the gun range twice a week, and I am licensed to correct a nigga.

In the next scene, BeBe is shown lying naked with Terry trying to make wedding plans and he just brushes her off a little bit:

Terry: Oh my God girl, you are gonna wear me out. Don't you ever get tired?
BeBe: Nope, you know I shouldn't even be doing this until after we're married I'm a good girl. Terry: Ok good girl, but if you weren't giving me any lovin we might not have been getting married...
BeBe: We need to get those invitations out in the next couple of days, oh and my parents are going to be flying in a few weeks before and the wedding planner needs to know how many we have on the guest list.
Terry: Girl, will you hush, who do you think got this party started? I know all of that. I cannot wait to make you Mrs. Terry White.

Unfortunately, Terry decides he is not ready for marriage just a few weeks before the wedding. However, BeBe decides he is still a good man, so by the end of the film they agree to just continue dating and take things slowly.

Denise and Jackson decide to be in a serious relationship by the end of the film. Denise is a freelance photographer taking pictures in the park one afternoon, where Jackson is talking to some of his patients. A few hours after meeting each other, the cameras show the two of them going back to his house and having sex:

Jackson: Listen Denise, I hope you don't feel nervous about us hooking up on the first day like this.
Denise: Why would I feel nervous? Because I picked you up, and I got you in the bed like this.
Jackson: A lot of women would feel nervous about this.
Denise: Well how about I picked you up so that would make you the slut puppy.

Jackson then informs her that whenever he sleeps with a woman, he usually never talks to her again because he has commitment issues. However, Denise is not scared off by this information:

Denise: There's a lot of interesting things I can do with a man like you.
Jackson: See, I thought you were crazy before, but now I know you really are.
Denise: No, I'm just a sucker for a naked man.

Jackson falls in love with her carefree spirit and soon they are in a monogamous relationship. Trouble arises however, when he finds out that Denise went on a couple of dates with his father Fred before he met her. By taking this angle within the story line, Denise is shown as a woman who is sexually immoral, since she dated a father and now his son.

*Brown Sugar* is a film that can be described as a hip-hop love story.

Sydney “Syd”, Francine, and Reese are the main female characters in this film.

Syd, editor of one of the largest hip-hop magazines in the nation, XXL, cannot find a man that she connects with like she does with her best friend Dre. When she moves back to New York, Syd and her cousin Francine attend an industry party where she sees Dre for the first time in months:

Syd: See this is why I don't date. The only guys I meet are in the industry and they don't ever have their shit together.
Francine: What, like him?

Syd is excited to see Dre again after so much time has passed. However, he introduces her to his new girlfriend Reese and tells Syd that he is proposing to her even though they have only been dating a couple of months because, he claims, she is brown sugar:

Dre: She's Brown Sugar.
Syd: Oh yeah, break it down for me?
Dre: Brown Sugar is wifey material, a woman who is fine, smart, classy but not a snob. Hella hella sexy but not a hoe, that’s Brown Sugar.

As Syd settles into her new home in New York, Francine talks to her about dating as she helps her unpack her belongings:
Francine: And where does this go?
Syd: It's not what you think, it's a massager from Brookstone. Men take too much of your time, time I don't have.
Francine: You're turning into a Terry McMillan character.
Syd: Don't say that, that's cold. I just never seem to find anyone on the same page as me.
Francine: What, like Dre?

Syd informs her cousin she does not want to take things to the next level with Dre because it would ruin their friendship. However, the night before his wedding he stops by her house, and they kiss. As Dre turns to leave for his bachelor party,

Syd asks him if he is sure he really wants to get married:

    Syd: Wait, are you sure you wanna do this tomorrow?  
    Dre: Yeah, yeah…I love her and I want to marry uh Reese, I love her.

Although Syd is disappointed and hurt that Dre married another woman, she still stands by his side and remains loyal to their friendship:

    Syd: The union of hip hop to the mainstream was a hard thing to imagine. Hip hop was always this personal, regional thing that belonged to just me…I knew I was going to have to share and that was hard to get used to.

As time moves forward, Syd has an interview with a basketball player named Kelby Dawson. Francine takes Syd to have a makeover so she can make a good impression:

    Francine: Look you need to catch a man but you're not dangling the right bait.
    Syd: I look fine, you dangle enough for the both of us.
    Francine: Ok look, I know you don't want to make that little friend of yours jealous, but you need the real thing.
    Syd: It's a massager from Brookstone.
    Francine: Whatever, you're about to go inside, Katrina is gonna hook your hair up, and then we're gonna get you some real clothes so you look incredible for your date with Kelby Dawson tonight.
    Syd: It's not a date, I'm meeting him for business.
Francine: It's an opportunity, so you gotta dangle.

Apparently Syd dangles the right bait, and she and Kelby begin dating. During the next couple of months, Dre leaves his job at a record company to start his own label. When he tells his wife, she is not very pleased:

Dre: I don't need you to be my lawyer, Reese I need you to be my wife.
Reese: And a husband consults his wife when he changes the plan.
Dre: And a wife supports her husband, baby I need your support.

At this point, Dre begins thinking that he may have made a mistake in marrying Reese since she does not support his dreams, and starts to realize he may have missed out on his opportunity with Syd. Soon after, Syd hosts a party at her home on New Year’s Eve with close friends in attendance. Kelby proposes to her at the party, and she accepts. However, Dre become jealous and tries to talk her out of marrying Kelby. At this point, Syd lets him know she sees Reese at the gym flirting with other men:

Dre: She's a flirt, she's always been a flirt and I'm cool with that.

However, one afternoon, Dre learns that Reese is on a lunch date with another man, and this is the final straw for him and he files for divorce from Reese. As he goes back to Syd’s house to vent, they end up sleeping together. By the end of the film, Syd and Dre admit they truly love each other and decide to start dating.

Analyzing the data provided above, women within their respective relationships, more often than not, had to choose between having a romantic relationship and being dedicated to their careers. There was no room for women to maintain both. NewBlackMan which is heavily influenced by Black feminist
thought calls on the importance of hearing stories of Black men and women from varying backgrounds and social class. One of the most important tenets of Black feminist thought is the call for social justice. However, social justice cannot be achieved through maintaining traditional gender stereotypes. Although having the opportunity to produce independent Black films, the Black male directors used for the purposes of this study have not been able to step away from the dominant White viewpoint in the representations of Black women. With Black film writers not stepping away from a patriarchal, hegemonic display of Black femininity the door is left open as Burks (1996) acknowledges for White producers to construct the Black female image in any way they see fit.

Claim #2:

Through positive male friendships, bonding rituals, and sexual prowess, male characters validate and uphold their masculinity in these films.

In the films *The Best Man*, *The Wood*, and *The Brothers* a prevalent theme is spending quality time with a group of male friends. A major scene in *The Best Man* is when Lance, Harper, Quentin and Murich get together a couple of days before the wedding to catch up, drink and play cards. The conversation quickly turns to the topic of sex:

Harper: Mo to the Jo.
Quentin: That's what I be puttin on my ladies when I do my thang.
Lance: He got them turned the hell out. They be makin breakfast for this fool, buying him jewelry, and they wonder why they're doing this cause they really hate his yellow ass.
Murich: Then he drops them like a bad habit.
As the men make fun of the way Quentin treats women in his life, Quentin quickly turns to Harper:

Quentin: I know, damn, well you ain't talkin about a nigga leaving a hoe strung out.
Lance: Yeah, that is true player, you are the serial monogamist dog.
Quentin: Nigga, you be having these girlfriends, no better yet, these jive ass public relationships talkin about this is my queen and shit, and the moment she steps out of your little boundary, she's gone.
Lance: Dismissed with the quick.

When the conversation turns to dating, the men quickly start comparing Robin to Jordan:

Murich: She still sounds nothing like Jordan.
Harper: That's cause she ain't Jordan.
Lance: Man I'm glad she ain't Jordan.
Harper: Why you say that?
Lance: Cause Jordan's too damn sassy and independent, man. And she might make more cheese than you someday bruh.
Harper: Yeah, and?
Jordan: Hey man, I love Jordan but let's face it, a woman like that don't need no man, no man, she's one step from lesbian.

Harper, Quentin and Murich then begin to question Lance on why he decided to get married as he is a known womanizer and has been so during their entire relationship:

Harper: What made you decide to get married? Cause you been dipping out on Mia, no offense for awhile.
Murich: Wait, and with the new contract…
Quentin: You gonna need a catcher’s mitt to catch all that new pussy coming your way.
Lance: Players, come on now, I done had all the ass ten men can have, my wild oats are sown. Besides, how much ass can one man have?
Harper, Murich, Quentin: A lot!
As Lance explains to his friends, marriage is something scared to him, he urges Harper to use the wedding weekend to cheat on his girlfriend with Jordan:

Lance: Yes, Jordan, I saw how she was looking at you tonight bruh.
Harper: What man, what did you see?
Lance: I saw that she wants to get with you playa. Ya'll going to smacking bellies this weekend. Harper: What happened to that talk about fidelity and putting an end to promiscuity?
Lance: I was talking about me, that don't apply to you. Look here man, I know you got your girl right, and ya'll doing your little relationship thing and that's cool. But Harper, you my boy, my ace, Jordan is fine dog, so for once in your life, go on and be a dog, dog.

Male friendship is also used to support their friends when they are in bad relationships. No one approves of Murich’s relationship with Shelby, so Quentin gives him advice on how he should handle her:

Murich: Hey Quentin, can I use your phone?
Quentin: Who you callin?
Murich: Shelby.
Quentin: Oh hell no.
Murich: Excuse me?
Quentin: I said no, you can't be lettin her know your every move, that's played.
Murich: Sometimes you're such an a-hole
Quentin: Well she's a…
Murich: Don't you dare!
Quentin: Oh come on, you know you don't like the way she be carrying you, none of us like it. It’s time for you to stand up and you know, grow some balls and be a man or something. Look all I'm saying is I don't want to see you standing around moping tonight, it's the bachelor party, I wanna see you have fun, get loose, rub you a little booty then don't even go home to her.
Murich: Now you're talking crazy.
Quentin: Trust me, it works.

Murich heeds Quentin’s advice, and is able to find the courage to leave Shelby after being together seven years:
Murich: Shelby, it’s over. I am not the man for you, and you are not the woman for me so let’s just stop fooling ourselves. I hope you find what you are looking for because that is what I intend to do. I have to go, bye Shel.

When Lance finds out Harper slept with Mia in college, he almost throws him over a balcony. Quentin is able to step in and remind Lance that Harper is his best friend:

Quentin: We know Harper is a bitch ass, but this cat is your man a hundred grand, he wouldn't do that to you, karma wouldn't come back that strong baby.

Although Lance finds out the truth, he realizes his friendship with Harper is too strong to throw it away over something that happened in the past.

The Wood displays how a lifetime friendship is formed for three young men in junior high school: Mike, Roland and Slim. Mike moves to Inglewood, California and immediately forms a bond with Roland and Slim:

Slim: Whose homeroom you got?
Mike: Mrs. Hughes.
Slim: Oh cool, so you can just roll with us.

When Mike gets into a fight with Stacey, Alicia’s older brother when he grabs her butt, Roland and Slim jump in to help their new friend:

Roland and Slim: C'mon Stacey!
Stacey: Man get off me! Ya'll want some of this too?
Slim: Yeah…I mean I guess so…
Mike: Thanks for having my back ya'll.
Slim: Oh fa sho, we always got your back, we can't have you getting killed your first day in the Wood.

Years after the above fight with Stacey, the day of Roland’s wedding, he begins to have doubts. Mike and Slim pick him up from his ex-girlfriend’s house and talk to him about the situation:
Slim: Look Ro, whatever you decide to do, we're behind you but I'm getting yo ass there and you need to stop running.

As the three men have lunch, Roland is surprised that his friends are not happy that he is having doubts about marrying Lisa:

Roland: I thought you guys were going to be happy about me having second thoughts. The way you guys were treating me when I first asked her. Man, when I said maybe I might move, what happened? Man why you bustin up the group man? The brothas, the Wood.

Slim: For real though, this is your home, we been together in the Wood for years and you talkin about leaving? We barely kick it as is…Look I just don't think you need to be following the woman, nigga be a man!

Roland: I am a man, that's bull. It's like, she has a good job so I'm gonna go and follow her. Slim: You need some panties.

By the end of the film, Mike and Slim are supportive of Roland's marriage to Lisa. As they are all at the reception and Mike sees his first love Alicia, he reflects on his friendship with Roland and Slim:

Mike: Hey, what did we know? All that mattered in life were your boys, the team, you never think anything could be more important. And you hold on to that feeling for a long time until you meet that one. It happened to ‘Ro and I suppose it will happen to Slim. Me? Well I was a goner the first day she walked into my classroom.

Mike realizes that Roland’s marriage signifies them growing up and becoming men.

Brian, Derrick, Jackson, and Terry are best friends in The Brothers. Every week, the guys meet up for a weekly basketball game and for a night out on the town. In the first few minutes of the film, Jackson expresses to his therapist, who he is seeing for his commitment issues, how important his time is with his friends:
Dr. Thelma Woolridge: I have an assignment for you. I want you to get back out there and date some more. In fact, try to meet a woman tonight.

Jackson: Oh no, I'm shooting hoops with the fellas tonight, then we hang, its kinda like a weekly tradition.

When the men meet up at a club after playing basketball, Terry announces his engagement to BeBe. Since his friends are concerned if he is making the best decision, they talk to him about getting married when BeBe goes to the restroom:

Jackson: You know Terry, you always said you would get married two seconds before you dropped dead, that's what you said right?
Terry: Yeah that was a long time ago, I have changed. Look fellas, I'm about to be 29 years old, I think it’s time I went and settled down... Wait I thought that's what we wanted, didn't we talk about this? Love, happiness and all that other shit.
Brian: Love and happiness is one thing, but we're talking about marriage.
Derrick: Listen, take it from me, marriage is not just something you jump into Terry.
Brian: And two months is barely enough time to know if the booty is right.
Terry: Wait, what is this, piss on Terry night?
Derrick: Listen Terry, we're your friends, we just want what's best for you.

Even at Terry’s bachelor party, Brian still tries to talk him out of getting married.

This upsets Terry and he decides to set him straight:

Brian: Why are you doing this Terry? Don't do it Terry, the brothers, we got a friendship, a bond. And you under the guise of growing up is about to throw it all away. And I'm looking out for us, I'm protecting the brothas.
Terry: You jealous man. I know you, you wish you had someone to care about and don't try to tell me different. Let me tell you what I discovered and that's why I'm doing what I'm doing. This world is full of amazing women waiting for brothas like us that got it together. But it takes courage to step up like that. But look at you, you don't know nothin’ about that cause you can't seem to see past your raggedy dick.
When Terry cancels on their weekly guy night, Brian is really upset and cannot understand how he could let a woman come in between their friendship:

Brian: See, its starting already. You put your boys on the backburner and more and more you just don't care. The next thing you know, you're wearing an apron, washing dishes and you have a feather duster up your ass.

However, it seems as if Brian knows his friend better because no sooner is the bachelor party over, does Terry call off his wedding. He goes to Jackson’s house and immediately pours himself something to drink:

Jackson: Terry, no.
Terry: I can't do it J, I was cool until a few days ago. I'm making a big mistake marrying B…
Jackson: Imma call the fellas, at a time like this you need to be with your boys.
Terry: Don't call Brian, I already know what his sorry ass is gonna say.

All the guys meet up for a late night of basketball, and start sharing all of the problems they have been having with the women in their lives:

Terry: You know fellas I've been doin some thinking. Complaining about the honies, what they want and what they don't want. Maybe we need to check ourselves.

As soon as Terry says this, all the men start laughing, and continue playing their basketball game.

In the films *Two Can Play That Game* and *Brown Sugar* the friendships between two men serve as a key element. Tony and Keith are best friends, and when Shante stops by Keith’s law office for afternoon sex, Tony immediately runs into Keith’s office to ask what happened.

Tony: Ay, you hit it, didn't you? Aww you's a dog!
Although Keith never confirms this to be true, he immediately begins laughing
and slaps his friend high five. Once he begins to have problems in his
relationship with Shante, the first person he calls is Tony for advice when she
catches him out with another woman.

Keith: Nothing happened, it was late and she asked me to join her for
dinner.

Tony is finally able to get Keith to admit he wanted to sleep with the woman, and
then begins to counsel him on how to get back into Shante’s good graces.

Tony: Now remember dog, don't rush in, take your time:

When Shante breaks up with Keith, he immediately goes into a depression. Even
though it has only been one day since the breakup, Keith cancels a Saturday golf
game with Tony, and decides to stay home. Tony is not very understanding of his
emotional pain:

Tony: You not still thinking about Shante, are you?

To make Keith jealous, Shante flirts with one of his friends in church and the
information gets back to Keith:

Eddie: Dog, you ain't gonna believe what we saw at church today.
Tony: What? What did ya'll see?
Eddie: Trent and Shante was all hugged up at church.
Tony: Keith's Shante?
Eddie: Hell yeah.
Tony: Not Shante, what you talkin about?
Eddie: C'mon dog, I know what I saw, they was basically grinding
up in the lobby. Tight.
Tony: No, that was just a Christian hug cause sometime she just
be feeling the spirit and she wanna spread the word...
Eddie: "Christian hug" my ass. But there wasn't no gap between
them, they was hugged up tight, and think about it, why she
hugged up on him like that anyway knowin he's the major player in
the church...Tell you right now, Tent fixing to wax that ass.
Once Tony relays this information to Keith, he goes into a depression and even calls in sick to work Monday:

Tony: Keith, what the hell is wrong with you? You didn't come to work today, hell look at you, it don't even look like you washed your ass. Keith, what's wrong? You whipped. She got you laid out here like a two dollar crack hoe man, you look like you waiting on a hit. It’s sad dog, look at you. Imma call your momma, they gonna take your player card for this, Imma see to it.

This causes Keith to snap out of his depression, take Tony’s advice, and go over to Shante’s home and flip the script on her. When he comes into work the following day, the first course of action is giving Tony a play by play account of what happened.

In *Brown Sugar*, while Dre’s friendship with Syd is important to the film, the male bond he forms with Cav, a rapper he signs when he starts his own label proves to be important to his success and his relationship with Syd. The day Dre quits his job at Millennium Records; Cav is driving the taxi he gets into. Dre begins to tell Cav why he left his job:

Dre: Do you wanna know why I left Millennium? I left Millennium cause I was tired of making bullshit, calling it hip hop.

Through Cav and Dre’s love of real hip hop music, he is able to convince Cav to sign onto his label, Brown Sugar Records:

Dre: No shiny suits, no bling bling, no spotted furs. It’s the real deal.

At Syd’s New Year’s Eve party, Cav realizes he is attracted to her cousin Francine and asks Dre to put in a good word for him:

Cav: Dre, yo Dre.
Dre: You alright man?
Cav: Yeah, come over here real quick. Hey uh, what's up with, uh, Sidney's homegirl?
Dre: Sidney…oh Francine, yeah she's cool. You feelin her?
Cav: We was talkin a little bit, you feel me?
Dre: You slick dog! You feelin her, man! So spit at her man, she's cool.
Cav: No, that's what I'm sayin I don't wanna just, you know, overwhelm her with all my game you know? I wanna conserve my game. I don't just wanna blow it all in one shot. So I was figuring you could like you know, drop a bird to Sidney...
Dre: Chris, it's cool. If you scared, just tell me you scared, just tell me, we're cool!
Cav: No, I'm not scared.
Dre: Listen, if you're scared of women...
Cav: Whoa! Why you talkin’ all loud? You don't know who's at this party, that's how rumors get started. What's wrong with you man? First of all I'm not scared of women, but I ain't like you. I ain't the black male model, I don't be in the gym at all times. Forget about it, don't even say nothing.
Dre: It's cool, I got you, let's go.
Cav: You gonna hook me up? Don't play me man.

Once Cav records his first single with Dre’s label, they go to a radio station to try and get the record on the radio. As they wait, Cav takes this time to let Dre know he should have tried to stop Syd from marrying Kelby:

Cav: I know you've done this mad times, I know you know what you're doing, but you know, when you go in there, just be firm with them, you know what I'm sayin?
Dre: Yeah.
Cav: Don't punk out like you did with Sydney. Just, stand your ground.
Dre: I didn't punk out with Sydney, I just respected her wishes.
Cav: Sounds like some punk logic to me.
Dre: What about Francine? You were feeling her right?
Cav: Yeah.
Dre: You didn't do nothin’ about it.

Cav’s encouragement works, and by the end of the film, Dre and Syd end up together.
Under the NewBlackMan framework, gender in these films took on very traditional roles. As was discussed previously, “through such collective, historical experiences, black men have adopted patriarchal values such as physical strength, sexual prowess and being in control as a means of survival against the repressive and violent system of subordination to which they have been subjected” Hall (1997, p. 262). Commonly in discussions surrounding gender, it is in the light of masculinity working separate from femininity, somewhat showcasing only the struggle between gender instead of the two working together. In the above examples, all male characters had careers that demonstrated their physical or mental capabilities. These films did not have men and women working together to deconstruct ideals of masculinity and femininity, but rather helped reinforce the idea of a Black patriarchal society.

This chapter outlined each research question utilized in this study, provided data from the films for each claim made integrated with my analysis. The next chapter is the final chapter. I will provide a discussion of my findings, showcase how my study contributes to the educational discipline, and provide suggestions for future research done in this area.
Chapter 5

Introduction

This will be the final and concluding chapter, which provides a discussion of the findings, the limitations of the research, and provides suggestions for future film analyses conducted within the field of education. The purpose of this study was to demonstrate how race, class, gender, and educational outcomes have been depicted in Black films that were released during the early 2000s. Significant research has not been conducted in this area. By utilizing a Critical Race Theory (CRT), social/cultural capital, and NewBlackMan lens, I was able to view these issues critically and hone in on how writers and directors portrayed these certain topics.

Discussion of Findings

As was discussed within the literature review, the depiction of Blacks within media, specifically film, has drastically changed since the 1900s. African Americans are no longer just maintained into the five stereotypical roles: The Tom, The Coon, The Tragic Mulatto, The Mammy and The Black Buck. With the increase of Black film writers and directors in Hollywood, there is the ability to have full creative control over the depiction of Blacks on screen. However, what has happened in the Black film boom of the early 2000s, black film writers have used their creative power to create this utopian space that does not exist. Stories shared are void of conflict and personal struggles. The audience does not have the realistic adaptation of what it takes for communities of color to
successfully navigate hostile spaces. Constructing stories that are not represented as counterstories to the grand narrative does nothing to empower communities of color. Still maintained is the idea that these communities are ‘lacking’ if people of color are not able to navigate these White spaces. Instead of using these films as a way to showcase how despite educational struggles the characters were able to still be successful, these films became a variations of a master narrative. The films told stories that fed into White privilege, patriarchy and meritocracy.

Issues surrounding race were not touched on within these films as well. By isolating the characters within Black circles, they never had to deal with interactions with people from varying backgrounds. Even within the workplace, the characters never had to encounter situations that typically being a person of color one would experience on a daily basis.

Creating stories that share a realistic perspective of the stress and toll it takes on a person of color to be successful within their career, despite barriers and manage to still survive would better equip young people watching these films on how life operates. I would like to see films that have been written and directed by African Americans portray a realistic example of high school life. It would be interesting for audiences to see how someone’s educational experiences can change just based upon teachers’ students may encounter in high school, and what it is like to attend a non-diverse high school. These films insinuate that all characters had moral support from schools and teachers, and no obstacles were ever presented in their lives. Everyone seems to come from middle class to upper middle class backgrounds. It is important for the stories of those who are first generation
college students to be heard and shared to build moral support and embrace those who have not had the same opportunities as others.

The films utilized in this study focused on topics surrounding gender, however, that was done from a heterosexual, patriarchal viewpoint. Women were not given full range and depth within their characters. Women either had to be the supportive wife or girlfriend, or had to focus on their careers. While the film writers allowed women to discuss their sexuality, it was still not to the degree or same liberty that was given to the male characters. Male characters were still framed as taking on the role of ‘The Strong Black Man’. Any male character that showed emotions such as sadness or fear, were framed as weak. Moving forward, films should look to showcase the fact that men and women share a range of emotions and have varying perspectives on their sexuality and which should be embraced within African American communities. By this being accomplished conversations regarding different topics can be openly discussed and not just swept under the rug.

**Contributions to the Educational Discipline**

As was stated in Brooks and Hebert’s (2006) article titled *Gender, Race, and Media Representation*, within media studies, more research needs to be conducted that rely upon works from educational and sociological disciplines. That is what has been done with this study. I employed a Critical Race Theory (CRT) as my overarching framework to critically analyze the depiction of race within Black film. This thesis highlighted how media, more specifically film,
should be utilized as a tool of educating. By bridging the gap between media and educational studies, this will allow for further studies to be conducted that use a critical lens when determining what is being portrayed on film.

Relying on Tara Yosso’s (2005) cultural capital model provided the opportunity to capture if African Americans are depicting the cultural wealth present within their own communities. By bringing to light the fact film writers and producers in this study chose to rely upon a normative ideal of cultural capital hopefully will force film writers and producers of color to reexamine their agendas in film production and look within their own communities for models of cultural wealth.

**Limitations of Research**

For the purposes of narrowing down this study, films were selected that were written/directed by Black males. This did not allow me to review how films written/directed by Black women would depict topics surround race, class, gender and educational outcomes.

**Conclusion**

The films released during the buppie era have provided examples of middle to upper middle Blacks in society, but had few examples of Blacks from varying backgrounds and social class. These films did not focus on how navigating traditionally White spaces and institutions as a person of color is difficult, and the films did not challenge the status quo. Furthermore, these films serve as a catalyst in maintaining a patriarchal structure within the Black community.
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