Brightening their Searchlight

STRATEGIC PROCESSING AS A TOOL FOR COUNTERACTING TELEVISION'S IMPACT ON THE MARGINALIZED CLASSROOM

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Table of Contents

- *Appendices*

  i.   In-Class Survey [completed]

  ii. *Reality Content v. Fantasy Content* (Adopted from Schramm, et. Al)

  iii. "Student 'sex Bracelets' an urban legend?" (Printed from CNN.com: Education)

List of Tables and Graphs

1. *Academic Conduct*

   a. Initiative

   b. Critical Thinking

2. *Behavioral Conduct*

3. *Television Ownership*

   a. Personal TV (in room)

   b. Cable Access

4. *Television-Watching*

5. Boondocks [Table]

1

Introduction

The global impact of mass media is something constantly being contended with, evaluated and advanced. Various educative institutions such as the Annenberg School of Communication have been formulated with the sole purpose of pushing such media, namely television/video, print, radio and the Internet, forward through critical analysis. While the "special education" afforded in graduate and undergraduate curricula[*] are indicative of adult, college-student life, it is also key to unveiling and potentially solving many of the problems plaguing the urban classroom setting.

Researching and impacting the manifestation of television programming in the marginalized, urban classroom environment is crucial to understanding the "under-development" of this populace. Bloomberg's institution of testing and teaching standards must be partnered with a significant probe into why the lines of demarcation among New York City youth, those that are grade-level versus those that do not measure up, are so plain. With media such an integral part of youth culture, gaining magnitude with more lucrative profit potential, increasingly becomes a vehicle through which corporations sell product.

Materialism, observed to be excessive and oftentimes disrupting classroom instruction, prevalent money mismanagement throughout student households, and obsession with television content guided the scope of this research. Being a member of the first generation to be reared on reality television and music videos, I submitted my personal experience with this programming as a yardstick for measuring change over the past decade given the similarities between my and the experiences of students in my classroom.

The density of student blindness to the media messages communicated through their television sets is overwhelming. However, my elucidation is purely resultant of two main factors:

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[*] As a Communications major at the University of Pennsylvania, I matriculated via Annenberg Graduate School's outlined undergraduate curriculum.

adulthood and education on the subject. Methodical research fueling the juxtaposition of behavior patterns, academic progress/digress and home television activity are required to divulge how these factors impact the classroom setting.

Abstract

As a function of acculturation, television plays a remarkably large role in the daily lives of most, if not all, of today's youth. Since my middle school rearing, after school television programming has come to embody principles and standards that seem to polarize those that welcomed me after three o'clock; principles that stand as pillars of popular consumer culture. My research project will probe into the effects of this gradual, yet marked, shift in aforementioned programming on today's classroom environment.

While I am not among the earliest "TV generations," my age group was among the first to be regularly exposed to reality television and pervasive cable television. The marked change between the five to eight programs perused during middle school and those available now is clear. Cable television mediated by investment corporations, Viacom, Disney and Time Warner for example, are driving children's mentality outside of the home, in the classroom. In considering behavioral patterns mirrored in my classroom from popular television programs, I concluded that a dissection of hip-hop culture's intense adaptation as corporate marketing tool is requisite in evaluating the following factors:

- Television Content and Corporate Confluence

- Media Literacy

- Implications for black and Latino youth

Cross-referencing pedagogy with media studies and familiarity with African-American youth contemporary experience, being an East New Yorker myself, this research is especially suited for advancing the framework for social justice.   Post-East New York, I experienced learning environments in magnet and boarding schools where the inextricable link between classroom behavior and instruction was simple: children that are engaged and aware of their education are less likely to impede lessons. The fact that Phillips Academy allowed little to no television during the week has intensified recall of more traditional post-classroom activity as a middle-schooler in Brooklyn. Talking on the phone and completing homework during programs such as Square One, Carmen Sandiego, DeGrassi High, and the occasional "afterschool special" contrasts sharply to the plethora of channels popularizing "reality TV" and music videos.   Consequently, this research project centers on the particulars of profit-driven programming and underserved children.

Review of Literature

In 1960, Professors Wilbur Schramm, Jack Lyle, and Edwin Parker defined a "strategic processor" as a:

> Twelve to thirteen-year old able to evaluate a product's appeal with greater sophistication because they can store information about the selling intent, other products and past experiences. [1]

However an average middle-schooler's "strategic processing" sophistication has not developed at the rate of mass media and corporate mergers over the last half-century. The gamut of literature reviewed for this project delves into the "business" of televisual imagery and marginalized youth's buying power as "ghetto consumers." Media literacy and empowerment is

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[1]   Shearon Lowery and Melvin DeFleur (1995,) Milestones in Mass Communication Research: Media Effects, 3rd Ed.. New York: Longman Publishers. 242.

requisite for unraveling the strategic processing skills of African-American and Latino children and improving the turbulent environment commonplace in urban classrooms.

Corporate intent

Critical dissection of the "powers that be" or business of television programming an essential step for comprehending the intensity with which marginalized are vulnerable to its intent. The traditional "commercial" a thirty second to one minute, interruption of regular programming is practically ancient compared to more recent advertising methods such as product placement, infomercials, and hip-hop music videos. Exponential growth of cable programming has allowed for the needs of corporate investors to trump that of the television consumer; basically television content is increasingly intended to sell product rather than entertain and/or inform the consumer.

Black and Latino, urban youth are consumers of a system that allows for corporate investors to spend, in the interest of profit, with little to no strings attached. Contrasting a banking model where shareholders have a vested interest in each other's success due to closer relationships or one where the workers' (labor) welfare is paramount, Japanese and European respective models, the American corporate structure is one where investors, those benefiting from business, cannot be held accountable for impacting community life. This distinction, as detailed in Comparative Economic Systems formulates an American "no-holes" bared environment of conducting business. It follows that urban "minority" adherence to repetitive, evidentiary televisual imagery must continually be developed for the sake of profit.

The details of this population's liability to "corporaTV" are to come, however researchers first began studying children's "uses and gratifications"[2] in 1960, as the number of television-owning households grew to one hundred fifty million. A monumental project by Schramm and his

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[2] Lowery, et. Al 241.

colleagues found twelve types of commercial television content during the "Children's Hour" between four and nine. Yet, the breadth of program variety as well as viewpoints has ironically decreased as channels become more abundant. News programming is increasingly biased, with over half of cable channels presenting one side of a news story, and commercial programming, reality television for example, resembling clones of one successful show[3].

The process of or the process by which "the billions of messages that are available in the world get cut down and transformed into the hundreds of messages that reach a given person on a given day"[4] allows for popular culture as mediated through television to embody the monetary needs of a handful of corporations, regardless of the plethora of cable programs made available. Marketing agencies have grown to tap into the youth's growing influence on household buying habits. Despite earlier attempts to safeguard children from advertising, such as the Federal Trade Commission 1977 warning that children are too young to understand selling intent and plead for corporations to avoid marketing directly to them, in the name of free speech corporations were permitted to target youth through mass media[5]. Moreover, the convergence of phone companies, cable systems and entertainment producers have allowed for television to exist as a corporate playground for investment companies where the youth population are "apparatus" rather than participants.

Eight years ago *Business Week* decided to take a look at Wall Street from the consumer's standpoint and investigate whether corporations have gone too far in an article called "Hey Kid, Buy This!". The byline concluded that the importance of "Brand Names," or corporate taglines,

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[3]   The Project for Excellence in Journalism (journalism.org), "The State of the News Media 2005: An Annual Report on American Journalism," http://www.stateofthemedia.org/2005. Accessed on 5/20/2005, "Five Major Trends."

[4]   Pamela J. Shoemaker, (1997,) "A New Gatekeeping Model." In <u>Social Meanings of News</u>., Edited by Dan Berkowitz. California: Sage Publications, 57.

[5]   Batra, Rajeev, (1996,) <u>Advertising Management, 5th Ed.</u>, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 677.

in youth mentality is overly lucrative and parents would have to stand firmer as corporations will continue to burrow the minds of children. Hip-Hop music videos, littered with product placement and advocating excessive spending, and reality television shows furnished by commercial sponsors are a natural outgrowth of the corporate autonomy on television content. Corporations establish the dynamics of television and because "the relationship between television and a child can be understood only in terms of the characteristics of both,"[6] probing into the consumer behavior of Black and Latino, working class communities, is necessary toward comprehending how these worlds manifest in the classroom.

Consumer culture

The attributes of television programming have been discussed with respect to corporations' investment and effect on popular culture or lifestyle. In the case of marginalized, minority youth in East New York, a review of forthcoming literature will expound the critical buying patterns of this community, and socioeconomic factors intrinsic to their values and social norms

The three most prevalent issues involving advertising effects on youth values and lifestyles, irrespective of race and income, call on: (1)materialism, (2) stereotypes and (3) promotion of harmful products[7]. Stereotype fulfillment is of particular concern amongst "ghettoes," where African-American athletic, violent and (music) chart-topping caricatures are oftentimes these children's only reflection of themselves other than their own marginalized communities. While almost half of all stories involving children aired involve crime, over sixty percent star African-American children[8]. Compounded with the conclusion that such selective representations take advantage of people's tendency to generalize implicitly from limited "visual evidence [or] to

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[6] Lowery, et. Al 255.
[7] Batra 679.
[8]   University of Michigan Health Systems, "Your Child: Television," http://www.med.umich.edu/1libr/yourchild/tv.htm. Accessed on 5/18/2005.

assume that what they are seeing on screen...is typical of...reality,"[9] the fact that violence is a day-to-day sight for ghetto residents is monumental evidence toward the general mentality of students in underserved classrooms to be considered by educators.

This year, Karl Berger addressed parents and advised them to "dematerialize," or decode selling intent communicated to their households through television, for the simple fact that avenues for corporate branding are on the rise. However, the parental guardians of urban ghettoes are seemingly handicapped in performing such a feat, oftentimes as susceptible to materialistic television advertising/programming as their progeny, if not more so. In "Explaining ghetto consumer behavior" it is hypothesized that the sense of powerlessness, or anomie, within these communities is quelled with not only capital, but also material acquisition.

In America, as in most developed economies, the higher degree of educational achievement translates into a higher yearly salary. Yet African-Americans, with only fourteen percent matriculating from an undergraduate institution or higher, spend inordinately. "Ghetto consumers" are culpable to rampant capital mismanagement because of their poignant vulnerability to materialism. East New York is one of many communities where consumers inhabit public housing when arriving home from low-paying jobs in a community constantly monitored by police. The engendered sense of powerlessness is inevitable, according to Stein.

 The truth remains that while white households are more likely to invest accrued capital, with a large percentage of urban residents, African-American and Latino families are more likely to spend. With only twenty-six percent of African-American households earning more than fifty thousand dollars yearly, black teens spend more yearly on items such as clothing, jewelry,

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[9] Batra 681.

computer software and athletic footwear"[10]. Ironically enough, the major vehicle for peddling such product via television is hip-hop culture, that born and perpetuated in the same communities.

What started as grassroots music in urban communal spaces of the Bronx has been commodified into a sharp corporate tool for controlling "ghetto consumer" youth behavior. Now infamous for its misogynistic overtones, stereotypes and explicit materialism, hip-hop is still marketed as the "reality" of the ghetto: its presence on television being somewhat happenstance. The duplicitous real/fantastic nature of hip-hop music video is a focal point in the hybrid of reality and fantasy that television content has come to embody. The most hazardous issues of television's effects, materialism, stereotypes and harmful product promotion, congeal in the popularization of hip-hop music. For example, "Pass the Courvousier," one of the most popular songs of 2001, shot the brand's cognac sales up considerably that year while routinely played on Black Entertainment Television's hit teen show "106th and Park"—a four-minute alcohol commercial with a consistent spot on the number one-watched show among African-American adolescents, in layman's terms. Television's most important uses are entertainment and information and according to Schramm children gratify fantastic and real-world needs in watching it—materialistic, stereotypical, and otherwise.

Manifestation in Black and Latino Youth

"Learning that takes place when a viewer goes to television for entertainment and stores up certain items of information without seeking them"[11] is a lucid statement describing incidental learning from television in 1960, before colossal corporations began to craft and heavily rely on these accidental memory banks for business. Schramm diagnosed the bulk of youth knowledge

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[10]   Magazine Publishers of America. "African-American Market Profile." New York, NY.
http://www.magazine.org/content/files/market_profile_black.pdf. Accessed on 5/18/05.
[11] Lowery 252.

from television as incidental, regardless of its pungency; middle-school aged children, such as those utilized for my research, are at their television-watching peak. Therewith, extra measures must be taken to combat the stereotypical, self-reflective social norms inherently ingested by this age group in underserved communities.

Inner-city schools resembling I.S. 292, recently under "registration review" for our below grade-level test scores, are home to Black and Latino youth who are "fantasy-oriented:" high users of television and low users of print media[12]. Consequently, without educational television content, such as after school specials and quiz shows marking my childhood, it is increasingly difficult to impose an educational standard of achievement on this populace in the classroom. While most community members seemingly equate success to immediate material acquisition, their actions are in line with seller intent and "deceptive advertising" outcomes. This style of advertising persists although buying behavior is impacted to the detriment of the consumer[13]; marketing Cadillac Escalades to the working class who cannot afford them for example, has become conventional.

Analogous to Riley's older brother Huey, "reality-oriented" children grow to comprehend the norms of the upwardly mobile: including self-betterment through deferred gratification, also known as the road of education. This sharply contrasts to the instant riches routinely showcased via reality television shows and super-stardom. Ultimately massive corporate mergers have managed for a plethora of products to be advertised on television with little variation in actual intent. Cable programming has made it easier to repeat these images and messages and given the ghetto consumer's culpability to it all, research into leveling the playing field for productive learning must include probes into home television activity. Urban sociological studies, as well as market research have illustrated the social norms and values cemented by television; this research project

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[12] Lowery 254.
[13] Batra 643.

is dedicated to pinpointing this resonance in the classroom, thereby channeling it into a productive learning environment.

Methodology Design and Methodology

The research methodology utilized for this project in probing aforementioned manifestations of home television watching amongst marginalized classroom settings is inspired by the "uses and gratifications" report from *Television in the Lives of Our Children,* performed in 1960. This monumental study included various North American communities, mainly concentrating on the west coast and even an American suburb. Children through grade six completed surveys and questionnaires while diaries also guided Schramm and colleagues' analysis of the functions and usage of television in the lives of youth.

Although this project does not include participant-action research as outlined by Weis, ET. Al, the perspective of youth television consumers, namely students within my classroom, is critical in analyzing the "incidental learning" variable of television time. Student assessment of their own television habits, relative amount of consumption for example, the importance of owning "brand-name" and academic activity must be solicited and juxtaposed with quantitative research complete with percentages and statistics speaking to these topics. Layering perceived notions of television and classroom conduct with "hard facts" serves to reveal the disjuncture between reality and fantasy in the educative lives of this target with hopes of alleviating this truth.

All survey research was conducted in my East New York classroom, where both seventh and eighth-graders are in attendance. Two drafts of the in-class survey were submitted for completion, but only the latter results were tallied. The former survey was not conducive to painless computation while it lacked graduated scaling, where students could easily gage their

responses. Although two eighth grade classes were initially surveyed, for the purposes of this project, four classes, totaling eighty-one students, participated including one eighth grade and three seventh grade homerooms. These classes are significant while they consist of my worst behaved (805,) highest reading level (707,) lowest reading level (701) and one "special needs" class (701.) "In-house suspension," a conglomerate of students, who grossly impede the classroom-learning environment that I taught thrice weekly, was also initially surveyed. However these students have since been folded into "PM school" or evening school sector and were unable to complete the second draft.

Side one of the in-Class Survey contains prompts for "Identifying Information." This side was designed to acclimate students toward answering honestly; at the start of administering the survey, I reminded each class that the questionnaires were purposely anonymous for this reason. While the majority of these prompts required "yes or no" replies and low-level thinking such as "Career Goal," the goal of the first side's design was to relegate students to the ease in answering the questionnaire, hopefully promoting truthful response.
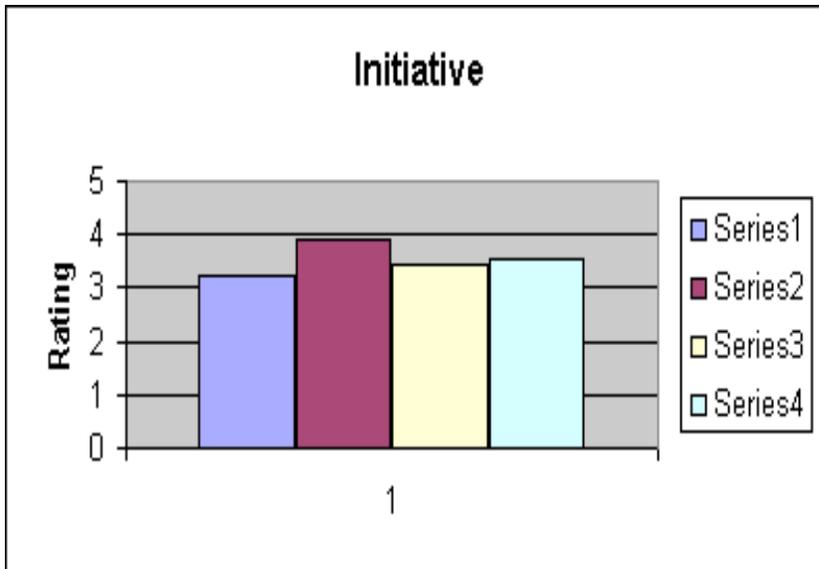
Side two is very different and includes a series of prompts, each requiring a circled response between "0" and "5." Although the level of critical self-evaluation has risen from side one, the simplicity of circling an answer was key in underlining student autonomy of their ratings. Also, not to lose student attention, a "Boondocks" cartoon is included. While the Freeman brothers are approximately middle school-aged and animated, the three-part process required for answering the final three prompts: reading, comprehending and critically evaluating, seems elementary—fun to some students. This was the intended outcome in designing this survey from lower-level to higher-level thinking.

Unlike Schramm who prompted journals documenting television experience from research participants by city, diaries are absent from this research project design. Instead, daily contact and conversations among students in the classroom and throughout school about television programming shed light on student perspective. A focus group centered on gender norms provoked by hip-hop music videos after screening a documentary on this subject entitled "Hip Hop Gurlz," also serves to solicit a more genuine participant perspective on values and lifestyles. At the outset, attempts were made to tally each and every conversation about television programs heard in the hallways and/or even whispered in the classroom. Yet, I found that this goal was lofty while they were, in fact, too numerous to count in the midst of teaching periods.
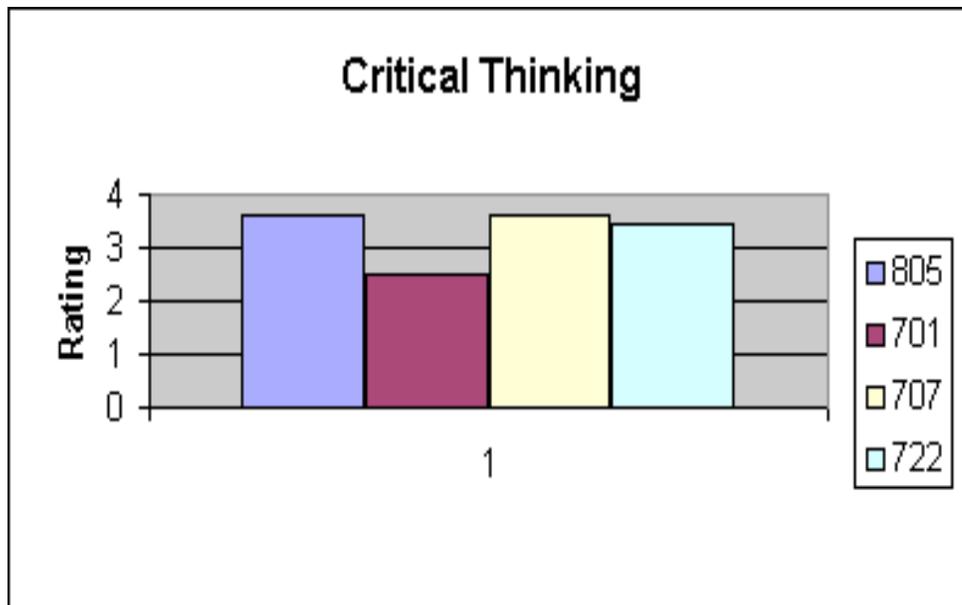
Furthermore, a detailed comparison of my own childhood experience in East New York is injected into this body of research toward underlining the marked change in after school television programming over the past decade of immense corporate merger. The black-and-whiteness of their grade school experience and mine actually fueled the production of "Hip Hop Gurlz," which I directed in 2003. This personal information is relevant while born and schooled within the same community that I currently teach, I am a Black woman afforded an additional platform on which to evaluate the current space that television programming has carved in the minds of these students. Surveys, functioning to gage classroom behavioral and academic norms, and interview, with Ms. Tanji Gilliam a Ph. D. candidate further detailed in the discussion, are at the heart of this research.
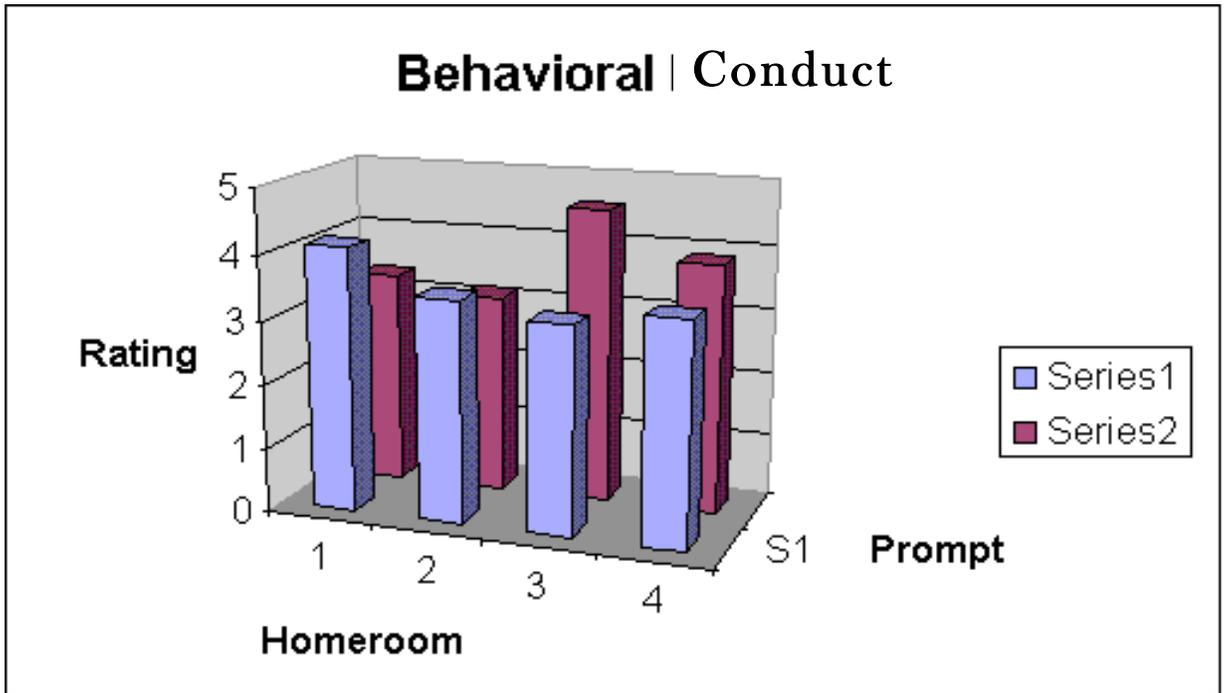
Academic Conduct

Initiative

Rating

5
4
3
2
1
0

1

- Series1
- Series2
- Series3
- Series4

KEY: Series 1 = 806   Series 3 = 707
Series 2 = 701   Series 4 = 722

Critical Thinking

Rating

4
3
2
1
0

1

- 805
- 701
- 707
- 722
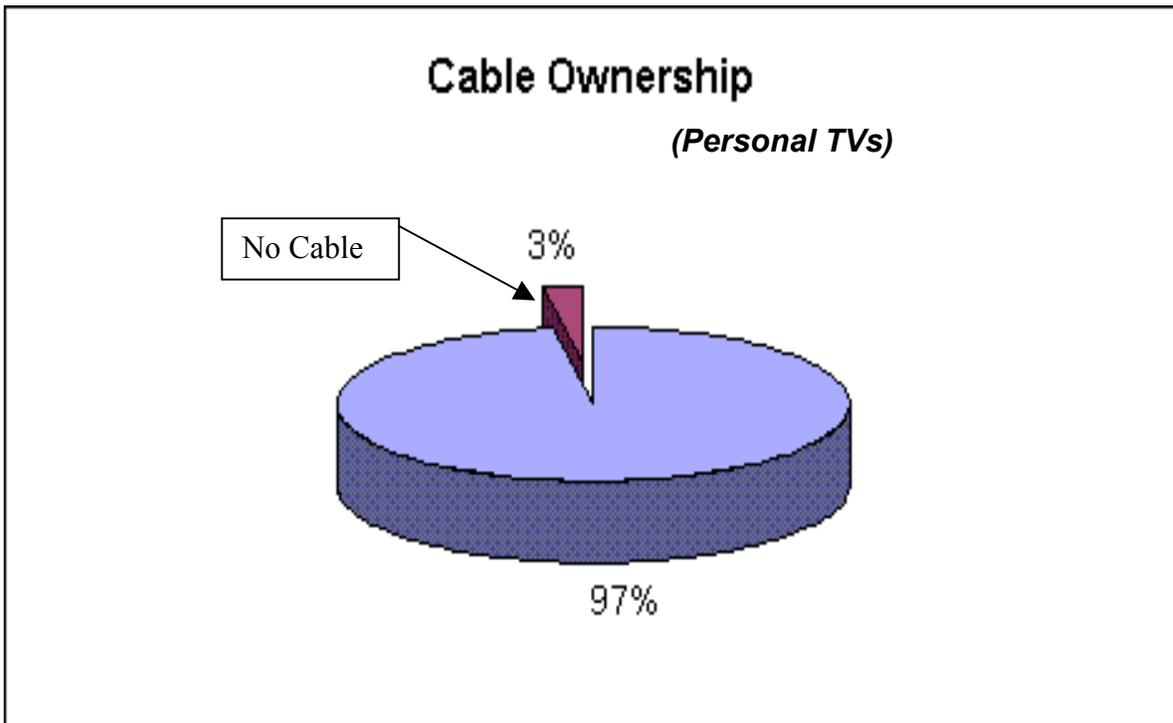
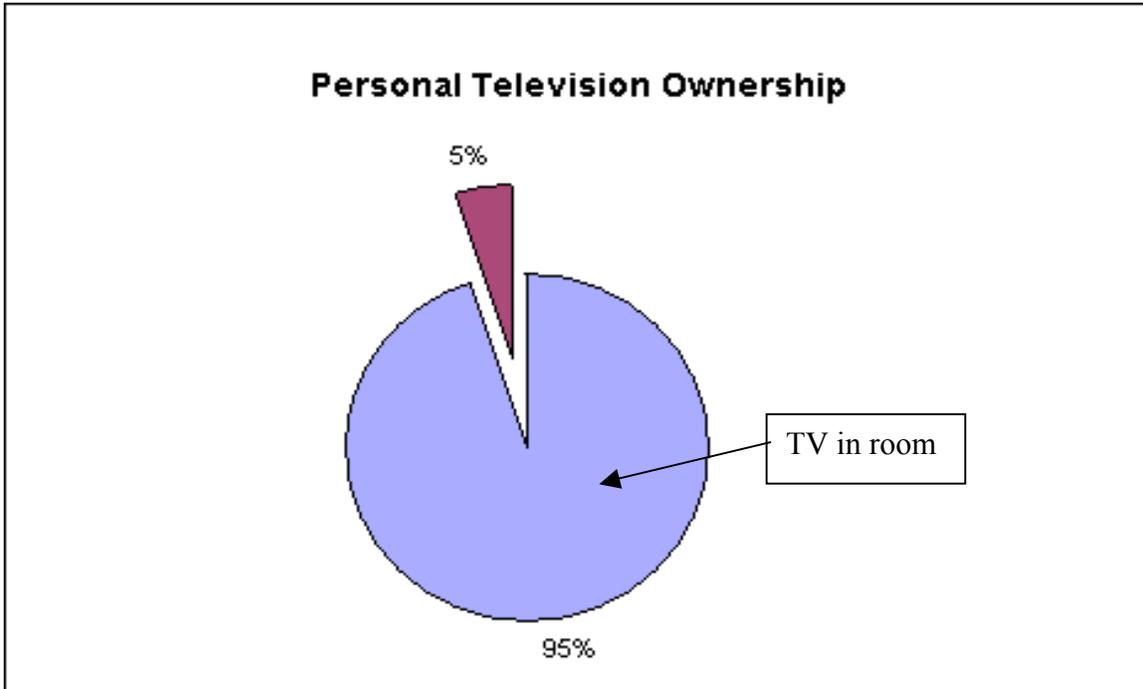**KEY:**

Homeroom 1 = 805
Homeroom 2 = 701
Homeroom 3 = 707
Homeroom 4 = 722

Series 1 = "Attention to Teacher"
Series 2 = "Importance to Own Name-Brand"

Television

Personal Television Ownership

5%

95%

TV in room

Cable Ownership

(Personal TVs)

No Cable

3%

97%

Television Watching

Home TV Activity
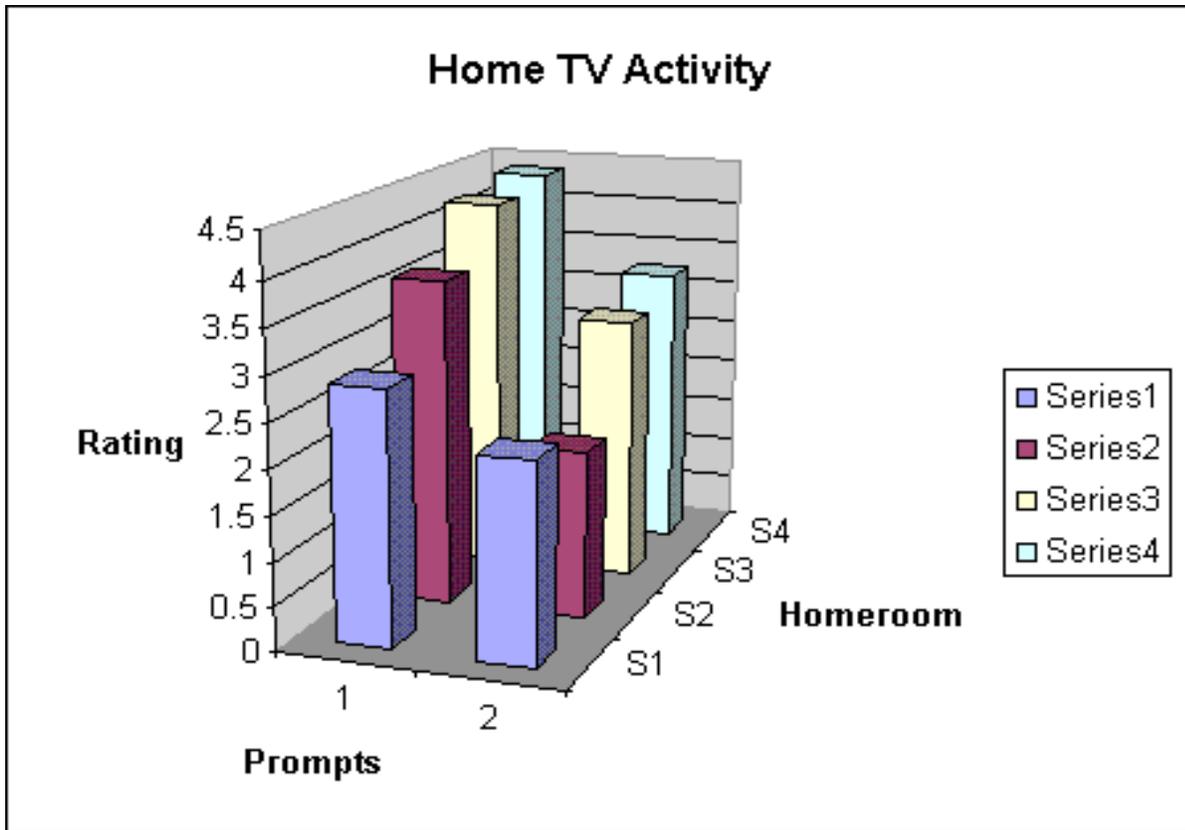
KEY: *Series 1 = 806*   Series 3 = 707
            Series 2 = 701   Series 4 = 722

Prompt 1 = "Amount of TV watched per week"
Prompt 2 = "Amount of TV watched with Parent"

Boondocks

(Prompts)					
1	Whose Side Would you Take?	1.222222	1.333333	1.5	1.125
2	Would you want the same gift?	1.625	1.333333	1.25	1.625
3	Riley's conduct in school with gift	1.777778	2.222222	1.125	1.25
		805	701	707	722

KEY:

Prompt #1: Students who answered Huey were coded as "1," Riley was a "2."

Prompt #2: Yes = 1, No = 2

Prompt #3: Responses were entered according to which was circled.

Discussion

Most television-watching at home takes place in the "late evening," as indicated in the survey results. While three out of five students do watch television after school, the "eight to ten" nightly time slot was the most popular among all students. Also, a surprising number of students watch television after ten at night, the average bedtime for an adolescent.   All but four students did not have a television in their room, and of the remaining seventy-seven students, two had their own televisions, but with no cable access. Cartoon programming was routinely screened by five students after-school while thirty-seven students watched television at least eight hours a day. The top three programs watched directly after-school, between the hours of three-thirty and six consisted of two music video programs and one reality show, "Fear Factor."

The class with the lowest average reading level, 701, rated themselves highest for academic initiative with a 3.9 overall. On the same note, 805, the worst behaved group gave themselves a

17

4.1, on a 0-5 scale, for "attention to the teacher." Furthermore, while lessons in these classes are interrupted with "cutting" or slandering classmates because of their clothes and sneakers, the best readers, 707, rated the "importance to own 'name-brand'" highest. Also, the worst behaved, 805, and highest reading-level homerooms on the floor tied in the "critical thinking" category with a 3.6.

Surprisingly, the highest numbers from the floor's best readers were exclusive of academic conduct. Rather the students of 707 were slightly behind their special needs counterparts, 722, in perceiving themselves to be high television consumers with ratings of 4.3 and 4.4 respectively. Also, these two classes ranked the "amount of television watched with parent" significantly higher than their lesser-behaved peers in 701 and 805, landing right in the middle of the scale with scores of 3.0 and 3.3. 701 watched the least amount of parentally supervised television with a 1.9 rating. However, time spent screening television content with parents is small with respect to the total television-watching time. Nonetheless, the lowest rating was television watched with parent, averaging out to 2.8 across all four classes. On the other hand, the most important element of eight "Classroom Conduct" prompts was the aforementioned "Importance to own 'name-brand,'" with an average 3.7 rating across all classes.

Student interpretation of the Boondocks segment varied throughout classes. The majority of students overall would take Huey's side in the brothers' disagreement. The more advanced readers in 707 having the most dissension, with an even split on whose side would be taken. Furthermore, 805 and 721, the special needs class were more likely to want a Blackberry for Christmas. Finally, Riley's reaction to his teacher's appeal to put the device away was more disruptive among 805 and 701. Both classes were in more agreement that Riley should read his e-mail regardless then put it away and leave it on. Lastly, while some students in 722 and 707 replied similarly, most of them would turn off the blackberry and join the lesson as advised.

Academic and behavioral conduct perceptions among students are relatively inconsistent with their actual classroom performance. Considering the detailed probes into classroom conduct, higher numbers were anticipated for the better performing class, 707. Conversely, their perceptions were on par if not lower than their lesser-behaved and reading-inclined peers. Nevertheless, the disproportionately high rating communicated by 805 and 701 were somewhat expected. Hypothesized results for my special needs class, a relatively well-behaved, lowest-reading level group, did not exist.

Before screening "Hip Hop Gurlz," a lesson plan functioning to craft a focus group of sorts was executed for 805 and 707. When prompted for gender norms or what behavior defines a woman or man, 707 was much more straightforward with their conceptions of females and male behavior. Contrastingly, echoes of laughter could be heard among 805 while terms such as "pimp" and "hustler" were blurted out for male gender roles. Furthermore, while both classes agreed that music videos do affect youth's perceived gender norms, each class remarked that the onus for deconstructing said stereotypes are on the parents, in the he household. Rappers and music companies should not be held accountable, while they are just making money.

Analysis/Conclusions/Significance

According to data, the bulk of television-watching after-school is unsupervised occurring in the "prime time" block, or between eight and eleven o'clock. If the television is on for seven hours in a typical American home, these students are excessive consumers, watching television one hour more than the average screen time. Furthermore, while parents are key elements in decoding potent advertising evidenced in television content, most students are receiving these messages unfiltered or "uncensored."

Not only are students exposed to corporate-manufactured messages designed to tap into their consumer power, but also those crafted for the adult television consumer, being that the prime time block is traditionally the "adult hour" these students are extremely disadvantaged in the realm of "strategic processing" or understanding seller intent. Furthermore, the uniform ownership of personal television sets is not in line with the economically struggling households that my students reside in. Many students remarked that their apartments contained at least four television sets. Of particular interest is a boy in 701 who lived in a shelter, but whose room had a television complete with cable and PlayStation.

In the interest of implanting social norms conducive to classroom instruction, strategic processing skills must be increasingly sophisticated to match up with the complexity of evidentiary televisual programming. With greater obedience to classroom rules and educational standards, the better readers were expected to rate themselves higher for the eight outlined elements affecting the classroom environment. Contrastingly, 805 and 701 with constant reprimands and failing grades were hypothesized to rate themselves lower than their better-reading counterparts on the classroom conduct gradation. However, the results were not consistent with my hypotheses. Instead, they were in line with Schramm and associates' findings that children are generally fantasy-oriented or reality-oriented according to the type and method of media consumed.

With a larger breadth of viewpoints and more critical analysis, print media consumers or readers, would be more familiar with the reality of school and their place within it. Data, from the more "reality-oriented" class, 707 are of particular significance. This population seemingly perceived their television-watching, academic and behavioral habits to be more detrimental to the classroom environment than the more delinquent readers. As aforementioned, these students watch as much television as the lower-level counterparts and make similar program choices.

However, this group spent significantly more time watching with parents, outside of the special needs group whose learning and emotional disabilities often require supervision.

Parental direction in decoding televisual imagery and greater adherence to print media has fueled their digestion of concrete social standards for achievement. Basically, 707 are more aware of the fantasy world communicated through television, and conscious of their disruption or inappropriateness in mimicking these behaviors at school. The more reality-oriented group owns a clear-cut gage of their own classroom habits. As a result, although this is the relatively best-behaved, group with the highest report card averages on the floor, they have internalized accepted norms for upward mobility and understand that their class still has much room to improve their learning environment.

The inextricable link between social norms and educative standards for achievement are evidenced in the fact that although 707 ranked themselves highest as far as misconduct and materialism, theirs was the most likely class to turn off a mobile device, like Riley's Blackberry, and join the lesson if prompted by their teacher. What's more, this class, being the only group where no one asked what "critical thinking" was, held the highest rating for this academic prompt, an indicator that they are aware of the genuine learning environment engendered by the classroom. Although 805 tied 707's "3.6" or above-average amount of critical thinking performed in-class, they were one of three classes who had to be reminded of what the critical thinking process entailed. Impressed by rampant implications of materialism, 707's penchant to side with Riley being just one example, the importance of actually being educated in the classroom trumps the tendency for "street dreams" to disrupt this more reality-oriented group's learning process within school walls.

Being that all participants are residents of East New York, a neighborhood home to various shelters, project housing and group/foster homes, a financially healthy, two-parent household is not

the standard model of living. "[C]hildren who ha[ve] unsatisfactory relationships with their families...tend to retreat to television where they could escape from their real-life problems"[14]. The powerlessness felt by adult "ghetto consumers" is compounded with the "anomie" felt by children as a function of their age and place in life. Karl Berger's pontification on the need to dematerialize television content is exponentially important for these research participants. However, as the findings indicate, little to no parental supervision in television watching is commonplace, blurring the lines between fantasy and reality even more. The inordinate ratings from 805 and 701, two of the worst behaved and academically performing classes on the floor, underlined the question that I often ask myself: "Are these kids living in a fantasy world?" According to Schramm and associates, they, in fact, are.

The fantasy world provoked by reality television and hip-hop music videos welcoming students after school has them under the impression that their classroom conduct, or lack thereof, is suitable for successful intents and purposes. Although 805 and 701 are regularly scolded for disrespecting and ignoring teachers, along with over half of each student body one to two grade levels behind, these students provided the highest ratings for initiative, attention to the teacher and critical thinking in class. They also rated themselves lowest for the amount of television watched per week, perceiving themselves as relatively low users of broadcast media. "Norms of the upwardly mobile middle class"[15] including the delayed, but worthwhile gratification characteristic of institutionalized schooling, have not been wholly processed. Consequently, the behavior and disregard for schoolwork exhibited in school oftentimes mirror those reflected by television's Black and Latino caricatures, and deemed suitable for the classroom.

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[14] Lowery 255.
[15] Lowery 255.

Armed with a disdain for print media, exemplified in reading scores, these classes are repetitively submerged within one-sided television content, intended for product sales. Although the most screen time took place during prime time, hip-hop music video programming and "Fear Factor," chalk-full of corporate sponsorships were the most popular choices for television watching directly after school. Materialism, stereotypes and promotion of harmful products dually function as the pillars of mass-marketed hip-hop music along with the three primary concerns of advertising on children's values and lifestyles. Not only is hip-hop marketed as reality, in an attempt to maintain its grassroots origin or "realness," it also serves as the soundtrack for many other advertising vehicles, commercials, video games, even televised sports to name a few.

Analogous to professional athletes, hip-hop's stars have seemingly gone from "rags to riches" in little to no time and, more importantly, without the help of education. It was projected that a majority of students would want a career in show business, namely rapping or singing. However, most students listed "football" or "baseball player" as their career goal, with the second most popular career choice being some type of businessman/lawyer. Singing and/or rapping was the fourth most popular choice, ranking behind medical practices, mainly doctoral with one student aiming to be a nurse. While these findings are not in line with my conjecture, it stands that "immediate gratification" via material acquisition or athletic super-stardom is still the widely accepted standard. As discrepancies on behavioral and academic standards for conduct plagues the classroom, the blurring of fantasy and is further exemplified in their lofty career goals, the majority of which require an extensive, even rigid, education: business school or medical school.

Athletic career goals are also indicative of the disproportionate presence of males in low-reading, underserved urban classrooms such as mine. While the NBA and NFL are full of young men that resemble the boys in my classroom, these athletes and rappers, paid to showcase their

clothing, jewelry and property on shows such as "Cribs" and in music videos, stand as the only proprietors of legit "success" for these underserved, heavy television consumers. "African American boys are more likely than any other group to be portrayed as perpetrators of crime and violence"[16] on television. These narrow media depictions of urban youth leave little to no room for instructors, like me, to carve space for educational standards of achievement in the minds of marginalized students, as exhibited in the overwhelming influence of "brand-names" on the classroom environment.

Numerous studies have proven that children believe what they see on television. Ms. Gilliam remarked that the late nineties was when she noticed a shift in hip-hop music videos from more realistic "hood" or neighborhood to more lavish mansions and party settings. She also remarked that this is when she noticed an onslaught of mergers assembling incalculably huge media empires. When asked if her students relished in the material success comprising television content, as mine often do, she responded that although she teaches in the inner city her students "do not watch much TV. They are part of [Chicago's] Academic Excellence program and are too busy with after school activity and homework."

Due to the little time spent by parents in deconstructing increasingly sophisticated methods of seller intent in television media at home, classroom pedagogy in underserved communities must be crafted toward this end. Utilization of visual media as a classroom tool, and incorporation of creative television content analysis in lesson plans grants educators more clout in formulating social norms conducive to a productive classroom environment. With corporate entities unwilling to censor advertising to children, regardless of its injury, and the adult "ghetto consumers'" own

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[16] University of Michigan Health Systems. http://www.med.umich.edu/1libr/yourchild/tv.htm. Accessed on 5/18/2005.

susceptibility to coveting material products, intense measures must be taken in mine, and similar classrooms to counteract the manifestation of commonplace values and lifestyles mediated by television-watching at home.

Data suggests that due to a number of factors, television is a cemented fixture in the lives of marginalized Black and Latino youth. Accordingly, their educative orientation to reality or success in the "real world" should incorporate this medium instead of work against it. It is possible to consume television at high levels yet still be knowledgeable of accepted canons of achievement, as illustrated with 707's ratings. Academia in schools like mine must consider the fact that these students are "high users" of television in establishing learning and performance standards. Media literacy and fracturing of seller intent was not as demanding during my adolescence in East New York because while advertisers' existed they were not as conglomerated or present in each stratum of television content. Advertising was reserved for commercial breaks in between after school programming promoting: academic achievement despite socioeconomic disadvantage ("afterschool specials",) drug aversion ("Say NO to Drugs!",) abstinence (DeGrassi High) and classroom recall (Square One) rather than corporate products.

The one local, half-hour show, entitled "Video Music Box" airing hip-hop music (Ms. Gilliam's South Jersey inlet was called "Urban Xpressions) contrasts sharply to the hours of music videos available to youth daily. Visual media studies' adoption into the classroom is necessary to intensify the reading capacity and desire of this student body. In addition, understanding the simplistic nature of television's corporate sponsors will undoubtedly lead students to seek different viewpoints—armed with a youthful inclination to explore. By fostering this group's penchant for television through pedagogy the road for educative achievement is substantiated and guidelines for this brand of success, both behavioral and academic, deemed more relevant.

<center>Implications for Further Study</center>

The educative needs for urban black and Latino student success must be congealed into a "special education" curriculum. For reasons explicated previously, this population is generally disabled as far as decoding television intent although they are high users. This handicap must be treated as a "learning disability" or "emotional disability" would be considered in molding pedagogical practice. Although I was aware of the implications that broadcast media held for disenfranchised youth, considering personal undergraduate and childhood experiences, "sex bracelets" punctuated the "different world" teachers in underserved classrooms must navigate: where television oftentimes perpetuate damaging social norms for the sake of profit.

Confiscating these bracelets that translated to a different sexual favor according to which color was popped had become a regular part of my classroom routine in the spring of 2004, my first year as a teaching fellow. Although, I received a memo warning against the bracelets, their mere presence within school walls was so disturbing, I researched how teachers in other communities were handling them. Instead of advice toward alleviating this hazardous sex game, cyberspace reported the bracelets as "urban legends" trumped up by the media. This rampant discrepancy between underserved classrooms in Brooklyn and widely acknowledged classroom environments fueled the notion that these issues were important enough to re-work traditional methods of teaching for communities akin to East New York.

In hallways filled with echoes of misogynistic hip-hop lyrics, student devotion to this ludicrous, explicit practice seemed to be a natural outgrowth of what they watched at home. "Kids with higher exposure to sex on TV [a]re almost twice as likely than kids with lower exposure to

initiate sexual intercourse"[17].   The overt sexuality of contemporary hip-hop prompting my production of "Hip-Hop Gurlz," I crafted my first lesson plan incorporating this documentary that spring.   However, pedagogy engaging social/gender norms cannot only result from spur of the moment outrage being that the confluence of disenfranchised black and Latino youth and popular culture is recognized and established.

A creative curriculum overlapping task-commitment with mass media's salience in the underserved classroom is essential to developing pedagogy for these learning environments. Further study into the parallels between this style of lesson planning and that of "special education" is recommended; the diagram below illustrates the flowing together of these elements for the purposes of this project.   Without strategic processing capabilities, television's unfiltered corporate implications are more likely to be revealed as a detriment to the classrooms. However, as media literacy is progressively folded into pedagogy, astuteness and high media use can reveal gifted Black and Latino youth.

Creativity — Task-commitment — Media Confluence [18]
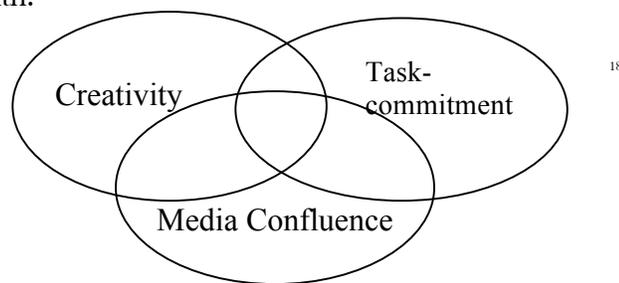
Nonetheless, mass media impact is a double-sided coin, as hip-hop culture is relegated by the same youth who stand to be academically injured by its marketed messages; it also stands to foster above-

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[17]   Parents Television Council Publications, "Facts/TV Statistics,"
http://www.parentstv.org/PTC/facts/mediafacts.asp. Accessed on 5/19/2005.
[18]   **This diagram is taken from the Criteria for instructing a "Gifted" classroom. I substituted "Media Confluence" where "Above-Average Ability" would have been. **
     Turnbull, Ann P. and Rud Turnbull, et. Al. 2003. Exceptional Lives: Special Education in Today's Schools, Fourth Edition. Columbus: Prentice Hall. 296.

average ability or "giftedness" among marginalized Black and Latino youth. This component of urban community classrooms intensifies the importance of critical self-reflective practice in assessing the outgrowth of popular culture from this community.

The standards fueling Problem-Based Learning in Social Sciences (or **P-BLISS**, a program developed for honing on marginalized students displaying giftedness,) while paramount in the School of Education's guiding principles should also be a component of grade school education in communities like East New York. Extensive collaboration across traditional subjects is requisite for transposing these principles of education and media literacy, traditionally reserved for college students, onto middle-schoolers. Economics, video production, American history from diverse perspectives, namely African and Native lenses, are just a few specialties necessary for this type of education.

Age-old stories of civilization from the canon of these historically under-represented groups are imperative to communicate the notion problem-based learning. According to textbooks, Black and Native populations seemingly pop up at opportune times, the Trail of Tears, Civil War and Civil Rights Movement for example. By unraveling these tapered chronicles of existence, the notion of deferred gratification/non-instant success, or achievement as a product of labor, discussion, information and performance standards would be more communicable.

Self-reflective practices would also include workshops, where students dialogued with members of their communities about aforementioned subject areas, and relevant topics. These workshops are crucial in counteracting the narrow depictions of minority life on television and attracting neighborhood adults to a "special education" that would also benefit them. Ultimately, this "special education" toward balancing television's effects would be expanded to middle class

communities as well, while the stereotypes prevalent in popular culture have a poignant impact on Black and Latino youth, but effect all American youth.

In capitalizing on student's home television habits, educators in underserved classrooms essentially expand their resources. A growing body of work detailing hip-hop's efficacy in teaching a variety of subjects is in place. While this brand of education is unique for the special circumstances of "ghetto youth," the avenues by which its goals are inline with citywide performance standards must be extensively examined. The goal is to impact social norms, while also moving the learning environment forward and failing to do the latter with inferior standardized test scores does not equate sustainable academic and behavioral growth. Fortunate enough to attend schools where resources were abundant and instruction so intense a phone call home to share this classroom experience was commonplace, in fully-developing this pedagogy I hope to brighten the educative searchlight of underserved students, whose classroom conduct indicates that they have yet to find their own, unique passion for learning.

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