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The Impact Of A Media Literacy Curriculum On Middle School Students' Ability To Recognize Racial Bias In Mass Media

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THE IMPACT OF A MEDIA LITERACY CURRICULUM ON MIDDLE SCHOOL
STUDENTS' ABILITY TO RECOGNIZE RACIAL BIAS IN MASS MEDIA

by

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ABSTRACT

This paper outlines an action research study focused on the possible effects of a media literacy curriculum on middle school students' ability to recognize racial bias in mass media. The research study also evaluated the possible differences in sensitivity to mass media messages based on gender and race. Currently, while numerous forms of media literacy education exist, very few K-12 educational systems in the United States have implemented a formal media literacy curriculum; instead, teachers who are not trained in media literacy education are expected to include the teaching of these skills within their daily lessons. The questions this research attempts to answer is: How can a media literacy curriculum sensitize middle school students to the racial bias and stereotypes present in mass media? and How do gender and race affect student sensitivity to the racial bias and stereotypes present in mass media?

While there are some studies concerning media literacy, they have not been conclusive, and additional research needs to be done. This action research study focuses on middle school students of various ability levels, and it looked both quantitatively and qualitatively at the impact of media literacy education. The data collected were evaluated through the lens of two theories that apply to media messages. Social Identity Theory combined with the idea of Identity Threat Theory are used to help negotiate the data gathered from the participants.

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CHAPTER 1: AN OVERVIEW OF MEDIA LITERACY

Introduction

Our world has been inundated with easy access to technology, and with this access comes a flood of information. The Internet provides easy access to information of all types through a variety of mobile as well as desktop technology devices. Tutkun (2011) suggests that "using computers and the Internet has become an indispensable part of daily life," and he takes it a step further by claiming that human development has been shaped by the information and by the technology that is used to gather the information (p.152).

Frank Baker has always been at the forefront of the Media Literacy movement in school media centers. He is an advocate for school libraries and Media Specialists in this digital age. Baker notes, "we no longer live in a print-centric world; we are surrounded by a culture filled with visual images and messages, many of which work on a subconscious level" (Jacobs, 2010, p. 133). Mihailidis and Diggs (2010) also point out that school libraries are facing many obstacles such as budget decreases in their attempt to "reinvent themselves" to keep up with the technology wielding students and faculty (p. 280). This evolution of Libraries to Media Centers has included the emergence of *media literacy*. Mihailidis and Diggs (2010) describe media literacy education as "teaching and learning about media's role in daily life and cultivating critical thinking skills to become more aware of media's ubiquitous power" (p. 280).

Within the middle school where I work, I witness on a daily basis the way in which young people employ technology. In addition to the 6 permanent labs and 15 mobile labs, we are also a "bring-your-own-device" school, allowing students to use their own smartphones, tablets, iPods, etc. within the building. Hobbs and Jensen (2009) suggest that current educators do not fully appreciate the extent to which students are using technology for entertainment (p.5). Educators may be teaching the so-called "digital youth," but these educators do not realize that students who are capable of using technology to access, share, and create information may not be aware of how to do this effectively or properly. "When students say they use the Internet, they are referring to a set of behaviors totally different than those that teachers activate when they use the Internet" (Hobbs and Jensen, 2009, p. 6). Collins (2009) notes that while schools are a primary source of learning, many students' first form of education comes from the media (p. 116). Laurence Steinberg stresses the importance of behaviors that will strengthen young peoples' ability to think ahead and control impulses, noting that the brain is very malleable during the middle school years, and that positive experiences, even those in the classroom can help influence brain development. In this way, media literacy education could lead to experiences that help mold the adolescent brain in a positive way.

The Media Literacy Project defines media literacy as "the ability to access, analyze, evaluate, and create media" (n.d.). It goes on to clarify that media literate adults and young people have the ability to comprehend messages received from all forms of media (n.d.). According to Naidich (2013), schools within this country are rapidly changing with more languages, ethnicities, races, and classes than ever before represented within the classroom (p. 337). This change within the classroom is reflective of the

major changes within all society in the United States (Naiditch, 2013, p. 337). This diversity within the classroom is representative of the diversity present outside of the walls of the classroom, and while this diversity can lead to a richer academic learning process, some of the issues facing the diverse people of Color in the United States have spilled over into the classroom. From police aggression towards African Americans to hate crimes perpetrated by White supremacist groups to Starbucks employees having African American men arrested, racial intolerance clearly still exists, and is often perpetuated by the media. When considering social identity theory, or one's membership in a certain social group, media portrayal of disadvantaged groups can lead to alienation of these groups by more advantaged members of society. This alienation may in part be due to an effort on the part of the advantaged group to maintain their privileged position in society (Social Identity Theory, 2018, p. 3). The perceptions that are present within media affect the behaviors of students and teachers within a school. Teachers are not immune to the pressures of membership to certain social groups, and it is very possibly that the group mentality impacts the treatment of the students within their classrooms. IT is the hope of the researcher that media literacy education can help insure that an increase in media consumption through the use of technology does not lead to an increase in intolerance, and that media literacy education can help eradicate preconceived notions present within the minds of both students and educators.

Hobbs and Jensen (2009) identify the technology "spending spree" that occurred around the United States within schools. This money is being spent on hardware and software in order for schools to keep up with the technology trends. A troubling point noted by Hobbs and Jensen is "where the passion for the latest technologies and tools

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outstrips school administrators' interests in the development of curriculum content or teachers' or students' knowledge and skills" (p. 5). The influx of technology within schools has created a number of issues, but my concern is always drawn first to the student. Naidich (2013) points out that the way in which teachers teach and the way in which students learn have been dramatically altered by digital technology, and that it has also greatly impacted the way in which people relate to each other in society (p. 337). He espouses the concept of using media literacy as a means of crossing "cultural borders" and diminishing the "gaps between cultures" that are often found within classrooms and schools (Naiditch, 2013, p. 337). Collins (2009) identifies a main problem facing media literacy in schools being the fact that schools are simply following the trends rather than setting them when it comes to media literacy (p. 117).

When evaluating the effectiveness of media literacy education, it is helpful to approach the results through the lens of theory. Social identity theory combined with Identity threat theory are helpful in elucidating the responses to certain stimuli, especially in a social situation such a school classroom. Social identity theory espouses the concept that in social situations people have "membership" in a certain group, thus gaining value within society based on the group standing rather than individual achievement (Ellemers, 2018, p. 2). Social identity theory can be helpful to those belonging to the predominant group; however, disadvantaged groups can find it difficult to find advancement due to the fact that the privileged groups often attempt to maintain their advantages by hindering the advancement of these disadvantaged groups (Ellemers, 2018, p. 3). When considering mass media's impact on social identity theory, Mastro and Kopacz (2006) note that media depictions of disadvantaged groups can impact the response of the typical White

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consumer to these disadvantaged groups (p.307). Identity threat theory takes this concept to a different level by stating that the media depiction of non-dominant groups leads to feelings of anger and anxiety on the part of the dominant group. A study by Seate, Ma, Chien, and Mastro (2018) found that "consuming media that contain these negative images leads to a slew of negative outcomes, including stereotyping and unfavorable intergroup judgements" (p. 192). They go on to note that the results of their study indicate that "the media cultivate anxiety and anger toward non-dominant groups in the United States" (p192). People who feel that they are members of a certain social group may react in a certain way in order to protect the group identity. Thus, their responses may be more indicative a group mentality than a personal belief. When evaluating the media, it is necessary to consider the students social identities as well as perceived threats on those identities.

Problem Statement

At an early age, students are gaining access to various forms of media, yet they have not been given the skills to evaluate the media inundation present today. Within the researcher's school, there has been a steady increase in inappropriate use of social media. In addition, students conducting research are unable to separate the valuable information from the vast array of media messages buried in the information. By integrating media combined with inquiry, content, and process within the classroom, educators can help students become more literate on issues of diversity by giving them the ability to decode media messages and recognize the way media portrays certain diverse groups within our society (Naiditch, 2013, p. 339). Mastro (2015) states,

Although a myriad of factors are known to contribute to racial/ethnic positions, for many, conceptualizations of race and ethnicity as well as interracial/interethnic dynamics are defined by the characterizations presented in the mass media – including both news and entertainment offerings (p. 1).

My school is beginning the move to a 1:1 situation with mobile devices; the school currently has approximately 500 mobile devices used by students. I have found that this increase in technology both within schools and at home has led to extreme exposure to mass media messages. Students lack the ability to decode these messages and determine what information is unbiased and useful. Scharrer and Ramasubramaniam (2015) found through their study that media literacy has the ability to "promote or to call into question stereotypical views…including those defined by race" (p. 171). While subject area teachers are primarily using the technology with students, they lack the knowledge and the time to create fully and institute a media literacy component to the curriculum. Seeing this need, I devised a study in which I, as the media specialist and researcher, introduced a media literacy curriculum in order to answer the question: How can a media literacy curriculum sensitize middle school students to the racial bias present in mass media? Through an effective media literacy program, I gave students skills needed for school purposes, but also skills that will enable them to be a more valuable, contributing member of their community. This media literacy program consisted of six lessons that focused on identifying the stereotypical and racist messages found in the following forms of mass media:

1. Television news
2. Movies

3. Print advertisements

4. Social media

5. Commercials

6. Student contributions to mass media.

As students were exposed to the negative messages, additional forms of media lacking these stereotypical images were presented to facilitate the identification of these negative media messages. Collins (2009) notes that within various forms of media, including films, magazines, and television shows, there is an ever-present "color-blind racism" that is presented as "natural, normal, and inevitable" (p. 116).

Purpose and Rationale

This action research study took place in a large public middle school in the southeast United States. The school is located in a newly emerging suburban area that is located outside of a major city. The school had approximately 1200 students serving sixth, seventh, and eighth grade students. There was an abundance of technology available to students within the school. With nearly 500 school-owned mobile devices, various desktop labs, and the students' own devices as the school was a bring your own device school, technology was constantly being used. However, the technology was not being used efficiently, effectively, or responsibly. Naiditch (2013) conducted a study focused on the deconstruction of media, including the identification of stereotypes, bias, and racism found within mass media (p. 340). He found that students can easily communicate through texting, and they have no issues with sharing aspects of their personal lives on social media (Naiditch, 2013, p. 339). Dickson (1993) commented that many research studies have found that racial and biased stereotypes can be found easily

in all forms of media entertainment and news (p. 29). "An important aspect of becoming media literate is that students come to understand the role that all forms of media play in society as they develop critical thinking skills, especially when it comes to issues of diversity (Naiditch, 2013, p. 339). Collins (2009) proposes that media literacy should not be confined to schools but that schools should be a major propagator of media literacy instruction in order for students to "develop their own critical analysis" of the media messages confronting them daily (p. 117).

Scharrer and Ramasubramanian (2015) have studied the effect of media literacy and have found that there is a positive correlation between media literacy education and the mitigation of negative stereotypes of certain social groups within mass media (p. 171). Action research was the best approach to dealing with the lack of a media literacy program as it set the stage for an evaluation of its effectiveness. By conducting the action research within the school, both students and teachers inside and outside of the study benefit if the media literacy curriculum was effective. Success could lead to implementation on a more school-wide level in the future.

Conceptual Framework

This action research study was guided by previous studies by Theresa Redmond and Renee Hobbs. Theresa Redmond is a proponent of media literacy in the sense that it can increase student participation and enjoyment in their own education. Redmond (2015) found that students are more engaged in lessons that include a sample of multiple media texts and their absorption of media literacy skills is accelerated through this inclusion (p. 15). Hobbs (2009) focuses on using the past to help direct the future. She

recommends that the issues surrounding today's youth, such as mass and digital media as well as pop culture be addressed and dealt with through media literacy (p. 9).

Skills considered essential by the Partnership for 21st Century Learning as well as the National Association for Media Literacy Education's Core Principles of Media Literacy Education in the United States also guided the study. The Partnership for 21st Century Learning includes media literacy in their Framework, including the ability to understand the construction of media, interpret messages and points of view, and apply ethical understanding to media. Furthermore, the creation of media products is included in the Framework (P21, n.d.).

The National Association for Media Literacy Education (NAMLE) has 6 core principles of media literacy, the first of which is, "Media literacy education requires active inquiry and critical thinking about the messages we receive and create" (2007). Two major implications for practice are that "all media messages are 'constructed'" and "media and media messages can influence beliefs, attitudes, values, behaviors, and the democratic process" (NAMLE, 2007). The Center for Media Literacy focuses on 5 core concepts that directly apply to this action research study.

1. All media messages are constructed.

2. Media messages are constructed using a creative language with its own rules.

3. Different people experience the same media messages differently.

4. Media have embedded values and points of view.

5. Most media messages are organized to gain profit and/or power (Center for Media Literacy, 2016).

In addition, social identity theory as it is influenced by identity threat theory was used as a lens through which to analyze the data collected within this research study. Mastro (2015) comments on today's "media saturated lifestyles" noting that the consumers of media are often unable to "recognize the influence of exposure on perceptions of reality (p. 3). In fact, she goes on to state that due to a person's media preferences, they may only be "exposed to one-sided images of different racial/ethnic groups, or simply not see them at all" (p. 3).

Methodology

The participants in this study were a convenience sample as one seventh grade class was selected to participate. The class selected was a creative writing course due to the fact that the gifted and talented students and the regular education students were not separated out for this type of exploratory class. The class was chosen based on the availability, willingness, and ability of the instructor to participate in the study.

Research Site

The research was conducted within the Media Center, computer labs, and classrooms of a large middle school located in an emerging suburb in South Carolina. This formerly rural area has grown considerably and is now considered suburban due to its proximity to a major city and the population of the area. The school had a population of approximately 1200 students, 65 teachers, 4 administrators, 4 Guidance counselors, and 30 support staff. Nearly 70 percent of students attending the site qualified for free and reduced lunch. The site offered students a large degree of access to school-owned technology on a daily basis. In addition, students were able to connect their own devices to a filtered wireless checkpoint.

Research Questions

The first research question that was addressed by this study was: How can a media literacy curriculum be used to sensitize middle school students to the racial bias and stereotypes present in mass media? This question evolved to this point after observing students' misuse of the internet, the inability of students to recognize racial stereotyping within all forms of media as well as the inability to create their own information free of these racial stereotypes. This was a multi-dimensional question that looked both at the students gained knowledge concerning media literacy as it applied to racial bias as well as the actual application of this knowledge in real world context.

As a researcher, I was interested in the differences, if any, the gender or race of the student would have on their responses and reactions. When considering social identity theory as a lens, it was of interest to see if membership to a certain social group would outweigh membership within other groups. Thus, a second research question addressed was: How do gender and race affect student sensitivity to the racial bias and stereotypes present in mass media?

Research Objectives

As with all action research, the objective of this study was to promote skills that would better serve students both inside and outside of the school. In addition, data retrieved from and knowledge gained from this study could be used to better inform future studies on the same or similar topic. This study focused on a small group of students from within a large middle school, and the results could help to initiate a more school wide media literacy drive. The results will be shared with the larger school community at the conclusion of the study.

Action Research

Trying new methods and learning new approaches is standard operating procedure for seasoned educators. While these approaches clearly involve teachers researching new methods, they are not fully action research because they are not fully grounded both in theory and in actual research conducted by the teacher. When conducting action research, the goal is for the teacher to gain valuable information for themselves (Mertler, 2014, p. 4). This information may be applicable outside the walls of the classroom, but that is not the goal of the researcher.

In order to conduct action research, teachers have to be willing critically to examine their teaching and realize that better methods of reaching their students may exist (Mertler, 2014, p. 12). Action research is not an indication of a teacher lacking in skills. On the contrary, it is an indication of a skilled teacher who wishes to better his or her teaching practices. Reflection is key to good teaching, and it is also the driving force behind action research. While good teachers may reflect on a regular basis, action research offers a documentable form of this reflection. This documentation proves invaluable as it drives future teaching endeavors. Many teachers are successful due to their willingness to adapt and evolve to meet the needs of students in this constantly changing world. However, these successful teachers become great when they add systematic reflection to their practice, used to drive their own action research studies (Mertler, 2014, p. 23).

Sources of Data Collection

Data for the research question addressing media literacy skills were collected through the administration of a pretest and a posttest. A pretest developed by the media

specialist assessing a student's sensitivity to racial bias and stereotyping within various forms of media was administered to the selected classes at the beginning the research study. This test was developed based on previous research studies as well as NAMLE's core principles and the specific needs of the students within the researcher's school. This test was administered a second time after the media literacy curriculum had been implemented in tandem with the creative writing curriculum. This was the quantitative data collection method used in the action research study.

The study was conducted throughout the course of a semester and through regularly occurring meetings with the media specialist. Qualitative data were collected during these meetings throughout the semester. Methods of collection used included observations recorded in a research journal by the researcher as well as informal interviews of the students using semi-structured questions. Students also kept a journal throughout the research study in order to reflect on the curriculum. The data collected included researcher and student observations as well as researcher reflection.

Dissertation Overview

This dissertation serves to explore the impact of a media literacy program upon the perceptions and behavior of middle school students. Chapter One of the dissertation has given a brief overview of the problem within the school in which the research occurred. In addition, the purpose of the study is stated, and brief information concerning the design, rationale, and methodology is included. Chapter Two offers an in-depth literature review that gives a clear look at previous research studies as well as the historical relevance of the current study. Chapter Three delves into methodology, quickly reviewing the research question and the need for the current study while going into depth

concerning the research design, including participants, setting, and data collection strategies. Chapter Four contains the findings of the current research study, and Chapter Five gives a summary and discussion of those findings.

Conclusion

Instructors of media literacy are searching for ways to help students understand the power of technology as well as the craft employed by media outlets when it comes to constructing messages (Hobbs, 2011, p. 30). Without this understanding, students have no educated method to use in determining what is to be believed.

Giving students the opportunity and the skills needed to create their own media products will demonstrate to the students how their "own words (images, sounds, and multimedia) can change the world in large and small ways" (Hobbs, 2011, p. 30). Beaudoin (2010) finds that the deconstruction of media examples can successfully teach students to recognize race and gender bias within mass media (p. 100). Collins (2009) states that the ultimate goal of media literacy is to help young people become creators of knowledge through the development of their analyzation skills. In addition, she notes that a large part of media literacy involves a person's ability to understand "the reasons that various forms of media replicate the patterns that they do" (p. 117). The media has the potential to have a "profound role" in the creation of viewpoints of various non-dominant diverse populations (Mastro, 2015, p. 3). This ability to mold perspective gives the media power, and the ability to decode and see through these false messages is the best solution.

CHAPTER 2: HISTORY, THEORY, APPLICATION

Introduction

Literacy is a common term used in education. At the most basic level, literacy is the ability to read, write, and effectively master mathematics. However, as this basic form of literacy no longer sufficiently prepares young people for today's world, additional forms of literacy such as digital literacy, visual literacy, health and financial literacy, ethical literacy, media literacy, and many more forms of literacy have emerged (Pietila, 2018). For the majority of time that an education system has been in place within the world, the term literacy has been applied to written texts. Within the last century, the introduction of various new forms of media including radio, television, and, more recently, the internet, has necessitated a change in the definition of literacy. New terms such as information literacy, visual literacy, digital literacy, and media literacy are now being used. The definitions of these terms vary amongst professionals, with new terminology having grown out of the previous terminology. For the purpose of this study, media literacy is an all-encompassing term focusing on the ability to access, analyze, interpret, and create all forms of media.

While a media literacy curriculum could benefit teachers of all subject areas by teaching students how to find, analyze, and evaluate information from the internet, it goes beyond this in the realm of possibilities. Media literacy "that encourages students to consider why messages are sent and where they come from can help young people interrogate texts that may reproduce racism, genderism, homophobia, and other

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prejudices" (Gainer, 2010, p. 365). When considering social identity theory and the adherence to group norms, the dominant group is the White consumer. The White consumer may often not question the intent of media messages as they tend to confirm the overall racial norms of the group. Study findings go so far as to suggest that the dominant White group reflects more positively on media depicting Whites in a positive light (Mastro & Kopacz, 2006, p. 309). A major problem with this is the fact that this mentality may not only condone, but it may promote the negative depiction of non-dominant races/ethnicities by the media.

Understanding Media Literacy

The definition of *media literacy* has evolved over the years. According to the Partnership for 21st Century Learning, media literacy applies to analyzing media and creating media products (P21 framework). Mihailidis and Diggs (2010) describe media literacy as "learning about media's role in daily life and cultivating critical thinking skills to become more aware of media's ubiquitous power" (p. 280). Gainer's (2010) perspective of media literacy "refers to a pedagogy that positions students to analyze, relations among media, audiences, information, and power and to produce alternative media texts that challenge messages in dominant discourse" (p. 364). The seemingly most referred to and most evolved definition of media literacy is provided by Hobbs (2010) as

> The full range of cognitive, emotional and social competencies that include the use of texts, tools and technologies; the skills of critical thinking and analysis; the practice of message composition and creativity; the ability to engage in reflection and ethical thinking; as well as active participation through teamwork and

collaboration (p.17).

Media literacy, while having a variety of definitions depending on what is seen as important by the researcher, relies on the "reader" forming meaning from their own "experiences and contexts" (Potter, 2004, p. 32). This means that one piece of media might be interpreted in very different ways by the diverse global community, potentially creating various divides throughout a classroom, school, community, city, etc. Media literacy attempts to bridge that divide by bringing to light the benefits of interacting with a diverse global community. A more cognitive explanation of media literacy is given by Potter:

> Media literacy is the set of perspectives from which we expose ourselves to the media and interpret the meaning of the messages we encounter. We build our perspectives from knowledge structures. The knowledge structures form the platforms on which we stand to view the multifaceted phenomenon of the media: their business, their content, and their effects on individuals and institutions. The more knowledge structures we have, the more media phenomenon we can "see" (Potter, 2004, p. 58-59).

Media literacy offers students additional knowledge structures to be used in the decoding of media messages.

Media literacy is more than a skill set; it is also a constantly changing mindset that makes us stop and consider things before we act (Potter, 2004, p. 39). Action is most certainly a part of media literacy, but, as Mihailidis says, access, appreciation, awareness and assessment should occur first. Media literacy at its core is the ability to access, analyze, evaluate and create messages in all forms (Center for Media Literacy, 2015).

This includes the ability to decode media messages and identify a variety of stereotypes including racial and gender bias.

Media is disseminated in such a variety of ways today that it becomes nearly impossible to ignore. The protectionist belief in avoidance is no longer a viable option. Potter (2004) argues that this constant flow of information causes us to err on the side of efficiency; many do not have the skills necessary to process the information quickly enough to determine what is accurate (p. 49). Media literacy education within the public-school system serves to assists students in their ability to avoid faulty meanings found in the media. One goal of media literacy is to teach students to avoid a state of "mindlessness" when they are confronted with media in order to eliminate their unconscious reactions or decisions (Potter, 2004, p. 51). For students as well as adults, this is often a challenge as we often turn to various forms of media in order to "zone out," making us more susceptible to underlying media messages. It is doubtful that this will ever disappear entirely, but awareness of the fact it is occurring can help eliminate some "mindless" occurrences. Middle school students' brains are still developing with the brain not reaching full maturity until the age of 25. At the middle school age, students may not have the brain maturity to show responsibility or to evaluate their actions. At this age, students instead may look for activities "that either lead to a high level of excitement or require very little effort" (McDonald, 2010, p. 46). This is not a one-size-fits-all application as students' brains mature at varying rates, but the instructor can use this knowledge when planning lessons as well as when evaluating students' participation and responses.

This study is grounded in the work of media literacy researchers such as Renee

Hobbs, Paul Mihailidis, Theresa Redmond, Valerie Diggs, Belinha De Abreu, Beau Beaudoin, Fernando Naiditch, Erica Scharrere, and Srividya Ramasubramanian. Their studies have confirmed the value of media literacy education while demonstrating the need for a constantly evolving methodology in order to address the ever-changing media landscape. This study serves to build on the findings of previous studies on media literacy education in the hopes of encouraging the implementation of a formal media literacy curriculum within school standards.

Studying Media Literacy

The vast majority of studies surrounding media literacy are qualitative studies relying primarily on interviews and observations as data collection methods. Hobbs et al. (2011) use pre-service teachers as well as researchers in conducting interviews, classroom observations, and in the collection of student work samples (p. 147). In their study, pre-service teachers with a strong media literacy pedagogy were paired with seasoned teachers in the implementation of a media literacy education program. Early meetings with students focused on the key ideas of media literacy, then moved on to modeling skills and actively including the students in the creation of a product (Hobbs et al., 2011, p. 147). Theresa Redmond (2012) has also conducted research centering on media literacy education, and while the size of her sample may vary, her approach to data collection is qualitative, with field observation being the primary method of data collection (p. 108). In her study, a Media Literacy Workshop was introduced involving a team of three teachers who were involved in teaching different aspects of media literacy (Redmond, 2012, p. 108). This team teaching approach allowed each teacher to focus on their own media literacy strengths giving the students the best possibly education. Often,

teachers individually do not have a strong enough background in all areas of media literacy; a team teaching approach is a way to solve this problem. In another study by Redmond (2015) a Media Literacy Project was also employed, but data were collected in additional ways to include "scripted and narrative details of lesson instruction, media and technologies used, activities, assessments, teacher/student comments, and reflective notes" (p. 13). In addition, in-depth interviews with teachers and students were conducted.

McDougall et al. (2015) in their research study which focused on Paul Mihailidis' five A's of media literacy - access, awareness, assessment, appreciation, and action - conducted 3 activities with participants in the study. These activities included a profiling exercise to determine the evidence of media literacy, an oral response to a film combined with an interview, and a student produced project (p. 7).

Naiditch (2013) conducted a study focusing on a classroom project to cross cultural boundaries (p. 337). Scharrer and Ramasubramanian (2015) focused their research on using media literacy education to eliminate the influence of mass media on the propagation of racial stereotypes (p. 171). Mastro has conducted many studies on the effects of media on non-dominant groups within society, finding that "exposure to depictions of race in the media provides an opportunity for group-based associations and distinctions" (Mastro & Kopacz, 2006, p. 319).

After thoroughly researching previous studies as well as the location and environment of this study, the decision was made to employ a mixed methods research approach. The study focused on a group of 7th grade students from middle school. The research question addressed was: How can a media literacy curriculum sensitize middle

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school students to the racial bias present in mass media? Within the research study, the media specialist was instrumental in implementing media literacy lessons seamlessly into the prescribed curriculum. After discussion with the teachers involved, it was clear that in addition to the qualitative data to be collected through interviews and observations, the teachers desired some concrete data that could be shared with parents. In order to address this, a pre-test/post-test scenario was employed to determine prior knowledge as well as knowledge gained throughout the course of the study. While this quantitative aspect provided valuable data, it was noted that many students while being capable of answering questions correctly concerning media literacy as it applies to racial bias might not actually change their real-life practices. The qualitative data collected through observation, interviews, and reflective journaling allowed the researcher to better observe these issues.

Theoretical Base and Historical Context

The Department of Visual Instruction, also known as DVI, was formed by the National Education Foundation (NEA) in 1923. The goal of DVI was to broaden the range of educational tools to be used in the classroom (King, 2008, p. 63). Over the years, DVI changed names and began to focus on audiovisual instruction. In 1945, after World War II, The Division of Audio-Visual Instruction service was formed by the NEA with the goal of establishing "new audio-visual instruction programs and expanding and developing existing programs in all levels of education" (King, 2008, p. 63). It was after World War II that schools began using more technology in the classroom, especially through the use of the television. As schools began to use this increased technology, they also began to provide training for the teachers on this new medium (King, 2008, p. 59).

This is clearly an early form of media literacy education for teachers. This new medium available to educators led to more challenges for African Americans students. African Americans were first portrayed on television and film by Whites wearing blackface. These White actors portrayed African Americans as not only unintelligent but also uncivilized (Adams-Bass, Stevenson, and Kotzin, 2014, p. 368). Prior to the advent of film and television, African Americans were depicted in a negative light through storytelling that showed African Americans as subservient to Whites (Adams-Bass, Stevenson, and Kotzin, 2014, p. 368).

Adams-Bass, Stevenson, and Kotzin (2014) conducted a study to "examine the relationship among exposure to and endorsement of media images of Black people, racial identity, and racial socialization for Black adolescents" (p. 369). The study found that young people who viewed more positive racial socialization methods or who received more Black history education were more likely to recognize yet not endorse racial stereotypes (Adams-Bass, Stevenson, and Kotzin, 2014, p. 384). The social identities of young people are impacted by these media messages, and many young people do not have the benefit of filtered media messages or a strong foundations in Black history with which to combat these messages.

As early as the 1950s, African Americans have been routinely shown by the media in a negative or stereotypical way (Walton and Smith, 2015, p. 85). Walton and Smith (2015) also note that "mass" media tailors their reports to what is considered the mass public, or the "general, middle-class Whites" (p. 85). Mastro (2015) states, "Whether looking at primetime television, newspapers, TV news, advertising, film,

sports, or videogames, the offerings provided in the media have historically been unfavorable when it comes to the quality of racial/ethnic representations" (p. 3).

In 1964, Robert M. Diamond, author of *A Guide to Instructional Television* defined instructional television as any television used within the classroom context (King, 2009, p. 59). Originally, instructional television (ITV) was considered to be the avenue by which the teacher could be replaced in the classroom (Hendry, 2001, p. 1). It became quickly evident that ITV would not replace teachers, and over the years, teachers discovered weaknesses when using ITV. For the intent of this action research study, the weakness of most importance is the difficulty in "adapting to a new technology" (Seay, et. al., 2001, p. 99). This is early evidence of the need for media literacy training both for teachers and for students. In 1995, a study reported that 60% of teachers questioned did not feel prepared for using ITV (Seay, et. al., 2001, p. 100).

Today, the realm of digital media is vast compared to that of instructional television alone, and the ability to navigate it safely and effectively is unknown to the majority of students and most teachers, also. This necessitates a media literacy curriculum. Collins (2009) identifies media as being a major part of the living experience of today's youth, unlike it has been with any prior generation. Thus, the ability to critically analyze media is crucial (p. 120).

Within the United States, as well as other countries, educators are beginning to see the importance of media literacy. Young people today are entering the information world at early ages due in part to the wide availability of the Internet. Within the public-school system, standards are being implemented that clearly expect students to have the ability to evaluate and analyze the various forms of media available. In addition, an

example of a Common Core English Language Arts standard demonstrates the expectation for students to be able to produce information in various media formats.

However, while the expectations are clear, the process to reach them is not. No clear curriculum is in place for media literacy instruction. For many years, schools have chosen to take a protectionist approach to media literacy, avoiding the inclusion of media formats other than printed texts within the curriculum. The instructors within the classroom combined with print resources have been the "omniscient" source of information for the students (de Abreu, 2010, p. 27). Ironically, much of the information employed by the instructors has been obtained through the use of various media outlets, primarily the internet. The mentality of educators has been "do as I say not as I do." De Abreu (2010) explains that with a protectionist attitude, teachers seek to "inoculate students from the world of media" by acting as the 'vessel of truth' (p. 27).

Change has begun to occur within the last decade; schools and educators have begun to see the value of incorporating and employing all forms of media within the curriculum. Most educators now "recognize that the stances of protection and empowerment are not examples of 'either-or' thinking, since these two positions are not in opposition – they are two sides of the same coin" (Hobbs, 2010, p. 30). "Media literacy is in fact empowerment of the best kind by teaching students to thoughtfully question and consider the choices they make as they participate in various media" (De Abreu, 2010, p. 30). While most educators have come to this realization, few have yet realized that a media literacy education program must be in place to address these positions. Mass media in all its forms can be used effectively to assist in the acquisition of skills such as inference-making and prediction; media literacy education serves to pave

the way for the acquisition of digital skills as well as to assist with the application of more traditional skills such as reading and writing (Hobbs, 2010, p. 31).

The purpose of this literature review is to express through the findings of previous research studies, the value of a media literacy curriculum which focused on 6 lessons geared toward identifying racial bias and stereotyping within all forms of media. While the studies vary in approach and implementation, the end results remain conclusive. Media literacy curriculum has a positive influence on students. The results as well as the methodology used in these research studies are used to inform the focus study of this dissertation.

Learning Outcomes for Students. De Abreu (2010) in his studies found that through media literacy instruction, students gained the ability to employ critical thinking in their analysis of various forms of information, and to begin to see the difference between the truth and a fallacy. He goes on to express that media literacy education is necessary to give students the tools to understand the ideas presented within language and media (p. 27). Prior to the formation of true media literacy programs within schools, the protectionist view of media literacy often taught students to avoid forms of media for their own protection. More recently, educators of media literacy have the desire to "cultivate in students a deep understanding of the constructedness of media messages" (Hobbs, 2011, p. 29). Students are encouraged to delve deeper in order to recognize the implications of the media, social implications, historical implications, economic implication, etc. (Hobbs, 2011, p. 29). Students also learn that we all view these messages through our personal lens that is influenced by our own situation and experiences. For the purpose of this study, social identity theory will be used to evaluate

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the lens through which media messages are received and decoded. The lessons will be taught in a social setting, and while student journals allow for more individual statements, the social nature of the classroom could potentially influence responses as is noted by social identity theory.

Joslyn Young (2012) conducted a study attempting to join traditional literacy with media literacy. She notes that results of a number of different standardized tests demonstrate that students are below standard in traditional literacies. These same students are very active in the communication and media delivery methods of present day, yet within the school system, when students are not scoring well on test of traditional literacy, it is only these traditional forms of text that are employed to increase skills (p. 70). Instruction on the various forms of media could potentially give struggling students a wealth of high interest material to work with in their attempts to increase their traditional literacy skills. Young (2012) proposes the following links between traditional literacy and media literacy.

1. Media literacy as a gateway to more frequent use and practice of traditional literacy;

2. Media production as a method to build on writing skills; and

3. Analysis of media as a way to enhance traditional critical reading skills (p. 71).

The association of one form of literacy with another seems logical in light of education today; the standards today are requiring media components along with traditional literacy skills. The melding of the two becomes necessary in order to accomplish everything within the allotted time period.

Young (2012) conducted a qualitative study with a youth organization that confirmed her idea that involving youth in media literacy programs can create interest in literacy practice. Through interviews, Young (2012) noted that the participants in her study began using their own spare time to write stories and scripts as well as to assist others with literacy skills (p. 75). Within her study, the creations of the participants were posted online, forcing the students to consider their audience (Young, 2012, p. 77). This clearly combines the concepts of traditional literacy with media literacy as it addresses the traditional component of audience while addressing the globalization of the times.

Internet Use & the Contemporary Student. Tutkun (2011), while not focusing specifically on media literacy, studied the Internet use and levels of sharing among students. When considering media literacy curriculum, it is imperative to consider the rapid increase of new forms of media available primarily through the internet. Traditional literacy programs were capable of handling media such as television and radio, but the information explosion provided by the internet and the web, demonstrate a clear need for addressing media literacy as a separate entity from traditional literacy. While the one may positively influence the other, they are very different in nature.

Tutkun (2011) states "Information and communication technologies used to acquire knowledge have had a significant effect on the development of human beings during the second half of the twentieth century (p. 152). This effect has only been magnified within the last 15 years. While we are aware of the impact of the various forms of media available through technology, we have done little within the field of education to address these forms of literacy.

Tutkun (2011) conducted a study in Turkey to determine the use of technology by students for accessing, using, and sharing information. He found that 87.5 % of students used the internet and 82% could not imagine going through the day without access to the internet (p. 158). While this study was not conducted within the United States, this situation can be seen in all first world countries. Scharrer and Ramasubramanian (2015) found that the prevailing theme in their study focused on the positive effects of exposure to diverse experiences and points of view that can be achieved through media literacy education (p. 180).

Intrinsic Benefits of Media Literacy. Theresa Redmond (2012) conducted a study in which she proposed that media literacy instruction could positively influence a child's love of what she terms *critical enjoyment* (p. 106). The research was conducted with seventh grade students in a very diverse school. Field observations and interviews of the students as well as the teachers were the primary source of data collection. The study focused on three key principles.

1. all media are constructed;

2. media are constructed for a purpose; and

3. audiences negotiate meaning (Redmond, 2012, p. 109).

Redmond's (2012) study required the incorporation of popular media within the media literacy instruction as a strategy for reaching learners of this age group (p. 110). Within their classrooms, teachers must attempt to meet the needs of their students while addressing the interests of those students. Redmond's approach gives students a vested interest in their education because it demonstrates value in what the students find interesting. Teacher pedagogy was adapted to support the enjoyment of the students in

the learning process. Steinberg (2011) notes that the middle school years are a time in which so many things happening to students, especially within their bodies, are out of their control, and, as a way to help teens and preteens cope, it is important that they be given some control and autonomy in other areas of their lives (p.42). Within her study, Redmond allowed for a social aspect in which peers shared experiences in order to make decisions about media (2012, p. 111). These students live in a world dominated by social media; this approach teaches the students on a small scale how to communicate socially in respectable ways. Redmond (2012) found that "Critical enjoyment is seen in media literacy practice that extends beyond preparing students to analyze and evaluate media to include a focus on kindling students' satisfaction in the analytical, social, and expressive processes of media deconstruction in their own right" (p, 113). The goal of a media literacy curriculum is not to demonstrate that students are able to evaluate the pre-chosen media presented to them, but to ensure that students are able to navigate within our information inundated world, decoding these various forms of media in an effort to make the best-informed decisions concerning what they believe as well as the information they produce. Redmond's inclusion of popular media allows students to apply their gained knowledge to personal situations, a goal that fuels all media literacy programs.

Six years ago, studies found that students were spending more than 8 hours per day outside of school engaged with technology, yet very few areas then or now incorporate programs to help young people decode the information they encounter in order to help them engage more effectively with their communities (Mihailidis & Diggs, 2010, p. 284). A learning commons approach to media literacy aims to teach students not only how to navigate a media center but how to navigate the internet, including online

databases, blogs, wikis, social media, as well as all forms of information sources that can be found online (Mihailidis & Diggs, 2010, p. 288). Young people today are referred to as "digital natives" which, in reality, simply means that most have grown up knowing how to access information using technology; very few young people have the skills to effectively navigate this information. A simple example of this lack of skills can be seen when young people conduct a search online. Most will simply accept the first response in the list of often millions of responses as the one that is correct. Students rarely even notice if the first hit is a paid advertisement. A combination of the ease of accepting the first response and the lack of skills to know how critically to evaluate the responses results in poor selections of information.

A Place for Media Literacy in Schools. Paul Mihailidis, a well-known researcher in the field of media literacy, and Valerie Diggs (2010) proposed the 21st century library be used as the location for disseminating media literacy education. They propose that media literacy is still on the outskirts of curriculum within the United States combined with the fact that school libraries are struggling to find where they fit in this wired age (p. 279-280).   In their study, media literacy is defined as "teaching and learning about media's role in daily life and cultivating critical thinking skills to become more aware of media's ubiquitous power" (Mihailidis & Diggs, 2010, p. 280). The approach employed in the study converted a school library into a learning commons, an area focused on student learning while encouraging collaboration, the use of technology, the arts, reading, writing, and inquiry-based thinking (Mihailidis & Diggs, 2010, p. 282).

This inquiry-based thinking within a creative commons space facilitates the implementation of a media literacy program unlike that of a traditional classroom. A

creative commons space does not limit the accessed information; it focuses on meeting the educational and personal needs of the stakeholders. Mihailidis and Diggs' study is of particular importance as it mirrors the environment used in this study. Schools in many areas have eliminated the school media specialist position, feeling that it is antiquated, and a certified teacher much less one with a Master's degree is not seen as necessary for checking out books. As succinctly stated by Mihailidis and Diggs (2010), "School libraries will have a limited and very narrowly defined future on the education horizon if they continue to be just information repositories" (p. 283). Many libraries and librarians have made the shift to becoming media centers and media specialist, embracing these new technologies, and making effort to stay at the forefront of what is new and of interests to the students and society in general. Librarians, in fear of elimination, are turning to media literacy and a learning commons approach to libraries in order to maintain their worth in the eyes of the entire educational community.

Mihailidis and Diggs (2010) propose a school library model where some noise is allowed; where students are engaged in the use of technology; where the librarian or media specialist is modeling the effective and appropriate use of technology in the search for information (p. 289). A library filled with access to information both in the traditional sense and through technology is not simply a prime location for implementing a media literacy curriculum, it is a location in which the media specialist should feel obligated to conduct lessons on media literacy in order to meet the needs of the students.

Traditional Literacy vs Media Literacy. A study by Theresa Redmond concerning students' critical enjoyment as it relates to media literacy was referenced earlier in this chapter. Redmond's studies are of particular interest as they focus on

middle school students. Middle school is often seen as the lost years between elementary and high school. However, middle school is the perfect time for the implementation of a media literacy curriculum because most middle school students are heavily involved with the use of technology and the search for information while still being open to influence in their decision-making. Adolescent brains are still making connections between areas affecting logical reasoning and those affecting emotions which will lead to more impulse control and more self-regulation (Steinberg, 2011, p. 42). A media literacy curriculum, focused on identifying racial bias and stereotypes, implemented while student beliefs and perception are still malleable could lead to life-long improvements.

In a second study by Redmond (2015), she proposes that there is a fundamental difference between media literacy and traditional literacy. Through media literacy, students are employing "critical thinking and creative problem-solving competencies where students learn to evaluate and create texts in all forms" (p. 11). The key component in media literacy is its ability to address all forms of texts, allowing the curriculum to address the increased time that students are engaged with media while nurturing critical thinking skills that are crucial within the 21st century (Redmond, 2015, p. 11). The new Common Core State Standards (CCSS) that have been adopted throughout the majority of the country demand a change in many of the traditional literacy skills previously adopted. CCSS push the curriculum away from traditional fiction texts more towards informational or nonfiction texts. The percentage of informational text to be included in the curriculum increases with grade level. This heavy reliance of CCSS on information texts offers opportunities for the curriculum to address media literacy skills through the inclusion of various forms of media to address

the concept of "informational text" (Redmond, 2015, p. 12). Advertisements, song lyrics, blogs, movie and television clips, video games, as well as numerous other sources could be used to address the call for informational texts. Naiditch (2013) describes a combined media and multicultural literacy in which students are able to decode media messages and recognize the impact of these messages in their own lives, allowing the student more control over these experiences (p. 340).

Redmond's (2015) study was conducted through the implementation of a Media Literacy Workshop that was team taught by a librarian, a visual arts teacher, and an educational technology specialist (p. 13). The focus of this study was on text selection, specifically how text selection could be improved through a media literacy program. Students were involved in the deconstruction of media messages found in print and non-print texts. Redmond is a strong proponent of developing a curriculum that values the interest of students. She believes that teachers are able to capture the interests of students by using a variety of media texts (Redmond, 2015, p. 15). The key findings of this study were

(a) teachers employ a range of texts, engaging students in active learning via an integrated model of literacy;

(b) teachers value young adolescents and strive to address their nature and needs; and

(c) teachers embody characteristics of committed leaders and seek to address 21st century skills (Redmond, 2014, p. 14).

These findings are significant for educators wishing to employ 21st century skills while meeting educational standards (Redmond, 2015, p. 14). Many teachers today tend to

avoid alternative text forms due to fear of the unknown. A number of teachers in service today have struggled to become familiar with even a small percentage of the technological advancements that have occurred in the last 25-30 years. Some seasoned teachers choose to stick with the traditional forms of texts and information, refusing to tackle anything new in the short period of time they have before retirement. While reaching all current teachers concerning media literacy may be impossible, a group of doctoral students from Baylor University found that a graduate course on media literacy enabled them to include media literacy concepts into courses for pre-service teachers (Meehan et al., 2015, p. 81).

Teacher Preparation. Educators and those in charge of creating curriculum are beginning to see the need for the inclusion of media literacy skills within the curriculum; however, most teachers do not feel that they have the skill set necessary to accomplish this. Even those teachers who may feel comfortable with media literacy have been trained using traditional texts and media forms and are more likely to stick with what they know. One cause for the lack of media literacy preparation for pre-service teachers is the lack of time to devote on new innovations due to the pressure to address the other more traditional requirements (Meehan, et al, 2015, p. 81). This is strikingly reminiscent of what is seen in the K-12 classroom.

A benefit of a media literacy course for pre-service teachers is that it "serves in the development of critical thinking skills, offering a tool to examine and to unpack diversity issues as they are represented in the media and conveyed in students' experiences" (Meehan et al, 2015, p. 83). Media literacy would be valuable not only to K-12 students but also to those soon-to-be teachers who will be responsible for

instructing students on media literacy skills. As the study by Redmond (2015) concludes, these teachers would be well-served by the ability to address media literacy skills as they address not only the needs of the Common Core State Standards but also those of the 21st Century Skills. For example, Redmond (2015) demonstrates that a CCSS ELA-Literacy standard that requires students to assess how point of view or purpose shapes the content and style of a text can be met more creatively through the deconstruction of print and television commercials (p. 16). Media literacy by no means discourages the use of traditional texts. However, some recommendations when implementing media literacy are to

(a) use a range of both print and non-print texts in literacy activities;

(b) use texts from the students' media experiences, inviting them to contribute to the curriculum;

(c) analyze texts critically, and synthesize learning through production projects that also employ media; and

(d) share your success with the school community and beyond (Redmond, 2015, p. 17).

There is no faster way to garner support in a program than to demonstrate its success to your stakeholders.

Media literacy education has implications for curriculum itself as online access allows for the construction, sharing, and publishing of new materials as well as the ability to have global collaborations on curriculum (Jolls, 2015, p. 65). By the time most students reach middle school, they have access to some form of internet accessible technology outside of the school building. This access takes learning beyond the walls of

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the school; they are educated by access to a global network of information. The saying, "it takes a village to raise a child" takes on new meaning as children now have instant access to the entire world. Classrooms no longer have to operate entirely behind closed doors; "Connected learning calls for education to provide youth with opportunities to engage in socially supportive learning that is also personally interesting and relevant, while connecting academics to civic engagement and career opportunities" (Jolls, 2015, p. 66).

All of these opportunities hinge upon the students' ability to navigate a wealth of information and media while learning to make valuable contributions of their own. Very few students recognize the importance of critically evaluating the information they contribute to the global communications network. While teachers may not be fully on board with including technology access into their classes, students are ready for this new development in education. The Aspen Institute released a report in 2014 entitled "Learner at the Center of the Networked World." This report recommends a new method by which students can gain knowledge. Specifically, "all learners and educators need a sufficient degree of media, digital, and social-emotional literacies to learn through multiple media confidently, effectively and safely. Every student must have the chance to learn these vital skills" (Aspen Institute, 2014, p. 36).

The United States along with numerous other countries recognize the need for a media literacy curriculum, yet, in most areas one does not exist. Canada, Great Britain, and Australia have moved towards a media literacy curriculum, yet educators in the United States are not yet informed enough to consider it (Kellner and Share, 2006, p. 59). Time constraints, lack of desire to learn something new, and fear of the unknown are all

barriers to media literacy. Within many school districts, very strict firewalls are in place in an effort to "protect" students. This excessively high level of "protection" makes it difficult to teach students the media literacy skills they will need in order to navigate the world outside of the school's "protected" zone. Jolls (2015) identifies media literacy as a "constant" skill needed by students and adults alike to "apply content knowledge." These skills are "used in deconstructing and constructing communication through which to contextualize, acquire and apply content knowledge" (p. 68).   Media literacy skills have no boundaries; they are global skills that will improve the ability to communicate and share ideas (Jolls, 2015, p. 68).

Like most acquired skills, media literacy must be taught in a way that is consistent. A global skill creates the possibility of a global curriculum, yet that possibility seems unrealistic as it is difficult for our one country to agree on one set of educational standards. In the past, instruction was teacher led and based entirely on individual mastery, and while this is still true to some extent, the ability to include collaborative learning in which the students play a more active role in their own education is facilitated by media literacy skills (Jolls, 2015, p. 68). K-12 education must move away from written or printed papers or projects constructed using tangible items. Not only do educators now have the ability to use and access to the technology that allows them to produce digital products that can be submitted electronically, they also have the opportunity to instill in their students the skills necessary to accomplish these tasks.

New pedagogies in education expect students to take the reins of their own educational quest, but in many areas, this is not an option. Media literacy education

would facilitate this endeavor, allowing students to be more involved and responsible for their education (Jolls, 2015, p. 70). Students who are involved and invested in their own education will gain the most, fostering an intrinsic motivation that will be valuable in all aspects of life. A key problem with media literacy education is the fact that most educators are not prepared to implement this new instruction (Jolls, 2015, p. 70). Media literacy has been operating in the background for years, but the influx of media components in education have forced teachers and teacher training programs to take a closer look. The hope is that teacher-training programs will begin to implement media literacy programs that will have a trickle-down effect within K-12 classrooms. This will be a slow process, but this study offers a temporary solution in which media specialist who are more versed in the area of media literacy skills will be able to instruct students on these valuable skills until the classroom teachers are better equipped to take on this task.

      Creative Approaches to Instruction. The teaching of media literacy skills is not limited to one format. As with teaching other standards, educators should have the freedom to find the approach that best meets the needs of the students while also addressing the subject content matter. Educator, Ari Kohen (2012) implemented social media through the use of Twitter within his political theory class. While this may not seem to have direct relation to media literacy education, it is in fact a very practical way to address this particular skill set. Through interactions on Twitter, Kohen (2012) is able to determine if his students comprehend the content at a level that allows them to "process it in such a way as to be able to put the ideas back out into the world in their own voice" (p. 253). This method joins media literacy skills and traditional literacy skills

with subject content skills. The media literacy skill that allows the students to navigate

the online Twitter environment makes way for class participation and collaboration that is

often hindered by class size and lack of time in traditional environments (Kohen, 2012, p.

254). Media literacy skills when realized by students allow for a myriad of additional

educational opportunities inside as well as outside of a classroom. Kohen (2012)

surprisingly notes that the use of Twitter better allows him to keep the class on topic,

making it easy for him to shift the conversation in the direction most appropriate (p. 262).

The melding of popular social media sites with an undercurrent of media literacy skills

allows for increased learning potential. A key notation to make in Kohen's (2012)

situation is the fact that a noticeable change began to occur with his students midway

through the semester when his students began to produce and publish their own critically

thought out content, branching out from Twitter to other social networks such as

YouTube (p. 262). This is a clear sign of media literacy being effectively incorporated in

a way that leads a student to think beyond the content provided them.

Creative methods can be employed to implement media literacy as a stand-alone

course or within a larger content course. McDougall, Berger, Fraser, and Zezulkova

(2015) conducted a study to examine the levels of media literacy of students who have

studied media in school as compared to those students who are at the same level

educationally but have not participated in a media literacy education program (p. 4).

Their study follows a framework proposed by Mihailidis, espousing civic engagement in

addition to media literacy through the use of the 5A's – Access, Appreciation,

Awareness, Assessment, and Action (McDougall et al., 2015, p. 4). The study by

McDougall et al. is of relevance to this study as it is grounded in the theory and

framework that also guides this study. McDougall et al. focused their study on media studies containing the following assessment objectives:

- Knowledge and understanding of media products and the contexts in which they are produced and consumed

- Analyze and respond to media texts/topics using media key concepts and appropriate terminology

- Demonstrate research, planning, and presentation skills

- Construct and evaluate their own products using creative and technical skills (McDougall et al., 2015, p. 6).

While this study was not conducted within the United States, the concept driving media literacy education is accepted globally with the expectation that a program will "foster criticality, participation, engagement, vibrancy, inclusion, tolerance, and even mindfulness (McDougall et al, 2015, p. 6). This is quite a demand for any curriculum much less one that has not been formally included within the current curriculum. Results of the study were mixed, finding that students who had participated in a media studies program were more likely to have social media accounts, yet there was no clear connection to civic action (McDougall et al., 2015, p. 12). However, McDougall and his colleagues were able to determine that students who had received training in media literacy were more capable of producing products that were coherent and literate in the traditional sense (2015, p. 14). Results of the study further show that students with media studies backgrounds tend to be more comfortable in "digital spaces," more creative and literate, and more able to choose appropriate vocabulary to express themselves in media texts; however, they were not more successful than their peers lacking in a media studies

background when it came to engaging in civic activity (McDougall et al., 2015, p. 14). These results lead one to believe that the true success of media education lies in the implementation. When various media texts or forms of social media, those of which are known to be of interest to the students are included, a higher level of engagement and learning occurs. A strong curriculum addresses the interests of the students; thus, media literacy education should address these interest, also.

James Potter in his book, *Theory of Media Literacy: A Cognitive Approach,* notes that radio, television, and now computers have broken down previous barriers to education (2004, p. 4). Although his book is over a decade old, many of his statements hold true today. Potter (2004) notes that the issue has now switched from accessing information to keeping up with the information; "We have long since reached a saturation point; there is no hope of keeping up with information" (p. 5). Potter (2004) proposes a cognitive approach to a theory of media literacy that gives specific information concerning why being media literate is necessary. His belief is that the value of media literacy must be evident in order to encourage people to invest the time and effort into its development (p. 36). Media of various formats often presents to the audience information lacking in truth. However, unless we choose to inform ourselves and develop our own beliefs, we will fall prey to automatically believing the information to which we are exposed (Potter, 2004, p. 14).

If the world was inundated with information to evaluate and analyze in 2004, that problem has multiplied dramatically today. Potter (2004) gives the example of a media literacy search on Google resulting in 87,000 hits as a way to show the growing importance of media literacy in education (p. 23). That same search today returns over

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17 million hits in approximately half a second. Students as well as many adults will quickly accept one of the first few hits as the information they are looking for due to the fact that attempting to delve through 17 million hits is not only daunting but impossible. Media literacy education is the key to teaching students and adults how to filter this excess of information. Potter's theory calls for clear evidence for why media literacy is necessary; it is doubtful that just a decade after his proposal that many would even think to question the importance.

In her Plan of Action for Digital and Media Literacy, Renee Hobbs (2010) declares that all contemporary cultures have become both consumers and creators of media messages. She urges Americans to acknowledge the importance of digital citizenship through the acquisition of skills that will allow them to function as consumers and creators in multimedia environments (p. vii). Hobbs' (2010) definition of media literacy is a "constellation of life skills" that will enable the consumer to proceed with the ability to do the following:

- Make responsible choices and access information by locating and sharing materials and comprehending information and ideas

- Analyze messages in a variety of forms by identifying the author, purpose and point of view, and evaluating the quality and credibility of the content

- Create content in a variety of forms, making use of language, images, sound, and new digital tools and technologies

- Reflect on one's own conduct and communication behavior by applying social responsibility and ethical principles

- Take social action by working individually and collaboratively to share knowledge and solve problems in the family, workplace and community, and by participating as a member of a community (p. vii).

The first three bullet points have long been seen as a part of media literacy; however, as additional media formats have arrived, especially social media formats, media literacy evolved to include social responsibility and social action. With young people, social media brought about a dramatic increase in bullying which garnered the term cyberbullying. A strong media literacy curriculum addresses the issue of cyberbullying, and while erasing it completely is unrealistic, media literacy can create a more accepting environment (Hobbs, 2010, p. 15).

In *Another Kind of Public Education: Race, Schools, the Media, and Democratic Possibilities*, Patricia Collins recommends a focus on three key elements of the analyzation of media.

1. What one brings to the act of "reading" will shape how the media is read.

2. Oppressed groups can use the filter of their own experience to gain empowering knowledge.

3. New interpretations of media can be formed to challenge the current truth (2009, p. 121).

Collins (2009) goes on to state that developing media literacy skills means bringing one's own knowledge to the conscious act of seeing and listening to media (p. 124).

The Partnership for 21st Century Skills includes in its frameworks various forms of literacy including civic literacy, information literacy, and media literacy. The requirements for media literacy focus on analyzing media and creating media. However,

media literacy education when taught effectively will not only address these standards but also those of information and civic literacy while impacting traditional literacy skills.

Hobbs' (2010) Plan of Action calls for 10 key steps in order to bring about the inclusion of digital and media literacy into the mainstream curriculum. These steps range from research and assessment to community support, parent outreach, stakeholder engagement, and teacher education partnership (p. 16). Hobbs (2010) uses the term *new media literacies* to encompass information literacy, media literacy, heath media literacy, and digital literacy (p. 17). Until recently, these literacies could be addressed separately, with information literacy being a primary focus in school libraries as it deals with research skills; media literacy focused on the ability to decode mass media messages; digital literacy dealt with the technical side of literacy (Hobbs, 2010, p. 17). For the purpose of this study, media literacy encompassed all three of these literacies in the study of racial bias in the media, and while this study used a more inclusive definition of media literacy, the action plan developed by Renee Hobbs created a foundation on which to build a media literacy curriculum. The essential competencies of access, analyze and evaluate, create, reflect, and act are rooted in all areas of the media literacy curriculum employed in this study.

In her recommendations for teaching digital and media literacies, Hobbs reflects some of the same thinking as Redmond. Redmond promotes the use of current media trends in order to engage learners. Hobbs (2010) also recommends gaming activities that are of high interest to young people, but more importantly, these games foster creativity, and decision-making skills. Role playing games while encouraging children to use their imagination also cause them to carefully consider their choices as well as reflect upon

poor choices (p. 23). Media Literacy education has an almost unique ability not only to be at the forefront of technology and to be fun for the students, it also fosters critical thinking skills that are rarely engaged within classrooms.

Technology & Education: A Historical Snapshot. Historically, education has not taken the most educated approach in terms of new technology and the ways in which to handle it. As it becomes clear that technology is now and will continue to be a key component not only in one's personal life but his or her professional life as well, schools are rapidly attempting to jump on the band wagon by dumping large amounts of money into technology hardware. These schools are operating under the assumption that by purchasing computers for schools they are making contributions to media literacy (Hobbs, 2010, p. 26). The fault in this mentality is evident today as the vast majority of students have access to technology either at home or at school, yet they are no better skilled in media literacy than their peers of five to ten years ago. Simply providing access to young people does not in itself lead to digital or media literacy.

Middle and high school students are signing up for online classes at such a high rate, that the assumption is being made that these "digital natives" have the media literacy skills necessary to function in an online world filled with a wide range of multimedia (Hobbs, 2010, p. 26). An easy way to explain this to adults who attended school before the digital age is to refer to DBQs, or Document Based Questions. DBQs are still in use within Social Studies classes today. A DBQ provides a question to students that they are required to answer using their own knowledge combined with various documents provided them. These documents range from political cartoons to primary source copies of actual political documents. Students have to use critical thinking skills in their

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examination of these media messages in order to determine their importance to the task at hand. Likewise, when students experience the world today, they are constantly required to evaluate the importance of the print and multimedia messages that surround them. Without the ability to critically analyze these messages, we are left with options such as ignoring them or accepting the faulty information provided as truth. A quick visit to Facebook shows a number of internet scams that are believed and reposted by even the most educated people. Spratt and Agosto (2017) found that teens receive most of their news information from social media, noting that many people believe the first thing they see when looking for information if it appeals to the personal beliefs that they already have in place (p. 18). We have turned off our critical thinking filters; media literacy is the key to turning them back on.

As our own lack of filters is an obstacle, internet filtering systems put in place by the school districts are additional obstacles to media literacy. The goal of these filters is to protect students from inappropriate material, but with so much being blocked, including almost all social media, it is difficult to adequately instruct students on navigating these realms. Students learn the most when they are surrounded by adults who are modeling correct behavior; not only does this apply to basic manners such as holding door for other people, it applies to all learned skills, even those of media literacy. Parents who possess media literacy skills are more likely to raise children with these skills; however, many parents are aware of the fact that they are rapidly falling behind their children when it comes to knowledge of technology much less media literacy skills. Thus, we must turn to educators to meet this need.

"Educators must not just teach *with* digital technologies, tools or games. To develop digital and media literacy competencies it is necessary to teach *about* media and technology, making active use of the practices of dialogue and Socratic questioning to promote critical thinking about the choices people make when consuming, creating and sharing messages" (Hobbs, 2010, p. 27).

When children are young, we approach new skills like writing or riding a bike in this way, but with media literacy, adults often feel unprepared or lacking in the skills necessary for teaching these skills, so they attempt to avoid them, or they expect children to learn the skills on their own. Children will develop some of these skills, but they will be riddled with falsehoods, and, once the incorrect skills are learned, it becomes that much more difficult to reteach proper skills.

Hobbs, Cabral, Ebrahimi, Yoon, and Al-Humaidan (2011) conducted a field study in which pre-service teachers collaborated with seasoned classroom teachers in order to use media literacy to promote global acceptance and understanding (p. 144). Their work was conducted with elementary school teachers, and it was noted that the collaboration with pre-service teachers could assist current teachers with media literacy skills as many teachers are not "familiar with the potential of digital and media literacy education to support the development of children's critical thinking and communication skills" (Hobbs et al., 2011, p. 145). While their study is slightly different from this action research study, the situation is quite similar with the role of the pre-service teachers being played by the school media specialist. Throughout the course of the study with the pre-service teachers, it was noted that the active engagement of the students in multimedia modes of messages led the students to higher levels of understanding and a deeper knowledge of

misconceptions (Hobbs et al., 2011, p. 149). Hindrances or limitations to the study did not reside in the student participation but with the teacher engagement. Hobbs et al. (2011) found that some key issues were teachers' discomfort in discussing topics with which they were unfamiliar, the teachers' tendency to simply use technology for technology's sake, the teachers' concept of what the types of film and media their students would be able to understand, and the lack of realization that film and multimedia messages can be used to teach moral education (p. 154).

While it may be unrealistic to include items such as moral education, civic duty, and cultural acceptance as an objective of media literacy education, these items can certainly be seen as positive offshoots of a successful media literacy curriculum. Due to the lack of formal training in media literacy for new teachers, it is not odd that teachers, parents, and students might believe that these skills will be developed without direct instructions (Hobbs et al., 2011, p. 155). Successful studies in media literacy education will serve to discount this theory and demonstrate the importance of a media literacy education, one that is most effective when it is woven into the current curriculum.

What to Include in a Media Literacy Curriculum. With media literacy curriculum like so many other subject curricula, the question becomes what to include. Educators' original concern over new technology being used by students at very young ages led to the "knee-jerk" reaction to ban it as had been done with television, radio, and films in the past (De Abreu & Mihailidis, 2014, Introduction). However, as with previous bans, educators quickly realized positive aspects to including technology and multimedia formats within schools. Included in this rapid switching of gears was little to no training on what to do with the technology or how to effectively incorporate it into the

current curriculum. Many teachers were simply instructed to use it, although many did not know how to use it in a physical sense much less in the sense of integrating it smoothly into their lessons. In many areas, technology has turned into the Achilles heel of education; it is difficult to imagine surviving as an educator without it, but it is equally difficult for teachers to develop plans that use technology and the multimedia formats it offers effectively due to their lack of knowledge in the area of media literacy. Many teachers simply choose to use technology and online resources for review games after having taught lessons rather than making these new and interesting resources an integral part of their lesson.

For example, social media creates a platform for young people to become engaged in world issues, and to become involved with civic issues, if they chose to do so (De Abreu & Mihailidis, 2014, Intro). However, it also gives young people an endlessly open forum for bullying and participating in cruel activity. The ease, sense of separation, and lack of reality that young people potentially feel in an online environment makes them quick to express themselves in ways they may not in person. Positive and negative outcomes can be gained by this; the shy student is able to express his thoughts, but the bully is able to express negative messages in far-reaching ways, also. In order to be effective, media literacy education "holds the immense responsibility of preparing future citizens, parents, politicians, teachers, community leaders – society in general – to facilitate their daily lives in a digital culture" (De Abreu & Mihailidis, 2014, Intro).

Gayle Bogel (2014) recommends school libraries as an environment that supports the development of media literacy skills due to the fact that the media specialist can integrate the development of these skills into lessons as a co-teacher (p. 110). School

libraries are already equipped with various sources of media and digital technology in a way that they mirror spaces outside of the school building, and appropriate media literacy skills are already modeled and encouraged by the media specialist (Bogle, 2014, p. 110). Looking back through history at community schools of 100 years ago, these spaces were used for the dissemination of information to the public (Bogel, 2014, 111). As school libraries are at the heart of the school, it remains logical to use the library to disseminate these new media literacy skills to the students and beyond. One of the goals of school libraries is to provide "community empowerment through information delivery" (Bogel, 2014, p. 112). This information at one time was only available in print form, but as the formats of information have evolved, so have school libraries. In order to meet the needs of today's learners, the newly coined "media centers" must provide instruction in media literacy skills.

Mihailidis (2014), a respected researcher in the field of media literacy, has identified three competencies to be addressed by media literacy education. They are individual, focusing on the foundations of finding and evaluating media, participation, focusing on identifying what is appropriate in order to participate effectively in the sharing of information, and collaboration, focusing on using media technology to go beyond personal interest and extend to civic involvement (p. 31). Research conducted by Mihailidis (2014) shows that young people are not simply using media technologies for the consumption of information, but for sharing and production as well (p. 33). "Recent investigations into youth and literacies in education have found that proper pedagogical methods that approach critical inquiry online, knowledge construction, reliability, and savvy web navigation can increase digital and media literacy" (Mihailidis, 2014, p. 33).

This describes the purpose of and the premise behind the media literacy curriculum implemented within this action research study. Media literacy education was incorporated into existing subject area curriculum in order to enhance the curriculum while teaching students how to navigate media effectively, identifying racial stereotypes that are found throughout all forms of media. Media specialists with a degree in Library and Information Science are uniquely equipped with the appropriate pedagogical skills to teach media literacy as these skills are of primary focus in the degree program. Until other pre-service teacher programs find ways to incorporate media literacy into teacher training, the responsibility to teach these skills falls on the media specialists.

Within many schools, classroom teachers are being pressured to incorporate technology within their lessons, but they are unaware of how to do this effectively, thus, they turn to technological devices simply to play games or take tests or use an online dictionary. In the minds of many teachers, this type of use is viewed as effective inclusion of media technology. This type of use is not employing the critical thinking skills of students; it is not broadening their existing knowledge of multimedia messages; the devices are simply being used as a tool, easily replaced by more traditional print resources. Using technology in this way is not in itself bad, but only choosing to use this method of employing technology is a disservice to students. The collaborative element of education that can be easily introduced using technology opens the door to critical thinking, reflection on and consideration of one's own contribution to the media world, and evaluation of one's civic responsibilities; it goes beyond review games and vocabulary.

A teacher with a pedagogical focus on media literacy may consider the use of technology for games, but this teacher will take it beyond review games to the possibility of collaborating with another teacher or the media specialist in order to have the students design their own games and, depending on their age and experience level, possibly learning some elements of computer coding along the way. This inclusion incorporates media literacy skills while giving them an introduction to marketable career skills. Globaloria is an example of a "network for designing and programming web-games that uses social media technology and computational skills for project-based learning…Participants create educational games for their own personal and professional development, and for the social and economic benefits of their community" (Hobbs, 2010, p. 28). Involvement in a program such as this one has the potential to teach media literacy skills while offering students the ability to be involved in performing civic duties in order to help their community.

Often missing from the media literacy education conversation is the assessment tools to be used to determine mastery. As media literacy is a constantly evolving skill, it seems impractical to believe that mastery can truly be determined by nothing more than a pencil and paper test. "It is impossible to fully judge how well someone can produce a video or host radio show through a multiple-choice examination. Instead, evaluations must become more performance-based, offering opportunities for students to fully demonstrate their varied literate skills" (Young, 2012, p. 78). This information about assessment influenced this research study, leading the researcher to include both qualitative and quantitative data collection methods.

Conclusion

Media literacy is the field that will help us learn how to be critical, savvy, expressive, participatory, and engaged with media to help build a more vibrant, inclusive, and tolerant digital media culture" (DeAbreu & Mihailidis, 2014, Intro). Young people are now spending upwards of 8 hours per day engaged with media; many of those hours are spent "media multitasking" enabling them to access nearly 11 hour's worth of media within the 8-hour time period (Kaiser, 2010). Increased consumption of media by the youth of this country as well as others places more of an emphasis on the need for young people to develop the skills necessary to be competent socially and civically when creating content for social spaces (Mihailidis, 2014, p. 30). The level of collaboration available to teachers and students today can lead to the creation of a global learning environment within the walls of a classroom, yet key problems still exist with students' lack of respect for others, and their inability to consider if their contribution has positive value; media literacy serves to teach "about the potential for empowered voices in social and digital platforms" (Mihailidis, 2014, p. 31).

Glossary of Key Terms

Bias is a prejudice against one thing, person, or group compared with another usually in a way considered to be unfair (Oxford Dictionaries, 2016).

Critical literacy is the ability to read texts in an active, reflective manner in order to better understand power, inequality, and injustice in human relationships (Coffey, 2015).

Digital Literacy is the ability to use information and communication technologies to find, evaluate, create, and communicate information, requiring both cognitive and technical skills (Visser, 2012).

Information is facts obtained about someone or something.

Literacy is the ability to read and write. Literacy is beginning to be understood as the ability to share meaning through symbol systems in order to fully participate in society (Hobbs, 2010, p. 30-31).

Media is all forms of communication including but not limited to print communication such as magazines, books, and newspapers as well as digital communication provided through television, movies, and the Internet.

Media Literacy is a twenty-first-century approach to education. It provides a framework to access, analyze, evaluate, create, and participate with messages in a variety of forms – from print to video to the Internet. Media literacy builds an understanding of the role of media in society as well as essential skills of inquiry and self-expression necessary for citizens of democracy (Center for Media Literacy, 2015).

Multimedia is a way of expressing information or ideas while employing more than one form of media.

Racism is defined by the Oxford Dictionary as prejudice, discrimination, or antagonism

directed against someone of a different race based on the belief that one's own race is

superior (Oxford Dictionaries, 2016).

Social Media is the collective of online communications channels dedicated to

community-based input, interaction, content-sharing and collaboration. Websites and

applications dedicated to forums, microblogging, social networking, social bookmarking,

social curation, and wikis are among the different types of social media (Whatis.com,

2015).

Stereotype is to believe unfairly that all people or things with a particular characteristic

are the same (Merriam-Webster, 2016).

Text is defined as the original words of a piece of writing or a speech; the words that

make up the main part of a book, magazine, newspaper, Web site, etc. (Merriam-

Webster, 2015).

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

Theresa Redmond (2015) describes media literacy as "a set of augmented literacy skills that respond to the culture of multimodal information, ideas, and communication media that young adolescents experience" (p. 10). Thus, media literacy is an ever-adapting skill that must adjust to meet the needs of the time period. Fernando Naiditch (2013) notes the importance of media literacy education with the current generation of youth who are surrounded by huge amounts of new and conflicting information and messages (p. 339). Additionally, he mentions the critical need to "discern between messages, read between the lines, and understand cause and consequence" (Naiditch, 2013, p. 340).

Mihailidis and Diggs (2010) describe an effective member of society in the 21st century as someone who can employ the critical thinking skills necessary to navigate and function easily when using various types of information, media, and technology (p. 281). In their study, Mihailidis and Diggs (2010) found that young people are spending close to eight hours daily focusing on media and screens, with the majority of time being spent on social media (p. 284). Various social media outlets have made the world a smaller place, and they have allowed for increased levels of diversity. Positive results of this include the fact that questions can be answered and problems can be solved in a split second thanks to responses and posts. On the negative side, students are oblivious to the dangers that exist in the world of social media; they hear the warnings, but they do not heed them. As a media specialist, one of the standards centers around the need to include

by representing "various points of view on current and historical issues" and providing resources that are "diverse and inclusive" (AASL, 2018, p. 54). Having the ability to analyze critically and evaluate the information they come into contact with as well as the information they create is an invaluable tool. Collins (2009) notes that "whites may less frequently find themselves in all-white spaces these days, but the existence of seemingly racially integrated settings (especially in the media) does not mean that white privilege has been dismantled" (p. 47). Mastro (2015) notes that "there is great isolation with our own racial/ethnic groups in U.S. society" (p. 3). Mastro (2015) also elaborates on the fact that although the majority of births in the United States are non-White, that interaction with races or ethnicities other than the one with which they consider themselves is rare (Mastro, 2015, p. 2). This study takes a closer look at students' ability to recognize bias and stereotyping in the media.

For this action research study, a mixed methods approach was used. The questions that guided the development of the research plan could not fully be answered by quantitative or qualitative research alone. The quantitative aspect of the study focused on students acquiring the technical skills necessary to evaluate the racial bias within media as well as the ability to produce quality forms of media free of negative stereotypes. The qualitative portion of the study focused on noting any observable changes in student behavior when interacting with mass media. Ivankova (2015) claims that both quantitative and qualitative types of data are necessary in order to address the verification of knowledge and the generation of knowledge (p. 56). This study addressed both of these.

Purpose Statement

Increased time spent using technology to access and share information has both positive and negative impacts. Young people are able to learn how to analyze and create content, but this same use can lead to negative repercussions on the development and behavior of our youth (Redmond, 2015, p. 11).

Media literacy education offers the opportunity for educational practitioners to respond to the increased amount of time adolescent students spend with media, and to foster the kinds of critical and creative skills that are vital for success in life and work in the 21st century (Redmond, 2015, p. 11)

This study had multiple purposes. Within my school, certain aspects of media literacy are touched on in library lessons and classroom lessons, but no structured media literacy curriculum had ever been implemented. One component of this study was the creation of a media literacy curriculum that could effectively be incorporated into the lessons and curriculum of other courses.

A second aspect of this study focused on the impact of media literacy learning on student critical thinking skills. Quantitatively, the purpose of this study was to examine the effect of a media literacy curriculum on middle school students' sensitivity to racial bias and stereotyping in all forms of media. Qualitatively, the purpose was to explore any changes in students' personal behavior while they were being introduced to a media literacy curriculum.

Problem Statement

This mixed method research study hoped to elucidate the issues associated with the current generation's exposure to massive amounts of media in all formats. Currently,

students lack the skills necessary to effectively evaluate information and identify various forms of bias that are offensive to so many in our diverse country. The first question addressed was as follows: How can a media literacy curriculum sensitize middle school students to the racial bias and stereotypes within mass media? Both quantitative and qualitative methods were employed to gather data and draw conclusions. As the researcher was interested in any difference in data collected when considering gender and race, a second question addressed was: How do gender and race affect student sensitivity to the racial bias and stereotypes present in mass media?

Research Design

This action research study followed a mixed methods design in order to address the confirmatory and exploratory qualities of the question. This was a quasi-experimental design as the sample was not chosen randomly. The quantitative portion of the study reflected the content learned and the critical thinking skills gained through the media literacy lessons that were administered throughout a semester. Data were collected through a pretest administered prior to the implementation of the media literacy curriculum. The test focused on students' critical thinking skills, and how those students applied those skills to evaluate and analyze media and texts in all formats. In addition, the test also examined the student's capability of creating media in various formats. The test, created by the media specialist, consisted of ten Likert scale questions. The same test was given a second time at the conclusion of the media literacy lessons, and the data sets were compared in order to determine the effectiveness of the action plan. The data were stored in an excel spreadsheet for comparison between pretest and posttest results. Positive or negative gains were used to determine if the media literacy curriculum

influenced the students' critical thinking and sensitivity to mass media messages. The sample used consisted of one class of students from seventh grade and was a convenience sample. A creative writing class consisting of students of varying ability levels was used to eliminate student skill level as a potential variable.

The qualitative portion of the study focused on observable changes in the critical thinking skills of the students. A group discussion occurred prior to the administration of the media literacy curriculum to gauge the students' understanding of mass media, media opinions, and bias. Researcher notes were taken during this discussion, throughout the implementation of the media literacy curriculum, during informal student interviews, and during a final group discussion at the conclusion of the study. These notes, observations, and reflections were kept in a journal and used to document observed student behaviors and actions. In addition, students were able to keep a journal throughout the study in order to document and reflect on what they learned. While many students are capable of employing critical thinking skills to answer test questions and create media, many of their actual behaviors may or may not be affected by the media literacy lessons. Through unobtrusive observation of student behavior, changes in behavior were noted and documented. This documentation was analyzed to determine if any themes or patterns were present within the data.

All evaluation tools within this study, including the pretest/posttest as well as the semi-structured interview questions, were evaluated by three professional educators in an effort to eliminate bias. Any questions of concern were removed or rewritten until all professionals agreed that no noticeable bias was present. Throughout the study, the

researcher noted any occurrences of personal bias in order to address it and eliminate any possible influence on the data collected.

Prior to the implementation of the media literacy curriculum, information for the students involved was coded to protect their privacy. Using student identification numbers, only basic information including grade level, gender, and race were collected. The student number was then removed and replaced with random numbers for each student. As the sample group was a convenience group and not a random sampling, the design was quasi-experimental. The pretest/posttest was administered to the same group of students, helping to rule out unwanted variables in the study. In order to analyze the quantitative data collected in the study, a paired *t*-Test analysis was used to infer any relationship between the media literacy curriculum implementation and any gain scores. In this research study, the paired *t*-Test was the best option for analyzing the data as the pretest/posttest was a repeated measure administered to the same group of students. The null hypothesis used for the *t*-Test was that there was no relation between the media literacy curriculum and the scores on the test with the alternate hypothesis finding that a relationship existed.

The qualitative data that were gathered throughout the research were coded first based on a short set of preset codes that focused on the curriculum being implemented. As the data were analyzed, additional emergent codes were added. This unstructured coded text gathered through observations, interviews, and group discussions was analyzed using a deductive approach to determine if reoccurring themes were present. These data were analyzed to determine if there was any relationship between the

implementation of a media literacy curriculum and the increase in student critically thinking ability as it applied to recognizing racial bias in mass media.

To protect the anonymity of the student participants, no student names ever appeared within the researcher's notes. Randomly assigned student numbers were used for all data collection.

Analysis of both the quantitative and qualitative data collected from the study were used to determine the effectiveness of the implemented curriculum, and it could serve as a guide for future action research studies.

Participants

Participants selected for the study were a convenience sample consisting of seventh grade students. The students were chosen as an intact creative writing class. This class was selected based on the inclusion of all levels of students. Core subject areas such as English, math, science, and social studies classes are grouped based on ability levels, and this grouping could produce skewed data. The class chosen was based on teacher availability, desire, and ability to participate in the study.

Consent for the study was provided by the school. In addition, a parent consent form was sent home with students advising parents of the purpose of the study and giving them the opportunity to withdraw their child from the study. Students were also given a student assent form notifying them that their participation within the study was voluntary, that they could withdraw at any time, and that the study would in no way impact their performance in the course. The teacher involving her classes in the study also did so in a completely voluntary manner. No teacher was required to have his or her class participate.

Setting

The setting for this study was the Media Center and classrooms within a large middle school serving 1200 students in a newly emerging suburban area in South Carolina. The Media Center is large and recently renovated. It offers student access to a wide variety of technology, including a smart board, desktop computers, laptop computers, Chromebooks, and iPads. The Media Center contains a stationary lab as well as a mobile lab to be used for direct instructions. In addition, the Media Center offers smaller, more comfortable areas in which students were able to employ the knowledge learned through the media literacy curriculum.

Positionality

I grew up in Summerville, South Carolina, very close to the school in which this action research study was conducted. While only 15-20 miles apart, my childhood was dramatically different from those of many of the students within the study. Technology did not become an integral part of my life until I began working within the public-school system 20 years ago. As a media specialist for the last 8 years, I have witnessed the impact of a media and technology explosion on this generation's youth. Young people struggle with all types of media literacy skills but their tendency to believe everything they read online combined with their lack of awareness of the impact of what they post on social media have caused me to become cognizant of the lack of awareness and acceptance of diversity within my school.

It is this diversity and lack of acceptance combined with the globalization of education that led me to the topic of media literacy. A quick look at the activities of the students within my school immediately revealed a need for a media literacy curriculum.

The student population is becoming more diverse, and students are interacting with media in new ways every day. A diverse population of students can make a student body stronger as long as they are sensitive to the difference of their fellow students. These diverse students can be better prepared for society through exposure to a variety of cultures and viewpoints (Shapira & Stefkovich, 2016, p. 103). However, to appreciate this diversity and navigate the various forms of media that exists, students need a foundation in media literacy. "Promoting media literacy is key to teaching teens how to differentiate between fake news and legitimate news" (Spratt and Agosto, 2017, p. 17). I aim to form this foundation through the implementation of a media literacy curriculum. I created this media literacy curriculum based on my experience as a media specialist as well as the needs of the students within my school. However, the skills introduced within the media literacy curriculum could potentially be of value to all students.

When considering research on a sensitive issue such as racial bias and stereotyping, I had to take an extended look at myself and my own practices throughout my years as an educator. I am a White female, and as my membership to the female group may have caused me to face some discrimination over the years, my Whiteness has created a path for me in life that had few obstacles. In my early years as a classroom teacher, I generally felt that all my students had equal access to all the educational system had to offer, making me feel that things were balanced and fair. I honestly kept this mentality until I began working on my Master's Degree in 2007. It was at this point that I really began to appreciate the diversity present within my school, and to realize that there is a dramatic difference between equal and equitable. My eyes were truly opened to the disparity in the education system during my time working on my doctoral degree. It

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was during this time that I began to fully understand the concept of White privilege. In addition, as a classroom teacher I had worked in a fairly affluent area and a predominately White school. As a media specialist, I accepted a position in a lower income area in which it was greatly apparent how much an effect privilege had on students' ability to advance. Some students were stuck in a cycle in which parents, grandparents, and even great grandparents had not graduated from high school, and they felt that they would not graduate either. These students did not have as many opportunities to learn at home when they were young or after they started school. In addition, many students had lived in this small town their whole life and never even visited the historic city just 20 miles away. Class placement of students of lower income families was generally relegated to the lower level classes as the students were in effect penalized for the lack of learning opportunities at home. When looking at the gifted and talented classes in the school, the classes consisted primarily White students from the middle-class income bracket. White privilege promoted certain students while holding others back.

In my school, where friendships did cross racial/ethnic boundaries, it was not uncommon to find students grouped by race on the recess field, in the cafeteria, in the library, and even within the classroom. While overt racism was rarely apparent, as I teacher I was curious about this clear separation. I questioned whether it was a conscious or unconscious decision on the part of the students. As I pondered this situation, I began to pay more attention to actions of the adults on campus. At meeting, luncheons, and other group gatherings, I found that the adults often separated into groups based on race or ethnicity. I began to wonder how I, as a media specialist, could encourage students to

be more inclusive of the diversity within their school while promoting the standards of a media specialist. The combination of student activity on social media combined with my desire to help students bridge what seemed to be a racial divide within my school led me to focus on a media literacy curriculum that could help uncover the racial bias and stereotyping in mass media.

As a teacher, one of my main goals is always to make my students feel comfortable and safe in my classroom, whether that is the media center, a computer lab, or the classroom of another teacher. Hardiman, Jackson, and Griffin (2013) state that "privilege tends to open doors of opportunity, oppression tends to slam them shut" (p. 20). For many years as an educator, I recognized the fact that oppression was a limiting factor for many students, but I did not recognize the extent to which privilege perpetuates the system of oppression that is present everywhere, even the school system. Harro (2013) noted that "If we are members of the groups that benefit from the rules, we may not notice that they aren't fair" (p. 48). While I strive to be conscious of these hidden benefits, I know there have been numerous times early in my teaching career and even occasions more recently in which I did not keep this concept of hidden racism at the forefront of my mind. Thus, I am sure there were times when I unknowingly propelled a hidden White privilege agenda.

Years ago, I watched a YouTube video on Peggy McIntosh entitled "Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack." In the video, McIntosh describes how she realized the ways in which she benefitted from White privilege (Spectrumlens, 2008). This video struck a chord with me, and it changed me as an educator and as a mother. As an educator, I began to recognize certain behaviors in relation to privilege or the lack thereof. In

addition, as a mother, I began to teach my boys that they should recognize the fact that they automatically benefit from being White and male. I grew up with parents who felt that the system gave everyone an equal chance to succeed, but they did not consider what occurred in peoples' lives before all of these "chances" were given. While I have struggled against this fault within myself, I strive in my personal and professional life to make things equitable and not just equal.

As a media specialist, my role is still that of a teacher, but my schedule is flexible, and I do not see the same students each day, making it impossible for me to have as strong of a bond with students as that of a classroom teacher. So, I have to consider the fact that students may not have felt comfortable enough with me to share their true thoughts and opinions. As a White educator, this is something to consider at all times, especially when the lessons focus on sensitive issues such as race.

Data Collection Strategies

Data for this study were both quantitative and qualitative in format. Quantitative data were obtained through a pretest and posttest administered at the beginning and the end of a school semester. A pretest designed by the researcher focusing on media literacy skills was administered at the beginning of the semester. After the completion of the media literacy lessons, the posttest was administered at the end of the semester.

The qualitative data that were collected in this study consisted of documented observations and reflections of the researcher in a research journal as well as notes from informal interviews, discussions with the students, and reflections in student journals.

Data Analysis Strategies

The data obtained from the pretest at the beginning of the study were compared with the data from the posttest at the end of the study. The comparison of scores offered specific quantitative data that spoke to the effectiveness of the action research study. The results could allow for the suggestion of a more school-wide media literacy program. The independent variable within the study was the media literacy curriculum that was implemented. The dependent variable was the scores on the pretest/posttest. A second research question focused on gender and race as variables within the study, looking for the difference, if any, in the data analysis of the student responses. The data collected were analyzed using a *t*-Test to infer the relationship between the implementation of the curriculum and any gain scores. The pretest/posttest was a repeated measure making the paired *t*-Test analysis beneficial. The null hypothesis being tested was that no correlation existed between the curriculum and the test scores while the alternate hypothesis inferred a significant correlation.

The qualitative data collected were compiled and analyzed better to inform and refine future research studies concerning media literacy education. A deductive approach was employed. All researcher notes taken through observation, class discussion, and informal interviews were coded using a set of preset codes. Emergent codes were also noted throughout the research process, and themes were noted as they arose. Preset and emergent code repetition and patterns were used to determine themes that could be deduced from the research.

In an effort to control bias within the study, the pretest/posttest was evaluated by three professionals in order to remove bias. In addition, within the interviews, the same

semi-structured questions were used for all participants. These questions were also

evaluated to remove any potential bias. Throughout the research study, the researcher

noted any occurrences of researcher bias in an effort to eliminate bias and later reflect on

possible implications of bias.

CHAPTER 4: RESEARCH FINDINGS

Introduction

Media Literacy is loosely defined as the set of skills needed to knowledgeably navigate the vast inundation of mass media in today's world. Literacy has always been a driving force in education, yet in many ways this traditional sense of literacy has not been formally updated to address the vast amounts of media messages that exist today. Young students are being educated by many forms of media before they ever enter the formal educational setting. As they grow up, these students are not equipped to evaluate and analyze the mass media messages confronting them daily. Spratt and Agosto (2017) found that not only teens but also adults confront fake news and inaccurate information on a daily basis thanks to the Internet and social media. The concerning fact is that most are unaware that the information presented is inaccurate or misleading (p. 18). One area in which many students are particularly lacking is in their ability to identify racial bias and stereotyping within mass media. Many forms of racial stereotyping and bias are so ingrained into students that students of all races and genders fail to identify them.

Media literacy education has become an added duty of media specialists and librarians; although, no time has been designated for these skills to be taught. The newly released *National School Library Standards* use the word "Include" as a standard for media specialist because "Librarians celebration of the diversity and commonality of humankind helps learners contextualize the idea of inclusion" (p. 148). The researcher has noticed increased inappropriate use of social media by students within her own

school as well as a general inability to differentiate between reputable media and biased media. Through the implementation of a media literacy curriculum focusing on various types of mass media, the researcher hopes to provide students the skills that will sensitize them to the racial bias present in mass media while providing them the tools to become valuable contributors to the societal knowledge base.

Scharrer and Ramasubramanian (2015) have conducted past studies in which they found a positive correlation between the inclusion of a media literacy curriculum and the elimination of negative stereotypes of certain groups propagated by mass media. The purpose of this mixed-media study was to determine if a there was significant change in student responses and behavior after the implementation of a media literacy curriculum within the researcher's school. The research study addressed the following questions: How can a media literacy curriculum sensitize middle school students to the racial bias and stereotypes present in mass media? and How do gender and race affect student sensitivity to the racial bias and stereotypes present in mass media?

The curriculum implemented in this action research study heavily relied on previous studies by Theresa Redmond and Renee Hobbs. In addition, attention was focused on the essential media skills required for the 21st century learner. The National Association for Media Literacy Education's 6 core principles of media literacy were used in the curriculum to instruct students about media messages. Those principles are as follows:

1. All media messages are constructed.

2. Media Messages are constructed using a creative language with its own rules.

3. Different people experience the same media messages differently.

4. Media have embedded values and points of view.

5. Most media messages are organized to gain profit and/or power (Center for Media Literacy, 2016).

Action research within the educational setting allows educators to approach the implementation of new curricula in more scientific ways. Within schools, new methods of teaching are tested on a regular basis, but these methods are not grounded in theory or actual research. Action research must be grounded in theory as well as the results of previous studies concerning the same or similar subject. To conduct action research, educators must be willing to critically analyze their own practices and reflect on the results produced by this analysis (Mertler, 2014, p. 12). The documentation of this reflection will be used to drive the future endeavors of the educator.

This action research study takes place in a large middle school in the southeast United States. The school serves over 1200 students in sixth, seventh, and eighth grades. A convenience sample of an intact seventh-grade creative writing class was used in this study instead of a random sampling of students, making this study quasi-experimental. The class was chosen based on the inclusion of a variety of academic levels present within the class combined with a diverse grouping of both gender and race. Within this study, both race and gender were considered categories rather than variables.

Both quantitative and qualitative data were collected in the research study. Quantitative data were collected using a pretest and a posttest, administered before and after the implementation of the media literacy curriculum. The test consisted of 10 Likert scale questions with 5 levels of agreement. In order to collect the necessary quantitative data, the Likert responses were assigned values ranging from 1-5 with 5 be the highest

level of agreement and 1 being the lowest level of agreement. These number scores then

allowed the comparison of pretest and posttest scores using a paired two-sample t-test.

The data collected were used to determine if there was statistical significance present

concerning the research question after the implementation of the media literacy

curriculum.

Qualitative data were collected in a variety of formats. Careful notes were taken

by the researcher throughout the process with reflective notes added after each lesson.

Students participated in semi-structured interviews within the last days of the study in

order to gather additional data. Students were given and encouraged to use research

journals in which they were able to write more personal thoughts about the lessons.

Audio recordings of the lessons were made in order to allow the researcher to take the

time to analyze the information, looking for themes and patterns to emerge. A list of

preset codes was created, but the data allowed for new terms to emerge and for patterns

and themes to be discernable within the data.

Both the results of the quantitative and the qualitative data were taken into

account when determining the implications of this action research study on future studies.

Quantitative data were analyzed to discover the statistical significance, if any, of the

implementation of the media literacy curriculum as it relates to the research questions.

The qualitative data were also analyzed to determine emergent themes or patterns as they

related to the research questions and the implementation of the new curriculum.

Quantitative Data

Originally, there were 23 participants within the study; however, one student was

not present for the pretest, thus that participant's posttest scores were not analyzed as

there was no comparison to be made. The final sample total for quantitative data was 22 students. Gender and race were both considered categories within the study, so it was necessary to include a breakdown of this information. The convenience sample consisted of 17 male students and 5 female students. For this study, gender as it appears within the students' school records was used. In addition, information concerning the race/ethnicity of the student participants was gathered from school records, and students were not directly asked to identify their race or ethnicity. The information gathered was based on paperwork completed by the students' parents or guardians upon enrollment. In analyzing the data, comparisons were made between the male and female responses in order to gather the information needed to answer the second research question. A second variable recognized by this research study in order to address research question 2 was race. The races represented were identified based on the information contained within the demographic information contained in the student records.   Three races were identified in the study: White, African American, and mixed race. The term "White" is representative of all caucasian students. African American refers to all students who identified as African American on their enrollment documents. "Mixed race" describes students whose parents identified more than one race for their child when they were enrolled. Fifty percent, or 11 participants of the study were White; 41percent or 9 participants were African American; 9 percent or 2 participants in the study were listed as mixed race.

The qualitative data were analyzed reflecting on gender and race separately as well as combined. As the purpose of the study was to determine the effectiveness of a media literacy curriculum on sensitizing middle school students to the racial bias and

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stereotyping present in mass media, it was interesting to see if the data varied based on these two categories. In addition, when considering social identity theory, there was a question if membership to a certain social group would impact some participants more than others. A second research question was developed to address a student's race or gender might affect their sensitivity to racial bias and stereotyping in the mass media. A major component of the research study was based on race, and one of the areas of focus within the curriculum was the fact that different people will interpret media messages in different ways. By looking at gender and race, the data showed if there were differences in the resulting data based on these two categories, thus allowing the data to be analyzed to determine if there was statistical significance indicating positive gains when considering gender and race as variables.
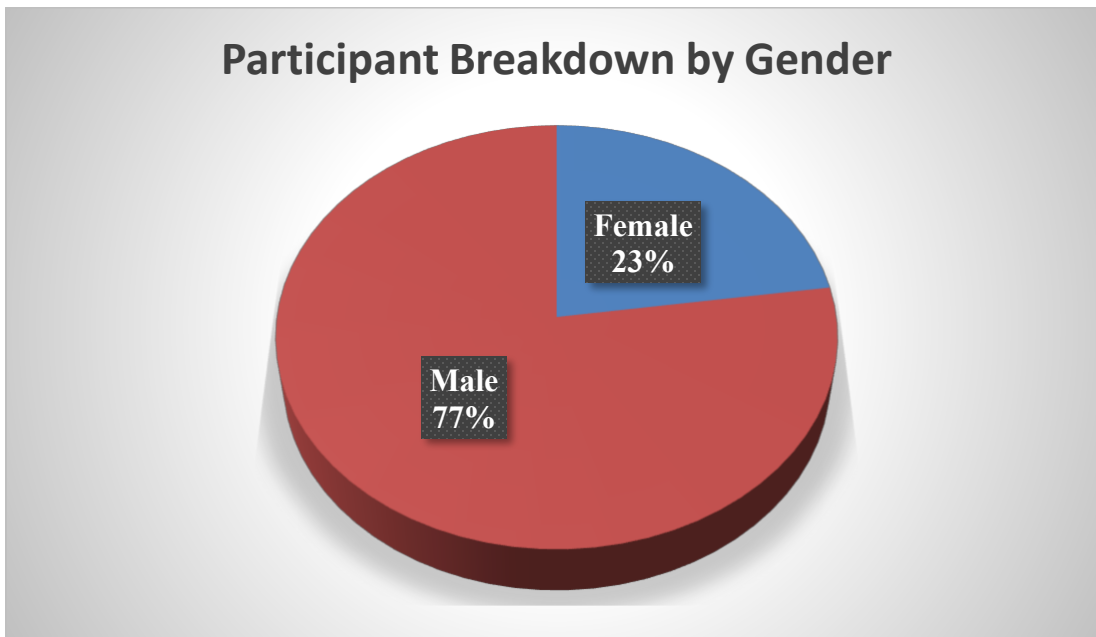
Figure 4.1 Breakdown of Research Participants by Gender

When combining the gender and the race of the participants, there was a greater breakdown with equal numbers of African American males and White males at 36

percent each. The remaining categories were much smaller with White females at 14 percent, mixed race males at 5 percent, mixed race females at 5 percent, and African American females at 4 percent. Due to limited number of participants in most of the categories, comparisons were mainly drawn between the African American males and White males when looking at combined gender and race.

Participant Breakdown by Race

Mixed 9%

African American 41%

White 50%
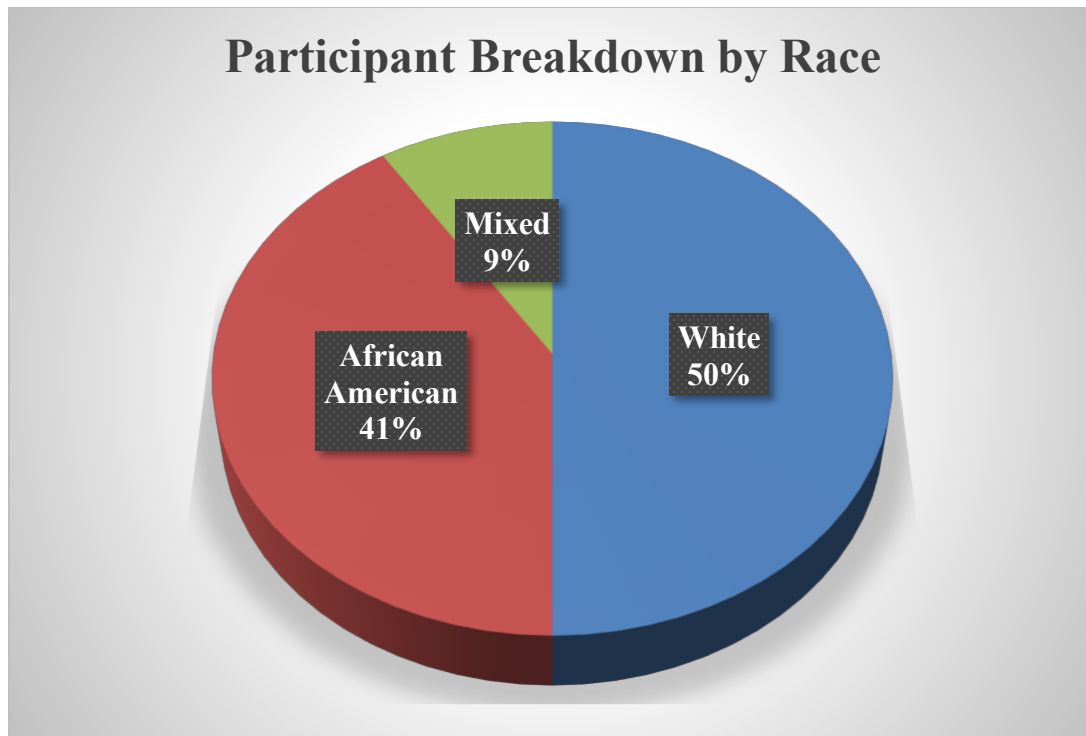
Figure 4.2 Breakdown of Research Participants by Race

As all of the students were seventh grade, age and grade level were not categories addressed within the research study. The study addressed one grade level in an effort to limit any other factors that might affect the data collected. The pretest/posttest measuring the participants' ability to recognize racial bias and stereotyping in mass media consisted of 10 Likert scale questions with one question containing 6 parts.

The responses given were in five possible ranges of the Likert scale of agreement. The scale was converted to numeric values in order to use the test scores to determine any

statistical significance. The highest level of agreement was given a five with the lowest

level of agreement being given a one. The total number of possible points on both the

pretest and the posttest was 75.
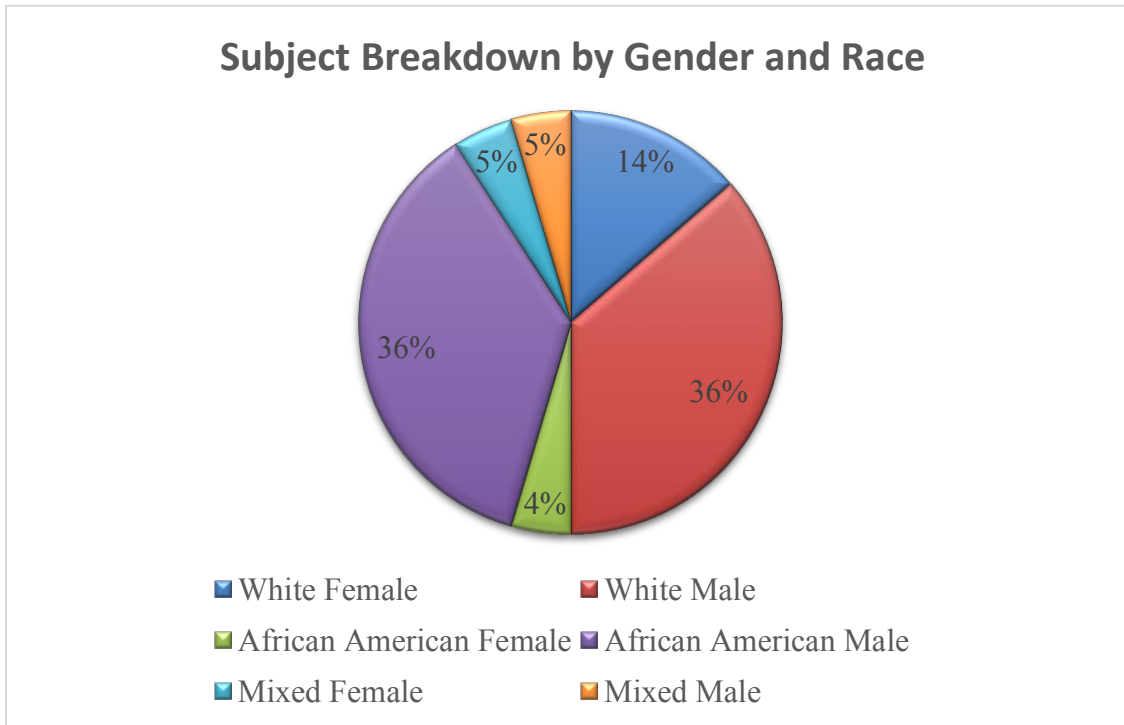
Figure 4.3 Participant Breakdown by Gender and Race

   Scatterplots were created for both pretest and posttest to look for possible outlying

scores in order to determine if any scores should not be included. The total number of

points possible on the pretest was 75 points. The median score on the pretest was 45.4

with a minimum score of 30, a maximum score of 55, and a standard deviation of 5.3.

While the minimum score of 30 was 2.9 standard deviations from the mean, it was not so

extreme to warrant its elimination in the reporting of the data. The high score of 55 fell

well within two standard deviations of the mean confirming that it was not an outlying

score.

The standard deviation of the posttest was 6.11, and all posttest scores fell within 2 standard deviations from the mean. All 22 scores on both the pretest and the posttest were included in the data analysis. The posttest scores showed no extreme outliers, and the scatterplot gave no indication of scores that should be eliminated from data analysis. The mean of the posttest was 47.6 with a median score of 48, a minimum score of 36, and a maximum score of 58.
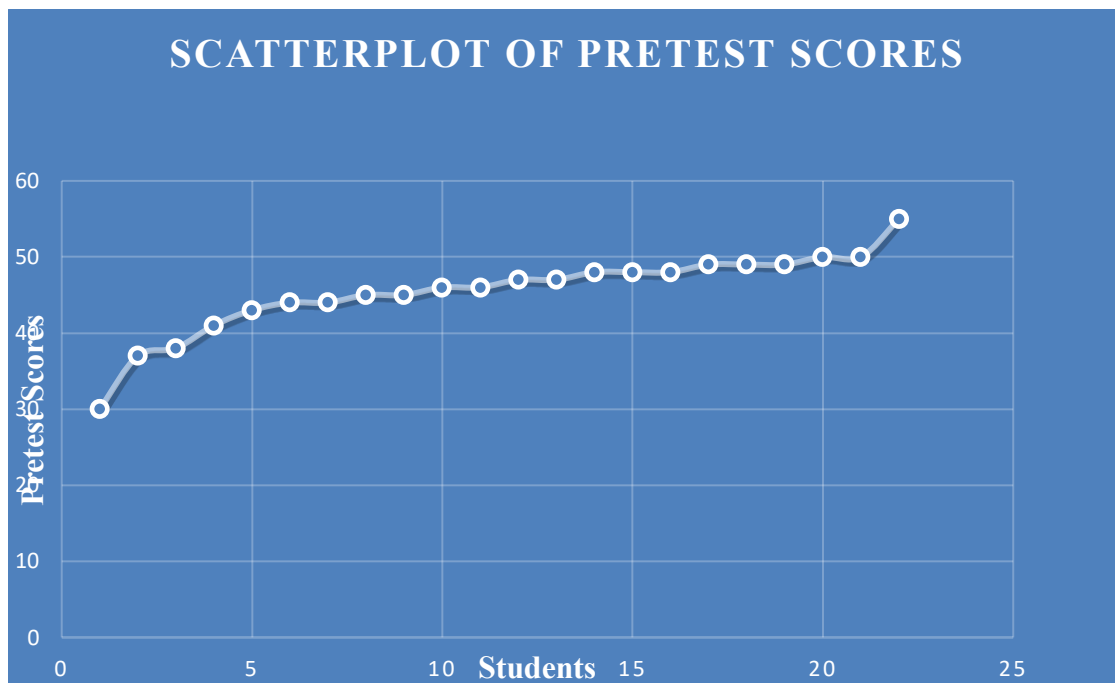
Figure 4.4 Scatterplot of Pretest Scores and Possible Outliers

After verifying that no extreme outlying scores existed, a paired, two-sample t-Test was conducted to determine if any statistical significance existed in the gain scores. Separate t-Tests were run for the whole group, as well as for males, females, African American males, White males, African American students, and White students.

These separate tests were run to determine if any statistical differences could be found within the different categories of student participants. The results of the t-Test

were used to determine if the gain scores were significant enough to reject the null

hypothesis.

SCATTERPLOT OF POSTTEST SCORES
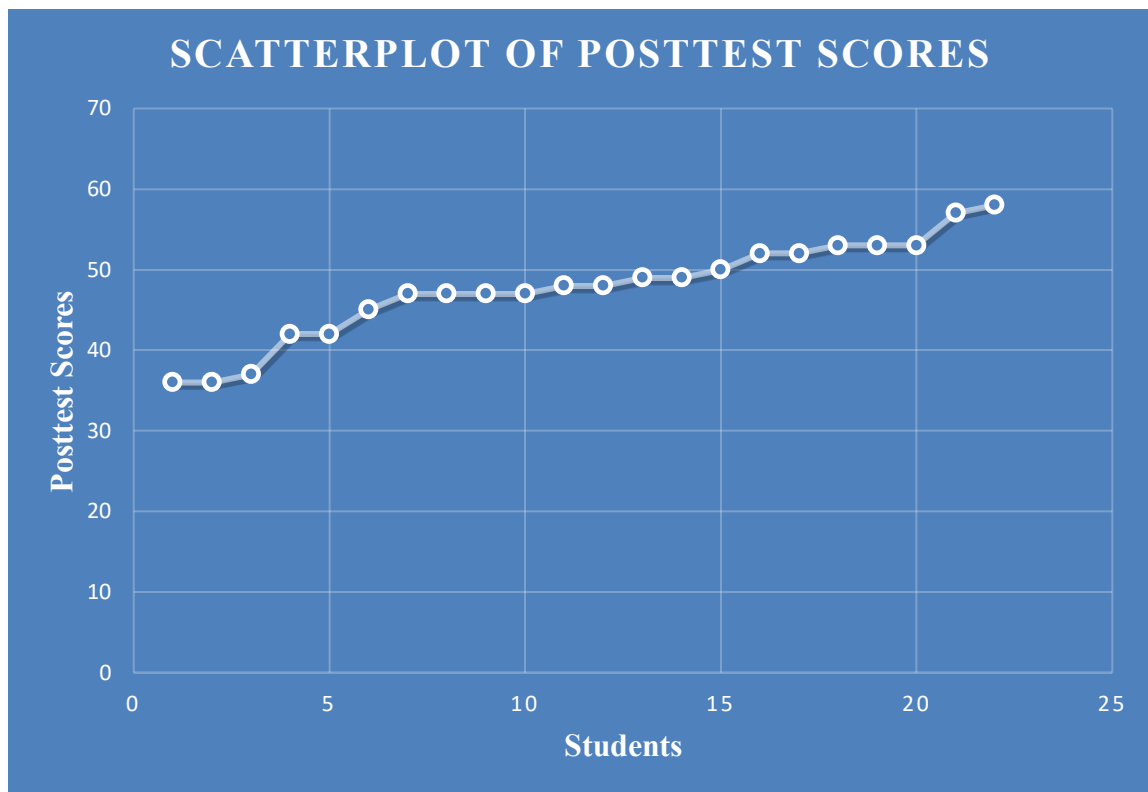
Figure 4.5 Scatterplot of Posttest Scores and Possible Outliers

Table 4.1 includes pretest and posttest scores for all 22 students within the study.

Included in the table are the differences scored by students from the pretest to the

posttest. The differences range from -6 to 17. The scores were used to run the t-Test

analysis. The numbers assigned to the participants were completely random and in no

way linked to any student data. In addition, abbreviations for gender and race were

included within the table data.

Clarifications for the abbreviations are as follows:

AAM – African American Male

AAF – African American Female

WM – White Male

WF – White Female

MM – Mixed Male

MF – Mixed Female

Table 4.1 Pretest and Posttest Scores with Difference

Participants	Gender and Race	Pretest	Posttest	Difference
1	WF	46	53	7
2	AAM	48	47	-1
3	AAM	49	49	0
4	AAM	50	48	-2
5	WM	41	58	17
6	WM	30	36	6
7	MM	44	45	1
8	WM	43	37	-6
9	WM	50	52	2
10	WM	45	49	4
11	WM	45	42	-3
12	AAF	47	47	0
13	AAM	44	52	8
14	AAM	46	47	1
15	WM	47	48	1
16	AAM	49	53	4
17	AAM	55	57	2
19	WM	37	36	-1
20	WF	48	50	2
21	MF	38	42	4
22	AAM	48	53	5
23	WF	49	47	-2

Research question 1 focused on middle school students' sensitivity to racial bias and stereotyping in mass media. Table 4.2 contains the quantitative results of the paired two-sample t-test for all participants in the study. A paired t-Test was performed to

determine if the media literacy curriculum was effective enough to reject the null

hypothesis. The t-Test results indicate a P=value of 0.04 which is less than 0.05, thus

indicating that the null hypothesis can be rejected. In addition, a descriptive statistics test

was run in order to further analyze the data.

Table 4.2 Paired Two Sample t-Test Results

t-Test: Paired Two Sample for Means		
	Variable 1	*Variable 2*
Mean	45.40909091	47.63636364
Variance	28.15800866	37.38528139
Observations	22	22
Pearson Correlation	0.66378863	
Hypothesized Mean Difference	0	
df	21	
t Stat	-2.203870805	
P(T<=t) one-tail	0.019414744	
t Critical one-tail	1.720742903	
P(T<=t) two-tail	0.038829488	
t Critical two-tail	2.079613845	

The mean difference from pretest to posttest (M=2.23, SD=4.74, N=22) is

significantly greater than zero. Two-tailed p=0.04, proving that the media literacy

curriculum is effective at sensitizing middle school students to the racial bias found in

mass media. According to descriptive statistics, the 95% Confidence Level about the

mean score difference is (0.13, 4.33). While the mean score difference of 0.13 is not

great, when it is considered in conjunction with the low p-value, it is safe to reject the

null hypothesis and note that there is statistical evidence that the application of the

independent variable, the media literacy curriculum, produces gains when it comes to

sensitizing middle school students to racial bias and stereotyping in mass media.

Table 4.3 Descriptive Statistics

Descriptive Statistics	
Mean	2.227272727
Standard Error	1.010618554
Median	1.5
Mode	1
Standard Deviation	4.740221194
Sample Variance	22.46969697
Kurtosis	3.524618205
Skewness	1.313572787
Range	23
Minimum	-6
Maximum	17
Sum	49
Count	22
Confidence Level (95.0%)	2.101696337

As gender and race were considered categories within this study, the data were

broken down into those categories to determine differences, if any, in the findings for

these groups. A second research question addressed these variables, focusing on the

effects that race or gender might have on the data collected. First, we look at the data

collected from the males in the study, no matter their race. When looking at the males

alone in the study, the main thing to note is that the P-value is greater than 0.05, making

it impossible to reject the null hypothesis. There is not enough evidence amongst the

male scores to offer significant statistical proof that the media literacy curriculum was

effective when considering research question 1. Additional data must be considered for

research question 2.

Table 4.4 Paired Two-Sample t-Test for Males

t-Test: Paired Two Sample for Means		
	Variable 1	*Variable 2*
Mean	45.2	47.4
Variance	30.37894737	39.72631579
Observations	20	20
Pearson Correlation	0.682368978	
Hypothesized Mean Difference	0	
df	19	
t Stat	-2.065261756	
P(T<=t) one-tail	0.026407386	
t Critical one-tail	1.729132812	
P(T<=t) two-tail	0.052814771	
t Critical two-tail	2.093024054	

Looking at females alone, the results are very similar to that of the males. In this

case, the P-value is much greater than 0.05, making it once again impossible to reject the

null hypothesis. It is of importance to note the small number of females in the study

which would make it difficult to determine any strong statistical significance that the

curriculum was effective in sensitizing students, but there is still the question of whether

this differs across the board when considering race and gender.

Table 4.5 Paired Two-Sample t-Test for Females

t-Test: Paired Two Sample for Means		
	Variable 1	*Variable 2*
Mean	45.6	47.8
Variance	19.3	16.7
Observations	5	5
Pearson Correlation	0.66284208	
Hypothesized Mean Difference	0	
df	4	
t Stat	-1.408405679	
P(T<=t) one-tail	0.115892883	
t Critical one-tail	2.131846786	
P(T<=t) two-tail	0.231785766	
t Critical two-tail	2.776445105	

After looking at the differences in the data from male to female, the data were

then evaluated based on race. The two races considered were African American and

White. Although, there were 3 students who identified as mixed race, that number of

students was too low to use the data to draw any conclusive evidence. When looking at

the results of the t-test for the African American participants, the first thing to notice is

the p-score value which is higher than the accepted 0.05. This makes it unnecessary to

further explore the data because the null hypothesis cannot be rejected for this group

alone. Again, this analyzed data must still be compared to that of other races or genders

to determine if the level of sensitivity varies based on gender or race.

Table 4.6 Paired Two-Sample t-Test for African American Participants

t-Test: Paired Two Sample for Means		
	Variable 1	*Variable 2*
Mean	48.44444444	50.33333333
Variance	9.277777778	12.75
Observations	9	9
Pearson Correlation	0.536339421	
Hypothesized Mean Difference	0	
df	8	
t Stat	-1.760453268	
P(T<=t) one-tail	0.058183225	
t Critical one-tail	1.859548038	
P(T<=t) two-tail	0.116366449	
t Critical two-tail	2.306004135	

Table 4.7 Paired Two-Sample t-Test for White Participants

t-Test: Paired Two Sample for Means		
	Variable 1	*Variable 2*
Mean	43.72727273	46.18181818
Variance	34.61818182	55.56363636
Observations	11	11
Pearson Correlation	0.591787749	
Hypothesized Mean Difference	0	
df	10	
t Stat	-1.315899483	
P(T<=t) one-tail	0.108787265	
t Critical one-tail	1.812461123	
P(T<=t) two-tail	0.217574529	
t Critical two-tail	2.228138852	

The last grouping to analyze was African American males and White males. There were not enough participants in the African American female, White female, mixed race male, or mixed race female categories to complete a data analysis. Once again, the p-value is higher than the allowed 0.05 at 0.11 which does not allow a rejection of the null hypothesis for African American Males.

Table 4.8 Paired Two-Sample t-Test for African American Males

t-Test: Paired Two Sample for Means		
	Variable 1	*Variable 2*
Mean	48.625	50.75
Variance	10.26785714	12.78571429
Observations	8	8
Pearson Correlation	0.514308268	
Hypothesized Mean Difference	0	
df	7	
t Stat	-1.790536843	
P(T<=t) one-tail	0.058243112	
t Critical one-tail	1.894578605	
P(T<=t) two-tail	0.116486224	
t Critical two-tail	2.364624252	

The White males t-test results also demonstrates a p-value that is outside of the acceptable range. The p-value is 0.35 which shows that there is not significant statistical evidence to allow for a rejection of the null hypothesis for White males. Thus, while the group as a whole shows statistical evidence that demonstrates that the gain scores are significant enough to claim that the media literacy curriculum implementation led to positive gains in sensitizing middle school students to the racial bias and stereotyping

present in mass media, definitive statements cannot be made due to the lack of evidence

within the groupings by race and gender.

Table 4.9 Paired Two-Sample t-Test for White Males

t-Test: Paired Two Sample for Means		
	Variable 1	*Variable 2*
Mean	42.25	44.75
Variance	39.64285714	68.21428571
Observations	8	8
Pearson Correlation	0.56728575	
Hypothesized Mean Difference	0	
df	7	
t Stat	-1.011628298	
P(T<=t) one-tail	0.172699359	
t Critical one-tail	1.894578605	
P(T<=t) two-tail	0.345398717	
t Critical two-tail	2.364624252	

In order to determine the success of the media literacy curriculum in sensitizing

middle school students to racial bias and stereotyping in the mass media, whole group

data as well as data separated by race and gender were considered. The whole group data

offered some tentative evidence that the curriculum was successful in sensitizing

students. However, when looking at the data when broken down by race and gender,

those results became less evident. The results of this broken-down information were then

used to answer research question 2 which focused on any differences in results when

considering race and gender as variable. No group based on gender or race or a

combination of the two showed statistical evidence that the curriculum was effective in

sensitizing students. Thus, as a researcher, I cannot claim that race or gender as a variable had any differing impact on student responses.

When analyzing the data, it is of interest to look at the differences broken down for each question and each student from the pretest to the posttest. While the overall results of the data show significant gains, a question by question breakdown gives insight into areas in which the media literacy intervention was more or less successful. The greatest gains can be seen in the total difference in the score for question 14. This question dealt with students' knowledge of the fact that they produce media on a regular basis. The increase in the response to this question as well as the other positive increases are directly representative of the positive gains from the media literacy curriculum. There are also negative score differences with the most dramatic being a -15 difference total for question 3. Question 3 addressed students' daily exposure to racial bias and stereotyping in the media. The range of difference totals for the test questions is -15 to 14 which could indicate a potential need for further examination of the test questions themselves.

Qualitative Data

As this study was a mixed methods study, it was necessary to evaluate the results of the qualitative data retrieved. Prior to analyzing the qualitative data, a list of preset codes was developed based on the expected data. However, as the data were analyzed, certain themes and patterns emerged that warranted further attention. The goal of the study both qualitatively and quantitatively was to determine how a media literacy curriculum could sensitize middle school students to the racial bias and stereotypes present in mass media. A second research question posed was included in order to

Table 4.10 Score Difference from Pretest to Posttest for Question 1

Student	Ethnicity and Gender	1.1 tv news	1.2 print ads	1.3 social	1.4 tv com	1.5 movies	1.6 tv shows
1	WF	-1	2	-1	0	0	0
2	BM	0	0	1	0	0	1
3	BM	0	-1	0	0	0	0
4	BM	0	0	0	0	0	0
5	WM	-4	-3	0	1	2	2
6	WM	-1	-2	1	1	0	1
7	MM	0	0	0	0	1	1
8	WM	1	0	-2	0	0	0
9	WM	-1	-2	1	2	1	0
10	WM	0	0	-1	-1	1	0
11	WM	0	-1	0	2	0	1
12	BF	0	-1	0	1	0	1
13	BM	0	-2	-3	0	0	1
14	BM	0	2	0	0	0	0
15	WM	-1	-1	1	-3	-1	1
16	BM	-1	0	-2	0	0	0
17	BM	-2	0	-1	0	0	0
19	WM	-1	0	-1	-1	-1	0
20	WF	0	0	0	0	0	0
21	MF	0	-1	0	-1	0	0
22	BM	0	0	1	1	0	0
23	WF	0	-1	-1	0	0	0
	Totals	**-11**	**-11**	**-7**	**2**	**3**	**9**

Table 4.11 Score Difference from Pretest to Posttest for Questions 2-10

Student	Ethnicit and Gender	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	totals
1	WF	-1	1	0	0	1	-1	2	3	0	5
2	BM	1	-2	-3	1	3	2	0	0	0	4
3	BM	0	0	0	0	-2	0	0	2	1	0
4	BM	2	-2	1	-2	0	0	0	1	0	0
5	WM	-2	-4	-2	0	3	1	-3	-2	2	-9
6	WM	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	2	-1	2
7	MM	1	-3	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1
8	WM	0	1	0	0	2	0	2	2	2	8
9	WM	0	-2	0	1	0	1	0	-1	-1	-1
10	WM	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	2	1	4
11	WM	0	-2	1	1	0	0	0	0	3	5
12	BF	1	2	0	-1	1	0	-1	0	0	3
13	BM	0	1	-1	-1	0	-2	0	0	1	-6
14	BM	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	3
15	WM	-1	-2	-1	0	-1	-1	0	0	0	-10
16	BM	0	-1	1	0	1	1	2	1	1	3
17	BM	1	1	1	0	2	1	2	1	0	6
19	WM	0	-1	-1	0	-1	0	2	0	0	-5
20	WF	0	-1	-1	0	0	0	0	1	1	0
21	MF	0	0	-1	-1	0	0	0	2	0	-2
22	BM	0	0	1	0	0	1	1	0	-1	4
23	WF	0	-1	0	-1	-2	1	2	0	0	-3
	Totals	**2**	**-15**	**-4**	**-2**	**8**	**4**	**10**	**14**	**10**	**12**

determine if the race or gender of the participant had any bearing on the level of sensitivity of those participants.   Three major themes emerged from the qualitative data gathered. The first theme is that middle grade students were only willing to discuss bias and stereotyping only after it has been pointed out to them. A second theme that emerged deals with the students' realization that they are contributors to mass media. A third theme that emerged is that students' lives may lack the diversity that would help them recognize how different forms of media can offend some groups while not offending others.

Three patterns also emerged as the qualitative data were analyzed. First, race and gender were not usually indicators as to how students would react to various mass media messages. This offers a tentative answer to research question 2, noting that race and gender did not impact a student's sensitivity to racial bias and stereotyping in the mass media. A second emergent pattern is that the students recognized that power was a driving force in all forms of media, and that media is used to maintain that power. Lastly, students often contradicted themselves when considering what they stated in class verses what they wrote within their research journals. This pattern is one of interest when considering the results with a social identity theory lens. When part of a social group setting, it is possible that their responses were filtered through what they consider the group values, yet when responding in journals, they may have indicated more individual thoughts and beliefs. In addition, social identity theory combined with identity threat theory can help elucidate student responses to certain prompts or in certain situations.

At the start of the research study, an open discussion with the student participants was conducted. These participants consisted of 17 males and 5 females. Broken down

further, there were 9 African American students, 11 White students, and 2 students who were listed as mixed race. The discussion occurred after the pretest was administered and began with clarification of certain terms. Students struggled to define terms like bias and stereotyping, but through examples they gave, it became clear that they did understand the terms. One term that was discussed was prejudice. One student stated, "my dad talks about that, but I don't know what it means." This was an African American student, and after hearing similar responses from other students, it became clear that most students were not fully aware of the implications of prejudice. Clarifying the terms bias, stereotyping, and prejudice helped students understand the focus of the study. During the conversation, the question of whether racism still exists was proposed. All students agreed that racism is still a problem that exists within our society; however, the students could not name ways in which mass media propagates racial bias and stereotyping.

In order to help the students recognize more clearly the terms being discussed, times was spent discussing the school system in which the students are a part as well as the lives of the students outside of school. This led to conversations concerning the founding of our country and the reoccurring theme of oppressed people of Color seen within the United States. The conversation ranged from talks of slavery to discussions of Japanese Internment Camps to women's rights to civil rights to gay rights. The students noted the ways in which various groups within our country had faced oppression and dealt with prejudice. I felt it was important to bring the conversation back to the school itself in order to discuss with students the inherent racism that could be found within the school institution itself. Students noted the absence of diversity within the higher-level classes as well as the high level of certain races in various sports team. The students

recognized that even within a school system, stereotypes not only exist but are perpetuated. This initial discussion was conducted in order to create an open environment in which students considered things with a mind that was open to the historical context as well as the current climate in our country as well as our school system.

The first theme that emerged after looking though the researcher notes, student journals, and interview notes is that students had difficulty or were uncomfortable identifying racial bias and stereotyping until it was pointed out to them. In their journals where they reflected on the lessons each day, students repeatedly stated, "That is racist" or a similar statement.
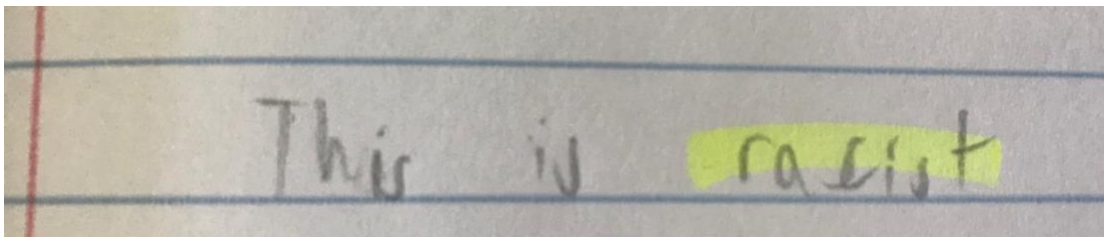

Figure 4.6 Sample Student Journal Entry

What was odd about this is the fact that most students could not identify the racism without a great deal of discussion. This was especially true within the first two lessons. This was possibly due to a lack of comfort on the part of all students in the study, and the African American students may have been particularly uncomfortable and unwilling to converse about racism as they may have felt that the conversation may have had no impact. In reviewing television commercials, the students were shown a controversial KFC commercial after which comments such as "I'm just confused" and "I'm used to it" were expressed. When faced with racism in films, one student stated, "I honestly didn't think anything was wrong with it at first," and another student noted, "They're just

movies" in response to any racial bias or stereotyping in movie clips. Another comment made by a student was "Most of the racists things in the clips I had never noticed, and they were really racist." When one student was asked if they were offended by anything that they had seen in the media, his response was, "No, because I am White." At face value, this pattern can simply be seen as the students' inability to truly recognize the racism present within some of the media shared with them. However, it is highly likely that the students did not feel comfortable discussing these sensitive matters in a social setting with the researcher or the other students within the classroom. This may be partially due to the fact that the media specialist was not their normal classroom teacher, and because of that the level of comfort in expressing themselves is low. In addition, the students' social identity may limit their comfort when it comes to expressing views on sensitive issues.
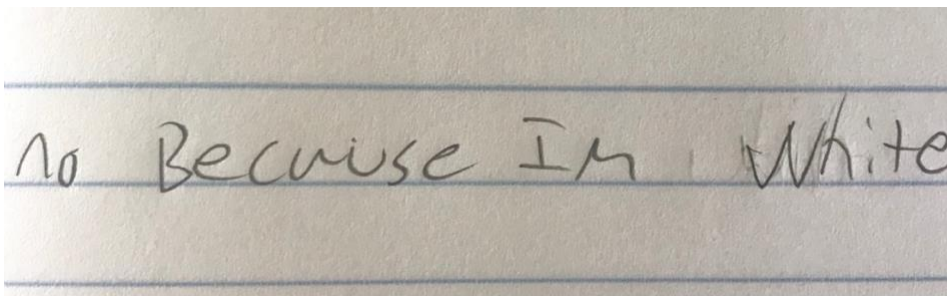

Figure 4.7 Sample Student Journal Entry

A second theme that emerged is that students do not see themselves as contributors to mass media. When students were asked if they created media, most students responded that they did not, yet all the students stated that they were active on one or more social media sites. One of the core principles addressed in this study focuses on the fact that media messages are constructed to carry forth a certain meaning. Most of the students did not feel that they had ever posted anything offensive on social media, but

many were unsure. One student stated that she did not think she had ever offended anyone, but if she had, she was sure one of her friends would have told her. Referring back to the first theme that emerged, it is highly possible that her friends would not recognize any offending material or feel comfortable pointing it out. At the beginning of the study, most students were unaware of what types of media are included in mass media. Many simply felt that the media referred to the news media. These students were in 7th grade, and it was clear that before this time they had experienced no form of media literacy even though they were taking in media messages before they were able to read or write.

A third theme that emerged is that middle grade students do not always recognize that certain mass media messages have the potential to be offensive to different groups of people. The one student who responded "No, because I'm White" when asked if he was ever offended by anything in the media has clearly not developed the sensitivity to notice anything that might offend other potentially minority groups. This lack of sensitivity may not be intentional; it may be due to the fact that the student has not been exposed to much diversity in his or her own life. Two particular print advertisements drew extreme reactions from students. One depicted a White woman holding a black woman by the throat, and another showed several African American athletes bowing down to a White businessman. When the focus was drawn to these advertisements, all students were clearly in agreement that the advertisements were racist. However, the White students stated that if this has been in a magazine they were reading, they would most likely have passed by the advertisement without noticing anything offensive. Mastro (2015) explains, "it is socially significant to systematically document racial/ethnic

representations in the media as these portrayals contribute meaningfully to both real-world intergroup dynamics as well as beliefs about oneself and one's own group in society" (p. 4). The African American students as well as the mixed-race students were quick to say that they would have noticed the advertisement and been bothered by it, but that they would most likely have just accepted it as normal and moved on. Mastro (2015) addresses social identity and perceptions by stating, "Research indicates that the selection and avoidance of media (both conscious and unconscious) plays an important role in maintaining racial/ethnic group identity" (p. 5). One thing to note about this concept is the fact that often avoidance is not necessary because racial diversity is not present in many forms of media. In a separate article, Mastro et al. (2008) note that media "satisfy Whites' need for a positive social identity without challenging them to face their hidden racial biases" (p. 4). After watching some racially charged movie clips, one White student stated, "I do not think the movies were using racism at all," but she goes on to say, "Some African Americans can take *it* different than Whites." The White students in the class are likely adhering to a social identity that paints them in a more positive light than their African American counterparts. The White students may not be aware that they are consciously doing this because they are not critically analyzing their actions or their reactions to media. The African American students may appear to have become somewhat immune to the exposure to racism, but it is highly likely that given the social situation of the research study that they are uncomfortable expressing their thoughts to the dominant White group.

As the data were reviewed, some patterns of interest occurred. First, although the study was focused on racial bias and stereotyping, race nor gender appeared to be factors

when it came to the responses expected by the researcher. Research Question 2 asked if race or gender was a factor in students' sensitivity to racial bias and stereotyping in the media. The quantitative data collected did not indicate any relationship between a participant's race or gender and their sensitivity to racial bias or stereotyping. Likewise, the qualitative data did not vary enough amongst these groups to indicate that these variables led to differing results. More often, the social situation or identity factors of the group with which the student identified had greater impact. When students were exposed to racial stereotyping in commercials such as the KFC commercial shown during the study, many of the African American students simply responded but saying, "That makes me hungry," or "Will you go buy me some KFC?" As study progressed, it was clear that the pattern was for the African American participants to be more impacted and recognizing of racial bias and stereotyping in print media while the White students seem to be more sensitive to the bias and stereotyping in films, television commercials and other forms of video media. Again, this could simply be a situation in which the students did not feel comfortable discussing a sensitive issue in a social setting. This must be taken into consideration when evaluating the qualitative data.

When looking at social media, both groups seemed to find the biased or stereotypical posts used in the study offensive, but African American, White, and mixed-race students all laughed at the same time they expressed their shock. This was a point in the study when the age and potential mental maturity level of the student participants as well as their comfort with the researcher had to be considered. When considering brain development, Steinberg (2011) notes that there are different types of cognition, and depending on the type of ability, a teenager can be just as mature as an adult. However,

she also notes that when it comes to less skill-based cognition and more emotional cognition, that young people are often not fully mature until the age of 25 (p. 48). Brain development varies for all young people, of course, and a "one-size-fits-all" concept cannot be applied to brain development. In addition, social identity and the comfort of the participant can always be variables that may skew the data. One of the social media items shared with the students was a tweet by a well-known singer accusing someone speaking a foreign language of being a terrorist. This was a blatantly racial biased tweet that all the students responded to with "That is racist!" while finding humor in the tweet at the same time. At one point in the lesson, a student gave an example of a racial stereotype when he said that "Chinese people eat cats." This came from an African American student after viewing a KFC commercial that stereotyped all African people as liking fried chicken. In some cases, the students were able to recognize bias and prejudice when it was focused on their own race, but they were quick to employ it when it attacked another race, leading the researcher to look more closely at the social identity characteristics of the group as well as a possible lack of sensitivity to racial and ethnic diversity due to a lack of this diversity within the lives of the participants.

A second pattern of interest deals with the students' recognition of power being a driving force within mass media, particular the maintaining of power. This pattern was centered around print media including newspaper articles, magazine advertisements, and magazines as a whole. Within the media literacy lessons, the students were shown two newspaper articles, both with pictures depicting people holding food items over their heads while navigating the flood waters after hurricane Katrina. The article with a picture of White people was entitled "Couple finds food for their family." The article

depicting African American people was entitled "Looting occurs in aftermath of

Katrina." The only difference that could be found was skin color, and several students

pointed out that the news always depicts White people in a better light than African

American people and that a major reason for this was power. Young (2013) in his

discussion of oppression states, "Its causes are embedded in unquestioned norms, habits,

and symbols in the assumptions underlying institutional rules and the collective

consequences of following those rules" (p. 36). The students' quick recognition of the

desire to maintain power was interesting because so many times the students seemed to

be unfazed by the racial bias and stereotyping, yet it seemed that they were able to

quickly identify the reason it exists. This recognition of power helps to clarify the fact

that the students are most likely not "unfazed" by bias and stereotyping, but that there is

most likely a different, underlying reason why they may not share their reactions. Within

their journals, students reacted to the print advertisements shared with them by discussing

the ways the advertisements demonstrated power of Whites over African Americans, with

several students relating it to slavery.

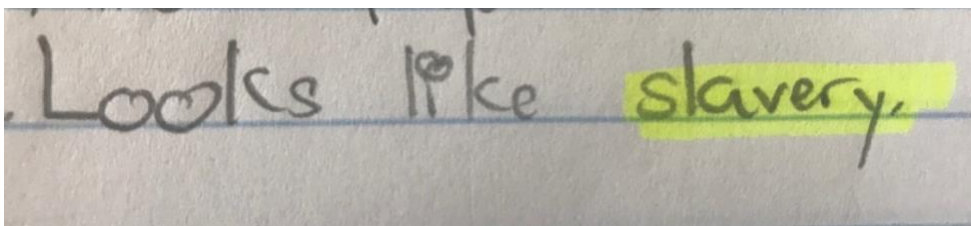Figure 4.8 Sample Student Journal Entry

This pattern of recognition of power continued as the students were all given magazines

to look at and react to. Some students had no real reaction while others noted one thing

repeatedly. As they looked through the variety of magazines, the students noticed a lack

of racial diversity, particularly a lack of an African American presence in the magazine.

When asked why the students felt this lack occurred, one African American student stated, "To keep us in our place." The students are clearly able to recognize the racial bias in mass media, but they are less comfortable discussing it than expected.

The last clear pattern that occurred is one of contradiction. Within the various forms of data collected, the students often contradicted themselves when it came to their exposure to racial bias and stereotyping from mass media. Within a journal entry, one student pointed out examples of bias and stereotyping that he sees within the media as well as within his school. However, when the same student was interviewed and asked about his exposure to bias and stereotyping, the response was, "I don't think I'm exposed to bias or stereotyping." In researcher notes taken during and after an open discussion with students concerning racial bias and stereotyping existing in the mass media, it was noted that all students agreed that bias and stereotyping were present in all forms of media. However, towards the end of the research study, students were interviewed with one of the informal interview questions asking how often they were exposed to racial bias or stereotyping in the media. Figure 4.9 breaks down their responses noting that 18 percent of students stated that they were never exposed to racial bias or stereotyping by mass media. In fact, the breakdown is relatively even with 18 percent stating they were exposed every day, 18 percent stating they were exposed often, 18 percent stating not often, and 28 percent of students stating that they were sometimes exposed to racial bias and stereotyping. Students who stated not often, sometimes, often, and everyday still fell into the realm of those students who recognized the existence of racial bias and stereotyping, albeit in some cases less than previous notes and discussions had indicated. The students who stated they had no exposure to racial bias in the media are of particular

interest. In some cases, discussion that followed indicated that by no exposure they meant that they were not the target of racial bias and stereotyping, but in other cases the students confirmed that they did not think they were exposed in any way to racial stereotyping or bias in mass media which contradicted statements made by these same students throughout the study. Again, this brings the mind the two theories of interest to this study – Social Identity Theory and Identity Threat Theory. These theories combined help to explain students' mixed reactions when responding in a social environment as opposed to within a journal. In addition, within the journals, the concern of a threat to their own identity or membership to a certain social group identity may have led to contradicting responses.
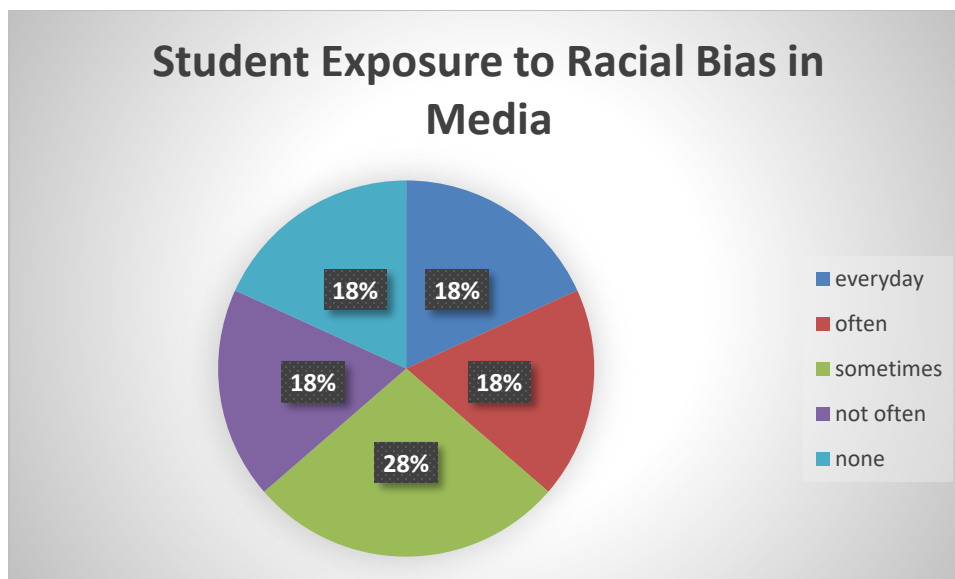

Figure 4.9 Student Exposure to Racial Bias in Media

Conclusion

The research questions addressed by both the quantitative data and the qualitative data was: How can a media literacy curriculum sensitize middle school students to the racial bias and stereotypes present in mass media and How do gender and race affect

student sensitivity to the racial bias and stereotypes present in mass media? The analyzation of the quantitative data collected through the administration of a pretest and posttest demonstrated statistical significance in the gain scores of students and, thus, the effectiveness of the curriculum. However, this only held true when examining data for the group as a whole. When considering research question 2, the data when broken down by gender and race did not offer any qualitative data to support the effectiveness of the curriculum or to note any observable differences based on gender or race. The qualitative data offered results that were even less definitive. The themes and patterns that emerged did not fully support the effectiveness of the media literacy curriculum, nor did they indicate any clear observable difference in sensitivity based on the race or gender of the student participant. Throughout the lessons, the students rarely noted the recognition of racial bias and stereotyping unless clear examples were presented to them while they also remained unsure of their actual exposure to racial bias and stereotyping at the conclusion of the study. Word such as "seem" and "appear" are crucial here as underlying causes may have led to certain student responses and behaviors. Adherence to certain group norms as well as the lack of a strong relationship with the researcher in discussing sensitive issues may have led to students responding as they did. These students while realizing their own contribution to mass media appeared unconcerned with the impact of their contributions. The results of all data indicate that more research needs to be conducted, and that media literacy lessons should possibly begin at a younger age before the students are actively contributing to mass media. In addition, the lessons with the media literacy curriculum should be revisited and revised to better meet the needs of the students. Lastly, the students' relationship with the researcher or the lack thereof should

be considered in the context of the study, especially how it affects the students ability to

respond openly and honestly to the media messages presented.

CHAPTER 5: SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION

Introduction

While some feel that huge leaps have been made when it comes to the eradication of racism in this country, many would also agree that forms of racism still exist, many of which are perpetuated by the racial bias and stereotyping found in mass media. It is noted that European American children are likely to be racially biased by the time they enter school, possibly due to a lack of education on racism at home because their parents may have viewed racial education as unimportant (Hughes, Bigler, and Levy, 2007, p. 1689). A study by Hughes, Bigler, and Levy (2007) found that young people who learned about historical racism had more positive attitudes towards their African American peers and expressed the importance of racial fairness (p. 1695).

Middle school students are of particular interest because while they have been consumers of mass media for years, they are just becoming contributors mainly through social media avenues. Many of these middle school students, no matter their race, accept the racial bias and stereotyping that they encounter in forms of media as normal, acceptable, or inevitable. It has become a fact of life for them, and many young people have become desensitized or unwilling to address the various forms of hidden and embedded racism presented to them through the use of bias and stereotyping within mass media. In addition, whether it is a conscious decision or not, most people, young and adult alike, consider themselves as a part of a greater whole, and the characteristics of the greater whole are used to determine their social identity. Tatum (2013) notes that "We

live with multiple identities that can be both enriching and contradictory and that push us to confront questions of loyalty to individuals and groups (p. 15). If students align themselves with the characteristics and viewpoints of a certain group, they may fail to acknowledge and appreciate the diversity around them, especially if they align with the dominate White group. Allan Johnson (2013) refers to privilege as a door opened and to oppression as something that slams doors shut (p. 20). It is possible that the dominant White group identity might oppress less dominant groups in an attempt to maintain their own group's positive perception in society. A key aspect of surpassing these social identity boundaries and exposing racial bias and stereotyping in the media lies in media literacy, and in educating students to understand and interpret constructed media messages.

Middle school students are being required in their classes to both interpret and produce media in various formats. Many of these students are active on social media, but it is clear that students do not know how to appropriately post on social media which is reflected in the extreme amounts of cyberbullying that occurs. In addition, when conducting research, the students have a tendency to believe everything they read online. Mass media has been proven to exert a significant amount of influence on the consumers of said media (Mastro & Kopacz, 2006, p. 305). This influence may benefit the person if they are part of the dominant White groups, but non-members of this dominant group suffer due to the negative portrayals in the media. Middle school students lack the skills needed to distinguish between reputable and faulty information or to recognize the underlying messages in mass media. Media literacy aims to give students the skills necessary to navigate the current inundation of all forms of mass media. For the purpose

of this study, the media literacy curriculum being implemented focused on the students'
ability to recognize racial bias and stereotyping. The goal of the curriculum integration
was to sensitize students to racial bias and stereotyping in the media. The research
questions addressed were: How can a media literacy curriculum sensitize middle school
students to the racial bias and stereotypes present in mass media? and How do gender and
race affect student sensitivity to the racial bias and stereotypes present in mass media?

Interpretation of Results

Both the qualitative and quantitative data collected yielded interesting results.
After gathering the data from a pretest and posttest for the quantitative portion of the
study, a t-test was conducted to determine any statistical significance in the gain scores
from the pretest to the posttest. The scores were analyzed looking at the group as a
whole, and then broken down further by gender and race, when possible, for analyzation.

Research Question 1 looked at the groups of students as a whole in an effort to
determine if a media literacy curriculum could sensitize middle school students to the
racial bias and stereotyping present in mass media. The results of the t-test evaluating the
quantitative data for the whole group yielded a p-value lower than 0.05 indicating
statistical significance in the gain scores. Thus, it is safe to state that the media literacy
curriculum was successful in increasing student sensitivity to racial bias and stereotyping
within mass media. However, when looking more closely at a breakdown of each
question, the differences between pretest and posttest became very evident with many of
the responses indicating gains while several others indicated negative gains. While the
descriptive statistics data indicated gains overall, the range of gain was from a low of .13
to a high of 4.33. The statistical significance was present for the group of 22 participants,

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but there is clearly room for increased gains. In addition, the large number of responses to questions on the evaluation tool that indicated a negative gain makes it clear that no definitive statement can be made concerning the effectiveness of the intervention curriculum as it pertains to the research question 1 using the quantitative data collected.

When evaluating the qualitative data collected, the same research questions were being addressed, but the changes or gains being evaluated were focused on the students' actual interaction with the media as well as the creation of their own forms of media. Positive gains would have been noted more easily if the students had progressed through the study by demonstrating a better awareness of racial bias and stereotyping by the end of the study. With some students this was the case, but not with all. The qualitative data gathered was inconsistent, and at times contradictory. Viewing this information through the lens of Social Identity Theory with the added perspective of Identity Threat Theory gives insight into possible causes for the inconsistencies. The themes and patterns that developed over the course of the study were not significant enough to definitively state that the curriculum implemented was successful in sensitizing the middle school students to racial bias or stereotyping, but the information did offer some guidance in evaluating changes for future research endeavors.

The first theme to emerge was that students appeared to need racial bias and stereotyping presented to them in isolation in order to gain full recognition. Even at the end of the study, students did not readily admit to recognizing examples of racial bias and stereotyping on their own. As a researcher, it is important not to take these reactions at face value, and to instead look for underlying causes that may have led to students responding as they did. First, while I make every attempt to make students feel

comfortable when I am teaching, the relationship between media specialist and student is not as strong as that of classroom teacher and student. Media specialist spend a fraction of the time with individual students when compared to classroom teachers, so the level of comfort is most likely not as high. In addition, the topic was sensitive in nature, and for the African American and other students of Color in the class, they may have struggled to relate to me as a White teacher who has not faced the bias and stereotyping that is being identified. When lack of comfort is combined with what the students perceive as their social identities, it may be very difficult for those students to express their individual thoughts and reactions in a group setting.

Throughout the study students were given time to freely browse various types of media, but many appeared to struggle to identify or admit to identifying any forms of racial bias or stereotyping while others would ask for confirmation from the researcher concerning the presence of racial bias or stereotyping within the media they were browsing. This was true of both male, female, African American, White, and mixed-race students. It is possible that many students have become desensitized to these underlying forms of prejudice that they not only tolerate it but openly ignore it, or that they agreed with the normalized racist messages surrounding them. It is of interest to note that members of the dominant group may not individually note the presence of racial bias or stereotyping because they benefit from the positive depiction of Whites and the more negative depiction of non-dominant groups by the media. Previous studies have noted that media content is given a more positive evaluation when the social identity of Whites is accommodated (Mastro & Kopacz, 2006, p. 309). Thus, while desensitizing is definitely a possibility, it is also highly likely that the social identity of the dominant

group and the characteristics representative of that group are controlling the reactions and responses of many of the students within the study.

The second theme that emerged was, students do not believe that they contribute to mass media. Once students were made aware that mass media was inclusive of social media, the students still questioned whether or not they were truly contributors. Many of the students believed that what they created for social media could never go beyond their friend base. A few students even opened up about having their own Youtube channels in which they post self-created media, often dealing with some type of gaming. Even these students struggled to recognize that they are active contributors of mass media. Through the notes and discussion, it became evident that they feel that they are not contributors simply because they feel they are not important enough or old enough to be considered contributors. Question 9 on the pretest/posttest asked students how often they contributed to mass media outlets. This question had the highest gain from the pretest to posttest with an increase of 14 points. In this way the qualitative data and the quantitative contradict each other. The students seem to be aware of how they are supposed to answer when given direct questions about their own creation of mass media, yet when they share their honest thoughts within their journals, they do not feel that they can truly be considered contributors. During one of the media literacy lessons, there was discussion of the term "expert." The students seem to feel that in order to be considered a contributor, they must be considered an expert on the topic. A quick internet search for information on Ancient Egypt returned a plethora of results, and it did not take long to find websites that were created by students. This helped the students realize that they do not have to be experts to produce media. At the end of the study, interviews with the

students revealed that most of the students still did not believe that they were contributors of mass media. This would indicate that the curriculum was not successful in clarifying to the participants what constitutes mass media.

A third theme that emerged that did not fully support a rejection of the null hypothesis is middle school students are not always sensitive enough to realize that some groups may find certain pieces of media more offensive than others. Some of the students within the study projected a self-involved nature which is not abnormal for the middle school age group. While no blanket statement can be made about all students' brain development, for some students it is within middle school that the adolescent brain is making lifelong connections which is why enhancing the students' ability to decode media messages at this age has lifelong implications. However, for some students the middle school age is also when students' brains are still looking for excitement and emotional stimulation, and when their brains are more interested in risky behavior, and more importantly, conflict (Johnson, Blum, & Giedd, 2009). Each student's brain develops at a different pace and in different ways depending on their experiences, making the inclusion of open and positive experiences important during the middle school years.

When one student responded to a question concerning whether they had been exposed to racial bias and stereotyping in the media with "No, I am White," the question arose as to how much exposure to diversity had been present in the student's life as well as how the probable life of normalized privileged had affected the response. Mastro (2015) found that media interaction is the main way in which people interact with more diverse groups, and she goes into more depth, noting that "media have historically been unfavorable when it comes to the quality of racial/ethnic representations" (p. 3). Within

the study, many of the students felt that they could only be exposed to this racial bias and stereotyping if they were a member of the group suffering from the prejudice. However, this was not always the case as several students admitted that they had not realized how offensive media pieces could be until after they had participated in the media literacy lessons. However, many participants did not fully come to recognize and identify the biased nature of many media messages, making it impossible to categorize the media literacy curriculum implemented as being fully effective in sensitizing students to racial bias and stereotyping in mass media.

One pattern that emerged that offered some validity to the implemented media curriculum treatment dealt with the students' repeated recognition without prompting of the role power plays in the construction of media messages. When asked about why the racial bias and stereotyping was present in various forms of constructed media messages, a repeated response both given aloud as well as within journal reflection was that the messages were constructed for power. More often than not the students recognized that the messages displayed an attempt to maintain the power of Whites over African Americans or other mixed races. This concept of power was perceived by all the students at some point throughout the lessons; although, it was noticed the least by White males. One interpretation of this could be that these males benefit the most by this ingrained power structure, so they are less likely to recognize it. Their social identity benefits from the negative reflections of other social groups. The African American students as well as the mixed-race students noted the power structure especially within the newspaper articles, the magazine advertisements as well as the movie clips. In addition, the White females were much quicker to recognize the power aspect than the White males. One

student noted that she recognized it because women have also faced a battle for power over the years. All people are part of more than one group that helps determine their social identity. In this case, the female student chose to align with her female counterparts. One of the goals of the media literacy curriculum was for students to recognize the reasons behind constructed media messages. In this way, the study was successful in sensitizing these middle school students. The way in which students recognized power as a driving force lends some credibility to the media literacy curriculum, but it also elucidates questions concerning the thought processes and the possible influences on the thought processes of students.

A second pattern of interest found within the qualitative data was that of apparent contradiction. With this pattern, it was necessary to consider the social identity of the students as well as the comfort level of these students when discussing sensitive topics. While I strive to build relationships with students, as a media specialist, I do not see these students daily, and I am not able to build the same bond as a classroom teacher. The relationship between the media specialist and students may not have been strong enough to allow students to feel safe enough to always voice their true opinions. This lack of a strong relationship may have led to some assumptions on the part of the students who saw me as a White teacher whom the students could not trust enough to share their actual views and experiences. In their journals, one students commented on the movie clips they had viewed by saying, "There are racist parts, but maybe they weren't meant like that." Another student commented in their journal about the various types of racial bias and stereotyping that they had noticed in the lesson, but ended the entry with the comment, "I don't think that I am exposed to bias and stereotyping." In this case, the

student may not fully grasp what exposure means, or their own social identity may have restricted their reactions. It is also very possible that the students have been conditioned by schooling, society, and family to deflect from instances of racism by defaulting to excuses such as "they weren't meant like that." Throughout the study within the researcher notes, documentation was made concerning the possibility that students may have be responding in the way that they felt they were "supposed" to in class discussions, yet they were more comfortable being honest in their journals. It is possible that students felt prompted to respond in certain ways during whole group discussions. This may account for some of the contradictions found, but not all. Due to this pattern, the information gathered that supported the media literacy curriculum as effective was often contradicted by information that did not support the curriculum. Whether due to lack of comfort, adherence to one's own social identity, or simply lack of recognition, it cannot be said with authority that the data gathered supports the effectiveness of the curriculum.

Research Question 2 looks more closely at the difference in the data when analyzed based on gender or race to determine if a certain gender or race demonstrates an increased sensitivity to racial bias and stereotyping. When the data were broken down first by gender, then by race, and finally by a race and gender combination, the result of the t-test no longer showed statistical evidence that would allow the rejection of the null hypothesis allowing the researcher to claim that the implementation of the media literacy curriculum was effective. Thus, there was no statistical evidence that indicated that gain scores improved based on a student's gender or race. This was interesting as the researcher's expectation was that higher gains would be seen in the disadvantaged population. This was not the case. It is likely that these students were already more

sensitized to the bias and stereotyping in the information presented, so there were fewer gains made with the implementation of the media literacy curriculum. Students who are not members of the dominant, White, male group as far as the media is concerned, may have been uncomfortable with the content of the lessons and less comfortable expressing their concerns in the social classroom environment. The results of the data analyzation would have led to more a more definitive decision as to the effectiveness of the media literacy curriculum if the results of the t-tests had resulted in a low p-value for all groups after the data have been broken down into categories by race and gender.

One unexpected pattern found in the qualitative data that came to light while examining the data was that the race nor gender of the student impacted the apparent recognition of bias or stereotyping. Researcher expectations were that females and people of Color would be more sensitive to racial bias and stereotyping because these groups have been the target of these media messages historically. At face value, the results did not indicate an increased level of sensitivity, but, again, comfort and social identity may have been factors. On more than one occasion, media with blatant racial bias or stereotyping of African Americans was shared with the students, yet many times the African American students did not react to this form of profiling. Exposure to negative depictions of diverse racial and ethnic groups within media can define social identity status both within dominant and non-dominant groups, and these messages delivered by the media have become a major component in defining and reinforcing group status and value (Mastro, 2015, p. 5). When questioned about their reactions, many of the students simply responded that they were used to these forms of media messages, so it did not offend them. This is a clear example of the media's role in

maintaining racial and ethnic boundaries through bias and stereotyping. Situations such as this one demonstrates ways in which the media literacy curriculum was both effective and ineffective. Class discussion helped illuminate the fact that these racial stereotypes should not be considered normal or natural, yet to fully change the perceptions and critical thinking of the students, a more ongoing process would need to occur in order for students to fully recognize how constructed media messages mold perceptions.

The qualitative data proved to be the most difficult to clearly analyze. Throughout the lessons, gains appeared to be made in the students' ability to recognize racial bias and stereotyping in various forms of media without prompting, but there is the question of whether this occurred simply because they were following the trend of the lessons and looking to give a "correct" response to the researcher. In school, students often feel rewarded when they give a correct answer, so this possibility cannot be fully ruled out. The comfort of students discussing a sensitive topic also has to be considered. As a White instructor discussing racial bias and stereotyping, the students may have felt unsure that their true responses would have been validated. In addition, as the classroom is a social setting, students may have been limited by their perceived social identities. Dominant and non-dominant groups alike may have felt restricted by the group characteristics. When considering the themes that emerged combined with the patterns found, the only pattern that fully supported the rejection of the null hypothesis in support of the media literacy curriculum was that the students were able to recognize the power structure implicit in the creation of some media messages. Thus, with authority, it cannot be stated that the media literacy curriculum was fully effective in sensitizing middle school students to the racial bias and stereotyping in mass media based on the results of

the qualitative data analysis. In addition, no clear difference in sensitivity was apparent based on the race or gender of the students within the study.

Limitations of Results

While the results of the quantitative portion of the study revealed statistical significance enough to reject the null hypothesis concerning the effectiveness of the media literacy curriculum sensitizing students to the racial bias and stereotyping in mass media, this was only the case when looking at the data for the group as a whole. When the data were analyzed for individual races or genders, the p-value was too high to claim statistical significance indicating that the null hypothesis was void, thus demonstrating that higher levels of sensitivity are not related to gender or race. In addition, when looking at the changes in the responses for the individual questions on the pretest and posttest, many of the questions resulted in negative gains. In order to be comfortable expressing that these results have broader implications, positive gains across the board need to be present. Too many of the questions resulted in negative gains for there to be complete confidence in the effectiveness of the curriculum.

The qualitative results yielded several themes and patterns of interest, but these themes and patterns were mostly indicative of a need for further research and a re-evaluation of the implemented media literacy curriculum. The data were inconclusive in determining if the intervention demonstrated changes in the students' perceptions of mass media. Together the data gathered both qualitatively and quantitatively did not offer strong enough evidence to claim positive gains with the implementation of the current media literacy curriculum.

Implications of the Findings

The findings indicate that more research needs to be conducted in order to determine if a media literacy curriculum can sensitize students to the racial bias and stereotyping in mass media and to note any differences in sensitivity based on race or gender. Also, the media literacy curriculum should be evaluated to determine if any changes to the curriculum or data collection tools might lead to the collection of data that would offer more statistically significant results. While it was clear that the students were better equipped to identify racial bias and stereotyping by the end of the study, this was mostly the case when items fitting those criteria were presented to them in isolation. Most of the students did not critically evaluate media on their own, or for various reasons, they were not comfortable sharing their evaluations. At face value, it appeared that the students simply used media as a means of entertainment, downplaying any bias or stereotyping as unimportant because they felt the media does not have great impact. When looking deeper, considering the social identities and the comfort level of the students, there data collected may have been impacted and cannot be taken at face value. The students' hesitation to discuss or note bias and stereotyping in mass media messages may indicate a need to start a more basic or generalized media literacy curriculum at a younger age, and then build on this curriculum over the years to extend to more sensitive topics. One possible solution could be the implementation of a general media literacy curriculum that through the course of sixth, seventh, and eighth grades builds to the level of identifying the bias and stereotyping present in mass media. In addition, the building of relationships between the researcher and the students could lead to a level of trust on the part of the students enabling them to participate in more forthright conversations.

The findings also indicate that more students should be included in the study. Looking at the quantitative data analysis, the results only displayed positive gains when they were not broken down by race or gender. No broad conclusions for the effectiveness of a media literacy curriculum can be applied until a larger more balanced cross-section of the middle school population is evaluated. In addition, data gathered from schools with different student demographics might offer alternate results of interest. Lastly, the chosen media shared with students may have been too blatant and may have caused some discomfort in their ability to relate to a White instructor sharing racially charged content. Messages containing more nuanced and less graphic displays may lead to more authentic data.

Methodological Limitations

There are several limitations for this action research study that must be noted. First, while the goal of this study was to determine the effectiveness of a media literacy curriculum on middle school students' ability to recognize racial bias and stereotyping in mass media, the sample used consisted solely of a small group of seventh grade students. While this small group of 22 students was diverse, it was not an example of a true cross section of the student body. This research study was conducted within a school setting, and the schedule differences from grade level to grade level made it necessary to choose one grade level and one intact class to use as a convenience sample. This class consisted mostly of male students with only 5 of the 22 students being female. Although the sample size was quite small, there was diversity within the group, but this diversity was primarily inclusive of African American males. As a researcher I was interested in noting any possible differences in sensitivity based on the gender or race of the student,

but the data gathered did not indicate any increase or decrease in sensitivity. The diversity within the group may not have been great enough to fully explore this possibility.

The study may have been further limited by the evaluation tool used to obtain quantitative data. The tool was evaluated by other experts for bias, but it is possible that the survey questions on the tool were difficult for middle school students to comprehend. Many of the students needed terms on the pretest/posttest defined in order to understand the statements. In addition, the high number of negative gains on some of the questions indicated that wording of those questions may need to be re-addressed. Thus, possible adjustments to the evaluation tool, making it easier for seventh grade students to understand and comprehend, could lead to changes in the data and analyzation of the data collected.

Another limitation was time. The time allowed for the study was limited as classes have to cover their own standards, and many teachers are unwilling or unable to sacrifice class time for additional instruction. If altered, the study could have been spread throughout the entire school year, allowing for more reinforcement of the curriculum and more time for students to practice the skills being taught. This would also allow for additional collection of qualitative data for evaluation. The data collected in the current action research study often presented contradictory evidence of the effectiveness of the media literacy curriculum. Increasing the duration of time would allow the results to be interpreted with more confidence.

Lastly, the study may have been limited by the conscious as well as the unconscious actions of the researcher herself. Reflection is a key component in teaching

as well as research, and this reflection process has shed some light on possible limitations of the study. While researcher bias was considered throughout the course of the study, this potential bias was not fully addressed in the planning of the curriculum. This research study not only revealed interesting baseline findings concerning media literacy, but it also revealed concerns that I need to address as a researcher.

When choosing the media messages to be shared with students, I chose images that more blatantly displayed racial bias and stereotyping. I did this because I was fearful that students this age may not perceive negative undertones in more subtle media messages. It is highly likely that the actual media included within the media literacy curriculum limited the study in various ways. First, these blatant displays may have immediately infringed upon the comfort level of all students, making them hesitant to share their thoughts. In addition, the more diverse students within the class may have been uncomfortable with a White teacher with whom they have had very little interaction delving into such a sensitive topic. Mass media looks to Whites as the dominant population, and as I am White, I have not faced the adversity that the non-dominant populations have and will face in their lives. This divide was not addressed, and it could have resulted in inauthentic student responses. A stronger relationship with the students, built over the duration of time was needed in order to partially eliminate this limitation. In addition, as a researcher, I must find ways in my own life to better relate to obstacles facing the students that I have never nor will ever have to face.

Implications for Research

Previous studies on this topic focused on similar principles, but the data collected were entirely qualitative. In a similar study, Scharrer and Ramasubramanian (2015)

found that a media literacy curriculum assisted in eliminating the influence of mass media on the propagation of racial stereotypes after analyzing the qualitative data collected. In addition, in a separate study, De Abreu (2010) found that a media literacy curriculum led to positive gains in students' critical thinking skills when analyzing a variety of media formats. De Abreu's (2010) study, like the current study, moved away from a protectionist view when approaching media literacy education towards an approach that focuses more on the critical thinking skills of students. Redmond (2015), Mihailidis, and Diggs (2010) all conducted research both with similar age groups as well as in similar environments. Redmond's (2015) studies were conducted in middle schools and focused on the principles that all media was constructed for a purpose, and audiences negotiate the meanings of media.

The results of most of these previous studies were somewhat inconclusive. While the data supported the implementation of a media literacy curriculum, the results were not concrete enough to make broad applications. Instead, each research study called for additional research to more strongly support the claims. However, the theories in place suggest that a media literacy curriculum initiates positive change in students' ability to critically analyze information presented through mass media. This critical analysis allows students to better negotiate mass media and determine when potential prejudices such as racial bias and stereotyping are present. In this sense, the current study does not offer any additional noteworthy qualitative results, and the results of the current study can be recognized and found to be relatable to the results of previous research studies on this topic. In addition, the current study does not suggest any new theory, but can be explained by previous theories provided by researchers of media literacy.

One way in which the results of the current study offers a different approach to the evaluation of a media literacy curriculum is through the quantitative data collected. While the data offers some contradictions, statistical evidence rejecting the null hypothesis and validating the effectiveness of the media literacy curriculum was present, paving the way for future studies to be conducted in order to improve upon these gains. One possible explanation for the unclear results both within the quantitative data as well as the quantitative data may have been the time frame allotted for the media literacy curriculum. Increased time could have allowed for a stronger relationship between the researcher and the students, and it could have helped eliminate the restrictions of social identity on the responses of the students. The sample used was a convenience sample consisting of an intact class. In order to conduct the lessons, the researcher worked around the classroom teacher's schedule of lessons, sometimes having to do lessons back to back while allowing large gaps of time between the other lessons. One possible solution is expanding the curriculum to be conducted throughout the entire school year at regular intervals potentially leading to more clarity in the data collected, and, thus, the results of that data.

When conducting research on a topic such as racial bias and stereotyping, the researchers own race and lack of experiences in confronting racial issues should be considered. Diversity and inclusion is of profound importance to me as a media specialist and a researcher, but that does not immediately eliminate possible bias, nor does it eliminate the fear that minority groups may have of Whites. These issues must be considered and addressed in future research.

Further investigation into the current action research study would doubtfully lead to any additional, more conclusive data; however, the results gathered indicate that additional research is needed to more accurately gauge the effects of a media literacy curriculum. It is definite that the strategies employed, media chosen, as well as the data collections tool for the quantitative portion of the study should be re-assessed to better address the learning levels and needs of middle school students. This could result in changes to the outcome of the data analysis. The theory driving further research should still be the idea that a middle school media literacy curriculum focused on identifying racial bias and stereotyping in the mass media, implemented while students' beliefs and perceptions are still malleable could lead to life-long improvements.

Middle School students tend to look at the results on evaluations as being of the utmost importance. Before conducting the action research study, the students were made aware that there were no right or wrong answers in this study, and that no negative consequences would result from their participation in the research study. After the completion of the study, the student participants were asked to write an entry in their journals describing in their own words how they felt about the media literacy lessons. The data for the research study had already been collected for analyzation, and this new entry was simply a way of allowing the students to reflect on the curriculum.

These reflection pieces will be used to involve the students in necessary adjustments to the media literacy curriculum before further studies are conducted. Students were asked to reflect upon the lessons taught both in content and structure as well as the evaluation tool used in data collection. The student reflections give the researcher key insights into the understanding of the student participants in order to make

any needed changes to make the curriculum and evaluation tool easier to understand for the students.

Implications for Practice

Teachers working in the school where the action research study took place were hesitant to be involved with a study that did not offer concrete results. This is one of the reasons why a method for collecting quantitative data was included in the research study. The stakeholders who stand to benefit from a successful media literacy curriculum are inclusive of the educational community at large. While reflection with the student participants was conducted and will continue in order to craft a better curriculum as well as better evaluation tools, the current research results will be shared with teachers within the school in order to consider the implications for future studies as well as changes within teachers own curriculum that would allow aspects of the media literacy curriculum to be included in all subject areas. While the researcher needs to continue to conduct research studies, one aspect could be the inclusion of all teachers in the implementation of this curriculum. Reflecting with the teachers will offer insight into how the curriculum could be adapted to meet the broader needs of the school as well as the individual classroom teachers. This research study focused on students' specific ability to recognize racial bias and stereotyping in mass media; however, in order to gain this ability, students have to put their critical thinking skills to work. This ability to think critically and analyze the information with which they are presented would be beneficial for all students. Working with and including other teachers with more diverse backgrounds would be beneficial in gaining the trust and increasing the comfort of all students. In

addition, these teachers could help assess the curriculum and assist in selecting the most appropriate mass media examples for their students.

This initial action research study was conducted on a small scale, and it yielded interesting results that may or may not be duplicated in future studies. Expanding the sample size for a future study might yield more broadly applicable results. Expanding future studies to include classroom teachers of all participants would not only give a plethora of valuable data, but it would also create an environment in which the teachers are all invested and interested in the results of the study with the expectation to be that the media literacy curriculum demonstrates positive gains not only in the students' ability to recognize racial stereotyping and bias, but in an overall improvement in their ability to critically analyze media messages presented to them in all formats.

Conclusion

Although the data analyzation of this action research study did not produce results that fully support the success of a media literacy curriculum, there was evidence of students being sensitized to the racial bias and stereotyping in mass media. In addition, the data collected from the study, particularly the qualitative data, demonstrated a clear need for an effective media literacy curriculum. Like any good teacher, when attempting something new, it is necessary to reflect at the conclusion in order to discern what went well as well as what changes needed to be made before attempting this method a second time. An action research study takes this "attempt of something new" to a scientific level, but the need for reflection and adjustment is still the key to success in the future.

This action research study offers a foundation for this researcher as well as others who are interested in creating a more media literate youth. For future researchers, this

study gives a map of some things to include along with clear ways in which the choices of the researcher may have led to extensive limitations of the study. The quantitative data did offer proof of positive gains, but the qualitative themes and patterns that developed demonstrated that further study is needed. Other researchers should use the results of this research study to develop their own curriculum for implementation in order to improve the critical thinking skills of their students. Students exposure to constructed media messages in all formats has increased exponentially in the last decade, yet no clear curriculum has been developed that will address the skills students need to navigate this media effectively. The results of this action research study allow for a more critical examination of the curriculum implemented in order to more fully develop and impactful media literacy curriculum that will leave a lasting and beneficial imprint on the student participants.

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APPENDIX A: PRETEST/POSTTEST

Media Literacy Curriculum
Pretest/Posttest

1. Look at each type of mass media below and select on the scale how much the type of media influences your thinking.

Television News
Always   Often   Sometimes   Seldom   Never

Print Advertisements
Always   Often   Sometimes   Seldom   Never

Social Media
Always   Often   Sometimes   Seldom   Never

Television Commercials
Always   Often   Sometimes   Seldom   Never

Movies
Always   Often   Sometimes   Seldom   Never

Television Shows
Always   Often   Sometimes   Seldom   Never

2. Choose a response to the following statement. News always presents reputable coverage.

Always   Often   Sometimes   Seldom   Never

3. Choose a response to the following statement. I am exposed to racial stereotyping or prejudice in the media daily.

Always   Often   Sometimes   Seldom   Never

View the advertisement above to answer the following questions.
4. Respond to the following statement using the scale below. Racial bias or stereotyping is present in the advertisement.

Strongly Agree   Agree   No opinion   Disagree   Strongly Disagree

5. How often would you buy products represented in advertisements such as this one?

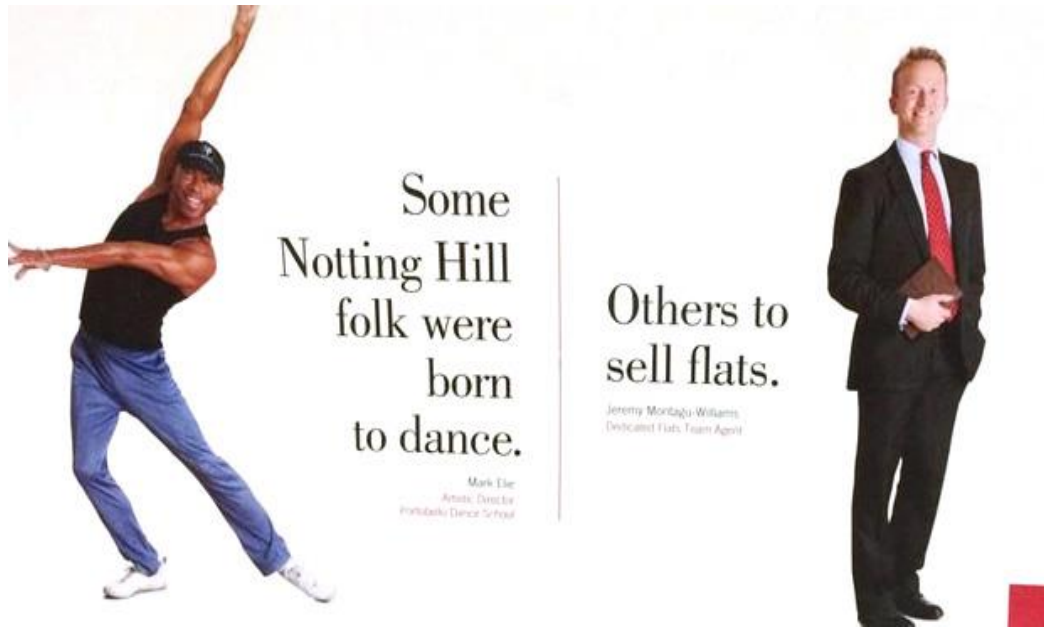Always   Often   Sometimes   Seldom   Never

View the advertisement above to answer the following questions.
6. Respond to the following statement using the scale below. Racial bias or stereotyping is present in the advertisement above.

Strongly Agree   Agree   No opinion   Disagree   Strongly
Disagree

7. Respond to the following statement using the scale below. The character in the
image is most likely a criminal.
Strongly Agree   Agree   No opinion   Disagree   Strongly
Disagree

Some
Notting Hill
folk were
born
to dance.

Mark Elie
Artistic Director
Portobello Dance School

Others to
sell flats.

Jeremy Montagu-Williams
Dedicated Flats Team Agent

View the advertisement above to answer the next question.
8. Respond to the following statement using the scale below. Racial bias or
stereotyping is present in the advertisement above.
Strongly Agree   Agree   No opinion   Disagree   Strongly
Disagree

9. Respond to the following statement using the scale below. I create and share
media on a daily basis.
Strongly Agree   Agree   No opinion   Disagree   Strongly
Disagree

10. Respond to the following statement using the scale below. The media I
create does not have an impact on the lives of others.
Strongly Agree   Agree   No opinion   Disagree   Strongly
Disagree

APPENDIX B: MEDIA LITERACY CURRICULUM

Day 1 - Introduction

1. Discuss the purpose of the Media Literacy Curriculum.

2. Distribute the consent letter.

Day 2 - Commercials

1. Collect the consent letters.

2. Administer the Media Literacy Pretest.

3. Introduce the core concepts of Media Literacy as developed by the Center for

   Media Literacy.

   - All media messages are constructed.

   - Media messages are constructed using a creative language with its own

     rules.

   - Different people experience the same media message differently.

   - Media have embedded values and points of view.

   - Most media messages are organized to gain profit and/or power.

4. Show KFC commercials that demonstrate racial stereotyping and ask the

   following questions.

   - Who created the message?

   - Are techniques used to attract my attention? What are they?

   - How might different people interpret these clips differently

- What lifestyles are included/omitted from these messages?

- What is the purpose of this message?

5. Show controversial Cheerios commercial.

- Why was this commercial controversial?

Day 3 – News Media

1. Discuss the meaning of a "constructed" message.

2. Show the black people "loot" and white people "find" news articles.

- What is the constructed messages behind these 2 articles?

- What is the purpose of this message?

- How might this message be interpreted differently by different people?

- What are the embedded messages?

- Does profit or power play a part in this message?

3. Show clip of D.L. Hugley Fox News interview.

- Are there techniques used to catch your attention in this interview?

- Who created this message?

- What is the purpose of this interview?

- How might different people interpret this news interview differently?

- What are the embedded messages found in this interview?

- Does profit or power play a part in this message?

4. Discuss the meaning behind terms such as "experts say" and "research suggests."

Do terms such as these make the information believable?

Day 4 - Movies

1. Discuss and define stereotyping and prejudice.

- Have students been exposed to or experienced either of these?

2. Show clip of *Birth of a Nation.*

   - What messages are embedded?

   - This movie was made during a very racist period in US History. Do messages similar to those expressed in this film still exist today? How might different people have different answers to this question?

3. Show movie clip of Disney's *Aladdin* (Arabian Nights portion) and discuss the initial thoughts of students.

   - Who created this message?

   - How might this message be interpreted differently by different people?

   - What is the purpose of this message?

   - What messages are embedded?

Day 5 – Print advertisements

1. Show Nivea "Re-civilized" advertisement and the Playstation portable white advertisement.

   - What lifestyles are included in these advertisements?

   - What embedded messages are included?

   - What are the techniques used to grab attention?

   - What is the purpose of these messages?

   - Does profit or power play a role in this media message?

2. Distribute magazines to students and allow 5-10 minutes for them to find advertisements they feel demonstrate racial stereotyping or prejudice.

- Share and discuss with class focusing on the core concepts of media literacy.

Day 6 – Social Media

1. Show social media examples – Justine Sacco tweet about Africa and Blake Shelton tweet.

   - Discuss the points of view demonstrated by these tweets.

   - What embedded stereotypes are being promoted?

   - What lifestyles are included/omitted?

   - Who created the message?

   - What is the purpose of the message?

2. Homework – Students are to bring examples from social media, news media, or print advertisements that contain what they feel is racial stereotyping or prejudice.

Day 7 – Student Contributions

1. Have students share their examples and discuss racial stereotypes and prejudice within the examples.

   - Who created the media?

   - How might different people interpret the media differently?

   - What lifestyles are included or omitted?

   - Are techniques used to attract my attention?

   - What is the purpose of the message?

2. Have students complete the posttest.

APPENDIX C: SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What do you consider to be media?

2. What is your definition of bias and stereotyping?

3. How often do you feel you are exposed to bias or stereotyping?

4. Have you ever been offended by something you have seen in the media?

5. Do you feel that some people are more sensitive to the bias that exists within mass media? Why?

6. What types of media do you produce? Do you consider how your creation will affect others?

APPENDIX D: STUDENT CONSENT LETTER

I am a researcher from the University of South Carolina. I am working on a study about Media Literacy and I would like your help. I am interested in learning more about how you interpret messages provided by mass media. Your parent/guardian has already said it is okay for you to be in the study, but it is up to you.

If you want to be in the study, you will be asked to do the following:
- Answer some written questions about messages presented by mass media. This will occur during one of your classes and will only take a few minutes.
- You will also participate in lessons presented throughout the semester concerning media literacy.

Any information you share with us will be private. No one except me will know what your answers to the questions will be.

You don't have to help with this study. Being in the study isn't related to your regular class work and won't help or hurt your grades. You can also drop out of the study at any time, for any reason, and you won't be in any trouble and no one will be mad at you. Please ask any questions you would like to.

Signing your name below means you have read the information about the study (or it has been read to you), that any questions you may have had have been answered, and you have decided to be in the study. You can still stop being in the study any time you want to.

_____   _____
Printed Name of Minor   Grade

_____   _____
Signature of Minor   Date

APPENDIX E: PARENT/GUARDIAN CONSENT LETTER

Dear Parent or Guardian,

This semester your student will be involved in a doctoral research study conducted by the Media Specialist at Berkeley Middle School. This study is non-invasive, and no personal information about your student will shared in the study.

The aim of the study is to determine the effectiveness of a media literacy curriculum on a student's ability to recognize racial bias and stereotyping within mass media. The curriculum being implemented meets school and district guidelines, and is typical of what would be taught by a school media specialist. The study will have no impact on your student's grade within the course.

If you would like more information concerning this study, or if you do not want your student participating in the study, please contact the researcher, Amy Savage, using the information provided below.

Thank you for your time,

Amy Savage
Media Specialist
Savagea@bcsdschools.net
843.899.8840

APPENDIX F: PRESET CODES

Preset Codes used for Coding Qualitative Research Data

Bias
Stereotype
Social Media
Facebook post
Snapchat
Movie
Television Show
Race
Skin Color
Criminals
Advertisement
Offensive
Sensitivity