A Conceptual Framework for Positive Black Female Identity Formation

KALA BURRELL CRAFT*
University of Maryland Eastern Shore

PETRA ROBINSON
Louisiana State University

AYANA ALLEN-HANDY
Drexel University

Educating Black females about critical media literacy is a fundamental responsibility that should be shared by all who are concerned with the ways in which Black females navigate the world, especially because of the media's pervasiveness. We proposed a conceptual framework for equipping Black females with the necessary critical media literacy (CML) skills to recognize, decode, and deconstruct successfully the negative media messaging to develop a positive Black female identity. Utilizing the Critical Literacies Advancement Model (CLAM) as a foundation, we argued that critical theory can help in terms of developing various critical, nontraditional literacies and to advance and promote positive Black female identity. Supported by the CLAM, we built our conceptual framework using Black feminist theory, critical media literacy, and critical consciousness to outline a clear argument for developing CML skills and critical consciousness to disrupt the perpetual cycle of subjugation of Black female identity.

Keywords: Black feminist theory, critical media literacy, identity development

Introduction
"We realize that the only people who care enough about us to work consistently for our liberation are us" (The Combahee River Collective Statement, 1977).

A positive identity is essential for Black women and girls. Identity is expressed as one's sense of personhood and it is an indistinguishable part of who one is as a person; it addresses how people define themselves and how they represent their culture, experiences, interests, relationships, values, and so much more. Black females have historically and contemporarily been viewed as "the Other" (hooks, 1992, p. 95) in society. Collins (2009) suggested that Black females subconsciously take on the persona of the "status as outsiders" that becomes the point from which other groups define their normality (p. 77). Schools and media, as "purveyors of sociocultural knowledge" (Brown, 2012, p. 28), act as socializing agents for girls in that they often communicate, replicate, and reproduce the norms of dominant society (Giroux, 1983). In

fact, in the 21ˢᵗ century, media in its multiple forms remain highly effective in reproducing and reinforcing Black females' undervalued and oppressed status. Further, from an early age, females are subjected to outdated gender norms and confusing identity models.

Admittedly, racial identity has been studied among Black people for a long time and the literature well documents that racial identity development is extraordinarily complex. Several Black identity scholars (e.g., Cross et al., 1998; DuBois, 1903) suggest that Black people are often forced to develop multiple selves. We argue, consequently, that it is necessary to reflect further on identity as essential to Black females' health and well-being, especially within the context of the pressure that Black women face to assimilate to mainstream hegemonic standards (Robinson & Barbel, 2020). This is particularly useful as we consider the relationship between racial identity and self-image and the role the media plays in those perceptions. Further, Black female identity development in the context of critical media literacy (CML) and other critical frameworks is an understudied area, albeit with significant implications both regarding contributions to the scientific literature and regarding everyday practice.

The purpose of this article, which the Critical Literacies Advancement Model (CLAM) foregrounds, is to share and advocate for a conceptual framework that engages Black feminist theory (BFT), CML, and critical consciousness in helping to shape and develop positive Black female identity formation. Miles and Huberman (1994) defined a conceptual framework as a visual or written product, one that, "explains, either graphically or in narrative form, the main things to be studied—the key factors, concepts, or variables—and the presumed relationships among them" (p. 18). This article seeks to contextualize the importance of CML as a tool for positive identity development for Black females. Based on our argument that critical theory can help advance and promote critical literacies, we ground our conceptual framework using BFT, the concept of CML, and critical consciousness to present a clear argument for developing critical media skills and critical consciousness to break the perpetual cycle of subjugation of Black female identity. These frameworks are essential to develop a broad understanding of the unique identity development experiences of Black women and girls.

To structure this article, we first present the need for a conceptualized framework for positive Black female identity formation followed by a discussion of identity literacy. Next, we present the CLAM (Robinson, 2020) and discuss how it serves as the foundation for advancing and promoting critical literacies, which include CML. Next, we discuss Black feminist thought and the role CML and critical consciousness serve in identity formation. Through this discussion, we present our conceptual framework to guide our understanding of how the media portrays Black females. We present a clear argument for developing critical media skills and critical consciousness to disrupt dominant narratives that subjugate Black females as it relates to their identity. We conclude the article with a discussion of the implications for key stakeholders who are concerned with the overall condition of Black females.

Identity Development

To best understand identity, it is important to consider that identity formation and development are multifaceted negotiation processes that ask questions regarding one's present, past, and future (Melucci, 1996). These formation processes begin at birth, peak during adolescence, and continue throughout adulthood, allowing individuals to negotiate fully the multiple aspects of their identities (Arnett, 2006; Mitchell, 1992) as they seek information and knowledge and navigate the world. Note that there are added layers to the identity process for Black women. Identities are social, rather than biological or individual constructs thereby

underscoring the importance of understanding, celebrating, and deconstructing the intersection of being young, Black, and female as a unique identity, which variables such as popular media constantly shape and influence. Literacy is the key to advance identity work. Navigating a media-rich world is challenging and requires a complex understanding of literacy (e.g., Livingstone, 2004) that identifies it not only as a set of skills through which information is processed through reading and writing but also as it refers to one's competence or knowledge in a specified area and relates to one's evolving sense of identity. The very process of becoming identity literate requires one to construct, reinvent, and perform continuously new identities. Burrell-Craft (2021) defined identity literacy as the process through which one can identify, understand, and apply the knowledge of intersecting dimensions of identity to daily tasks and interactions with people and processes that help to understand oneself and each other. Burrell-Craft (2021) also stated that increasing identity literacy could help in the efforts to promote equity and social justice.

Identities are not merely individual constructs—they are social in nature and are often tied to group membership such as race, social class, and gender. Thus, teaching Black females about CML is a fundamental responsibility that should be shared by educators and other stakeholders who are concerned with the ways in which Black females navigate the world and with their best interests overall. Having a conceptualized framework that promotes positive identity formation in Black females is crucial to empowering Black girls and women in this highly media-driven society. Brown et al. (1991) recognized that inadequate attention has been given to Black females and their self-concept and self-empowerment in the field of media studies. Having a tool such as this framework is one way that Black females can empower themselves and counter the negative images and narratives that they see in the media.

The Critical Literacies Advancement Model (CLAM)

To foreground our discussion of promoting positive identity development for Black females, we center critical theory as a foundation upon which critical literacy skills can be developed, as is presented in the CLAM (Robinson, 2020). At the foundational level of the model, critical theory grounds the work as we consider how it addresses, "marginalization, oppression, and systematic inequities in society" (Robinson, 2020, p. 1). Similar to Robinson (2020), we argue that critical literacy serves as a practical application of critical theory and while there are various models related to critical literacy, the CLAM illustrates how it pushes the advancement of critical literacies beyond the traditional conceptions of literacy. This is particularly relevant to our discussion on how Black female identity development is interconnected to broad understandings and conceptualizations of literacy.

Further, the model describes the interconnectedness of various critical literacies that are essential for contemporary life in this globalized, technology-focused, media-saturated society. This is significant because it can contextualize specific goals for addressing societal problems that can be entrenched in systems and institutions promoting hidden agendas of oppression. This has real implications for understanding and conceptualizing Black female identity because messages are often received through formal and informal ways of learning, such as through the media, which can become deeply entrenched in Black girls' psyches, thus perpetuating negative perceptions about self and identity (Allen, 2016). Moreover, understanding the media's role in Black female identity development requires critical thought that rejects monolithic understandings and embraces the multiple identities and positionalities within this group.

Using the CLAM (Robinson, 2020) as a framework seeks to expand a Black female's knowledge of identity regarding its development and its intersectionalities. Intersectionality acknowledges the unique experiences of individuals who are members of multiple minoritized socially and culturally constructed categories (Crenshaw, 1994) and is often used to examine how individuals' multiple identities interact and relate to societal inequities and social injustice (Reimers & Stabb, 2015). Therefore, we propose that through critical literacy and more specifically, identity literacy, Black females can become critical thinkers who are more equipped and informed to promote self-efficacy, stronger self-concept, self-esteem, and self-empowerment. This also has implications for how people see each other and even parent their daughters. Being able to identify, negate, and replace negative imagery from popular media is one powerful skill that girls and Black women to appreciate confidently their authentic selves while viewing themselves through a positive lens. This can enhance their relationships and sisterhood while also having long-term implications for other relationships. This can help move the needle from the notion of "I am my sister's keeper" to "I am my sister."

Considering the CLAM as a Framework for Positive Identity Development

Based on this critical stance, the CLAM (Robinson, 2020) is useful to this conceptual framework because it highlights the importance of critical theory, critical thinking, and developing critical literacy skills such as CML and identity literacy to help advance or promote informed decision making, as well as behaviors and actions that can ultimately lead to positive social change, such as promoting equity and social justice, and in this instance, more specifically, the development of positive Black female identity. As the model suggests, the development of one set of nontraditional critical literacies has direct implications for other literacies and skills, such as critical thinking, to include those related to social identity markers that include race and gender.

The CLAM (Robinson, 2020) is useful as an "analytical tool and organizing device" to challenge and critique social issues such as colorism and skin bleaching among Black women (Robinson & Barbel, 2020, p. 327) because it is grounded in a critical sociocultural perspective. Additionally, in discussing the effect of colorism, Robinson and Barbel (2020) illustrated how colorism among Black women is promoted by, "colorist messages in advertising editorial content, and widely by popular, mass, and social media" (p. 331). As such, we use the CLAM to show how critical nontraditional literacy skills can be developed toward the goal of informed behaviors and actions, especially as it relates to how Black women perceive themselves in light of the negative ways in which the media portrays them.

Figure 1. *The Critical Literacies Advancement Model* from "The Critical Literacies Advancement Model (CLAM): A framework for promoting positive social change" by P. A. Robinson, 2020. Reprinted with permission.
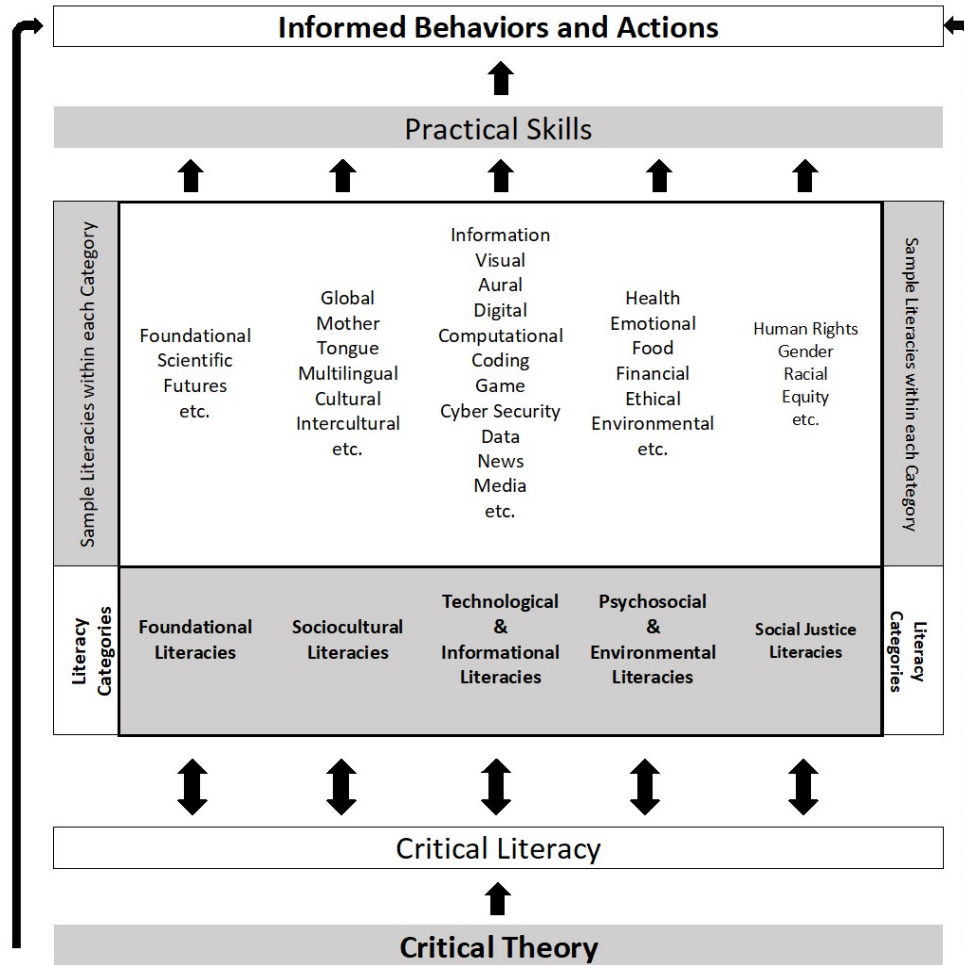
As Robinson (2020) pointed out, "the CLAM is a useful framework for organizing a critique of societal problems which affect people in a variety of ways, as described in the model in terms of a variety of literacies" (p. 2). Its applicability for this conceptualization is based on the relevance of developing CML and other forms of critical thinking skills to facilitate a positive Black female identity.

Essentially, the graphic indicates, the model is built on the core of critical theory, which we and Robinson (2020; 2021) argue can help lead to develop critical literacy. In the model, it is evident that critical literacy skills are essential to develop a wide variety of critical literacies, which are organized into distinct categories such as foundational, technological, sociocultural literacies, and so on. Further, the bidirectional arrows speak to how the development of critical literacy skills in one area can advance overall critical literacy, and they speak to the idea that developing critical literacy skills in one area can also lead to the development of additional critical literacy skills in other areas. Importantly, the CLAM focuses on the premise that through practical critical literacy skill development, individuals can have more informed decision-making and actions, which can ultimately lead to positive social change.

Black Feminist Theory (BFT)

BFT (Collins, 2009) is a critical social theory rooted in Afro-centric philosophy, feminist standpoint theory, sociocultural theory, and critical race theory, as well as in postmodernism and the sociology of knowledge. Others may record BFT, but Black women produce it (Collins, 1986). Through BFT, Black females situate their experience and understanding of their position (as Black females) in relation to racism, classism, and sexism.

BFT's goal is the realization of justice and empowerment for Black women and other groups that are similarly oppressed within society (Collins, 2009). For Black girls, much of their experience regarding gender identity development stems from the lack of congruency between their physical characteristics and the dominant standards of femininity and beauty in the United States (Cauce et al., 1996; Ward, 1990). This is problematic and causes problems such as cognitive dissonance and can manifest in issues such as skin bleaching (Robinson, 2011; Robinson & Alfred, 2013) and negative ideas about the self and notions of beauty and attractiveness.

BFT is a useful lens through which Black females can view and analyze these negative depictions of themselves as represented in the media. BFT provides a critical stance that can leverage the unique knowledge that Black females already possess and provide them with the opportunity to develop critical media literacy skills. "Critical Black female spectatorship emerges as a site of resistance only when individual women actively resist the imposition of dominant ways of looking and knowing" (hooks, 1992, p. 128). BFT centers on the idea of women's emerging power as agents of knowledge and highlighting BFT's insistence that both the changed consciousness of individuals and the social transformation of political and economic institutions constitute essential ingredients for social change.

Black Girls' Literacies Collective (BGLC)

The Black Girls' Literacies Collective (BGLC) is a group of Black women literacy scholars who support, uphold, and advance the literacies and well-being of Black women and girls. The BGLC is a space for resistance and a site for possibility in literacy research, theory, and practice (Muhammad & Haddix, 2016). Much like the BGLC, we, Black women scholars, are committed to bring to the forefront research and practice that call out and work against educational harm toward Black women and girls, while simultaneously promoting social change. A Black womanist lens,

> informs our understanding of collectivity and why we bring people together to think collectively about issues of marginalization in literacy research that disproportionately affect Black women and girls. As we create spaces that honor the inclusion of identities and perspectives that represent the full spectrum of Black girlhood and womanhood, we draw upon ways of knowing that are steeped in an intersectional framing to make sure we account for the multiple ways of being a Black girl or woman in a variety of contexts. (Black Girls' Literacies Collective, 2018)

Through the lens of BFT and following the rich traditions of Black women's literacy societies, we argue that CML skills can be developed to help empower Black females and to guide their meaning-making processes and their consciousness as they relate to their identity.

Critical Media Literacy (CML)

CML is an educational response that expands the traditional conceptions of literacy to include a reflective and reflexive critique of popular culture, new technologies, and various forms of communication. More specifically, it allows to analyze critically the relationships among media, audiences, information, and power. CML addresses issues of class, race, gender,

sexuality, and power and, questions how forms of media construct, reproduce, and give meaning to the ways in which power, privilege, and hierarchies based on social differences operate within U.S. culture (Kellner, 1998). We posit that these notions are applicable for consideration beyond the borders of the United States especially because these media messages are not confined either by geographical borders or confined to be studied by any singular academic discipline.

As scholars in various fields such as communication, sociology, and education have illustrated, popular culture and media often portray Black females in a negative light. Black females are seen as receiving little to no respect through a discourse of demonization, stereotypes, and objectification (Giroux, 2015). Robinson (2015), executive director of ColorofChange.org, warns that constant exposure to unbalanced and distorted portrayals of Black people will result in implicit bias. Walton's (2013) Images of Black Women in Media study displayed that some of the most frequent images used to depict Black females were gold diggers, modern Jezebels, baby mamas, ratchet women, mean girls, and angry Black women, to name a few. Patterns in portrayals of Black people in the media can (a) promote antagonism toward the Black community, (b) promote exaggerated views of Black people related to criminality and violence, and (c) reduce attention to structural and other big-picture factors that affect the Black community, such as racial inequalities (Media Representations and Impact, 2012).

CML serves as a tool that supports the deconstruction and rejection of inaccurate images, personas, and caricature representations of Black females. In defining CML, Baker-Bell et al. (2017) stated that it referred to "the educational process that makes young people aware of the role that media play, both positively and problematically, in shaping social theory" (p. 139). Kellner and Share (2007) argued that it effectively "promotes the production of alternative counterhegemonic media" (p. 4). They stated that CML could be tools for empowerment for people who have been marginalized and/or misrepresented in mainstream media. Through CML, Black females can learn how to intelligently consume and produce their own forms of media (Jacobs, 2016; Kellner, 1998; Kellner & Share, 2007; Morrell et al., 2013). Equipping Black females with the CML tools to consume and produce their own forms of media empowers them with the opportunity to create and share "competing narratives" of their experiences and perspectives that depart from those of the dominant culture (Morrell et al., 2013, p. 17). It follows that developing these CML skills can effectively support the development of a positive Black female identity.

Critical Consciousness

Critical consciousness draws on Freire's (2000) theory of "*conscientiazação*" (p. 35), which holds that critical consciousness development involves a growing awareness and analysis of the power relations that exist within social relationships and societal structures (Jacobs, 2016). Critical consciousness (Freire, 1970, 1973) is an in-depth awareness of and ability to perceive social oppression, including sociopolitical and economic oppression. It includes several components, including "social group identification, discontent with the distribution of social power, rejection of social system legitimacy, and a collective action orientation" (Kelso et al., 2014, p. 1237). Additionally aligned with Collins's (2009) theory of "Black woman standpoint" (p. 29), our perspective of consciousness highlights how Black females in the United States learn to develop a particular way of seeing the world as a result of their interlocking oppressive identities (Allen, 2016). Going beyond being able to identify Black female interlocking oppressions, critical consciousness is the stage of thinking where Black females begin to think

more critically about their circumstances and develop a keen awareness and intellectual analysis that can lead to social transformation. As Robinson et al. (2021) highlighted,

> The Freirean notion of critical consciousness involves both reflection and action, which occurs through the development or transitioning through various stages of consciousness. In the first stage of *semi-intransitive consciousness,* individuals are unable to recognize existing structural barriers, attributes, and outcomes to supernatural forces or to their own personal shortcomings. The second stage of *naïve consciousness* is when an individual begins to reflect on one's own problems and on those in society but oversimplifies them both. The final stage of *critical consciousness* is when individuals reach an in-depth understanding of the ways in which social, political, and economic oppressions and history of these oppressions operate to affect individuals and society. Furthermore, at this stage individuals take action against the oppressive elements of society (transformation). (p. 82)

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

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

Expanding social consciousness to include CML analysis is a powerful yet potentially transformative tool that would aid in developing a positive Black female identity. Combining Freire's work on critical consciousness with Collins's (2009) "Black woman standpoint" of critical consciousness allows us to adequately further explore, express, and critique the stages of interlocking oppressions that Black females experience at various stages in their lives that shape their identity.

Critical Media Literacy and Black Female Identity

CML, as described in this article, is an important technological and informational literacy that, as a set of practical skills, can lead to informed behaviors and actions leading to positive social change (Robinson et al., 2021). These skills can be developed to support Black females with the necessary tools to build a positive identity. It is a tool that can be used to disrupt the dominant narratives in the media, particularly the social constructions of beauty as they relate to hair texture and skin color. Hair texture and skin color are two contentious aesthetic characteristics related to Black females' identity and are often associated with notions of beauty in media. Despite the longevity and pervasiveness of colorism in the United States, little is known about how messages regarding beauty, skin color, and hair factor into socialization messages about race (Brown et al., 2016; Lesane-Brown et al., 2008; Stevenson et al., 2002). Further, only a small amount of research has addressed types of racial socialization messages that are specifically conveyed to Black girls and young women regarding the meaning and importance of their skin color and hair (i.e., colorism; Leonard, 2009). Hair texture and skin color are not the only characteristics related to Black female identity, but they do help provide a context, purpose, and critique for the disruption of dominant narratives in media.

A conceptual framework is needed to attend to the deeper emotional, psychological, and philosophical issues that have been traditionally ignored in discussions centered on Black female identity development and the skills females need to recognize and navigate them. Uncritical

consumption of media, its imaging, and narratives about Black people can have a negative effect on Black youths' self-esteem and cognitive development (Tan & Tan, 1979) and can lead to serious social and psychological problems (Nightingale, 1993). Because we agree that critical theory is effective as a foundational lens upon which we situate our work, BFT, critical media literacy, and critical consciousness as a blended approach provide a useful starting point for critiquing and theorizing the ways in which Black females' identities shaped and narrated in public discourse and through the media. CML can provide a useful set of skills that can be developed to support Black females with the necessary tools to build and shape a positive understanding of their identity. We have situated our discussion on the ways in which media and social constructions of beauty, such as skin tone and hair texture, can shape the identity development of Black females to develop a conceptual framework for the ways in which CML can lead to the process of critical consciousness and ultimately positive identity construction.

A Conceptual Framework for Positive Black Female Identity Formation is a framework that represents a cultural-ecological perspective of Black female identity formation (Ogbu, 1981). This framework takes hold of Black females' intersectional identities of race, class, gender, and sexuality (Collins & Bilge, 2018) in tandem with the imperative of critical consciousness development. As a tool, CML supports the deconstruction and rejection of inaccurate images, personas, and caricature representations of Black females. Via this perspective, Black females can interrogate negative messages and inaccurate portrayals of Black females in the media through CML by serving as a filtering mechanism that can be utilized to examine media and reconceptualize and reframe the Black female narrative. Robinson et al. (2021) stated,

> Critical media literacy serves as that conduit by which Black females can be ever aware of how to best 1) **decode**, 2) **analyze**, and 3) **deconstruct** the negative and unfruitful messages perpetuated through media outlets. Thereafter, Black females can utilize the skills and mindsets developed through critical media literacy to a) **reject** and negate inaccurate, racist, and sexist portraits of Black females including negative narratives of skin tone and hair bias, b) **replace** the negative and stereotypical images and representations with opposing viewpoints and positive representations of Black females including celebrating the hybridity of skin tones and hair textures amongst Black females, [and] c) **reframe** and redefine positive images and definitions of Black girl/womanhood as it relates to her intersecting identities. (p. 85)

As Black females sharpen their CML skills, they progress to higher levels of critical consciousness from semi-intransitive to naïve, and to a place of true, transformative critical consciousness. At this transformative stage, Black female identity can be positively constructed and developed, resulting in stronger self-concept, self-esteem, and self-empowerment.

Healing and self-empowerment are necessary and important in this time when Black females are feeling wounded, weary, and dispirited by the ubiquitous assault against Black bodies and a burgeoning media culture that works to stigmatize, criminalize, demonize, and objectify them (Baker-Bellet et al., 2017). This positive Black female identity conceptual framework alone cannot eradicate all negative messages and images that Black females face—relegating them to immunity. However, this framework acknowledges the intersectional complexities that exist in society for Black females, such as negative imagining in the media, sexism, classism, and race; not to mention environmental factors such as home, school, peer influence, parental relationships, and socioeconomic status, that all have a bearing on Black females' identities and provides them with a tool. A tool to heal that, "acknowledges that a

wound exists and helps identify its culprits" and one that transforms by "responding to the wound using a tool that works to transform the conditions that led to the wound (Baker-Bell et al., 2017, p. 139) such as CML skills and a conceptual framework for positive Black female identity formation. Identity literacy and CML skills afford Black females the opportunity to respond and understand across a range of social contexts that are needed when engaging in both formal and informal educational arenas, as well as across a range of media and mediums. CML means having the ability to recognize and respond not just to tensions of individual agency but also to identify the structural forces that social and cultural contexts play across various spaces and time.

Discussion

Critical approaches for problematizing knowledge by means of challenging and dismantling practices of power, domination, privilege, and oppression in the media are essential, albeit limited. In this article, we suggest that because of the traditional hierarchy of knowledge, power, and societal values that popular media and culture promote, Black females require a useful way to conceptualize how they can challenge such structures while developing a positive identity. Therefore, adopting a critical stance and a conceptual framework through a Black feminist lens allows Black females the opportunity to consume, critique, and reject messages from the media and to produce their counternarratives to the negative dominant messages and images constantly portrayed. Equipping females with CML tools will help create positive messaging that will promote self-esteem, boost self-confidence, enhance identity development, and strengthen self-empowering attributes. Positive imaging will validate that *Black girl magic* that dominant society often fails to uplift and embrace. CML can provide a barrier between the many interlocking oppressions that historically and currently exist in Black females' experiences and display to the world the beautiful complexity among this unique group of people.

Understanding identity and its many complexities including its development can help guide Black females to broader and more critical understandings of who they are and who society often tells them who they need to be. Teaching CML skills provides Black females more information about some of the larger intersections of identity to inform and direct better the knowledge of a more critical approach when considering navigating the spaces in which they must enter and navigate the world (Burrell-Craft, 2021). This is particularly relevant when considering the multiple intersections of Black female identity.

An individual's multiple identities do not function independently; they intersect and relate to the overall functioning of the self. Based on these intersections of their identity, Black females may experience the world around them in ways that can influence their behaviors and overall experiences in multiple spaces. The implications of a positive identity formation and critical consciousness, developed through CML, has several implications such as a higher self-esteem, which is the central component of having a positive or strong self-concept, particularly for Black women. Other implications include a sense of self-empowerment and unwavering confidence in oneself. These characteristics have strong implications to affect not only Black female identity but also positively influence home, school, peer influence, parental relationships, and socioeconomic status. Notwithstanding, we acknowledge there is no singularity to the breadth of experiences and identities of Black females, but we offer this conceptual framework as a way to think broadly about an overall picture of how Black women's identities are shaped by media and other dominant messages that can perpetuate stereotypes and the marginalization of this oppressed group. Through adopting this framework, we argue for an equity-based

orientation and approach by considering positionality, critiquing, and rejecting dominant hegemonic practices that can in turn promote agency and positive identity development for Black women.

As Black women sit in these marginalized spaces, they encounter questions related to their legitimacy and worth. Developing critical consciousness through CML has far-reaching implications. Because meaning making and negotiating identity done through a critical lens result in a deeper level of awareness of oppression and other types of injustice, some of which the media and popular culture tend to portray in covert ways, on a global basis, it can assist males in developing a greater understanding of the need for them to support Black women in light of the challenges they face. The presented framework provides a means through which to challenge the ways in which Black females are the subject of and subjected to negative messages and stereotypes promoted in the media. This conceptual framework, as informed by the CLAM (Robinson, 2020) also illustrates how, through CML and critical consciousness, there is a space for informed action and for promoting social change.

Regarding practical application, we propose implementing and adopting the model by way of personal development opportunities that could be offered to young girls and women through schools (health education classes), local community youth groups such as the Boys and Girls Club, or through other social avenues including churches. Additionally, other groups committed to young women's growth and development such as sororities could build curriculum around the model. It would be useful for the model to reach the intended audience to help girls and women develop these useful skills toward a positive view of themselves and their overall identity.

All students will benefit from this framework, but early implementation of the Critical Media Literacy Framework for Positive Black Female Identity is best. As early as preschool, teachers and parents should show, discuss, and promote positive imaging through books, play, and media. This process aligns with Piaget's (1936) view of intellectual growth as a process of adaptation (adjustment) to the world (McLeod, 2018). Teachers can use this time to foster diversity and begin the process of teaching students how to **decode** the messaging they receive in school and in this world.

Just as curricula builds on itself, so does the teaching and implementation of this framework. Once students receive ample practice with decoding and they progress in age and maturity, they can move forward with **analyzing** and **deconstructing** those images and media (Robinson et al., 2021). By fourth or fifth grade, students have learned to *reject* negative imaging and they can begin **replacing** and **reframing** those images with positive ones. Once students reach middle school, they should have repeated and are sustaining the practice of utilizing the framework; young Black girls being the prime benefactor. When this framework is introduced early, students will be more aware of their personal identities as they enter Erikson's (1968) psychosocial stage of identity versus role confusion (McLeod, 2018); therefore, having a lasting, positive effect on their identity formation.

Conclusion

In this article, we have conceptualized a framework for the ways in which positive Black female identity can be constructed through developing CML skills for the development of critical consciousness leading to a stronger self-concept, self-esteem, and self-ideal. Individuals have many social group identities and they experience them simultaneously; they are entangled with each other and define each other in complex ways (Moran, 2018). Although some may be

perceived as fixed such as race, others such as class/socioeconomic status may change. Some identities are within individuals' control to choose and others, such as likability or disability, are not. By having CML skills and a working knowledge or literacy of identity formation, Black females can avoid generalizing and making judgements about themselves and other females that look like them. Instead, they can communicate more effectively with one another, embrace positive self-identities, welcome new perspectives, build relationships, be supportive of other Black females, and have the tools they need to analyze the media and messages they encounter. Through identity literacy of self and others, critical thinkers such as Black females become equipped and informed to promote equity and social justice more effectively for themselves and others who find themselves among the margins both in terms of educational spaces and in general, the world.

Additionally, for Black women, an active resistance to the prejudices and challenges they encounter may relate to positive mental health, through the notion of positive self-concept and self-esteem (Ramseur, 1991). This is important in terms of one's social and cognitive development (Wigfield et al., 2002) and in the overall perceptions that Black females and women will develop in relation to themselves, their agency, efficacy, and self-esteem. Reflecting on the most recent attacks on the Black community, such as the renewed call for social justice after the murders of George Floyd, Amaud Abery, Breonna Taylor, and others, and on the ways in which Black females remain marginalized, attacked, discredited, and targeted through popular media, these conceptualizations are not only timely but also essential when gazing upon activist movements seeking to make a better world for Black women. This is a small, yet impactful contribution with the potential of having long-term implications for those seeking and wanting to support positive social change in terms of equity and social justice.

References

Allen, A. (2016) African American girls and the kaleidoscope of identity: Reflections and refractions of contextual influences and K–12 schools. In P. Larke, G. Webb-Hasn, & J. Young (Eds.), *Cultivating achievement, respect, and empowerment (CARE) for African American girls in prek–12 settings: Implications for access, equity, and achievement* (pp. 257–278). Information Age.

Arnett, J. J. (2006). G. Stanley Hall's adolescence: Brilliance and nonsense. *History of Psychology*, *9*, 186–197.

Baker-Bell, A., Stanbrough, R. J., & Everett, S. (2017). The stories they tell: Mainstream media, pedagogies of healing, and critical media literacy. *English Education*, *49*(2), 130–152.

Black Girls' Literacies Collective. (2018). The Black Girls' Literacies Collective Statement. *Research in the Teaching of English* , *53*(2), 173–175.

Brown, D. L., Blackmon, S., Rosnick, C. B., Griffin-Fennell, F. D., & White-Johnson, R. L. (2016). Initial development of a gendered-racial socialization scale for African American college women. *Sex Roles*, *77*, 178–193. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11199-016-0707-x

Brown, D., & Gary, L. (1991). Religious socialization and educational attainment among African Americans: An empirical assessment. *The Journal of Negro Education, 60*(3), 411–426.

Brown, E. (2012). "It's about race…no, it isn't!" Negotiating race and social class: Youth identities at Anderson School in 2005. In D. T. Slaughter-Defoe, H. C. Stevenson, E. G. Arrington, & D. J. Johnson (Eds.), *Black educational choice: Assessing the private and public alternatives to traditional K–12 public schools* (pp. 28–48). Praeger.

Burrell-Craft, K. (2021). Identity literacy: Relative to understanding people and relevant to functioning in a global society. In P. A. Robinson, K. V. Williams, & M. Stojanovic (Eds.), *Global citizenship for adult education: Advancing critical literacies for equity and social justice* (in press). Routledge.

Cauce, A. M., Hiraga, Y., Graves, D., Gonzales, N., Ryan-Finn, K., & Grove, K. (1996). African American mothers and their adolescent daughters; Closeness conflict, and control. In B. J. Ross Leadbeater, & N. Way (Eds.) *Urban girls: Resisting stereotypes, creating identities* (pp. 100–116). New York University Press.

Clance, P. R., & Imes, S. A. (1978). The imposter phenomenon in high achieving women: Dynamics and therapeutic intervention. *Psychotherapy: Theory, Research & Practice, 15*(3), 241–247. https://www.paulineroseclance.com/pdf/ip_high_achieving_women.pdf.

Collins, P. H. (1986). Learning from the outsider within: The sociological significance of Black feminist thought. *Social Problems, 33*(6), S14– S32. https://academic.oup.com/socpro/article/33/6/s14/1610242.

Collins, P. H. (2009). *Black feminist theory: Knowledge, consciousness, and the politics of empowerment* (2nd ed.). Routledge.

Collins, P. H., & Bilge, S. (2018). *Intersectionality*. Polity Press.

Combahee River Collective. (1977). *The combahee river collective statement*: *Black feminist organizing in the seventies and eighties* (1st ed.). Kitchen Table: Women of Color Press.

Cross, W. E., Jr., Parham, T. A., & Helms, J. E. (1998). Nigrescence revisited: Theory and research. In R. L. Jones (Ed.), *African American identity development: Theory, research, and intervention* (pp. 3–71). Cobb & Henry.

Crenshaw, K. W. (1994). Mapping the margins: Intersectionality, identity politics, and violence against Women of Color. In M. A. Fineman & R. Mykitiuk (Eds.), *The public nature of private violence* (pp. 93–118). Routledge.

Downing, N. E., & Roush, K. L. (1985). From passive acceptance to active commitment: A model of feminist identity development for women. *The Counseling Psychologist, 13*(4), 695–709. https://doi.org/10.1177/0011000085134013

Erikson, E. (1968). Identity: Youth and crisis. New York: W.W. Norton & Company.

Freire, P. (1970). *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. Continuum.

Freire, P. (1973). *Education for critical consciousness*. Continuum.

Freire, P. (2000). *Pedagogy of the oppressed* (30th anniversary ed.). Continuum.

Giroux, H. (2015, May 15). *The fire this time: Black youth and the spectacle of post racial violence.* Truthout. http://www.truth-out.org/news/ item/30907-the-fire-this-time-black-youth-and-the-spectacle-of-post racial-violence

Giroux, H. A. (1983). *Theory and resistance in education: A pedagogy for the opposition.* South Bergin & Garvey.

hooks, b. (1992). *Black looks: Race and representation*. South End.

hooks, b. (2010). *Teaching critical thinking: Practical wisdom*. Routledge.

Jacobs, C. E. (2016). Developing the "oppositional gaze": Using critical media pedagogy and black feminist theory to promote black girls' identity development. *The Journal of Negro Education, 85*(3), 225–238.

Kellner, D. (1998). Multiple literacies and critical pedagogy in a multicultural society. *Educational Theory, 48,* 103–122.

Kellner, D., & Share, J. (2007). Critical media literacy is not an option. In J. W. Hunsinger & J. Nolan (Eds.), *Learning inquiry*. Springer.

Kelso, G. A., Cohen, M. H., Weber, K. M., Dale, S. K., Cruise, R. C., & Brody, L. R. (2014). Critical consciousness, racial and gender discrimination and HIV disease markers in African American women with HIV. *AIDS and Behavior, 18,* 1237–1246.

Lesane-Brown, C. L., Scottham, K. M., Nguyen, H. X., & Sellers, R. M. (2008). *Parent-child racial socialization: A new measure of use with African American adolescents*. [Unpublished manuscript]. University of Michigan.

Livingstone, S. (2004). Media literacy and the challenge of new information and communication technologies. *The Communication Review*, 7(1), 3–14.

Maxwell, J. (2012). Conceptual framework: What do you think is going on? In L. Bickman & D. Rog (Eds.), *Qualitative research design: An interactive approach.* (pp. 39–72). Sage Publications.

McLeod, S. A. (2018, May 3). *Erik Erikson's stages of psychosocial development.* Simply Psychology. https://www.simplypsychology.org/Erik-Erikson.html.

MeLeod, S. A. (2018, June 6). *Jean Piaget's theory of cognitive development.* Simply Psychology. https://www.simplypsychology.org/piaget.html.

Media representations and impact on the lives of Black men and boys. (2011, November 30). *Opportunity Agenda*. http://opportunityagenda.org/literature_review_ media_representations_and_impact_lives_black_men_ and_boys.

Melucci, A. (1996). *The playing self: Person and meaning in the planetary society*. Cambridge University Press.

Miles, M. B., & Huberman, A. M. (1994). *Qualitative data analysis: An expanded sourcebook* (2nd ed.). Sage Publications.

Mitchell, J. J. (1992). *Adolescent struggle for selfhood and identity*. Detselig Enterprises.

Moran, M. (2018) Identity and identity politics: a cultural materialist history. *Historical Materialism 26*(2), 21–45.

Morrell, E., Dueñas, R., Garcia, V., & López, J. (2013). *Critical media pedagogy: Teaching for achievement in city schools.* Teachers College Press.

Muhammad, G. E., & Haddix, M. (2016). Centering Black girls' literacies: A review of literature on the multiple ways of knowing of Black girls. *English Education*, *48*(4), 299–336. http://www.jstor.org/stable/26492572

Nightingale, C. H. (1993). *On the edge: A history of poor Black children and their American dreams.* Basic Books.

Ogbu, J. U. (1981). Origins of human competence: A cultural-ecological perspective. *Child Development, 52*(2), 413–429. https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ251334.

Piaget, J. (1936). Origins of intelligence in the child. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.

Ramseur, H. P. (1991). Psychologically healthy Black adults. In R. L. Jones (Ed.), *Black psychology* (3rd ed., pp. 353–378). Cobb & Henry.

Reimers, F. A., & Stabb, S. D., (2015). Class at the intersection of race and gender: A 15-year content analysis. *The Counseling Psychologist, 43*(6), 794–821.

Robinson, P. A. (2011). *Skin bleaching in Jamaica: A colonial legacy.* [Doctoral dissertation, Texas A&M University]. OAKTrust.

Robinson, P. A. (2020). *The Critical Literacies Advancement Model (CLAM): A framework for promoting positive social change.* Digital Commons. https://digitalcommons.lsu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1000&context=shrewd_pubs

Robinson, P.A., & Alfred, M.V. (2013). Colorism and skin bleaching in Jamaica: Global implications for communities of color and urban classrooms. *National Journal of Urban Education and Practice, 6(*3), 29–40.

Robinson, P.A., Allen-Handy, A., & Burrell-Craft, K. (2021). Critical media literacy and Black female identity construction: A conceptual framework for empowerment, equity, and social justice education. *Journal of Media Literacy Education, 13*(1), 79-91. https://doi.org:10.23860/JMLE-2021-13-1-7

Robinson, P.A., & Barbel, P. A. (2020). Colorism and skin bleaching: Implications for advancing multiple critical literacies for equity and social justice. In K. M. Woodson (Ed.), *Colorism: Investigating a global phenomenon, with implications for research, policy, and practice* (pp. 324–336). Fielding University Press.

Robinson, R. (2015). *Not to be trusted: Dangerous levels of inaccuracy in tv crime reporting in NYC.* Color of Change. https://s3.amazonaws.com/s3.colorofchange.org/images/ColorOfChangeNewsAccuracyReportCardNYC.pdf

Searle Center for Advancing Learning and Teaching (n.d.). *Social identities.* Retrieved from https://www.northwestern.edu/searle/initiatives/diversity-equity-inclusion/social-identities.html

Steele, C. M., & Aronson, J. (1995). Stereotype threat and the intellectual test performance of African Americans. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 69*(5), 797–811. https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/7473032/

Stevenson, H. C., Jr., Cameron, R., Herrero-Taylor, T., & Davis, G. Y. (2002). Development of the Teenager Experience of Racial Socialization scale: Correlates of race-related

socialization frequency from the perspective of Black youth. *Journal of Black Psychology, 28*(2), 84–106. https://doi.org/10.1177/0095798402028002002

Tan, A. S., & Tan, G. (1979). Television use and self-esteem of Blacks. *Journal of Communication, 29*(1), 129–135.

Walton, D. (2013). *Essence's images study: Bonus insights.* Essence. https://www.essence.com/2013/10/07/essence-images-study-bonus-insights

Ward, J. V. (1990). *The skin we're in: Teaching our children to be emotionally strong, socially smart, spiritually connected.* The Free Press.

Wigfield, A., Battle, A., Keller, L. B., & Eccles, J. S. (2002). Sex differences in motivation, self-concept, career aspiration, and career choice: Implications for cognitive development. In A. McGillicuddy-De Lisi (Ed.), *The development of sex differences in cognition* (pp. 93–124). Ablex Publishing.