

The Movie “Precious”: A Misrepresentation of Most Young Black Urban Mothers

by

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Abstract

This study is an exploratory content analysis of the cinematic portrayals in the movie *Precious* (2009) against those present in five movies: *Sparkle* (1976); *The Color Purple* (1985); *Eve’s Bayou* (1997); *Love and Basketball* (2000); and *Akeelah and the Bee* (2006). These movies feature Black female youth between the ages of 10-16 in eighteen television sitcoms. In general, regardless of family structure or socioeconomic status, young Black teens in the films were equally likely to be in unloving, unsupportive, and dysfunctional family units as they were in loving, nurturing, and supportive home environments. The eighteen television sitcoms that feature Black female youth between the ages of 12 to 16 demonstrate them as reared in married, two-parent homes in which they are consistently receive love, respect, and protection. Recommendations are made regarding debunking negative stereotypes of low-income, high-risk Black children and their families.

Keywords: African American; poverty; *Precious*; social support; stereotype; teenage pregnancy.

Introduction

When I viewed the movie *Precious* (2009)¹ several years ago, I was deeply moved by the script, the performances, and the cinematography that was part of that cinematic experience. For over two hours, I watched this young Black woman endure frequent physical, verbal, mental, and emotional abuse at the hands of her dysfunctional mother Mary and her perverted father, Carl, with whom she bore two children. As I exited the theatre, my heart grieved for the poor, Black teen mothers reared in severely disadvantaged home environments like the one depicted in this movie. Over time, however, my graduate course, *Human Diversity and Oppression*, helped crystallize in my mind that the tragic experiences suffered by the protagonist in this movie may not be an accurate representation of the lives of most young Black urban teen mothers. To state this more clearly, although the life of Claireece “*Precious*” Jones is a multitude of traumatic experiences, it can be reasonably argued that the experiences of this young Black poor woman and the dynamics within her family and community are a gross misrepresentation, trumped up by media sensationalism.

As a critical race scholar, I actively encourage my graduate students to identify specific stereotypes related to race, class, and gender, but more important, I challenge these students, who will one day be social workers, to understand how stereotypes can negatively affect perceptions of individuals and families. A stereotype is “a widely held but fixed and oversimplified image or idea of a particular type of person or thing” *Oxford Dictionaries* (2012). Thus, a “fixed and oversimplified image” can have two negative effects: (1) stereotypes oftentimes make it difficult or impossible to understand the real experiences of individuals, families, and communities; and (2) stereotypes may frequently obscure the various ways that poor Black teen youth demonstrate resilience in the face of multiple challenges.

The purpose of this paper is to conduct a content analysis of the cinematic portrayals offered in the movie *Precious* (2009) against those presented in six movies that feature Black female between the ages of 10-16 in eighteen television sitcoms that feature Black females between the ages of 12-16. In particular, I gave attention to representations of young Black² females in movies and sitcoms as these genres, along with radio, are the most frequently consumed by members of the general public.³ Furthermore, film and television are media outlets that include audio as well as visual imaging, while music is solely limited to audio depictions. An additional purpose of this paper is to examine the lives of young Black females in movies and sitcoms against scholarly work that has focused on poor Black urban teen mothers, their families, and their communities in the United States.

There are four reasons why an examination of poor Black urban teen mothers is significant. First, according to recent statistics, Black children (37.9%) are substantially more likely to live in poverty⁴ than Hispanic (33.8%) or White, Non-Hispanic children (12.3%).⁵ Second, school dropout rates are significantly higher for teens residing in poorer communities.

In 2007, the dropout rate of students that lived in low-income families was about 10 times greater than the rate of their peers from high-income families (8.8% vs. 0.9%).⁶ Third, the academic achievement gap is greater for low-income African American and Hispanic children compared with their more affluent White peers.⁷ Finally, poverty and economic hardship is particularly difficult for parents who may experience chronic stress, depression, marital distress and exhibit harsher parenting behaviors. These all link to poor social and emotional outcomes for children.⁸

This study has three major goals. The first is to identify pervasive negative stereotypes that make it difficult to understand, identify, and interact with individuals, families, and communities. The second goal is to demonstrate how the media, especially films, often obscures the various ways that poor Black teen youth demonstrate resilience in the face of multiple challenges. The final goal of this study is to reveal the economic realities of young Black teen mothers, in both *real life* and *reel life*.

From the onset, it is important to acknowledge young Black teens' disproportionate exposure to a plethora of realities that perpetuate poverty and make social mobility more difficult. For example, Black teens generally reside in poor neighborhoods, and are members of weak family units that contribute to lower learning.⁹ In addition, Black youth are more likely to be depressed,¹⁰ homeless¹¹ and experience decreased functioning in all aspects of life quality.¹² Furthermore, an analysis of the home environments of young Black female adolescents is informative. Related to this, Gordon, Perko, and Taylor (2007) reveals that Black people, on average, view an hour and 45 minutes more television than White people. Besides viewing more television than White people, Lariscy, Reber, and Paek (2010) finds young African American teens are also more likely than teens from other racial and ethnic groups to rely on media (television, radio, and the Internet) as viable sources of health information. Given the influence of the media on Black teens, Littlefield (2008) asserts that the media perpetuates racial and gender stereotypes that place Black women at a distinct societal disadvantage. This paper uses content analysis to expose and compare the stereotypes presented in both television and film, paying particular attention to young Black female characters.

The following five questions were foundational to this critique: (1) What are the major issues and challenges that poor Black teenage mothers face? (2) What kind of relationships do poor Black teen mothers have with their parents? (3) How are poor Black teenage mothers, generally faring? (4) How does the movie "*Precious*" compare with other portrayals of Black youth between the ages of 10-16 in movies? (5) How does the movie "*Precious*" compare with other portrayals of young Black teens between the ages of 12-16 in television sitcoms? Although the story length, character development, and ending in movies and sitcoms are uniquely different, content analysis examines the race,¹³ gender¹⁴ and socioeconomic realities of Black people,¹⁵ as well as the impact of product placement in these genres.¹⁶ For example, Watson (2012) and colleagues found sexualized images of Black women in various media outlets fuels the wanton sexual objectification of members of this group.

In the section that follows, the review of literature is organized based on the questions that guide this scholarly endeavor, which starts with an overview of the changes in Black families and highlight the growth of young single parents. In particular, key scholarship is highlighted related to the major challenges that Black poor teenage mothers face, the relationships of young Black youth, as well as how young poor Black teens are faring, overall. Then, I briefly discuss the impact of media on popular culture and highlight the controlling images of Black women in the media. This paper concludes with a discussion of how the character “*Precious*” reflects and does not reflect the complex characterizations of other young Black urban teens, their families, and communities presented in the media. To accomplish this goal, I juxtapose the experiences of Claireece “*Precious*” Jones with those of other young Black adolescent females in five other movies, as well as young Black adolescent females featured in eighteen television sitcoms. Essentially, in this paper, I argue young poor Black urban characters in families that are more nurturing, supportive, and positive than the dysfunctional one portrayed in the stereotypical “*Precious*.”

Review of Literature

The African American family has historically been the subject of scholarly attention, national concern and debate.¹⁷ Over seventy years ago, E. Franklin Frazier (1939) wrote the first comprehensive study of Black family life, titled *The Negro Family in the United States*. In this historical piece, Frazier (1939) discusses the impact of matriarchy and patriarchy, the impact of slavery on family solidarity, the impact of long-term poverty and lack of access to education and migration, that has negatively impacted the stability of the Black family. Nearly thirty years later, Daniel Patrick Moynihan (1965) offers the report, *The Negro Family: The Case for National Action*, which suggests a breakdown of urban Black families was approaching a “crisis level” and likely to continue. Moynihan argues that the root of many problems faced by these families was the simultaneous erosion of the traditional Black family structure and the rise in poor single-headed, female households. In essence, Moynihan strongly suggests that if Black family units were characterized by traditional (married) and economic stability, they would be shielded from family problems. It is important to note that many scholars took issue with Moynihan’s wide sweeping assertions and offered new scholarly approaches to studying Black families. In particular, these erudite methodologies assert characteristics of Black families does not relate to race, but rather, social conditions that deter Black progress, affirmed cultural “difference,” and praised the strengths of Black families instead of focusing on their deficits.¹⁸

Although society has seen a general increase in the number of children born to unmarried parents, the rise in single parents is dramatically evident among African Americans.¹⁹ In 1965, 24 percent of Black infants and 3.1 percent of White infants were born to single mothers. In 1990, 69 percent of Black children were born to unmarried parents,²⁰ and these rates have seen a slight increase.

Currently, 72 percent of Black children are born to unmarried parents.²¹ The increase of single-headed households is an issue of societal concern because researchers note a link between marriage and family economic conditions.²² Several researchers,²³ in particular, suggest economics and poverty are largely responsible for many of the family and social problems that exist in poor Black communities.

The Major Challenges of Poor, Black Urban Teen Mothers

Over the past thirty years, scholars identify several factors that place poor African American adolescent mothers and their children at risk. While these factors are not exclusive to Black people, they are in many ways more pronounced in Black America than among other racial and ethnic groups. For example, poor Black urban teens are more likely to experience an increased risk of financial hardship than their affluent counterparts are.²⁴ In addition, these Black teens engage in greater sexual activity,²⁵ and tend to have poor contraceptive use.²⁶ Consequently, poor Black teen mothers are more likely to bear children prematurely,²⁷ engage in delinquent behaviors,²⁸ have poor health, and are more likely to be homeless.²⁹

The academic performance of young Black teen mothers has a direct impact on their lives. In particular, school failure and dropping out of school contributes to anti-social behavior,³⁰ intimate partner violence and depression,³¹ premature and inappropriate exposure to adult knowledge and the assumption of adult roles and responsibilities before young Black teen mothers are psychologically and emotionally ready for these.³² Subsequently, teenage girls with lower educational attainment have greater odds to have a child with an older man (a paternal age of 20 years or older).³³

In addition, when compared with older mothers of higher socioeconomic levels, poor Black urban teen mothers face adverse psychosocial effects due to healthcare disparities,³⁴ a higher incidence of health problems,³⁵ adverse sexual health outcomes, including HIV and other sexually transmitted infections,³⁶ and unintended pregnancy.³⁷ Given this reality, recent scholarship identifies the importance of ensuring that young teen adolescent girls understand the difference between routine forms of contraception, emergency contraception, as well as the difference between emergency contraception and abortion.³⁸

Even the children of teen mothers are at risk. When compared with children of older mothers, the children of teenage mothers have an increased risk of becoming single parents themselves,³⁹ and in experiencing maltreatment and changes in their primary caretakers.⁴⁰ In addition, scholars reveal familial and social risks (i.e., teen mother, low maternal education, homelessness, and maltreatment) significantly relate to both academic and behavioral outcomes and are most strongly associated with school attendance problems⁴¹, and subsequent school dropout.⁴²

Further, prior structural, family, school, and behavioral influences may increase the rate of homelessness among this demographic group. In particular, lower school bonds, depressed mood, violent behavior, and running away in adolescence (before the age of 15) were strong predictors for later homelessness among Black urban teens.⁴³ In addition to these risk factors, Black teens exposed to trauma are substantially more likely to experience nightmares, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) severity, and have decreased functioning in all aspects of life quality.⁴⁴ Cumulatively, the abovementioned factors make it difficult for poor urban teen mothers and their families to achieve short and long-term success, and as poor Black teens become mothers (or parents), there is an increased risk for several of these factors.

The Relationships of Young Black Urban Teen Mothers

The intergenerational ties that exists between teen mothers, grandmothers, and great-grandmothers are one of the strongest triadic sources of support for young Black urban teen mothers.⁴⁵ An earlier qualitative study identifies four conceptual models of familial adaptation to adolescent parenthood between inner-city adolescent mothers and their mothers (or surrogate mothers): (1) Parental Replacement, (2) Parental Supplement, (3) Supported Primary Parent, and (4) Parental Apprentice. Essentially, these conceptual frameworks recognize the structural (the individuals that comprise a household) and functional (the ways that families meet the needs of its members) nature of Black family life.⁴⁶ Thus, through shared parenting and household management, generations learn to provide and depend on important sources of physical, emotional, financial, and spiritual support.⁴⁷

The relationship between young Black urban mothers and their own mothers can determine the relationship quality that these young teens establishes with her own children as well as her level of parental satisfaction. Case in point: Black teens that perceive the communication between themselves and their parents (e.g., mother-son, mother-daughter, father-son, and father-daughter) as positive engage in fewer sexual risky behaviors and pregnancies.⁴⁸ Other scholars confirm the salience of the adolescent mother-grandmother relationship, as well.

Another study finds adolescent mothers who had caregiving responsibilities and a supportive adolescent-grandmother relationship reported greater competence in their parenting role. Thus, young mothers gain competence through direct caregiving experience in the context of a supportive relationship.⁴⁹

To further reiterate this reality, O'Donnell, Myint-U, Duran, and Stueve (2010) evaluate the 'Especially for Daughters' intervention, whose mission was to provide urban Black and Latino parents with information and skills to support their daughters in delaying sexual initiation and alcohol use. At follow-up, girls in the intervention reported fewer sexual risks and less drinking. In addition, their parents reported greater self-efficacy to address alcohol and sex and more communication on these topics. This gender-specific parent education program was for communities with high rates of HIV, where early sexual onset is common, and often fueled by alcohol.

Recent research reiterates the relationship between a Black teen mother's perceptions of nurturance from her own mother and father and her own mental health and parenting attitudes. Lewin et al's (2011)⁵⁰ research among 139 Black urban teen mothers reveal those who felt nurtured by their mothers had greater empathy toward their own children, and those who felt nurtured by their fathers report greater parenting satisfaction. Thus, even though they may not rear children in the best conditions, supportive and nurturing relationships between mothers and fathers can minimize many of the risks these youth typically experience.

In addition, depressive symptoms can also associate to the quality of the mother-daughter relationship. Related to this, a positive adolescent mother-grandmother relationship decrease depressive symptoms among these youth over time.⁵¹ In particular, low-income teen mothers who reside with their grandmothers and have less participation in decision-making tend to be more depressed than youth who had high levels of participation in decision making with little adult support.⁵²

How Young Black Urban Teen Mothers are Faring

Recent research provides several insights into how young, Black, teen mothers are generally faring. For one, in spite of the success of television shows such as *16 and Pregnant* (2009) and *Teen Mom* (2009), the teenage birth rate decrease nine percent from 2009 to 2010 and reached an all-time low of 34.3 birth per 1000 females aged 15-19 in 2010.⁵³ More recently, the Center for Disease Control (CDC) reports a 40 percent decline in births among teens 15 to 19 from 2009 to 2013 (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2012). The steady drop in teenage birth rates may be due in large part, to increased interventions that promote abstinence and increased contraceptive use among sexually active adolescents.⁵⁴ In addition, even when they become parents, many young Black teen mothers have high levels of self-esteem⁵⁵ and demonstrate favorable attitudes toward the parenting role through meaningful "family time" engagement and developing strong relationships with their children.⁵⁶

Furthermore, the children of teen mothers may make different choices than those made by their mothers. A longitudinal study of a mostly Black group of Baltimore females found teen motherhood did not necessarily result in the same for her children.⁵⁷ The findings of this study suggest that youth-driven support groups are ideal sites to help young Black single mothers establish healthy relationships with adults and peers within these programs.⁵⁸

Even though adolescent mothers and their children are especially susceptible to witnessing or directly experiencing violence, neither harsh discipline or stimulation in the home environment acted as significant mediators, and there were no direct or indirect effects of mothers' witnessed violence on child behavior. Thus, these findings suggest that a potential means of preventing behavior problems in minority children born to adolescent mothers is to identify mothers directly exposed to violence, and treat their depressive symptoms and aggressive behaviors.⁵⁹

Several dynamic dimensions of support have been instrumental in facilitating the resilience of young Black urban teen mothers. In particular, extended family networks, the socioeconomic structure of extended family networks, the adaptability of family members to meet the needs of one another, and the age structure of family members have been found to be salient forms of support that lead to resilience in economically disadvantaged African American families.⁶⁰ Haight, Finet, Bamba, and Helton's (2009) qualitative study presents beliefs of three resilient African-American adolescent mothers who transition from foster care into independent living in Illinois. Essentially, the positive value they place on children and motherhood, spirituality, "other mothers" and various sources of community support were cultural beliefs and practices that supported resilience within these young females. Studies that are more recent have confirmed the resilience of contemporary young Black teen mothers.

As part of a larger study of factors influencing the educational and occupational achievement of adolescent mothers, Klaw (2008) explore the phenomenology of pregnant and parenting teens' aspirations and expectations using the construct, "possible selves." Focus group discussions, autobiographical projects, and self-report surveys reveal that African American pregnant and parenting youth develop self-representations relate to future achievement in the context of interactions with neighborhoods, health care systems, and adult support figures. Essentially, these young females describe their lives in terms of three dimensions: their "ideal selves," "feared selves," and "who they might become."

Turney et al (2011) examine the relationship between 141 young teen mothers' self-efficacy, social support, and behavioral intentions regarding education and child bearing. In general, even though these young mothers primarily depended on their parents for housing, financial support, and someone to talk to, they reported high levels of self-efficacy, and a strong intention to complete high school. Furthermore, continuing education can especially mitigate disadvantages in the home or community context.

A nationally representative sample of 3,193 young mothers finds continuing education efforts mediate less than favorable home environments as well as the negative consequences of early births. Therefore, encouraging school retention may help young mothers form a safe, healthy, nurturing, and developmentally appropriate home environment.⁶¹ Thus, although child abuse relates to a wide range of negative developmental outcomes for children and their families, these negative outcomes may be less when evidence-based interventions create strong partnerships with community agencies that generally serve these youth.⁶²

Media and Popular Culture

In general, the media perpetuates and reinforces negative Black stereotypes,⁶³ and in many ways, racial stereotypes accompany negative gender stereotypes. Historically, the portrayal of Black women in the media is negative. Littlefield's (2008) historical account of these negative images began with the stereotypical depiction of the "welfare queen" that former President Ronald Reagan made popular in the eighties⁶⁴ to the just shy of "pornographic video hoe" omnipresent in most rap videos.⁶⁵ Yet, the two most popular, controlling and competing images of Black women are the Mammy and the Jezebel.

Collins (2009) describes this controlling image of the Mammy as, "caring and nurturing, asexual, obese, dark skinned, and possessing large buttocks and breast." Mammies are unattractive and non-sexual. These attributes make them non-threatening and allow them to occupy spaces dominated by White people, such as being the docile and obedient housekeeper for financially affluent White people.⁶⁶

At the other end of the spectrum is the Jezebel, who is hypersexual and overly promiscuous.⁶⁷ Sadly, this image has results in the objectification of Black female bodies. Historically, Black women's bodies demonstrate purport biological racial differences between Black people and White people.⁶⁸ A popular and noteworthy example of this type of "othering" was Sarah Bartmann, famously known as the Hottentot Venus (see Susan Bordo. 2003. *Unbearable weight: Feminism, Western culture, and the body* and Patricia Hill Collins. 2009. *Black feminist thought: Knowledge, consciousness, and the politics of empowerment* for a detailed account of Black women and their bodies).

While the Mammy and Jezebel images are often superimposed on adult Black women, some assume young Black girls are more likely to move into one of these stereotypes, as they become women. For young Black females, the objectification of them is ever-present in mass media.⁶⁹ As these images continue to flood the media outlets, they have the potential to influence behavior through beliefs and attitudes,⁷⁰ and thus negatively influence the self-identity of young Black viewers.⁷¹ For example, Townsend et al (2010) found the pervasiveness of the Jezebel image might lead young poor Black adolescent girls to believe risky sexual behaviors are less risky than they actually are.

Taken together, these internalized behaviors, beliefs and attitudes that emerge from young Black girls viewing the depiction of Black women in the mass media, seem to make a compelling argument for the rise in single-headed, mother dominated, households. Furthermore, Taft, Bryant-Davis, Woodward, Tillman and Torres (2013)⁷² and Bryant-Davis (2005) suggested that such media messages internalized by African American girls and women, can also be unconsciously (or consciously) adopted by African American men and persons of all races that can potentially help (or hurt) Black women.

Besides the damning consequences of such imagery, what is equally disturbing is the clear absence of positives images of Black women in the media to counteract these negative ones. Littlefield argued that, “. . . oversexed depictions of African American Women justify the problems that overwhelmingly affect the African American Community—namely, the increase in unwed childbirths, AIDS, teenage pregnancy, decline in marriage among African Americans—and thus create the same paradigm of blaming the victim that has characterized dominate-minority relations in the United States.”⁷³

Given some of the changes in Black families, in particular the emergence of poor, unwed, teenage motherhood, the issues present for these mothers, and the impact of mass media on young Black people and culture, I compare the *Precious* character to other young Black women in starring roles. Although on the surface the *Precious* character appears to exacerbate the ills in poor Black America, researchers do not know enough about other young Black female characters in relation to the *Precious* character to make such a clear-cut determination.

Methodology

This exploratory content analysis examined the structure and quality of Black families in television sitcoms and movies. In order to establish the validity of the study, I took several steps. First, a comprehensive list of the most popular Black movies that featured Black adolescent teens were obtained from the following websites: (1) “Ten Best Black Family Movies (<http://www.screenjunkies.com/movies/genres-movies/family-friendly/10-best-Black-family-movies/>); (2) List of the Best Black Movies (<http://www.ranker.com/list/all-Black-movies-or-list-of-Black-movies/all-genre-movies-lists>); and (3) Top 100 Alphabetical Listing

Black Classic Movies on DVD (<http://www.Blackclassicmovies.com/top100alpha.html>).

Second, I identify movies that feature a Black teen female adolescent. In order to identify movies that fit these criteria, I obtained a complete description of the show (e.g., cast, characters, location, and family structure) from Internet Movie Database (www.imdb.com). Third, I identify television sitcoms that feature a Black teen female adolescent. In order to identify television sitcoms that fit these criteria, I obtain a complete description of the television show (e.g., cast, characters, location, and family structure) from *TV Guide* (www.tvguide.com). In the next section, I provide a brief overview of six American movies that feature young Black females.

Presentation of the Findings

Six American movies featured a young Black female (aged 12-16) as the protagonist, or lead character: (1) *Sparkle* (1976, 2012); (2) *The Color Purple* (1985); (3) *Eve's Bayou* (1997); (4) *Love and Basketball* (2000); (5) *Akeelah and the Bee* (2006); and (6) *Precious* (2009). In subsequent paragraphs, I provide a brief summary of the character, plot, and family structure of these young Black females.

Sparkle (1976) starts at 1958's Harlem, New York and centers on the Williams sisters: Sister (portrayed by Lonette McKee), Dolores (portrayed by Dwan Smith), and Sparkle (Irene Cara). (A remake of this movie releases in 2012 with Jordin Sparks as Sparkle, Carmen Ejogo as sister and Tika Sumpter as Delores). In the original movie, the mother Effie (portrayed by Mary Alice) rears these young females. Effie is a single parent that works hard as a house cleaner for the Gerber family at Long Island, and is proud that her daughters sing in the local church teenage choir along with their friends Stix (portrayed by Philip Michael Thomas) and Levi (portrayed by Dorian Harewood). Effie is very loving, close, and protective of her daughters and greatly supports their involvement in the church's teenage choir. Even though Sister becomes romantically involved with an abusive kingpin by the name of Satin, at no time does Effie verbally or physically abuse any of her daughters.

The Color Purple (1985) was nine years older than the original *Sparkle* (1976), yet took place in the Southern United States during the early 1900's to mid-1930's. The protagonist in the movie, Celie Harris (portrayed by Whoopi Goldberg) is an abused child. By the time she was fourteen years old, she already had two children by her father (portrayed by Leonard Jackson). He takes them away from her at childbirth and forces the young Celie (portrayed by Desreta Jackson) to marry a wealthy young local widower Albert Johnson, who she only refers to as "Mister" (portrayed by Danny Glover), who treats her like a slave. This movie chronicles Celie's transition from an abused woman with no self-confidence to one that is mentally strong, determined to reunite with her children, and blaze a successful life for herself as an entrepreneur.

Eve's Bayou (1997), was narrated by Eve Batiste (portrayed by Jurnee Smollett), a 10-year old girl that resides in a prosperous Black community in Louisiana. She resides in the home with her younger brother Poe, her sister Cisely (portrayed by Meagan Good) and her parents: her mother Roz (portrayed by Lynn Whitfield) and her physician father, Louis (portrayed by Samuel L. Jackson). When Eve accidentally witnesses her father's infidelity with family friend Matty Mereaux (portrayed by Lisa Nicole Carson), she tells her sister Cisely, who has a very affectionate relationship with her father, and convinces Eve that she misinterpreted an innocent moment. After Cisely admits to Eve that one night when their father was drunk, he tried to molest her. Although Eve and Cisely had a loving and nurturing relationship with their mother, their relationship with their father was distrustful and strained.

Love and Basketball (2000) spanned roughly thirteen years of friendship between childhood sweethearts Monica Wright (portrayed by Sanaa Lathan) and Quincy McCall (portrayed by Omar Epps). The film is split into four quarters; in the first, Monica and her family move to Los Angeles in 1981 from Atlanta, Georgia and become acquainted with their new neighbors the McCalls, a wealthy family due to Quincy's father Zeke being the shooting guard for the Los Angeles Clippers. Quincy and Monica grow up in loving, supportive homes, attract to one another, and share a passion for basketball.

Akeelah and the Bee (2006) focuses on the experiences of Akeelah Anderson (portrayed by Keke Palmer), a student at Crenshaw Middle School, a predominantly Black school in South Los Angeles. Akeelah is a bright 11-year-old and never makes errors on her spelling tests and does not really seem to fit in. She lives with her widowed mother, Tanya (portrayed by Angela Bassett), her three siblings Kiana, Devon, and Terrence (portrayed by Erica Hubbard, Lee Thompson Young, and Julito McCullum), and her infant niece. This young woman is reared in a loving, nurturing, and supportive home environment, and is spurred on by key adults in her life (e.g., her principal, Mr. Welch and her teacher, Mrs. Cross, and a visiting English professor Dr. Joshua Larabee (portrayed by Laurence Fishburne) to become a co-winner in a national spelling competition.

Precious (2009) was set in 1987 where an obese, illiterate, 16-year-old Claireece "Precious" Jones (portrayed by Gabourey Sidibe) lived in the New York City ghetto of Harlem with her dysfunctional and abusive mother, Mary (portrayed by Mo'Nique) and her father, Carl (Rodney "Bear" Jackson), who has raped her and by whom she has twice become pregnant. She suffered long-term physical and mental abuse from her unemployed mother. The family resided in a Section 8 tenement and survived on welfare. Her first child, known as "Mongo," which is short for Mongoloid, has Down syndrome and was being cared for by Precious' grandmother, though Mary forced the family to pretend Mongo lives with her and Precious so she could receive extra money from the government. When she learns that Precious was pregnant with her second child, her high school principal arranges to have her attend an alternative school, which she hoped could help Precious change her life's direction. Precious finds a way out of her traumatic daily existence through imagination and fantasy, and within her mind, creates a world where she receives appreciation and unconditional love. Essentially, during these grandiose fantasies Precious always envisions herself as beautiful, glamorous, and loved.

As a student of the alternative school, Precious comes into contact with a supportive network of adults and peers that gave her the strength to detach from her dysfunctional upbringing. These supportive networks include her new teacher Blu Rain (portrayed by Paula Patton) who teaches her to read and write as well as Ms. Weiss (portrayed by Mariah Carey), her social worker with whom she shares her incestuous past.

Other members of Precious’s support network is Mr. McFadden (portrayed by Lenny Kravitz), a nursing assistant who is kind to her while she is in the hospital, as well as her peers from the alternative school that visit her in the hospital, and demonstrate their concern for her health and well-being. When Precious learns she is HIV positive (her newborn son Abdul is not), she severs ties with her mother, determines to earn her high school equivalent and make a better life for herself and her newborn son. [See Table 1 for a List of the Movie Title and Release Year, Family Structure, Name and Age, Socioeconomic Status, and Production Company of Movies that Featured Black Female Adolescents 11-16 Years of Age].

Table 1 – Movie Title and Year, Family Structure, Name and Age, Socioeconomic Status, and Production Company that Feature Black Female Adolescents 10-16 Years of Age (1976-2009)

Movie Title and Release Year	Summary			
	Family Structure	Name and Age	SES	Production Company
<i>Sparkle</i> (1976, 2012)	Unmarried (Single-Mother)	Sparkle (16)	Working-Class	Warner Bros. Pictures (1976); Tri Star Pictures (2012)
<i>The Color Purple</i> (1985)	Married	Celie (16)	Poor	Amblin Entertainment
<i>Eve’s Bayou</i> (1997)	Married	Eve Baptiste (10)	Upper-Class	Trimark Pictures
<i>Love and Basketball</i> (2000)	Divorced	Monica Wright (11)	Middle-Class	New Line Cinema
<i>Akeelah and the Bee</i> (2006)	Widowed	Akeelah Anderson (11)	Poor	Lionsgate Films
<i>Precious</i> (2009)	Unmarried (Two-Parents)	Precious (15)	Poor	Lionsgate Films

How the movie “*Precious*” compares with other portrayals of young Black teens aged 12-16 in Television Sitcoms

From 1974-2014, the majority of television sitcoms that feature young Black females between the ages of 12-16 portray homes in which these youth are unconditionally loved, respected, and protected. Moreover, in contrast to the home environment of *Precious* in which she was consistently verbally, emotionally, physically, and sexually victimized, the parents of these females were verbally supportive, emotionally encouraging, and were never abusive. Thus, regardless of the socioeconomic conditions in which they were reared, most young Black females reared in Black families cannot relate to the traumatic experiences of *Precious* (2009). [See Table 2 for a List of Sitcom Titles and Release Year, Family Structure, Name and Age, Socioeconomic Status, and Network of Television Shows that Featured Black Female Adolescents 11-16 Years of Age].

Table 2 – Sitcom Title, Family Structure, Name and Age, Socioeconomic Status, and Network of Television Sitcoms that Feature Black Female Adolescents 12-16 Years of Age (1974-2012)

Sitcom Title and Release Year	Summary			
	Family Structure	Name and Age	SES	Network
<i>Good Times</i> (1974–1979)	Married	Thelma Evans (15)	Working-Class	CBS
<i>The Cosby Show</i> (1984–1992)	Married	Denise Huxtable (16) Vanessa Huxtable (14)	Upper-Class	NBC
227 (1985–1990)	Married	Brenda Jenkins (14)	Working-Class	NBC
<i>Family Matters</i> (1989–1998)	Married	Laura Winslow (15)	Middle-Class	ABC
<i>The Fresh Prince of Bel-Air</i> (1990–1996)	Married	Hillary Banks (16) Ashley Banks (14)	Upper-Class	NBC
<i>The Parent’Hood</i> (1995-1999)	Married	Zaria Peterson (15)	Middle-Class	The WB
<i>Moesha</i> (1996–2001)	Married	Moesha Mitchell (16)	Middle-Class	UPN
<i>The Hughleys</i> (1998–2002)	Married	Sydney Hughley (12)	Middle-Class	UPN
<i>Bernie Mac Show</i> (2001–2006)	Married	Vanessa “Nessa” Thomkins (15)	Upper-Class	FOX
<i>My Wife and Kids</i> (2001–2005)	Married	Claire Kyle (15)	Middle-Class	ABC
<i>That’s So Raven</i> (2003–2007)	Married	Raven Lydia Baxter (15)	Middle-Class	Disney
<i>Everybody Hates Chris</i> (2005–2009)	Married	Tonya (14)	Working-Class	FOX
<i>Tyler Perry’s House of Payne</i> (2006–Present)	Married	Jazmine Payne (12)	Middle-Class	TBS
<i>Meet the Browns</i> (2009–Present)	Married	Brianna Janae Ortiz (16)	Middle-Class	TBS
<i>The Cleveland Show</i> (2009–Present)	Married	Roberta (16)	Middle-Class	FOX
<i>Are We There Yet?</i> (2010-Present)	Married	Lindsey Kingston-Parsons (15)	Middle Class	TBS
<i>Reed between the Lines</i> (2011-Present)	Married	Kaci Reynolds (15)	Upper-Class	BET

<i>The Soul Man</i> (2012-Present)	Married	Lyric Ballentine (16)	Middle- Class	TV Land
<i>Blackish</i> (2014-Present)	Married	Zoey (15)	Upper-Class	ABC

Discussion

This paper critically examines the validity of the Black family portrayals offered in the movie *Precious* (2009) against television images of Black females and their families. To accomplish this goal, I analyze the family structures within five movies that featured young Black female adolescents, eighteen television sitcoms that feature young Black female adolescents between the ages of 12-16. Results reveal three movies, or 50% of those analyzed (*The Color Purple*, 1985; *Eve's Bayou*, 1997; *Precious*, 2009) portray young Black teen females in unloving, unsupportive, and dysfunctional family units, while the other three movies (*Sparkle*, 1976, 2012; *Love and Basketball*, 2000; and *Akeelah and the Bee*, 2006) portrayed young Black teen females in loving, nurturing, and supportive home environments. In addition, the eighteen television sitcoms that feature young Black females between the ages of 12-16 demonstrate these females are consistently loved, respected, and protected. In addition, while cinematic portrayals are more likely to offer dysfunctional, traumatic, and abusive family units, these portrayals are not consistent with those offered in television sitcoms, nor are they an accurate reflection of the lives of most young, Black, urban teen mothers.

Given disparities in the movie and sitcom representation of young Black teenage girls, I wonder if stereotypically negative portrayals are a stronger draw for cinematic audiences than sitcom audiences. This might suggest that movie producers are more concerned with making money than producing positive images of Black America. On a cautionary note, although her life is not representative of most young, Black, urban teens, "*Precious*" is a deeply-moving cinematic testimony regarding the resources upon which young Black females draw, the strength that lies within them, as well as their determination to successfully face the challenges that life brings. In some ways, this movie is a clear indication of art imitating life. A compilation of true and real events inspires this creative work, as scholars' document the issues present in this work across numerous disciplines.

Thus, in spite of growing up in economically disadvantaged households and communities, many young Black poor teens, like *Precious*, have high levels of self-efficacy, complete high school, and grow up in strong supportive networks where their physical, emotional, social, and spiritual needs is met.⁷⁴ These findings directly support previous research. However, the reader should be aware the purpose of this paper was not to discredit or totally, disregard cinematic experiences offered in the movie, *Precious*.

Instead, the goal is to highlight stereotypes inconsistent with scholarly work on young Black urban teen mothers, their families, and communities as well as explore the cinematic portrayals offered in movies and television for young Black female characters, and frame these around the *Precious* character.

With that said, I first give attention to the portrayals in this movie that support the literature. First, scholars within and across disciplines have identified cumulative factors that place young, Black urban teen mothers and their children at risk. Among these, poverty decreases the likelihood that Black urban teens will excel in school and go on to pursue higher education. Second, an additional portrayal in the movie that confirms extant scholarship is the link between the quality of the home environment with the self-efficacy, self-esteem, and self-confidence of youth. Clearly, the physical, psychological, and emotional traumas experienced by the character *Precious* cumulatively created within her a sense that she was unattractive, unlovable, and unworthy of genuine love, affection, and care.

Lastly, the movie addresses the power of strong, supportive networks in the life of a disadvantaged teen. Thus, this movie reveals that regardless of the environment in which they are reared, stable sources of human capital in the form of teachers, social workers, and hospital support staff can reverse, over time, the layers of negative trauma poor urban Black youth experience. Most notably, for the *Precious* character, Blu Rain (the teacher), Ms. Weiss (the social worker), and John McFadden (the hospital staff worker) personified these forms of human capital. In spite of the aforementioned consistencies, I identified twelve portrayals in the movie *Precious* that are inconsistent with television depictions of young Black females and literature based on understanding the experiences of poor Black urban youth and their families. [Stereotypes, Contemporary Realities, and Scholarly Support are in Table 3].

Table 3 – Stereotypes, Contemporary Realities and Scholarly Support

Stereotypes	Contemporary Realities	Scholarly Support
Child abuse is more likely to occur in poor, Black, non-educated, and non-religious families.	Child abuse occurs at every socioeconomic level, across ethnic and cultural lines, within all religions and at all levels of education.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (2010)
Black children are more likely to experience abuse than white children are.	Most abuse cases involve white children.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pediatrics (2010)
The psychosocial realities of poor Black adolescent mothers are the same as other mothers.	Black adolescent mothers and their children face additional adverse psychosocial effects due to healthcare disparities, a higher incidence of health problems, and an increased risk of financial hardship.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bryant (2006)
Black mothers are more likely to demonstrate	Black mothers are no more likely to demonstrate punitive (strict)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reis (1993) • Jarrett and Jefferson

punitive (strict) behavior toward their children than white mothers are.	behavior toward their children than white mothers and frequently use several buffering and enhancing strategies to protect their children from danger and promote positive social, cultural, and academic development.	(2003)
The adolescent mother-grandmother relationship has little influence on the parental competence of adolescent mothers.	Adolescent mothers with caregiving responsibilities and a supportive adolescent-grandmother relationship reported competence in their parenting role.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Apfel and Seitz (1991) • Carr et al (2012) • Dancy et al (2015) • Jarrett (1998) • Stephens (2014)
Shared caregiving will result in increased conflict between the adolescent mother and her grandmother.	Shared caregiving was not associated with conflict in the adolescent mother-grandmother relationship.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Oberlander, Black, and Starr (2007) • Burton and Jarrett (2000) • Jarrett (1998)
The relationship between a teen mother and her mother and father had little effect on the teen's level of empathy and parenting satisfaction.	Teen mothers who felt nurtured by their mothers had greater empathy toward their own children, and those who felt nurtured by their fathers reported greater parenting satisfaction.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lewin, Mitchell, Hodgkinson, Burrell, Beers, and Duggan (2011)
Most Black fathers have abusive, dysfunctional, and toxic relationships with their children.	In spite of the economic hardship that they face, the relationships between Black men and their children are healthy, caring, and mutually rewarding.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coles (2001) • Hamer (2001) • Hamer (1998) • Hamer and Marchioro (2002)
It is difficult and/or virtually impossible for poor Black urban youth to establish meaningful connections with adult figures.	Relationships with community adults generally develops in stages among poor urban youth, moving through the stages of suspicion and distrust, to facilitated contact, and meaningful connection.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Larson, Pearce, Sullivan, and Jarrett (2007) • Jarrett, Sullivan, and Wakins (2005) • Lewin, Mitchell, Hodgkinson, Burrell, Beers, and Duggan (2011) • Sullivan, Clark, Castrucci, Samsel, Fonseca, and Garcia (2011) • Anderson, Koo, Jenkins, Walker, Davis, Yao, and El-Khorazaty, 2011)

Poor Black urban teen mothers have low levels of self-efficacy and lack the desire to complete their high school education.	The young mothers reported relatively high levels of self-efficacy and intended to complete high school.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Turney, Conway, Plummer, Adkins, Hudson, McLeod, and Zafaroni (2011)
The offspring of teenage mothers are destined to become adolescent parents.	The offspring of teenage mothers may not become teen mothers themselves.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Furstenberg, Levine, and Brooks-Gunn (1990)
Poor Black urban families can never become resilient.	Poor Black urban families frequently use "survival strategies" that promote family resilience and stability in the face of neighborhood challenges.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chaney (2009) • Klaw (2008) • Jarrett, Jefferson, and Kelly (2010)

The Economic Realities of Young Black Teen Mothers in Film

Almost 70 years ago, sociologist Daniel Patrick Moynihan paints the African American family as a stereotypical, social pariah that snubs its nose at traditionalism and encourage the rise in poor single-headed, female households. While the widespread assumption of the Black family makes for good cinema, in reality, these families are a lot more resilient than they appear.

At this point, I direct the reader to the six cinematic offerings that were featured earlier, namely *Sparkle* (1976, 2012), *The Color Purple* (1985), *Eve's Bayou* (1997), *Love and Basketball* (2000), *Akeelah and the Bee* (2006), and *Precious* (2009). As we consider the portrayal of the Black female protagonist in these movies, most of these women did not exhibit stereotypical Mammy (caring, nurturing, docile and obedient caretaker for White people) or Jezebel (hypersexual and overly promiscuous) characterizations.⁷⁵ For those that assert the Mammy was prominent in the movie *Sparkler*, a closer examination merits. In the original (1976) version of *Sparkle*, the Black mother Effie is a single parent that works as a house cleaner for the Gerbers, a White financially affluent family that lived in Long Island. Given this stereotypical representation of Effie as a "working-class Mammy," it is important to note that *Effie did not make caring for the Gerber family more important than caring for her own children*. In fact, even though they were a working-class family, and lived in a community affected by crime, violence, and poverty, this Black mother consistently loved, cared for, and protected her daughters by supporting their involvement in the church's teenage choir.⁷⁶

As it relates to the socioeconomic standing of these families, it was noteworthy that one Black family was middle-class (*Love and Basketball*, 2000) another was upper class (*Eve's Bayou*, 1997), one was working-class (*Sparkle*, 1976, 2012) and three were poor (*The Color Purple*, 1985; *Akeelah and the Bee*, 2006; *Precious*, 2009).

Although the young Black females in these movies ages ranged from 10 to 16 (and were on average, 13 years old), the experiences of these young Black teens was generally marked by economic hardship, family dysfunction, and unstable family units. In other words, regardless of whether the family unit was a traditional (marriage) or non-traditional (single-parenthood) one, the advanced or poor socioeconomic standing of the Black family did not protect this unit from internal and external ills. For example, the two-parent family homes in which Celie, Eve and Cisely, and Precious grow up did not protect them from the incestuous treatment (or near-molestation endured by Cisely) they endure at the hands of their fathers. Although Eve and Cisely's father was a well-respected doctor in Louisiana's colored community, and they were reared in a traditional, two-parent, upper-class family, dysfunction was the foundation on which Eve's unfolding narrative about her distrustful and strained relationship with her father was shared with the audience.

The Economic Realities of Young Black Teen Mothers in Television

Over four decades (from 1974 to 2015), television has advanced Black family traditionalism and socioeconomic stability. Of note, even the first sitcom, *Good Times* (1974-1979), features Thelma Evans; a poor, Black female reared by two, loving, married parents and never becomes a teen mother. The promotion of Black family traditionalism echoes via sitcoms during several decades; notably during the 1980's (namely, *The Cosby Show*, 227; and *Family Matters*), 1990's (*Family Matters*, *The Fresh Prince of Bel-Air*, *The Parent'hood*, *Moesha*, and *The Hughleys*), 2000's (*My Wife and Kids*; *That's So Raven*; *Everybody Hates Chris*; and *Tyler Perry's House of Payne*), and over the past five years (namely, *Meet the Browns*; *The Cleveland Show*; *Are We There Yet?*; *Reed Between the Lines*; *The Soul Man*; and *Blackish*). Interestingly, the marital and economic positioning of Black motherhood does not situate within the experiences of poor single Black mothers, but rather, through educated, hardworking, financially established Black women in stable, marital relationships.

It is essential that individuals who currently work in or who one day plan to work in social service, educational, or medical fields understand that erroneous stereotypes may further demoralize Black youth who need support to become physically, mentally, and emotionally healthy. Thus, by not keeping the atypical experiences of a young Black teen youth in perspective, lack of experience within these domains may actually feed negative stereotypes. According to Mark Snyder, when people have not learned enough about the diversity that exists within and between groups or had contact with members of a negatively stereotyped groups, they are hardly likely to change erroneous stereotypes on their own.⁷⁷ Therefore, it is important that scholars actively and consciously help to eradicate negative stereotypes of poor Black families.

Recommendations for Scholars that Teach Courses on Black Families

To support professors who teach courses that focus on the contemporary Black family, child abuse, and family resilience, I provide three recommendations regarding how instructors can balance the atypically chaotic life of *Precious* against the contemporary lived experiences of poor Black youth and their families. First, it is important that students have frequent and meaningful experiences with poor Black youth and their families. By doing so, students learn about the challenges, barriers, and resilience demonstrated by Black youth reared in disadvantaged home environments. Secondly, scholars must address what research has revealed about the current lives of abused children. In this respect, qualitative studies that focus on the loving relationships that custodial⁷⁸ and non-custodial Black fathers⁷⁹ establish with their children can help students who have limited experience with Black urban youth to understand that in spite of the many challenges that they face, Black men can and do establish healthy, supportive, and loving relationships with their children.

Finally, I recommend that atypical, traumatic, life experiences such as the one portrayed in *Precious* (2009) be balanced by strong, positive cinematic counter narratives. In particular, these movies should specifically highlight the love, trust, and care between parents and parents and their children. Examples of these movies include, but are not limited to, *Claudine* (1974),⁸⁰ *Crooklyn* (1994),⁸¹ and *The Pursuit of Happyness* (2006).⁸² In each of the aforementioned movies, which span several decades, Black children are reared by Black parents who work hard to provide for their physical needs (food, clothing, and shelter), and do not inflict upon them any form of physical, mental, verbal, emotional, or sexual abuse.

Limitations of the Current Study

There were limitations in the current work. First, this study's focus on the representation of Black teen female adolescents in American cinema and television sitcoms may not be compatible with the portrayal of these young females in foreign films and television sitcoms. Second, the study primarily focused on the experiences of a single poor Black urban female reared in an atypically and highly dysfunctional home. However, the trauma this young woman experiences is not the reality for most young Black youth.⁸³ As previously mentioned, my goal in focusing on the life of *Precious* was not to reinforce stereotypes, but rather to weigh their validity in light of other cinematic offerings of Black female adolescents as well as those that are more frequently seen on television. Lastly, this study's focus on the dynamics within a poor Black urban family make it impossible to generalize these experiences to those of more affluent Black families in American movies such as *Waiting to Exhale* (1995); *Soul Food* (1997); *The Best Man* (1999); *Love Jones* (1997); *Dr. Doolittle* (1998); *Antwone Fisher* (2002); *Why Did I Get Married?* (2007); *Why Did I Get Married Too?* (2010); and *Think Like A Man* (2012).

Directions for Future Studies

There are two ways that future studies can expound upon the findings presented here. Since Black people are more likely to divorce than White people are and grow up in single parent families,⁸⁴ future scholars should examine how single and divorced, African American parents navigate this responsibility in movies and television. Research in this area may reveal that unmarried Black single parents, as well as those divorced, may utilize unique coping strategies that are inherently different from those of their married Black counterparts. Most important, this research can highlight how these parents are successful in these roles, where Black male leadership or female supportiveness is non-existent or lacking.

Second, future research should examine the unique stressors of Black adolescent males. Since these men are more likely to drop out of school, become involved in gang activity, and experience incarceration,⁸⁵ future work can find nuances in regards to this reality. In particular, scholars can examine the intrinsic factors, social networks, and conscious pathways that these young men take to increase their chances of being self-supportive, dependable, and stable influences in the lives of their families and communities. Thus, an examination of the internal and external stressors that these young men experience in movies and television may lead to a greater understanding of the factors that heighten or reduce resilience in these young men. Most important, by focusing on the family structure, stressors, and strengths demonstrated by young Black men in movies and television sitcoms, scholars can more clearly identify the real and/or perceived barriers of these men as they actively work toward resilience.

Conclusion

Fifty years ago, sociologist Daniel Patrick Moynihan (1965) publicly states non-traditional Black family structures and the rise in poor single-headed, female households would push these families to a state of “crisis.” While research supports many of the negative consequences associated with poor, single Black motherhood, a substantial body of scholarship finds that with stable (grandparents and great-grandparents) supports, poor Black females can thrive. Although the performances in *Precious* were deeply moving, we must acknowledge the majority of poor Black teen youth are not experiencing these problems.⁸⁶ Clearly, some poor Black youth grow up in toxic homes marked by fear, dysfunction, and abuse; however, the life of *Precious* does not represent the lives of *most* poor Black urban youth in movies (reel life), television, or real life. Poor Black urban youth are not a monolithic group. In other words, while some Black youth grow up in homes that mirror the poverty experience of *Precious*, most Black youth grow up in loving and nurturing homes, albeit in poverty.

During my many years of working with poor Black youth in various social settings, I admonish individuals, especially those in authority, to not allow the mass media, whether film or television, to paint poor Black youth with a wide-brush of dysfunctionality. Stated more clearly, I directly caution that individuals not allow negative media stereotypes to drive how they think or behave toward young Black urban youth. Furthermore, I strongly admonish these individuals to actively dismiss preconceived stereotypes and *consciously* recognize that poor Black youth are individuals of value and limitless potential. Overall, in spite of poverty, diminished education, and poor life chances, most of these youth are good teen parents, have high levels of self-efficacy, intend to complete their education, and become valuable members of society. In spite of the formidable experiences endured by Precious, I am comforted in the knowledge that because of the strength of her social network, she and so many young Black poor youth like her, can actualize their inherent abilities and strengths and resist society's stereotypical image of them.

Notes

¹ The movie *Precious* is a 2009 American drama film directed by Lee Daniels and is an adaptation by Geoffrey S. Fletcher of the 1996 novel *Push* by Sapphire.

² The terms "Black" and "African American" are interchangeable in this manuscript.

³ (Davis, 2009; Hall, 2007; Xu, Wang, He, Jin, Luo, and Lu 2012)

⁴ The federal government defines poverty this way: For a family of four, an annual income below \$23,492, which is \$64 a day. By definition, extreme poverty refers to a family of four having an annual income less than half of the poverty level, which is \$11,746, a year, or \$32 a day for the average family of four.

⁵ (Census Bureau Statistics, 2013)

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ (Whitaker, Graham, Severtson, Furr-Holden, and Latimer, 2012), and desire motherhood in spite of high-disease risk (Finnocchario-Kessler, Sweat, Dariotis, Anderson, Jennings, Keller, Vyas, and Trent, 2012)

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- ¹⁰ (Sanchez, Lambert, and Ialongo, 2012)
- ¹¹ (Smith, Ireland, Park, Elwyn, and Thornberry, 2011)
- ¹² (Peterson, Lewandowski, and Chiodo, 2011)
- ¹³ Smith (1996).
- ¹⁴ (Watson et al 2012)
- ¹⁵ (Elliott, Powell, and Brenton 2015)
- ¹⁶ (Ong 2004)
- ¹⁷ (Billingsley, 1968; Blackwell, 1975; Cox, 1940; DuBois, 1899; McAdoo, 1980; Staples, 1973).
- ¹⁸ (Billingsley 1968; Chaney, 2011; Hatchet and Jackson, 1993; Hill, 1968)
- ¹⁹ (Cherlin, 1981; Hester, 2014; Tucker and Mitchell-Kernan, 1995).
- ²⁰ (Ventura and Bachrach 2000)
- ²¹ National Center for Health Statistics, 2013
- ²² (Chaney, 2012; Chaney, Mitchell, and Barker, 2014; Tucker and Mitchell-Kernan, 1995).
- ²³ (Darity and Myers, 1995; Elliott, Powell, and Brenton. 2015; Wilson, 1987; Wilson & Neckerman, 1986)
- ²⁴ (Berry, Shillington, Peak, and Hohman 2000; Horton 2006; Jarrett and Burton 1999; Leadbeater 1999)
- ²⁵ (Nelson, Morrison-Beedy, Kearney, and Dozier 2011)
- ²⁶ (Waddell, Orr, Sackoff, and Santelli 2010)

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- ²⁷ (Castrucci, Clark, Lewis, Samsel, and Mirchandani 2010)
- ²⁸ (Jarrett 1997; Sipsma, Ickovics, Lin and Kershaw 2015)
- ²⁹ (Fothergill, Doherty, Robertson, and Ensminger 2012)
- ³⁰ (Rozie-Battle 2002)
- ³¹ (Hall, Kusunoki, Gatny, and Barber 2015; Smith, Ireland, Park, Elwyn, and Thornberry 2011; Teitelman, Ratcliffe, McDonald, Brawner, and Sullivan 2011)
- ³² Burton (2007)
- ³³ (Castrucci, Clark, Lewis, Samsel, and Mirchandani 2010)
- ³⁴ (Black et al., 2009)
- ³⁵ (Partington, Steber, Blair, and Cisler 2009)
- ³⁶ (Finnocchiaro-Kessler, Sweat, Dariotis, Anderson, Jennings, Keller, Vyas, and Trent 2012)
- ³⁷ (East 2014; Hutchinson and Montgomery 2007)
- ³⁸ (Mollen, Fernando, Hayes, and Barg 2012)
- ³⁹ (Rivara, Sweeney, and Henderson 1985)
- ⁴⁰ (Hetherington 2014; Stier, Leventhal, Berg Johnson, and Mezger 1993)
- ⁴¹ (Erdmans and Black 2015; Rouse Fantuzzo, and LeBoeuf 2011)
- ⁴² (Basch 2011)
- ⁴³ (Fothergill, Doherty, Robertson, and Ensminger 2012)
- ⁴⁴ (Peterson, Lewandowski, and Chiodo 2011)

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- ⁴⁵ (Carr, Hayslip, and Gray 2012; Dancy, Julion, and Wilbur 2015; East 2014; Jarrett 1998; Stephens, 2014)
- ⁴⁶ (Apfel and Seitz 1991)
- ⁴⁷ Allison and Burton 1999
- ⁴⁸ (Anderson, Koo, Jenkins, Walker, Davis, Yao, and El-Khorazaty 2011; Hutchinson and Montgomery 2007)
- ⁴⁹ (Oberlander, Black, and Starr 2007)
- ⁵⁰ (Lewin, Mitchell, Hodgkinson, Burrell, Beers, and Duggan 2011)
- ⁵¹ (Sanchez, Lambert, and Ialongo 2012)
- ⁵² (Schweingruber and Kalil 2000)
- ⁵³ (Hamilton and Ventura 2012)
- ⁵⁴ Bryant (2006)
- ⁵⁵ (Berry, Shillington, Peak, and Hohman 2000)
- ⁵⁶ (Reis 1993; Tubbs, Roy, and Burton 2005)
- ⁵⁷ (Furstenberg, Levine, and Brooks-Gunn 1990)
- ⁵⁸ (Dickinson and Joe 2010)
- ⁵⁹ (Mitchell, Lewin, Rasmussen, Horn, and Joseph 2011)
- ⁶⁰ (Clark, Nguyen, and Belgrave 2011; Jarrett 1998b; LeCuyer, Christensen, Kreber, Kearney and Kitzman 2015)
- ⁶¹ (Sullivan, Clark, Castrucci, Samsel, Fonseca, and Garcia 2011)
- ⁶² (Toth and Manly 2011)

⁶³ (Grandy 2001; Littlefield 2008)

⁶⁴ (CNN, January 23, 2012)

⁶⁵ (Stephens and Few, 2007)

⁶⁶ (Collins 2009; hooks 1981)

⁶⁷ (Collins 1991; Littlefield 2008)

⁶⁸ (Watson et al 2012)

⁶⁹ (Littlefield, 2008)

⁷⁰ Collins (1991)

⁷¹ (Milkie, 1999)

⁷² (Taft, Bryant-Davis, Woodward, Tillman and Torres 2013)

⁷³ (Littlefield, 2008, p. 682)

⁷⁴ (Anglely, Divney, Magriples, and Kershaw 2015; Oberlander, Black, and Starr 2007; O'Donnell, Myint-U, Duran, and Stueve 2010; Turney et al 2011)

⁷⁵ (Collins 2009, 1991; hooks 1981; Littlefield 2008)

⁷⁶ (Chaney 2009; Klaw 2008; Jarrett et al, 2010)

⁷⁷ (Snyder 2010, p. 511)

⁷⁸ (Coles 2002; Hamer and Marchioro 2002)

⁷⁹ (Hamer 2001, 1998; Maaza 2002)

⁸⁰ Diahann Carroll plays Claudine, who is the mother of six children who tries to support herself and her family by working as a maid. One day she meets a charming garbage man named Roop (played by James Earl Jones). Although a romance develops between them, Roop is still unsure of the relationship because of his own trials in life.

⁸¹ From Spike Lee comes this vibrant semi-autobiographical portrait of a schoolteacher (portrayed by Alfre Woodard), her stubborn jazz-musician husband (portrayed by Delroy Lindo) and their five kids living in '70s Brooklyn.

⁸² In Columbia Pictures' *The Pursuit of Happyness*, Chris Gardner (portrayed by Will Smith) is a bright and talented but marginally employed salesperson. Struggling to make ends meet, Gardner finds himself and his five-year-old son (portrayed by Jaden Smith) evicted from their San Francisco apartment with nowhere to go. Despite his troubles, Chris continues to honor his commitment as a loving and caring father, using the affection and trust his son has placed in him as an impetus to overcome the obstacles he faces.

⁸³ (Oberlander, Black, and Starr 2007; O'Donnell, Myint-U, Duran, and Stueve 2010; Turney et al 2011)

⁸⁴ (Gibson-Davis, Edin, and McLanahan 2005; Schoen, Landale, and Daniels 2007; Simmons, and O'Connell 2003; Smock and Manning 2004)

⁸⁵ (Blumstein, 2015; Taylor, Jackson, and Chatters 1997; U.S. Census Bureau 2006)

⁸⁶ (Oberlander, Black, and Starr 2007; O'Donnell, Myint-U, Duran, and Stueve 2010; Turney et al 2011)