

“YOU GOT THE JUICE NOW”: AN ANALYSIS OF JUICE USING CRITICAL RACE
THEORY

by

James Hadnot

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

for the Requirements for the Degree

MASTER OF ARTS

Major Subject: Communication

West Texas A&M University

Canyon, TX

May 2019

APPROVED:

_____ Date: _____

Chairperson, Thesis Committee

_____ Date: _____

Member, Thesis Committee

_____ Date: _____

Member, Thesis Committee

_____ Date: _____

Head, Major Department

_____ Date: _____

Dean, Graduate School

ABSTRACT

The film *Juice* is one of the most popular films amongst the Black Community and can be considered a cult classic within the community as well. A film that is top 10 in many lists, *Juice* presents the experience of four young men growing up in the late 80s and early 90s. The events within the daily life of the young men, Q, Bishop, Raheem, and Steel, experiences include both positive and negative happenings that craft their outlook on themselves, their peers, and their own life. The purpose of this thesis is to analyze how the film characterizes and constructs what it means to be Black and male within this time-period and how those instances connect to the current landscape of men in similar situations. This study examines the events that transpire in the film as well as the characters' speech to discuss their outlook on life and on their masculinity. By using both critical race theory and standpoint theory, the study explores how "*Juice*" formulates ideas of Black masculinity and the Black male experience. Through analysis of the film, the study showcases the central themes of interpersonal and intrapersonal respect as the main building blocks for both masculinity and the Black male experience. The study reveals that while the film might showcase these young men in a negative, stereotypical light, the surroundings of the young men fashion their mentality. These surroundings, along with other lived experiences in their life, concoct a warped view of respect and power which impact their safety and well-being.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

WOW. This such an amazing moment and I first must give thanks to God for blessing me with the mental capacity to complete this thesis. Second, I want to thank my parents and brother who pushed me to be great and who have instilled more confidence in me then I could ever imagine. Thirdly and very importantly, I must thank Dr. Trudy Hanson, Dr. Noah Franken, and Dr. Kristina Drumheller for being patient with me throughout this entire process and for helping me craft this thesis. I want to thank Kit Strief. Kit hired me on in the Athletics Department when I had no place to work. He provided me with this opportunity not only to advance my career, but to advance my intellect. So many great experiences have transpired due to that hiring and I am so very grateful. Lastly, I want to thank all of my friends and other family members who have been my support system. Thank you.

Table of Contents

Chapter	Page
INTRODUCTION	1
Rationale	2
Description of the Artifact	3
Critical Reviews of the Film	4
Critical Race Theory	6
Summary	9
LITERATURE REVIEW	10
Black Masculinity Defined	10
Black Hegemonic Masculinity.....	12
Stereotypes of Blacks in Film	14
Stereotypes of Blacks Outside of Film	16
Summary	20
METHODOLOGY	21
Critical Race Theory	21
African American Criticism.....	23
Black Feminist Thought.....	23
Summary	25

ANALYSIS.....	26
Black Feminist Thought and My Standpoint.....	27
Intrapersonal Power	29
Power through intrapersonal respect.....	29
Interpersonal Power	33
Power through interpersonal respect.....	33
Then and Now	40
Summary	42
DISCUSSION & CONCLUSION	43
Social Construction of the Black Male Experience and Black Masculinity	43
Limitations of the Study.....	46
Conclusion	47

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The essence of the film *Juice* (1992) and the height of its meaning stems from the rawness and realness of its story. On the set of the film, Khalil Kain (Raheem), a main actor in the film said, “This film is going to tell a real street story, because Joey is not gonna clean up his act and run off to Cornell at the end of the movie” (662dodz, 2018). The story documents the lives of Q, Raheem, Bishop, and Steel, four young Black men in Harlem dealing with the daily struggles of everyday life in the late 1980s and 1990s. Jermaine Hopkins (Steel) said, “It’s like you get a camera, you go to the neighborhood, and you start filming” (662dodz, 2018). The connection of the young Black men in the film and the lived experiences of the young men outside of film is central to the understanding of Black masculinity and the Black male experience during this time-period. You must insert yourself into the time-period and setting to explore the ideas of the individuals and understand the true meaning of this film. Without this knowledge or understanding, the actions that persist within the film can be misunderstood. I employ both critical race theory and standpoint theory to express how the filmmaker creates a lens that allows the viewer to peek into the lived experience of the Black male and also provide commentary on Black masculinity.

The goal of my thesis is to interpret how the writer and director, Ernest Dickerson, used specific elements to connect the ideas of Black masculinity and power/powerlessness within the community and how those ideas situate themselves within the time-period, and yet provide a relevant commentary today. I explain how this film has a cultural angle that must be taken into account in its assessment and how this cultural lens operates within a space of media that is not often given agency. Both of these goals are essential to why this film and others like it are important to study.

Rationale

This study finds its importance in the epistemic significance of the film. First, being that the film is a top cult classic film amongst Black people, and secondly, that it serves as a narrative of Black life. Patricia Hill Collins (1986) identifies narratives and experiences as important in the creation of understanding. Collins (1986) also identifies others like Georg Simmel who notes that “strangers,” in this case those often outside of the realm of academia, might be able to see patterns that others can’t (Collins, 1986). In this case, incorporating this film into an academic study opens up the doors to an entirely new view of the experience of Black males within this time period. It is a chance to test the validity of the narrative as well as analyze what it has to say about the Black male. I am a Black male and have a direct connection not only to the storyline of the film, but the messages within it as well. Therefore, I have a unique view of the film, its impact, and its validity. Calling on Collins’ (1986) standpoint theory, I use my standpoint as a Black male to interpret the message of the film and analyze them as well.

Description of the Artifact

A film that is considered a Black cult classic, *Juice* (1992), is well renowned within both the Black and Hip-Hop communities. The movie's aura "mirrored the landscape of early 90's [in] New York [which] was the epicenter of Hip-Hop during the 'Golden Era'" (Brown, 2012, para 3). Numerous Hip-Hop magazines place *Juice* in the top 10 or top 20 in best Black movies or best Hip-Hop movies ever (Kimble & Josephs, 2018; Johnson, 2018; "Top 5," 2015). The film debuted at No. 2 at the box office during its opening weekend raking in \$8 million (Williams, 2017). The film as a whole has amassed \$20.1 million domestically (Williams, 2017).

The film is set in Harlem in the late 80s and early 90s. In the words of Tupac Shakur himself, we have "four young black males, tight like glue. Now, you see how these four black males try to grow up as we all go in different directions" (662ddodz, 2018). Viewers meet the men one at a time. Q (Omar Epps) wants to be a DJ and wakes up still with his headphones on from practicing the night before. Bishop (Tupac Shakur) lives with his grandmother and father. The first glimpse of Bishop is him attempting to tell his father good-bye before leaving for the day to which his father does not respond. Bishop's father continues to stare blankly at the television screen, showing no emotion as if he is in another world. Steel (Jermaine Hopkins) lives with his brother, mother, and father and leaves his books at the house and trades them out for a radio before he leaves. Lastly, Raheem (Khalil Kain) is shown with his sister trying to get into the bathroom for a job interview and their mother trying to figure out why the two siblings are arguing.

Multiple things happen over the course of the day including Raheem having a conversation with the mother of his child, the group being bullied by a rival gang, the

young men running from the truancy police, and Q telling the group his plan of making it into a local DJ competition. The most compelling event of the day is when Q runs into an old classmate, Blizzard, in a bar. Blizzard has just gotten out of jail and plans to rob the bar asking Q if he wants in on the action. Q declines the offer, leaves the bar, and the group continues their day even though Bishop wants to return and rob the bar. The group sees later on the news that Blizzard was killed in a standoff at the site of the robbery.

This is a turning point in the film because Bishop believes the situation would have been different if the four young men had taken part in the robbery, whilst Q believes the five of them would all be dead. The two get into a fight and have to be separated by Raheem, the leader of the group. This sparks an idea that the four of them should rob a local corner store and it just happens to be on the same night of Q's DJ competition. The robbery goes terribly wrong as Bishop shoots the store owner in cold blood, then murders Raheem in the aftermath in a dispute about what to do with the gun. Bishop continues a spiral of violence. When confronted by the gang that bullies him, Bishop attempts to fight all of them, and kills the gang's leader. Bishop attempts to cover his tracks by trying to kill his so-called friend Steel in an alley near where the four used to hang out and frame all four killings on Q. Bishop and Q have a standoff and Q ends up accidentally killing Bishop; the two were fighting on a rooftop and Q could not hold on to Bishop after a punch took him over the edge. The movie comes to a close with an onlooker telling Q, "Dog, you got the juice now."

Critical Reviews of the Film

Critically, *Juice* had mixed reviews when it was released in 1992. Roger Ebert (1992) linked *Juice* with films like *Boyz n the Hood* and *Straight Out of Brooklyn*

claiming *Juice* was a “reaction” to how these films heavily glamorized urban violence. Ebert noted, “There is a real terror in the faces of these kids as they realize that people have died, that guns kill, that your life can be ruined, or over, in an instant” (Ebert, 1992, para 3). This quote directly aligns with the thoughts and ideas of Ernest Dickerson. In an interview about the film 25 years after the release of *Juice*, Dickerson highlighted the idea of preserving these types of films because of their connection to cultural heritage (Williams, 2017). The biggest takeaway from Dickerson’s comment is the fact that violence is not glamorized, but shown as a true complication in the lives of the young men in the film. By showing violence, particularly gun violence, as a potential product of the environment and a very real dilemma for the young men, their situation becomes more human and less theatrical. It also forces viewers to ask the question how did circumstances arrive at this point and how will their story turn out?

Another interesting critique of the film was Dickerson’s ability to really bring the viewer into the setting of the lives of the young men. Film critic for the *New York Times*, Janet Maslin (1992), praised Dickerson and his cinematographer, Larry Banks for the ability to shoot the streets of Harlem (Maslin, 1992). Maslin noted the “rare crispness” of the Harlem streets and “the film’s look is handsome, but also claustrophobic, creating a caged in feeling even in some outdoor scenes” (Maslin, 1992, para 2). Maslin’s words spoke to me because of the importance of the setting in the film. Growing up in a rough environment doesn’t always mean that its outlook or how it seems visually is going to be right in your face. By showing the streets of Harlem in this way, Dickerson perfectly sets up the turn for the worst for the boys. The area, like any area, has its negative people and

villains and must be assessed as such, but also just because places are heavily stereotyped, does not mean that destiny is a forgone conclusion.

The most critical review came from *Los Angeles Times* film critic, Kenneth Turan. Earlier in his critique, Turan (1992) acknowledged the connection between *Juice* and the other films of its time, e.g. *New Jack City*, *Boyz N the Hood*, *Hanging with the Homeboys*, and *Straight Out of Brooklyn* (Turan, 1992), but in some ways downplayed *Juice* as a simple addition to this canon of street film. Turan noted that *Boyz N the Hood* had a deeper meaning and *New Jack City* heavily romanticized the gangster life, but felt *Juice* fell flat in both areas. Turan heralded *Juice* as “unexciting and predictable” saying, “Both the film's characters and the real-life situations they're based on deserve better. Now that filmmakers have begun to show the ghetto in living color with some regularity, they will have to come to grips with the fact that just showing it isn't going to cut it anymore” (Turan, 1992, para 11). On its face, *Juice* could be seen as a pathological tale of young men trapped in a system of violence; however, this depends on what the viewer seeks as important in the narrative. The themes of Black hegemonic masculinity and Black stereotyping, which are explained more in depth in the next section, are the two most important to help bring about a deeper meaning, which Turan believes the film was lacking.

Critical Race Theory

Critical Race Theory (CRT) aims to study the link between race, racism, and power. The goal of CRT is not only to understand this association but also to challenge certain inconsistencies and provide context for certain situations that tie-in race, racism, and power (“What is,” 2019). Alan Freeman and Derrick Bell crafted this critical theory

as a way to challenge common legal practices that the two felt were slowing down the process for racial reform (“What is,” 2019). One of the main tenants that I use from CRT is the incorporation of storytelling/counter-storytelling and “naming one’s reality” (Delgado & Stafaincic, 1993).

My theoretical framework relies on CRT, as well as the perspectives of such feminist writers as bell hooks and Patricia Hill Collins. I look at Black masculinity from a feminist perspective, one that actively critiques aspects of hegemonic Black masculinity as well as one that denotes the need to explore and understand Black masculinity as non-monolithic. The operational definition of hegemonic Black masculinity comes directly from Collins, noting that masculinity as a whole is an intersection between numerous ideologies including gender, race, age, class, and sexuality that creates a system that seats white, wealthy males at the top and heavily marginalized groups such a Black men and men from indigenous groups at the bottom (Collins, 2004). Taking it one step further, Collins (2004) expresses the idea that because the system privileges white manhood and denounces Black manhood, the Black male aspires to have the same male experience as the white male to fulfill his meaning. This becomes problematic because of the misogynistic, controlling, and other negative aspects of white patriarchal manhood.

Bell hooks (1992) set out to reconstruct Black masculinity in a way that not only takes into account the Black male experience above, but also articulates the many other realities for the Black male. By starting from the times of slaves and tracing the ideas of masculinity critically, hooks (1992) explained the connection of Black masculinity within her ideology of the white supremacist capitalist patriarchy, how masculinity came to be, and how it has been and continues to be reshaped both positively and negatively. Hooks

asserts that many men fall into the patriarchal, head of household role, which she says is a staple amongst the Black community and one of the key models of Black masculinity (hooks, 1992, p. 87). This is evident in hooks' upbringing and is often the stance that most men have taken. These are the men she has taken time out to critique and who have shaped an expanse of her analysis on white supremacist capitalistic patriarchy (hooks, 1992, 2004). Hooks (1992) also indicates that some men in her upbringing and in her life do not fit this mold. She continues by cautioning a potential conversation on masculinity that is monolithic; meaning that to truly discuss Black masculinity you must look at it not as a linear experience, but as a multitude of experiences that are encompassed by an overarching attempt to be systematically shutout of achieving true agency. This is why certain forms of Black masculinity are heralded (i.e., forms that directly correlate to white patriarchy), and others are vilified (hooks, 1992).

Bell hooks (1992) defines white supremacist capitalist patriarchy as “an amalgamation of inequalities predicated on hierarchies of superiority and inferiority” (p. 270). Through this liberation, hooks seeks wholesale change in the social ideology rather than an equivalent space for women (Foss et al., 2014).. Hooks outlines two ways in which rhetoric can enact “decolonization” or a breaking down of white supremacist capitalist patriarchy through critique and invention (Foss et al., 2014). Critique is the means to examine and thus be made aware of the way the ideology operates and invention is an active resistance to the ideology (Foss et al., 2014).

In this thesis, I explain how the film *Juice* (1992) operates as an avenue to critique the stereotypical narratives of the Black male experience as well as highlight opposing views to the stereotypical black male experience. Despite the film perpetuating certain

stereotypes of Black male life, the film as a whole engages in a story that is real and a part of the lives of Black males of the time. The film also connects with Black males in the current time period and serves as a way to bring about necessary conversations about the Black male experience and the importance of these black male narratives. This thesis focuses on the following research question related to the portrayal of the Black male experience:

RQ: How does *Juice* illustrate the social construction of the Black male experience and Black masculinity?

Summary

The first chapter of my thesis described the artifact I am analyzing and why it is worthy of analysis. I indicate how I plan to critique the film *Juice*, as well as discuss critiques of the film. Chapter Two provides an overview of the research done in the field of Black Masculinity and Blacks in film as a precursor to how the film, *Juice* should be examined. Without this knowledge, the film could be viewed stereotypically. Chapter Three explains my methodological process in critiquing the film. Chapter Four is my analysis of the film through the methodological lens of Critical Race Theory. Lastly Chapter Five includes a discussion of my findings, limitations, and any implications for future research.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

The film, *Juice*, highlights numerous aspects of the young Black male experience including ideas of hegemonic Black masculinity along with negative stereotypes of the Black male experience. These stereotypes are seen not only in other films due to common tropes of Black male life, but also understood and corroborated off the film screen as well. Within this literature review, I discuss the idea of hegemonic Black masculinity and the numerous stereotypes that pathologize the life of the Black male and serve as a function to bolster structural racism. These ideas provide the context on why writer and director Ernest Dickerson attempts to discuss the narrative of the young Black male through his own lens in *Juice*.

Black Masculinity Defined

In describing Black masculinity and the Black male experience bell hooks (2004) goes into deep detail on the plight of the Black male and the many things stacked against him noting:

whether in actual prison or not, practically every Black male in the United States has been forced at some point of their life to hold back the self he wants to express, to repress and contain for fear of being attacked, slaughtered, destroyed.

(ix)

This is extremely powerful literally and figuratively simply because of the many stereotypes plastered on Black people. Because of those stereotypes, Black men have to conform to certain ways of living or resist and risk being labeled, locked up, or worse. How is this being done? Hooks (2004) answers this question, saying Black men systematically are shut out of opportunities to learn basic reading and writing skills at a young age, the promotion of the drug trade as a viable source of income, widespread unemployment, and “continued psychological lure of life-threatening patriarchal masculine behaviors” (p. xi). These instances characterize the experience of the young Black male in impoverished communities and serve as an overarching reason for their actions.

Ideologically, when discussing Black Masculinity, hooks (2004) speaks about the necessity to reconstruct Black masculinity. Hooks suggests that Black men must move away from a white patriarchal idea of masculinity. In *Black Looks: Race and Representation*, hooks (1992) notes that even Fredrick Douglass believed his manhood was connected with his ability to fend for himself.

It rekindled in my breast the smoldering embers of liberty. It brought up my Baltimore dreams and revived a sense of my own manhood. I was a changed being after that fight. I was nothing before. I was a man now. (90)

This white patriarchal view of masculinity stretches all the way to the times of slavery connecting the ability to have a family and possess property as a true distinction of manhood (hooks, 1992).

The overarching idea throughout in *Reconstructing Black Masculinity*, is that there is not one monolithic way to look at the Black male experience (hooks, 1992). Critiquing masculinity as a singular, linear entity helps to enhance and refurbish the white supremacist capitalist patriarchy ideology (hooks, 1992). The specific masculinity that is connected directly to this ideology is the Black patriarch, head of the household (hooks, 1992). This masculine ideal requires control and subordination of the Black woman in hopes to heal the problems of racial domination, but hooks begins the entire piece by describing the many different types of males who did not follow this ideal and were supremely happy with their lives (hooks, 1992):

Kid, who lived in the country who lived out in the country and hunted the rabbits and coons that came to our table; Daddy Gus, who spoke in hushed tones, sharing his sense of spiritual mysticism. (88)

This quote is such an important aspect not only of her work, but of Black masculinity in general. Expressing different occurrences in the web that is the Black male experience breaks down the stereotypical views as well as the views that serve to enhance racist ideals, and provides space to understand and critique those stereotypical and negative ideals.

Black Hegemonic Masculinity

Patricia Hill Collins (2006) describes hegemonic masculinity by first explaining its intersection of numerous ideologies including gender, age, class, sexuality, and race. At its core, masculinity is organized by a three-tier structure: wealthy white men who wield the most power, men situated right below this tier who are marginalized (Latino, Asian, and White immigrant men), and finally males who are subordinated by both

groups (Black men and men from indigenous groups; Collins, 2004). One of the most important aspects of Collins' (2004) description of hegemonic masculinity is the hierarchy of successful and failed manhood dichotomies:

White normality/Black deviancy framework that accompanies racism; the heterosexual/homosexual binary that supports heterosexism; structures of age that grant superiority to older males over younger ones; and a class system that grants propertied individuals more power and status than those who lack it. (187)

This is important because of the privilege given to the experience of the white male compared to his Black male counterpart. By placing race, age, sexuality, and property at the forefront of masculinity, the idea of what it means to be a man can be coopted in numerous ways. Additionally, property is not only somewhere to live, but connects to aspects of income and stability (Collins, 2004), which directly connects to ideas of power, wealth, and success in the film *Juice*. As will be seen later in the review, stereotypes of black men created by the white male through film and other structurally racist power structures help bolster the dichotomy between the Black male experience and the white male experience with the goal of continuing the status quo and dehumanizing the Black male (Larson, 2005).

A dimension of hegemonic masculinity that serves as one of the themes in the film is power through violence. Collins (2004) argues that “‘real’ men exercise control not just over women, but also their own emotions, in leadership positions and over all forms of violence . . . [meaning] exercising male authority is a vital component to masculinity” (p. 189). Power is a key aspect of hegemonic masculinity and the ability to wield that power is different within diverse groups; examples of this power include

propertied white men who are in control of legitimate forms such as mass media, sports, and elite white men who control military and police forces (Collins, 2004). African American men lack access to these forms of political and economic power, so working-class and poor Black men with access to street weapons and their own bodies as weapons tend to seek respect as their source of power (Collins, 2004). Lastly, Collins (2004) quotes sociologist Elijah Anderson who notes that in “economically depressed neighborhoods affected by drugs and crime, interpersonal violence among young African American men reflect a desperate search for respect . . . an indicator of male authority and manhood [which] is highly valued” (p. 190). Collins (2004) expresses the exact experience of the young men in this film. The surroundings of the young men, coupled with their lack of legitimate forms of power, push them to seek respect as the only viable form of power and authority. The correlation with power/respect and manhood directly relates to what it means to be a Black male. To be a Black male is to possess power amongst your peers, within your household, and amongst others whether through violence or through economic prosperity.

Stereotypes of Blacks in Film

On the silver screen, Black males have been consistently subjugated to stereotypes of their experience dating back to early minstrel shows before the invention of film (Larson, 2005). These stereotypes range from heavily sexualized, brutes/savages, Uncle Toms, Man-Children, and Coons (Larson, 2005). All of the stereotypes mentioned fit into a spectrum of denying agency to the true Black experience and create an unrealistic depiction of Black life. Two stereotypes that directly connect with *Juice* are the sexualized Black body and the brute/savage. Larson (2005) defines the brute/savage

as “oversexed and savage, violent and frenzied as they lust for white flesh” (p. 30).

Though lacking an oversexualized aspect, Bishop fits the role of savage, violent, and frenzied in a lust for power. Although this is not the intention of the filmmaker, this box characterizes a stereotypical view of his character when context is not provided. Larson (2005) also talks at length about the hypersexualized image of the Black male as well. In this film, Raheem being around 17 with a child, Q being 16 or 17 and engaging in a sexual relationship with an older woman, both fall under this idea of sexualization, but when reviewed in context we can note that these were true stories (Dickerson, 2017). In interviews with the director, Ernest Dickerson explains how these stories of a 17-year-old participating in a sexual relationship with a separated nurse were both jarring as well as told to him via word-of-mouth when doing research for the film. This speaks to the authenticity of the tale and the direct connection to the experience of the young Black male during the time-period.

Larson (2005) explains how these stereotypes and themes help to enhance the status quo in two ways noting that certain themes “justify inequality . . . showing dangerous, immoral, or mentally deficient characters as emblematic of their race” (p. 31) and the themes also “deny racial inequality by focusing on films and ignoring social structures” (p. 31). Both of these points are important in relation to *Juice*. On its face, the film falls into a stereotypical story of the demise of the Black male at the hands of another Black male. While director Ernest Dickerson has explained that he wanted this story to mirror some of his experiences like peer pressure, he also notes that he wanted to explore the overarching themes on why these experiences persist (Pernice, 2017). Dickerson was interested in telling the story of the young Black male through his own

personal lens, but also through the lens of other young Black males during the time period. This makes the story more holistic in nature and echoes hooks' argument about having a non-monolithic view of the Black male.

Stereotypes of Blacks Outside of Film

Off the silver screen, stereotypes heavily impact the outlook of Black males as well. Specifically, in classroom and social settings Black males have been characterized as numerous caricatures that present them in a negative light. Givens, Nasir, Ross, and Royston (2016) describe three commonly used stereotypes of Black males in schools as “anti-intellectual and anti-school, prone to criminality, and ... hard, unemotional, and disconnected from the social sphere” (p. 168). These stereotypes have a long, connected history to the experience of the Black male ranging back to the times of slavery (Givens et al., 2016). The aforementioned caricatures of the Black male directly connect with many of the films of the time period of *Juice* (1992). Bishop fits the role of the Black male prone to criminal behavior, being unemotional, and disconnected from the social sphere, whilst the crew of men in general could be considered anti-school seeing as they cut school daily. Films such as *Menace II Society* (1993), *Boyz in the Hood* (1991), *New Jack City* (1991), and even later films such as *Baby Boy* (2001) and *Paid in Full* (2002), all take a stab at diagnosing the Black male experience in the coming of age period. Though these stereotypes are prevalent within these films, the goal of the films per their directors is not to glamorize the behavior, but to humanize the behavior (Gilcrest, 2004).

Boyz N the Hood had an unmatched impact in the realm of Black cinema due to the accolades the film received following its release. Writer and director, John Singleton, was the first African-American, male or female, to be nominated for Best Director. The

film was nominated for Best Original Screenplay (Swanson, 2011). With this story being recognized by the Academy Awards, the validity and agency that is often stripped from Black narratives was realized. The film was also shown at the prestigious Cannes Film Festival in France and received a 20-minute standing ovation at its conclusion (Swanson, 2011) showing the story's gravity not only to American filmmakers, but international filmmakers as well. Of course, the Academy is not the final word on the validity of films as the first Black director to ever win an Oscar for Best Picture was Steve McQueen for *12 Years a Slave* in 2013 (Grier, 2019). The most telling aspect of this connection to the Academy and Black narratives is the fact that the first ever Black director to win Best Original Sscreenplay was in 2018: Jordan Peele for *Get Out* (Grier, 2019) at the 90th Academy Awards. It took nearly a century for an African American to be recognized for creating his own narrative. Spike Lee was the first African American Male to be nominated for Best Original Screenplay in 1990 (Pavilion, 1990). Just two years later, Singleton was nominated and the golden age of Black cinema was upon us.

While *Boyz N the Hood* was groundbreaking to most, it left a sour taste in the mouth of young film directors Allen and Albert Hughes and screenwriter Tyger Williams, the creators of *Menace II Society*. The creators wanted *Menace II Society* to be the “antithesis” of *Boyz N the Hood* because they felt it was a “fairy tale” (Hobbs, 2018, para. 6.). Williams said, “So many kids never make it out the hood, and I was more interested in telling their story” (Hobbs, 2018, para. 2). *Menace II Society* received much more backlash because of its rawness, realness, as well as the violence that ensued from the picture, but the importance of the film is the connection it made to the youth, specifically the ones growing up in the same hood showcased in *Boyz N the Hood*.

Despite the heavy backlash to the film, *Menace II Society* still raked in \$28 million and won Best Picture at the MTV Movie Awards in 1994 beating out *Schindler's List* and *Jurassic Park* (Hobbs, 2018). This not only shows the popularity of *Menace II Society*, but also its connection to the youth of the time.

In my personal opinion, *Juice* serves as the middle ground between these two films on the opposite coast. Both *Menace II Society* and *Boyz N the Hood* are set in South Central Los Angeles, while *Juice* is set in New York City. The thread that runs through each of these films is the influence of surroundings, violence, and struggle for control that characterize the films. They also describe narrative of the Black male and create a foundation for the importance of documenting the Black male experience.

Specifically, criminality has been a consistent hang up when speaking about the African American male experience. Criminality must be discussed and diagnosed in any situation when engaging in a conversation on stereotypes due to the pathological imprint it has had on the Black Male community. Statistically speaking, Martin et al. (2011) highlighted a 2006 Federal Bureau of Investigation report that “African American youth accounted for 59% of arrests for murders, 51% arrests for violent crimes, 31% of arrests for property offenses, and 30% arrests for drug uses” (p. 662). These statistics are staggering seeing as African American youth only make up 16% of total American youth (Martin et al., 2011).

The numbers are used to fuel the stereotypes of criminality amongst African Americans. A report put out by the National Center for Juvenile Justice (1999), noted that Black juveniles were referred to juvenile court at a rate more than double that for whites. The report highlights person, property, drugs, and public order offenses just as the FBI

report does. The numbers though point to 66% of white males being booked in delinquent cases compared to 30% of Black males (Synder & Sickmund, 1999). A bullet point on this graphic notes “although two-thirds of delinquency cases involve white youth, Black youth were overrepresented in the delinquency caseload given their proportion of the juvenile population” (p. 159). This is of note is because statistically speaking, the cases are not that far off when discussing Black males and their white counterparts. Diving deeper into the report, Black males were booked for one more drug offense in 1996 compared to their white counterparts, eight more personal offenses, and 11 fewer property offenses (Synder & Sickmund, 1999). This again points to the previous fact that statistically speaking Black males are not committing crimes at an alarming rate compared to whites or other races.

Martin et al. (2011) point to the potential that structural racism is involved in the overrepresentation of Black Americans in criminal justice statistics. Structural racism refers to any “array of historical and contemporary conditions that have helped create inner-city communities characterized by racial segregation, poverty, residential instability, and low levels of social control, conditions that contribute to high rates of offending in these communities” (p. 662). So, not only are the crime statistics over-representing African-American offenders, certain contextual factors that are difficult to quantify aren’t a part of the numbers either. This continues to bolster the point of how stereotypes can persist and reaches back to the initial point of Black male caricature in schools.

Summary

In summary, hegemonic masculinity serves as a way to deny Black males a certain space as a male. Because of this and other structural factors, certain situations have arisen in which Black males submit to a similar form of masculinity within the spaces they live. Moreover, these aspects of Black hegemonic masculinity along with certain stereotypes, whether on the film screen or in real life, create a skewed look into the Black male experience and serve as a way to continually dehumanize the Black male and his life. This is why it is important to explore the stories of the Black male with a critical lens using the film *Juice*. The next chapter discusses my methodology and how I began to craft my analysis.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

To better understand the variety of messages and meanings found in *Juice*, I draw upon the concepts of Critical Race Theory (CRT) as explained by Freeman and Bell (2019), and Standpoint Theory as developed by Collins (1986) who focused on how standpoints determine meaning. Additionally, I also apply the concept of intersectionality from Crenshaw (1989)—how race, class, gender—all work together to create one’s view of the world.

Critical Race Theory

Critical Race Theory (CRT) is used to study and change the often slanted conversation on race, racism, and power (“What is,” 2019). Alan Freeman and Derrick Bell crafted this critical theory as a way to challenge common legal practices, that the two felt were slowing down the process for racial reform (“What is,” 2019). One of the main themes of CRT is the incorporation of storytelling/counter-storytelling and “naming one’s reality” (Delgado & Stefancic, 1993). Delgado and Stefancic (1993) characterize this aspect of CRT by noting that some theorists find the “majoritarian mindset” as one of the main obstacles of racial reform (p. 462). The mindset is defined as the “bundle of presuppositions, received wisdoms, and shared cultural understandings persons in the dominant group bring to discussions of race” (p. 462). Therefore, a multitude of occurrences, i.e., racial stereotypes, personal experiences, systemic and systematic

racism, all play a role in how racial reform is approached. Because of these occurrences, certain narratives are deemed true while others are deemed false. The dominant group decides which narratives are valid, but they do so from their flawed perspective. Delgado and Stefancic (1993) go on to note that CRT challenges these earlier mentioned beliefs by “employing counter stories, parables, chronicles, and anecdotes, aimed at revealing their contingency, cruelty, and self-serving nature” (p. 462). By applying this method, the critic not only creates a narrative that is truer to the actual situation, the critic also highlights the negative nature of the prior narrative. In later works, Delgado and Stefancic (1993) explain that storytelling and counter-storytelling can “show us the way out of the trap of unjustified exclusion . . . and help us understand when it is time to relocate power” (p. 61). As radical as this sounds, it must be understood from a critical perspective. The idea is not that there is an overtaking of another group, but a redistribution of power and inclusion of all. I employ this critical lens to analyze how Dickerson utilized his own story, stories from his research, and his own creative process to explore the Black male experience and why it is important to have these types of narratives.

Another major theme in CRT is race, sex, and class and their intersections (Delgado & Stefancic, 1993). Crenshaw (1989) coined the term “intersectionality” when discussing the lack of inclusion of Black women in the discourse on both feminist theory and antiracist policy due to the fact that the experiences don’t reflect the intersection of race and gender. Crenshaw (1989) noted that “because the intersectional experience is greater than the sum of racism and sexism, any analysis that does not take intersectionality into account cannot sufficiently address the particular manner in which

Black women are subordinated” (p. 140). Within this paper, I hold the same view when discussing ideas of Black masculinity because it is impossible to discuss the entire experience of the Black male, and separate what it means to be *Black* and to be *male*. The addition of class in my analysis rounds out the experience as a whole and is important to the experience of the Black male.

African American Criticism

African American criticism falls under the larger umbrella of CRT. Taylor (2008) specifically points out that in African American criticism, race becomes “the object of analysis because race, in America, informs our individual and cultural psychology, and therefore our literature, in profound ways” (p. 394), meaning the goal of the criticism is to analyze the work as a way of its impact and explanation of issues within the African American community. Taylor (2008) notes that this criticism understands different aspects of the text that would not be as apparent without this perspective and “to understand the challenges, responsibilities, and opportunities of living in an ethnically diverse society” (p. 394). Taylor’s research applied to literary texts asks critics to consider what the work teaches about African heritage or African American culture and experiences, as well as considering racial politics and the construction of race.

Black Feminist Thought

Diving deeper into CRT and rounding out the holistic methodological approach for the paper, I also incorporate ideas of Black Feminist Thought within my analysis of the film. Collins (1986) described Black Feminist Thought as “ideas of Black women to clarify a standpoint of and for Black women” (p. S16). This comes from Collins (1986) concept of the “outsider within” (p. S14). When characterizing the concept of “outsider

within,” Collins points out the livelihood of Black women living and operating in white spaces and how those Black women have an interesting outlook on self, society, and family (Collins, 1986). Continuing, Collins also points to other theorists who support her idea of the impact in analysis an outsider can bring. Collins mentions bell hooks (1984) echoing an earlier idea of a non-monolithic view of masculinity and its different faces in her community compared to the mainstream, misogynistic caricature including Kid and Daddy Gus mentioned earlier (Collins, 1986). Collins also points to Manheim (1936), who labels, “‘strangers’ as ‘marginal intellectuals’ and argues that the critical posture such individuals bring to academic endeavors may be essential to the creative development of academic disciplines themselves” (p. S15). While I am not a Black woman, I incorporate the same idea as a Black male analyzing Black masculinity and the Black male experience.

Furthermore, certain assumptions are working to bolster the definition. First per Collins (1986), “it is impossible to separate the structure and thematic content of the thought from the historical and material conditions shaping the lives of its producers” (p. S16). Collins continued by noting that Black Feminist Thought could be recorded by anyone but is produced by Black women. This means one cannot discuss the themes of the experience without also taking into account the surroundings, upbringing, and other contextual aspects of the lives of those who are being discussed. This is a huge misstep in other forms of discourse about people of color simply because this context is not added and the pathologizing of Black life comes into play. Second, Black women share certain commonalities of perception due to their standpoint (Collins, 1986). Third, while these commonalities might exist, diversity, class, region, age, and sexual orientation all play a

role in the potential for commonalities (Collins, 1986). Lastly, while the standpoint exists it is the goal of the Black female intellectual to produce facts and theories that clarify the Black woman's standpoint for Black women (Collins, 1986). This is a very powerful way to claim space in the world of academia and analyze race critically in a way that not only provides clarity on racial topics, but also validity to those not often allowed in academic spaces. I employ this same idea of standpoint theory as a Black male to discuss Black masculinity in the film.

My process for analyzing the film was taking my initial knowledge of the film and my ideas of Black masculinity and the Black male experience into my first viewing. During my second viewing, I picked out the central themes of the film and noted which scenes directly connect to these themes and showcase the lived experience of the Black male in this specific time period. After watching the film for a third time and locating these themes, I analyzed these themes from my own personal standpoint as a Black male while also incorporating the necessary context for the situations seen in the film.

Summary

By using a combination of CRT and my own standpoint I described the implications of race, racism, and power and how it operates in popular culture. Building on the foundation provided by CRT, the insights of Collins about standpoint theory, and the concepts that hooks has articulated in her work, my theoretical grounding assists me in uncovering the messages of the film, *Juice*, in Chapter 4.

CHAPTER IV

ANALYSIS

In this chapter I analyze the two most prevalent themes within the film *Juice*: interpersonal and intrapersonal power. These themes that I deciphered from the film view power through the subthemes of respect and violence. These themes follow the idea of counter-storytelling as well as “naming one’s reality” from Critical Race Theory (CRT). These themes serve as the factors and experiences that represent the characterization and the construction of the Black male in the film. I then relate these themes to the overarching idea that runs throughout the entire film which is the connection of power and powerlessness that percolates within the lives of the young Black men in the film. Following this discussion, I examine how this idea of power and powerlessness crafts the experience of the four young Black men in the film and how it connects to Black masculinity. Within this examination, I decipher the intersections of class, race, and sex when discussing both the experience and masculinity of the Black male. The important aspect of instilling my standpoint in the analysis is to continue the ideas above of “naming one’s reality” as well as self-definition and self-valuation that is a staple in both CRT and Black Feminist Thought; which highlights the reason why my standpoint is meaningful when discussing race and masculinity. This analysis answers the following question: How does *Juice* illustrate the social construction of the Black male experience and Black masculinity?

Black Feminist Thought and My Standpoint

One of the key tenets of Collins' (2004) discussion of Black Feminist Thought was the major theme of self-definition and self-valuation as it relates to Standpoint theory. Self-definition is defined as "challenging the political knowledge-validation process that has resulted in externally-defined, stereotypical images of Afro-American womanhood" (p. S16), while self-valuation is "replacing externally-derived images with authentic Black female images" (p. S17). My personal standpoint is as follows: I am a 23-year old, Black male, from Arlington, Texas. I graduated top 15 in a class of more than 450 students from Timberview High School, and began college with 15 credit hours already to my name. While in college at Syracuse University, I majored in Broadcast and Digital Journalism which creates my background in media and media studies. I also finished with three minors in Sports Communication, Sports Management, and most importantly for this paper, African-American Studies. Also, while at Syracuse I was a Resident Advisor for three years. Through my experiences in residence life, media, sports, and my African American Studies curriculum, I have interacted with and been privy to an immense amount of information and a measureless amount of diverse individuals. Since graduation, I have decided to pursue a career in Sports Broadcasting and have worked not only in a collegiate athletic department in media at West Texas A&M University (WTAMU), but also as a graduate assistant for an academic communication department at WTAMU. I have gotten the chance to teach students in both media law and sports broadcasting while at WTAMU. The experiences I have had at WTAMU only add to the boundless and constant observation I do of my surroundings, my media intake, and my communication with others.

As I have discussed in the paper it is not possible to discuss race critically without discussing the intersections of race, sex, and class that create certain opportunities. I, as a Black male, am privileged by my gender and also by my socio-economic status of being what most consider middle-class. Now, per my education, I do not believe there are three classes, but truly only two: the “ruling class” and “working class” which also impacts how I view race, class, and gender. Also, I have been privileged to attend one of the most prestigious universities in the world as well as to attend graduate school. I understand my place of privilege as well as tap into my experiences over the course of my life to analyze the characters and their connections to the Black male experience and Black masculinity in the film.

In discussing my standpoint, I also need to state my privileges in relation to those in the film and young men who mirror the experience of those in the film. These privileges and experiences impact my outlook on power and respect, but also introduce the aura of the tensions faced by the young men. I firmly believe that knowledge is power, and with knowledge, I garner a certain level of respect. I believe that respect is earned, not taken and by becoming knowledgeable people will have no choice but to respect me. If they chose not to respect my knowledge base but I possess enough wisdom to succeed in spite of this lack of respect, then I am the more powerful individual overall and will be successful despite this disrespect. Now knowledge is not only academic, but also cultural, spiritual, economic, political, interpersonal, and intrapersonal. I have been in all of these circles depending on extracurricular activities, schooling, and working therefore my understanding of the world and how it works is holistic. However, I understand that my mindset would be different if I was not privy to these opportunities or

knew about them but could not afford to experience. This is tension that I discuss as it relates to the young men in the film and their experience as black men.

Intrapersonal Power

Power through intrapersonal respect. The first theme is power through intrapersonal respect. For the young men, their self-worth/self-respect is very important to their development as men as well as their outlook on their life. Bishop, who serves as the antagonist in the film, struggles mightily with his outlook on himself in relation to the world around him due to numerous experiences he's had. This alters his understanding of what it truly means to live and clouds his understanding of respect and what it takes to seize it. Bishop's bout with self-worth/self-respect is most evident in the scene when Q, the crew, and Bishop return to Steel's house after running from the truancy police.

This scene is important to Bishop's view of himself and his respect for the group as exemplified by this quote which begins an argument, "We aint shit... We run from the cops, we run from Radamez [gang leader], we run from security guards, we run from old man Quiles in his bullshit store when he comes with that bullshit gun" (Dickerson, 1992). Bishop believes he is nothing and that the only way to become something is to rise up and throw down. This is extremely hegemonic in nature and speaks to a truly domineering ideology of power that seeks violence as the only way to gain respect. Now, this is just the beginning of Bishop's idea of power through violence which will be further explained later, but his need for violence does not come from a place of rage as it stereotypically thought, but rises from a place of self-hate and lack of self-worth. He is not happy about his situation and wants to do something to change it and the only way to change it is to counter to the legitimate ways he has been living his life because that is

what has put him here in the first place. Later in the film, after the murder of Raheem and Quiles, Bishop corners Q at his locker in school. Bishop attempts to use fear as a tactic of control over Q which again is violent in nature. The point though is the quote that Bishop makes, echoing earlier statements and crafting a very clear view on his respect level for the entire group and himself:

I am crazy, but you know what else I don't give a fuck. I don't give a fuck about you. I don't give a fuck about Steel. And, I definitely don't give a fuck about Raheem. I don't even give a fuck about myself. I ain't shit and I aint never gon be shit. And you're less of a man than me so when I decide you aint gon be shit.
POW.

Bishop squarely believes that he is nothing and does not care about himself, his well-being, or anyone around him. A true sign of lack of self-worth and self-hate. Now, how does one get to this point of not caring about the world? Again, the context comes from the intersections of class, race, and gender in Bishop's life. By the world's standards he is a part of the lower class and he has very low social capital within the community. He is often bullied and harassed by the local gang and his point of view on respect is discredited in the aforementioned scene above. So, amongst his close friends his ideas are not believed and within the community he is not safe. Additionally, his father has been brutalized in prison to the point where he is mute and cannot provide for his family. The same gang that harasses Bishop physically also makes a point to harass him verbally saying that he is going to be just like his father. Racially, growing up as a Black male in this community is difficult, and as Bishop said, it seems like he is always on the run, never in control of his own life. All of these instances fashion his experience and

construct how he sees not only his current reality but his future reality as well. If he does not make drastic change, Bishop believes he will continue in this cycle. But rather than take up a legitimate change like Q, Bishop ends up on the other end of the spectrum.

Power through violence in relation to intrapersonal respect. As stated above, Bishop believed the only way to gain respect was to stand up, throw down, and die for it. Bishop, would actually put this way of thinking into action which showcased not only that he truly believed this was the only way to gain the respect he was looking for, but also allows the audience this cruel and sad realization as well. Bishop's tainted mentality not only impacted his experience but the men he called friends and enemies.

The two instances that showcase this are the first time Bishop holds a gun and the committing of the robbery. When Bishop insists on holding the gun as the group discusses the particulars of the robbery, he clutches it and there is an obvious change in his demeanor. The audience can sense the power he now has and this is also evident based on his speech throughout the film. Bishop has joked with Steel before telling Steel that that he isn't in control of his own life because Bishop is allowing him to breathe. When Bishop asks to see the weapon, it serves as symbolic transfer of power in the group, and the beginning of the spiral of violence mentioned earlier in the thesis. The most chilling display of both the threat of violence as well as power through violence in the film was the robbery committed by the four young men. After the robbery is completed and Raheem twice says let's go, Bishop murders Old Man Quiles in his store. Then, when Raheem attempts to take the gun back from Bishop, a scuffle breaks out and Bishop murders Raheem. When Bishop, Steel, and Q are left alone, Bishop pulls the gun on Q and asks if anyone has a problem with the way things went down basically saying "I

have the gun, so I say what happens next,” which is another telling aspect of Bishop having the power in his own hands. “If I go down the group goes down,” Bishop says, showing togetherness to begin the robbery but the consequences of when things go wrong.

All of these instances concentrate on the central symbols of the gun and how the gun promotes an accredited form of power amongst the young men. The finite aspect of violence and death are the factors that have the biggest role in these examples. For Bishop, who throughout the film has struggled to protect himself without the help of his friends, this weapon proved to be what tips the scale. Similar intersectional factors to his lack of self-worth and paternal experiences also create more of a reason to wield a weapon as protection, and even more-so for reasons of control. Bishop does not believe he is in control of his own life and for that reason he does not value it. This lack of value of his own life spills into his lack of value of other life as he quickly turns on his friends. The gun serves as a warning for potential violence, but also as a source of power which refers back to a hegemonic view of masculinity. Domination by force directly aligns with hooks (1992) idea of white supremacist capitalist patriarchy. This domination serves as a way to assert power over others, but in the case of Black men, the consequences are often troublesome and sometimes deadly as we see in the film. hooks (2004) refers to a quote from Eldridge Cleaver from his work in *Soul on Ice* to describe how young men like Bishop retain this type of thinking:

In a culture that secretly subscribes to the piratical ethic of “every man for himself”—the social Darwinism of “survival of the fittest” being far from dead . .

. the logical culmination of this ethic, on a person-to-person level, is that the weak are seen as the natural and just prey of the strong. (p. 26)

This quote characterizes Bishop's outlook on respect and fashions his beliefs on the potential for violence. As stereotypical as this seems, the previous context of his lived experiences plus his lack of belief in himself and his future heavily impact his ideology.

Interpersonal Power

Power through interpersonal respect. Respect amongst those in your community and within the crew is tantamount amongst these young men. The group's level of respect is directly connected to how they are seen as a man and how the group of young men experience life as a Black male. Each of the four men have a different experience interpersonally with respect which impacts how they see themselves and how they live their life.

Steel's struggles in the film are due to his lack of social status amongst his friends. This lack of social status influences how he sees himself and his ability to make decisions within the group. Because of this lack of ability to make decisions his experience is conjoined with those around him for better or for worse. As mentioned earlier Steel receives an immense amount of ridicule amongst the group. When the crew is at his house, Q and Bishop get into a scuffle and break different pieces of furniture including his mother's vase, which highlights them not respecting his space. Also, whilst at his home, the crew makes fun of his cooking. When Steel arrives late to the group at the beginning of the film, he jokes that he was having sexual relations with a young woman named Donna Brasswell. The other three in the group press him about the young woman's features and even joke that Steel slept with "Donald" Brasswell, which attacks

not only his manhood but his sexuality as well. Steel had no problem with any of these jokes because they were just that-- jokes. But, by being the recipient of ridicule, Steel was quiet in almost every scene that might have impacted how he was seen amongst the group as it related to potential opposition of the robbery. He was quiet in the initial scene with the death of Blizzard, he was quiet when the young men discussed the robbery for the first time, and he started crying after the robbery went wrong and Raheem was shot.

Returning to my standpoint, cracking jokes amongst friends is how young men often gain camaraderie amongst each other. This action strengthens the bond between the group and brings the group of friends closer. The constant idea of embarrassing your friends amongst each other is hegemonic in nature as it connects to the idea of holding the upper-hand and dominating one another, but it is not seen as problematic until things go too far. Now, what is too far is designated by the group and once that boundary is reached, there are two options. There is often retaliation (which is, again, hegemonic), an apology, and then atonement, or there is retaliation, no apology, and no reconciliation. We see this amongst all the young men as the crew is constantly tugging and pulling one another, in some cases harder than others; but, this tug of war heavily impacts the experiences of the young men as each attempt to find meaning in their life. This action amongst young men directly links to Steel and his experience as a Black male. Steel, while he is often made fun of, is still an integral part of the crew. This is often the most difficult place to be in the crew as both friend and object of ridicule. When things go terribly wrong as they did during the robbery, these friends who were comforting can potentially turn their back on the person with the lowest social standing. In this case, Bishop shot Steel and framed Q. Steel's place in the crew at the bottom of the pecking

order impacted his ability to make decisions for fear of being ridiculed as well as being left out entirely. Also, as stated earlier, his masculinity was challenged. Still, Steel had an important role in the crew. He serves as the lookout during the robbery, he helps in the heist of records for Q early in the film, and he and Q stick together when Bishop decides to spiral into a seed of violence. His experience was characterized as necessary, but also sub-serving. He was needed by the crew, but also was not heavily respected and that affected his ability to speak up and speak his mind in certain situations.

For Raheem, his experience with respect amongst his friends is the complete opposite. He is the leader of the group and well revered by his crew and others. Where Raheem falls short is his relationship with the mother of his child, Keesha. This relationship affects not only not only how he sees himself, but his status as a man amongst the group. Raheem is not able to provide for his child monetarily, which is completely contrary from an understood expectation of Black masculinity of being the head of household. Because of this inability, Raheem attempts the robbery to gain the necessary funds as well as continue to cement his place amongst the group and in the community as it relates to respect. This is evident by our first true introduction of his character and first building block of his experience is interaction with Keesha early in the film. They have a verbal altercation in which Keesha accuses Raheem of not being a real man. She believes his actions of skipping school and spending all day with his friends do not make him worthy of being around their child. Keesha also makes a note that having a child does not make Raheem a man, but presumably, taking care of the baby he created does. This scene is coupled with a later scene in the film when Raheem and Bishop see Keesha getting into a vehicle with another man who is paying cash for the car.

Raheem has the “juice” amongst his friends and is their leader, but in his outside relationships he is seen as nothing. This relationship between himself and his child’s mother is stereotypical and serves as another construction of the Black male experience in the film. Raheem seems to be more focused on gaining respect within the street amongst his boys, rather than stepping up for his responsibilities as father. In the case of Raheem, he sees that he cannot provide for his child monetarily and that another man can. This hurts his pride and lowers his level of respect. While not explicitly mentioned, this lack of respect serves as a potential motivation for the robbery. For Raheem, it is not to gain respect amongst his crew or even the Puerto Rican gang, it is to control the only thing that is impacting his level of respect and that is being a caregiver for his child. This begs the question, why doesn’t Raheem get a legitimate job to provide for his child rather than steal?

We revisit an earlier quote from Julius Lester on how legitimate forms of work are not seen as viable amongst Black men in these communities: “To a black man, work means putting yourself directly under a white man on a job and having to do what he says . . . thus, work becomes synonymous with loss of respect” (cited in hooks, 2004, p. 23). This is where the impact of race, class, and gender intersect to create something both contextually amazing and constructively devastating. This idea of respect and work being disconnected is not held at all within the dominant society, but actually the exact opposite idea is held. The dominant society has coined the idea of the American Dream, pulling yourself up by your bootstraps, and making something of yourself; however, this idea hasn’t worked historically for Black people, thus highlighting a potential reason for a shift in their belief in it. This American Dream has not worked for Black people because

of systemic and systematically racist factors that have shut Blacks out of industry, devalued education, and cornered them into impoverished communities. All of these factors play a role in Raheem's life and help craft his mentality. Contextually, Raheem is attempting to gain respect in what he sees as the only credible fashion amongst his peers, which is to support his child by any means. Also, by committing the robbery he continues to grow as a central figure amongst his peers and throughout the community. The reason he commits this crime though comes from an illegitimate idea of respect that is extremely detrimental to his potential growth and causes his untimely death. Again, my standpoint on respect rings true in this situation as it relates to lack of knowledge. I firmly believe that if I had not been privy to my understanding of racism and how it systematically disenfranchises me as a Black male, shutting me out of industry, and creating systemic instances of injustice, my outlook on upward mobility and respect would be different. That is why education is so important and why lack of education is extremely dangerous for individuals whose situations don't allow access to it.

Q is the most well put together of the four men both from an experiential sense and a masculine sense. Experientially, his room is filled with posters of prominent Black individuals including Malcolm X and Martin Luther King, his connection to hip-hop through his DJ'ing career, and his success at the DJ competition create a social construction of confidence and success. Q serves as what could be considered the hope of the group: the one most would believe has a chance to "make it out." Therefore, his level of self-respect and self-worth is evident in these situations and characterizes his experience. The problem for Q is not his respect or thirst for power but the company he keeps.

Q is the only one who does not see “juice” as the only viable source of control/power and this dichotomy is set by his difference in actions compared to the others. Because Q believes respect is earned and not taken, his route to earn this respect is different than those in the group who attempt to take it. His downfall though is his connection to his crew that carries this skewed ideology on respect. Because of this connection, Q becomes merely a part of the plot to gain respect as a group. Q’s avenue for respect is seen as illegitimate or a long shot, whereas the robbery breeds immediate, tangible success.

This difference is evident when Q decides to try-out for the DJ competition. He sees the DJ competition as a way to stop hustling at the corner store. He also heightens the idea by seeing it as a way to get respect from the big names who will also be performing. His dreams are shot down by his friends in joking that he is just local, but this language is detrimental in two ways. One, the idea of him being local in comparison to the other artists forecasts his ability to get out of the hood contrary to his wants. Also, even though his friends are just joking, their lack of uplifting speech means they are okay with Q just being local as well. This does not mean they do not want him to succeed, but also do not truly believe he will succeed, continuing the idea these young men are a reflection of their surroundings and stuck in this cycle. This is often the experience of young Black men in the community. Even when they attempt to do something, those who should be their main supporters are sometimes their main agitators and haters. So, while Q seeks an avenue for success, his friends’ words and actions stifle that chance. This most tenuous aspect of this interaction between Q, his friends, and the DJ competition is the fact that the competition served as an alibi for the crime. Therefore, Q’s connection to

his friends superseded his potential for success and served as a way to legitimize their actions. For Q, he understood that it takes time to gain respect legitimately, his friends did not, and believed next step was the threat of violence.

Power through violence in relation to interpersonal respect. The robbery and violence that transpired has a bearing on the lives of Raheem, Steel, and Q. For Raheem, he loses his life as a result of trying to obtain the respect he was not receiving from Keesha. For Q and Steel, they become accessories to murder and must continue to keep quiet in fear of messing up their own lives. In relation to Q specifically, he cannot continue his DJ competition because he is questioned by police that night. The bigger issue though is the threat of violence on him after the robbery as well as how the violence from the prior night affects his future. Q designated a route to success through DJing and was on the route by getting accepted into the competition and winning the first round, but Q was pushed off that route because of the company he kept. Not only was he pushed off that route, but it forced him down the opposite path as he sought out a place to find a weapon. This continues the theme of power/powerlessness within the groups lived experience. Q seemed to have the most control over his own life, but one decision cost him that power. He then was at the mercy of his friend due to potential threat of violence as well as the threat of going to jail if he confessed to his part of the crime. This double-edged sword really speaks to the impact guns, gun violence, and overall crime has in the inner city and how the Black male experience is affected by it. The potential for death and injury is present in any illegal attainment of respect and if the plan does not come to fruition the aftermath often leaves these Black men worse off than before. Making matters worse in the case of Q, based on his construction as a character he did not need to

be a part of this robbery at all. His respect level, understanding of his self-worth, and route to greatness was all out in front of him.

Then and Now

Almost 30 years after the film's original release in 1992, *Juice* still resonates with the youth and there are common narratives that persist. Also, with this film's connection to hip-hop and Black culture, the artists of today echo similar experiences as well. As mentioned previously, *Juice* was named a top 5 hip-hop movie of all-time by *SOURCE Magazine* and top 10 by *Complex Magazine* (Kimble & Josephs, 2018; "Top 5," 2018). Hip-hop as a whole was considered by one writer as the fifth character in the film (Brown, 2012). From some of the earliest hip-hop songs such as *Grandmaster Flash* and the Furious Five's *The Message* to Tupac's early songs *Trapped* and *Brenda's Got A Baby*, all the way to recently released songs by J. Cole 4 *Your Eyez Only* and Meek Mill's *Oodles O' Noodles Babies* the common thread of struggle is threaded throughout hip-hop music. These songs also serve as narratives of the experiences of the young Black male and the many trials that they face on a daily basis. J. Cole in the opening lines of 4 *Your Eyez Only* (2015), a song that documents the life of his childhood friend and his belief that his life is over, is very chilling but mirrors earlier ideas of struggle and lack of options:

[People] be dying on the daily, it seems my dreams faded for far too long the consequence is deadly. Can't visualize myself as nothing but a criminal, control the block serving up rocks and stay subliminal. Cause young [people] is hardheaded they letting off. Full of adrenaline, ignorant to what death can cause.

(para. 2)

This sums up the situation that the young men in the film found themselves in connecting the earlier explanation of the rise in gun violence and gang violence in the streets. The biggest comparison coming in the last line, as Bishop and the rest of the young men find themselves entangled in a web of violence. For Bishop, his surroundings are constantly negative, his familial life is crumbling, and his life outside of home is filled with terror, all these factors helped elicit his actions as the film went on. For the rest of the group, they become complicated in the spiral of violence as friends of Bishop and all accomplices in the crime, with Raheem being a victim of the violence.

A 2012 *New York Daily News* article highlighted how students who were taken to see the film *Juice* were still resonating with the film and its message on violence, peer pressure, and simply growing up Black. One student noted that he had seen four of his peers gunned down and he was only 16 years of age (Feeny, 2012). The same young man discussed that by seeing *Juice* numerous things were put into perspective about gun violence. Khalil Kain (Raheem) and Jermaine Hopkins (Steel) were a part of the members who took 100 kids to view the film at the Magic Johnson theatre in Harlem. Both commented on how the same issues that they portrayed in the film are still happening all around them and that decision-making is extremely key in trying to break the cycle (Feeny, 2012).

These points give greater validity not only to the construction of both race and masculinity in the film, but also to the message of the film. By crafting these real-world experiences and creating a narrative that better aligns with what is actually happening in the lives of the youth, there is a chance for growth as well as a breaking of the cycle of violence that has continued to persist for almost three decades. The importance of being

able to tell a real story and understanding that the of a Black male in creating a piece that is meant to speak to the Black community holds extreme weight.

Summary

This chapter highlights the major themes of power through respect both intrapersonal and interpersonal and the subthemes of power through respect and power through violence which are heavy influences on the young men in the film. These themes both influence their outlook on life and how they see themselves as men. With respect these young men are seen as not only more masculine, but also more powerful. Through violence these four young men can demand respect through the threat or kill someone who doesn't give them the respect they feel deserve. This mentality envelops Bishop and forces him in to a spiral of violence that ends up becoming his undoing. Q's mentality is the antithesis of Bishop's, but Q also saw a way out of his current situation which also crafted his outlook on life and himself. These contextual factors for both Q and Bishop provide a foundation for their lifestyle. As for Steel and Raheem, similar factors fashion how they come to think the way that they do. For Raheem his interaction with his mother's child impacts how he sees himself and his lack of ability to provide for his child. For Steel, his low social status within the group impacts how he decides to act within the group as well. All of these factors connect to instances that are still happening today highlighting not only how important this story is, but the work that needs to be done so more individuals do not meet similar fates within the Black community.

Chapter V

DISCUSSION & CONCLUSION

This analysis uses both Critical Race Theory (CRT) and Black Feminist Thought to analyze the film *Juice*. Throughout the film, the coming of age of the four young Black men create a commentary on the topic of Black masculinity and the Black male experience. In this chapter I discuss the findings from this commentary on the aforementioned topics. The coming of age story of the four young Black men in the film *Juice* led to this research question:

RQ: How does *Juice* illustrate the social construction of the Black male experience and Black masculinity?

Social Construction of the Black Male Experience and Black Masculinity

The social construction of both the Black male experience in the film as well as Black masculinity can be attributed to the factors that impact the lives of the young men in the film. As noted, the actions of the young men from an outsider's perspective are in some cases stereotypical in nature (e.g., the use of guns to attain power and respect, the commission of a crime to gain a reputation on the street), but these actions are not committed because of the same reasons these stereotypes are enforced.

The stereotypical views of Black men date back to times of slavery and situate black men as genetically deviant and less than their white counterparts. Other stereotypes include their lack of ability to control their emotions, their inept attitude towards

knowledge, and their violent nature. This is why laws have been enacted and situations have been created to curb this supposed genetic deviance and other stereotypical ideals. This stereotypical ideology of the Black male comes from a well-documented history of racism and discrimination within the film industry that plays into the overarching idea of racism and discrimination in the view of the Black male as a whole. From the brute/savage stereotype to the lack of intellect that derives from the coon stereotype, this ideology is heavily present in films that discuss Black livelihood especially with men (Larson, 2005). These stereotypes enhance the already negative view of the Black male and serve as reasons to continue unjust practices against them.

When studied more critically through the lens of *Juice*, it is not a deviant nature that forces these young men to subscribe to this behavior, but the circumstances in which they grow up and the lack of legitimate ways to gain the respect they seek. This is not meant to pathologize the Black life, but as noted in the film and in my analysis when the context of the surroundings is added, circumstances, and the view of what it means to be a man, the actions that are seen in the film become commonplace. This is the reason why some of these stereotypical actions happen in different places as well. Even as time has passed and some areas have gotten better the grand scheme of the Black male experience in certain impoverished areas have not changed.

The film illustrates the social construction of Black masculinity through providing caricatures of what it means to be masculine in a raucous, unsafe, and peer pressure fueled environment. As it relates to the Black male experience, Dickerson creates sequences in the film that highlight the day-to-day activities of the Black male in the streets of New York. These activities and experiences are not always ideal, but by

showcasing them Dickerson allows for the audience to construct what it means to be a young Black male growing up. Dickerson features certain actions such as running from the truancy police, the crew chilling at both their homes and the corner store, and numerous other experiences to give an overview of what the lives of these young men are like. Some of these actions in the film are stereotypical including the violence and theft, but by incorporating these items in the film Dickerson doesn't shy away from what in some cases really happens in the lives of young black youth. The violence that is seen in the film is a real-world example of how Black youth can be enveloped by their surroundings and fall into the systemic trap that has been set for them as mentioned in the research question. The experiences of the Black male from an outsider's perspective are constructed as deviant and standard actions, but when provided with the contextual themes the audience understands the actions of the youth as an attempt to navigate their lives as it has been provided to them.

As for Black masculinity, the film also helps the audience understand what it means to be a man at this stage of life for Black youth. If they do not have any "juice," they are easily put down, stepped over, and disrespected. One of the only viable options to attain the respect that the young Black men were looking for was to commit a crime. This crime connects to a type of masculinity that is hegemonic in nature and puts domination as the most important factor in masculinity. Because domination or power is the most important factor, the young men needed to find a way to legitimize their power over others in the community and set an example for anyone who would be looking to challenge that power in the community. The incorporation of the gun in the crime doubles down on the idea of domination and power as with a weapon one has the ultimate

power over another's life. This social construction of masculinity is built to help formulate negative action as simply a way to ordain manhood and not as a detrimental action to the community.

Limitations of the Study

Limitations to this study include the fact that this is only one film, therefore the scope of the critique could be different if applied to other films of the same canon. Within the thesis, I have mentioned other films that fall in the same genre including *Boyz in the Hood* and *Menace II Society* which would be films that could help corroborate or diminish the different findings within this study. Also, films that have a heavy hip-hop impact such as *Paid in Full* or *Notorious* which are reenactments of true events (*Paid in Full* being the story of well-known drug dealers in Harlem in the late 1980s and *Notorious* being the adaption of the life of hip-hop legend Notorious B.I.G). While Dickerson's story is inspired by true events that he had experienced or taken from young men he had spoken to, these aforementioned stories incorporate different angles that could add to the analysis of the Black male.

Another limitation or potential critique of this thesis is the absurdity of naming one's reality. While this would limit someone's ability to call his/her own depiction of his/her own life absurd, the point stands that reality is subjective to different people. Therefore, basing what reality is or isn't could be difficult to assess as valid. The incorporation of true stories from young men and the point that these narratives have persisted over twenty five plus years later not only in hip-hop music, but also in the Harlem streets – the same streets in which the film was shot and meant to portray – help

bolster the validity of Dickerson's ability to name reality not only for himself but for others.

Conclusion

Within this critique of the film *Juice*, I utilized both Critical Race Theory (CRT) and Black Feminist Thought to highlight important aspects of the film that connected to Black masculinity and the Black male experience. The findings within this thesis sought to explain how race was constructed from an outsider's view of the film and to add necessary contextual aspects to highlight why the stereotypical aspects of the film should be viewed from a different perspective.

The study revealed that in certain situations the young men in the film represented stereotypical depictions of the Black male and carried a bravado that is also stereotypical of Black masculinity. The analysis also points out why these stereotypical visions of the young men unfairly characterize their existence, and in some cases pathologizes their being. By incorporating the ideas of standpoint theory and self-valuation and self-definition which are important aspects of Black Feminist Thought and counter-storytelling and intersectionality in CRT, the study shows that the behavior of the young men comes from peer pressure and their quest for respect amongst themselves within their crew and the people around them in the community who often deny them of this respect. Other themes that are within the film that have a bearing on the young men's behavior are the impact of guns and gang violence within the community and the simple aspect of growing up in a rough space. All of these factors based on the research done by the film's director, myself, and young men that grew up in similar spaces over the past

thirty years contribute to the behavior and growth of the young men. These factors also contribute to how have they define what it means to be a Black man.

REFERENCES

- 662dodz (2018, January 08). 2pac super rare interview on set of juice movie [Video file]. Retrieved from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_5PyG8u4NUc
- Brown, L. (2012, January 20). Know the ledge: A 20 year retrospective on “Juice.” *Hip-hopDX* [online]. Retrieved from <https://hiphopdx.com/editorials/id.1841/title.know-the-ledge-a-20-year-retrospective-on-juice>
- Collins, P. H. (1986). Learning from the outsider within: The sociological significance of Black feminist thought. *Social Problems*, 33(6). doi:10.1525/sp.1986.33.6.03a00020
- Collins, P. H. (2004). *Black sexual politics: African Americans, gender, and the new racism*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Crenshaw, K. (2018). Demarginalizing the intersection of race and sex: A Black feminist critique of antidiscrimination doctrine, feminist theory, and antiracist politics [1989]. In K. Bartlett (Ed.), *Feminist legal theory: Readings in law and gender* (pp 57-80). New York, NY: Routledge. doi:10.4324/9780429500480-5
- Delgado, R., & Stefancic, J. (1993). Critical Race Theory: An annotated bibliography. *Virginia Law Review*, 79(2), 461. doi:10.2307/1073418
- Feeney, M. J. (2018, April 09). 'Juice' 20 years later: Messages in a violence-riddled film still resonate with local youth. *New York Daily News* [online]. Retrieved from <https://www.nydailynews.com/entertainment/tv-movies/juice-20-years-messages-violence-riddled-film-resonate-local-youth-article-1.1008907>
- Foss, S. K., Foss, K. A., & Trapp, R. (2014). *Contemporary perspectives on rhetoric*. Long Grove, IL: Waveland Press.

- Geier, T. (2019, February 24). Every Black director nominated for an Oscar, from John Singleton to Spike Lee (photos). *The Wrap* [online]. Retrieved from <https://www.thewrap.com/black-director-nominated-for-oscar-john-singleton-jordan-peelee/>
- Genius. (2016, December 09). J. Cole – 4 Your Eyez Only. *Genius* [online]. Retrieved from <https://genius.com/J-cole-4-your-eyez-only-lyrics>
- Gilchrist, T. (2004, September 17). Interview: Charles Stone III. *IGN* [online]. Retrieved from <https://www.ign.com/articles/2004/09/17/interview-charles-stone-iii>
- Givens, J. R., Nasir, N., Ross, K., & Royston, M. M. (2016). Modeling Manhood: Reimagining Black Male Identities in School. *Anthropology & Education Quarterly*, 47(2), 167-185. doi:10.1111/aeq.12147
- Hobbs, T. (2018, April 7). Beats, rhymes and cinema: *Menace II Society*. *Little White Lies* [online]. Retrieved from <https://lwlies.com/articles/beats-rhymes-and-cinema-menace-ii-society/>
- Hooks, B. (1992). *Black Looks: Race and representation*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Hooks, B. (2004). *We real cool: Black men and masculinity*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Kimble, J., & Josephs, B. (2018, June 01). The best hip-hop movies. *Complex* [online]. Retrieved from <https://www.complex.com/music/best-hip-hop-movies/>
- Larson, S. G. (2006). *Media & minorities: The politics of race in news and entertainment*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Martin, M. J., McCarthy, B., Conger, R. D., Gibbons, F. X., Simons, R. L., Cutrona, C. E., & Brody, G. H. (2010). The enduring significance of racism: Discrimination and

- delinquency among Black American youth. *Journal of Research on Adolescence*, 21(3), 662-676. doi:10.1111/j.1532-7795.2010.00699.x
- Mannheim, K. (1936). *Ideology and utopia*. London, U. K.: Routledge.
- Maslin, J. (1992, January 17). Review/Film; Too much to prove, and no reason to prove it. *New York Times* [online]. Retrieved from <https://www.nytimes.com/1992/01/17/movies/review-film-too-much-to-prove-and-no-reason-to-prove-it.html>
- Pavilion, D. C. (1990, March 26). The 62nd Academy Awards | 1990. Retrieved from <https://www.oscars.org/oscars/ceremonies/1990>
- Penrice, R. R. (2017, June 13). Juice at 25: Director Ernest Dickerson talks Tupac, hip-hop and the film's enduring legacy. *The Root* [online]. Retrieved from <https://www.theroot.com/juice-at-25-director-ernest-dickerson-talks-tupac-hip-1796054192>
- Raab, S. (1988, March 15). Brutal drug gangs wage war of terror in Upper Manhattan. *New York Times* [online]. Retrieved from <https://www.nytimes.com/1988/03/15/nyregion/brutal-drug-gangs-wage-war-of-terror-in-upper-manhattan.html>
- Snyder, H. N., & Sickmund, M. (1999, September). Juvenile offenders and victims: 1999 national report. Retrieved from <https://www.ncjrs.gov/html/ojjdp/nationalreport99/toc.html>
- Swanson, T. (2011, July 26). 'Hood,' revisited. *Los Angeles Times* [online]. Retrieved from <https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-2011-jul-26-la-et-boyz-anniv-20110726->

story.html Taylor, L. (2006). *Critical theory today: A user-friendly guide*. Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge.

Top 5 hip hop influenced movies ever made. (2015, September 08). *The Source*. Retrieved from <http://thesource.com/2015/09/01/top-5-hip-hop-influenced-movies-ever-made/>

Turan, K. (1992, January 17). MOVIE REVIEW: Is this 'Juice' fresh? *Los Angeles Times* [online]. Retrieved from <https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-1992-01-17-ca-193-story.html>

What is Critical Race Theory? (2009, November 04). UCLA School of Public Affairs. Retrieved from <https://spacrs.wordpress.com/what-is-critical-race-theory/>

Williams, B. (2017, June 07). 'Juice' director says we can't let future generations sleep on classic Black films. *Huffington Post* [online]. Retrieved from https://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/juice-25th-anniversary-director-ernest-r-dickerson_us_59383781e4b0c5a35c9b33e7