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At-Risk Students' Perceptions of the Impact of Popular Culture and the Media on Their Lives.

Rebecca Cupples Draper
East Tennessee State University

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by

Rebecca Cupples Draper

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Dr. Louise MacKay, Chair

Dr. Cecil Blankenship

Dr. Nancy Dishner

Dr. Jasmine Renner

ABSTRACT

At-Risk Students' Perceptions of the Impact of Popular Culture and the Media on Their Lives

by

Rebecca Cupples Draper

This qualitative study is comprised of indepth interviews with 16 at-risk high school students. The students were asked to give reasons for their discipline problems in high school. They were also asked to give their perspectives on various forms of popular culture. Questions regarding television, movies, music, video games, and sports were posed to determine the participants' interest level in each of the areas. The students were then asked to gauge how much these interests had taken away from their schoolwork. The students' perceptions and life experiences were explored in depth via the interview process.

In general, the lives of these students had been impacted in some way by some form of popular culture. There has been a tendency in recent literature to decry the influence of the media on today's youth; this seems to be borne out by some of the statements made by these students. Throughout the interview process, they stated that their lives had been both positively and negatively influenced by their culture despite the beliefs held by many parents, teachers, and administrators that popular culture has a strong negative impact on their lives.

The implications for the future include ways that educators can incorporate popular culture and the media into the curriculum effectively. Additionally, teachers, administrators, and parents

need to gain a better understanding of how important popular culture is to adolescents and how they can combat its negative effects while keeping students interested in school.

This work is dedicated to the two most important people in my life: my two best friends. The constant encouragement from you both has helped me to realize that trials are temporary, yet love and hope will always remain. Happiness is a choice and you both taught me that choosing a positive attitude is one of life's essentials.

To Ryan, thanks for all the adventures we have shared. Your dedication to helping me achieve my goals has meant so much to me and your support of all my crazy ideas just proves that we are in this together. I am grateful that you have encouraged me to pursue my dreams. You have always cheered me on no matter what the circumstances. Of all the cities and all the apartments we've shared, my three constants in life have been your love, your laughter, and a good map.

To Pat, your sacrifices have never gone unnoticed or unappreciated. Your support, love, and belief in me have helped me to always stay positive no matter what obstacles I might have faced. Without your guidance and strength, I don't know how I would have ever accomplished so much. Thank you for being my mother, my friend, and my confidant. Thanks for always keeping your cell phone on too, because I don't know what I would do if I couldn't talk to my mom!

I can't imagine how I would have made it through any of this without the love and strength of these two amazing individuals.

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CONTENTS

8

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Today's young people seem to be obsessed with popular culture and inundated with images from the many forms of media's presence in their lives. There are televisions in almost every home in the country and many young people have their own television in their rooms. It is becoming increasingly difficult to get into a car, go into a store, or watch a commercial without hearing some type of music playing; it can be blaringly loud and omnipresent or it can be the subtle soundtrack of our lives. Sporting events occur practically every day on a variety of levels; many of these competitive events are televised. The athlete has been exalted in our society, and many of our young people look up to athletes as heroes. Today's students are also inundated by movies and video games. In this digital age, many researchers suggest that students simply have too much visual and aural stimulation (Federman, 1997; Giroux, 1998; Lasn, 1999; Levinson, 1997; McWhorter, 2003; Schneider & Stevenson, 1999).

Because parents and teachers have allowed and sometimes encouraged it, many adolescents have embraced popular culture. The trappings of popular culture are everywhere in schools; no topic of conversation among young people gets more regard (other than talking about each other) than does popular culture. Students spend great sums of their allowance money or their minimum wage earnings on music and video games. They go to movies in droves with little attention to the appropriateness of the morals and values represented in those films (Hepburn, 2001). They participate in and watch sports more than any other segmental group of society and are impacted more by their participation or viewing habits than any other cross-sectional group of Americans today. Television is ubiquitous, and it often seems as if today's teens cannot or, more tellingly, will not live without television in their lives. In fact, when asked what they would do if there were no television, many students were at a complete loss for words. They simply could not imagine life with no TV. Most know in the back of their minds that

television was not always around; however, because current teenagers' parents also watched television and it was a huge part of their lives, today's teens do not seem so completely different from their parents (Franklin, 2003; *Nation Still at Risk*, 1999; Owen, 1997).

Of great concern to society is the continuing decline of high school graduation rates in this country; however, some efforts are being made to stem this tide. Specifically, the Jacobs Creek Job Corps Center, a federally funded academic and vocational program for at-risk youths, enrolls troubled students and helps them get their diplomas and training in a vocational skill in order that they may become gainfully employed (U.S. Department of Labor, 2004). In 2003, 525 students entered the program. Of those 525, only 122 entered with a high school diploma or a GED. These numbers highlight the fact that only 23.2% of students entering the program had been able to finish high school or pass all five portions of the GED exam. The remaining 77% did not complete high school (Brendon, 2003; U.S. Department of Education, 2002a; U.S. Department of Labor).

Additionally, many public high schools have incorporated alternative programs to help at-risk youths learn to deal with their problems more effectively in an effort to keep these students enrolled in school. One program at Lexington Senior High School in Lexington, North Carolina, has been very successful since its inception two years ago. Many of the students who were assigned to spend time in this alternative school did not become repeat offenders; instead, they generally spent one day in the alternative program and subsequently vowed never to return. The recidivism rate is low because of the perceived stigma that is attached to the alternative school and because of the students' desire to not be separated from their friends. The Jacket Academy, named after Lexington's YellowJacket mascot, helped students deal with the problems that they faced at school and attempted to help them return to their regular classes as quickly as possible.

In America's high schools today, more students are dropping out of school for a greater variety of reasons than in the past (U.S. Department of Education, 2001). Some reasons overlap,

11

and many students give similar reasons for their actions; yet, each student is different and each one has his or her own personal story to tell (Kozol, 1991). I attempted to record some of these stories in an effort to make some sense out of the "messes" that these students claimed their lives had become. Some of the students had specific reasons for wanting to leave school with some of those reasons demonstrating a direct correlation to popular culture and the influence of the media. Others did not know why they were in danger of not making it to their graduation day but they had some ideas. Those ideas at times related back to their interests in the media and popular culture. This study focused on the roles of popular culture and the media in the lives of at-risk students. Findings from the study might help teachers to direct students in positive ways to avoid the distractions of too much emphasis on popular culture. Many teachers are not aware of how much influence these distractions have on today's teenagers. Perhaps, with a better understanding, teachers could try to reach out to troubled youngsters in an effort to keep these at-risk students in school (Giroux, 2000; Halford, 1999; Janzen, 1994; Means, 1997).

Research Questions

The interview questions that were posed to each of the participants asked them to describe problems they had in coping with school, reasons they believed they were struggling to complete their required coursework, how the alternative program had helped them, and how they believed these decisions have impacted their lives. A second set of questions addressed which particular aspects of popular culture and the media they believed had impacted them the most, how they said that popular culture had influenced them personally, their earliest recollections of the media and how they affected them the most, and finally, what they believed they had learned so far from the influence of media and popular culture on their lives. A third and smaller set of questions aimed at teachers, guidance counselors, principals, and parents focused on how to gauge the extent to which they believed the students were impacted by their interests in popular

culture and the media. The following research questions were formulated to guide the investigation:

1. What common factors do these at-risk students report that may have helped cause them to become labeled as at-risk students?

2. To what extent do at-risk students report that they watch and/or participate in television, movies, music, video games, and sports?

3. How can teachers, administrators, and parents help at-risk students place popular culture and the media in their proper context, emphasizing their importance while combating the negative aspects?

Purpose and Significance of the Study

This study is significant for several reasons. There is not a great deal of scholarly research on this particular topic; journal articles and scholarly papers tend to focus more on academic matters such as site-based management, policy analysis, and the impact of test scores on any number of varying factors. Many articles have been written about the influence of popular culture on society at large and on adolescents specifically; yet, the majority of these articles are published by the media in popular cultural types of publications. In recent years, popular media outlets have come under attack because of their gradual leniency in deciding what is permissible to air, play, or publish (Dowler, 2003; Levin, 2003; Molnar, 2004). Many administrators, teachers, and parents realize that the media can have a negative impact on young people; yet, few recognize the extent of the influence of the media and popular culture, and fewer still know how to combat these negative influences. Additionally, not all media are bad; students can learn much about how to live through their music, movies, television shows, and even sports and video games. According to many researchers, there are salient points to be made on both sides of the issue (Hamilton, 2001; Holmes & Branch, 1994; Kumar, 1997; U.S. Department of Education, 2002b).

Supporters of media outlets claim they are necessary to maintain an informed society whereas others see popular culture as a national defiler. This contradiction is not lost on students. They are surrounded by popular culture and media that can have both positive and negative influences in their lives. The double standards are set regarding the media and popular culture and many seem unable to reconcile them. They simply accept them along with the palpable influence that media have over their lives (*Nation Still at Risk*, 1999).

Groups that might benefit from this study include teachers, parents, and school administrators. The study could have serious implications for teachers, many of whom do not seem to realize how strongly students rely upon information supplied by popular culture and the media on a regular basis. By examining the students' stories presented in this qualitative study, teachers might be able to reflect upon their own use of media and popular culture in their classrooms to better educate youngsters and help them reach educational goals.

In addition, many parents do not seem to realize how important popular culture is to their children or the huge impact it has on their lives. The results of this study might help parents learn to instill values in their children using popular culture as a starting point; they could then help their children to either embrace the values taught or to shun them as detriments to their growth. A major point of contention in this particular study was that the media and popular culture are not bad or negative influences in and of themselves but they could affect students in negative ways without strong parental involvement to help them understand how to make sense of society and the way in which it is presented to them.

Administrators could benefit from the results of the study by considering their schools' policies on media and technology use and examining how these affect the student population. Each teacher's use of media in the classroom should be monitored closely to ensure that it is appropriate, useful to, and informative for the students. Administrators who are out of touch with current popular culture and the media often have a more difficult time relating to the students and their needs because they have no understanding of what is important to students in

14

these areas. Furthermore, administrators must know that some aspects of media and popular culture that they allow to be brought into their schools are not all negative. As with parents, administrators have a huge responsibility in ensuring that students are protected from negativity and surrounded by influences that will bring positive learning opportunities into students' lives. Music, movies, sports, television, and even video games all have their places in schools. Administrators must be willing to take the time and spend the money necessary to ensure that these influences are positive ones in the lives of the adolescents under their care and direction.

Background

The amount of information published each year about popular culture is astounding. This information is promulgated by the media in an attempt to entertain the masses. As a society, we were first conditioned to believe everything that we were told by the media. Gradually, over time, we were told to trust no one. Today, a healthy percentage of adults have learned to evaluate everything they are told in search for the truth (Abdullah, 2000). Sadly, our young people sometimes do not get this lesson. They grow up with television, movies, music, video games, and sports and learn some very important life lessons from each genre (Kumar, 1997). Yet, they are almost never taught to look at these lessons critically and examine them for the truth. They simply assume that truth is there when in reality very little of what mass media and popular culture represent is completely accurate. Even "reality television" is fake in the sense that television cameras filming one's every action must inherently change the situation (Dowler, 2003).

There is a shortage of scholarly research on the influence of popular culture and the media and their impact on at-risk youths. My goal was to attempt to address critical issues in the lives of students who were in danger of not making it to graduation in order to investigate how these students' lives had been impacted by the choices they had made and how they expressed their feelings about their choices.

Participants

Sixteen students were chosen for the study. There were four African American students comprised of two girls and two boys. I selected four Hispanics, two girls and two boys. I chose four Caucasians, two girls and two boys. Finally, I selected four Asian Americans, two girls and two boys. My mixture was evenly split between genders on purpose in order to maintain equal representation. This particular racial make-up of students, this purposeful sampling, was chosen in order to get a variety of cultural representations with such a small sample size. All of the students I interviewed had been sent to the alternative program at Lexington Senior High School at least three times, yet, all had the option of returning to Lexington Senior High after they completed their required stay at the Jacket Academy. While not yet high school dropouts, many were near that state at the time of our interviews. However, all knew that they could return to their regular classes so long as they abided by the rules and worked regularly with the counselors. They were all considered at-risk according to the definition outlined in the following section of this study. The students selected had a pattern of low grades, low-test scores, poor attendance, and/or had negative behavioral incidents. The participants ranged in age from 15 to 20. They were each interviewed twice; both interviews contained questions related to school and popular culture.

Definitions of Terms

For the purposes of this study, there were very few words used that required definitions. There are several instances where the subjects are quoted; slang will be used at times to convey the students' true forms of expression. Whenever necessary, an explanation will be provided. Because this study references popular culture and the media, it is helpful to examine how the components of these phrases are defined by Merriam Webster's 2004 Online Dictionary:

1. *Popular* (Pop music): (a) of or relating to pop music (pop singer), (b) of or relating to the popular culture disseminated through the mass media (pop psychology, pop

grammarians, pop society) (c) of or relating to pop art (pop painter), (d) having, using, or imitating themes or techniques characteristic of pop art (pop movie).

2. *Culture* (pop culture): (a) the act of developing the intellectual and moral faculties especially by education; (b) enlightenment and excellence of taste acquired by intellectual and aesthetic training; (c) the integrated pattern of human knowledge, belief, and behavior that depends upon man's capacity for learning and transmitting knowledge to succeeding generations; (d) the customary beliefs, social forms, and material traits of a racial, religious, or social group.

3. *Media*: (a) a means of effecting or conveying something; (b) a channel or system of communication, information, or entertainment; (c) a mode of artistic expression.

These definitions are explored further in other parts of the study.

A final term that needs defining in this study is that of at-risk youth. In this particular study, the participants interviewed may or may not have been identified as at-risk youths before being sent to the Jacket Academy; however, the common factor that they all shared is that they did go to the alternative program. Finn, Willert, and Marable (2003) defined at-risk youths as socially or financially disadvantaged, learning disabled, emotionally or psychologically disturbed, or even the products of broken homes. These loose terms do not succinctly define at-risk youths; furthermore, applying the term "broken home" as a delimiting factor would label over half of young people as at-risk when considering the current divorce rate in this country.

Some educators consider all students at risk of falling behind; others would limit the definition to include only adjudicated youth (Casey, 1992). For every type of student anomaly, there is an advocate for their inclusion into the category of at-risk. Students who have physical or emotional disabilities are sometimes included depending on the level of help they receive from their schools. According to McCollum (2000):

> A student is classified as at-risk according to the Improving America's Schools Act (IASA) if he or she is a member of any of the following groups: children in high poverty areas; children who are limited English proficient; migratory children; neglected or

delinquent children; homeless children; immigrant children; American Indian children; children with disabilities; refugee children; and teen parents. (p. 12)

For the purposes of this study, those students who qualify for free or reduced lunch, whose primary language is not English, who have lived or currently reside in foster care or are homeless, who are considered migratory or immigrant, who are neglected or delinquent, who have documented disabilities, or those who are parents themselves will be considered as interview subjects.

All students, unfortunately, could become labeled as at-risk. Adolescence is a tentative and difficult life passage, and students are easily distracted during this critical period in their lives. According to Donnelly (1987), at any given time, any student could become labeled as an at-risk youth. The participants in this study were labeled as at-risk youths not only because they fell within one of the above categories but also because they had demonstrated other types of at-risk behavior in school. Either they were on the verge of dropping out of school or they had had significant disciplinary or academic problems that had potential to keep them from remaining in school. They were all troubled and for many, the next few weeks or months would determine whether they were going to succeed in continuing their education or not.

Limitations and Delimitations

In this study, I did not attempt to reform the media or influence popular culture in any way. Rather, I merely set out to explain in the words of 16 young people how they reported that their lives were impacted by the media and popular culture and whether they perceived their decisions to leave school were affected by these factors. Some of the influences were negative; some were positive. The nature of popular culture is not inherently bad and mass media are not a complete wasteland. This study focused on the impact of these influences on the lives of a particular group of troubled youngsters in an attempt to determine what had been helpful and what had been hurtful. This study also examined what educators and parents might learn from these influences to help young people make sense of the images they confront on a daily basis.

This study was not designed to cure the ills of society at large; I did not attempt to validate groundbreaking theories and hidden truths were not uncovered as a result of my talking to young people about their lives. Rather, and more simply, the students who contributed to this study needed to be heard. Because of the impact of the media on their lives, they were drawn to the tape recorder and the laptop computer. They all, in one way or another, expressed excitement with having their words, thoughts, and feelings recorded for others to study and to possibly learn about factors that they might not have previously considered.

A limitation of this study was that its findings cannot be generalized to every student in every high school across the country. The small sample size can only give educators and parents an idea of the issues that teenagers in our modern society face and how they might help them to cope more effectively before they make life-changing mistakes. A small study using such few subjects could not possibly address all these issues nor did the researcher attempt to do so. The study was limited on purpose to give each student an opportunity to have his or her voice heard. An indirect benefit from the study could be that it gave at-risk students a chance to try to make a difference in someone else's life by discussing the obstacles they faced in their own lives.

This study might not have helped the students who participated to return to high school, but it could help others learn how important the media and popular culture are and how much they impact students' lives. This knowledge could help teachers, parents, and administrators to reach at-risk students and to help a wider audience of young people who might otherwise fall through the cracks. It was delimited in the sense that there were only 16 students interviewed; applicability across populations or geographic areas is not necessarily appropriate. This was a situational study and the students' input may or may not reflect other students' experiences in other situations. Nevertheless, its findings could be useful in general terms to serve as informative guidelines for teachers, administrators, and parents.

Statement of the Problem

The problems that teenagers face today are myriad and often quite complex. Ultimately, every student has a different story to tell (Darling-Hammond, 1997). Some teens lack sufficient coping skills and become unable to complete their high school years. Other students are asked to leave school because of serious behavioral problems. These behavioral problems may or may not be related to the fact that many students have undiagnosed learning or emotional disabilities that can prevent them from paying attention in class or making good grades. Other students find it necessary to leave school to get a job for a variety of reasons including to care for children of their own. Some students' parents are unable to care for themselves or their children so the teens must work; some just need to get a job to eat and pay the rent every month. Some parents never stressed the importance of school so the students do not understand why education is important in their lives. Still others have no one to encourage them at home; therefore, what may seem normal to some seems like a waste of time to them. Some students appear to be lazy or unmotivated; perhaps a lack of parental support has allowed these traits to penetrate into all aspects of such students' lives. These are the students who are sent to alternative schools such as the Jacket Academy, or, as a last resort, to the Job Corps program. They are the ones who "slip through the cracks."

I attempted to identify several leading reasons why at-risk students struggled to complete school and examined whether popular culture and the media had a significant impact on these students' decisions regarding their future academic careers. The study also addressed ways in which teachers, administrators, and parents might attempt to deal with the influences of popular culture and the media both inside and outside the classroom by concentrating on the implications they have for teenagers' futures. Perhaps the study of popular culture's impact could better enable stakeholders to prepare students to incorporate media effectively into their lives in ways that could benefit the students and society.

Overview of the Study

Chapter 1 included an introduction to the study, a statement of the problem, research questions, the significance of the study, definitions of terms, and limitations and delimitations of the study. It provided background information, a framework for the study, a brief introduction to the participants and the methods used, and the purpose of the study. Chapter 2 presents the review of literature and the implications of popular culture and the media on young people. In Chapter 3, the methodology and procedures are presented, while Chapter 4 includes the findings and analyses of the results of the interviews with the subjects. Finally, Chapter 5 presents a summary of findings, recommendations for further research, and the possible implications of this study on the lives of students, their parents, teachers, and school administrators.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Increasingly, ours is a society that is consumed by popular culture and the media. According to the 2000 United States census, 99.7% of American homes had at least one television set (U.S. Census Bureau, 2003). As recorded in *Entertainment Weekly* by Ross (2004), the most popular television show in the summer of 2004, *CSI*, was seen by 29.6 million people despite the fact that it was a rerun and that during this summer season, television viewing was generally down significantly from the previous fall and spring seasons. The three most popular movies during the summer movie season of 2004 earned $815 million and were viewed on 11,565 movie screens across the country. These movies, *Shrek II*, *Spiderman II*, and *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban,* reflect citizens' fascination with fantasy worlds as methods of escapism (Ross). Music is pervasive. Radios are standard equipment in automobiles whereas floor mats are optional. Music's ubiquity is apparent in movies, television shows, commercials, video games, and at sporting events. According to Dowler (2003), video game companies sell more units per year than the best-selling textbook on the market today. Athletic activities representing all types and all levels of sports have long been a form of viewer entertainment in this country. On a recent afternoon, the ESPN sports network broadcast the Little League World Series, a college softball game, amateur athletes competing in Olympic qualifying trials in swimming, and a major league baseball game between the New York Yankees and the Boston Red Sox (Sternheimer, 2003). In today's society, our youth are increasingly distracted by the lure of television, movies, music, video games, and sports (Mueller, 1994; Rasmussen, 1997).

These media have invaded the schools en masse. As noted by Lewin (2001), in a typical middle-class, middle-American high school English class, students were furnished with televisions, VCRs and/or DVD players, and computers with which to play games and music

CDs. Invariably, the class will contain at least a few student athletes as well, merging the five most popular time-consumers of adolescents' lives into one microcosm (Abdullah, 2000). These students are inundated with mass media and popular culture on a daily basis both at home and more often at school as well.

To assume that today's teenagers are not impacted by these temptations is ludicrous. The reality is that they are influenced by popular culture to varying degrees, and the media is as much a part of their lives as, say, toothpaste. Many teenagers have supportive parents and teachers who help them discriminate between positive and negative morality; the values that most parents teach their children help them to discern what is right and what is wrong (Acland, 1995).

Nevertheless, there are a number of adolescents who are impacted in a negative way by the media and by their interest in popular culture. Barley et al. (2002) explained that at-risk students who unfortunately are often without proper parental guidance had a more difficult time distinguishing between fantasy and reality and generally took television, movies, music, and video games at face value. For at-risk students, these media forms are rarely placed into the appropriate context and many of these students lack the skills that they need to help them deal effectively with negative images that bombard them on a daily basis (Ascher, 1991; Baas, 1991; Ben-Yosef, 2003; Gay, 2000).

This review of literature begins by addressing each of these five media forms in depth. Interwoven throughout is the literature related to the genres' effects on students in general and on at-risk students in particular.

Television's Impact on Students' Lives

Some educational leaders argued that television viewing enriches students (Pallas, 1989; Paris, 1997).   Teachers use videotaped segments from educational programs to enhance their classes. Movies are shown to help students visualize lessons or to enrich the literary curriculum. The use of video components can, without question, assist students in learning new things.

However, it is possible that it also reinforces the notion that watching videos equates with learning. Students who watch television at school seem to quickly associate the practice with lessons learned. It has become an acceptable medium to use in the classrooms in schools around the country (Brown, Halsey, Lauder, & Wells, 1997).

The role of television as a babysitter has been around for quite some time; this is in no small part caused by the prevalence of televisions and VCRs in nursery schools and day care centers across the country. *Sesame Street*, a program designed to educate young children, has been around since 1968. Three generations of children have been exposed to the alphabet, numbers, and life's lessons from Big Bird, Oscar the Grouch, and the other Muppets (Children's Television Workshop, 2003). Mr. Fred Rogers' death in 2003 caused grown adults to grieve; this was a man they had never met but one who had reached out to help them understand how to be good to each other. Children's programming on television today comprises 42% of all daytime television programming (Levin, 2003).

TV in the Classroom

The advent of television and its proliferation in this country has led many to wonder how it could be used effectively in education. An experiment in Ohio in the 1950s required an airplane to fly around the state while broadcasting educational programming (Levinson, 1997). The experiment was eventually abandoned because of lack of funding and more tellingly, a lack of interest. The teachers stated that the students got bored after a while. The televised lesson format did not lend itself easily to class discussion or peer interaction. It was initially hailed as an educational innovation that could revolutionize the classroom but it was eventually relegated to secondary status as an instructional technique (Levinson).

Having televisions in schools has become so pervasive that students now watch national disasters happen during the school day (Apple, 1997). One guidance counselor whom I interviewed reported that when the Space Shuttle Challenger blew up on January 28, 1986, all

24

the television sets in her school were tuned in to the news. She recalled her students watching the replay over and over again yet she stated that they all felt powerless to help the students deal with this tragedy because it was so overwhelming. She said that the teachers were just as stunned as the students were but they tried to help them make sense of what had happened. Years later, there was some speculation that the widespread media coverage of the Challenger disaster helped many students deal with the impact of the tragedy (Kumar, 1997). Conversely, Soulliere (2003) suggested that repeated viewings of the explosion and its aftermath were detrimental to the psyches of young people and that they desensitized them to televised traumatic situations.

More recently, when the Branch Davidian disaster occurred in Waco, Texas, a principal whom I interviewed recalled that he had all the televisions in the building turned on so the students could watch the Davidian complex burn. A questionable news story, the O. J. Simpson trial, was a hot topic of conversation in 1995. Several teachers recalled that many students and staff brought radios to school with them so they could hear the jury's verdict as to Simpson's guilt or innocence as it was announced. When the not guilty decision was read, they stated that they remembered that virtually every class stopped working to listen to the result. Some teachers tried to turn the current events in each of these cases into an educational opportunity; more often, the education came in the days after the media storms quieted and students and teachers began to reflect more deeply on what the events meant to them.

Televised Violence in the Classroom

In Littleton, Colorado, the tragedy at Columbine High School stunned the country. Many schools immediately incorporated the events into their lessons by using news programs and televised counseling sessions to help students understand this tragic event (Cloud, 2003). This again raises questions: Does all this televised tragedy desensitize students to the pain and suffering that is felt by real people? Does seeing something violent on TV make students go out

and do the same thing? The rash of copycat school gun incidents could imply that TV has a much greater impact than many assume and has not been explored in sufficient depth. According to several researchers, students who see so much death and destruction on television every day must be affected in some way; whether televised violence leads to actual violence remains to be seen (Acland, 1995; Federman, 1997; Owen, 1997).

The questions remain about the effects of television violence on young people. According to the U.S. Public Health Service (2002), multitudes of studies have been conducted, varying results have been returned, and many hypotheses have been rejected or not rejected based on the results of these studies. This report to the Surgeon General noted:

> Most systematic research on children's exposure to violent media dates back to the 1970s, when most families did not have access to cable television, music videos, video games, or the Internet . . . very few contemporary studies systematically document children's actual consumption of violent media; this is particularly true for the newer media. (p. 1)

Much can be made about these studies or very little conclusive evidence can be assumed, depending on which researchers are being discussed. The undisputed fact remains that television has influenced nearly everyone in this country and its importance to our culture cannot be ignored.

Reality TV: Whose Reality?

The advent of "reality television" programming has changed the way many students look at themselves. It has changed the standard program model by making it not quite the reality that is seen in millions of living rooms every week. Strong, Silver, Perini, and Tuculescu (2003) pointed out that when cameras are around, most people act differently than they would if they were alone or with a group of friends. Yet, the essential appeal of reality television shows that have become so popular in recent years is that these are real people doing real things. Actually, the producers of these shows have reluctantly admitted that they chose participants for their shows based on their looks, their personalities, and their potential to make a good show. Thus,

pretty and/or thin people are chosen over those who are more plain or plump. Aggressive or annoying personality-types are chosen often to keep people intrigued (Strong et al.).

As reported by Sternheimer (2003), the producers of reality TV shows mandate that there be interest in the participants and that lack of controversy or visual appeal leads to viewer boredom and thus should be avoided. This sends the wrong message to our young people. They quickly assume, by watching these shows that are supposed to be real, that acting in strange ways, being dramatic, or looking beautiful gets one more attention.

Positive Aspects of Classroom TV Use

At least one researcher has encouraged the use of television in the classroom. As noted by Sornson (2001), using television as a teaching tool has helped many teachers reach out to students who are unresponsive to traditional teaching. Sornson deemed it an effective tool for reaching students with attention deficit disorder or attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder. It was also labeled as an enrichment opportunity for gifted students (Sornson). Many teachers like using televised clips or entire programs or movies to supplement their curricula. When used effectively, valuable lessons can be conveyed.

The sheer variety of options for using television in the classroom today is overwhelming to some teachers. *Channel One* is broadcast in thousands of classrooms every morning. It has come under fire in some school systems and in certain communities because of the commercials that it broadcasts. Many teachers record news programs or other contemporary issues to assist students in understanding current events and connecting learning to these events. There is a cadre of companies that specialize in educational videos with subjects ranging from history and literature, to science, mathematics, art, music, physical education, driver's education, and vocational interests (Tell, 1999).

Many teachers use movies to enhance their curricula. According to Lasn (1999), some schools had their own television studios to allow budding journalists and television stars to hone

27

their media skills. Still other teachers required students to submit video diaries or other videotaped segments as part of assigned class projects and assignments (Lasn). All these options make classroom television use almost impossible to avoid; indeed, avoidance of educational television programs should not be encouraged when they can truly benefit the students.

An alternate view presents classroom use of television as detrimental to the students' educational growth. Tell (1999) considered it as being devoid of useful application when teachers used television without providing proper introductions or conclusions or without making the programs meaningful to the learning that is taking place in the classroom. Television programs and movies are not all bad, but they can be used very ineffectively or for the wrong purposes within a supposedly educational context. An alternative viewpoint is that some simply have no opinion on the matter, perhaps because they do not have children or because they do not perceive that there could be a problem with television or the morals and values represented there.

Television's Evolution

The media and popular culture have not always received as much attention as they have in recent years. As recently as 20 years ago, the various news media were perceived as generally fair, unbiased, and accurate. As time has progressed and the proliferation of news outlets has increased dramatically, the American public has become more exposed to and usually more accepting of varying opinions within the news media. Aiex (1989) found news programs that were very liberal in nature, others that were very conservative, and still more that proclaimed they were neutral and unbiased when presenting news and current events. Opinions have flooded news television in today's society and the line between facts and opinions is often blurred just as the line between news and entertainment has gradually been eradicated on such programs. According to Aiex (1999), news magazine-type programs have further compromised the demarcation between actual, factual news and human-interest stories, presenting each as facts that are not questionable. In today's world, educators and parents must be cautious when

exposing young people to televised media because of its potential to influence their thoughts about current and historical events.

As noted by DeGraaf, Wann, and Naylor (2002), the news programs of yesterday have been nearly abandoned and the days of serious, suit-and-tie anchormen reading the news on camera are nearly over. The last bastion, the White, older, male-newscaster, is still a strong force on the national nightly news programs. However, as DeGraaf et al. pointed out, many co-anchors today are female, or nonwhite, or both. This is a welcome reflection of our increasingly diverse society. The programs have also become more diverse to appeal to multicultural interests.

The old way of presenting the news by reading from prepared scripts has been supplemented by video clips, still photographs, music, and computer-generated graphics (Lowry, 1990). Reports are now generally supplemented with opinion-based responses or commentaries from different perspectives in respondents' own words. These additions or enhancements to news stories might make the news more appealing to young people, but they could also lead to misinterpretations of the facts. Teachers and parents must use caution when allowing students to gather information from the news. Even though many young people have been taught to trust the news, it must also be fact-checked to ensure that truths, rather than opinions, are being emphasized (McLuhan, 1964).

News to Use: Positive Classroom Applications

According to Mortimore (1997), news programs, when introduced appropriately, can be extremely useful in the classroom. Coverage of presidential elections, while full of rhetoric and personal opinions, can also help students understand the roles and functions of our government. Current events classes often require the use of televised news segments in order to present the immediacy of these events to the students. As suggested by Sanchez (1998), it can be incredibly useful to view several news talk shows in order to compare and contrast the commentators'

multiple opinions while teaching students to do their own research into current events in order to gather enough information to make educated opinions of their own.

Rasmussen (1997) suggested that documentaries could be incredibly helpful in science classes. The author noted that for today's students, it is usually much more compelling to watch a cougar chase down a rabbit than it is to discuss it in class. Because of the proliferation of science shows on television today, science teachers have virtually an entire curriculum of recorded materials. The visual and aural stimuli that these television programs can provide often allows for more student engagement and retention. According to Roberge (1995), students tend to remember more about lessons that include video components. Roberge admitted they might not necessarily remember the kinds of key facts that teachers would choose, but their recall of the video clips was generally quite good. Furthermore, students whose parents encouraged viewing of these kinds of educational programs remembered more details about the contents of these shows and were able to apply out-of-class learning to the classroom situation. For these reasons, teachers must ensure that the video segments that they introduce are essential and beneficial to the lesson, and parents should encourage the viewing of scientific programming in the home as a supplement to the regular curriculum that their children participate in at school (Titterington & Drummer, 2001).

Traditionally, most teenagers do not spend a great deal of time watching the national news. Thus, news programs are not considered a major influence in their lives. As acknowledged by Kerka (2000), their lack of knowledge or seeming unconcern about world events was caused partly by the nature of adolescence and partly by the self-absorption and insular nature of society. Those young people who are labeled as at-risk generally demonstrated even less knowledge of current world events than students who had not been designated as at-risk. Such students should be encouraged to begin seeking out news media to learn more about the world so that they can begin to contribute as active and knowledgeable participants in our democracy (Kerka).

Media Frenzy in the Classroom

Other kinds of media that can and should be used in the classroom in positive ways are newspapers, magazines, and websites. Abdal-Haqq (1993) noted that newspapers have been used as one of the primary means of communication among citizens in this country almost since their inception. They are critical to information dissemination in smaller communities, and the bigger cities often have a number of newspapers and other periodical-type literature from which to choose. Many teachers have used newspapers extensively and successfully throughout all curricular areas; indeed, the *Newspapers in Education* program has spread nationwide and has become a very successful way to use local newspapers in the classroom for educational gains (Gay, 2000; Lord, 1995). The program makes it easy for teachers to help students gain understanding from the various parts of the paper by including lesson plans, ideas for activities, and achievable goals for students to strive toward (*Alternative Assessment and Technology*, 1993).

Weekly news magazines such as *Time*, *Newsweek*, and *U.S. News and World Report* all have educational divisions that produce components that can be readily used in the classrooms. While very useful and easily implemented into most classes, at-risk students often do not have access to these materials. As supplements, they cost more and take time away from the traditional curriculum. Rather than being seen as the excellent enhancement tools that they could be, they are often criticized as being too expensive (because they take away necessary funds in at-risk schools) and too time-consuming. Thus, a potentially helpful resource is seldom introduced to many students because of budgetary or political reasons (MacIver & Balfanz, 2000).

Some educators encourage students to read magazines no matter what the subject matter or content of those magazines might be (Rimm, 1999). According to Rimm, their rationalization was that any kind of reading that young people engaged in was positive and could only benefit

those students academically. This encouragement helped many students improve their vocabulary and reading skills, even if they were reading *Sports Illustrated* or *Rolling Stone.* Rimm reported that these teachers felt justified in their recommendation because of the proliferation of positive literature supporting students' reading of all kinds including magazines that might be of particular interest to the students but not generally valued for their literary merit. Some teachers have come under fire for their beliefs, especially when the content of student-selected magazines was in direct conflict with the values supported by parents or the school (Imel, 1993). As implied by Naylor (1989), the more reading students engaged in, the more potential skills they could develop.

Ultimately, students are exposed to more types of media today than they have ever been before. Contrary to many headlines, the media is not solely responsible for the corruption of today's society. Young people cannot be sheltered from television, newspapers, and magazines. Their strong presence in modern society makes exposure an almost certainty. Educators must use media responsibly in schools and parents have a huge responsibility to ensure that their children are exposed to media in positive ways.

For today's standards, television is generally seen as an acceptable educational technique in the modern era's schools. Teachers readily use it because it is familiar and adds depth to their classes. The video dimension is often able to capture students' interest when other methods are ignored. Thousands of options are available from short taped segments to longer programs. Students seem to expect that television will be used in their classes. It is as much a part of their lives as telephones and electricity. Its impact on their lives outside the classroom is huge; its effect on students' learning is still being debated.

Film's Impact on Today's Youth

Movies have also helped to influence our young people in many ways. Ben-Yosef (2003) reported that according to the Nielson's media research conducted in November 2003, the top 10

movies were: *The Matrix Revolutions, Elf, Brother Bear, Scary Movie 3, Radio, Love Actually, The Texas Chainsaw Massacre, Mystic River, Runaway Jury*, and *School of Rock*. Combined, these films made $522 million and were seen on 24,618 screens nationwide. Collectively, these movies glamorized the themes of murder, theft, parental abandonment, drug use, racism, discrimination, deliberate deception, premarital sex, gratuitous violence, and fantasy (Ben-Yosef).

As noted by Ben-Yosef (2003), the top 10 video rentals in 2003 according to Nielson's media research, were *The Hulk, 28 Days Later, Charlie's Angels: Full Throttle, The Italian Job, The Matrix Reloaded, Daddy Day Care, Wrong Turn, Anger Management, Dreamcatcher,* and *Hollywood Homicide*. These videos collectively earned $984 million at the box office and made $72 million in video or DVD rentals. Themes represented in these videos were also murder, theft, deliberate deception, premarital sex, gratuitous sex and violence, and fantasy. These themes were being reinforced at night, on the weekends, when students were home from school, and, increasingly, at school as well. In recent years, the standards at many schools have been falling for what constitutes acceptable videos. As pointed out by Strong et al. (2003), some schools no longer monitor the videos that students bring from home to watch at school. Virtually every classroom in America comes equipped with a television and VCR or DVD player and the unfortunate reality is that movies are shown much more often today than they were even 10 years ago (Strong et al.).

Movies in Schools

According to Lewin (2001), the prevalence of movies has allowed many schools to relax once strict yet still relatively new media policies. Initially, most principals and school boards created media policies that stated that television shows and movies shown in class had to be approved first. As the policies relaxed, many administrators changed their policies so that teachers could decide what they wanted to present as long as it was educationally enriching to

the students. As stated by Lewin, some schools have even dropped this requirement; teachers can show any movie or television show so long as it enhanced the curriculum or, worse still, did not interfere with the curriculum. Movies have become common in class, especially in the days before school is dismissed for holidays or breaks. Students will bring their own movies and argue over which one they want to see (personal observation, 2003).

In recent years, historical subjects and events have been glamorized in film. When used as a supplement in history or literary classes, these sometimes pseudo-historical films can help students gain a deeper understanding or additional insight into the events. When shown alone or with little educational context with which to relate the film's content, students often perceive the film's version of events as historical facts rather than fictionalizations. Hollywood actors and actresses who seldom resemble the original historical figures play the roles; they are seemingly selected because they look good on screen. According to Mortimore (1997), historical inaccuracies may abound because the filmmakers always want to create a good story and make money at the box office, yet many times this is not revealed to the viewers. Thus, students are often given a false sense of understanding how historical events actually unfolded.

The Ratings Game

Like television, movies have often been criticized for the moral corruption of young people. The ratings system was created to help parents understand the potentially offensive materials that certain films might contain and steer their children away whenever they felt it was necessary. Unfortunately, ratings have not deterred many young people from seeing movies that have questionable content. When blockbuster movies are involved, many young people see these movies either with their parents or with consent from parents who show no concern as to what the movies' ratings might be (Wilson & Wickham, 2001).

A recent study by the Harvard School of Public Health (2004) stated that over the past 11 years, movie ratings have gotten much more lenient. The study that was released on July 13,

2004, by Medscape General Medicine used a database developed to determine movies' ratings and their content. As stated in the study, "The results found a significant increase of violence, sex, and profanity in films over the 11-year period, suggesting that the MPAA (Motion Picture Association of America) became increasingly more lenient in assigning its age-based movie ratings" (n. p.). The study found among other things, an astounding 95 % of movies released during the selected time period featured alcohol, drug, or tobacco use and abuse. According to Thompson (2004), 51 % of the G-rated films rated as appropriate for general audiences (meaning everyone, including small children) contained some kind of alcohol, drug, or tobacco use. Thompson reported that movies that were rated PG-13 or R and contained at least one violent act grossed significantly more money at the box office than other movies. According to Waxman (2004), the study was very critical of the currently used rating system for "confusing and murky descriptions" (n. p.) of movie content and called for a standardized universal rating system that would be used across all entertainment media.

The violence that movies contain has been linked by some researchers to increased rates of violent crimes in real life. According to the U.S. Public Health Service (2002), "Many anecdotal reports have described instances in which television and film violence led to immediate violent behavior in individual children, but scientific studies of this relationship draw a more complex and qualified picture" (p. 2). The media appear to love to report on these anecdotal incidents and often portray films in the most harsh and derogatory light possible. Granted, there is a not insignificant portion of movies available today that are completely lacking in morality; however, to denigrate the entire movie industry because of some films' negativity is to ignore a great deal of what is good and positive about this popular cultural medium.

Movies surround young people especially with the advent of VCRs, video rental shops, DVDs, and mail-order movie rental agents. Cable and satellite television providers supply an endless stream of movies 24 hours a day, seven days a week. While there were some attempts initially to limit the showing of R-rated movies to evening hours, and while many televisions and

cable or satellite boxes have child lock codes, today all kinds of movies are shown at all hours.

Children of all ages have access to movies that contain violence, sex, profanity, drug and alcohol use, and smoking if their parents subscribe to cable or satellite service. Even network television, available on any television equipped with an old rabbit ear-style antenna, contains questionable material that could potentially be seen as not suitable for minors' viewing (Wessler, 2003).

Positive Uses of Film in the Classroom

There have been many fine movies made, and some rather significant portions of children's lives are spent learning life's lessons from watching movies. Historical films and films adapted from literary sources are the two primary kinds of movies shown in schools today, and these are the kinds of films regarded by most teachers and administrators as acceptable for educational consumption (Molnar, 2004). The quality of these films varies widely, as do the films' ratings. Many schools' curricula have been enhanced by the addition of movies as supplemental materials to the regular classroom tasks. There are entire classes devoted to the study of film at some high schools today; while these types of classes are much more common at the university level, they are a staple at high schools to concentrate on the performing arts. Some high schools have their own filmmaking classes; many other schools have included video components into major project requirements (Aiex, 1999; Bradshaw, 1995; Burt, 1999).

Teachers have embraced movies as valid, viable learning tools to help them present multiple perspectives on the particular situations being studied. Aiex (1999) noted that many schools' conversion to block scheduling led to an increase in teachers' abilities to show films in class. The longer time allocated allowed teachers to introduce movies properly; show them in ways that were most conducive to learning by pausing to discuss key points or rewinding to examine certain scenes more carefully; and to conclude them in more appropriate ways. Rather than splitting up films into small segments, teachers can make more use out of them and help students understand key concepts without interruption.

Allowing our students to be taught via television and movies is easy because of their prevalence in their lives; it could also prove dangerous because of the power of these media. Television shows and movies are not real, yet they are ubiquitous. They often give our students a false picture of how the world truly is. Even news anchors, the ones who are supposed to represent "everyman," wear make-up on their faces and carefully selected clothing on the air. This fakery is not revealed; students see perfection on televisions and movie screens and impose these ideals on the world at large and inwardly on themselves. They begin to look at television and film representations of the way people interact with one another as reality; with no one to put these images into perspective, students might accept them as the way things are supposed to be. According to Rimm (1999), the glamorization of violence, sex, and deception is so prevalent that students rarely consider the consequences of these actions when applied to real life unless they have proper guidance at home or at school to help them make sense of these images and turn them into valuable life lessons.

Reality viewing at the cinema, as on TV, is not real. The people are often carefully selected, their actions are inherently changed in subtle or not-so-subtle ways because of the presence of a camera and directors, and they are often directed to do things they might not otherwise do to make a more compelling drama. Controversy is encouraged, enthusiasm is rewarded, and tears can be a box office bonanza if presented in the right way. Documentaries convey truth filtered through the writer, director, and editor so that the viewer gets a carefully controlled version of the truth. Video is everywhere, yet it rarely teaches our young people the lessons that are critical to creating effective citizens. When teachers do not take the time to use video well in their classes, then its potential benefits are negated; it becomes an electronic siphon of meaningful class time (Shipley & Cavender, 2001).

Whatever Happened to Good Family Values?

Much to-do has been made recently over the loosening values represented on television and in movies. Parental, religious, and school groups have formed coalitions to help stem the tide of loose morals that adolescents are exposed to; yet, there is a dichotomy here. There are a great deal of morally questionable programs on television, and there are hundreds of movies released each year that receive restricted ratings, but there are also many quality shows and positive movies available today as well. The explosion of cable and satellite channels available virtually ensures that all shades of the morality spectrum are represented. Not all movies and television programs are bad, and even the ones that are supposed to be bad can teach young people valuable life lessons if done so in a caring, understanding environment (Halford, 1998; Levin & Kelley, 1997).

This is the key component that many at-risk students are lacking. A large number of at-risk students are the products of broken homes. Their home life may not lend itself to parental guidance as they watch television or movies. Some students' guiding role models might be working overtime to help pay the bills and support the family. They could be absent for personal reasons or issues such as drugs or alcohol could distract them. Every at-risk student has an individual and personal situation that has led him or her to poor school performance, but one of the most common factors is a lack of guidance at home (Gaustad, 1993).

Because many at-risk students do not have adequate training or proper adult leadership at home, they have trouble making sense of mass media and popular culture on their own. The images that they are inundated with become their mental image of normalcy, when in fact these images can often be quite far from reality. What teenagers see in the movies that they like to watch can be disturbing; this is even more troubling when teens have no way to put these filmed images into their proper context. Furthermore, some parents (especially very young ones) lack adequate parenting skills to help their children interpret popular culture appropriately, and some older parental figures such as grandparents are simply unaware of the changing moral landscape

that is being represented in popular culture today (Rothstein-Fisch, Greenfield, & Trumbull, 1999).

<center>*Music's Role in the Lives of Adolescents*</center>

Music is one of our most enduring forms of culture. It was, in classical times, considered a critical component of education. It has been a foundation for thousands of years and it remains a curricular staple in American education today. Teaching students about music encourages academic skills while instilling appreciation for aesthetic concerns. Music appreciation fosters appreciation for other artistic means of expression as well.

Of all the genres discussed in this study, music has probably evolved the most and can be found in the most varied forms. Television, movies, sports, and video games are limited to certain forms; yet music seems to be the most expansive and has the most widespread universal appeal. As mentioned earlier, music is associated with all these other genres in some way. Television theme songs, movie soundtracks and background music, warm-up music or the national anthem sung at athletic events, and electronic bloops and bleeps in video games are ever-present. They often blend into the background because of how closely they are entwined. Moreover, there are so many different genres of songs with which individuals can identify that generalizations about music's impact are nearly impossible. This is just as true for adolescents as it is for adults (Ninno, 1999).

Music to Move the Masses

Music is another industry that has vastly affected our schools in both positive and negative ways. It can very often be more invasive because most schools have some sort of music program incorporated into the general school curriculum. According to Thornton (1996), the type of music produced in the traditional classes, though, is most often not the same type of music enjoyed by most adolescents. Some students are so consumed by the music they prefer

<center>39</center>

that they drive to school in cars with loud, expensive sound systems, and then go to class with personal CD players or MP3 players' headphones stuck into their ears. Most schools ban these types of personal music players, yet a great many students regularly ignore this ban and bring these items to school anyway. The small size of the players and headphones makes it very easy to conceal these items in coats, clothing, or bags (Thornton).

A principal in North Carolina once started each day for an entire school year by playing a popular R & B song on the PA system every morning as the students came into the building. They became so conditioned to hearing this particular song that they became visibly upset when, on one occasion, the principal was absent and the song was not played that morning. When discussing the ideals contained within the song, the students were able to sing the words, discuss what they meant, and apply these ideals to their own life. This event proved to the teachers, students, and parents that music was a powerful tool for teaching students life lessons. The impact of music on students' lives is real; however, the quality of the music and the values represented in much of the music young people prefer are sometimes questionable (personal correspondence, 2003).

At the end of 2003, the top 10 selling albums in this country were by Toby Keith, Sarah McLachlan, 50 Cent, Sheryl Crow, Outkast, Ja Rule, Rod Stewart, Clay Aiken, POD, and Ludacris. Of these 10, 6 contained lyrics that the parental advisory board deemed inappropriate for children less than 18 years of age, yet the majority of these albums were sold to young people (Ross, 2004). It is impossible to get a true count of the number of students who listen to music containing explicit lyrics because of the enormous popularity of music-sharing websites on the internet (Schlozman, 2002a). This digital sharing is one of the most common ways that young people access the music that they listen to on a daily basis. According to DeGraaf et al. (2002), this is how many youngsters under the age of 18 gain access to explicit music without parental consent.

Our Nation's Heroes?

Two of the most popular musicians in 2003 were Eminem and Britney Spears (Finn et al., 2003). Eminem is a white rapper whose musical highlights include raps about killing his mom, a fan committing suicide, killing his wife, drinking, going to clubs to find women to have sex with, and smoking marijuana. His four major albums have sold at least one million copies each, yet every one has had an explicit lyrics label. He has glorified the thug lifestyle for millions of young people. His protégé, 50 Cent, appears on television frequently discussing his own thug-type lifestyle, including the fact that he had been shot nine times. His most popular hit this past year, titled "In Da Club," glorifies promiscuous sex, excessive drinking, and the objectification of women (Finn et al.).

On the opposite musical spectrum, yet equally disturbing, is the overwhelming popularity of Britney Spears. Once a Mouseketeer who appeared regularly on the Disney Channel, she now regularly appears in scantily clad designer fashions on awards shows, in clubs, on television programs, and in music videos (Schlozman, 2002b). She once professed her wholesomeness and was marketed as a positive role model for young girls, then she began changing her image by singing about premarital sex, she started smoking and drinking regularly in public, and discussing her sexuality in television and magazine interviews. Last year, Spears appeared on the MTV Video Music Awards wearing a white lace bustier, three-inch heeled thigh boots, and little else. She capped off her performance with an open-mouthed kiss with Madonna, herself a popular culture boundary breaker and sometime role model for the past 20 years (Schlozman).

Even students who do not listen to rap or popular music usually know who these musicians are and are familiar with their music to some extent. They might not own the CDs but the media does a great job of highlighting their exploits. Musicians are entertainers, and even when they are not singing or rapping onstage, they are still in the spotlight and their lives are glamorized. Many students look up to them as role models and fashion icons, often more so than they look up to other entertainers in television or movies. Music is more accessible to them

because it seems to be everywhere they are. Students identify with music as something that they can take with them that expresses who they really are (Mueller, 1994).

Ours Is a Rhythm Nation

Because music is so pervasive, many teens do not perceive its influence over them. Alarm clocks today provide an option to awaken the slumbering one with the radio station of his or her choice. Radios and CD players are made specifically to withstand the dual assaults of both the shower water and the shower-singer. Cars are, as mentioned previously, equipped with radios that teenagers are known to adjust frequently. Thus, before many teens ever make it to school, they could potentially have had numerous opportunities to become influenced by music (Rothstein-Fisch et al., 1999).

There is such a wide variety of music available to choose from today that all students can find a niche of music that they feel is their personal milieu. Rap, R & B, rock, pop, punk, country, Christian, classical, Latin, club, hip-hop, alternative, and techno rhythms are all popular forms of music heard regularly on radio and television today. Students' musical choices can sometimes reveal a great deal about their lives and values. While many students will often argue that this is simply not true and that it is not fair to judge them by the music they listen to, they will also be the first to say that music defines who they are as individuals. They might not be willing to admit it, but more details of their lives relate back to the music they listen to than virtually any other medium. According to students' own accounts of how music has impacted their lives, they admit that the music they choose reflects who they are or who they want to be (Giroux, 1998; McWhorter, 2003; Thornton, 1996).

The Music of Our Lives

An interesting observation regarding music is that it is a critical component of many preschoolers' lives. Many toddlers learn to say the letters of the alphabet by singing the ABC

song. The curricula of many preschoolers include song time as a significant learning tool. Elementary school teachers incorporate singing in lessons to encourage students' learning. Some researchers maintain that music played for babies in utero helps them to learn more and faster after birth. Indeed, some market-savvy companies have made a great deal of money selling Beethoven and Mozart CDs to expectant mothers hoping to give their babies an intellectual edge (Schneider & Stevenson, 1999).

As children grow up, music becomes less a part of formal schooling but more important to their personal lives. As they move into adolescence, lyrics become more applicable as students gather experiences that are more personal. Their music becomes worldlier; innocence is often lost from the music as children grow into adolescence (Giroux, 1998; Zweig, 2003).

The many forms of music are so varied that it is not possible to make accurate generalizations about their perceived influence on students in today's society. Classical music does not have the same negative connotation that rap music does; moreover, classical music is still an important curricular component in band and music appreciation classes across the country. Heavy metal music and punk rock are generally associated with poor values and represent behaviors that are not promoted in mainstream society, but choral groups sing Broadway musical selections in their Spring Revues every year (Giroux, 1998). There are all types of music and they can all impact students in some way. Whether the impact is seen as a positive or a negative influence generally depends upon the type of music being discussed, and is, like the other components of this study, very subjective in nature.

Within musical genres, there is usually a mixture of values communicated by the lyrics. Rap, rock, metal, and punk music have all been vilified in the press over the past 30 to 40 years as being morally corrupt. These forms of music and the artists who produce them have generally been bashed by the media for the corruption of young people, yet the media have perpetuated music to the point that it is barely discernable in some cases. Because music is so ubiquitous, it is often relegated to background noise and is then perceived as a noninfluence.

43

However, music is present in many places and has the potential to become very influential to teenagers, either subliminally or explicitly. Each of those genres (rap, rock, metal, and punk) that has been perceived as negative in the past has also been responsible for creating music that espouses positive values and ideas as well as negative ones (Degraaf et al., 2002). It is dangerous to make blanket statements about the morals and values contained in any form of music, as each genre is so vast and varied. Furthermore, other genres that have traditionally been labeled as appropriate listening for young people could, in fact, contain questionable moral content. As stated regarding other topics within this study, music should not be judged blindly; the ills of society cannot be blamed solely on the decline of moral values represented in popular music today. It has been blamed for teenage violence, suicides, and general mayhem, even as early as the 1950s with the advent of rock and roll. However, according to Gay (2000), music has also been credited with bringing beauty and harmony into our lives. It too cannot be blamed for teenagers' falling into at-risk behaviors, nor can it be held up as a salvation for lost teenage souls. Teachers, administrators, and parents must educate themselves as to the content of the music that today's teenagers listen to so that they know what is out there. They need to know what students are listening to in order to help them make meaning from the signals that they receive from this music. They need to know how students are being influenced by their music and how to steer them toward positive moral attitudes without alienating them completely. Music can be a wonderful influence over students when and if it can be presented in the proper context.

How Video Games Changed the Way We Play

The next genre of popular culture that influences students is video games. In 2002, video game sales increased by 150% (Slagle, 2003). On average, students spend more time playing video games in any given week than they do working on homework. One proven benefit that has resulted from the influx of video games into children's lives is their ability to improve hand-eye

coordination. Military personnel and medical school faculty have encouraged the kinds of skill games that enable students to practice fine motor skills (Slagle).

Otherwise, video games have been declared one of the biggest time wasters of modern society by many teachers, administrators, and parents. Even students will admit that they are a "brain drain," but that they enjoy them just the same. Many students even characterize some of them as being addictive in nature. They are played when students are alone as well as with friends (Schultze & Anker, 1991). They are not as ubiquitous as television or music yet, but they are becoming more prevalent. Most malls in America have video game stores; most major portal websites have links to free or pay-for-play games as well. According to *The New York Times'* technology writer, Slagle (2003), 250 new video games were released in December 2003, just in time for the Christmas buying season. Today, any time a student has a computer with internet access he or she can play games, and it is quite common to see video games for rent in most movie rental outlets. Young people are surrounded by the video gaming world (U. S. Department of Education, 2002b; Scherer, 1996).

Video Game Violence and Its Implications

Perhaps more disturbing than the staggering amount of time young people spend playing video games is just how violent they are becoming. Gone are the days when one could go into an arcade and find such games as Space Invaders (shooting at alien spacecraft), Road Rally (racing against other cars), Frogger (jumping frogs across a pond), and PacMan (a little creature that eats dots and ghosts). Today's video games are based on the reality that the media have created. The top-selling video games feature human characters shooting each other or monsters, human characters stealing cars and running drugs, human movie characters continuing along the same storyline as the movie, or athletic stars participating in their particular sport. There are still many fantasy-type games out there, but the best sellers all feature humans (Schneider & Stevenson, 1999). According to the U.S. Public Health Service (2002):

45

The proliferation of new media has expanded the opportunities for children to be exposed to media violence at home. Current psychological theory suggests that the interactive nature of many of these new media may affect children's behavior more significantly than passive media such as television. (p. 1)

After the Columbine shootings, authorities searched one of the student killer's personal belongings. They found a video game in which the player earned points for shooting people. The better the aim, the higher the score. The boys who carried out these violent shootings had copied the dress of their favorite video game characters and had even acted out one of the scenarios in that game (Wessler, 2003). Another video game that has gained notoriety in recent years is a flight simulation game. The player can choose where he wants to fly his plane; one of the options is to fly over and around New York City. If the player fails to fly correctly, he will hit the World Trade Center towers. Both these games received a great deal of attention after the September 11 tragedies and the Columbine shootings, as each portrayed a fantasy game brought to reality (Wessler).

Further examples of the denigration of moral values represented in video games can be seen upon examination of the most recent sports games available today. One game, called *MLB SlugFest*, features today's top players violently hitting each other upon reaching each base. The player who can hit first, hardest, and most often will be ensured a win. Another game titled *NFL Street* places today's players in urban street settings where they play football against each other in games that have few rules. One of the rules that must be strictly adhered to, however, is that of taunting and celebrating upon any score. The more a player taunts, or trash-talks the other players, and the more elaborate his celebration dance upon scoring, the higher his score. Perhaps the most disturbing video game to mesh sports into the electronic world is called *NBA Ballers*. Its primary goal is not necessarily for the player to play basketball. The way to earn points in this game is in the acquisition of material goods. Good play is rewarded with large and expansive homes and luxury automobiles. Acquire enough points and you also get to choose from several women, any of which (according to the game's narrator) would be happy to be your steady girlfriend or just a temporary friend for the night. The lack of morality in these three

games is offensive to many, yet they are three of the most popular titles among teenagers and young adults today (McWhorter, 2003).

Video games of today have enormous crossover appeal. At least 35% of all games published today are sports-related. Another 30% are based on movies, television shows, or the characters contained therein. A critical component of all games is music, and some games are based solely on music itself. One game in particular, *Dance Dance Revolution*, comes with an electronic floor mat on which the players dance, guided by the music contained in the game. Video games have embraced television, music, movies, and sports as their primary content and subject matter. The synergy created by these media merging into video games has had a huge impact on teenagers' lives (Rasmussen, 1997).

Video Games in School

When video games were first introduced, schools became some of the first organizations to expose children to them. As they began to purchase computers and software, games were prevalent and became quite popular. Drill and practice games especially were included in many software packages and were often quite useful in helping students acquire and reinforce basic skills. As time went on, though, the lack of meaningful learning from computerized video games became more apparent. While student loved them, teachers began to avoid using them. They hypothesized that the video games took valuable time away from classroom instruction and did not significantly impact students' test scores in a positive way. Many have abandoned them in more recent years for a return to an emphasis on acquiring basic skills using more traditional teaching methods (Aiex, 1999; Casey, 1992; Imel, 1996).

Most educational games published today still do emphasize basic drill and practice learning; nevertheless, there is a lack of emphasis on higher-level thinking and learning skills in many of them. Some do have educational value. Even basic question- and answer-types of games can help reach out to students who are easily distracted or learn well via alternative

47

teaching methods (Lowry, 1990). These types of video games appeal to students with different learning styles and can be used in positive ways in well-organized classrooms. As pointed out by Imel (1996), they are especially helpful for at-risk students where they have been shown to help them in basic skill recovery. Additionally, students with mild to moderate learning disabilities have also been shown to positively benefit from teachers' use of drill and practice computer games in their special education classes. The combination of visual and auditory stimulation helps attention-deficient students remain on task, and the kinesthetic aspect of playing these games, by touching keyboards, mice, and even screens, seems to appeal to students of all learning styles (Lewin, 2001).

Because there are so many kinds of games available and because they encompass a variety of skills and levels, teachers must be particularly vigilant about which games their schools purchase and why these games are purchased. They need to be directly involved in introducing these games into their classrooms, as games without guidance can lead to wasted academic opportunities. When the games are just something for students to do when visiting the computer labs, or when they are not placed within the proper academic context, then they are rarely helpful to the students. However, when used in conjunction with good lesson plans that engage students in numerous ways, they can be excellent supplements to good teachers' classes (McWhorter, 2003).

Adolescents who are encouraged to develop their skills through gaming are often better equipped to develop other skills including academic skills once they leave school. Unfortunately, most at-risk students do not have as much exposure to video games as other students, especially when discussing at-risk students from lower socioeconomic levels of society. These students' parents are simply not able to afford to invest in the game boxes, computers, or the actual games that have been proven to help students improve basic and reading and math skills. Thus, the students who could potentially benefit the most from participating in video games are the very ones who are least likely to play them.

While video games have often been uniformly labeled as harmful to students' educational futures, they also have their merits. In fact, many of today's video games can be just as educational for certain students as textbooks in some situations. Students must learn to effectively analyze the messages that are inherent in the games that they play and they must learn to distinguish between games for gaming's sake and the more educational games that can help students learn important lessons. Parents must make themselves more aware of the types of games their children play and should limit video game violence whenever possible. They must also encourage their children to pursue more educational-type games in order to strengthen students' academic abilities. Teachers and administrators must be cautious about the types of games purchased for school use. They must also be vigilant about monitoring students' use of the internet to play games as well. Games have their place in academia, just as do music, movies, and television.

Sports: Amateur and Professional Games

Sporting competitions have been a part of organized society for thousands of years. Like music, sports bring out parts of our elemental nature that we ultimately learn from upon repeated exposure. Human nature seems to drive us to pursue sports when we are small; some children pursue competition in other ways as they grow up, but sports have always been very important culturally in our country. Games make up a significant portion of children's lives both in school and outside of it. In school, students play many varied games during physical education classes; they play arithmetic games in math classes, word games in reading classes, or participate in geography bees in social studies classes. Outside of class, children engage in footraces, hopscotch, jumping rope, soccer, football, baseball, basketball, swimming, running, and multitudes of other sporting games. Children's leagues abound for every sport imaginable, and many parents place a strong emphasis on their children's participation in these leagues. Most schools in this country have very strong and popular athletic programs. There continues to be

much heated debate in educational circles as to the importance of sports and their impact on students' grades (Davis, 1996).

The Age-Old Debate: Sports Vs. Academics

Sometimes, sports seem to be drawing our students away from school rather than into it. Professional, collegiate, and amateur sports are everywhere. Many students play sports, watch sports in person, and regularly watch sports on television; they do not have to be athletes in order to enjoy watching sports. It is a major topic of conversation among young people when they are not talking about television, movies, music, video games, or each other (Scherer, 1996). Sports have as big a role in popular culture as music, television, movies, and video games and they occupy teenagers' minds just as often (Davis, 1996).

Some administrators, teachers, and parents resent the presence of sports in students' lives; an equal number state just as vehemently that sports keep students interested in school (Beller, 2002; Davis, 1996). There has been a very clear division between these two camps of adults; they argue often and usually in public, but a consensus is seldom reached. What is not usually disputed, though, is that sports do take some time and attention that students might otherwise be able to devote to some other pursuits that might not offer as much to students either physically or emotionally (Franklin, 2003; Rasmussen, 2000).

Playing sports in high school can be good for some students. It can keep them interested in keeping up their grades to maintain their eligibility. If they are talented enough, they can even qualify for scholarships to play sports in college. Sports can open up doors for students that they might not otherwise have been able to enter, as well as provide opportunities for students who have financial or academic difficulties (Kozol, 1991). However, for every successful student athlete, there are many who become so consumed with playing that their grades fall or they lose focus on their classes (Levin & Kelley, 1997).

Making the Grade for Sports Eligibility

One critical factor that most coaches of school teams require is an appropriately high grade point average. This concession to the academic essentials has caused many an athlete to focus more on his or her studies in order to participate and for this, most parents are grateful. Furthermore, some schools provide additional tutoring or remedial classes for their athletes to ensure that they are able to participate with the team. This practice has been criticized as being an unfair allocation of resources, but the fact remains that many athletes have benefited academically through extra tutoring and additional resources designed to help them succeed in the classroom. For these students, sports can be seen as an educationally enriching pursuit that will ultimately benefit them; sports can and often do affect scholarships and college careers (Molnar, 2004; Scherer, 1998; Taylor, 1999).

Sports scholarships have enabled many students to pursue higher education. This has been especially true for minority students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds. While not all college athletes graduate, their exposure to higher learning can and does influence their lives in meaningful ways. There are some who do not take full advantage of their scholarships; they squander their time in trivial pursuits or spend so much time at practice that they neglect their studies. Their grades may fall below the required standard and they then, in turn, lose their eligibility that leads to the loss of their scholarship and, very often, the end of their college career as well. Student athletes whose parents and coaches have instilled a sense of responsibility in them usually fare much better, but all collegiate athletes are susceptible to the pressures of athletic competitions and athletic preparedness (Beller, 2002; Brown, 1998). Thus while athletic involvement should be encouraged, it is not without its own risks, especially when including students who are already designated as at-risk.

Armchair Quarterbacking

Some students are not athletes themselves but still love to watch sporting events in person or on television. These students might not spend as much time watching sports as others do playing video games, but sports have just as significant an impact on many students' lives as do video games (Halford, 1999). In what seems to be a strange merger, the most popular video game sold in 2003 was *Madden 2003*, a football game. Students who love to watch sports and even ones who love to play sports will often enjoy sports video games for the same reasons. Competition is incredibly important to these students, so they embrace it whenever they can (Davis, 1996).

Impact of Sports on Students' Lives

There is a great deal of research on the impact of sports on students. Generally, statistics show that most student athletes are well adjusted, make average to above average grades, and usually are successful outside of school as well as in school (Schneider & Stevenson, 1999; Schwartz, 1996). For every high school football player who flunks English class but is allowed to play in the big game anyway, there is a cheerleader who is an honors student and president of the school's Student Government Association. For every swimmer who cuts class to go to the pool, there is a soccer player who volunteers for the Special Olympics and the Boy Scouts. All student athletes are different, and generalities are almost impossible to make because of the many sports and individual differences athletes exhibit (Taylor, 1999). This study did not specifically focus on student athletes; however, some of the interview subjects were former or current members of sports teams or had taken part in sporting competitions.

Competition has long been a part of academia in this country. When used effectively, academic competitions (such as spelling bees, Academic Olympics, and Quiz Bowls) can build students' knowledge bases, promote leadership opportunities, and help them learn to communicate effectively (Hamilton, 2001). Competing in various sporting events can teach

52

students the importance of teamwork, preparation, and appropriate social skills. Competition, as with anything else, can be used in a negative or hurtful way also. The fact that it is such a strong presence in most American schools speaks to its power to shape students in many helpful ways (Rimm, 1999; Scherer, 1996).

More American Heroes?

In today's society, professional (and, more troubling, even some college and high school) athletes have become as glorified as movie and television stars or musicians. They are lifted up as heroes by many young people (Giroux, 2000). They are paid huge sums of money and their conspicuous consumption of flashy jewelry, expensive clothes, luxury cars, and a large home is seen as a form of entertainment. Their exploits off the field often get as much media coverage as their athletic skills. There is a great deal of media transfer by athletes. Some cut their own music CDs, some appear in movies or on television shows, many appear in video games, and their every move seems to be documented by either ESPN, MTV, CNN, HBO, or the nightly news (Taylor, 1999).

Not all athletes portray negative values, though. Just as student athletes should not be stereotyped, neither should their professional counterparts. There are many athletes, often glorified and reported on during the Olympic games, who are excellent examples of strength, dedication, and self-sacrifice (McLuhan, 1964). Many athletes give generously of their money or their time to community organizations dedicated to helping others. Quite a few have created programs to help disadvantaged youth or have funded the building of new playing fields, community centers, and schools (Sternheimer, 2003).

Remaining to Play

Certainly, many students remain in school simply because of the appeal of high school athletics. There are students whose only interests are in sports and for them making good grades

and staying out of trouble are prerequisites to remain on the team. These students' sports interests could be perceived as essential to their school success. Without the impact of sports on their lives, their academic achievements might be fewer and some might lose interest altogether.

Adolescents' exposure to popular culture in the media has often been linked to the degradation of society's morals and values. However, there is another perspective that deserves equal and thorough exploration. Exposure to popular culture through today's media with the appropriate parental and educational guidance can actually be helpful to young people. Experiencing new feelings through music can help at-risk students discover their own feelings in more emotionally stable ways. Students can learn coping skills via television shows and movies that are presented in context especially when coupled with a safe environment for communicating with others. Video games and sports provide an outlet for growing boys and girls to display their skills, instilling a sense of pride in them that they can do things that others cannot. Thus, popular culture and the media can be used in positive ways to help raise adolescents into positive young adults, so long as the negative influences are identified as such and are placed into the context of the greater community outside teenagers' immediate circles.

Summary

The review of literature regarding popular culture, the media, and their impact on at-risk youth has been mixed. Many studies have reported that popular culture has been disastrous to the moral fiber of our country and has led to the degradation of today's adolescents. The media have been decried as being biased, unfair, or outright wrong in their presentation of current events especially in relation to politics and the criminal justice system. According to the media, television is a moral wasteland where young people learn that violence, drug and alcohol abuse, promiscuous sexuality and questionable morals are acceptable and often glamorized. Movies do not fare much better in the eyes of the media. The very medium that is primarily responsible for aggressive promotion of movies is also the one that continually bashes them for portraying

negative images and perpetuating their popularity among teens and young adults (Mortimore, 1997; Owen, 1997).

Musicians, athletes, and celebrities are all popular media targets, and much of popular culture is consumed with following these media-designated role models, yet the media thrives on celebrity missteps, trials, and difficult times. Sports have become entertainment not just for the sheer enjoyment of the athletic activity but also because of the personalities of celebrity athletes who participate, their exploits off the field, and the media's incessant coverage of all things sports-related (Davis, 1996; Strong et al., 2003).

Video games, too, have received their fair share of negative coverage in the media in recent years. They have been linked to major disastrous events in this country such as school shootings and terrorist acts. They have been blamed by both parents and teachers alike for consuming students' waking hours and for subsequently causing their grades to steadily worsen. Most of these games have been cited for their lack of moral values, and the violence contained in video games has been linked by the media to the perpetuation of more violence by adolescents (Schwartz, 1996; Tell, 1999; Wessler, 2003).

The literature is very strong when describing what we are losing. Appreciation for classical music, old movies, and television shows is waning in the face of the sheer number of options available in each of these genres today. Critics cite poor sportsmanship and athletes on trial for murder as indicative of society at large; they remain convinced that the publicity surrounding such morally reprehensible actions glorifies them in the eyes of young adults. The proliferation of questionable morality has, according to many, become rampant and has led to the corruption of today's youth in America (Mueller, 1994; Ninno, 1999).

Nevertheless, the literature also provides a great deal of evidence that these genres of popular culture can be used to benefit young people in their academic, social, emotional, and physical growth. The media can, in fact, be a strong positive influence in the lives of teenagers. Even at-risk youth who seem to be particularly susceptible to popular culture's influences can

reap rewards from classes that use the media effectively to enhance the curriculum. Gay (2000)

explained:

> For example, showing how basic forms or shapes . . . are applied in different types of
> ethnic architecture, arts, and symbols makes it easier for students to learn to recognize
> these forms and shapes. Similarly, using ethnic examples of protest poetry while
> teaching literary criticism may increase some students' interest and, therefore, mastery of
> the task. Using such examples benefits all students by introducing them to multicultural
> content within the context of a routine literature theme. (pp. 7-8)

Gay continued by stating, "These skills may not be measured by standardized tests, but

nonetheless they are powerful indicators of students' achievement. Furthermore, they positively

affect students' academic performance" (p. 8).

Studies have proven that successful youth are the ones who are encouraged to pursue

their interests; the nature of these interests is rarely important. Students who are actively

involved in pursuit of art, music, sports, and even (occasionally) video games have less time to

become distracted by negative pursuits. They have more of a vested stake in what they are trying

to accomplish and remain more committed to achieving goals and creating new goals for

themselves. Thus, cultural pursuits can in fact be quite beneficial in helping to create well-

rounded students who can become adept at dealing with life's disappointments and achievements

through their exposure to such cultural experiences (Kozol, 1991; Levinson, 1997; McLuhan,

1964).

There is a whole section of literature that supports students and teachers who use media

in effective and educational ways. In most communities today, there are children's choirs, little

league teams, regional ballet companies, a multitude of art classes and competitions, and

numerous other opportunities for young people to get involved in artistic pursuits. While these

activities have the potential to take students away from their studies at times, the benefits to their

academic and social skills are persuasive reminders of why we need to continue these cultural

pursuits. Using music and sports in positive ways has long been a part of our world culture, and

educators and parents must ensure that these areas remain integral parts of all students'

educational lives (Darling-Hammond, 1997; Levin & Kelley, 1997; Levinson, 1997; Wessler, 2003).

Students who are consumed with popular culture can even pursue these interests today via higher education. As mentioned earlier, many young people take advantage of their athletic abilities to garner college scholarships. Students who love sports have many options in college today: They can become sports trainers, sports writers, nutritionists, exercise physiologists, and sports medicine physicians. A small number even goes on to become professional athletes. Students who love music often begin to teach music to or perform it for others (both professionally and informally). Every year, there are students competing and auditioning to get into Julliard, the New York City School for the Performing Arts, and other such schools across the country. Magnet and charter schools are being created to help students pursue their artistic and creative interests while they are also fulfilling the requirements necessary to gain their high school diplomas, and these students very often go on to colleges and universities that specialize in artistic majors and minors. An interest in video games can possibly lead to a career in computer programming, advertising, website design and maintenance, or a multitude of other careers that involve technical or graphic skills and good hand-eye coordination (Giroux, 1998; Kumar, 1997).

Much has been made of how media have changed and evolved over the years and how they have influenced society. In fact, the themes prevalent today on television and in movies have always been present to some extent, and as such could be perceived as having limited negative impact over young people. The previous generations have been impacted by television, movies, and music as well and these genres have all been decried in their day as representative of the degradation of American society. A closer look at each decade's concerns is warranted (Sternheimer, 2003; Tell, 1999; Zweig, 2003).

Rock and roll music in the 1950s was considered by many to be a negative influence as were acid rock and the drug culture in the 1960s. The 1970s brought a rash of cinematic and

57

televised violence, drug use, and sexuality that was more promiscuous. In the 1980s, mass media began to feature unrealistic body images as the norm and portrayed greed in an idealized manner as an appropriate goal; "slacker culture" and the rock grunge scene took over popular culture in the 1990s. Each decade has had its share of questionable media and popular cultural influences and many authority figures of each era have been quick to decry their influence over the youth of that era. Although cultural influences over adolescents have often been questioned and cited as negative, many students have been able to overcome these perceived influences on their lives (McLuhan, 1964; McWhorter, 2003; Owen, 1997; Rimm, 1999; Schultz & Anker, 1991).

Cultural enrichment is a nearly universal pursuit. The finer things in life, such as art, music, poetry, and other types of creative expression are considered to be educationally beneficial; indeed, they are essential in helping students in their attainment of a quality, well-rounded, liberal-arts based education. Ultimately, popular culture can be quite beneficial for students as well when incorporated in appropriate ways (U.S. Department of Education, 2002b). The media can be invaluable learning tools that can help young people learn to make sense of their community, their country, and the world at large. According to Gay (2000), "School achievement means more than academics and intellectual development. Social, personal, cultural, moral, and political skills also are essential elements of achievement" (p. 1). Students' pursuit of music has been shown to increase their academic retention of basic skills. Participation in sporting events helps students learn to cope effectively with loss, work together with teams, and strategically analyze a wide variety of life situations. Movies and television can be incredibly helpful teaching tools in today's modern classroom. Actually, students in the current generation have come to expect these media to be used in order to help them visualize lessons in ways that are more effective. Even video games have been shown to help students attain and improve basic skills that can lead to faster absorption of higher and more complex learning tasks (Gay).

58

As a nation and as a people, we need popular culture, the media, and effective communication devices in our lives. When introduced in students' lives appropriately with adequate parental and educational leadership and guidance, these venues can be very helpful learning tools. At-risk students especially can benefit in both great and small ways from the addition of these media in their lives so long as it is done effectively and purposefully.

As Gay (2000) stated, "Education reforms that are not culturally relevant to ethnically diverse groups of students will produce minimal, if any, improvements in achievement" (pp. 1-2). She took this thought one step further, stating, "Achievement in academic subjects and basic learning skills will increase when the impact of culture on learning is clearly understood and routinely incorporated into classroom instruction" (p. 2).

In this study I attempted to ascertain if the problems certain young students had experienced were exacerbated by examining their perceptions of the impact of popular culture and the media on their lives. All of these students had stories to tell; I endeavored to give them a forum in which to do so. By recording the stories of their lives, it was hoped that some patterns would emerge that could be used to help educators to understand better what influenced these students the most.

By learning what influenced at-risk students both in negative and in positive ways we could begin to gain a better understanding of how to help such students to use these influences to their benefit. By learning what distracted students the most, educators could better prepare for these distractors. By examining why students were attracted to certain types of television programs or video games, teachers could tailor their lesson plans and even their curricula as a whole to appeal to at-risk students in new and innovative ways. Educators and parents could also learn, based on what these 16 students had to say, whether there were some common factors that impacted students in negative ways and could then begin to formulate plans to counteract the negativity that surrounds students every day. Ultimately, we might be able to help students recognize negative elements in their lives and how to turn away from them. By helping

59

adolescents to make positive choices, we might help them to be more successful in school and in life.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY AND PROCEDURES

This qualitative study focused on perceptions of the impact of popular culture and the media on at-risk youth. Sixteen students were selected to participate in interviews based on their gender and race. All the students selected for the study were enrolled in the alternative school at Lexington Senior High School This program was specifically designed to assist at-risk youth, thus making it very useful to this particular study.

Students were asked a series of questions regarding their thoughts and beliefs about school. They were also questioned about five aspects of popular culture: television, movies, music, video games, and sports. Participants were asked questions relating to how they perceived the media's influence over their lives. The results from these interviews are presented in Chapter 4.

Additional interviews were conducted with administrators, guidance counselors, teachers, and parents. These interviews helped in triangulation of the data gathered from students. They also provided further insights into students' perceptions of the impact of popular culture on their lives.

Research Questions

The following research questions were formulated to guide the investigation:

1. What common factors do these at-risk students report may have helped cause them to become labeled as at-risk students?

2. To what extent do at-risk students report that they watch and/or participate in television, movies, music, video games, and sports?

3. How can teachers, administrators, and parents help at-risk students place popular culture and the media in their proper context, emphasizing their importance while combating the negative aspects?

Research Design

At the beginning of this project, an interview guide was created and was pilot tested. The pilot test was conducted twice with two different groups of students. The questions were arranged in two different sequences to determine which method would elicit the most meaningful responses. The pilot study was invaluable in polishing the final interview guide and in helping to gather the best and most useful information in an efficient manner.

In the first section of the interview guide for the first pilot test, there were several questions regarding students' reasons for doing poorly in school. Following these were another set of questions regarding the perceived impact of popular culture and the media on these same students' lives. The questions were asked of a heterogeneous group of 20 students from the ages of 16 to 20 who had dropped out of high school before graduating and were enrolled in the Jacobs Creek Job Corps program. The first pilot test lasted approximately two hours and much discussion was generated. It was audio taped and transcribed for further evaluation. Care was taken to ensure that no student was allowed to dominate the conversations. Every student who participated in the pilot test was asked specific individual questions to ensure that they all had an equal opportunity to voice their opinions.

Pilot Studies

The questions in the first pilot study were arranged in the particular manner described above for a specific reason. Questions about popular culture tend to generate a great deal of animated discussion and sometimes even arguments among adolescents. In order to stress the seriousness with which the answers should be given and in order to remain on topic, the

questions about students' perceptions regarding school were asked first. The popular culture questions were asked after the first set of questions had been completed. Although this seemed to be an effective arrangement of questions for the study, the pilot study ultimately determined whether this arrangement was effective. As with the participants in the actual study, students who were under the age of 18 required parental permission notices in order to participate in the pilot studies.

The second pilot study generated much discussion as well. For the second test group, the questions were reversed. The popular culture questions were asked first and then the questions regarding students' perceptions of school were asked subsequently. This second group was made up of a different group of 20 students from ages 16 to 20 who were also enrolled in the Job Corps program because they had left high school before graduation. This second test took approximately two hours as well.

The two groups of students who participated in the pilot tests were required to have signed consent forms on file; those students who were 17 years of age or younger had parental consent forms as well. The pilot test sessions were audio taped and transcribed. Students had an opportunity after the pilot tests to review either the tape or the transcription or both if they so desired. The interviewer also took extensive notes during the tests to record recurring themes, ideas for further questions, and students' responses and reactions to the questions. All these materials aided in refining and polishing the interview guide.

Based on the two pilot tests with two focus groups, the interview guide was revised. Using the results as a guide, some questions were eliminated, some were expanded, and some were reordered. A decision was made in relation to beginning the interview with the school questions and finishing with the popular culture questions or vice versa. As a result of the pilot tests, the sequence that seemed best for encouraging students to focus most clearly on the questions was selected and used for the purposes of this study. These pilot studies along with the

two focus groups allowed me to prepare an appropriate and meaningful interview guide while validating the findings.

Subject Selection

For the actual study, 16 students were selected. The selection process was based on the students' gender, race, and age in order to get a clearer picture of how a variety of different students perceived the impact of popular culture and the media on their lives. There were four African American students, four Hispanic students, four Asian American students, and four Caucasian students selected for this particular study. Two boys and two girls from each racial category were selected. Their cultural and gender differences elicited a variety of responses; age was a delimiting factor because of the nature of the study. Young people who were classified as at-risk were essential to the tenets of the study and a mix of races, cultures, and genders could help to ensure a well-rounded representation of the various sub-groups that make up the teenage culture of today.

At the end of the interview process, students were given an opportunity to evaluate the questions and the interview methodology and to provide feedback to ensure that the questions were appropriate, interesting, and beneficial to the study's goals. They reviewed the consent form that they signed at the beginning of the interview process and were then given an opportunity to review the transcript from the session and make revisions if they felt that their comments were not accurately reported. Students who were not over the age of 18 years required a parental consent form to participate in this study and each participant had also agreed to sign a consent form that stated he or she was a willing participant in the taped interview process; these consent forms and interview transcripts will be kept on file for future reference (see Appendices A, B, & C).

The students were interviewed in a safe, nonthreatening environment where they were assured that their confidence would not be betrayed. They all presented signed consent forms to

ensure that their parents knew that they were willing participants in this study. They were assured that they could halt the interview process at any time or refuse to answer questions with which they did not feel comfortable. All interviews were audio taped and transcribed. The interviews were conducted at times and locations suggested by the students themselves to accommodate their schedules and to ensure that the environment was the most conducive to their willingness to discuss the issues that appeared on the interview guides.

Additionally, a series of two principals, guidance counselors, teachers, and parents were interviewed to get a better understanding of their perceptions of at-risk youth. Two members of each of these groups were selected based on their involvement in assisting at-risk youth. They were interviewed using a shorter interview guide than for the students; only four to five questions were asked of each of these participants. Like the audiotape format used with the young people, these interviews were also taped and the answers given were carefully noted. These interviews were also compiled into a written transcription for review purposes. As with the students, the adult participants also received transcripts of their interviews to review for member checking. They had an opportunity to make corrections and clarifications if they so desired. Their insights proved useful in understanding the difficulties that adolescents face in today's society. These selected individuals generally had a strong idea of how students responded and what they said influenced them; thus, their opinions and observations greatly enhanced the results of this study.

Validity and Reliability

In order for this study to be considered a valid one, I had to ensure that students' responses and the results were accurate, truthful, and represented a clear picture of what the subjects said during the interview process. Because I interviewed each student individually, I wanted to ensure that my interpretations of their thoughts and feelings remained accurate during the course of this study. To certify this, all tape recordings of all interviews were transcribed.

An independent auditor participated in triangulation of the data, listening to the tapes while verifying that the transcripts were correct. The students and adults were then given copies of their interview transcripts for member checking. Any discrepancies were noted and corrected; three students wanted to clarify some items that appeared on their transcripts; this took place immediately after they verified the transcripts.

Descriptive validity was more difficult because of the open-ended nature of the interview guide. Unlike surveys, this guide required that students provide responses in an unstructured way. For this reason, the findings section of Chapter 4 will not be presented in chart or linear form. Rather, the students' and adults' responses will be described with as much thickness as possible while using direct quotations extensively.

Content validity was of critical importance to this study as well. Therefore, the pilot studies were done initially with the focus groups to ensure that the interview guide was an accurate reflection of the research questions. The interview guide was further examined by members of this project's dissertation committee and modifications and improvements were made to several of the questions. These steps were taken to ensure that the students were represented fairly and honestly and that no interviewer bias was present during the course of this study.

The reliability of the instrument for this study was affirmed via the pilot studies. Some of the questions were purposely redundant in an effort to get to the truth in these students' stories and responses. The questions were crafted and arranged thusly to elicit truthful, meaningful, and useful answers from the participants. By testing the instrument on two focus groups, both of which were made up of the same types of students who actually participated in the study, reliability of the interview guide was enhanced.

Interview Questions

The interview guide I used was created specifically for this study (see Appendix D). The first set of questions dealt strictly with students' struggles with their high school classes, their grades, and their general study habits. The participants were asked about their teachers, classes, parents, friends, and other influences. They were asked to focus on the time when things started to go wrong for them in school, the events that led up to their actions, factors in their school decisions, their perceptions about leaving school, their current opinions regarding school, and who they felt had been affected the most by their school decisions.

The second part of the interview guide focused on popular culture and the media; I asked students to focus on the five different areas that made up this particular study. Specifically, the participants were asked about their television habits (the types of shows they said they watched, the number of hours of television they reported watching per day, and the times of day that they watched television). They were also asked about the most shocking things they had seen on television and the most important historical events they believed had been televised in their lifetime.

Next, they were asked about the types of movies they preferred, how many movies they said they watched each week, how they chose to watch them (either at home on cable, on a rented video or DVD, or at the theatre), and the movies they believed had impacted their lives the most. Another line of questioning determined how many movies students said they watched in school and how these movies related to the coursework being taught at the time.

Next, we explored music. Students were asked the same types of questions (styles of music they enjoyed and how, when, and where they listened to music) but they were asked to reflect on their musical choices a bit more than they had done on the previous two forms of popular culture. They were encouraged to think about what music meant to them and whether it had helped them deal with difficult events in their lives.

Questions about sports were next. Students were asked whether they had played sports in the past and whether they had attended sporting events regularly. They were also asked how much and what kinds of sports they liked to watch on television. Finally, they were asked about athletes they admired and the reasons for their admiration.

The last set of questions regarded video games. Students were questioned about their interest in video games. Specifically, they were asked if they enjoyed playing video games, the medium that they said they used most often to play (video game player, computer, or handheld device), and the types of games that interested them. They were asked how often they played video games and for how many hours each week they engaged in the activity.

The 16 subjects were allowed to select the time, day, and location for the interviews. They were told before the interviews that the questions would involve a variety of topics and that the interview was optional and voluntary. If at any time, the subjects felt uncomfortable with the questions or with the discussion in general, they were free to change the subject or terminate the interview process. All subjects completed participation forms and those students under the age of 18 were required to present parental permission forms completed and on file before they were allowed to participate. The interviews took place one at a time and they were audio taped and then transcribed. The questions were not rushed. The participants had ample time to reflect on the questions and they were allowed to spend as much time as they wanted on the topics that were addressed. The interviewer took careful notes during the interview process to record such subtleties as body language, tone of voice, interest in the topic, and other observations not easily discernible on an audiotape or written transcript.

Methodology

This study, by its very nature, was a qualitative study. It relied primarily on a long and extensive interview process. The interviews were conducted in a safe, trusting, and caring environment to promote honesty in students' responses. Descriptions of their lives, often in their

own words, were rich in detail and contained a wealth of insight into the issues and concerns that these adolescents faced on a daily basis both at school and with their friends. In describing my findings, I used many of Creswell's (2003) methods of conducting appropriate and effective qualitative studies. Four of Creswell's methods that I used were:

1. Triangulate different data sources of information by examining evidence from the sources and using it to build coherent justification for themes

2. Use rich, thick description to convey the findings. This may transport readers to the setting and give the discussion an element of shared experiences.

3. Present negative or discrepant information that runs counter to the themes. Because real life is composed of different perspectives that do not always coalesce, discussing contrary information adds to the credibility of an account for a reader.

4. Spend prolonged time in the field. In this way, the researcher develops an indepth understanding of the phenomenon under study and can convey detail about the site and the people that lends credibility to the narrative account. (p. 196)

By using these methods, I endeavored to ensure that the study represented a fair and unbiased presentation of the students' feelings about school, popular culture, and the media. Triangulation helped to present a well-rounded portrait of the students. Member checking by the students and adults who participated in this study ensured that the transcripts did accurately reflect what the subjects said and that they were being represented fairly. Thick descriptions, using the students' and adults' own words whenever possible, ensured that the reader would gain a deeper understanding of many aspects of the students' lives. The independent auditors were critical readers both of the transcripts and of the completed study to ensure that interview bias did not appear. Discrepant information was sometimes present in this study; however, the objective was to present a clear picture of who these students were and what influenced them regardless of whether those influences were perceived as negative or positive. Finally, a great

deal of necessary time was spent with these students in order to gain their trust and ensure

fairness in the presentation of the results of the study.

CHAPTER 4

PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS OF DATA

Interview Guide and Focus Groups

The interview guide used for this study was created based on the research questions pertinent to the study. It was designed to gain a better understanding of at-risk students and their perceptions of the impact of popular culture and the media in their lives. The questions were designed to elicit free and open responses from the students involved and the interview guide contained enough flexibility to allow them to deviate from the questions whenever appropriate. It was pilot tested twice to focus the questions on the interview guide and to ensure that the findings would be validated.

For the first pilot test, the questions regarding students' reasons for leaving school early appeared first. Next, was another set of questions regarding the perceived impact of popular culture and the media on students' lives. The students took the focus group questions very seriously. At the end of the interview process, the bell rang for students to take a break. Upon their return to the classroom, they asked if they could keep answering questions because they liked the subject matter. When told that the interview was over, they continued to discuss popular culture and its impact on their lives for another hour until they were dismissed for lunch. Later that day, two students reported that they continued their discussion at lunch as well.

Because questions about popular culture are usually appealing to young people, they were very excited about the prospect of participating in the interview process. In order to garner much discussion on topic, the questions about students leaving school were asked first in this particular focus group. The popular culture questions were asked after the first set. The results were predictable. The students in this particular group setting were very cautious and were not forthcoming when discussing reasons for having trouble in school. Because they all had

different reasons for getting in trouble, it was difficult for them to relate to each other or to make sense of their reasoning. However, they all enjoyed discussing popular culture and everyone began to contribute to the conversation. It seemed to be an effective arrangement of questions for the study.

The second pilot study also went well, but different lessons were learned. The results were not as good as from the first pilot test; the discussions were not as lengthy. It was difficult to get the students to focus on the reasons they left school after they discussed popular culture. They had a tendency to try to steer the conversation back to television, movies, music, video games, and sports. Many were uncomfortable discussing the reasons they left school in such a public forum. Several gave vague reasons but were clearly uncomfortable discussing something so personal in an environment where they were sure to be judged by their peers. I decided based on this test that it would be easier for the students to answer these questions in a very small, intimate setting or in a one-on-one interview.

The second pilot test's participants did seem as engaged in the topics as the first group, yet these students were clearly not as forthcoming when discussing past school troubles. Perhaps this was because many of them had been out of school longer than the Jacket Academy students had been. Nevertheless, their insights were quite helpful when analyzing students' perceptions of popular culture.

The interview guide was revised after conducting the two focus groups. It was very helpful to have tested the instrument two times before the actual interviews began. Based on the results, some questions were removed from the interview guide. Still others were modified in minor ways to elicit the best responses. The interview guide was structured so that the school questions would appear first and then the popular culture questions would comprise the second half of the guide. This structure seemed the most conducive to garner active, honest answers and seemed to convey the seriousness with which the questions should be considered. The two pilot studies helped to cement the questions. This process was used to further validate the findings.

After the interview guide was revised and fresh copies were prepared, I began to identify students who were enrolled in the Jacket Academy alternative school who might provide insightful answers to my questions. I approached each student individually and discussed this study with him or her. Every student that I approached was willing and seemed eager to participate. All students were given the appropriate consent forms and we discussed the interview guide at length before they agreed to participate. Table 1 shows the students' pseudonyms along with their gender, ethnicity, and age. It could be a useful reference tool throughout this chapter.

Table 1

Demographic Information Concerning Research Participants

Pseudonym	Gender	Ethnicity	Age
Mike	M	Caucasian	14
Alex	M	Caucasian	18
Amy	F	Caucasian	16
Llisa	F	Caucasian	17
Tyrone	M	African-American	18
Jameer	M	African-American	15
Rochelle	F	African-American	17
Rose	F	African-American	16
Carlos	M	Hispanic	18
Javier	M	Hispanic	15
Jennifer	F	Hispanic	18
Julieta	F	Hispanic	19
Li	M	Asian	16
Chen	M	Asian	18
Phan	F	Asian	17
Ari	F	Asian	18

Next, we scheduled the students' interviews for times and places where the students felt comfortable. It appeared that several of the students were happy to be asked to participate because they wanted to get out of class for a while. With the research questions in mind, the interviews began.

Research Questions

1. What common factors do these at-risk students report may have helped cause them to become labeled as at-risk students?

2. To what extent do at-risk students report that they watch and/or participate in television, movies, music, video games, and sports?

3. How can teachers, administrators, and parents help at-risk students place popular culture and the media in their proper context, emphasizing their importance while combating the negative aspects?

Four case studies are presented that explore in detail four very different students. The common factor in all these students' lives is that they were all labeled as at-risk; yet, the circumstances surrounding each student's school troubles were all quite dissimilar. By listening to their stories, some other common factors were revealed. From an exploration of these case studies along with the data that follow regarding the interview guide, I will attempt to answer the research questions.

Case Study One: Mike

Mike was a 14-year-old Caucasian teenager in the ninth grade. He was born in Texas to a 16-year-old mother and an 18-year-old father. Despite their young ages, the parents agreed that they wanted the best for their baby. Both finished school and then got married. The young family moved to North Carolina far away from their few friends and family members to start a new life together. They worked odd jobs and tried to be good parents. However, Mike's mom

74

began going out with her friends a great deal leaving Mike and his father to take care of themselves. She started drinking more, staying out late at night, and began to take drugs. Eventually, her drug habit became a problem because she missed a lot of work and used up much of the family's money to buy more drugs. Mike's father wanted to take him away from that environment but was reluctant to do so. He finally changed his mind one night when Mike's mom came home drunk and high and began hitting Mike because he had not cleaned his room like she had asked him to do. Mike's father took him and they went to stay with a friend.

However, Mike's parents did not get divorced. Mike's father still held out hope that they might be able to get back together, so he refused to see a lawyer to begin the proceedings. Instead, he tried to be a good father to Mike while working two jobs to pay the bills. Mike and his dad were happy; yet, this too was short-lived. Mike's father was also a heavy drinker and he developed cirrhosis of the liver. It was a particularly fast onset of the disease and Mike's father died almost three years after he was diagnosed. Mike's mother refused to take custody of him; in any case, because of the abuse, he likely would not have been allowed to live with her had she wanted him.

Mike was left alone in a city and state where he had no relatives. His paternal grandmother, a widow, was physically and financially unable to care for Mike. His maternal grandparents were both deceased by this time. He had no aunts, uncles, or family acquaintances who could or would take custody of him. He was sent to live in a foster home. He stayed there for nearly a year when a friend of his father's who lived in another state heard about his situation. He and his wife began the two-year process to gain custody of Mike. Finally, the court system granted full custody of Mike to this friend and that is where Mike lived at the time of the study.

Mike told me his story with very little emotion. He said that he had lived for so long with it and had told his story so often to so many people that it did not really bother him anymore. He was fiercely proud of his deceased father, yet he called his foster father "Dad" as well. He

distinguished between the two by calling one his "real dad" and the other his "new dad." He was remarkably composed even when discussing how sick his father was and how hard it had been when he died. He spoke openly about going to live at a group home and then into strangers' houses, but there was some hesitation when delving into these aspects of his life. When I asked if he was happy now, he answered with an emphatic "yes." He told me that he was very happy living with his new mom, dad, and sisters.

We talked a lot about school and how he had done so far. He said he had been in trouble a lot when he was younger. He admitted that when his mom was drinking and staying out late, he would sometimes skip school and go hang out with some other "bad kids." He said that they did many destructive things in the neighborhoods where they hung out. For example, Mike said that one day he and his friends stole a go-kart and took it out riding in a field. It was old and had some wiring problems and it soon caught fire. Mike jumped out of it and ran away but when he looked back, it had caught the tall field grass on fire. The fire department was called to put out the fire. Mike ran away so that he would not get in trouble. His parents never knew that Mike accidentally started that fire. He was so scared of getting into trouble that he never even bragged about it to his friends at school, and the other boys who were there that day made a pact to never tell a soul that they were involved.

Mike admitted that his grades also began falling around the same time that his mom's drug use became widely known. He said that she used to be the one who helped him with his homework and made sure that he knew how important good grades were. Once she started coming home later and partying with her friends, Mike's motivation to get good grades diminished. Mike's father was so busy working two jobs that he rarely saw him. He told me that when he was left alone so often, he would just spend his time outside playing basketball or watching TV. He said that he was rarely lonely on those nights because there were always friends around with whom he could play ball or he could always go inside and find something on TV to keep himself occupied. He did report being scared sometimes at night when he had to go

76

to bed by himself; so, he would just fall asleep on the couch with the TV blaring until his mom would come home drunk and wake him up. He said that on many of those nights she would not even see him on the couch as she stumbled to bed.

Because his dad worked swing shifts and other odd jobs, he was away from home often during this period. Furthermore, Mike said that his dad had never really gotten good grades when he was in school and he told Mike that it did not really matter to him what kind of grades he got as long as he passed his classes and behaved in school. Mike seemed to have no problem with either of these two things. However, his grades formerly As and Bs turned into mostly Ds. Because these grades were still passing ones, Mike's dad was not angry. Mike did not cause problems in class during this period either, but outside of school, he was a rough little boy.

He started getting into more verbal and physical altercations on the playground and basketball courts. He became very argumentative with others. Mike said he did not really know why this happened, but he had a theory. He said he might have been jealous of the other kids and of how they seemed to have more than he did. He said he, too, wanted to have cool clothes, nice sneakers, and two parents who loved him. He admitted he remembered feeling a lot of envy during the years before his parents split up.

He told of another time that he got into trouble in a fight on the neighborhood basketball court. He said that some kid said that he heard that Mike's mom was a druggie who slept with men for money so she could buy more drugs. Mike said that he went into a rage and did not remember anything else until he was slammed into the asphalt and a policeman fell on top of him. He said that the officer twisted his arms behind him and put handcuffs on him and put him in the backseat of a patrol car. Mike was angry and yet very scared about what was going to happen to him.

He was ordered by the court to go to an alternative school. He said that the students there had a very strong negative influence over him, and he was glad that he only had to go there for a short time. He did not remember how long he stayed there but considered it long enough to

77

decide it was a place that he never wanted to see again. He explained that it made him feel like he was in jail and that he determined never to get in trouble again.

This seemed to be one of the deciding factors in causing Mike's dad to leave his mom. Rather than being upset by his parents separating, Mike said he saw it as a good sign. He recalled that both he and his father hoped that it would make his mom sad to be away from them and that she would decide to straighten up and do better so they could all get back together as one united and happy family. Sadly, Mike and his father kept waiting for something that was not meant to be. His mom did not change her ways; in fact, she became much more violent and irrational just before they left and had not contacted them after they were gone.

Mike said that once he and his dad got out on their own, they became much closer. They began to rely on each other more, and Mike saw how hard his dad worked to support him. Mike said he wanted to be a good son. He began by helping out around the house and started to study more for his classes. He revealed that for the first time he understood how his negative behavior had affected his dad and he made a conscious effort to do better.

When his dad was diagnosed with a terminal illness, Mike granted that he was very angry for a while. He reported that he started to lose concentration in school again and was tempted to just start skipping school altogether. His dad seemed to sense this and warned Mike not to begin traveling down the wrong path again. Mike refocused his efforts and began to raise his grades again. He said that this part of his life was worse than what he had experienced before with his mom, so school became his refuge. When he became sad thinking about how sick his dad was getting, he would just turn to his schoolwork to take his mind off his father's illness. Despite dealing with intense personal grief, Mike was able to maintain average grades and got in very little trouble during his father's illness and subsequent death.

It was while he was living in foster care that he got into some trouble at school for skipping classes and stealing. He said he knew that his dad would not have been proud of him, yet he seemed unable to do the right thing. He recalled feeling that his foster family did not

really care about him or what happened to him, so he just decided to do whatever he felt like and see what happened. Consequently, he was sent to several alternative schools. He was not happy there but had no motivation to help him do the right thing.

After moving in with his new family, Mike related that they sat him down and told him of their expectations for him. They then asked him to discuss his expectations of them. Mike stated that this really made him feel like part of their family and he felt loved again for the first time in a long time. He made a commitment to them and to himself that he was going to be good and not get in any more trouble.

His new family began taking him to the youth group gatherings at their church. They all began to slowly get to know and love one another, and Mike said he felt good again about his life and his future. Since moving in with them, he had not been in any more trouble at school and his grades were As and Bs again.

When asked to reflect on his life so far, Mike seemed filled with sadness. He said that he had let his real dad down by being a bad kid. He had gone to counseling sessions to try to deal with his grief and stated that his counseling sessions had been helpful. He said that he wished he could get just one more chance to speak with his dad again and to apologize for getting into so much trouble. He said he had no desire to see his mom and that she had made no efforts to contact him. He seemed completely happy with his new family. He said he loved them unconditionally and that they felt the same way about him. He noted that he, for the first time in his life, had enough food, clothing, and security to allow himself to be completely happy. Mike had finally found a stable home.

He cited sports as one of the only positive aspects of his life prior to coming to live with his new family. Mike confessed he loved to play and watch sports. He said that were it not for basketball, he would probably have gotten into much more trouble. He fondly recalled several coaches who had actively tried to help him stay out of trouble and encouraged him to keep his grades up. He discussed an event where his basketball coach went to the principal and appealed

Mike's suspension for stealing. Mike, the coach, and the principal all knew that he was guilty, but because the coach was willing to work with Mike, the principal allowed him to stay in school. Mike stated that this taught him so much about being a man and trying to help others. He admitted what he did was wrong and that he felt bad about it, but his coach's actions taught him that everyone deserved another chance. He stated that he had never forgotten that lesson and that he would love to go into coaching one day so that he too might help give young people second chances to make something of their lives.

Mike observed that had he not loved to play ball so much, he would have failed several grades and learning to rely on teammates helped him get through his difficult family issues. His love of sports helped him become the young man that he is today.

Case Study Two: Li

Li was a 16-year-old male. Although still classified as a ninth grader, he said he hoped that by the end of the semester he would have enough credits so that his picture would appear under the tenth-grade section of the yearbook. This was the third year he was enrolled in the ninth grade and he said he thought he might make it out this time. His grades were not good, though, and he had already been in quite a bit of trouble at the time of the interview.

Li's mother and father were immigrants from Cambodia and were actively involved in gang activity in Li's neighborhood. Li was also in the gang and had just been suspended from school when I interviewed him for this study. He related that he did not consider being in a gang as a bad thing because his mom and dad were both still in and his dad held a prominent role in it. In fact, Li spoke with admiration of his fellow gang members, calling them his brothers. He laughed about his "jump in" initiation where several older gang members beat him up to test his loyalty to the gang. His mom watched and his dad helped with the jump in. Li said that he wanted to make his parents proud of him so he never cried out or protested as his friends hit him repeatedly.

80

Li had been in trouble for most of his school career. When he was younger, he remembered that he got into trouble a lot for talking. He said he liked to be the class clown and make other people laugh, but that desire got him into trouble with his teachers almost daily. He admitted that he felt sorry for many of his teachers because he knew that he was being a bad boy and trying their patience, yet, he seemed unable to stop craving the attention he received whenever he made jokes.

In high school, he experienced the same kinds of trouble as before, but he also began to find new forms of trouble and the punishments became more severe. He was still a class clown, but he also got more violent with other students. His gang did not like another gang's members who also attended the high school; Li participated in several fights with the members of this rival gang. In his first year of high school, he was suspended three times for three days each time. He failed all his classes the first semester and he failed three classes the second semester. In his second year of high school, he did really well the first semester. He passed three of his four classes. By the second semester, though, he started getting into more fights. He was suspended three or four times before being suspended for the remainder of the year. During the current year, Li had been suspended two times and had just been sent to the alternative school for the remainder of the semester.

Li told me that he wanted to stay in school and earn his credits but it was too hard. He pointed out that he thought the work was easy but the difficulty was in staying out of fights. Li had never discussed his aggressive tendencies with a counselor prior to enrolling in the Jacket Academy but had been trying to work through his violent nature since starting the alternative program. He stated that he still wanted to get his diploma because it would make his parents proud. He concluded that they were proud of him for being so tough within the gang, also, and he did not know how to maintain the two goals in his life. He wanted to stay in the gang because he considered he really belonged there and was accepted by the others. However, the gang was

holding him back from passing his classes. His dilemma was the primary topic of conversation with his new counselor and it was something that Li said he thought about a lot.

I asked Li for his opinion as to how popular culture had influenced his life. His wardrobe consisted mostly of Oakland Raiders football jerseys and black jeans. Even so, he said that he rarely watched football. He wore the jerseys because the colors of his gang were black and silver as were the team colors of the Raiders. Li stated he had never played sports at school; instead, he was always jealous of the students who were on school teams because they always seemed like they had so many friends who accepted them for who they were. He had never tried out for any sports because he said that his family never had enough money to buy equipment for him.

Li's obsession was with rap music. He favored the style of rap called "gangsta rap" that primarily focused on young thugs in gangs who carry guns and use violence to get what they want. In gangsta rap, the artists glorify guns, drugs, and alcohol and often objectify women. Li said that he admired these rappers because they had grown up poor like he had and they had all made something of their lives by becoming rich and famous. He said that he was not very good at rapping but listened to the music nearly all the time. He liked to watch rap videos too because he liked the way the rappers dressed and how pretty the women all looked in their tight clothes. He stated that he wanted to have a gangsta lifestyle one day.

When asked whether he felt more violent when he listened to rap music, Li stated that he did a little bit. He said that it was usually a combination of the music and his friends that made him want to act out in violent ways. He did recall one time that he went into another boy's house and beat him up because the boy had taken one of Li's CDs. The boy and his parents were scared of retaliation so they did not press charges against Li. He was not remorseful about this incident; rather, he stated that the boy deserved to get hurt because he took Li's music and it was very important to him. Li's father was the one who suggested that Li should hurt the boy to get his music back.

82

Li also stated that he was obsessed with the movie *Scarface*. He said that he first heard about this movie while watching some of his favorite rappers talk about how much they loved it on a music program on TV. He rented the movie and thought the violence and excessive cursing was funny. He started watching the movie repeatedly. In fact, he stole a copy of the DVD from a boy at school. He had asked the boy if he could borrow the movie and the boy complied. When the boy asked Li to give the movie back, Li refused and hit the boy repeatedly with his fists. He told the boy that if he told anyone else that Li had kept his movie, he would get all his fellow gang members to beat him up. The boy never told anyone what had happened and Li did not feel remorse about how he had acquired the movie.

Li's life had been difficult and it did not appear to be getting any easier as he grew older. His love of hard rap music and violence in movies, coupled with parents who seemingly encouraged his gang activities, had set Li up for failure in school. Taken separately, the music and movies that Li enjoyed might not have encouraged him to put himself into bad situations at school, but the lack of parental guidance was a very strong factor in his behavior choices. Li stated that he wanted to please his parents because respecting your elders was an important part of Asian culture. However, he felt that the best way to please his parents was to remain an active leader in the gang. In order to do this, he had to maintain a tough persona both on the streets and at school. This persona was fueled by listening to violent rap music and watching movies that encouraged a life of crime. Rather than appearing to be a lost soul, Li seemed very confident that he was traveling down the right path for his life.

When I asked if he was worried about his future, Li stated that if it was meant to be, he would die young. He expressed admiration for Tupac Shakur, a rapper who had been gunned down by rival gang members several years ago. He replied that if he had to go out like Tupac, then that was an honorable way to go and said that his parents and friends would be proud of him if he died young fighting for the gang.

Because of this heavy involvement with his gang and because of his troubled past in school, Li had been required to see a counselor daily and was attempting to work through these feelings at the time of our interview. His counselor observed that he needed a great deal of intervention to help him deal with his strong feelings of hatred, entitlement, and desire for violence. Li was a very troubled young man who needed intensive crisis intervention in order to help him overcome the difficulties that he had already faced in his life.

Case Study Three: Rochelle

Rochelle was a 17-year-old 11th-grade student who was enrolled in the Jacket Academy full time. Her father was African American and her mother was Hispanic. They both passed away when she was young. Her father was shot in a club when she was only five and her mother died of a drug overdose just two days after Rochelle's seventh birthday. Rochelle had been living with several family members for the past 10 years. She stayed with one grandmother for a while, and then went to live with an aunt. Her aunt kicked her out because she could not afford to keep buying clothes and food for her and the rest of her family, so she went to live with a cousin. While there, she was sexually abused by her cousin and two of his friends. Rochelle ran away and spent two nights living on the street until she found a homeless shelter. The shelter counselors sent her to a group home where she discovered that she was pregnant as a result of the abuse that she had suffered.

She was so excited to learn that she was going to have a baby. She said she felt that she was finally going to have someone to love again. She continued to go to school while she was pregnant. She had always gotten good grades and liked school a great deal. She stated that her teachers had always encouraged her and made her feel like a real person, especially after her mom died. She said that they always seemed to know what had happened to her and were very understanding when she came to school late because of her living arrangements.

Once Rochelle had her baby, though, things began to change. She had some serious health complications after the birth and had to stay in the hospital for nearly two weeks. Her baby was born with some complications as well; so, even after she returned to school, she missed many days. North Carolina's laws only allow students to miss eight days; after the eighth absence, the student automatically fails the class. Despite Rochelle's best efforts, she failed all her classes. Her only option was to take all those classes again the next semester.

She re-enrolled and signed up for the same schedule as before, yet her baby's health problems caused her to miss too many days again. She enrolled in summer school to try to make up her credits so she would not be so far behind her classmates. The summer school program was held at the Jacket Academy. While she was there, she was able to make up three out of four credits that she had missed. She met regularly with a counselor there who helped her find a day care center that specialized in helping young mothers finish their education. She also got a job after her classes at Jacket Academy every day that helped her to earn money so that she could move into a low-income apartment of her own. She became so successful there that she asked to remain at the Jacket Academy for the next school year.

Even though she did not fit the traditional student's profile at the alternative school, she found that she really learned there and was grateful to the staff for understanding her needs and helping her to achieve her goals. With permission from the Jacket Academy staff, she enrolled there for the next school year. According to Rochelle, she was finally working toward achieving the goals that she had set for herself as a little girl: to pass her high school classes and to get a diploma.

When Rochelle and I talked, she stated that she was happy with her life for the first time. She said that she had spent her whole life being jealous of others because they had happy, stable families and she did not. She never received any counseling after the death of her parents, and she said that she never really felt like anyone loved her any more after they were gone. She

recalled being happy when she learned she was pregnant, even if the baby could have been her cousin's, because she wanted so badly to be part of a family again.

Rochelle said she spent a lot of time watching television and movies. She liked all types, but she was especially drawn to love stories and family-centered shows. Some of her favorite television shows and movies represented traditional family values and featured these as core tenets. She said before she got pregnant and had her baby, that watching family sitcoms used to make her cry because she was so desperate for that kind of life. She shared that she was now determined to provide that kind of life for her little girl. She wanted them to be a normal family, and her idea of normalcy came from watching television.

She admitted that she and her baby did not form an old-fashioned family of mother, father, and child, but she was satisfied with what she had. She commented that in today's society, many families are not traditional any more; but because she was a single mother, she was committed to raising her daughter the right way with good moral values and a strong character. She seemed to have blossomed into a strong young mother who was dedicated to creating a good life for herself and her child, despite having learned so much from television. It appeared that TV had influenced her in a positive way.

Rochelle remembered that all the important events in American history that had happened during her lifetime had been broadcast on television. She stated that watching TV was the best way to learn about history. She said that one of the things she liked the most about her first period class in school last year was *Channel One*, a 12-minute broadcast that covered current events in a teenager-friendly way. She liked the way the correspondents delivered the news in ways that made it easy to understand and said she admired them because they looked pretty or cute, wore nice clothes, and seemed happy with their lives and their job. She even said that she might want to go into some kind of journalism one day because she wanted to prove to her daughter that she could be someone too.

She also said she liked to watch science show on channels like Discovery and Animal Planet. She expressed that these were good programs for her daughter to watch when she got older to learn about animals and other important topics that were educational. She remembered history classes in which they watched videos of wars and other historical events and said that while she did not remember all the details of each event, she did remember the images and they helped her to visualize what had happened back then. She said she wished that her history classes had been taught using more videos because seeing things on the screen and hearing someone talk about them helped her to learn.

Among her favorites was an English class where the teacher used many films to teach novels and stories. She shared that she liked this teacher because she asked the students to read the stories first and then they had a chance to watch the films associated with them. The teacher asked them to compare and contrast the different interpretations of the stories and then create their own unique interpretations. Rochelle said she liked doing these activities because she could be creative with old stories and put her own thoughts into them. She added that this was a really good way to learn about literature, and she had a great deal of respect for that particular teacher because she thought the teacher wanted to make the lessons fun for them.

Rochelle said that she could not imagine what teachers did before there were televisions, VCRs, and DVD players in classrooms. She said she felt sorry for students who used to have to learn about World War II by reading about it. She recalled that one of her grandfathers fought and died in the war, yet she really knew nothing about it until her American history class her junior year. Her teacher helped them to understand the brutalities of war by showing *Saving Private Ryan* in class. This film presented a very graphic rendition of several battle scenes, yet it was lauded by veteran soldiers and critics for being an accurate portrayal of the war's events. Because of the graphic violence in this movie, Rochelle said her teacher had sent permission slips home for parents to sign so students could watch it. She said some parents would not let

their children watch the movie and she felt sorry for those students who had to leave the room during the film and work on an alternative assignment in another classroom.

When I asked Rochelle whether she would let her daughter watch this film, she hesitated only a moment before her reply. She stated that she felt it was a good portrayal of what really happened and she did want her daughter to see it one day, but she said that her daughter needed to be much older to be able to cope with the violence in the film. She also expressed that watching the film outside of the context of her classroom might not be as powerful as she really felt that her teacher had done a good job of teaching them the background story and putting everything into the appropriate context. She said that she thought it was very important to have good teachers who could help students understand what they were seeing on screen and why the events were important.

Rochelle's life had been incredibly difficult and she was only 17. However, she seemed like she had adjusted well to the trials that she had faced. Indeed, she stated that she was happier now than she had ever been. She said she had finally made it to the point in her life where she felt like she was a good mom, a successful student, and she finally had a family that gave her a purpose in her life. Because of the care and concern that she had received from her counselors and teachers, she was able to concentrate on her school work, pass her classes, and move closer to her graduation day. She stated, repeatedly, that her life felt like a good reality show. She said that she wished someone would come to Lexington, North Carolina, and film her for a while so that America could see how great things were going for her and how she had worked hard with the help of others to create a good life for herself and her daughter.

Case Study Four: Carlos

Carlos was an 18-year-old Hispanic student who had just been suspended from school for the rest of the year. He had only enough credits to be considered a sophomore because of his frequent suspensions and other absences in previous years. He was enrolled in the Jacket

Academy as a last resort. He had already been suspended earlier in the year three times for fighting and cursing his teachers. The year-long suspension was a result of Carlos having started a fight with another student over a cupcake. Carlos wanted the cupcake but when the other student did not give it to him, Carlos punched him in the face.

Carlos was diagnosed as an Exceptional Child shortly after he started school. His school offered him services and provided modifications and an Individualized Education Plan for him, yet Carlos' parents spoke very little English and did not understand much of what his teachers said to them. They were migrant workers and moved frequently, and Carlos said that this was very hard for him. He stated that he was tested at every school he went to and he was always placed in the slow classes. He said that he never really felt like he belonged anywhere, and added that he felt stupid for always being put in the "retarded kids" classes.

One thing that he did like about being in special classes was playing all the interactive games and working on projects. Carlos was unable to sit quietly and copy notes or listen to lectures, but he could sit in front of a computer screen for hours. He loved playing games and going online to look up information. He said that he learned much about school from the computer and that he could be happy just using it every day.

Carlos had his own PlayStation at home that he liked to play for hours at a time. He played so many video games and for so long that he got headaches and hand cramps. His said his parents encouraged him to play games because they felt that this kept him off the streets and out of trouble. The problem, Carlos said, was that the games he liked to play were violent. He admitted that he started to emulate the violence in the games that he played and that often got him in trouble at school.

One of his favorite games involved characters engaging in street fights with each other. Carlos described that the player has to choose which character he wants to be; then, he chooses which environment and which weapon he wants to fight with. When the game begins, the player's character fights the game's selected character until the character dies. Carlos stated that

89

sometimes he just wanted to make this game real, so he would start fights with other students at school or with his friends at home after playing. Carlos said that his mom and dad got mad at him only when he was suspended from school.

The times that he was suspended, his mom and dad were called to the school for meetings with Carlos's teachers and counselors. While he was in high school, he had a special counselor who dealt only with Exceptional Children. Carlos said that his counselor tried to help him control his anger and not act out what he saw in his favorite video games. Carlos added that he wanted to be good so that he would not disappoint her; but he stated that he just could not control himself. Attempts to help Carlos via anger management classes were fruitless. He got into a fight in anger management class and was kicked out of the class. This incident was the one that caused his yearlong suspension. He stated that he felt bad about not being able to control himself, yet, he also said that he acted out just like his favorite video game characters and that the way they behaved was a lot like real life.

Carlos wanted to graduate from high school and go on to a four-year college. He wanted to find a job where he could try out new video games every day. He had been told that these kinds of jobs were hard to get, but said he was determined to try to do something like this with his life. He stated that he was sad because he had been kicked out of school again and he said he felt that he was wasting his time trying to get all the credits he needed to graduate.

He said he felt different from other students. He shared that he felt he was always a few steps slower that the others and regardless of how hard he tried, he simply could not catch up to them. He stated that his teachers always went too fast for him and that he had to struggle every day to make sense of his assignments. Even in his special classes, all his reading assignments were difficult for him to comprehend. He said that many students made fun of him because he could not read very well and that made him mad. He took his anger out on other students by fighting with them. He remembered one time that a teacher asked him to read aloud and he did not want to because he was embarrassed. He tried to read aloud anyway, but the student in front

of him started making fun of him. Carlos used this as an excuse to keep from having to read aloud anymore. He hit the student in the back of the head so that his teacher would kick him out of class and send him to the principal's office.

He related another incident in which he knew that the inschool suspension teacher was spending a week in the computer lab allowing those students to catch up on their work using the school's computer network. Carlos said he acted poorly in all his classes that week so that he would be sent to the computer lab every day. He said that his teachers never realized what he was doing and he never told his parents about all the times that he was sent out of class for misbehavior.

The Jacket Academy allowed students to participate in credit recovery classes online. Carlos told me that he really wanted to be kicked out of school for the rest of the year so that he could attend the Jacket Academy and do all his work on the computer. He had finally achieved his goal for the year and he looked forward to starting his assignments online.

Carlos said he felt bad about hurting so many people; yet, he said that he sometimes felt that his violence against others was not real. He said that he felt like he was acting out something that he had seen in a game and so that made it seem less real than it really was. Carlos had been influenced by video games in both positive and negative ways. He repeatedly said that video games and computers were his life; yet, he also acknowledged that they got him into a lot of trouble. He wanted to do well in school but admitted that he was addicted to playing games and would rather play games instead of doing any kind of schoolwork. Carlos said, for better or for worse, that video games were the most important influences on his life.

Research Question #1

The first research question is as follows: What common factors do these at-risk students report that may have helped cause them to become labeled as at-risk students? The students'

responses were correlated with the questions from the interview guide in order to present thematic content analysis.

The first question that I asked every student was, "Why do you believe you are struggling in school right now? What's going on in your life that prevents you from doing well?" Seven of the boys and five of the girls said that they just did not care about school very much. Alex said that he did not see how his classes had any relevance to the real world. He said he wanted to make money so he could get a nice car because he felt like he could get more dates with a "fat ride," and he said he felt that school was simply holding him back from getting a good job and making a lot of money.

Rose, Rochelle, Julieta, and Lisa all had children and cited childcare as one of their main concerns. All of these girls said that taking care of their babies had caused them to miss classes and assignments and that their grades had suffered because of their single-parent status. Julieta admitted:

> I did real good in school before I had my baby, but then my mom couldn't help me out no more and I couldn't find a daycare that I could afford. Even the free service at the church couldn't take her, so I had to stay home. For a while I tried to go in to school whenever I could, but I was always so far behind that one of my teachers just laughed at me every time I came in to his class. He asked me why I even bothered to come in because I was always out. I just figured that he was probably right.

She continued in a wistful tone:

> All my girlfriends were so excited for me when I was pregnant. They were always touching my belly and stuff, but then when I had her and they had all seen and played with her for a little while, then they went back to being regular kids and I was left at home with my baby. I love her so much, but nobody ever told me that my life would change this much.

Javier had this to say about his school troubles:

> I just hate school. It's so damn boring. It's the same shit every day: lectures and takin' notes and stupid quizzes and tests and shit that I don't know the answer to and I don't even care about cells and stuff anyway. I ain't ever going to have to know algebra if I want to work in a body shop. I don't even need a college degree for that. I know most of it already, so I just need to get on up outta here and get me a job doing that. School don't make no sense why we have to go there. As soon as I turn 16, I'm quittin' and I'm gonna

get me a job at Jiffy Lube or some place until I get me some experience and then I'm goin' to get a job at a real garage fixin' bodies and engines and stuff.

The students confessed that school was not very appealing to them for a variety of reasons. Most said that it was boring. Mike, Jennifer, and Tyrone specifically said that they needed more excitement in the classrooms to keep their minds from wandering. Two others said that if their teachers used more games, they would like it better. The general consensus was that school simply did not hold the interest or the attention of this particular group of 16 students. Li summed it up best, stating, "School don't got nothin' for me. I learn more from the street 'bout how to survive, and that's more important than book smarts to me."

The next questions that I asked the students were: "How do you feel about school now? How do you feel that you did in junior high? What kind of student do you think that you were in elementary school? What kinds of grades did you receive?" The responses to these questions were mixed. Nine of the students said they used to be good students whereas seven students said they had always gotten in trouble or had bad grades at school. Chen, Tyrone, Amy, and Jameer all cited their parents' divorces as being a turning point in their lives. Mike and Tyrone said that when they started to play sports, their grades and behavior got worse at times.

Only five students said that their parents asked them about their grades or punished them when their grades were poor. When asked about her grades, Phan shared:

My mom used to give me money for making As and Bs, but when I got to middle school I got a little boy crazy. I started failing my classes and she tried grounding me, but that didn't work because I just snuck out of the house whenever I wanted to do something she wouldn't let me do. So she stopped grounding me. I know she's disappointed in me when I bring home Fs, and I used to feel really bad about disappointing her, but I just can't seem to concentrate in class. I like to flirt and write notes and stuff. And I don't do a lot of homework because I talk on the phone so much when I'm not at work. So, my grades have gotten so much worse than they used to be. I used to be smart and I think I might still be but I just don't even try no more.

As a follow-up question, the students were asked, "Do you think that your parents/guardians support your decisions regarding school? How do you think that they feel about your lack of participation/poor grades/poor attendance?" In response to these questions,

93

six students recalled that their parents had been very upset with them for cutting classes or being sent to the Jacket Academy's alternative program. Specifically, Jennifer said her mom told her that she had shamed the family by going to the alternative school. Ari reported a similar familial situation, stating:

> My mother was really pissed at me for getting sent here. She said that my poor grandmother and grandfather would be so ashamed of me and my behavior. I felt kinda sad that they might be ashamed that I can't act right in class, but I can't just sit by and let girls say stuff to me, so I had to fight them. I look at it like this: I was protecting my family name by fighting. They oughtta be proud of me for standing up for myself, but that's not really part of my culture. That's why my mother's so pissed.

The next question I asked was: "How do you believe you would feel if you were asked not to return to school? How do you think your parents/guardians would feel?" Four of the students said they would not care if they were asked not to return to school. Indeed, Javier and Li said they wished that the principal would give them long-term suspensions so they would not have to return to school at all. Most of the students said that their parents would be angry or disappointed. Amy summed up most of the students' reported feelings by saying:

> I prolly wouldn't even know what to do if he told me not to come back to school. I've never been in that bad a trouble before. My mom would kill me . . . and I wouldn't know what to do. I don't wanna be here with these rejects for the rest of high school. I wanna be back with my friends. I know my temper gets the best of me sometimes but I don't wanna' be kicked out of school. I need to be there 'cause that's where my boyfriend is and all my friends are there.

Next, I began exploring the students' past disciplinary consequences. I asked, "Have you been sent to an alternative school or expelled before? What reason did the principal or your parents give you for sending you there? Do you agree with their reasons?" The answers I got were long, detailed, and full of complexity. The students gave answers that shared some common themes with the other responses to these same questions. For example, Phan said that she had never really been in trouble before. She recalled she had always done well in school and gotten good grades. However, when she entered middle school, she met new friends. She said she started spending a lot of time with them and admitted that they were not very good influences on her. She said they often talked her into doing things that she otherwise might not

do. She related that one day they decided that they did not want to go to school because they had a big "end of grade test" and they did not want to take it. They convinced Phan to call in a bomb threat. She did this, and she subsequently got caught. She was expelled from school for the remainder of the school year. She related that her parents were horrified and ashamed, that she missed a lot of school work, and that she failed the eighth grade. When she reentered the middle school the following year, she continued spending time with friends who were bad influences on her. She said that many of the teachers were mean to her. She continued:

> They all knew that I had been suspended for the year, but some of them didn't know why. I guess they thought I was really bad or something like maybe I had gotten in a real bad fight or carried a gun to school or something. They were not nice to me when they saw me in their classes. I tried to talk to the counselor about it, but she didn't have time for me and told me to go on to lunch. I just got through it without really thinking about it too much; but, I felt like they didn't wanna help me because they thought I was some loser girl.

Like many of the other students, Phan considered that she had been labeled as a "bad student" and that her teachers treated her differently than they did the other students. Five students who participated in this study also reported that they felt discriminated against because of their past disciplinary problems. Tyrone said:

> All my teachers expected me to be some thug because of what has happened in my past. I didn't go to school wantin' to be no thug, but after every single grown person in the school looks at you like you done somethin', well that just makes you wonder why you even try to do the right thing.

Tyrone said he felt that his past bad behavior had labeled him and it appeared that it was quickly becoming a self-fulfilling prophecy.

The next set of questions fit nicely together. They were, "What do you think you are going to do with your life? When you are finished with high school, what do you think will be the next event in your life?" and, "Do you want to attend a university, community college, or a trade school?" Fourteen of the 16 students said they wanted to get married and have children. The two who did not share this goal with the others were male; they both said they wanted to remain bachelors and date many different girls. This seemed to be the only sure thing for most

of these students. Eight said they wanted to go to a university or community college; yet, all eight also said their families could not afford to send them to either and they all expressed doubt as to how they would ever get in or pay for it. Tyrone and Mike both said they felt that they might be able to get scholarships to play sports at a college or university. Three students admitted they did not know what they wanted to do when they got out of high school. Alex explained her dilemma, saying:

> I don't even know what I can do when I get out of school. Going away to college is what you're supposed to do, but my mamma can barely pay her own bills, so I know she ain't gonna let me go off to no school. I guess maybe I'll go to trade school or community college or somethin', but they're expensive too nowadays. Man, I don't know what I'm gonna do. I guess I better start thinkin' 'bout getting outta high school first.

In conclusion, there were several factors that these students pointed out that could have helped to label them as at-risk. Divorce was a common thread among these students. Boredom in school was another. The students felt that once they had been in trouble, it was much easier to get into more trouble as time went on. All the students mentioned their friends as having a particularly strong influence over their behavior, usually in negative ways. Another commonality that was mentioned several times was a lack of parental supervision or interest in the lives of these students. It appeared that these factors could have contributed to these students being labeled as at-risk.

Research Question #2

The second research question upon which this study was based is as follows: "To what extent do at-risk students report that they watch and/or participate in television, movies, music, video games, and sports?" I endeavored to gain a better understanding of students' actions and behaviors by asking these questions about popular culture and the media. The questions and their answers appear below in the order in which they were asked of the students.

Television

The questions regarding television were first on the interview guide and they proved to be useful in getting students to open up about their viewing habits. The first questions were: "Approximately how much TV do you watch per day? Where do you spend most of your time while watching TV?" Out of the 16 students that I interviewed, all 16 had television sets in their rooms at home. Nine of the students slept with their televisions on all night. Each student reportedly watched a minimum of two hours of television per weekday; they all reported significantly more hours spent in front of the TV on weekends. All of the students reported that when they were with their friends, they spent a lot of time watching television as well. Only one of the students interviewed, Amy, stated that her parents controlled what she watched on television. The remainder claimed that their parents let them watch anything they wanted. Only Ari and Jennifer regularly watched television with their parents, although eight students stated that they watched with younger or older siblings. Only Lisa said that she would not let her younger brother watch some things on television. She explained:

> I didn't used to be that way, but now I have a baby of my own and I care about what my baby's gonna watch one day. There's a lotta bad stuff out there and I don't want my child or my little brother to get caught up in doing some stupid stunt or acting foolish because of something they saw on TV.

The other students conveyed that they felt no parental instinct to try to screen programs for younger siblings even though they all admitted that there were some things on TV that younger viewers should not be allowed to see.

The next few questions were: "What types of movies/shows/music/games/sports do you like?" and "Who are some of your favorite artists/TV personalities?" A few of the favorite programs identified by students were *CSI*, *Survivor*, *The Apprentice*, *The Real World*, *Spongebob Squarepants*, *Chappelle's Show*, *South Park*, *The Simpsons*, *WWF Smackdown!*, and *Monday Night Football*. The students all reported that they liked reality programs and seven admitted they also watched cartoons. Half the girls interviewed said they watched soap operas during the

summer. Rochelle and Jennifer both went to great lengths to tape their favorite soap operas to watch after school. Mike, Jameer, Rochelle, and Phan related they liked to watch reruns of old sitcoms and game shows. Thirteen of the 16 students said they watched sports on television.

All students interviewed had cable subscriptions in their home; half of them also received cable movie channels such as HBO, Showtime, Cinemax, The Movie Channel, and STARZ! All of the students said they liked to watch movies on television regardless of whether the movie was on a pay cable channel or on a regular channel. Four students reported that they preferred to watch 30-minute or hour-long programs rather than movies because they sometimes "got bored" watching longer movies or sitting for such lengthy periods. Carlos shared personal reasons for his preference to watch half-hour to an hour television shows, stating:

> I just can't sit still long enough to watch movies, man. I gotta get up and move around. Besides, I've seen it all before. All movies is today is a buncha shootin' and blowin' up shit, and I seen all that before a hundred times.

The students interviewed said their favorite channels were: MTV, BET, Fuse, Nickelodeon, Disney, Entertainment, Comedy Central, FOX, WB, FX, Lifetime, and HBO. In particular, 12 of 16 students reported that they usually turned their televisions to MTV or BET if they were not watching a program just so they could listen to the music. When I asked these students to distinguish between whether the music was just background noise or if they were actually watching the videos, all 12 stated that they did both. They agreed there were many music videos that were inappropriate for young children, yet there were several students who stated that they had dressed in a particular way or acted in a certain way in an effort to emulate someone they had seen on a music video.

All but one student admitted that the artists in the videos that they watched influenced them. Mike was the lone holdout for this question. He explained:

> I watch rap videos and stuff and I just laugh at them. Those gangsta rappers think they're so cool with their crunk juice and bling-bling and sexy women, but I feel bad for them. All they seem to care about are expensive cars with fancy rims, pretty girls, and getting drunk and high. I just don't care about stuff like that because I know it's usually fake,

98

but all my friends think that's they way they should live, you know? I think it's bad to look at women as hos and to spend all your money on shit like that. It doesn't make any sense to me. It's like they're trying to tell us to be like them so they'll feel better about themselves or somethin' like that.

Although every student interviewed reported that he or she watched the news on television at least occasionally, none of the subjects watched the news regularly. Several of them said that they got their news from *Channel One* every morning at school. Two others, Alex and Rose, said they relied on the radio or newspaper for current events. In general, the students did not express a great deal of interest in the news; five stated that they could not see how world events affected them so they were not interested in what was happening in far away places, nor did they take the time to find out what current events might affect their future.

However, all 16 students stated that they learned of major tragedies and disasters from the news on television. These students all said they remembered what happened in our country on September 11, 2001, because they saw it on television. In fact, all 16 students reported being in class when they heard about the tragedy, and they all stated that their teachers stopped teaching while they spent the rest of the day watching television. Javier stated that he never really knew that there were people in the world who hated Americans until that day. He said that seeing those images on the TV screen changed him forever as it did many of the other interview participants. Another girl, Rose, said that world events did not really matter to her until that day. She commented that wars never really seemed real to her until the day when terrorists attacked the country and that made her open her eyes to the big picture.

The students were asked about television viewing in their classrooms. Each student stated that there was a television set in his or her classrooms. Five students admitted that they could not imagine school without television sets. Each one reported that television was one of the most important ways by which they learned things. One boy, Tyrone, said that television was the only thing that kept him awake in class. He stated if a teacher started lecturing or making the students copy notes, that he would go to sleep; however, if the teacher turned on the TV, he would be wide awake for that class period.

Julieta said that she learned better when she could see the concepts on TV rather than just read about them. She claimed to have a good imagination, yet she needed the visual and auditory stimulation that TV provided. She said that using video segments made teachers better at their jobs, and she claimed that all her friends felt that way. She said that seeing images on screen helped her remember better and added that the lessons she learned best had always come from television.

Four of the students interviewed stated that some teachers used the television as a babysitter. Tyrone shared an incident. He said that he was in a bad science class one year. The students in that class were unruly, disruptive, disrespectful, and uninterested in learning. The teacher left shortly after the school year began. The class had several substitutes until a permanent teacher could be located. Unfortunately, the new teacher came into the class unprepared to handle such difficult students. She began showing videos to the class nearly every day. He said that was the only way to keep his classmates quiet. He admitted he actually learned something in that class. He did not object to the videos being shown, but stated he did feel like she was just using them to keep the students from causing more trouble in the classroom.

Another student, Javier, shared an interesting anecdote regarding television in the classroom. This student reported that he was suspended for 30 days for breaking a classroom television. He said he got angry with a teacher and wanted to do something to threaten her, so he picked up a heavy doorstop and hurled it at the television. It did not break the screen as he had intended but it did damage the controls and the VCR underneath the television. He had to pay for a new television and VCR in addition to his suspension. He recalled that his classmates were all mad at him for breaking their TV because it took too long for them to get a new one.

Movies

Some of the questions pertaining to movies were: "In an average week, approximately how many movies do you watch?" I also asked, "What are your favorite types of movies to watch?" and "Do you watch movies on cable, on DVD/video, or at a theater?" Movies were very important to 10 of the 16 students interviewed. The students all seemed to prefer the same kinds of movies: horror, comedy, science fiction and fantasy, and romance. Documentaries, dramas, and children's movies were not mentioned as being very popular with this particular group of interview subjects.

Overwhelmingly, the students who expressed a fondness for movies particularly enjoyed horror movies. Rose said that she liked to be scared by a movie because she knew that it was not real. Alex added that he liked to take girls to scary movies because they usually were scared and sat closer to him or held his hand. He said he liked to feel protective of his dates and scary movies gave him a way to get closer to them.

The favorite movies cited by the students were generally movies designed to appeal to teenagers. Teen love stories and comedies seemed to appeal to all 16 of the students interviewed. Five students stated that they wished their lives were like the lives of the characters in these teen movies. All five, Amy, Rochelle, Julieta, Chen, and Alex admitted that they wanted to dress, talk, and act like characters in movies that they had seen. Six students reported emulating some aspect of a character's actions in movies they had seen recently, such as using phrases that the characters had used or emulating their style of speaking.

All 16 students revealed that they liked to watch movies on television. All 16 also reported renting movies to watch at home with their parents or their friends. They all stated that they liked to see movies at the theater with their friends, even though 8 of the 16 admitted they went to the theater for the social experience rather than just to see the movie. None of the students had ever gone to the movie theater alone to see a movie. They preferred the associated

experiences of buying popcorn and sodas, talking with friends, and making out with their girlfriends or boyfriends over actually going to see a particular movie. Alex readily admitted:

> I go to see movies because that's where my friends are. Besides, that's the one place my mom used to let me go without giving me shit about it because she knew I would really go there instead of out riding around drinkin' and raisin' hell. Most of the time we didn't even care what movie was showin' 'cause we din't really go to watch it anyways. We just went to see if there was any hotties there.

All but one student were allowed to see rated R movies without their parents. Ari's mother refused to allow her to see R rated movies at the theater even going so far as to purchase her ticket for her to movies that were rated PG-13 or PG. Ari said her mother would not allow her to watch R rated movies at home unless she had seen it first; even so, Ari stated that she often watched them after her parents went to bed or at her friends' houses. The particular movie theater that these students frequented rarely asked to see the students' identification; therefore, they were allowed to see movies that carried the R restriction. Only two of the students' parents, Rochelle's and Amy's, asked about a movie's rating. Most of the students said that their parents did not care what rating the movies they saw carried; indeed, all 16 students conveyed they had seen rated R movies with their parents and their parents did not mind this fact.

The students reported that they loved watching movies at school. They all stated that movies helped them to learn more about the subject. Li stated that he believed that teachers who showed movies in class were good teachers who wanted to help the students understand what was going on in ways that teenagers could understand because movies were easy to figure out.

Four of the students reported that their teachers sometimes showed boring movies. When asked to elaborate, Lisa and Carlos said that they considered black and white films to be boring. Chen also said that if movies were made a long time ago, he felt that they were usually boring. If the students had never heard of the movie before, they were generally not as interested. However, they all said that they felt that a day in class watching any movie was better than a day of copying notes or listening to a lecture.

The students particularly liked such historical movies as *Titanic*, *Saving Private Ryan*, *Pearl Harbor*, and *Gladiator*. These movies had the advantage of having big budgets, popular actors and actresses, and a great deal of box office appeal; however, they were all mentioned by at least one student as being used in the classroom to teach students about history.

Six of the interview subjects also reported that they liked scientific movies such as *Jurassic Park* and *Congo*. Jameer suggested that these movies, while not designed to be educational, contained a great deal of scientific knowledge and that students could really learn from these films.

Biographical films were appealing to two of the students, Mike and Rose. One student, Lisa, recalled that after her English class studied Sylvia Plath, her teacher brought in a copy of *Sylvia*. Her teacher told them that the details presented in that movie were disputed, but they watched the film anyway and came to a better understanding of this conflicted poet. Lisa said that Plath's poetry appealed to her before seeing the film, but after she watched it, she felt that she knew Sylvia Plath in a new way and was further drawn to her work. She credited her English teacher for inspiring her to want to read more poetry and began writing some herself to help deal with her feelings.

All 16 of the students reported that teachers had allowed them to watch educational movies in class to help them understand concepts and ideas. However, the students stated that they had been allowed to watch noneducational movies in classrooms as well. Seven students recalled that the days before school let out for holidays were always movie days. Four students remembered times when their teachers had taken an unplanned absence and left no class work plans, so their substitute teachers had allowed them to watch movies that may or may not have been educational.

One Asian student, Chen, said he loved it when they could watch movies that were not educational because it felt like he was on a vacation from school for that class period. Chen further stated that he felt most movies should be considered educational in some way because he

could learn something valuable from almost anything. Other students interviewed for this study agreed. Two females, Rochelle and Ari, pointed out that most movies conveyed some kind of lesson and that young people could learn much from watching characters in movies. They both stated that most movies had happy endings and that all problems usually got resolved at the end of the two hours. They considered that movies' villains almost always got their comeuppance in the end and that this was a valuable lesson to keep people from doing wrong. In general, these students reported that movies were positive influences on young people because teenagers were mature enough to watch movies responsibly.

Music

Several questions were asked about music including: "Approximately how long do you listen to music each day? Where do you listen to music the most?" I also asked the students, "What are the major types of music you like to listen to?" and "How do you listen to music usually? (headphones, videos, MP3 players)" Finally, I wanted to know, "Have your clothing or tattoos or piercings ever gotten you into trouble at school? What happened?" and "Has your personal style been influenced by popular culture? In what ways?"

Overwhelmingly, all 16 of the students interviewed for this study cited music as being one of the major influences in their lives. The genres of music listened to and appreciated by the students were as varied as the students themselves, but they all agreed that music had made huge impressions on them and that it was very important to them as individuals. Thirteen of the 16 students interviewed stated that music was a very powerful medium that helped them learn to cope with the difficulties of being a teenager in today's world.

Of the 14 students who said that they listened to music a lot, this group claimed to listen to music for a minimum of two hours per day up to a maximum of six hours per day. They all listened to music while they got ready for school each day, and all but one (Julieta) listened to music on their way to school. Julieta said that her mother would not let her take her personal CD

104

player to school for fear of it being stolen. Seven of these students listened to music at school despite the school's ban on personal CD players and radios. Five of these seven took their CD players out during the interview to show the current CD that they were listening to, and two students (Alex and Li) brought out small CD collections as well.

The ways in which all these students listened to music varied widely. Some listened to the radio, some listened to CD players, a few students listened to internet radio stations, others turned their televisions to cable music stations, and most watched a lot of music videos. Amy and Mike both had MP3 players that allowed them to download music from the internet; five more students said that they wanted to get MP3 players in the near future because all their friends were getting them. Each student had his or her own radio and CD player in his or her bedroom at home. Most also had personal, portable CD players with headphones.

Seven of the students interviewed also played at least one musical instrument. Two boys, Mike and Chen, played electric and acoustic guitars in bands they had formed or joined. Rose had been part of the school band's drumline until she had been kicked off the drumline for cursing at another band's drumline members at a football game. She still played the drums in hopes of getting a college scholarship one day, although she said that having a baby had hampered her practice time and that she had gotten very rusty since then. Another student, Amy, played classical piano and participated in numerous recitals and music programs each year despite the fact that she was constantly in trouble at school for disrupting class. Ari played a traditional family flute while her brother accompanied her on an ancient Japanese drum set.

The students all reported that their parents had little influence over the kinds of music that they preferred. They all considered that their parents had no control over their music and most suggested that their parents did not care what kinds of music they chose. Thirteen students stated that they had at least one CD that contained explicit lyrics. All but Phan had bought the CDs themselves despite the fact that they were not all old enough to purchase these types of CDs. Several of the students said that they had purchased the explicit lyrics CDs at local music

stores, but some had simply downloaded the music from the internet or had purchased it online; both are common and easy ways for underage teens to purchase music with explicit lyrics.

The genres that the students listened to were reflective of their cultures to some extent: the four African American students preferred rap, R & B, and hip-hop music; the Hispanic students liked Latin rhythms, salsa music, and music by Spanish-speaking artists. The Asian and Caucasian students liked music from both of these cultures, but they also cited alternative, punk, heavy metal, top 40, and electronica music as some of their favorites. The African American and Hispanic students did not exclusively limit their musical choices to those most popular in their cultures, however. They liked some of the same kinds of music as the Asian and Caucasian students and the same was true for these groups as well.

The most popular genres cited by the students were rap, alternative, and R & B music. The students considered that these forms were the most real to them because they dealt with real issues that were important in teenagers' lives. The ones who liked R & B said that listening to that kind of soulful music helped them deal with relationship issues. The students who preferred alternative music liked it because they said that it helped them question society and understand people in new ways. Students who preferred rap music considered that it was real and gave them an opportunity to identify with rappers who had been through many of the same hardships that they had undergone.

When I asked the next questions, I got some interesting responses with regards to music. Those questions were: "Have you ever changed your behavior (dress, vocabulary, attitude) because of a song, movie, or TV show?" and "Have you ever done something (good or bad) because you saw it or heard about it on TV / in a movie or song?"

The two kinds of music that fostered the most conversation with regards to these questions were rap and death metal. These two seemed to polarize the most people because of the strong messages that they sent to their listeners. Rap music contains a great deal of morally questionable lyrics: explicit words are rampant, women are objectified, drugs and alcohol are

glamorized, and an expensive lifestyle is encouraged in many rap songs. Five students reported that they admired rappers who maintained and encouraged this lifestyle, and these five admitted that they liked to watch television shows or videos that featured these rappers because they idolized them. Of the students interviewed, 10 liked rap music. Only five were drawn to the rappers and their lifestyle, though; the other five simply said the music was good but they did not think that the rappers themselves influenced them in any meaningful way. All 10 who liked to listen to rap music reported that they felt it made them use profanity more because so many rap songs had so much cursing in them.

One of the Asian male students, Chen, said that he had been suspended once because he was rapping in gym class and the coach asked him to stop cursing. The student said that he got mad because he felt that the coach was being unreasonable, so he cursed him out and then was suspended. The student said the rap song caused that suspension. According to Chen:

> I wasn't even really cussin' at him, G. I was jus' rappin' an' shit, but then he got all crazy on me an' got up in my face. I'm a grown ass man; ain't nobody gonna get in my face like that. My mamma don't even talk to me that way. See, I was jus' rappin' but he said I was cussin'. I don't even remember what rap it was, but it prolly did have some words in it. But I wadn't loud, you feel me? I was jus' keepin' to myself and enjoyin' my music, but he had to go all out and make a issue of it. But yeah, if I hadn't been rappin' that song then I might notta gotten in trouble.

Three of the students interviewed, Alex, Lisa, and Phan said they liked to listen to death metal. Such musicians as Slipknot and Marilyn Manson were these three students' favorites. All three students dressed in fashions similar to these artists by wearing all black clothing, long black trench coats, chains on their clothing, and bracelets and bands with metal spikes. All three had several piercings each, including eyebrows, noses, chins, lips, and tongues. Lisa and Phan had hair that was dyed black; Alex had bright orange hair on the day of the interview but it was green by the following week. These students expressed their admiration for death metal artists by emulating their personal style. They each said that they liked to listen to that kind of music because it helped them with their anger despite the fact that listening to it also caused them to get angry at times. Phan noted that the music could influence some students to harm themselves or

others if those persons were unstable to begin with but that it did not really have a negative impact on their lives.

However, Alex had been expelled, as he related, because of his musical tastes. He said he liked to wear chains on his pants, as did some of his favorite musicians. He had gotten in trouble repeatedly for wearing them, yet he continued to do so. One day another student started making fun of the way he dressed and he got very angry. He said he started thinking about some of the songs that he liked that made him feel aggressive and angry. He added that he felt he needed to teach this boy a lesson, so he charged him and started punching him repeatedly. When the boy began to fight back, Alex tried to hit him with the chain on his pants. He was expelled for a year because of his actions and he admitted that his music and his clothing had contributed exclusively to his expulsion.

None of these students considered that music was very harmful to them but some conceded that others might perceive it that way. In general, the students reported that while parents and other adults thought that music was a bad influence over them, they admitted that their friends had more of an impact on their lives than the music they enjoyed.

Video Games

I asked these questions about video games: "For about how long do you play video games each day?" and "What are some of the games you like best?" Of the five types of popular culture explored in this study, video games were the least popular with this particular group of students. Remarkably, though, they seemed to take a large amount of time from the students who did play them. Out of 16 students, Alex, Jameer, Carlos, Chen, and Javier reported that they played video games regularly. They stated that they played for an average of two hours per day during the week. The average amount of time spent playing video games on the weekends and during school vacations, according to the students, was four and a half hours per day.

Of the students who reported that they played video games regularly, all were males and all five reported that sports games were their favorites. They had other types of games as well; all had at least one game that involved some kind of crime such as assault, murder, and car theft. These five students said that they did not feel that video games were bad influences on them despite the messages of violence that most contained.

Interestingly, these students and others in the study stated they felt that playing video games was educational. Chen said that an Army recruiter told him that he could use his gaming skills in the Army fighting Iraqis. Jameer said that he learned new basketball moves from his video games and later practiced them on the court in real-game situations. Yet another student, Carlos, said that he had been told that playing video games helped to develop hand-eye coordination; therefore, he was improving his skills by playing video games for hours at a time.

The other students in the study had all played video games before. The girls liked puzzle games more than shooter and crime games and the male students who did not spend a lot of time playing video games liked sports games better than these as well. All the students had played computer or educational games at school and stated that these games were usually fun ways to learn. Two students, Lisa and Ari, said that their parents had encouraged them to play educational video games at home on their computers. Another student, Rose, said that her mom had purchased some computer game software to help her improve her math skills. They all said that playing educational games made them better students and could help them learn in new and better ways.

The students acknowledged that video games had a bad reputation for making students act out in crazy ways. Specifically, Mike remembered seeing news segments where video games had been blamed for causing students to take guns to school or cause harm to others; yet, these students said that those incidents represented only a very tiny percentage of all video gamers. The five students who played games regularly said that the games they played had no real impact on them or on their behavior. Four of the five had never gotten in any significant trouble at

109

school because of video games; however, Carlos and Alex both reported that they had skipped school at least once to play video games that they were addicted to playing. For these students, video games had some negative impacts upon their lives as well.

<center>*Sports*</center>

I asked the following questions about sports: "How many sporting events do you usually watch per week?" and "Is there a special athlete that you admire or dislike? Why?" I also wanted to know, "What specifically about those people do you admire or dislike?"

Fourteen students responded favorably to the questions about sports saying they liked to watch and play sports regularly. These 14 said that watching sports helped them to be better people because it taught them about good sportsmanship. Seven students said that their love for sports had kept them in school longer and made them want to stay in school at times when they were frustrated and wanted to drop out.

Among this group of interviewees were athletes in football, basketball, baseball, softball, volleyball, soccer, tennis, track, cross country, skiing, snowboarding, and cheerleading. The sports they liked to watch the most were football, basketball, baseball, hockey, and the Olympic Games. Ten stated that they spent several hours per week watching, practicing, or playing sports.

All the participants who said that they liked to watch or play sports cited sports' positive influence in their lives. Mike considered that students who participated in sports were well rounded and seemed to treat others fairly. Jameer agreed, stating that he felt that other students looked up to athletes as school leaders; seven of the students said that this was one of the reasons they liked being involved in school athletics.

Phan had been a cheerleader but had been removed from the team because of her school suspension. She said that being a cheerleader had been very important to her and that she was very sad when they asked her to turn in her uniform. She expressed:

<center>110</center>

I felt like a big part of who I was gone for good. I hope they'll let me try out again next year. Now I'm just me, but before I was part of a team and they were my friends. Now they talk to me sometimes but it's like I'm an outsider again.

Some of the student athletes stated that their involvement in sports had hurt them academically while others said that if they had not had to keep their grades up to play they would have failed many more classes than they did. One football player, Tyrone, credited an after-school ACT preparatory class taught by his English teacher for helping him get the required score for college admission. He said that his educational background had not been strong enough to help him pass the test, but this special class created just for football players was exactly what he needed to get the score that was required. Tyrone admitted that he had received preferential treatment because he was one of the school's top athletes; he also said that he felt that some of his teachers had given him passing grades sometimes even if he didn't earn them because he was such a good player.

One of the cheerleaders, Lisa, remembered that she had been an A and B student in middle school, but when she came to high school and joined the cheerleading squad, the long practices took away from her study time. Her grades slipped to Cs and Ds and were just barely acceptable to remain on the squad. She said that her parents were upset about this, but that she was so happy being a part of the cheerleading squad that she did not care about her grades so long as they were passing.

Four of the students, Mike, Amy, Jameer, and Ari, stated that watching sports could send the wrong message to young people. They said that athletes who got in trouble with the law were considered heroes or role models and this was bad for young kids to see. Jameer said that he liked to see athletes brag and make boastful statements until he saw his younger brother doing the same thing on the basketball court one day. He admitted that his little brother probably thought that this was a good way to act toward others, and he told him that his behavior would probably get him into a fight one day. He said that he began looking at collegiate and professional athletes in a new way after that incident.

111

All the students expressed admiration for athletes that they had seen on television. Some of the athletes that they cited had reputations as being bad or negative influences. Several others liked athletes who tried to set good examples for young people. They said they admired them because of their fame, money, exposure, and athletic skills. They added that they admired several athletes for being good sports and for being dedicated to their sports.

To summarize our interview sessions and to try to gain a better understanding of these topics' places in the lives of these students, I asked these summary questions: "If you had to give up all but one of the following, which would be the one you choose to keep: TV, movies, music, video games, or sports? In other words, which one of those five categories do you believe that you simply can't live without? Why?"

Music was the overwhelming favorite; although, the students admitted that television was the most important communication tool for reaching mass audiences. They related that movies were important in shaping how they reacted to the world around them, and that sports and video games helped them to relieve stress and have a good time while challenging themselves in competitive ways.

Finally, I asked them these questions: "How do you believe popular culture has impacted your life?" and "What is there about popular culture that appeals to you? How much do these topics influence your life?" The students' responses are best summarized by quotes. Tyrone, who was 18 years old, explained:

> I don't think I would have made it this far without my coach. He helped me to be a man and he stayed on my butt every day in practice and in the hall whenever he saw me coming. He cared about my grades and not just 'cause he wanted me to play. He cared more about my schooling that my momma did. I feel bad about getting into trouble 'cause I don't wanna do nothin' to let him down. So, when I get back I'm gonna show him that I can do better.

Phan, who was 17, admitted:

> Music mellows me out. I don't know what I would do without it. It helps me to feel better when my boyfriend does me wrong. I got sent out of school for getting in a fight with a ho that was hittin' on my man, but after I calmed down I just listened to my music

112

and I was okay then. I like to write poetry and songs too; they help me get what's in my head on paper so it doesn't weigh me down and make me be mad or sad. I wish we could take our CD players to school 'cause that might help me tune out all the gossip that these little girls go around spreadin' every day.

Javier, who was 15 at the time of the study, acknowledged:

I think this culture stuff helps us understand stuff better. I like watchin' movies in class…even the educational stuff they make us watch is pretty okay usually. It makes historical stuff more real. Yeah, and I like to watch those science shows. They're jacked up. I like the ones with snakes and sharks. I wish we could play games in all our classes 'cause I feel like I really learn stuff from them.

Jameer, who was 15, wanted to convey:

All those people out there who think that rap music and harsh games are bad for us are crazy. See, I like to listen to rap and I make up my own raps, but I don't wanna go out and carry a gun around and be all hard. That ain't me. My mamma taught me better than that. Only thugs do stupid things like that, and it's just 'cause they want everybody to think they're playas. They're just shallow-minded, small people who can't think for themselves.

Alex, who was 18 years old, defended popular culture by acknowledging:

Movies and TV don't make kids be bad. Music don't either. Friends make them be bad. Most of the time, a guy can play a game with shootin' and fightin' but he won't go out and copy that. Now if his friends say, "Let's go out and mess up some people," well that's different. That will make him start to think about all those moves in his games and then he might do somethin' bad. But I don't think that just playin' makes you do that crap.

Finally, Rose, who was 16, summed her thoughts in a mature manner, stating:

I think that some of this stuff can be bad if students are insecure or if their parents let them run wild. I know kids whose mothers and grandmas let them do whatever, and they act like fools doin' stuff they saw on movies and from lookin' at TV. These girls today are out there sleepin' with any guy that'll have 'em 'cause they just want somebody to pay attention to them. They need to learn that acting that way ain't cool. It gives them a bad rep, not like what they see on TV.

Research Question #3

The final research question was: How can teachers, guidance counselors, administrators, and parents help at-risk students place popular culture and the media in their proper context, emphasizing their importance while combating the negative aspects? Based on the students'

113

interview responses, these 16 young people had struggled in school and their lives had been influenced by popular culture and the media to varying degrees. This final aspect of the study was an attempt to help the adults in these young people's lives learn to help them interpret popular culture's messages more appropriately.

The questions asked of two principals, two guidance counselors, two teachers, and two parents began with these**:** "How do you believe we can use the media in effective ways to help our students understand its importance while encouraging them to view it with a critical eye?" and "How do you think we can counteract the negative impact of media and popular culture while encouraging students to recognize and embrace the positive impact that they can have?" One principal shared his perplexity, saying:

> I just can't imagine why our kids are so focused on what happens on TV every night and with all these rappers and celebrities. If they spent half the time studying or reading that they do on such nonsense, our test scores wouldn't be so low.

One teacher, who used multimedia presentations frequently, said she felt that the media had a tremendous influence over students and that the media get a very bad reputation that seems self-perpetuated at times. She said that using TV in the classroom to take up time or keep the students quiet had ruined its reputation as a valid and valuable educational tool.

Mike's mother explained:

> I just think that there's so much out there that's so bad, but I have to work for a living. I've gotta pay my bills and I can't always be home to watch what he's watching. I feel like since he's been living with us I've raised him up to be a good boy. I don't think I can really control what he watches anymore, but I can talk to him about it and make sure that he knows the difference between some crazy TV show and the real world.

Likewise, the guidance counselor at the Jacket Academy where all these students had attended said she felt that many parents thought they had little control over what their teenage children watched and listened to. She said she believed that many of them had just given up and that was perhaps the wrong message to send to their children because that made some of the students feel like their parents just did not care any more about what happened in their lives.

114

The next set of questions were: "Can you share your philosophy regarding popular culture, the media, and their use in the classroom?" and "How important do you think popular culture and the media are in the lives of our young people?" One principal gave a carefully worded answer, stating:

> I think there are some teachers who really use movies and shows and music well in their classes. I think there are some classes that lend themselves better to using those kinds of media better than others, but I also think that good teachers can find different kinds of media to help enhance their classes too. What it all comes down to for me is this: are you really teaching those kids or are you just putting in a movie because you need a free day from teaching? Because if you just need a free day then there's not going to be any learning going on because those kids are going to know that you're just using that movie to free you up from dealing with them. Kids are smart that way."

The two parents interviewed said they felt that popular culture and the media were critically important in the lives of their children and their children's friends. One parent said that he believed that our entire country was obsessed with popular culture and the media. He recalled:

> Back in my day, we didn't watch so much TV and the music wasn't that bad. There might have been some heavy metal guitar songs and stuff like that, but nothing like all this rap music and cussing and violence that you hear today. Movies weren't so bad either, but today practically half the movies you go see there's somebody getting shot or killed or some girl getting raped. But like my boy tells me, that's how things are today and I better get with it if I want to stay up on things. It happening all over our country. Things is just different nowadays.

One teacher stated that in order to reach teenagers you had to appeal to their interests. He admitted he taught students by using as many current icons and popular culture references as possible. He said that he had had much success in keeping students' interest by referencing sporting events, TV shows, and music in his lessons. He related that it kept his students intrigued to find out what he might discuss next and that his references always sparked interest and debate from his students. He said the key to making this useful was to first capture their interest and then make them think about how a certain song helped them to solve a problem or how a movie could give them new ideas about how to view current world events.

I went back and revisited these questions: "Do you believe that teachers should try to avoid using music, movies, television, sports, and video games simply because there is a perception that they could be negative influences?" or "In your opinion, how can we incorporate popular culture effectively in the classroom to capture students' interest and teach them new skills and coping mechanisms?" Both parents considered that teachers should use movies and video clips to help students understand historical, scientific, and literary concepts. One parent suggested:

> Maybe there should be a class that helps [teachers] learn how to use stuff like that in their lessons. I guess the school has already spent enough money on TVs and computers and all that, so now maybe they just need somebody good to come in and show 'em how it's done.

A teacher agreed. She said she was already a strong multi-media user and felt that other teachers were either too comfortable teaching in more traditional ways or were intimidated by bringing in popular culture and media items into their classes. She suggested that staff development could help those teachers tremendously.

Finally, I asked this set of questions to all the interview subjects. "How do you feel that we can ensure that popular culture and the media become positive influences rather than negative ones?" and "As educators and parents, what do you believe we can do on a small scale or a local level to alleviate the negative impact of popular culture on teenagers?" The parents were the most unsure about how to enhance the positive while helping students understand the negative influences. Mike's mother sighed, and then stated:

> I wish there was a training manual for raising teenagers. Whoever can write that book can become a multi-millionaire. It's hard being a parent of a teen. There's just so much out there and you want your child to be protected from the world, but you also don't want him to be sheltered his whole life either. You can lock them up and keep them away from bad influences, but you can't be there all the time either. All I know is that my parents always taught me right from wrong and told me to abide by the golden rule, and that's what I teach my children. I tell them that no matter what happens, always think before you act and don't ever do anything to hurt another person. I feel like that's all I can do.

The guidance counselor at the Jacket Academy warned:

116

There are so many ways we can let teens fall through the cracks. We have to take a stand that we as educators are not going to let that happen. Every child deserves an opportunity to learn, even if he is a pain in class.

She continued with some advice for teachers:

If he's restless and easily distractible, don't blame it on too much TV or video games or ADD or some other crutch. Take a look at your teaching style. Yes, these students maybe do watch too much television, but there's nothing you can do about that as a teacher. What you can do is make your classroom as exciting as some of the things these students see on TV and then see if they give you problems. I just think we're too quick to place blame, when really there's something more that we all can do to try to help these young people out.

A teacher reported similar feelings. He said that it troubled him to walk down the hallway during his planning period and see teachers droning on in lectures or classrooms full of quiet students sitting at individual desks taking notes or completing worksheets. He believed that times had changed and that the old way of running classrooms should become obsolete. He related his belief that energy, enthusiasm, and movement were critical components of classrooms where students actually learned. He went on to describe and give examples of using these techniques in his classroom:

I try to run my class like a detective's game show. My students are inquisitive about each day's lesson and are diligent about seeking out the central truths. Once they uncover the truths that the lessons contain, then they compete with each other to discover the facts. It's compelling entertainment, but at the end of the day they still know a surprisingly large amount of facts, plus they have developed those critical higher-level thinking skills that they will need not just to pass the state tests but to be successful.

In conclusion, the parents, teachers, guidance counselors, and principals all agreed that popular culture and the media were of key importance in the lives of these at-risk students. They all expressed concern that the messages that students received from popular culture were not always the best and that they all played a role in helping students make sense of and take positive lessons from these messages. Each interview subject also agreed that it was impossible to keep students away from the media and popular culture, so incorporating them into the classroom could be beneficial if done in meaningful and thought-provoking ways. Interestingly, there was little responsibility taken for these students in the interviews that I conducted. Principals,

teachers, and guidance counselors all placed much of the blame on the parents while barely acknowledging that each of them could do more to take responsibility for these at-risk students. The parents cited teachers as being partly to blame yet no one group admitted that their role was critical in these students' development. Even the students refused to take on much of the responsibility for their actions, jumping to blame their friends or the media for causing them to act out in negative ways. The reality is that all four of these adult groups must take ownership of these students' futures if they are going to become productive and contributing members of society. We can no longer pass on responsibility for these struggling youth; we must all know our influence and wield it accordingly.

CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS, IMPLICATIONS TO STAKEHOLDERS, AND

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

Summary of Findings

All the students interviewed for this study had led troubled lives. They had all been in trouble at school to some extent. Through the course of these interviews, the students revealed that they had experienced some troubles at home as well. For these reasons, they were classified as at-risk.

Each student had a different story made up of varied circumstances that led to his or her problems at school. However, an emotion that every student had in common was stating a feeling of hopelessness. Some students considered that it was hopeless for them to learn so they created class disruptions or skipped school altogether. Some admitted their lack of hope stemmed from the alienation they had felt from their parents. This pervasive sense of hopelessness made all the students seem sad, resigned, withdrawn, or bitter regarding their troubles at school.

They listed several common factors that they believed had helped to label them as at-risk. Several cited their appearances These students said that because they dressed like death metal rockers or rap artists, they felt that their teachers treated them differently. They stated they believed that some teachers were prejudiced against them because they had tattoos or piercings modeled after sports and music stars, or because their pants were big, baggy, and sagged below their underwear. Some other students said that the fact that they liked to listen to music often got them into trouble because they felt that teachers were always looking for them to do something wrong.   Still others reported that their love of video games and their incessant playing of these

games at school caused teachers to speak negatively about them to other teachers and perhaps this prejudiced them towards the students.

The student athletes recalled being given preferential treatment from some teachers but being treated poorly by others especially when their grades were not as high as other students' grades in their classes. A couple felt that they had been labeled "dumb jocks" by classmates and teachers just because they seemed to care more about sports than their grades. Some said that teachers had negative attitudes toward them because they played ball all the time and did not spend enough time on their studies.

For this particular group of students, several common factors emerged. They all expressed a strong desire to keep up with at least one type of popular culture cited in this study. They all had received at least one poor grade because of negative behaviors. They all claimed that their parents did not really know what was going on in their lives including those who reported having good relationships with their parents. They all agreed that music, movies, television, video games, and sports had reputations for making students behave in negative ways. Regardless, these students considered that even though the media made it seem like these were all bad influences, they had different opinions. These students, overwhelmingly, reported that the media and popular culture had helped them deal with their emotions more than they had harmed them academically or behaviorally.

They all admitted spending a lot of their time watching television. They stated that it was a necessary part of their existence. Five students said that they felt they could not live without television. In conjunction with television, movies were very influential in these students' lives. They liked to watch movies and television and would often mimic characters' actions, dialogue, or mannerisms when hanging out with their friends. These students especially liked to quote movies and television to each other and said they felt that knowing lines from certain shows or movies made their friends think that they were cool or hip.

Music was the most powerful influence over this particular group of students. Eight of the 16 students interviewed, fully 50%, reported that music was the medium that they felt was necessary for them to be happy. The kinds of music these students enjoyed and preferred were vastly different; yet, they all seemed to have an appreciation for different musical genres and were very accepting of others' musical choices so long as others did not judge them for their choices. According to these students, music had power over them to change their feelings and alter their emotions. Music was the single item cited by every student as being important to him or her in some way. It was also one that seemed to affect these students the most and it seemed to get them in trouble at school more than the other forms of popular culture explored in this study.

Sports and video games were important to these at-risk students in varying degrees. Two students said that sports were the biggest influences on their lives. They credited good coaches and a strong desire for competition with helping them to want to succeed in school. They both stated that playing sports made them better and helped them keep their grades up to some degree. Many of the students enjoyed watching sports but there was a marked difference in disciplinary actions between the students who played sports and the ones who merely watched them on television. The student athletes got in less trouble overall than the ones who only watched or participated on a very limited basis. However, the student athletes also reported that they had received some favorable treatment because they were athletes. Specifically, each student athlete reported at least one incident in which he or she should have gotten punished for doing something wrong at school yet they received leniency because they were athletes.

Video games were important to this group of students but not excessively so. This was the only category that was gender specific. The only students who stated that video games were necessary to their lives were males. While a few female students admitted to playing and enjoying video games, the addictive nature of them did not seem to have much effect on these girls. While only one student claimed that video games were very important to his happiness,

several other students also noted their love of video games during the course of these interviews. Overall, the students generally reported that video games were good for teenagers and that the violence contained within them was more cartoon-like than real. They said they felt that video games had little impact on how students behaved in real life. They also cited computer games and video games that were educational in nature as being enjoyable. Each student had used educational games at some point and several had them at home; they said that they truly did learn from most of these games and that they enjoyed them immensely when allowed to play them at school.

Four students noted that television provided for them all the categories of popular culture that we had discussed. They acknowledged that they watched movies on TV, listened to music and watched music videos on TV, watched sports on TV, and played video games on TV. A couple of students also noted that movies were often made by television stars, contained popular music, and sometimes featured sports or video games. Other crossover genres mentioned were sports that included music and were featured in video games. Finally, video games contained soundtracks that were hugely popular and often were spin-offs from movies and some television programs. These five content areas have become so enmeshed that it becomes difficult to discuss one without mentioning another. Today's teenagers are so bombarded with mass media that parents, educators, guidance counselors, and administrators cannot ignore their impact.

Implications to Stakeholders

Representatives of these groups (parents, educators, guidance counselors, and administrators) were also interviewed to assess their perceptions of the influence of popular culture on these students. The implications have significant impact on what one teaches and how it is taught to this particular group of students.

Parents

The parents interviewed acknowledged that music was a strongly negative influence. They cited rap music as being particularly damaging to students because it sent the wrong message to young people about lifestyles that were not appropriate or attainable. They stated that those who sold music should not sell CDs with explicit lyrics to minors. They also said that parents should make themselves aware of the content of their children's music.

The parents who participated in this study were also concerned with the levels of violence contained in today's movies and video games. They considered that parents held the responsibility to make sure their children did not have easy access to violent content; yet, they conceded that this was easier said than done. They admitted to having allowed their own children to watch movies that might have been inappropriate and they also admitted they had purchased video games for their children that featured extreme violence. These parents stated that teenagers needed proper guidance to help them understand that violence in music, movies, and games was fictional and that it should not be copied or imitated in real life.

Finally, the parents admitted to being overwhelmed and inundated with media options. They stated that they had so many responsibilities as working parents that they rarely had a chance to investigate what their children were watching, listening to, or playing. The students' observations were similar to their parents' views. They admitted that their parents were not really in touch with what they watched and played on a daily basis and that if their parents knew the whole story, they might be more concerned. What was revealed through these interviews was that there was a serious lack of parental involvement in the lives of these at-risk students. Many of them seemed to have left the babysitting chores up to the television for many of these students; subsequently, they had few role models to emulate.

Teachers

The teachers interviewed cited parents as the biggest untapped influence over students' lives. They stated that parents had more of an influence over students' lives than they realized and expressed strong desires that parents would try harder to have meaningful conversations with their children. By informing themselves about what their children were watching and listening to, the teachers conveyed that parents of at-risk students could possibly intervene before students got into more trouble at school.

Teachers also suggested that their colleagues needed to embrace forms of popular culture in the classroom in order to engage students in different ways. The two teachers who participated in this study both used multimedia presentations frequently in their classes, and noted that these unique methods had helped their students achieve success. These teachers expressed their strong beliefs that using music, movies, and television in their classes could help students make new connections between the curriculum and prior knowledge. They both stated that using media in the classroom helped students to make sense of the world around them and their place in it as good citizens.

An example of this theory occurred during the course of this study. One teacher at the Jacket Academy was teaching a lesson about Emily Dickinson using traditional methods of lectures, notes, and textbook study. The students seemed bored and not interested. Another teacher was teaching the same content to students on the same reading level as the previous group, but this teacher used rap music and video clips to present her message. The students were engaged, enthusiastic, and seemed to be learning.

One week later, the students in the second class had higher scores on their tests and seemed to have more recall about the poems that they had read. While this is certainly not a scientific study, it does illustrate via anecdote what some teachers reported: Students are used to this type of stimulation and tend to respond well to it.

The teachers involved in this study were eager to help their colleagues learn new ways to incorporate media into their lessons; however, they acknowledged they felt a great deal of resistance from some of them. Both teachers said they thought many teachers were threatened by media that they did not understand; or, they simply did not have time to incorporate media into their classes.

The teachers mentioned that there were some who used media in inappropriate ways in their classes. They cited teachers who showed movies just to keep their students quiet. They also said that there were some teachers who simply showed movies or videos without placing them into the proper context. They considered that students needed some guidance in helping them interpret the information they gathered from these media and that taking them out of the context of a strong and supportive class could take away the benefits.

Guidance Counselors

Guidance counselors of these at-risk students had perspectives that proved beneficial and insightful. They stated that many parents and teachers did not take time to form meaningful relationships with these students and this lack of involvement resulted in them getting into more trouble than was necessary. The two with whom I spoke expressed concern over the kinds of music and music videos that these students were interested in and they acknowledged that no one had asked the students how they felt about the music they listened to or what it meant to them.

The counselors admitted that music, movies, sports, television, and video games were not inherently bad. They expressed concern that there were so many students who seemed to lack coping skills, and said that parents and teachers could concentrate more on how to help at-risk students learn to recognize the differences between reality and the media's version of it.

Administrators

Finally, two school administrators were interviewed to determine their perceptions of the effects of popular culture and the media on at-risk students. The two who participated both stated that violence and excess were far too common as themes in the kinds of music, television, movies, sports, and video games enjoyed by their students. They sympathized with the parents, stating that they knew being a parent was difficult in today's society.

They acknowledged that whereas many teachers used media well in the classroom, there were several who did not incorporate them well into the curriculum. They expressed a strong desire for at-risk students to receive more counseling to help them learn valuable lessons through the media to which they are exposed. Both administrators stated that students needed to learn to question the thousands of images and sounds they are exposed to daily and to evaluate these messages carefully for truth and appropriateness.

Additionally, the administrators expressed their concern that many of the best teachers were not teaching in at-risk schools. They both perceived a need to have strong teachers involved with at-risk students daily and that it was difficult to attract these kinds of teachers at "bad" schools. Both admitted that they needed to work harder to attract good teachers to their schools and expressed a desire for more incentives to offer to these outstanding teachers so that they would get involved in at-risk schools. They also suggested that it was important to receive adequate training in educating at-risk students. Both pointed out that teachers were not properly prepared to teach students who were troubled based on the current curricular offerings in many universities today.

Limitations

This study was limited to a small sample size. The students involved had been labeled at-risk at some point in their lives, yet they were not necessarily representative of all at-risk students. Careful selections were made to incorporate students of four different races and the

126

gender difference was split evenly; nevertheless, these 16 students may or may not have been truly representative of all high school students enrolled in American schools today.

Because the students had to fit these criteria for the study, they were more carefully selected than a random sampling would allow. This particular group happened to be enrolled in the Jacket Academy at the time the study took place; therefore, they were selected to participate. Another group with the same racial and gender makeup could give very different responses.

The results from this study cannot be generalized past this particular group, yet it does have meaning for educators. The stakeholders in the lives of at-risk students could benefit from the responses given here despite this study's lack of transferability to other students.

Recommendations for Further Research

One recommendation for further research is to investigate via quantitative studies approximately how much time a sampling of teenagers spends watching television and movies, listening to music, and playing video games and sports. It would be interesting to find out if at-risk students spend more, less, or about the same amount of time with these endeavors than other students do. A quantitative study would be helpful in analyzing data regarding students' viewing and listening habits.

Another idea for further research would be to investigate programs that help teachers incorporate media in their classes. A practical approach could allow teachers to use the methods that would be helpful in engaging at-risk students. Schools for at-risk students could benefit from this type of research as it would allow them to tailor staff development opportunities to the teachers who interact with these students every day. Training sessions aimed at both educators and parents would be helpful in explaining what students are faced with and how best to cope with these distracters.

It would also be interesting to investigate programs aimed at the parents of at-risk students. There are many useful programs that teach appropriate and effective parenting skills.

These are the kinds of programs that could help turn at-risk students' lives around. A study comparing and identifying the merits of each of these programs would be very beneficial.

Finally, it would be helpful to investigate the kinds of interventions that guidance counselors could use to help at-risk students. There are many of these programs as well. An examination of these could be very useful when counseling these students. Guidance counselors, teachers, principals, and parents could benefit from learning what works best with at-risk students and which methods have been the most effective in helping them to remain in school and improve their behaviors and their grades. Furthermore, educating students to become educated consumers and users of media could benefit them greatly. By encouraging responsibility in at-risk students, parents and educators could begin to help them make mature choices concerning the media to which they are exposed.

Conclusion

These students wanted to tell their stories. They had been conditioned from an early age to tell stories, as that was the primary method of information dispersion that they had been exposed to in their short lives. Television programs, movies, and music all convey stories. Video games have a plotline and sports broadcasts incorporate stories to make the games more interesting and appealing. The at-risk students selected to participate in this study were no different.

They liked talking about the times that they had gotten in trouble and conveyed how they had bragged about their exploits to their friends and sometimes even to their parents. Telling their stories to me was fun for them; nearly all watched me to see my reaction to their tales. While they all did exaggerate some stories, most were very accurate according to school records. One student told me that it made him feel better to talk about the times that he had gotten in trouble. He said that the events were always blown out of proportion by his friends and it felt good to tell me the truth about what had really happened in his life. He said that talking about

his anger and fears after the fact helped him to realize that he usually made mistakes when handling adverse situations. These students were resilient. Most had come from disturbing situations and had made the most of what had been given to them. They had certainly gotten into trouble along the way and some might not make it to their graduation day; yet, their resilience was strong and they had determination that other students may never have to tap in their lifetimes.

All but two students thanked me for allowing them to participate. Several said that talking about their problems in school helped them to understand the implications of their actions. They all expressed a strong desire to graduate; yet many admitted that circumstances beyond their control might prevent them from doing so. A couple of students considered that their past negative behaviors had unfairly biased teachers against them. One student remembered a time when he walked into a classroom for the first time and the teacher said something similar to, "Oh no, I've heard about you. You're trouble." He said that the statement was made in front of the whole class and they laughed at him. He said that he felt no choice but to uphold that image because that was what the teacher and the class expected. Despite this negativity, though, these students seemed hopeful about their futures. They were very positive, despite being considered at-risk and being enrolled, at least temporarily, in an alternative school program.

The best conclusion that can be drawn from this study is that popular culture and the media have huge impacts on at-risk students. These influences can be negative when students are not provided with coping mechanisms to filter the words and images to which they are exposed. In some cases, they can provide many positive effects if introduced appropriately. Parents can help their children learn to differentiate between fiction and reality by staying involved in their children's lives. They can help their children understand the media's obviously hidden messages and teach them how to distinguish between right and wrong. They need to understand how much of an impact these genres have on their children and help to filter what

129

their children are exposed to. They also must realize how strongly their child's friends influence him or her and react accordingly.

In addition, educators must recognize the extent to which students are influenced by media and popular culture. They should understand that by incorporating media effectively in the classrooms, students might learn more. Teachers, guidance counselors, and principals must make themselves aware of the current trends in television, movies, music, sports, and video games so they will all know what is influencing our young people. They must stop denying the power of these media and begin to incorporate them in ways that are meaningful and appropriate. By working together, educators and parents can use the media and popular culture to help not only those at risk but all students to achieve their educational goals.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Minors' Consent Form

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD
East Tennessee State University
Veterans Affair Medical Center

INFORMED CONSENT

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: Rebecca Draper

TITLE OF PROJECT: At-Risk Students' Perceptions of the Impact of Popular Culture and the Media on Their Lives

This Informed Consent will explain about being a research subject in an experiment. It is important that you read this material carefully and then decide if you wish to be a volunteer.

PURPOSE

The purpose of this research study is as follows:

I would like to ask you students several questions about school first. Specifically, I want to ask you about being enrolled in the Jacket Academy alternative school program, how you came to be enrolled, and how you did in school before now. I also want to ask you about some of the things you liked about school and some of the things you did not like. Then I want to ask you about some other topics which you may or may not be interested in. We'll discuss television, movies, music, sports, and video games. I want to know about your favorite kinds of each of these subjects, and about the kinds of things you do not like very much in each of these categories.

Additionally, I want to ask parents, teachers, counselors, and principals several questions about how they perceive students are impacted by the media and popular culture. The questions for this group will ask you to formulate opinions about how important media and popular culture are in the lives of young people.

The specific purpose of the study is to examine at-risk students' perceptions of the impact of popular culture and the media in their lives. It is also designed to highlight the positive influences of television, movies, music, sports, and video games in the lives of young people and to give some insight into how teachers can use these media effectively in the classroom to promote higher level thinking skills in the classroom. The study results may not be generalized to the population of adolescents at large, but the information gathered will be beneficial by making education professionals aware of the impact of the media and popular culture. It may also be used to gather ideas about how to incorporate these media more effectively in the classroom.

Ver. 9.9.04   _____ Subject Initials

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: Rebecca Draper

TITLE OF PROJECT: At-Risk Students' Perceptions of the Impact of Popular Culture and the Media on Their Lives

DURATION

The interview process will only take about an hour or two of your time. Shortly after the interview is concluded, you will be provided a typed transcript of the interview. You will be asked to read it and verify that it is correct. You will also be given an opportunity to go back over the transcript with me and to clarify any of your ideas that might not be very clear. After you review this, then your participation will be concluded.

PROCEDURES

Once you agree to participate in this interview study, you will need to sign this form (and have your parent or guardian sign it if you are under the age of eighteen). Then we will decide upon a time and date that you would like to answer the interview questions. On that day, we will go to a quiet place so that the tape recorder will be able to pick up our conversation well. I will begin asking you questions. You can decide how much or how little you want to answer for each question that I ask, and you can also tell me if there are any questions that you do not want to answer. Your real name will not be used in the study, and it will not appear on the transcript or in my notes. You will be given another name (a pseudonym) that will be used for the study.

Soon after the interview is done, I will give you a typed transcript of our words for you to review. You can look at it and make sure that it is correct. You can then add anything if you feel that your words are unclear or if you want to add more of your thoughts.

POSSIBLE RISKS/DISCOMFORTS:

There is the possibility of some psychological risk if your grades are discussed. However, you will have a chance to review the interview questions before you agree to participate, and you may cross off any question that you do not want to answer. During the questioning process, you may also refuse to answer any question that makes you uncomfortable or to which you do not wish to respond.

POSSIBLE BENEFITS *and/or* COMPENSATION:

There are no benefits or compensation associated with this study. Your opinions may be used to help teachers, administrators, and parents understand how popular culture and the media affect you, but there are no tangible benefits related to this study now or in the future.

Ver. 9.9.04   _____ Subject Initials
Minor Consent Form

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: Rebecca Draper

TITLE OF PROJECT: At-Risk Students' Perceptions of the Impact of Popular Culture and the Media on Their Lives

<u>CONTACT FOR QUESTIONS</u>

If you have any questions or problems at any time, you may call Rebecca Draper at XXX-xxx-xxxx, or Dr. Louise Mackay (Committee Chairperson) at XXX-xxx-xxxx.

You may call the Chairman of the Institutional Review Board at 423/439-6055 for any questions you may have about your rights as a research subject.

<u> CONFIDENTIALITY</u>

Every attempt will be made to see that my study results are kept confidential. A copy of the records from this study will be stored in a locked filing cabinet in my home (Address: [redaction]), for at least 10 years after the end of this research. The results of this study may be published and/or presented at meetings without naming me as a subject. Although my rights and privacy will be maintained, the East Tennessee State University Institutional Review Board (ETSU IRB) and research related personnel from the ETSU Department of ELPA have access to the study records. My records will be kept completely confidential according to current legal requirements. They will not be revealed unless required by law, or as noted above.

<u>VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION</u>

The nature, demands, risks, and benefits of the project have been explained to me as well as are known and available. I understand what my participation involves. Furthermore, I understand that I am free to ask questions and withdraw from the project at any time, without penalty. I have read, or have had read to me, and fully understand the consent form. I sign it freely and voluntarily. A signed copy has been given to me. My study record will be maintained in strictest confidence according to current legal requirements and will not be revealed unless required by law or as noted above.

_____
SIGNATURE OF VOLUNTEER   DATE

_____
SIGNATURE OF PARENTS OR GUARDIAN   DATE

_____
SIGNATURE OF INVESTIGATOR   DATE

Ver. 9.9.04   _____ Subject Initials
Minor Consent Form

Non-Minors' Consent Form

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD
East Tennessee State University
Veterans Affair Medical Center

INFORMED CONSENT

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: Rebecca Draper

TITLE OF PROJECT: At-Risk Students' Perceptions of the Impact of Popular Culture and the Media on Their Lives

This Informed Consent will explain about being a research subject in an experiment. It is important that you read this material carefully and then decide if you wish to be a volunteer.

PURPOSE

The purpose of this research study is as follows:

I would like to ask you students several questions about school first. Specifically, I want to ask you about being enrolled in the Jacket Academy alternative school program, how you came to be enrolled, and how you did in school before now. I also want to ask you about some of the things you liked about school and some of the things you did not like. Then I want to ask you about some other topics which you may or may not be interested in. We'll discuss television, movies, music, sports, and video games. I want to know about your favorite kinds of each of these subjects, and about the kinds of things you do not like very much in each of these categories.

Additionally, I want to ask parents, teachers, counselors, and principals several questions about how they perceive students are impacted by the media and popular culture. The questions for this group will ask you to formulate opinions about how important media and popular culture are in the lives of young people.

The specific purpose of the study is to examine at-risk students' perceptions of the impact of popular culture and the media in their lives. It is also designed to highlight the positive influences of television, movies, music, sports, and video games in the lives of young people and to give some insight into how teachers can use these media effectively in the classroom to promote higher level thinking skills in the classroom. The study results may not be generalized to the population of adolescents at large, but the information gathered will be beneficial by making education professionals aware of the impact of the media and popular culture. It may also be used to gather ideas about how to incorporate these media more effectively in the classroom.

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: Rebecca Draper

TITLE OF PROJECT: At-Risk Students' Perceptions of the Impact of Popular Culture and the Media on Their Lives

DURATION

The interview process will only take about an hour or two of your time. Shortly after the interview is concluded, you will be provided a typed transcript of the interview. You will be asked to read it and verify that it is correct. You will also be given an opportunity to go back over the transcript with me and to clarify any of your ideas that might not be very clear. After you review this, then your participation will be concluded.

PROCEDURES

Once you agree to participate in this interview study, you will need to sign this form (and have your parent or guardian sign it if you are under the age of eighteen). Then we will decide upon a time and date that you would like to answer the interview questions. On that day, we will go to a quiet place so that the tape recorder will be able to pick up our conversation well. I will begin asking you questions. You can decide how much or how little you want to answer for each question that I ask, and you can also tell me if there are any questions that you do not want to answer. Your real name will not be used in the study, and it will not appear on the transcript or in my notes. You will be given another name (a pseudonym) that will be used for the study.

Soon after the interview is done, I will give you a typed transcript of our words for you to review. You can look at it and make sure that it is correct. You can then add anything if you feel that your words are unclear or if you want to add more of your thoughts.

POSSIBLE RISKS/DISCOMFORTS:

There is the possibility of some psychological risk if your grades are discussed. However, you will have a chance to review the interview questions before you agree to participate, and you may cross off any question that you do not want to answer. During the questioning process, you may also refuse to answer any question that makes you uncomfortable or to which you do not wish to respond.

POSSIBLE BENEFITS *and/or* COMPENSATION:

There are no benefits or compensation associated with this study. Your opinions may be used to help teachers, administrators, and parents understand how popular culture and the media affect you, but there are no tangible benefits related to this study now or in the future.

Ver. 9.9.04   _____ Subject Initials
Non-Minor Consent Form

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: Rebecca Draper

TITLE OF PROJECT: At-Risk Students' Perceptions of the Impact of Popular Culture and the Media on Their Lives

CONTACT FOR QUESTIONS

If you have any questions or problems at any time, you may call Rebecca Draper at XXX-xxx-xxxx or Dr. Louise Mackay (Committee Chairperson) at XXX-xxx-xxxx.

You may call the Chairman of the Institutional Review Board at 423/439-6055 for any questions you may have about your rights as a research subject.

 CONFIDENTIALITY

Every attempt will be made to see that my study results are kept confidential. A copy of the records from this study will be stored in a locked filing cabinet in my home (Address: [redaction]), for at least 10 years after the end of this research. The results of this study may be published and/or presented at meetings without naming me as a subject. Although my rights and privacy will be maintained, the East Tennessee State University Institutional Review Board (ETSU IRB) and research related personnel from the ETSU Department of ELPA have access to the study records. My records will be kept completely confidential according to current legal requirements. They will not be revealed unless required by law, or as noted above.

VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION

The nature, demands, risks, and benefits of the project have been explained to me as well as are known and available. I understand what my participation involves. Furthermore, I understand that I am free to ask questions and withdraw from the project at any time, without penalty. I have read, or have had read to me, and fully understand the consent form. I sign it freely and voluntarily. A signed copy has been given to me. My study record will be maintained in strictest confidence according to current legal requirements and will not be revealed unless required by law or as noted above.

_____

SIGNATURE OF VOLUNTEER   DATE

_____

SIGNATURE OF INVESTIGATOR   DATE

Ver. 9.9.04   _____ Subject Initials
Non-Minor Consent Form

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD
East Tennessee State University
Veterans Affair Medical Center

INFORMED CONSENT

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: Rebecca Draper

TITLE OF PROJECT: At-Risk Students' Perceptions of the Impact of Popular Culture and the Media on Their Lives

This Informed Consent will explain about being a research subject in an experiment. It is important that you read this material carefully with your child and then decide if you will allow your child to be a volunteer.

PURPOSE

The purpose of this research study is as follows:

I would like to ask your child several questions about school first. Specifically, I want to ask about being enrolled in the Jacket Academy alternative school program, how the student came to be enrolled, and how he or she did in school before now. I also want to ask about some of the things your child liked and disliked about school. Then I want to ask about some other topics which your child may or may not be interested in. We'll discuss television, movies, music, sports, and video games. I want to know about your child's favorite kinds of each of these subjects, and about the kinds of things he or she does not like very much in each of these categories.

Additionally, I want to ask parents, teachers, counselors, and principals several questions about how they perceive students are impacted by the media and popular culture. The questions for this group will ask you to formulate opinions about how important media and popular culture are in the lives of young people.

The specific purpose of the study is to examine at-risk students' perceptions of the impact of popular culture and the media in their lives. It is also designed to highlight the positive influences of television, movies, music, sports, and video games in the lives of young people and to give some insight into how teachers can use these media effectively in the classroom to promote higher level thinking skills in the classroom. The study results may not be generalized to the population of adolescents at large, but the information gathered will be beneficial by making education professionals aware of the impact of the media and popular culture. It may also be used to gather ideas about how to incorporate these media more effectively in the classroom.

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: Rebecca Draper

TITLE OF PROJECT: At-Risk Students' Perceptions of the Impact of Popular Culture and the Media on Their Lives

DURATION

The interview process will only take about an hour or two of your child's time. Shortly after the interview is concluded, he or she will be provided a typed transcript of the interview. He or she will be asked to read it and verify that it is correct. The child will also be given an opportunity to go back over the transcript with me and to clarify any ideas that might not be very clear. After the child reviews this, then his or her participation will be concluded.

PROCEDURES

Once the student agrees to participate in this interview study, you will need to sign this form; he or she will sign a form similar to this one. Then we will decide upon a time and date that he or she would like to answer the interview questions. On that day, we will go to a quiet place so that the tape recorder will be able to pick up our conversation well. I will begin asking the student questions, which are attached to this form. He or she can decide how much or how little to answer for each question that I ask, and the student can also tell me if there are any questions that he or she does not want to answer. Your child's real name will not be used in the study, and it will not appear on the transcript or in my notes. He or she will be given another name (a pseudonym) that will be used for the study. Soon after the interview is done, I will give the student a typed transcript of our words for review. The student can look at it and make sure that it is correct. He or she can then add anything if the words are unclear or if the student wants to add more thoughts.

POSSIBLE RISKS/DISCOMFORTS:

There is the possibility of some psychological risk if your child's grades are discussed. However, you and your child will have a chance to review the interview questions before he or she agrees to participate, and any question that he or she does not want to answer can be eliminated. During the questioning process, the student may also refuse to answer any question that makes him or her uncomfortable or to which the student does not wish to respond.

POSSIBLE BENEFITS *and/or* COMPENSATION:

There are no benefits or compensation associated with this study. Your child's opinions may be used to help teachers, administrators, and parents understand how popular culture and the media affect him or her, but there are no tangible benefits related to this study now or in the future.

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: Rebecca Draper

TITLE OF PROJECT: At-Risk Students' Perceptions of the Impact of Popular Culture and the Media on Their Lives

<u>CONTACT FOR QUESTIONS</u>

If you have any questions or problems at any time, you may call Rebecca Draper at XXX-xxx-xxxx, or Dr. Louise Mackay (Committee Chairperson) at XXX-xxx-xxxx.

You may call the Chairman of the Institutional Review Board at 423/439-6055 for any questions you may have about your child's rights as a research subject.

<u>CONFIDENTIALITY</u>

Every attempt will be made to see that my study results are kept confidential. A copy of the records from this study will be stored in a locked filing cabinet in my home (Address: [redaction]), for at least 10 years after the end of this research. The results of this study may be published and/or presented at meetings without naming me as a subject. Although my rights and privacy will be maintained, the East Tennessee State University Institutional Review Board (ETSU IRB) and research related personnel from the ETSU Department of ELPA have access to the study records. My records will be kept completely confidential according to current legal requirements. They will not be revealed unless required by law, or as noted above.

<u>VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION</u>

The nature, demands, risks, and benefits of the project have been explained to me as well as are known and available. I understand what my child's participation involves. Furthermore, I understand that I am free to ask questions and withdraw my child from the project at any time, without penalty. I have read, or have had read to me, and fully understand the consent form. I sign it freely and voluntarily. A signed copy has been given to me. My child's study record will be maintained in strictest confidence according to current legal requirements and will not be revealed unless required by law or as noted above.

_____

SIGNATURE OF PARENTS OR GUARDIAN *(if applicable)*   DATE

_____

SIGNATURE OF INVESTIGATOR   DATE

Ver. 9.9.04   _____ Subject Initials
Parental Consent Form for Minor Students' Participation

NARRATIVE DESCRIPTION OF THE PROJECT

1. NAME OF PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR

Rebecca Draper

2. PROJECT TITLE

At-Risk Students' Perceptions of the Impact of Popular Culture and the Media on Their Lives

3. PLACE

This study will be conducted at Lexington Senior High School's Jacket Academy, an alternative program, in Lexington, North Carolina

4. OBJECTIVES

The objectives of this study are to determine students' perceptions of the media and popular culture in their lives, and to identify ways teachers can incorporate these into the classroom in effective ways.

5. SUMMARY

This will be a qualitative case study of sixteen high school students who are enrolled in the Jacket Academy alternative high school affiliated with Lexington Senior High School. The study will attempt to determine these students' perceptions of how popular culture and the media impact their lives. Additionally, several adults who work with these at-risk students will be interviewed to gather insights into their perceptions of the impact of popular culture and the media.

6. METHODS OF RECRUITMENT

Students who are enrolled in the Jacket Academy will be asked to participate based on their race, gender, and enrollment status. I plan to select four of each of the following racial categories: African-American, Asian, Caucasian, Hispanic. Two boys and two girls from each racial category will be selected. Students whose enrollment status is temporary will not be selected. The adults who will be selected will be made up of these groups: two parents, two guidance counselors, two teachers, and two administrators. Participation will be voluntary for the students and adults.

7. RESEARCH DATA

Students and adults will be audiotaped after agreeing to participate in the interview process and signing all consent forms. Students who are under the age of 18 will be required to submit

parental consent forms as well. All audiotapes will be transcribed and given to the participants for member checking. Additionally, notes will be taken during the individual interviews. This raw data will be used to compile the study results. Students' and adults' real names will not be used. Pseudonyms will be used throughout the process.

8. SPECIFIC ROLE OF HUMAN SUBJECTS

Students will be asked a series of questions regarding their school history, especially concerning their grades, behavior, and expectations. They will then be asked a series of questions pertinent to television, movies, music, sports, and video games. These questions will specifically address how often they engage in these activities and each one's importance in their lives. Each interview participant will be interviewed individually; none of the questions will require an answer if the student feels uncomfortable or if he or she feels that the questions do not apply. The adults will be asked questions to determine their perceptions of popular and the media and their perceived impact on students. The adult interviews will be set up in the same way as the student interviews, as described above.

9. SPECIFIC RISKS TO SUBJECTS

There are no known risks associated with this research

10. BENEFITS TO SUBJECTS

There are no known benefits to the subjects at this time, although research may provide some insights into how teachers can begin to utilize popular culture and the media more effectively in the classroom. At this stage of the study, no benefits are immediately known.

11. INDUCEMENTS

None

12. SUBJECT CONFIDENTIALITY

Each participant's right to privacy will be maintained. The research information will be available for inspection by study related personnel and the ETSU IRB. All information about the participants will be treated confidentially and will not be revealed, except as noted above, unless required by law. Pseudonyms will be utilized throughout the study to maintain anonymity.

13. INFORMED CONSENT

The Informed Consent form is attached. All participants will be given Informed Consent (IC), have any questions answered by the principal investigator or other knowledgeable, qualified designee(s), and receive a copy of their signed Informed Consent Document (ICD), unless the requirement for signed IC has been waived by the IRB. Furthermore, minors who participate in the study will be required to provide a signed parental consent form. When appropriate (IC requirements not waived) the participant will be required to document their agreement to

participate by signing the ICD in order to participate in the project. Even though signed Informed Consent forms will be kept on file, students' and adults' actual names will not appear anywhere in the study.

ADVERSE REACTIONS REPORTING

Any unanticipated event. All adverse events (AE) must be reported (for local events) verbally to the IRB within 24 hours of its occurrence and in writing to the IRB (1) for local events – no later than five working days from the date of the event, and (2) for off-site events – no later than five working days from the date the PI is notified of the occurrence.

15. PERTINENT LITERATURE

References list is included in these documents.

16. LOCATION OF RECORDS

Audiotapes, transcripts, and all notes will be kept in a locked filing cabinet at my home at the following address: [redaction]. These records will be kept for 10 years, and will be subsequently destroyed in September 2014.

APPENDIX D

Instrument

This first list deals specifically with why students are having problems in school and their plans for the future. I will ask these questions first, before I ever begin to ask them about popular culture and the media. All subjects will sign a release form granting permission for their words to be used in this study. Additionally, all interviews will be recorded via audio tape, and students will each have an opportunity to review transcripts of the interviews that they granted to ensure that their words are represented accurately and fairly. This member checking will help maintain the validity of the study. Furthermore, I will enlist the help of an outside auditor to affirm my interpretations of students' words.

?? Why do you believe you are struggling in school right now? What's going on in your life that prevents you from doing well?

?? How do you feel about school now? How do you feel that you did in junior high? What kind of student do you think that you were in elementary school? What kinds of grades did you receive?

?? Do you think that your parents / guardians support your decisions regarding school? How do you think that they feel about your lack of participation / poor grades / poor attendance?

?? How do you believe you would feel if you were asked not to return to school? How do you think your parents / guardians would feel?

?? Have you been sent to an alternative school or expelled before? What reason did the principal or your parents give you for sending you there? Do you agree with their reasons?

?? What do you think you are going to do with your life? When you are finished with high school, what do you think will be the next event in your life?

?? Do you want to attend a university, community college, or a trade school?

The questions that follow focus primarily on popular culture and the media and students' perceptions of these two areas. The questions will be very informal and conversational in nature to allow students to take the questions and their answers in the direction that feels most comfortable for them.

?? Approximately how much TV do you watch per day? Where do you spend most of your time while watching TV?

?? In an average week, approximately how many movies do you watch?

?? What are your favorite types of movies to watch?

?? Do you watch movies on cable, on DVD / video, or at a theater?

?? Approximately how long do you listen to music each day? Where do you listen to music the most?

?? What are the major types of music you like to listen to?

?? How do you listen to music usually? (headphones, videos, MP3 players)

?? For about how long do you play video games each day?

?? What are some of the games you like best?

?? How many sporting events do you usually watch per week?

?? If you had to give up all but one of the following, which would be the one you choose to keep: TV, movies, music, video games, and sports? In other words, which one of those five categories do you believe that you simply can't live without? Why?

?? Who are some of your favorite artists and athletes (music, movies, TV, sports)

?? How do you believe popular culture has impacted your life?

?? Have you ever changed your behavior (dress, vocabulary, attitude) because of a song, movie, TV show, or video game?

?? Have you ever done something (good or bad) because you saw it or heard about it on TV / in a movie or song?

?? Is there a special musician, actor, or athlete that you admire? Why?

?? What specifically about those people do you admire?

?? Is there a particular musician, actor, or athlete that you dislike? Specifically, what about this person do you dislike and why?

?? Have your clothing or tattoos or piercings ever gotten you into trouble at school? What happened?

?? Has your personal style been influenced by popular culture? In what ways?

?? What is there about popular culture that appeals to you? How much do these topics influence your life?

Implications for guidance counselors, educators, administrators, and parents of at-risk students:

?? How do you believe we can utilize the media in effective ways to help our students understand its importance, while encouraging them to view it with a critical eye?

?? How do you think we can counteract the negative impact of media and popular culture while encouraging students to recognize and embrace the positive impact that they can have?

?? In your opinion, how can we incorporate popular culture effectively in the classroom to capture students' interest and teach them new skills and coping mechanisms?

?? Can you share your philosophy regarding popular culture, the media, and their use in the classroom?

?? Do you believe that teachers should try to avoid using music, movies, television, sports, and video games simply because there is a perception that they could be negative influences?

?? How important do you think popular culture and the media are in the lives of our young people?

?? How do you feel that we can ensure that popular culture and the media become positive influences rather than negative ones?

?? As educators and parents, what do you believe we can do on a small scale or a local level to alleviate the negative impact of popular culture on teenagers?

REBECCA CUPPLES DRAPER

Personal Data: Date of Birth: August 29, 1973
                           Place of Birth: Dyersburg, Tennessee
                           Marital Status: Married

Education: Middle TN State University, Murfreesboro, TN;
                               Bachelor of Arts; English and Education
                               1994

                           St. Joseph's University, Philadelphia, PA;
                               Master of Science, Educational Leadership and Technology;
                               2000

                           East Tennessee State University, Johnson City, Tennessee;
                               Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis, Ed.D.;
                               May 2005

Professional
Teaching
Experience: Language Arts Teacher, 7th Grade;
                               Smyrna, TN;
                               1994-1995

                           English, 7th – 12th
                               Winston-Salem, NC;
                               1995-1996

                           English, 8th Grade;
                               Kinston, NC;
                               1996-1997

                           Philadelphia Job Corps Center, Ages 16-24
                               Philadelphia, PA
                               1997-2001

                           University of Phoenix Faculty, EDA 564
                               Online
                               2003-Present

Professional
Administrative
Experience: Assistant Principal, Tri-Cities Christian School;
                                    Blountville, TN;
                                    2001-2002

                                Principal, Jacobs Creek Job Corps Center;
                                    Bristol, TN;
                                    2002-2004

                                Assistant Principal, Lexington Senior High School;
                                    Lexington, NC;
                                    2004-Present

Honors and
Awards: Educator of the Year 2000
                                    Philadelphia, PA

Presentations: PAACE Annual Convention: Hershey, PA;
                                    Creative Uses for Internet Technology in the Classroom
                                    February 2001

                                MCOL Literacy Workshop, Philadelphia, PA;
                                    Creating a Classroom Website
                                    Scavenger Hunting on the Web
                                    May 2001

                                TACS Educators' Conference, Murfreesboro, TN;
                                    Using the Internet in the Classroom
                                    Effective Teaching Techniques Using Technology
                                    September 2001