

**WHAT FACTORS CONTRIBUTE TO AFRO JAMAICAN FEMALE HIGH
SCHOOL STUDENTS' ACADEMIC SUCCESS OR FAILURE?**

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ABSTRACT

This research employed an anti-racist feminist theoretical framework to examine the factors that have contributed to African Jamaican female students' academic outcomes within the Canadian educational systems, with particular reference to a small city within the Greater Toronto Area (GTA). The study is of significance because there is limited Canadian literature which focuses on Black female students, how they are experiencing the educational system, and the factors which mediate their academic success or failure.

I utilized a qualitative research methodology. Data collection was done in two stages. For stage one, I conducted two focus group interview sessions, with seven participants who fit the criteria of the study. From these sessions, I invited four girls (two who had experienced academic success and two who had experienced academic challenges) to participate in stage two of the investigation. In stage two I utilized structured and semi-structured individual interviews to examine the participants' lived experiences within the educational system.

The data was analyzed, disaggregated and coded to identify commonalities and to distinguish characteristics that enabled their success or failure within the educational system. The study indicated that an intricate array of factors within the educational system intersects with systemic barriers to mediate Black female students academic outcomes.

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To complete a journey you must begin with a single step; my journey began with a community believing that it takes a village to raise a child and with God all things are possible. Therefore, I would like to first take this opportunity to thank God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit who has blessed me with wisdom, knowledge and understanding to commence and complete this journey. Then to the community which has nurtured me throughout my educational journey; I am forever grateful. I dedicate this thesis to you.

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My expectation is that in the coming years my children, Nile, Havanah and Nylah will be educated in a publicly funded educational system that is equitable, inclusive and free of systemic barriers, biases, stereotypes and discrimination.

To all my Sistas in the Canadian educational system who despite all odds...

“Keep on *pushin*”

I've got to keep on *pushin* (mmm-hmm)

I can't stop now

Move up a little higher

Some way, somehow

'Cause I've got my strength

And it don't make sense

Not to keep on *pushin*'

Hallelujah, hallelujah

Keep on *pushin*'

Now maybe some day

I'll reach that higher goal

I know that I can make it

With just a little bit of soul

'Cause I've got my strength

And it don't make sense

Not to keep on *pushin*'

Now look-a look (look-a look)

A-look-a yonder

What's that I see

A great big stone wall

Stands there ahead of me

But I've got my pride

And I'll move on aside

And keep on *pushin*'

-Curtis Mayfield (1964)

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Chapter 1

Introduction

As a Black female educator, student and emerging scholar, I am aware that educational achievement is one of the most important factors in determining one's future life chances, in terms of employment, income, housing and many other necessities. Most Canadians recognize the link between educational attainment and quality of life, and know that academic success or failure can have significant consequences for individuals and society.

However, few people may be fully aware of the many costs—both intangible and tangible—associated with academic outcomes. The intangible costs of not completing high school are numerous. Many students who do not succeed experience negative outcomes, such as diminished social growth, reduced sense of control over their lives and less personal satisfaction (Stanard, 2003). The tangible costs are no less numerous, directly or indirectly; academic success or failure has enormous economic implications for governments, society, and individuals, particularly in terms of the effects on things such as health, social services and other social programs (Stanard, 2003).

For example, Canadian researchers Trypuc & Heller (2008) stated that students who did not complete high school were 2.5 times more likely to be unemployed than those who completed high school. In addition, they found that high school dropouts comprise 85 percent of welfare recipients and account for 80 percent of inmates in federal prisons. Furthermore, they suggest that high school drop-outs are the leading burden on Canada's welfare, health care and prison systems, as they incur a life time cost of 5.5

billion dollars. It is interesting to note that the vast majority of these former students are Blacks, immigrants and Aboriginals.

Although academic success or failure cuts across social groups in terms of structures such as race, class, gender, ability/disability and sexual orientation, and are impacted by social institutions, including the educational system and the labour market, it appears that throughout North America, Black students have significantly higher failure rates than their White counterparts. For example, in New York, Chicago, Los Angeles and Toronto (the four largest school districts in North America), research suggests that Black students' graduation rates are significantly lower than their White counterparts (Toronto District School Board, 2008; National Center for Education Statistics, 2001).

The question is why and what are the factors that are contributing to Black students' academic outcomes and how can these issues be mediated? Historically, Black education in North America has always been a conflict-ridden issue. In the United States the educational system is stained with national conflicts involving Black students. For example, there was outright denial of education during slavery, followed by the implementation of segregated schools (*Plessey vs. Ferguson*) which led to the desegregation of public schools (*Brown vs. the Board of Education*) (Wolff, 2012) and the subsequent Little Rock Crisis in 1957 (Rains, 2000).

In Canada, the situation was not as dramatic as in the United States. Nevertheless, Blacks have faced insurmountable challenges to access equitable educational services for their children (McLaren, 2008). Historically, for example, in Canada West, it was a commonly held view among Whites that they would rather cut off the heads of their children, than have them attend school with "niggers" (McLaren, 2008; p.72).

In addition, the Canadian government refused to enforce policies that would allow Black students to acquire the same educational opportunities as their White counterparts, although forced segregation was “illegal”. For example, the School Act of 1843 states “it shall not be lawful for such trustees, or the chief, or other superintendent of common schools (public schools), or for any teacher to exclude from common school or from the benefit of education therein, the children of any class, description of persons or resident within the school district to which such common school may belong” (McLaren, 2008; p. 72).

However, Superintendent of Education, Egerton Ryerson continued to support the illegal implementation of segregated schools. In addition, he articulated that exclusion of students on the basis of their skin colour was against the law. Nevertheless, he asserted that “there was nothing he could do to stop it” (segregated schools) (McLaren, 2008; p. 72). Furthermore, White society constructed Black students as “escaped slaves, who lacked morals, values and behaviours required to be educated with White children. Whites articulated that “Black children were inferior to White children; they were worse trained than White children, rude in speech, uncouth in manners and address, and untidy in attire” (McLaren, 2008 p. 71). Additionally, they expressed fear that “African Savagery” would conquer Anglo-Saxon “civilization” if Black students were allowed to attend schools with White children (McLaren, 2008 p. 71). Therefore, Whites asserted that their children would suffer the effects of this “bad example” and forced the government to create laws allowing segregated schools in Ontario and Nova Scotia by 1850 (McLaren, 2008).

However, Black schools were poorly funded, conditions were deplorable and education was “grossly inferior” when compared to their White counterparts (The Canadian Encyclopaedia, 2012). When coupled with residential segregation and financial deficiency, poor schooling helped to embed a framework that perpetuated and institutionalized discrimination and racism into the fabric of the educational system in Ontario (The Canadian Encyclopaedia, 2012). Strangely enough these constructions of Black students and historical events (surrounding Black education) have laid the foundation for Black education in North America. They continue to shape school boards, policies, programs, activities, structures and ultimately facilitate the schooling experiences and the outcomes of Black students in contemporary society.

Rationale and Background

Today, despite many government initiatives, Black students continue to face challenges in the educational system across Ontario. In Toronto, the city in which Canada’s largest Black population resides, education officials have raised concerns that the educational system is not meeting the needs of Black students. For example, the Toronto District School Board (TDSB), Canada’s largest school board and the board with the largest enrolment of Black students, has reported that the dropout rate for Black students has reached an alarming 40 percent, the majority of which are males (Toronto District School Board, 2008).

Consequently, the TDSB has been experimenting with various methods in an attempt to combat the aforementioned issue. For example, in 2008, the Board unveiled the Urban Diversity Strategy, which aimed to cut the dropout rate of underachieving groups such as Blacks and Black Males, by 25 percent over the next five years (Toronto

District School Board, 2008). In addition, the Board opened the country's first and only Afro-centric focus school in 2009 and appointed former Director of the Hamilton Wentworth School Board Chris Spence (a Black male) as its new Director of Education. Furthermore, the TDSB is collaborating with other Boards and the Ontario Ministry of Education to implement the 2009 Ontario Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy which aims to embed equity and inclusive education throughout the educational structure of all 72 school boards in Ontario.

However, despite the efforts of the TDSB there is no evidence that the academic problems facing Black students are improving or under control. Existing data indicates that within the TDSB the problem is worse than originally reported because some ethno-cultural groups within the African Canadian Diaspora such as Somali youth are experiencing even greater dropout rates, as much as 50 percent (Somali Students Association at York University, 2010).

Furthermore, a plethora of Canadian researchers (Dei, 1995; Dei et al, 1997; Glaze & Wright, 1998; Henry, 2005; Henry & Tator, 2006; James, 2004; 2005; 2010; 2011; School Community Advisory Panel, 2008; Solomon & Allen, 1995) have long articulated that factors such as a Eurocentric curriculum, low teacher expectations, negative teacher perceptions, school disciplinary practices, lack of Black/racialized educators, lack of/limited parental involvement, institutionalized discrimination, racism and sexism have significantly contributed to Black students' continued struggle within the educational system. Moreover, in his study of the school system in Toronto, James (2004) concluded that racial and ethnic minority students experience high levels of oppression that are rooted in stereotypes. James articulated that teachers in Toronto

reported that students in racially, ethnically and linguistically diverse inner city schools are labelled “low achievers, learning disabled, trouble makers and problem students who are prone to illegal activities” (James, 2004, p. 3-4). In addition, Black students expressed that they feel shut out of the educational process due to the negative attitudes and perceptions of educators who were unsupportive of their educational needs (Curling & McMurtry, 2008).

However, the bulk of the literature which addresses Black students’ educational outcomes speaks largely to the impact of these factors on Black male students’ academic failure and high dropout rates. The literature is largely silent in articulating how the aforementioned factors impact Black female students’ academic success or failure. Furthermore, the emphasis in the literature on Black males is underpinned by the patriarchal structure that governs the social, political and economic institutions. For although Black males experience racism, Black females experience both racism and sexism (Archer-Banks & Behar-Horenstein, 2012; Calliste & Dei, 2000; Collins, 2000; Davis, 1983; James, 2005). Evidently, the lack of Canadian literature on factors that contribute to Black female high school students’ academic success or failure requires further research from a Canadian vantage point.

Research Purposes

The purpose of this study is to use an anti-racist feminist framework to critically explore the factors that contribute to African Jamaican female high school students’ academic success or failure in a small city within the GTA. As a Black female educational researcher, I feel it is imperative for me to examine how Black females are

experiencing the school system. Are Black females succeeding in high school? What are the factors that are contributing to their success or failure?

Moreover, as mentioned above the TDSB reported that 40 percent of Black students are dropping out of high school of which the majority are male. But, these statistics are not broken down by gender; therefore, we do not know what percentage of this 40 percent is female. In addition, it is evident from previous literature that factors such as a Eurocentric curriculum, low teacher expectation, school disciplinary practices and institutionalized racism have negatively impacted Black students' academic outcomes. Therefore, a qualitative research study on this topic is warranted.

Personal Experience and Knowledge

As a Black (African Jamaican) female who continues to volunteer, work and study within the GTA educational systems, I have experienced factors which have mediated my academic outcomes. Factors such as low teacher expectation, negative teacher perception and the social construction of Black females as single mothers and welfare recipients have affected my academic abilities.

For example, as an African Jamaican female student who spoke with an "accent", I was often overlooked for scholarship nominations even though I maintained an "A" average throughout my academic career. In addition, in university, as soon as it became known that I had children, I was automatically perceived as a single mother, poor, living in government housing and therefore lacking the intellectual and social capacity to succeed academically. This was difficult to deal with because it made me feel inadequate, to the point where I felt that I did not belong in the halls of academia. However, with the

support of my family and a few positive educators, I was able to negotiate the educational landscape with much success.

Therefore, it is from my own lived realities that I seek to explore the factors that contribute to African Jamaican female high school students' academic success or failure. In addition, I also seek to investigate whether the above-mentioned factors have impacted other African Jamaican females within the educational system, as well as how African Jamaican females negotiate these factors. My experiences within the educational system and the Black community will ground my insights and reflections on how the social, political and economic institutions are interrelated to the experiences of African Jamaican female students' lived realities.

Research Questions

It is with the above in mind that this qualitative research will seek to explore the following questions: (1) What are the factors that contribute to Black female high school students' academic success or failure? (2) How are Black females experiencing the school system? and (3) How do racism and sexism intersect in the school system and impact Black female students' academic outcomes?

Background Statement

I used the facilities of a public library in a small city within the GTA to conduct the interviews for this study. The library is a safe and accessible community space, where diverse residents can access free learning resources, as well as community programs and events. It is located within a working/middle-class community consisting of mixed housing and mixed income families. The area is reflective of the cultural diversity that exists within the GTA. All the participants from this study reside in this community.

Definition of Terms¹

- **African Jamaican Females** are conceptualized as first or second generation young women of African Jamaican ancestry who have attended high school in an urban environment such as the GTA.
- **Academic Success** is conceptualized as completion of the Ontario Secondary School Diploma (OSSD) requirements (30 credits at either the academic or applied level), with an option to attend college or university.
- **Academic Failure** is conceptualized as non-completion of OSSD requirements or completion of OSSD requirements (drop-out or completed 30 credit in the essential stream), with no option of attending college or university.

Outline of Thesis

In chapter one I have explored the research questions and examined the background of the problem under study. I investigated some of the factors that have contributed to Black students' continued challenges within the educational system. In addition, I have explored some of the initiatives that have been implemented to mediate this problem.

Chapter two is a literature review which speaks to the challenges facing Black students in the educational system. There is an overview of the factors that contribute to male and female Black students' academic success and failure, as well as forms of resistance employed by Black students in their attempt to negotiate the educational systems.

¹ See Appendix E for definition of terms used throughout this study.

Chapter three focuses on my research methodology. Here I describe the qualitative research strategy and why I chose this method of analysis. I also discuss the theoretical framework (Anti-racist feminist) in which the research will be grounded. In addition, I explain the methods I employed to collect the data as well as discuss ethical considerations and assumptions that were evident in the research process.

The analysis of the data begins in chapter four. In this chapter, I will discuss and systematically organise the key findings of the study.

In chapter five I present, discuss, and interpret the findings of the study with reference to the research questions posed in chapter one. In addition, I discuss the implications the finding may have for educators, students, parents and stakeholders. I conclude by offering realistic recommendations to engage the problem under study.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

Introduction

It is apparent from previous literature that many factors have negatively impacted Black students' academic outcomes (Dei, 1995; Dei et al 1997; Glaze & Wright, 2000; James, 2010; 2011). However, I find it unsettling that these studies predominately focus on the academic outcomes of male students, leaving a perception that Black female students are "succeeding" in the educational system (Gaymes-San Vicente, 2006). Research has clearly indicated that Black females are facing similar challenges as their male counterparts. For example, American research suggests that Black females occupy one of the bottom two spots when it comes to teacher ratings; they hover close to the top of every indicator of school failure and are underrepresented in gifted programs (Grantham & Ford, 1998; Holzman, 2008; Jordan and Cooper, 2003). In addition, research has distinctly articulated that Black females, particularly those from a working class background are also over represented as at-risk students (Fine, 1991; Gaymes-San Vicente, 2006). It is with this in mind that this chapter will explore similar studies which have focused on the factors that have contributed to Black students/Black females' academic outcomes.

As previously mentioned there is limited Canadian literature which speaks to the factors that contribute to Black female students' academic success or failure. However, in the United States a plethora of literature exists which speaks specifically to the factors that have impacted Black students and Black female students' academic outcomes in

particular. As a result, the bulk of the literature referenced here will be drawn from the United States.

Eurocentric Curriculum

Curriculum is complex and multifaceted; it is intertwined with the teaching and learning process and, thus, cannot be defined as a single entity. It encompasses multiple factors, such as teachers, administrators, students, parents, stakeholders, environment, location, learning resources and policies to name a few. In addition, it is constructed to include and promote the social, political, economic beliefs and viewpoints of the society's values, expectations, interests and aspirations (Alladin, 1996; Apple, 1990; Egan, 2003; Henry and Tator, 2006; McCutcheon, 1997).

McCutcheon (1997) suggests that curriculum is the mission of schools. It is what students have the opportunity to learn within the educational system. In addition, curriculum shapes and is shaped by teaching, and teaching shapes and is shaped by curriculum, hence the complexity in finding a definition which embodies the essence of curriculum.

Notwithstanding the complexity, Allingham (1992) defines curriculum as: the textbooks and storybooks, the pictures and the seating and the group work and the posters and the music, the announcement, the prayers and the reading, the language spoken in school, the food in the cafeteria, the visitors to the classroom, the reception of parent in the office, the race (or race) of the office staff, the custodial staff, the teachers, the administration, the displays of student work, the school teams and the sports play, the clubs, the school logo or emblem, the field trips, the assignments and projects, the facial expression and body language of everybody, the clothes everybody wears. It is the whole environment (Allingham, 1992 as cited Dei., et al, 2000).

In general, McCutcheon and other researchers believe that there are three types of curricula. The overt/formal curriculum affirms the ministry's expectations about what

students “should learn” and what teachers “should teach”. This curriculum contains the process of instruction, which is shaped by learning materials and resources such as assignments, lesson plans, textbooks, technology and grades (Henry and Tator, 2006). The hidden/informal curriculum contains what is not formally taught by teachers but is learnt through everyday interactions within the school milieu. It includes educators’ personal values, viewpoints, assumptions, expectations and the physical and social environment of the school (McCutcheon, 1997; Henry and Tator, 2006).

For example, students may receive information about race, class and gender roles through their interaction with teachers. However, it may not have been the intent of the teacher to convey such a lesson. Nevertheless, powerful messages regarding the stereotypical representation of students that do not belong to the dominant (European) group are transmitted through these informal interactions. Finally, the null curriculum consists of what is excluded or eliminated from the overt/formal curriculum. For instance, educators may decide to exclude or eliminate particular materials from the formal curriculum. This can be a conscious act in an attempt to avoid controversial issues, such as homophobia, religion, racism, sexism or can be associated with lack of time, knowledge and suitable materials to complete the task (McCutcheon, 1997). It is important to note that although each curriculum has a specific role they do not operate in isolation; each curriculum supports and maintains the other.

The development of Eurocentric curriculum began with the imperial mission (Willinsky, 1998). The goal of the mission was to preserve a Eurocentric focus on the West’s educational project for the world. For five centuries Europeans studied, classified and ordered humanity through an imperial framework (Willinsky, 1998). This has given

rise to unequal and powerful ideas about race, culture, language and nation, which in effect became conceptual tools employed by the West to divide, conquer and educate the globe (Willinsky, 1998). In essence, the mission of imperial education was to maintain the values, beliefs and viewpoints of Europeans. For example, the establishment of missionary schools in North America was not concerned with developing the intellectual abilities of the Aboriginal peoples; they were focused on getting the Aboriginal peoples to assimilate to Eurocentric values, beliefs, viewpoints and ideas of civilization (Alladin, 1996). Furthermore, Eurocentric education's main objective was to educate the colonized to serve the colonizer. Eurocentric education was and continues to serve as a tool to maintain and promote European values, beliefs, customs, traditions and viewpoints (Alladin, 1996).

However, this is problematic in the educational system in Ontario, particularly the Greater Toronto Area, due to the fact that the demographics of this region are culturally, ethnically, linguistically and racially diverse (Cukier & Yap, 2009). For instance, educators have expressed the view that the official school curriculum is disempowering to racialized students such as Blacks, Hispanics and Aboriginals, to the point where they become disengaged from the classroom (Dei, 1995).

As a result of the above, it is essential that a curriculum be reflective and responsive to the demographics which it serves. There is power in representation, and Black Students have voiced that they do not see themselves reflected in either the curriculum or the composition of school board personnel, i.e., teachers, administrators or school support staff (Dei, 1995). They point to the fact that there are often no role models in their schools' staff and no representation of their identities. The only time they see

themselves in the curriculum is when it is speaking to a negative, e.g., slavery or negative images of Blacks in the media (James, 2003; Dei, 1996b). In addition, there is an absence of positive images or portrayal of Black females in the curriculum. For example, Rezai-Rashti (1997) in her examination of Somali female students' experiences in schools, found that the curriculum portrays Black women through a stereotypical lens which places these students at risk for discrimination, racism, sexism, alienation and eventually academic failure.

Harmon and Ford (2006) assert that the curriculum is neither supportive nor inclusive of Black history, cultures or traditions and is taught in ways that are inconsistent with how Black students desire to learn. In addition, Black students have articulated that they find it difficult to connect with curriculum content as it does not reflect their lived experiences (Dei et al., 1997).

For instance, when "Canadian history" is explored through the Eurocentric curriculum, only the stories of Europeans are told. It excludes the contributions of Blacks/Africans, Aboriginals, and other racialized groups (Scaglione, 2005). Their stories are taught through the lens of slavery, segregation, colonization, oppression, and discrimination (Scaglione, 2005). However, European stories are taught through the lens of White exploration, conquest, settlement, invention, and success (Scaglione, 2005). As a result, Black students internalize a sense of inferiority and shame (Mattison and Aber, 2007).

The Ontario Ministry of Education acknowledged the existence and the consequences of Eurocentric curriculum when it articulated that:

Ontario's school system has been and continues to be mainly European in perspective. The prevalence of one cultural tradition (European) limits students' opportunities to

benefit from the contributions of people from a variety of backgrounds. Moreover, exclusion of the experiences, values, and viewpoints of Aboriginal and racial and ethnocultural minority groups constitutes a systemic barrier to success for students from those groups and often produces inequitable outcomes for them. Such inequities have been linked to students' low self-esteem, placement in inappropriate academic programs, low career expectations and high dropout rates (Ontario Ministry of Education, 1993, p.4).

Furthermore, Curling and McMurtry, (2008) in their study regarding the causes of youth violence, report that the recent investment in Ontario's educational system is not reaching those students who need it the most. In addition, the study found that one of the main problems within the educational system in Ontario is that the curriculum is primarily reflective of Eurocentric ideals. As a result, it offers little or no encouragement for Black students to develop pride in their African/Black heritage. Consequently, official (formal) and unofficial (hidden, null) school curriculum places Black students at risk of not succeeding in the educational system in Ontario because it operates through a racial text, which reinforces and reproduces Eurocentric norms values and beliefs while alienating, excluding and eliminating "others" (Curling and McMurtry, 2008; Pinar, 1993).

Furthermore, Willinsky (1998) asserts that teaching resources, such as textbooks, utilized by educators also contribute to Black student academic outcomes. For example, in his examination of science, geography and literature textbooks, he found that these textbooks reproduce and maintain Eurocentric superiority and Black inferiority. The lack of representation in the curriculum significantly contributes to Black students being excluded from the teaching and learning process (Dei, 1997). Or as aptly coined by James, (2010) Black students become "the stranger;" they occupy a position in the educational system where they are both near and far at the same time. They are near

because they are in the classroom being taught but they are far in that they are not represented in the curriculum content.

Furthermore, curriculum experts are aware that literacy development is the most important variable in curriculum development, i.e., syntax, sentence structures and language rules, and therefore is vital to the success of all students. However, the curriculum is culturally framed, written and articulated through a White/Anglo middle-class lens. This does not take into consideration that literacy development differs across class and cultural lines and that most Black students do not come from the above demographics (Henry, 1998a).

For example, Black students come from a plethora of linguistically/dialectally and culturally diverse backgrounds; however, the curriculum fails to adequately respond to the linguistic challenges of Black students (Wheeler, 2006). Some Black students from diverse linguistic communities were asked to respond to the following reading readiness task: *The mouse runs. The dog runs. The cat runs.* They responded to the above as follows: *Da mouse run. Da dog run. Da cat run.* This is grammatically incorrect, but dialectically correct, because the above are grammar patterns from the community transferred into the students' writing (Wheeler, 2006). Therefore, it is imperative that the formal curriculum provides alternative ways of knowing and mechanisms such as code switching (a technique where the dialect is switched with standard English in order to develop the lacking skills) to enable students from diverse linguistic communities to develop the essential skills needed for success in the Eurocentric educational system (Wheeler, 2006).

For example, U.S. research suggests that culturally and racially diverse educators are limited in the teaching profession. In fact, the majority of educators are middle-class, European and female (Pang & Gibson 2001). However, this is in blatant contrast to the demographic of students they serve, especially in large urban school districts (Pang & Gibson 2001). In these school districts, the majority of students come from racialized ethnic groups and working-class families (Pang & Gibson 2001). Research indicates that there is a social disconnect between the teaching staff and the student population. For instance, students come to school with significantly different experiences, values, cultures, languages and expectations from their educators (Cochran-Smith 1997). Conversely, research suggests educators may come to school with their own deeply entrenched methods of teaching, Eurocentric values and ways of knowing which their student population may have difficulty responding to (Cochran-Smith 1997).

Dee (2001) suggests that there are significant correlations between academic success for Black and White students when they were assigned to teachers of their own racial group. Furthermore, Canadian researchers Cukier and Yap (2009), in their report entitled “Diversity Counts”, assert that educators who reflect students’ ethnic and cultural background are vital to the promotion and development of their identity, self-image, self-esteem, and ultimately academic success.

Furthermore, Pang and Gibson (2001) indicated that Black Educators are far more than physical role models for Black students. These educators enrich the school environment with a variety of family histories, values, traditions and lived experiences; they tend to consistently weave in issues of race, class, culture and gender into their classroom discussions even though the textbooks do not speak to these topics (2010).

Bonner (2009) further suggests that Black educators view teaching as an opportunity to bridge the gap between the culture at home and the culture at school. Hence, the presence of racialized educators in school remains crucial to the achievement of Black students.

Henry (1998a) asserts that the absence of Black history from teacher education programs, school curriculum, and school environment inspires Black educators with an eagerness to teach Black students about their cultures, histories and lived experiences. Research further asserts that the incorporation of administrators, teachers and school support staff from diverse racial, ethnic and linguistic background enriches the school community. It provides students with role models, a variety of teaching styles, different methods of communication, and knowledge which is beneficial to *all* students (Dei et al, 2000).

Since, research has affirmed that the incorporation of racialized educators into the official school curriculum is vital to the success of all students, particularly racialized students; the Canadian school system needs to remedy its mono-culture curriculum because it significantly isolates, alienates and silences Black students from the teaching and learning process, and negatively impacts their academic achievement/success. In essence, a mono-culture curriculum maintains the knowledge gaps and erasures and excludes and silences Black voices from the educational experience (Norquay, 2002).

However, given the fact that we live in a multicultural society, where various forms of social, cultural, political and economic diversity have become part of our lived realities, it is imperative that educational curricula are reflective of the population they serve. The curricula must provide students with the historical and contemporary knowledge of Canada's multicultural, multilingual and multiracial foundation, which

informs the 'Canadian identity' (Pinar, 1993). Hence, if Canada is to become a 'great nation', the curricula must embrace diverse knowledge and ways of knowing.

Teachers' Perceptions and Low Expectations

Research indicates that factors such as race, class, gender, and racially based stereotypes of Black students have created socially constructed categories which negatively affect their academic outcomes (James, 2011; Fine, 1991). For example, James (2011) found that constructing Black students as at-risk, disruptive, dropouts, fatherless, immigrants, aggressive, angry, sexually promiscuous, intimidating and rebellious makes them vulnerable to negative academic outcomes. These labels that have their foundation in racially based stereotypes, discrimination, racism and sexism have significantly impacted the ways teachers interact with Black students (Clark, 2006; James, 2011).

Furthermore, research asserts that these stereotypes inform teachers' perceptions and expectations of students (Kunjufu, 1993). Teacher expectation is one of the most important variables when it relates to students' success and it is crucial to their academic achievement or lack thereof (Kunjufu, 1993). However, the literature has articulated that some teachers' perceptions and expectations of students are skewed by social structures such as race, class, gender, and the physical appearance of the students (James, 2003; Rong, 1996). Not surprisingly, lower-class students of color suffer the most academically from low teacher expectations (James, 2003). In addition, Obiakor (1999) contends that when the expectations of students' achievement and behaviours are lowered or raised, it has a significant impact on the students' self-understanding, self-love, and self-empowerment. Harmon (1991) suggested that social support and encouragement from

educators affect the academic performance of Black students more than any other group of students.

Research further purports that teacher perceptions and expectation of racial minority students are formed before they reach the classroom (Avery & Walker, 1993). For instance, Avery and Walker (1993) in their research with prospective teachers at both the primary and secondary level found that prospective teachers had perceived and constructed ethnic minority students as problematic in schools. Furthermore, Shinn et. al. examined teachers' perceptions and expectations of Black students as early as 1987 and found that 60 percent of teachers believed that their Black students would not attend college. Consequently, those teachers did not prepare their Black students for college acceptance. Over two decades later Garza (2012) reported similar findings; in her examination of pre-service teachers, she found that teachers continue to hold negative assumptions about Black students. Teachers believed that Black students come to school with a complex array of social, emotional and behavioural issues, which renders them incapable of academic success.

Landsman (2004) in her study to confront the racism of low expectation, found that racist beliefs lie at the core of most White teachers' expectations of racialized students, particularly Black and Latino students. For example, she found that teachers believed that "Black or Latino students could not possibly know the answers to deep or complex questions" (p.1). Therefore, they did not engage these students in discussions that required critical thinking skills. These negative perceptions of Black students have contributed to them being constantly identified as the group that lags behind in school success (The Schott Foundation for Public Education, 2010).

Furthermore, research alleges that stereotypical assumptions, coupled with the existence of institutionalized and systemic deficits have severely curtailed the success of racialized youth within the educational system, particularly Black males (Dei, 1996; Glaze and Wright, 1998; James, 2003; 2011). For instance, in the United States the vast majority of states have reported that Black male high school graduation rates are significantly lower than their White counterparts (The Schott Foundation for Public Education, 2010). In New York City's 2007/08 cohort (North America's largest school district and the district with the largest enrolment of Black male students) only 26 percent of Black males graduated from high school, compared to 50 percent of their White counterparts. Furthermore, on a national scale only 47 percent of Black males graduated from high school in 2007/08, compared to 78 percent of White males (The Schott Foundation for Public Education, 2010).

Additionally, American research asserts that Black females are not immune from negative teacher perceptions. They are perceived as uncivilized, unfeminine, loud, bad-mannered and unable/unwilling to learn (Clark, 2006). These perceptions of Black female students are false and have their roots grounded in racism, sexism, stereotypes, cultural differences and media representation (Frazier-Kouassi, 2002; American Association of University Women, 1998). For example, the media portrays Black females as hypersexual, lacking mainstream social habits, as single mother, poor and in need of support (Archer-Banks & Behar-Horenstein, 2012). Steele (1992) expressed that when teachers' perceptions cause them to lower their expectations and accept racial stereotypes, they undermine Black students' achievement/success, which eventually

causes the students to disassociate with school and decrease their self-esteem and self-identity.

Research shows that, Black female students are cited more often for dress code violations, and receive more suspensions than their White, Latina and Asian peers (Chavous et al., 2008). Furthermore, female students are forced to “pass” as the male dominant “other” (White male) if they desire to achieve academic success: that is, acting as if one is someone or something they are not (White male) (Archer-Banks & Behar-Horenstein, 2012; Fordham 1993). Fordham (1993) asserts that gender passing is thus a reality for both Black and White female students. However, for Black females to “pass” or be successful in academia they have to assume the “universal” identity of “femaleness” (White middle class female). Therefore, Black females who do not share this racial, ethnic or cultural heritage are compelled to silence or gender passing (Fordham 1993).

Research professes that students’ race and gender are the most common sources of information from which a teacher forms impressions of their students. In addition, teachers’ race also influenced how they viewed students and the students’ race or ethnicity influences teachers’ perceptions (Rong, 1996). For example, Mendez and Knoff (2003) explored possible teacher bias in race and gender and found that teachers referred a higher percentage of Blacks and male students compared with White and female students for suspension. The investigators concluded that gender and race *must* be considered as factors affecting teachers’ perceptions and its impact on decision making.

Furthermore, Bahr and colleagues (1991) examined whether teachers’ perceptions of difficult-to-teach students were racially founded. Teachers were asked to nominate a difficult-to-teach student out of a pool of equal numbers of Black and White students

most in need of referrals for psychological evaluation and placement in special education. The results indicated that teachers rated Black difficult-to-teach students as more appropriate for referral than their White counterparts.

Moreover, Pigott and Cowen (2000) found that both Black and White teachers behaved more positively with members of their own “race”. Black students may, thus, lose out on learning opportunities because of differences in cultural communication codes and student/teacher racial match. Researchers have examined not only the way that teachers’ perceptions vary with respect to teacher-student similarity but also the way in which patterns of difference conform to ethnoracial or gendered stereotypes (Jones & Myhill 2004). For example, Tiedemann (2002) found that stereotypes held by teachers regarding gender differences in math ability affected the teachers’ perceptions of their students’ ability and effort. Other studies have revealed how teachers’ perceptions of students’ effort and performance conform to stereotypical expectations of girls, to be high achieving through effort and boys through natural ability, particularly in subjects that are constructed as masculine, such as math and science (Jones & Myhill 2004). Furthermore, Warrington and Younger (2000) found that teachers’ expectations and perceptions of female students are based on traditional gender norms. They assert that some teachers have lower expectations for girls than boys. In addition, girls were marginalized in the classroom as teachers generally respond more frequently to boys than girls.

Additional research has shown that teachers’ stereotypical perceptions greatly impact students’ educational behaviour, performance, and attitudes (Blanchard, 2012). Numerous studies (Diamond & Spillane, 2004; Lewis, 2003; Jones & Myhill 2004) have examined how teachers’ gender and racial stereotypes affect their interpretations of

students' classroom behaviour and performance and how these perceptions affect student outcomes. In an examination of previous research, Jussim & Eccles (1992) conclude that teachers' perceptions of student performance are largely accurate but point out that more subjective attributes such as student attitudes, behaviour and characters may be perceived less accurately and that these "measurement errors" by teachers may result in large differences over time. For example, teachers' perceptions of hard work were highly subject to bias and minimally reflected student self-reports of effort, ability, or time spent on homework (Jussim & Eccles 1992). In these cases, perceptions of students by teachers may reflect existing cultural stereotypes and may be divorced from other relevant measures of student behaviour.

Furthermore, research asserts that racial stereotypes carry with them symbolic meaning, which afford group members enhanced authority or reduced social standing in the eyes of others (Lewis, 2003). For example, stereotypical images suggest that Blacks are not as intelligent as Whites (Schmader, et al. 2001). These widely circulating stereotypes may influence teachers' perceptions and expectations of students based on their ethnic background (Diamond & Spillane, 2004). Research has demonstrated that Black students are rewarded less for their cultural capital than their White counterparts due to low teacher expectations and race-based tracking (Diamond & Spillane, 2004).

Studies have shown the negative impact that teachers' perceptions have on minority students, and students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds (Oates, 2003). For example, Oates (2003) found that similarities between students' and teachers' ethnoracial and class background affect teachers' perceptions and expectations of students' maturity, potential, diligence and performance.

In addition, researchers have indicated that White middle-class teachers may rate Black students as less well-adjusted because teachers' experiences limit their understanding and influence stereotypical views of Black students (Pigott & Cowen, 2000). For example, teachers' perceived low-income Black students' academic capacity as lower than those of middle- and upper-income White students. This research also emphasizes the role of the "self-fulfilling prophecy" through which teachers' low expectations reduce students' academic self-image, which causes students to exert less effort in school, and therefore leads teachers to give certain students less challenging coursework (Diamond et al., 2007).

Moreover, Auwarter and Aruguete, (2008) found that teachers rated students from low socio-economic status (SES) backgrounds as having less promising futures than identical students from high SES backgrounds. Their study indicates that students from higher SES backgrounds are perceived more favourably than equally performing children from lower SES backgrounds. More specifically, research has indicated that students' social class was a significant factor that influenced teachers' perceptions and behaviour towards their students (Murray, 1996). Murray (1996) also found that students from low-socioeconomic backgrounds were less prepared for academic success than students from middle-high socioeconomic backgrounds. The evidence points to teachers' preconceived notions of performance standards and low expectations for these students, which translate into disengagement from the teaching and learning processes.

Furthermore, research suggests that teachers' perceptions and low expectations of Black students are impacted by parental involvement (Gillborn et. al, 2012; Sanders, 1997; Yan, 1999). For example, American research found that there is a perception

among educators that Black parents are not actively involved in their children's education; however, research clearly shows that they are very involved (Gillborn et. al, 2012; Sanders, 1997; Yan, 1999). In fact, research articulates that successful Black students received equal or higher parental involvement than their White counterparts (Jeynes, 2005). However, despite parental involvement, some educators consistently and systematically have lower academic/social expectation for Black students and Black parents, regardless of their social class (Gillborn et. al, 2012). For instance, Gillborn et. al (2012) examined 62 middle-class Black Caribbean parents and their educational experiences and found that, despite being actively involved in their children's education, their children continue to receive less teacher's attention, increased disciplinary referrals, and relentless and unwarranted criticisms that ultimately impact their academic outcomes.

In addition, research found that social class also impacts the way in which Black parents interact with schools. They found that middle-class Black parents interact more frequently with their children's school community than working-class Black parents (Lareau & Horvat, 1999; Trask-Tate & Cunningham, 2010). Furthermore, studies have shown that parental involvement was perceived differently when it involved Black single parent households. They were viewed by educators as "not actively involved" in their children's education. In addition, school officials had the lowest educational and social expectations for children from Black single parent households (Jeynes, 2005). They assumed that these students have negative relationships with their parents and, therefore, receive little or no educational or social support from their parents (Jeynes, 2005; Yan, 1999).

Research essentially suggests that teachers' perceptions of parental involvement in Black children's education are based on stereotypes of parents, their social economic status, level of education, family structure and the level of parental involvement in school activities (Bakker et al., 2007; Trask-Tate & Cunningham, 2010). Bakker et al. (2007) affirms that these stereotypes negatively impact student academic achievement/success. Studies also suggest that teachers' perceptions regarding the level of parental involvement also influence students' academic achievement, particularly racialized students such as Blacks and Latinos (Jussim et al., 1996; Trask-Tate & Cunningham, 2010). In addition, Bakker et al. (2007) indicate that Black parents with high levels of education were perceived by teachers to have more contact with teachers, more influence on the school, more participation and more involvement at home, than parents with low levels of education and from lower social economic status.

Nevertheless, these perceptions of parental involvement in their children's education were based on stereotypes. When teachers' perceptions of parental involvement are less than accurate they spawn differential teacher-student interactions and teacher-parent interactions which alienate Black students and parents from becoming active members of their school communities. As a result, this becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy of negative outcomes for students, particularly racialized students such as Blacks and Hispanics (Bakker et al., 2007).

Negative teacher perception and low expectation of Black students are very discouraging. They limit these students because they fuel a cruel cycle of academic failure. When students do not believe that educators are concerned about their wellbeing and academic success, their potential to flourish is diminished (Noguera, 2003).

Teachers' perceptions and expectations dictate their feelings, behaviours, and relationship with students. Therefore, when teachers' perception and expectations of student performance are low, instruction is likely to be "non-challenging and non-academic" and poor instruction fosters an inferior education, which virtually guarantees the academic failures that many teachers come to expect from Black students (Noguera, 2003).

Black Female Students and Their Schooling Experience

The inconsistencies between the ways in which males and females are treated in the educational system, have led researchers to suggest that schools are not adequately preparing female students for today's competitive labour markets (AAUW, 1998; Archer-Banks & Behar-Horenstein 2012). Conversely, for Black female students the aforementioned conditions are intensified by their race and gender (Rollock, 2007). This is due to the fact that Black females' racial and gender identities are elusive concepts and cannot be easily defined within the educational system (Morris, 2005; Yon, 2000). Consequently, educators often demand that Black females embody a Eurocentric ideology of femininity. However, when Black female students embody the aforementioned persona they become estranged from friends, families and communities, which hinders the development of their racial identity and self-esteem (Clark, 2006).

When Black females "act White" they become invisible, silenced and forced to take on a dual identity (Fordham, 1993; Henry, 1998b). James (1994) asserts that teachers have the power to make some students "feel invisible and insignificant and that their differences are irrelevant"; this is influenced by the cultural perceptions and expectations teachers bring with them to the classroom (p. 27). In addition, Fordham (1993) and Henry (2005) assert that Black women and girls' traditional form of literacy education have

required silencing, invisibility and other forms of accommodations. Black female students are often required to separate their lived realities from classroom life, immersing themselves in the stationary activities of reading, writing, and speaking in ways that are structured by the dominant group (White males and females) if they desire academic success (Fordham, 1993; Henry, 2005).

Archer-Banks and Behar-Horenstein (2012) assert that Black female students are often misunderstood due to their outspoken and independent nature. They are often perceived by educators as troublemakers rather than leaders (Frazier-Kouassi, 2002). Similar representation in the media has influenced the way in which Black female students are perceived and how educators interact with them (Archer-Banks & Behar-Horenstein, 2012). Research asserts that when Black females are “loud”, educators view them as “socially backward” individuals who lack “appropriate values and morals” (Archer-Banks & Behar-Horenstein, 2012). Therefore, educators spend more time addressing their social skills and less time addressing their academic needs (Archer-Banks & Behar-Horenstein, 2012; Chavous et al., 2008; Lei, 2003).

Delpit (1993) found that when the educational system operates through a single cultural lens (Eurocentric) to the exclusion of “others”, or when students are required to set aside their cultural practices as a condition for success, this leads to feelings of alienation, racialization, discrimination, silencing, disengagement and ultimately academic failure.

In addition, Pollard (1993), in her examination of gender, achievement, and Black students’ experience, found that Black females received less academic support than their White male and female counterparts. O’Connor (2002) articulates that Black female

students interact less with teachers than White female students, although they initiate more contact than White females. Moreover, Black female students are given less academic reinforcement from educators than any other ethnic group, even when race and gender are taken into consideration (Chavous et al., 2008; Lei, 2003; O'Connor, 2002). For example, when Black female students outperform White students, particularly males, research has found that teachers assume White students are not working to their full potential. Conversely, when Black females achieve academic success the teachers assume that the student had to work "extra hard" to achieve success (Fordham, 1993; Lei 2003; O'Connor, 2002).

Additional research suggests that Black female students must manoeuvre negative assumptions, systemic discrimination, stereotypes, and racial and gender biases in order to succeed at school (Archer-Banks & Behar-Horenstein, 2012). For instance, Black female students receive more disciplinary referrals than their White male and female peers (Frazier-Kouassi, 2002; Morris, 2005). Furthermore, the literature asserts that the educational system consistently places Black female students in programs that cripple their chances to gain entry into post-secondary institutions (Archer-Banks & Behar-Horenstein, 2012). For example, Oakes (2005) found that when educators are given the opportunity to place students into advanced placement or lower track placement they disproportionately place Black students into lower track programs. This places Black students at an academic disadvantage as they are systematically disqualified from applying to post-secondary institutions (Oakes, 2005).

In addition, research suggests that Black female students are excluded from core courses such as math and science as early as elementary school (West-Olatunji et al.,

2010). Hubbard (2005) asserts that these inequitable practices are maintained by guidance counsellors who fail to supply Black female students with the proper information and resources they need to participate in these courses. The consistent lack of academic support by educators places Black female students at risk for academic failure (West-Olatunji et al., 2010). Hubbard (2005) in his examination of the role of gender in academic performance found that the unfair treatment of Black female students by guidance counsellors limits their academic achievement. Black females were frequently discouraged from enrolling into advanced courses and upon high school completion they were only given information about trade school or diploma programs and were deferred from pursuing degree programs (Hubbard, 2005). In addition, Fine & Zane (1991) found that working-class Black females who were perceived as loud and assertive were at a greater risk of dropping out or being pushed out of high school.

It is important to note that in spite of these challenges Black female students have found ways to negotiate the barriers within the educational system. For example, Fordham (1993), Hubbard (2005), Clark (2006) & Henry, (2005), have found that Black female students use silence and invisibility as strategies to gain entry into the halls of higher learning. Research suggests that academically successful Black female students adopt the silence and invisibility persona as a mechanism to avoid and negotiate stereotypical categories (loud and belligerent), even with the risk of alienation and losing their identity (Clark, 2006; Fordham, 1993). For example, when these females adopt the aforementioned personas their peers accuse them of “acting White” (Clark, 2006). This often means that these students have mastered Standard English and use little or no cultural vernacular. In addition, they adopt Eurocentric gestures, body language, dress

and communication styles. In short, the price of academic success and entry into middle class standing are equated with rejection of your racial, cultural, linguistic and ethnic identities (Clark, 2006).

Institutionalized Racism

Research has asserted that racism (racist ideologies, policies, practices and structures) continues to permeate our educational system (Berlak, 2001). For example, Berlak, (2001) proclaims that there is a race gap in academic achievement. Every year Blacks, Native Americans and Latino students continue to lag behind their White peers. These students leave school without diplomas, the ability to read, write or complete simple arithmetic. However, this should not be surprising, since racism is an ingrained feature of North America's educational system (Alexander, 2010; Alladin, 1996; Berlak, 2001; Henry and Tator, 2006; Lee, 1996; Pinar, 1993; Willinsky, 1998).

One of the most blatant forms of institutionalized racism is the treatment of Aboriginal children in Canada (Henry and Tator, 2006). In response to the "Indian Problem," the government implemented a repressive system to educate Native children (Henry and Tator, 2006). According to the Minister of Indian Affairs at the turn of the 20th century, (Frank Oliver, 1908) "Education would elevate the Indian from his condition of savagery and make him a self-supporting member of the state and eventually a citizen of good standing" (p.111) (Henry and Tator, 2006). As a result, Aboriginal children were torn from their families and communities and placed in the care of "strangers" (Haig-Brown, 2007; Henry and Tator, 2006). They were not permitted to speak their languages, practice their customs, or learn about their histories. They received

inferior education, poor health care and suffered years of physical, emotional and sexual abuse (Lee, 1996; Haig-Brown, 2007; Henry and Tator, 2006).

Furthermore, Henry and Tator (2006) articulate that Canada suffers from “historical amnesia”; racist views and practices, although prevalent and unrelenting, are often “invisible” to everyone except the victims. Lee (1996) voiced that Canadian culture has a distinct and detailed past when it comes to institutionalized racism. Some examples of the manifestation of racism in Canada include slavery, segregated schools and the enactment of racist immigration policies to prevent Chinese, South Asian, Black and Jewish immigrants from entering and settling in Canada (Lee, 1996).

Today racism continues to saturate the Canadian landscape (Muyinda, 2009). For example, the Supreme Court of Canada (2005) in the case of R. V. Spence, articulated that: “Racial prejudice against visible minorities is...notorious and indisputable... [it is] a social fact not capable of reasonable dispute” (para. 5). In addition, Muyinda (2009) confirms the aforementioned statement when she voiced that “racism is deeply entrenched in institutions, policies, programs and practices—so much that systemic racism is either rendered invisible or functionally normalized” (p.2). This is problematic because when racism becomes institutionalized and infused with society’s ideologies it is difficult (if not impossible) to remove from the public domain (Lee, 1996).

Furthermore, given the historical foundation of racism in Canadian institutions, particularly the educational system, it is no accident that Aboriginals and racialized students such as Blacks are adversely affected more than any other students (Henry & Tator, 2006).

Institutional racism is defined as unequal access to educational opportunities based on race or ethnic group (Jones & Carter, 1996). Today, racism in educational institutions is manifested through various overt and covert forms, such as attitudes, behaviours, assessments, policies, school disciplinary practices, streaming of students into non-academic courses, the assimilationist culture (forcing students to “perform” Whiteness or leave their culture at the door) and teaching through the lens of a mono-cultural Eurocentric curriculum (Glaze & Wright, 1998; Henry & Tator, 2006; Lee, 1996; Rozansky-Lloyd, 2005). The aforementioned manifestation of institutionalized racism within the educational system intersects with negative teachers’ perceptions, racial, class and gender biases, low teacher’ expectation and ultimately contributes to the disengagement of Blacks and other racialized students from the teaching and learning process (Dei et al., 1997).

For instance, when the curriculum predominately speaks to European cultural values, histories and viewpoints, it inevitably alienates “other” groups from the educational process. This, in turn, leads to negative academic and social outcomes for racialized students (Dei et al., 1997; Henry & Tator, 2006; Ontario Ministry of Education, 1993). In addition, when Canadian history is taught through a mono-cultural Eurocentric lens, it articulates that only Europeans were instrumental in discovering and establishing settlements in what is now “Canada” and, therefore, they are the “discoverers” of Canada (Henry & Tator, 2006). This version of Canada’s history (the single story) excludes the contribution of “other” groups in the development of Canada. Furthermore this history is problematic, because it does not highlight the fact that when the first Europeans arrived in Canada, the indigenous peoples of North America had for centuries established their own

cultures, values, norms, perspectives, traditions, identities, and systems of government (Henry & Tator, 2006). Moreover, you cannot discover a place if someone is already living there. Nevertheless, this has been widely accepted as “knowledge” in the delivery of Eurocentric education in Canada.

Comissiong (2009) asserts that the educational system in North America is inherently racist because continues to ask racialized students to personify and celebrate historical figures such as Christopher Columbus who murdered tens of thousands of indigenous peoples (Comissiong, 2009). These students are socialized to accept these figures as “heroes” regardless of the hurt or damage they have caused.

Other manifestations of institutionalized racism include negative teacher perceptions and school disciplinary policies. For example, Wentzel (2002) found that teachers believe that Black students are more defiant, disrespectful, and rule-breaking than any other group. As a result, Black students were more likely than White students to be referred for reasons related to defiance (Ontario Human Rights Commission, 2004; Gregory & Weinstein, 2008). Together, these studies suggest that negative teacher perceptions places Black students “at-risk” for academic failure and high dropout rates. Thus, the perception of them being defiant by educators inevitably leads to them being sent out of class and thereby missing important instructional time. These studies point to the need for a deeper understanding of teachers’, administrators’ and school personnels’ “perceived defiance” and its impact on Black students’ academic success and failure (Gregory & Thompson, 2010).

In addition, American researchers Mendez and Knoff (2003) in their examination of school disciplinary practices found that “almost one half of Black male and almost one

third of all Black female students” (p. 49) received at least one out- of- school suspension during middle school. Moreover, Black males were three times more likely than White or Hispanic males to receive out- of- school suspension in elementary school, while Black females were eight times more likely than their White and Hispanic peers to receive an out- of- school suspension in elementary school. Similarly they found that Black females received a greater percentage of suspension in high school than both their White males and female counterparts.

Surprisingly, discrepancies in disciplinary practices are not a new phenomenon. In the United States research suggests that as early as 1975 Black students suspension rates were two to three times higher than that of their White counterparts at the elementary, middle and high school levels (Drakeford, 2006). Skiba and Knesting (2002) further assert that the problem has intensified over the past decades. For example, researchers have found consistent evidence that Black students were overrepresented in office referrals, suspension and expulsion, even when socioeconomic status was taken into consideration (Skiba et al., 2002; James, 2003).

Furthermore, research also suggests that Black students were suspended for minor infractions, such as perceived defiance of authority, talking back, class disruption, not reporting to after school detention and wearing hats (Mendez and Knoff, 2003). Mendez and Knoff (2003) further assert that disciplinary infractions such as suspensions do not alleviate or improve students’ behaviours. In fact, research has found that these “behavioural interventions” have failed and are one of the leading causes of academic failure and school disengagement for racialized students, particularly Black students (Mendez and Knoff, 2003; School Community Advisory Panel, 2008).

Likewise, a 2004 report by the Ontario Human Rights Commission, examined the Ontario Safe Schools Act and the school board disciplinary policy, known as “zero tolerance” and their impact on racialized students and students with disabilities. The report found that the Act and school board policies were having a disproportionate impact on racialized students, particularly Black students, and students with disabilities. They were suspended and expelled more often and received stricter and harsher penalties than their White counterparts. The Commission found that disciplinary policies and practices are related to a multiplicity of negative academic and educational outcomes for Black students.

Consequently, the Ministry of Education repealed the Ontario Safe Schools Act and replaced it with Bill 212 (Progressive Discipline). However, the School Community Advisory Panel (2008) found that the framework of zero tolerance has been entrenched into the school system and will take “decades” to dismantle. For example, in their 2008 report (*The Road to Health: A Final Report on School Safety*) following the fatal shooting of 15-year-old Jordan Manners (a Black student) in a Toronto high school, the School Community Advisory Panel, reports the following from their findings:

The Panel accepts that the Safe Schools Culture has deeply hurt this City’s most disenfranchised. The devastating effect that this style of discipline had (and continues to have) on marginalized communities is borne out by its lasting and ongoing effects. Specters of “zero tolerance” policies continue to hang over the Safe Schools Department (School Community Advisory Panel, 2008, pp. 2-3).

Furthermore, it is important to note that the Ontario Ministry of Education was aware that decades of research in Nova Scotia, England and the United States had previously asserted that zero tolerance policies do not improve school safety (Ontario Human Rights Commission, 2004). In fact, these studies suggested that zero tolerance

policies increased suspensions and expulsions, which led to loss of education, higher dropout rates, increased criminalization, and anti-social behaviours in racial minority children, particularly Black Students (Ontario Human Rights Commission, 2004).

However, despite the evidence, the Ministry implemented the policy to the detriment of Black students. Given the devastating impact that Safe School legislation has had on Black students in other jurisdictions, one has to ponder why the government would choose to implement this legislation, knowing that the outcome would be detrimental to Black students. It is evident from these studies that school disciplinary policies and practices are forms of institutionalized racism that have had, and continue to have, a devastating impact on the academic outcomes of Black students.

The consequences of these widespread and deep systemic failures to address issues surrounding the negative impact that school disciplinary policies and practices are having on racialized students, particularly Black students, will inevitably lead to complications in Black communities such as high unemployment, high imprisonment rates, unstable families and drug abuse (Alexander 2010; Leone et al., 2003). These policies only perpetuate institutionalized racism (The Windsor Star, 2005). For example, former Ontario's New Democratic Party leader Howard Hampton further argues that the Safe Schools Act with its zero tolerance implications should really be called "a gang recruitment act", because the provisions contributed to putting youth, who most need to stay in school, on the streets (Satzewich & Lioudakis, 2007). Therefore, one has to contemplate, whether the actions by the government was not a blatant act of racism against Black students.

Moreover, Stephen Lewis (1992) in his Letter to the Premier, regarding racism in Ontario, states that race relations in Ontario's educational system were “disturbing and a real cause for concern” (para. 6). He found that when it comes to education, there was an absence of Black history courses, lack of visible minority teachers, double standards in discipline practices; racist incidents and epithets were tolerated and minority students streamed into non-academic courses and discouraged from pursuing university education by their White guidance counsellors who knew very little about their cultural backgrounds (Lewis, 1992). These manifestations of institutionalized racism have been identified as some of the factors that have contributed to Black student academic failures within the educational system (Dei et.al, 1997; Glaze & Wright, 1998; Henry & Tator, 2006; Lee, 1996; Ontario Ministry of Education, 1993; Rozansky-Lloyd, 2005).

Conclusion

A multiplicity of research has examined the factors that have contributed to male and female Black student academic success and failure (Archer-Banks & Behar-Horenstein, 2012; Auwarter, & Aruguete, 2008; Avery & Walker, 1993; Ferguson, 2003; Fordham, 1993; Frazier-Kouassi, 2002; Henry, 2005; Henry, 1998a; Henry, 1998b; James, 2005; James, 2003; Kunjufu, 1993; Rong, 1996). This body of research underscores the impact that factors such as Eurocentric curriculum, negative teacher perception, low expectation, parental involvement, school disciplinary policies and institutionalized racism have had on the outcomes of Black students. This in turn alienates students from the teaching and learning processes, while at the same time silences female students, particularly Black females (Blanchard, 2012; Diamond et al., 2007; Henry, 2005; Henry, 1998a; Lewis, 2003; Jones & Myhill, 2004; Warrington &

Younger; 2000). These factors compel Black students, in particular Black females, to adopt survival mechanisms that require them to separate their lived realities from their educational experiences and as a result severely curtail their academic achievement/success, future life chances, and inevitably their upward social mobility (Fordham, 1993; Henry, 2005; Henry, 1998a; Henry, 1998b; James, 1994).

As already mentioned, there is limited data on the problem under study from a Canadian vantage point. Therefore, additional Canadian research is needed in order to critically interrogate the problem from a Canadian perspective and specifically in the GTA. This would provide further insight into the intersections of this complex problem within the educational system, Black communities and society.

Chapter 3

Methodology

This chapter describes the research methodology employed to unearth the factors that contribute to Black female high school students' academic success or failure. A mixture of qualitative phenomenological interview methods (individual and focus group interviews) was utilized to obtain data for analysis. The research setting, participants, ethical concerns, theoretical framework, as well as the researcher's biases are discussed within this chapter.

A phenomenological interview allows the researcher to study phenomena that are not easily studied by other research methods (Creswell, 1998). For example, only participants who have experienced the phenomenon under study were recruited for this research; as only these participants are able to provide credible data for analysis (Creswell, 1998; Gay & Airasian, 2009). In addition, phenomenology interviews provide the researcher with tools to examine the lived experiences of the participants. Phenomenological researchers aim to gain in-depth knowledge and understanding of the essential "truths" (i.e., essences) of the lived experiences of the participants (Creswell, 1998; Gay & Airasian, 2009).

Qualitative Research Methods

A qualitative research strategy was utilized to acquire a maximum comprehension of participants' thoughts, feelings, actions, attitudes, values, beliefs, traditions and practices. Qualitative research examines lived experiences (i.e., the lived realities) in an effort to understand and give them meanings. This is usually done by systematically

collecting and analyzing narrative materials using methods that ensure credibility of both the data and the results (Gay & Airasian, 2009).

Arguably, the quantitative deductive approach to studying social reality can be effective for this study. However, within this study the constructionist epistemological approach and its ontological orientation to social reality challenge the objective position that social actors have limited agency to alter their positionalities in society (Bryman & Teevan, 2005). Therefore, the quantitative approach is not suitable for this study as it does not allow for the interpretive narratives of Afro Jamaican female students to be heard.

A qualitative research methodology is concerned with asking descriptive questions such as: What happened? Or explanatory questions such as: How or why did something happen? (Bryman & Teevan, 2005). A qualitative research strategy was useful for my research because it provided causal explanations, such as describing the process by which a particular incident may have affected the participants (Gay & Airasian, 2009). In addition, a qualitative research methodology facilitated the building of rapport between the participants and the researcher, thus, enabling the building of trust (Bryman & Teevan, 2005). This is key when attempting to extrapolate and give meaning to the participants' lived realities. Likewise, it afforded me the critical insights to explore how the educational system impacts the academic outcomes of the participants. In addition, it granted me the opportunity to analyze and observe the factors that facilitate and limit the educational outcomes of Black female high school students (Glesne, 2011). Furthermore, the qualitative research strategy allowed me the freedom to choose from a

range of data collection methods. In so doing, it enabled me to place the lived experiences of the participants at the centre of analysis.

Limitations/Bias

There are two main limitations to this type of study. They include threats to the validity of the data through observer bias and observer effects (Gay & Airasian, 2009). For example, the researcher presence during the interview may create prospective problems. In addition, another researcher may perceive the situation through a lens different than the one perceived by me (observer effects). Furthermore, each researcher brings to the setting his/her distinct background, experiences, preferences and attitudes which, in turn, impact not only *what* is observed but *how* it is observed (observer bias) (Bryman & Teevan, 2005; Gay & Airasian, 2009).

The aforementioned limits of qualitative research may be viewed as strengths or weaknesses. This depends on the original purpose of the research (Gay & Airasian, 2009). For example, one common criticism levied at qualitative research is that the results of a study cannot be generalized to a larger population because the sample group is small (7 participants in this case) and the subjects were not chosen randomly. However, (as in this case) the original research questions sought insights into a specific subgroup of the African Jamaican population, specifically female high school students and the factors that contribute to their academic success/failure in a small city in the GTA. This is not about the general population, but about the subgroup which is “distinct” and different from the general population, and that “distinctness” is the focus of this research (Gay & Airasian, 2009; Glesne, 2011).

Description of Research

This qualitative research was conducted at a public library in a small city within the GTA. The library was mutually agreed upon by the participants and me. The library is a safe, inclusive and holistic community space, where diverse residents can access free learning resources, community programs/events and spaces. It is located within a working/middle-class community consisting of mixed housing and mixed income families. The area is reflective of the cultural diversity that exists within the GTA. These demographic factors are relevant because socioeconomic status and cultural dynamics influence the academic outcomes of racialized students (James, 2005; Toronto District School Board, 2009).

Participants (see Table 1 on p.49 for additional background information)

The seven participants were drawn from the African Jamaican community. They represented both first-and second-generation Canadians of African Jamaican background. They were between the ages of 18 and 20 years old. Four of the participants were born in Canada and three were born in Jamaica. All of their parents were born in Jamaica and have immigrated to Canada over the last 20 years. The participants are from working and middle class backgrounds, they attended public and Catholic schools, and have grown up in two parent and single parent homes that are headed by females. Some of the participants expressed that their fathers were absent from the home, while others expressed that although their fathers were present they took a passive role in regards to their education.

It is important to note that all the participants and educators discussed within this study were given fictitious names (pseudonyms) in an attempt to protect their identities.

Tilya, Kelly and Riley successfully completed high school and were pursuing post-secondary studies, while Diamond was on track to successfully completing high school and attend university. Nadia and Deanna recently returned to high school in order to acquire the necessary credits for their high school diploma and Jennifer dropped out of high school and was working in the retail industry.

Description of Participants

Diamond is an 18 year old first-generation African Jamaican high school student. She was born in Jamaica and migrated to Canada with her mother and brothers at the age of 16. Diamond describes herself as an African Jamaican who takes pride in her Jamaican identity. She articulates that while growing up in Jamaica her parents always expressed the importance of having an education. Therefore, she applied herself because as her mother always said “if yuh want gud yuh nose haffi run” (if you want good in life you have to work hard). It is her desire to attend university upon completion of high school to pursue a career as an educator. Presently, Diamond is enrolled in academic courses as she believes that these courses will place her at an advantage in her pursuit of a university degree.

Deanna is a 19 year-old second-generation African Jamaican Canadian. She was born in a small city within the GTA and grew up with her mother, three older brothers and an older sister. Deanna described herself as Canadian with Jamaican heritage. She articulated that growing up her mother always told her education was important, however, no one took a keen interest to ensure that she was on track with her studies. As a result, she did not complete high school. Nevertheless, at the time of the interview she had returned to high school in an attempt to attain her diploma.

Nadia is a 19 year-old second-generation African Jamaican Canadian. She was born in Toronto and moved to a small city within the GTA at the age of 9 with her mother, stepfather and two younger siblings. Nadia considered herself a Jamaican-Canadian. She voiced that she is more Jamaican than Canadian. This is because her mother is closely tied to the Jamaican community within the GTA. Nadia indicated that education was always important in her home. However, she felt that because her mother was a “teen mom”, she lacked the ability to negotiate the educational system to ensure that Nadia’s educational needs were met. Nadia graduated from high school but without an option to attend college or university. Nadia recently returned to school to upgrade her courses and improve her chances of attending a post-secondary institution.

Jennifer is a 20 year-old second-generation African Jamaican Canadian. She was born in a small city within the GTA and grew up with her mother and two younger siblings. Jennifer describes herself as Jamaican and believes that her Jamaican identity makes her unique or as she states “everyone want to be Jamaican but we [Jamaicans] don’t want to be anyone else”. Jennifer expressed that her mother always discussed the significance of obtaining an education. However, Jennifer admitted that she was more interested in the social aspect of school and, therefore, paid little attention to her academics. As a result, Jennifer did not succeed in high school; she currently works as a cashier at a retail store.

Tilya is a 20 year-old first-generation African Jamaican college student who was born in Jamaica and migrated to Canada with her parents at the age of six. However, shortly after migration, both of her parents returned to Jamaica, leaving Tilya to be raised by her aunt. Tilya identifies herself as Jamaican; she expressed that she returns to Jamaica

every summer and, therefore, feels a deep connection to her Jamaican roots. Tilya articulated that her family always stressed the value of education; however, they did not consistently monitor her progress. She credited her success to her own hard work and dedication.

Riley is a 20 year-old first-generation African Jamaican university student. She was born in Jamaica and migrated to Canada with her sibling at the age of 17. She currently lives with her mother, stepfather and younger sibling in a small city within the GTA. Riley describes herself as a Jamaican living in Canada. Riley indicated that she had successfully completed high school in Jamaica before migrating to Canada; however, she was required to “upgrade” her courses prior to attending university. Riley asserted that her mother was adamant that she receive a university education. She credited her accomplishments to her mother and her own commitment to success.

Kelly is a 20 year-old second-generation African Jamaican college student. She was born in a small city within the GTA and grew up with her mother, stepfather and older brother. She identified herself as a Jamaican-Canadian who takes pride in both cultures. She expressed that her family valued education and saw it as essential to her success. Therefore, her mother ensured that she took all the appropriate courses needed to successfully complete high school and attend college.

Table 1: Participants' Background

Name	Age	Country of Birth	Family Make-up	Parents Occupation	At what age did you Migrate?	Highest Grade level Attained	Aspirations
Diamond	18	Jamaica	Single parent house hold (mother)	Child Care Worker	16	Grade 12	To become an Early Childhood Educator
Deanna	19	Canada	Single parent Household (mother)	Registered Practical Nurse	N/A	Grade 11	To Obtain her High School Diploma
Nadia	19	Canada	Two Parent Household	Personal Support Worker (mother) General Labourer (stepfather)	N/A	Grade 12	To attend College or University
Tylia	20	Jamaica	Extended family (aunt)	Small Business Owners (mother & father)	6	Grade 12	To become an Accountant
Riley	20	Jamaica	Two Parent Household	Human Resource Supervisor (mother) Auto Mechanic (stepfather)	17	Grade 12	To become a Teacher
Kelly	20	Canada	Two Parent Household	Travel Agent (mother) Factory Supervisor (stepfather)	N/A	Grade 12	To become a Child & Youth Worker
Jennifer	20	Canada	Single Parent Household (mother)	Nurse	N/A	Grade 11	To Obtain her High School Diploma

Interview Format and Data Collection Methods

The interviews were audiotaped and then transcribed. At each of the interviews, I asked the participants to write reflections on their transcripts. These methods allowed me to obtain important data which could not be obtained from interviewing alone. For example, by having the participants reflect on the transcripts, I was able to gain a clearer understanding of their responses to particular questions; this provided me with more descriptive and richer data for analysis. Furthermore, the written reflections allowed the participants an opportunity to express themselves in ways which counter the “dominant texts of official school discourse” (Henry, 2005; pg. 79). In addition, the written reflections presented me with a better understanding of the participants’ lived experiences and how they interpret the factors that contributed to their academic success or failure (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998).

The format of the interviews was structured and unstructured questioning. This meant that I asked structured questions and through the flow of the interview other questions were generated from the dialogue (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). This approach assisted me to develop a relationship, rapport and establish trust with the participants. In addition, the aforementioned methods provided an excellent opportunity to build an environment that helped/encouraged the participants to feel comfortable in disclosing personal and sensitive information (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). Furthermore, it provided the participants with an opportunity to answer (or not answer) any questions they were comfortable (or comfortable) answering.

Through my work and contacts in the educational system I was able to recruit twelve young women between the ages of 18 and 20, who fit the criteria of the study

(African Jamaican female students who were academically successful/not successful in high school). Upon contact, I met with the participants' individually, provided them with background information about the problem to be studied and gained formal permission in writing. This provided the participants with the opportunity to read, understand, ask questions regarding the problem under study and give formal consent (see Appendix A) to participate in the research study.

From this group, I selected eight young women to form a focus group session. The girls were informed that there would be one audio-taped 45-60 minute group interview and from this session I would select four participants for individual interviews. However, only seven participants participated in the study (three who were having academic challenges and four who were succeeding academically); one participant withdrew from the study for personal reasons. I had to split the focus group session into two audio-taped 45-60 minute group interviews, as the girls who had experienced academic challenges expressed that they did not feel comfortable speaking about their lived experiences in the presence of girls who were academically successful. Not surprisingly, the girls who had experienced academic success did not object to discussing their lived experiences in the presence of the girls who had experienced academic challenges. It was easier to facilitate the focus group session with the academically successful girls than with the girls who had experienced academic challenges. For example, it took only a few phone calls to arrange and complete the interview sessions with the academically successful girls. On the other hand, it took several weeks and countless phone calls before I was able to arrange and complete the interview sessions with the girls who had experienced academic challenges.

The participants in both groups were asked to respond to a series of structured and unstructured questions regarding the research topic (What factors contribute to Afro Jamaican female high school students' academic success or failure?). For example, they were asked: (1) How would you best describe your experience in high school? (2) What was your relationship like with your teachers/administrators? (3) What was your relationship like with your peers? (4) How involved were your parents in your education? Questions such as these and others were generated from the dialogue with the participants and formed the core questions for the focus group sessions. The questions allowed the participants to reflect on their lived high school experiences, while providing an opportunity for discussion between group members. In addition, the focus group interviews provided the participants with an opportunity to probe or modify each other's response to particular questions (Weis & Fine, 2000). Moreover, the above sessions provided the researcher and the participants with an opportunity to build rapport and trust; these are vital components of the interview process (Bryman & Teevan, 2005). Furthermore, the group sessions served as a conduit which generated questions and discussions that were useful in the individual interview sessions (Bryman & Teevan, 2005; Weis & Fine, 2000).

From the above groups, I selected four participants to participate in four individual (45-60 minutes) interview sessions (two students who are academically successful and two students who are not). These students were selected because they made significant contributions in the focus group sessions. For example, they were outspoken, eager to participate and spoke passionately about their experiences. After transcribing the focus group sessions, I provided the participants with pseudonym names,

to protect their identity. I then asked the participants to reflect (make notes) on the process in an attempt to member check their responses from the sessions. However they refused to provide the above reflections.

Therefore, I arranged and conducted the four individual interviews with the participants. Each interview lasted about 45-60 minute; I then transcribed the data and invited the participants to make comments (making notes on transcripts) on their responses to the interview questions. This was an attempt to member check the responses between the two interview sessions and provide me with an understanding of the factors that contributed to their academic success/failure. However, only the girls who were academically successful provided feedback on the interviews.

Theoretical Framework

In an attempt to excavate the factors that contribute to African Jamaican female high school students academic outcomes, I employed an Anti-racist feminist theoretical framework to provide a lens to analyze the data. According to Creswell (2005) a theoretical framework offers a “guiding perspective or ideology that provides structure for advocating for groups, individuals and writing reports” (p.476). Furthermore, Bogdan and Bilken (2007) assert that theoretical frameworks are “ways of looking at the world, the assumptions people have about what is important and what makes the world work” (p. 24). Therefore, it is with the above in mind that I engaged an Anti-racist feminist theoretical framework.

An Anti-racist feminist theoretical framework is a qualitative research strategy, with an emphasis on interpreting, rather than measuring, reality. Anti-racist feminist theory can be defined as: “A body of literature that positions the lives and lived

experiences of women of colour as the starting point for analysis” (Dua, 1999 p. 9). In addition, the Anti-racist feminist framework “attempts to integrate the way race and gender function together in structuring social inequality” within social institutions such as the educational system (Dua, 1999 p. 9). In her analysis of Black feminism, Collins (2000) found that theories such as Marxism, Afrocentrism or White feminist thought could not fully encapsulate the complexities (including the intersections of race, class, gender, abilities/disabilities, etc.) of Black women’s lives and lived experiences. Collins (2000) articulated that by utilizing an Anti-racist feminist framework she was able to capture the intersectionalities and complexities of Black women’s lived realities by placing their ideas and lived experiences as the starting point for analysis.

In addition, Woods (2010) in her study of Black females and their schooling experiences in Canada found that Black females are faced with many challenges which stem from the intersections of their race, class, gender, ethnicity, immigrant status and other aspects of their identity. Therefore, in her attempt to understand the intricacies of their lived experiences, she utilized the Anti-racist feminist framework. Moreover, Woods (2002) in an earlier examination of Black Canadian girls within the educational system, asserts that the Anti-racism feminist framework is a practical lens through which to examine “how schools, through their programs and activities, structure and facilitate the schooling experiences, and ultimately the outcomes, of Black female students” (p.10).

Likewise, it provides a lens to explore how some Black female students are able to negotiate, mediate and manage the educational terrain, (despite being faced with many challenges such as discrimination, racism and sexism) by employing mechanisms such as

motivation, determination and persistence (resiliency) to attain academic success (Evans-Winters, 2011; Gaymes-San Vincente, 2006).

Therefore, the Anti-racist feminist framework was instrumental in providing me with the tools I needed to examine the ways in which race, class, gender and ethnicity intersect with social institutions (school) in structuring and constructing social inequality that affect the lives of the participants (Dua, 1999; Collins, 2000; Woods, 2010).

Furthermore, the Anti-racist feminist framework enabled me to offer theoretical and informed responses to challenging questions about the educational system, such as, why should the values, norms, perspectives and traditions of one social group (White) be adopted as standard by the institutions of society, such as the educational institution? In addition, the Anti-racist feminist framework provides for an examination of “how intersections of race, class, gender, sexual orientation, issues of age and issues of ability actually work to locate women” particularly Black females within social institutions (Robertson, 1999 p. 310).

This framework enabled me to place the lives of the participants at the centre of analysis, thereby, providing a conduit to critically interrogate the complexities and intersections of their lived experiences. By interrogating the factors that contribute to their academic success or failure, the Anti-racist feminist framework reveals how social power and knowledge are shared in contemporary Canadian society (Dua, 1999; Robertson 1999). It provides a way to question and locate how inequities are reproduced within educational institutions (Calliste & Dei, 2000; Collins, 2000). Furthermore, James (2005) writes that “Anti-racist feminists give attention to the historical, political, economic, and cultural context in which the process of racialization in Canada has shaped

and continues to shape women of colour's experience of gender, class and racism" (p. 109).

Data Analysis Procedure

The data were analyzed using the three tools of grounded theory. Grounded theory is an action/interactional oriented method of theory building (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). It is defined as theory derived from systematically gathering data, arising through the research processes (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). It has two main features: the development of theory out of data, and an iterative or recursive approach, which is frequently referring between collecting and analyzing of data. There are three tools of grounded theory: (1) Coding, (2) Theoretical Saturation and (3) Constant Comparison. Coding is the key process in grounded theory; it entails reviewing transcripts and/or field notes and giving labels (names) to items that seem to be of potential theoretical significance and/or that appear to be particularly salient within the social worlds of those being studied (Strauss & Corbin, 1990; Bryman & Teevan, 2005).

There are three types of coding in grounded theory: (i) Open Coding is the process of taking apart, investigating, relating, theorizing, and classifying data; (ii) Axial Coding is a process where data are put back together in innovative ways after Open Coding, by making associations between categories; and (iii) Selective Coding is the process of selecting a main category and analytically comparing it to other categories. (2) Theoretical Saturation is reaching a point in analysis where there is no further point in reviewing the data or collecting new data to see how they fit with concepts or categories. (3) Constant Comparison refers to a process of maintaining a close connection between data and conceptualization (Strauss & Corbin, 1990; Bryman & Teevan, 2005).

I began the analysis with preliminary coding from the focus group interview by listening, comparing and going through the data until general or predetermined categories emerged; by predetermined I included themes such as a Eurocentric curriculum and Institutional racism. Additionally, I cross-examined the data by listening to the individual interviews and compared the categories that were connected or shared in terms of patterns of interaction. My findings were guided by the research questions outlined in chapter one of my study. I concluded the data analysis at the point where concrete categories were conceptualized and categorized with their own properties (Bryman & Teevan, 2005).

Ethical Issues

Creswell (2005) declares that “in all steps of the research process, one needs to engage in ethical practices” (p.11). In addition, Mertler (2006) suggests that “research ethics deals with the moral aspects of conducting research, especially when involving human beings” (p.26). Furthermore, it is “unethical and sometimes illegal to conduct research that exposes participants to harm of any kind” (Creswell, 2005, p. 39). I was cognizant of the above and ensured that the participants were not exposed to any unforeseen harm. In this research there were several ethical issues that were taken into consideration such as ensuring informed consent was gained and maintaining confidentiality and anonymity of the participants’ identities. Therefore, I ensured that all participants read, understood, asked questions for clarifications, and signed the consent forms. In addition, I protected the identity of the participants by using fictitious names and locations. I simultaneously ensured that representations of the participants’ narratives, issues and events are accurate, fair and adequately depicted by having the participant read, reflect and sign off on the authenticity of their interview transcripts.

Furthermore, I was aware that the subject under study was sensitive to issues of language used, in terms of, for example, racism, classism and sexism because they could elicit painful memories. Therefore, I took these issues into consideration when conducting the interviews. Additionally, language was not an issue as I am fluent in the local dialects of the participants.

Chapter 4

Data Analysis

This qualitative research seeks to explore factors that contribute to African Jamaican female high school students' academic success or failure. Therefore, in an attempt to gain a fuller understanding of the phenomenon, I conducted two focus group sessions with seven African Jamaican female students who reside in a small city within the GTA and fit the criteria of the study. From these sessions, I chose four of the participants for individual interviews. This allowed me to assess through the literature review and the participants' responses, the factors they identified as contributing to their academic success or failure, within the educational system.

The interviews were organized so that the participants felt comfortable discussing sensitive issues that were not easily shared with adults. The study was based on an anti-racist feminist framework and individual interviews were informed by themes which emerged from the literature review and initial focus group sessions.

I utilized the three tools of grounded theory to analyze the data. I began with open coding which is the process of listening and going through the data. During this process, I found that there were many factors that were perceived by the participants as contributing to their academic success or failure. The first set of categories I coded focused on factors that significantly contributed to the participants' academic failure such as: (1) negative teachers perceptions, (2) low teachers expectation, (3) lack of positive role models, (4) negative student/teacher relations, (5) lack of academic support, (6) being excluded (7) lack of parental support, (8) suspensions, (9) mono culture curriculum, (10) office referrals, (11) targeted, (12) differential and unequal treatment,

(13) stereotyping, and (14) lack of Black educators in their school. The second set of categories I coded significantly contributed to the participants' academic success. These were (1) positive teacher support, (2) high teacher expectations, (3) positive student/teacher relations, (4) positive parental support, (5) having a caring adult, (6) resiliency, (7) high parental expectations, (8) participation in sports, (9) being silenced by educators, (10) positive peer relations (11) having Black educators in their school.

However, after further analysis of the data, using the process of axial coding and selective coding, I combined categories that were connected or shared patterns of interactions which emerged from the open coding process. The new categories that emerged which drastically contributed to the participants' academic failure were (1) negative teacher perception/low expectations, (2) eurocentric curriculum, (3) lack of parental involvement and (4) school disciplinary practices. New categories emerged which significantly contributed to the participants' academic success, they were, (1) racialized educator as allies, (2) parental involvement, and (3) resiliency of participants.

Personal Vantage Point

Prior to examining the findings of this study, it is appropriate to articulate my perspective of the factors that contribute to African Jamaican female high school students' academic success or failure. I am aware that my race, ethnicity, gender, sexual identity, ability/disability, social class, culture and history provide me with a specific lens to understand our world and consequently a lens for interpreting academic research. This vantage point provides me with a context to critically analyze the research study, especially since the study examines the experiences of young women who share the same gender, race and social background as me. In addition, this provided me with an

opportunity to develop rapport, build trust, achieve social connection and bond with the participants. The above is important when attempting to gather and give meaning to the participants' lived realities.

Furthermore, being an African Jamaican female student and a product of the Canadian educational system, I know some of the challenges that confront African Jamaican female students. Many of the themes that arose in the literature review and the students' narratives are informed by my academic training. Numerous issues that were echoed by the participants are similar to the issues I encountered as a student. As a result, my personal and historical experience will reflect how I understand and interpret the narratives of the participants in this study.

Factors that Contribute to Academic Failure

The intent of this section is to highlight and discuss the factors the participants identified as contributing to their academic failure. After carefully analyzing the data, four core themes emerged which drastically contributed to the participants' academic failure. These are (1) negative teacher perceptions/low expectations, (2) eurocentric curriculum, (3) lack of parental involvement, and (4) experiences with school disciplinary practices.

Negative Teacher Perceptions and Low Expectations

Numerous studies have identified the adverse effect that negative teacher perceptions and low expectations have on Black students' academic outcomes (James, 2011; Obiakor, 1999; Avery and Walker, 1993; Shinn et al, 1987). For example, Francis (2012) noted that teachers often perceived Black female students as less attentive and more disruptive than their White, Asian and Latina counterparts. As a result of these

negative perceptions and low expectations, Black female students are sometimes discouraged from pursuing academic courses. This limits the likelihood of students attending college or university. These factors were evident when the participants expressed that teachers (through their behaviours and attitudes) consistently perceive them as low achievers, who are not capable of attaining academic success (James, 2003). Furthermore, they articulated that these assumptions were based on skin colour and racial stereotypes held by educators. For example, Tilya, (who had successfully completed high school) voiced that:

It's like they [White teacher] already have a mind-set as to who this person is and how they are going to do in their class. I have had so many teachers who expected so little of me and sometimes they might tell you to drop the course because you might not be able to handle it.... I was in an academic math class and the teacher directed a comment at me saying, 'If you can't handle this course then you can leave because this is a difficult course'. I knew that it was, because I am the only Black person in her class. She felt like I did not have the skills to complete grade 12 academic math.

The above experience was echoed by many of the participants throughout the interview sessions. They expressed that they were frequently placed in essential courses by their guidance counsellors, who told them they were not capable of doing applied or academic courses. This was evident when Nadia (who completed high school without an option of attending college or university) articulated that her guidance counsellor consistently changed her courses from applied to essential stating that: "You're not going to do good in applied, so you need to do basic essential, it is better for you. You are not

going to catch on to the applied, so you should stay in essential.” Moreover, Deanna (who dropped out of high school) asserted that her guidance counsellor religiously placed her in essential courses every year stating that this was where she belonged: “I didn’t pick my courses they put me in those classes, they told me it would be easier for me, so I did it, now I am back in school upgrading all my courses”. I noted that Deanna was upset after making the above statements. Therefore, I enquired what was wrong; she explained that during high school, she thought that her guidance counsellor was doing her a favour by placing her in all essential courses, but after leaving school with no option of attending college, university or gaining meaningful employment she realized that her guidance counsellor did not care about her.

The above illustrates the devastating impact that negative teacher perceptions and low expectations had on Deanna’s educational outcomes. These findings are similar to other studies conducted in the United States and Canada regarding the adverse effects that negative assumptions and low teachers’ expectations have on Black students (James, 2011; James, 2004a; Landsman 2004; The Schott Foundation for Public Education, 2010). For example, Kelly & Carbonara (2012) found that when students are placed in essential or lower track courses they become reserved, distracted, disruptive and detach from the schooling environment. In addition, they found that teachers also held negative views about students who are placed in low-track courses. These students were often perceived as dishonest, irritating and prone to having disciplinary problems.

Furthermore, the participants complained that their teachers were not supportive of their academic needs. They declared that educators would often make them feel uncomfortable in the classroom, to the point where they become frustrated and

disengaged from the teaching and learning process (see also Curling & McMurtry, 2008; Dei et al., 1997). For example, Deanna voiced that:

Some teachers [White teachers] make you don't want to be in their class, you don't want to listen to them, you don't want to hear anything that comes out of their mouth. You don't want them to help you do anything; you just want to be away from them. White teachers' gives off negative vibes to Black students, you don't want to be around negative people. Why would I want to listen to people who are not paying me any attention and have no interest in what I want to learn? You help other people [White students] but you are giving us [Black students] a vibe, [negative attitude] like, we [Black students] don't belong here, that doesn't make sense to me.

Likewise, Jennifer (who dropped out of high school) echoed the same sentiments when she expressed that:

I realized that some teachers [White teacher] just don't care, they wouldn't come out and actually say those words, but their attitudes are like that, and then you don't want to ask them for help. I know that I didn't do anything to Ms. Smith, but her attitude, her vibes, it wasn't positive at all. I would know that I needed help with something, but I couldn't ask her. I don't like feeling like that.

The above statements illustrate the extent to which negative teacher attitudes hinder student engagement in the classroom, to the point where students refuse to engage in course work or ask for assistance, regardless of the devastating impact this will have on their academic outcome.

In addition, the participants professed that educators often held stereotypical views of them which made it difficult to attend school. According to Nadia:

Being Black and female made it harder to attend school, the teachers judge you because you are Black, they just look at you and assume that you are all of the nasty stereotypes. You are loud, you skip class, you are rude, you are going to get pregnant and be on welfare. It's like they assume you are doing everything that is bad because they believe that's how Black females behave. They [White teacher] would just automatically see you as that. So it's not easy being Black and female in school.

Other studies have articulated that negative teacher perceptions and low expectations discourage Black students and Black female students from pursuing their full academic potential (Diamond et al., 2007; Dei, 1997). These factors also fuel a vicious cycle of reduced academic self-image among Black students. The consequences of the above are disengagement, academic failures and high dropout rates (Diamond et al., 2007; Noguera, 2003; Dei, 1997).

Lack of Parental Involvement

Research has noted that parental involvement is vital to the academic outcomes of students (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2010; Trask-Tate and Cunningham, 2010; Jeynes, 2005). However, some participants in this study frequently voiced that their parents showed little or no interest to their academic needs. For example, Nadia (who completed high school without an option of attending college or university) expressed:

I wish my mom was more involved in my education. She never asked how I am doing in school. She did not even know the courses I was taking or the grades I

got. She did not know any of my teachers, she never came to not even one parent/teachers interview, she never helped with my homework, she was just not involved at all. I wish she had made my education her priority. I wish she had asked me why my grades were so low or tell me to put in more effort. I believed if she was involved I would have done much better in school.

Research has indicated that when parents are not involved in their children's education, particularly Black students, it places them at risk of dropping out of school (Abduladil & Farmers, 2006). In addition, there has been an increased need for parents and educators to work together in an attempt to foster academic success, because schools alone cannot adequately educate students (Epstein & Sheldon, 2006). The above is evident as Nadia asserted that if her mother had been involved in her education, she would have been more successful. In addition, Tilya (who successfully completed high school) acknowledged her parents lack of involvement when she stated:

My parents were never involved in my education, that's just the way it was. They never asked me how I was doing in school; all they cared about was the report card at the end of the school year. If it was good, I would hear how important education is and if it was bad they would give me the same speech [how important education is]. They never attended any parent/teachers meetings. Never came to any of my games or track meets, yeah they were never involved; it was just something I had to live with.

Here Tilya raised an important point regarding parental involvement and how it is perceived by parents and students. Specifically, her parents seem to perceive parental involvement as checking her report card or giving her a "speech" at the end of the

semester. However, Tilya's perception of parental involvement is attending parent/teachers meetings, having frequent conversations regarding school work and attending her games and track meets during the school year. Her argument is supported by research studies which suggest that "appropriate" parental involvement includes attending extra-curricular activities, parent/teacher meetings, maintaining viable home/school communication, and providing assistance with homework (Trask-Tate & Cunningham, 2010; Wyrick & Rudasill, 2009; Yan, 1999). Furthermore, these findings have been corroborated with other research studies which suggest that Black students who are low achievers tend to have less parental involvement, while high achieving Black students have more parental involvement than their White counterpart (Jeynes, 2005; Gutman & McLloyd, 2000).

Other participants voiced that although their parents wanted to be involved in their education, growing up in a single parent household placed significant limits on their involvement. For example, Deanna (who dropped out of high school) noted that:

My mother was a single mother, and had no time to be involved in my education. She was too busy working and providing for me, my brothers and sister. The only time my mother took time off work was when I got into trouble and she had to meet with the principal. After the meeting she went straight to work. She never asked about school, she was never home, she was always at work. I had to do everything for myself. The only thing my mom did was look at my report card at the end of the semester and said *nothing*....

Deanna's experience is consistent with other research which shows the impact that social class has on parental involvement (Archer-Banks & Behar-Horenstein, 2008). Based on

their study, Diamond & Gomez (2004) found that working-class Black parents were less involved with their children's education due to socioeconomic challenges. In addition, these parents are usually less educated and have difficulties navigating the educational system (Diamond & Gomez, 2004).

The participants also expressed the negative impact that migration has had on their parents' involvement in their education. For example, Riley (who successfully completed high school) said that when her mother was in Jamaica she was very involved in Riley's education, to the point where her mother became friends with her teachers. She further stated that her mother would consistently enquire about her homework, assignments and ensured that all her educational needs were met. However, after migrating to Canada her mother became too busy with work, her own personal life, and navigating the Canadian social and economic structures to assist with her education.

Riley said the following:

When I came to Canada, things changed drastically, it was like I was on my own, everyone was on their own basically, so I had to put in my own interest. I had to make sure that I wanted this [an education] because I was the only one pushing myself. I had to keep pushing myself; she would ask for my report card because she wanted to know that my marks were ok. But the support through the year to ensure that I was doing well in school was not there. She never asked if I needed help, if I had the right books, if I had homework, she was just more involved with work and her new life. I remember saying to her, 'you don't even ask about school or anything; and she said: 'Oh mi busy wid work and tings, I caan rememba' [*Oh I am busy with work and things, I can't remember*]. My father, he

was never there, when I lived with him in Jamaica, he would provide food and shelter, but he never came to any of my school meetings or events. He would pay the school fee and that was it. He didn't know anything that was going on in school.

James (2011) underscores the above when he states that immigrant parents have high academic expectations for their children; however, their immigrant experience does not always provide them the time, opportunity or resources to navigate the Canadian educational landscape. As a result, they are ill-equipped to provide meaningful parental support to their children.

All the participants in this study consistently stressed the value of parental support and how it has impacted their educational outcomes. These findings are aligned with other research studies, which have articulated the significant impact parental involvement has on students' academic success or failure (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2010; Archer-Banks & Behar-Horenstein, 2008; Jeynes, 2005; Gutman & McLloyd, 2000).

Eurocentric Curriculum

Research continues to illustrate that the official school curriculum is disempowering to Black students, to the point where they become detached from the teaching and learning process (Curling and McMurtry, 2008; School Community Advisory Panel, 2008; Ontario Ministry of Education, 1993; Dei, 1995; Lewis, 1992). In addition, the literature points to the fact that Black students have articulated that they do not see themselves reflected in the curricular content of schools. This was articulated by Nadia (who completed high school without an option of attending college or university) when she stated:

The White kids got to lead the group things like prom committee, arts night and things like that. Never the Black kids and when we try to get involved they make you feel so uncomfortable. They talk about what they like, they don't include our ideas and the teachers don't do anything to help us. Their [White students] ideas would be picked over ours and we would get shot down most of the time. Maybe they don't think our ideas are good, but it's like they wouldn't even try. So did I feel included in my high school? No!

Riley (who successfully completed high school) also articulated her frustration with the curriculum:

The only time that they [teachers] would say something about Black people or Black history was in February during Black History Month. I have never read a book about a Black person in high school. Even when its Black History Month, it's the same people they talk about, Rosa Parks and Martin Luther King, that's it. There was no mention of anything Black, there was just Canadian history [Europeans history] and all about Canadians [Europeans].

This lack of curriculum representation has been cited in numerous research studies as a major contributor to Black students' academic failure (Curling and McMurtry, 2008; Dei et al, 1997; Ontario Ministry of Education, 1993). In addition, a mono-cultural curriculum excludes the experience of other racialized groups and, therefore, places limits on their academic outcomes (Curling & McMurtry, 2008; Ministry of Education, 1993).

Tylia (who successfully completed high school) uttered similar concerns when she stated:

There is nothing in there [the curriculum]; there is nothing on my background. I think if they included people like Marcus Garvey, Michelle Jean, or Barack Obama into the lessons, it would give me and other Black students drive to be more involved in our school work. We want to hear and learn about Black people and our history, so we can feel a sense of pride and accomplishment.

Here Tilya expressed the need to see herself reflected and represented in the official school curriculum. In essence, Tilya is asserting what other researchers have found, the present school curriculum excludes the experiences of Blacks and other racialized students. Consequently, it offers limited opportunities for Black students to cultivate pride in their African/Black heritage (Curling & McMurtry, 2008; Lee, 1996; Ontario Ministry of Education, 1993; Lewis, 1992).

Furthermore, Diamond (who is currently on track to completing high school and attend university) asserts: "I think if they [teachers] include our history into the curriculum we would be encouraged and feel better about ourselves. We are a part of this country; we have been here for hundreds of years". Kelly (who successfully completed high school) summed it up when she asserted: "Honestly, schools can do more to incorporate our heritage and culture so that we can learn more about it as we grow up. I think it would be better for everyone". In addition, the participants expressed that the curriculum's depiction of Blacks is stereotypical. For example, Tilya asserts "the only areas where Black people are represented is in dance, sports, rap music and Black History Month, where they tell you that you are descendants of slaves". When students do not see themselves reflected in the curriculum - "the textbooks, pictures, posters, announcements, the language spoken in school, the office staff and teachers"- or when their only depiction

is through stereotypical lens, they become disconnected from the schooling environment (Dei., et al, 2000). This lack of representation and negative depictions ultimately lead to academic failure (Curling & McMurtry, 2008; Dei, 1997; Lee, 1996; Ontario Ministry of Education, 1993).

School Disciplinary Practices

School disciplinary practices have been highlighted as a significant contributor to Black students, academic failure (Chavous et al., 2008; School Community Advisory Panel, 2008; Glaze and Wright, 1998). For example, research asserts that Black students are suspended and expelled at a much higher rate than their peers (Drakeford, 2006; James, 2003; Skiba & Knesting, 2002). The participants raised this issue and explained how unequal disciplinary practices had impacted their educational outcomes. For example, Nadia (who completed high school without an option of attending college or university) communicated that her school's disciplinary practices are inequitable:

I wore a top which showed a little cleavage and I was sent home for 3 days. I was upset because I did not think that showing a little cleavage merit being suspended, especially when White girls do the same thing or even worse; they show 'crackage' [showing the crack of your buttock] and are not suspended. They wear short stuff, really short stuff to school and I'm thinking that they are going to get suspended or into trouble because if I wore that, which I won't, I would get suspended. I hate that!

Deanna (who dropped out of high school) voiced similar views when she expressed: "I use to get suspended a lot, for no reason! Every time I came to school if I showed a little cleavage I would get suspended. My principal would send me home for a week because I

showed a little cleavage”. Nadia’s and Deanna’s experiences are similar to those of respondents in other research studies which suggest that Black female students were cited more for dress code violation than for their academic aptitudes (Archer-Banks & Behar-Horenstein, 2012; Chavous et al., 2008; Fordham 1993). Deanna continued to explain how school disciplinary practices underwrote her academic failure:

One morning I came to school, I was not feeling well, my English teacher requested that I read out loud. I told her I don’t feel comfortable reading right now. She then called the office and told them that I was being disrespectful and disrupting her class. The principal came down. I tried to explain what happened but she did not listen. She escorted me out of class, called my mother, told her I was being rude and disruptive, and suspended me for three days.

Wentzel (2002) suggests that Deanna’s experience is not uncommon, teachers frequently perceive Black students as belligerent, ill-mannered and rebellious. As a result, of these perceptions Black students are at risk of higher suspensions, expulsions, dropouts and academic failures (Townsend, 2000; James, 2004a; Glaze & Wright, 1998; Dei, 1995).

Furthermore, the participants voiced that Black students receive harsher punishment for similar behavioural issues than their White counterparts (Ontario Human Rights Commission, 2004). This was illustrated by Riley (who successfully completed high school) when she stated:

You could tell that some teachers [White] were disgusted when dealing with Black kids who got into trouble. However, when dealing with White kids who gave the same amount or even more trouble than the Black kids, they would talk to the White kids like it’s nothing or let them get off with everything. But they

would pick on that Black kids and send them to the office every chance they got.

They [White teachers] would insult them [Black students] and say, they [White teachers] don't know why they [Black students] are here [in school].

Riley's comments illustrate the disparities that remain in schools' disciplinary practices.

These inequalities have been noted as a major factor which exclude and limit Black students educational opportunities (Schott Foundation for Public Education, 2010; Curling & McMurtry, 2008; School Community Advisory Panel, 2008; James, 2004b; Glaze and Wright, 1998; Dei, 1995).

Factors That Contribute to Academic Success

Racialized Educators as Allies

Throughout the interview process, the participants repeatedly expressed how specific teachers (who were usually Black or racialized) took time to ensure that they were successful; even the students who had experienced academic failure identified a caring teacher as being significant during their academic careers. The participants viewed these teachers as allies, someone they could rely on in any situation. These teachers held high expectations for all their students, regardless of their race, class or gender. In addition, they took time to assist them with class assignments, homework and personal issues. These teachers encouraged them, scolded them when they were out of line, and showed them genuine love and affection. For example, Riley (who successfully completed high school) recounted her experience:

I remember I skipped class for an entire week because I was facing family problems at home. I was at school but I didn't go to class. All my teachers just assumed that I was skipping class, except for a South Asian teacher. She searched

for me in the halls, when she found me, we talked about my problems. It helped me and motivated me to do better because she cared. She could have assumed that I skipped class like my other teachers, but she didn't. She was my math teacher, she really cared about me. We had a good relationship, she always wanted to know if I was ok, and she always asked me about my other courses. She didn't just show interest in her class but in all my other courses. If I was sad she would want to know what was wrong. She inspired me to the point where I would try to get the best marks not just in her class but all my other classes. I really valued the relationship we had and I did not want to let her down.

Riley's experience with her math teacher illustrated the positive impact that radicalized educators have on racialized students (Bonner, 2009). Ryan et al. (2007) noted that visible minority educators possess the skills to develop and maintain meaningful relationships with racialized students, which is vital to their academic success and future life chances.

Several of the participants (two who were academically successful and two who were not) uttered similar accounts of racialized educators who extended themselves to support their educational needs. For instance, Tilya declared:

I had a Black teacher and he wanted me to do well. He would push me to come to him for extra help. As a Black person, they [Black teachers] want you to do better, he told me that himself: He said 'as a Black individual I want you to excel in this class, so if you need extra help please come and see me'. He was very particular about making me successful. He cared about my education, none of my other teachers showed that kind of interest. He had high expectations for me. This

made me want to work hard because I did not want to disappoint him. I wanted him to see that all his effort was not for nothing. Sometimes, I wish he would lay off a little bit because he's was on my case, but at the end of the day, I know he was good for me.

The teacher's high expectation of Tilya motivated her to go beyond what she perceived was possible. She noted that: "I handed in an assignment and he gave me a C+ and I thought that I deserved at least a B. When I spoke with him about it, he said, you can do much better than a B. He showed me why I received a C+ and how to improve my mark to an A".

Tilya's narrative is the basis on which Bonner (2009) proposed that Black educators are vital to Black students social and academic progress, as they hold high expectations for Black students. Their association nurtures a positive self-image, self-assurance, and leadership abilities. Moreover, Black educators interpret the teaching and learning processes as an opportunity to link the values at home with the values at school (Bonner, 2009). This is evident in Deanna's comment:

At my old school there was a Black female teacher who actually pushed me to succeed. We had a good relationship. We would stop in the hall and just talk, sometimes about something specific or just anything. She even did a recommendation letter for me. No other teacher would have done that for me. We had a mutual respect for each other; we simply liked each other. We had a disagreement before. She pushed my buttons, you know; but we talked about it. No other teacher would have talked to me about it and showed me that I was wrong. I would let her scold me and I wouldn't even say anything because I know

that she's just looking out for me. At the end of the day, she really cared about me, so I never disrespect her in any kind of way. She motivated us to come to class. She made us comfortable and made sure we understood the work. I did a project for class and got an A+; I was so happy. She put it up in the class because she liked it. I felt positive, I saw myself in a positive way. At the end of the day I knew that I had a teacher at school that I could go and talk to about anything. Lots of people don't have that at school.

Other research suggests that racialized teachers are more familiar with the experiences of racialized students; therefore, they are more apt to recognize the multiplicity of issues (historical, political, migration, cultural, social and economic) which have moulded racialized students schooling experiences (Foster, 1995). Nadia echoed this idea when she stated:

I realized that Black teachers are more sympathetic and empathetic towards all students. To be honest, they are more involved in school activities than White teachers. White teachers are 'different' from Black teachers, even teachers from other cultures are 'different', like Asian teachers, they are nice, but White teachers are just 'different'. I'm not saying all White teachers are bad, because I have had some who were very nice. But what I am saying is that, Black teachers and Asian teachers try to connect with you on your level. What I mean by this is that they know where you're coming from and they understand what you are saying, how you are saying it, and what you mean by it. They don't think that you're being disrespectful or rude they understand that this is how 'we' speak.

What Nadia was alluding to is what research has referred to as “cultural synchronization” — that is, the capability of racialized educators to interpret and comprehend students’ languages, dialects, ebonics, vernacular, mannerism, intellectual abilities, and communication styles (Ryan et al, 2007).

Similarly, Tillman (2004) affirms that racialized educators operate as cultural mediators; they are skilled at assisting students negotiate the educational landscape. Kelly explains how a racialized teacher supported her and other students during their academic tenure:

I have only had one Black teacher in my life. She was my grade 11 religious teacher Mrs. Daphne; she loved to see kids succeed. We could go to her for anything, talk to her about everything, she made the work fun and she made it fun for everyone not just the Black students. She motivated us to learn and she treated everyone fairly. She was always there for us when we needed help.

Kelly’s accounts of Mrs. Daphne’s interaction with her students demonstrate the expertise that teachers from racialized background bring to the educational milieu. Research asserts that this affiliation is key to the success of all students, regardless of their race, class or gender (Villegas & Davis, 2005; Henry, 1998a).

Parental Involvement

Research has indicated that parents, unlike educators, play a unique and dynamic role in children’s lives. This is largely due to the fact that (for the most part) parents serve as reliable resources for their children (Trask-Tate & Cunningham, 2010). Furthermore, numerous studies have articulated that parental involvement is vital to the development and academic success of children (Gillborn et al. 2012; Ontario Ministry of Education,

2010; Sanders, 1997; Wyrick & Rudasill, 2009; Yan, 1999). Throughout this research the young women (three who were academically successful) spoke about the impact that their parents had on their academic outcomes. For example, Riley voiced that:

My mom was always there; right throughout high school in Jamaica. She would help with my homework, she wanted to know about all my assignments, my mom wanted to know everything. She ensured that I did all my homework, assignments and did not waste time. She attend every parent teachers meetings, she wanted to know that I had everything under control. When I came to Canada, she took me to the high school, got me registered and ensured that I got into all the courses that would put me on the right track [to university]. She ensured I understood what I needed to do in order to get into university.

Riley's account of her mother's involvement in her education has been echoed by other researchers as a major contributor to students' academic success (Trask-Tate & Cunningham, 2010). Gillborn et al. (2012) suggest that Black parents provide supportive home environments, help with homework, consistently communicate behavioural limits, frequently interact with educators, and have meaningful dialogue with their children about the values of achieving academic success. In addition, research has established that these conversations help to promote positive self-image and leadership skills. This, in turn, nurtures and supports academic success in the face of racism and discrimination which Black students encounter on a daily basis in schools and society (Jeynes, 2005; Sanders, 1997).

Kelly articulated that her mother was immersed in her education. She credits her academic success to her mother's constant support and encouragement. Kelly expressed it in the following way:

I love my mom, she has always been there. Whenever I needed help with my work she is always there. She really stayed in-depth into what I was doing, if I had a quiz she would know and would want to know the result. She attended parent/ teachers meetings, my cheer leading competitions, my mom did it all.

Now here I am, [college] I owe it all to her.

Kelly's depiction of her mother's involvement demonstrates that when parents are involved in their children's education it promotes positive parent/child and school relations, which is a conduit to academic success (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2010).

Diamond voiced similar parental involvement:

My mom is very involved in my education. She helps with my assignments, checks my homework and ensures that I study for all my exams. My mom and I always talk about the importance of graduating from high school, attending university and getting a good job. She attends parents/teachers meetings, school concerts and anything that I am involved in. My mom ensures that I get the things I need for school. If anything goes wrong at school, I can always go to my mom; she would help me sort things out.

These account of parental involvement is consistent with what Yan (1999) identifies as "effective" parental involvement. Yan asserts that when parents develop viable social networks between themselves, educators and students, they are in essence facilitating academic success.

Resiliency of Participants

Resiliency was another factor that the young women (two who were academically successful and one who was not, but, is back in school to upgrade courses) attributed to their academic success. Resiliency - their own inner strength and ingenuity to achieve success. The participants assert that they had to overcome many personal, family and economic challenges, coupled with negative perceptions often held by educators. They were perceived as loud, low achievers, socially backward and inadequately feminine to name a few (Archer-Banks & Behar-Horenstein, 2012; James, 2005; Frazier-Kouassi, 2002). These were stereotypes that respondents tried to go against. In doing so, they relied on their inner strength to ensure that they succeeded in school.

Riley expressed this idea of resiliency in the following way:

After we moved to Canada my mom was no longer involved in my education. She was too busy with work and her own life to notice that I needed help. She did not ask me anything about school, I was on my own. I was alone. My drive [resiliency] was the most important thing, it kept me going, it made me want to succeed at everything I do. If I failed, I would have let down a lot of people, I always tried to put out my best, even when I felt like giving up. I kept on thinking that even though my parents showed little interest, I wanted to make them proud. They were there at some point, so for them and others, I always tried to put in *extra* effort to succeed.

Riley's drive to succeed has been cited in other research which suggests that despite their challenges, Black female students have been able to overcome many obstacles to achieve academic success (Clark, 2006). In addition, research suggests that Black female students

have high expectation, high self-esteem, are highly confident and often made good grades (Clark, 2006; Fuller, 1980).

Tilya explained that she is aware that teachers hold low expectations of her and therefore, she uses it as a motivator for her success. She asserted:

I felt like I had to drive myself and motivate myself academically to succeed.

They [White teachers] already have a negative outlook that you will not succeed because you are Black. They believe that you are not interested in your education; you are going to get pregnant and drop out of school or some other stereotype. So you have to prove to them that you are going to do well, and as well or even better than the 'other' students in the class. You have to prove them wrong or live up to their expectations of you.

Tilya's felt that in order to achieve academic success she had to consistently prove to educators that she was not the "stereotype". Often when educators have low expectation for Black students they tend to perpetuate and support the self-fulfilling prophecies of academic failure (Bakker et. al, 2007; Glaze & Wright, 1998; Jussim et. al, 1996).

Other participants voiced that their lived experiences inspired them to succeed.

For example, Nadia articulated that:

My life, that's what made me want to succeed, I don't want to be a failure, I don't want to be a drop out. My mother tries, I'm her first child; I'm her only child without a father. My mother dropped out of high school because she got pregnant with me. So I look at her life now and think, where she could have been if she did not get pregnant in high school. I don't want that for myself, so I work hard at

everything I do. I have to succeed, there is no other way out, I need my education.

I needed to make my mother proud. I needed to make me proud.

Nadia explains how her mother's circumstance and her lived experiences are motivation for academic success. She asserts that getting an education is the only way out of her present situation. This is in line with research that suggests that Black females often associated academic success with social and economic prosperity (Evans-Winters, 2011).

Furthermore, Evans-Winters (2011) suggests that resiliency in Black females is borne out of their "ability to recover from or adjust to problems, adversities, and stress" (p. 20). The participants were able to use their inner strength and ingenuity to convert their circumstances into positive outcomes.

Summary

After systematically analyzing the data through selective coding it became evident that the factors that contributed to Black female students' academic failure are grounded in institutionalized racism and sexism. All the participants expressed that they had experienced some form of racism and sexism during their academic tenancy. They voiced that they had to negotiate various forms of racist and sexist attitudes, beliefs and practices (overt and covert) which often placed them in a deficit position, thus limiting their academic potentials. This is not surprising given the historical foundation of racism and sexism within the Canadian educational system (Henry & Tator, 2006). For example, historically the Canadian educational system has been premised on the ideology of assimilation –the total immersion of different ethnic and racial groups into European cultures, values and belief systems. This was (is) considered the ideal model for educational institutions and society (Henry & Tator, 2006). Thus, the training of

educators, the practice of teaching, the content and context of the curriculum and the hiring and promoting of staff was and continues to be grounded in monoculturalism (Eurocentrism) . This pervasive, coercive and patriarchal ideology continues to dictate the educational system and has had a devastating impact on the social and academic outcomes of Black and other racialized students (Curling and McMurtry, 2008; Henry & Tator, 2006; Glaze & Wright, 1998; Dei 1997; Ontario Ministry of Education, 1993)

In addition, the social construction of Black females as backwards, domestics, mummies, welfare recipients and single mothers has penetrated the social, “cultural”, political and economic aspect of society (Collins, 2000). As a result, Black females are often perceived by educators as less feminine, bad-mannered and socially backward (Clark, 2006). These constructions intersect with institutionalized racism and have severely limited Black female students’ educational opportunities and future life chances.

In essence, Black females have been marginalized into a hazardous space where they must choose between the fight against race, gender or class oppressions. This positionality has forced Black females into a desperate struggle for survival (Brock, 2005) For instance, the participants in this study articulated that their race and gender were key factors, which dictated the types of interactions they had with educators. They expressed that White educators would consistently refer them to the office for minor offences and would make negative comments to them such as, “you are lucky that you are not out there picking cotton, you should dress like a “lady” or I’m not the one who will be living on welfare”. In addition, they spoke about being treated like criminals, humiliated, targeted, streamed, excluded, suspended, expelled, harassed, stereotyped and

treated differently and unequally to their White counterparts. As one participant voiced, “We just want them (White educators) to treat us like they treat the White kids.”

It is evident from the above that racist and sexist attitudes, beliefs, practices and policies have been entrenched within the Canadian educational system. They are operationalized via unequal disciplinary practices, negative teacher perceptions, low teacher expectations, lack of Black educators and a mono-culture curriculum. As a result, we cannot ignore that institutionalized racism, sexism and the devalued position of Blacks in our society have significantly contributed to Black female students’ underachievement in the Canadian educational system (Codjoe, 1997).

Likewise, the factors that contributed to Black female students’ academic success were centred on having a racialized educators or an involved parent during their high school career. The participants expressed that these individuals were instrumental to their academic success, self-esteem, self-assurance and ultimately their resiliency; they demonstrated genuine interest in the students’ social and academic wellbeing.

Furthermore, the participants voiced that it was particularly important that their teachers had a sense of cultural proficiency, thus, enabling them to better facilitate their academic, social and cultural needs. As previously mentioned, Black or racialized educators have the capacity to interpret and comprehend students’ language, ebonics and communication styles (Ryan et al, 2007). Thus, racialized educators act as cultural mediators by assisting students with their social, cultural and academic needs (Tillman, 2004).

Nevertheless, it is important to note that it is not being suggested that only Black or racialized educators are able to support the academic, social and cultural needs of

Black female students, as many of the participants voiced that they had caring White educators who supported them throughout their schooling experiences. What is being suggested is that *all* educators need to equip themselves with diverse ways of knowing in order to meet the needs of their multicultural, multiracial and multilingual student population.

Chapter Five

Summary, Limitations, Contributions, Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to critically investigate the factors that contribute to African Jamaican female high school students' academic success or failure in a small city within the GTA. As a Black female student, I was particularly interested in this segment of the population, as it is the perception that Black female students are experiencing high levels of academic success, when compared to their male counterparts (Gaymes-San Vicente 2006). It has also been my experience that Black females were outperforming Black males. For example, at my university graduation in 2010, I counted only five Black males in contrast to at least sixty Black females who were graduating.

Furthermore, as an individual who works and volunteers in high schools within the GTA, I have noticed that Black female students were graduating at a higher rate than Black males. This phenomenon prompted my curiosity; I was eager to find out what factors might account for Black female students' educational outcomes. Moreover, it is evident from the literature that Black students, particular Black males, face an assortment of challenges such as low teacher expectations, negative teacher perceptions, unfair/unequal disciplinary practices, and the negative impact of a mono-curriculum within the educational system (Curling & McMurtry, 2008; School Community Advisory Panel, 2008). These challenges have been cited in numerous research studies as barriers to their academic and social success (James, 2010; 2011; Curling & McMurtry, 2008; School Community Advisory Panel, 2008; Glaze & Wright, 1998; Dei 1997).

In addition, research has indicated that Black students were dropping out of high school at significantly higher rates than their White peers (TDSB, 2008). However, there

was no mention of the percentage of Black females or what factors were contributing to their academic failure. Finally, the lack of Canadian literature on Black female students' high school experiences has also fuelled my interest about the factors which contribute to their success or failure.

This study employed an anti-racist feminist framework and critically engaged the following research questions: What are the factors that contribute to Black female high school students' academic success or failure? (2) How are Black females experiencing the school system? (3) How do racism and sexism intersect in the school system and impact Black female students' academic outcomes? The investigation found that the major themes which contributed to their academic failure were, negative teacher perception/low expectations, a eurocentric curriculum, lack of parental involvement, and school disciplinary practices. However, contributing to their academic success were racialized educators as allies, parental involvement and resiliency.

Summary of Major Findings

The data suggest that Black female high school students face similar academic challenges as their male counterparts. For instance, Black female students have to negotiate negative teacher perceptions, low expectations, lack of representation or inclusion in the official school curriculum, and unfair and unequal disciplinary practices within the educational system. In addition, the study found that some Black female students are not able to manoeuvre the above challenges, which at times are coupled with other personal and family issues such as lack of parental support and low self-esteem. These factors together with institutionalized racism and sexism limit the educational outcome of Black female students. For example, in order to attain academic success,

Black female students must negotiate and manoeuvre a patriarchal and Eurocentric educational system, which is laden with negative perceptions, racist attitudes, and inequitable practices (Gaymes-San Vicente, 2006). As a result, Black females are scarcely mentioned in the official school curriculum and when they are mentioned it is often through the stereotypical lens of slavery, poverty, sexual promiscuity, aggression and loudness. In essence, Black females hold a location within the educational system that consistently places them at-risk of not succeeding (Evans-Winters, 2011; Woods, 2010; Gaymes-San Vicente, 2006).

Notwithstanding the above challenges, there are Black female students who are able to negotiate the educational terrain and succeed academically. These students are self-motivated and have parents who are able to foster their social and academic needs at home and school. According to Trask-Tate and Cunningham (2010) academically successful Black females students have supportive homes; their parents consistently discuss the value of attaining academic success and the significance of maintaining appropriate behaviour at home and at school. In addition, these students are supported (not exclusively but predominantly) by racialized educators who are able to motivate, cultivate and facilitate their social and academic aptitude. In other words, these educators act in loco parenti (in place of the parents).

Factors That Contribute to Academic Failure

As previously mentioned, the study revealed that negative teacher perceptions and low expectations have significantly led to academic failure for some Black female students. According to the participants, these perceptions and expectations were often used by educators to gauge their social and academic intelligence quotient. For example,

many of the participants voiced that they were frequently placed in non-academic classes by their guidance counsellors who perceived them to be academically incapable of managing academic or applied courses. Furthermore, they were discouraged from pursuing academic courses by educators who expressed that these courses were “difficult” and, therefore, it would be in their “best interest” to choose non-challenging courses. When educators rely on their uninformed perception to measure students’ social and academic prowess, what they are doing is limiting student success, maintaining inequitable outcomes, and supporting institutionalized racism (James, 2004; Noguera, 2003). Educators need to be aware of their positions, the power they hold, and how their actions, attitudes, values and beliefs shape the outcome of all students, particularly racialized students.

Eurocentric curricula was another factor that emerged as a barrier to Black female students’ academic success. The study suggests that the official school curriculum does not portray Black students in a positive manner, nor is it inclusive of their values, norms, beliefs, traditions or histories. This lack of representation leaves Black female students feeling isolated, alienated and disconnected from the school milieu. When education is delivered through a Eurocentric lens it inevitably erases the contributions of “other” groups, who have contributed to the development and settlement of the Canadian landscape. A mono-cultural curriculum functions as a racist and sexist ideology, which structures, preserves and perpetuates the power dynamics in society. Furthermore, it maintains, communicates and reproduces a system of European conquest, exploration and supremacy based on race (Henry & Tator, 2006; Codjoe, 1997). In essence, the presence of a mono-cultural curriculum endorses institutionalized racism and sexism, limits the

opportunities of Black female students, and operates as a systemic barrier to their academic success and upward mobility (Henry & Tator, 2006). Therefore, in order to generate academic success, reduce achievement gap, and “reach every child”, educational policymakers and administrators must incorporate resources that are reflective of the Canadian “multicultural” mosaic.

School disciplinary practice was another factor that drastically contributed to Black female students’ academic outcomes. The participants frequently voiced that they were not given the same “privileges” or treated in the same manner as their White peers. Their accounts of unfair disciplinary practices by educators and school administrators spoke to issues of “White privilege”, power, discrimination, marginalization and inequity in schools. This has been cited by previous research as a major contributor to negative academic outcome for racialized students (Chavous et al., 2008; Lei, 2003; Glaze & Wright, 1998; Dei et. al, 1997). When school disciplinary practices intersect with inequity and institutionalized discrimination, Black female students become marginalized and, therefore, are at risk of academic failure and dropping out. Thus, it is vital that educators use discretion, empathy and operate through an equitable and non-discriminatory approach, which gives attention to the intersection of race, class, gender, abilities and disabilities when applying school disciplinary policies.

The study suggests that lack of parental involvement in some Black female students’ education has significantly curtailed their educational success. Several of the participants expressed the negative impact their parents’ lack of involvement had on their academic outcomes. They asserted that despite their parents being aware of the value of education, they were either too busy with work or their personal lives to assist them with

their educational needs. This lack of involvement often left them feeling alone, lost and confused, especially when they did not have a supportive adult at school or in the community. Research suggests that this inconsistency leads to loss of education, higher drop-out rates, increased criminalization and anti-social behaviours in racial minority children, particularly Black students (Ontario Human Rights Commission, 2004). Hence, it is imperative that parents, particularly Black parents, play an active role in their children's educational journey because their contributions or lack thereof can have enduring consequences.

Factors That Contribute to Academic Success

This study found that despite the various challenges that the participants faced on a daily basis, many have been able to persevere and achieve academic success. They were able to attain success with the support of parents, teachers and self-determination (resiliency).

Parental involvement emerged as the most significant factor in the success of Black female students. It provided students with a stable environment, enhanced their academic potential, improved self-confidence, fostered positive student/teacher relations, reduced negative teacher perceptions, and enriched the home/school relationships (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2010; Trask-Tate & Cunningham, 2010). Furthermore, the study revealed that students became inspired, eager to learn, behaved "appropriately," and pursued post-secondary studies when their parent(s) are passionately involved in their educational and social needs. The evidence clearly indicates that parental involvement is instrumental to the success of Black female students. For this reason, educators, parents

and policymakers need to ensure that parental involvement is at the core of educational policies and practices.

The study further unearthed that racialized educators, particularly Black educators were influential to Black female students' academic success. These educators provided students with social, emotional and academic support; this in turned spawned student engagement, self-confidence, leadership skills, and ultimately student success. In addition, the study revealed that when Black or racialized educators were able to relate to Black female students' experiences, shared their views and values, as aptly stated by one of the participants , "they understand where we are coming from." Furthermore, they comprehended and recognized the social, political, economic and historical landscapes, which have shaped, and continues to shape, the educational realities of Black female students. Pang and Gibson (2010) had similar findings; they suggest that Black educators are far more than physical role models for Black students. These educators enrich the school environment with a variety of family histories, values, traditions and lived experiences. They emphasized that Black educators are vital to the success of Black students. This is due to the fact that they share similar experiences, beliefs and viewpoints. In addition, my research found that Black or racialized educators held high expectations for Black female students; this inspired them to excel and achieve academic success. Given the ethnic and cultural diversity of the GTA and the dynamic skills that racialized educators bring to the learning environment, it is, therefore, advantageous for the educational system to hire, support and promote culturally relevant educators.

Finally, my examination revealed that the students' abilities and desire to pursue their goals and succeed despite facing various social, economic, and educational barriers

–in short, their resiliency –have extensively contributed to their academic success. The study suggests that students succeed when they are aware of how their race, class and gender intersect with institutionalized discrimination within the educational system to mediate their academic outcomes. This awareness allows them to manoeuvre the social and educational structures. In addition, the study illustrated that students achieve academic success when they are conscious of the value of education, their lived realities, and education’s capacity to elevate them from their various social and economic circumstances. Similarly, the study indicates that when Black females are cognizant of their “location” (young, Black, female and working class) and the challenges associated with their “position”, this knowledge motivates them with the ingenuity and resourcefulness (resiliency) needed to navigate and succeed in the educational terrain (Gaymes-San Vicente, 2006). Evan-Winters (2011) suggests that Black female students are raised to be strong-minded individuals as well as dedicated students. In addition, they are often aware that their situations do not define their destiny. As a result, Black female students are often able to negotiate racism, sexism and classism at home, school, in their communities and society to achieve academic success.

In order to understand and mediate the factors that contribute to Black female students’ academic success or failure, policymakers, educators, parents and students need to become conscious of how race, class and gender intersect with institutionalized barriers such as racism and sexism to impede their academic potential. When educational stakeholders become aware of the issues surrounding Black female students’ educational experiences, they will be better equipped to facilitate the educational needs of Black students, particularly Black female students.

This qualitative research has explored some of factors that contribute to Black female students academic success or failure in high schools, specifically in a small city within the GTA. However, given the narrow scope of this investigation additional research is warranted in order to probe further. My hope is that the findings and suggestions in this study will provide educators, parents, policymakers, and students, particularly Black female students, with a conduit from which to critically interrogate and navigate the educational system.

Limitation of Study

The limitations are as follows: The results of the study cannot be generalized beyond the scope of this research. Therefore, application of the results to other research focusing on Black females' educational experience should be taken with precaution as the results are based on a specific group of participants. As such, given that the diversity and complexities of Black females have shaped their educational experiences, a different group of participants could render significantly different results.

A further limitation of this study is that the participants who were experiencing academic failure would not participate in the focus group session with the young women who were experiencing academic success. This was unexpected but understandable, as the girls who were experiencing academic failure may have felt uncomfortable discussing their academic experiences in the presence of girls they perceived to be more intelligent. In addition, they may have felt that the academically successful girls would not understand their social and educational challenges and, therefore, would judge them based on their lack of success. However, this limited the richness of the data, as I did not have an opportunity to probe both groups at the same time. This would have allowed me

to gain a different, if not a better understanding of the factors, as participants would have been able to correct, challenge, agree with or probe each other's responses, thus providing additional data for analysis.

The third limitation involved some of the participants' refusal to provide their written reflections on the interview transcripts. The participants expressed that this exercise was time consuming; furthermore, they articulated that they were comfortable with their responses during the interview sessions and did not see the need to write reflections on their transcripts. Therefore, I was not able to member check my interpretation of the data with the participants' responses.

The fourth limitation involved more time and additional human and financial resources. I would have liked to broaden the interviews so that they incorporated not just African Jamaican female students but also other Black female students from the Black/African diaspora, educators and parents. It is anticipated that the increased sample size would have provided diverse insights and perspectives in terms of what they perceived as the factors that contribute to the problem under study.

In addition, the research is limited because I did not have the means to conduct the study in multiple locations over a prolonged period of time. This would have provided an opportunity to member check responses, extract additional data for examination, reduce researcher bias and effects, and decrease threats to the credibility and validity of the study. Despite the limitations, it is my sincere desire that this study will enrich the literature on how Black female students are experiencing the Canadian educational system.

Contributions to Education

Educational research is embarked on with a vision of refining teaching, learning and the educational processes. By its nature, it is anticipated that guidelines, policies, procedures, structures and curriculum will be enriched and advanced; so that educational practices and academic organizations will mature proficiently and successfully (Oyesola, 1988). Consequently, this research aims to provide teachers, administrators, policymakers, parents, stakeholders and students with a glimpse into the multiplicity of issues affecting the outcomes of Black students, particularly Black female students.

As previously mentioned, the literature that focuses on Black female students' educational experiences in Canada is limited. Therefore, it is my hope that this research will function as a spring board to spawn additional research which critically interrogates Black females' experiences in the Canadian educational system. Furthermore, this study will provide educators with additional insights, knowledge and understanding in terms of how their attitudes, values, mannerisms and behaviours intersect with systemic biases that mediate the social and educational outcomes of racialized students.

Likewise, it is hoped that this research serves as a conduit to examine how issues such as a mono-cultured curriculum, lack of racialized educators, and school disciplinary practices negatively impact the educational experiences of Black female students. It is evident from this research and others that factors such as the above have significantly curtailed the academic outcomes of racialized students (Bonner, 2009; Curling & McMurtry, 2008; Sanchez, 2008; School Community Advisory Panel, 2008; Ontario Ministry of Education, 1993).

Moreover, this research, along with others, has illustrated the significance of parental involvement. In fact, the Ontario Ministry of Education (2010b) has stated that, “There is a direct connection between parent engagement and improved academic achievement” (p.2). In addition, the Ministry (2010a) has indicated that they are committed to “identifying and removing discriminatory biases and systemic barriers in order to allow participation of all parents in their children’s schools, with the goal of supporting student learning and helping to close the achievement gap” (p.6). Thus, it is my desire that this research will enable others to enquire how to create effective home/school relationships that support the outcomes of racialized students, particularly Black females.

Furthermore, it is my earnest desire that this research will bring awareness to the issue of resiliency, what it is, how it is manifested and how it can be supported by educators, parents and communities. As students from this study and others have shown, resiliency was essential to their success (Evan-Winters, 2011; Gaymes-San Vicente, 2006; Henry, 1998; 1994). Evan-Winters (2011) asserts that when parents or caring adults are able to cultivate awareness in students, in terms of how their identity impacts their location in society, it enables them to manoeuvre the challenges that mediate their social and educational outcomes. Finally, it is hoped that this research will provide complementary viewpoints from which we can interrogate cultural diversity, equitable and inclusive issues in education.

Conclusion

This project began in a coffee shop in downtown Toronto. My colleagues and I were discussing our perceptions about why so many Black males were dropping out of high school. We agreed that it had something to do with how they are constructed by society and its institutions such as the educational system. We also discussed the plight of Black female students in regards to their absence from Canadian literature and the perception that they are doing better educationally than their male counterparts. However, I wanted to know more! I became intrigued and wanted to know how Black females, particularly African Jamaican females, were experiencing the educational system in Canada. Being a member of the African Jamaican diaspora I was interested in knowing how other African Jamaican female students were experiencing the Canadian educational system.

During my investigation it was difficult to find Canadian research which had critically interrogated the experiences of Black females in the education system. The bulk of the literature in Canada which addressed Black students experiences mainly speaks to Black male students and their continued struggles within the educational system (Codjoe, 1997).

However, in the United States, a significant body of literature exists that speaks to the experiences of both Black male and female students. Nevertheless, the majority of these studies are written from a deficit vantage point, as they mainly speak to Black students' failures, sexually promiscuity, propensities to commit crime and aggression (Evan-Winters, 2011; Alexander, 2010; Clark, 2006). These studies, although useful in some respect, ignore the source of the problems and perpetuate stereotypical

representations of Black students, particularly Black female students. They do very little to spawn new insights into the complexities and barriers that surround their educational experiences (Evan-Winters, 2011).

For example, after critically analyzing the participants' experiences within the educational system and an exhaustive analysis of the literature, I found that a multitude of factors such as teachers' perception/low expectation, Eurocentric curriculum, school disciplinary practices, lack of parental involvement, and lack of racialized educators are at play. These factors have the ability to limit the outcomes of Black female students; however, when these factors become intertwined with institutionalized racism, sexism and other "isms" within the educational system, the impact is devastating for Black students.

At this stage of the study, I have to ask some pointed questions such as: What is the role of the Canadian educational system and whose interest does it serve? Is it to maintain the values, beliefs and viewpoints of a particular group (Europeans) (Willinsky, 1998)? These may seem like rhetorical questions; however, they are valid, given the historical constructions of Black students (escaped slaves, inferior, lacking morals, rude in speech, uncouth in manners and untidy in attire) within the Canadian educational system (McLaren, 2008).

These constructions continue to permeate the educational system today. For example, the curricula's portrayal of Black history through the lens of slavery and at the same time pontificating White domination of the globe, erases the rich contributions that Black people have made to the development of the world. Subsequently, this "single story" maintains the perceptions that Black people are inherently inferior to Whites and,

thus, are deserving of the stereotypes (lacking morals, rude in speech, uncouth in manners and untidy in attire). Educators act on these stereotypes and severely undermine the educational outcomes of Black students.

Current research suggests that educators spend more time correcting their speech, behaviour and attire and less time addressing their academic needs. Furthermore, decades of research has articulated that the existence of one dominant culture's curriculum (European) restricts the educational chances of students from marginalized groups and creates systemic obstacles to their success (Curling & McMurtry, 2008; Lewis, 1992).

My investigation revealed that the same barriers that existed decades ago still exist today. For instance, the Ontario government has affectionately noted: "If we are to succeed, we must draw on our experience and on research that tells us that student achievement will improve when barriers to inclusion are identified and removed and when all students are respected and see themselves reflected in their learning and their environment" (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2009, p.2). Thus, educational research needs to go further and interrogate the social, political, economic and historical circumstances which intersect with institutionalized racism, sexism and consequently mediates the outcomes of racialized students. Therefore, it is imperative to the educational outcomes of Black students that educators dismantle the current system that sets them up to fail socially and academically.

Notwithstanding the above issues, some Black female students have been able to endure the challenges and achieve academic success. The participants suggested that with the support of their parents, Black or racialized educators and their own resiliency they were able to persevere.

When I juxtapose my own educational success to that of the participants, I realize that I succeeded because of the values my parents, community leaders, and racialized educators instilled in me. My resiliency was inspired by their talks, interest and guidance. Therefore, parents need to share some of the responsibilities and become involved in their children's education. Likewise, educators must equip themselves with resources that will enable them to be culturally proficient educators. In today's multicultural, multiracial and multilingual educational environments, the goal of education must be to effectively organize the learner's experiences, so that their tendencies and powers may develop in a manner satisfactory to them and their communities.

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Appendix A

Informed Consent Document

Date:

Study Name: What Factors Contribute to Afro Jamaican Female High School Students' Academic Success or Failure?

Researchers: Sonia Lewis, Faculty of Graduate Studies in Education, 282 Winters College, York University, email: sonia_lewis@edu.yorku.ca

Purpose of the Research:

This research seeks to explore the factors that contribute to Afro Jamaican female high school students' academic success or failure. The research will be conducted using audio taped interview sessions. In addition, the format for the interviews will be structured and unstructured questioning. The interviews will then be transcribed, analysed, theorized and presented to my formal thesis committee, as a partial fulfilment of my Masters of Education Degree at York University.

What You Will Be Asked to Do in the Research: You will be asked to participate in an initial (1 hour) focus group interview with 7 other young women. Where you will be asked to reflect and discuss the factors that contribute to their academic success or failure. In addition, you may also be asked to participate in a follow up interview.

Risks and Discomforts: I do not anticipate any risks.

Benefits of the Research and Benefits to You: This research will provide complementary viewpoints from which we can interrogate equitable and inclusive issues in education. Furthermore, it will serve as an outlet from to examine issues that present themselves as challenges to Black female student educational outcomes. You will become aware of the factors that have contributed to your success or lack thereof. Moreover, this research may allow you to develop networks and support groups with other young women who have experiences that are similar to yours. In addition, the study will provide you with insight into negotiating systemic and institutionalized barriers that may impact your educational outcomes.

Voluntary Participation: Your participation in the study is completely voluntary and you may choose to stop participating at any time. Your decision not to volunteer will not influence the *nature of the ongoing relationship you may have with the researchers or the nature of your relationship with York University* either now, or in the future.

Withdrawal from the Study: You can stop participating in the study at any time, for any reason, if you so decide. Your decision to stop participating, or to refuse to answer particular questions, will not affect your relationship with the researchers, York University, or any other group associated with this project. In the event you withdraw from the study, all associated data collected will be immediately destroyed wherever possible.

Confidentiality: Your interview data will not be associated with any identifying information. All information you supply during the research will be held in confidence and unless you specifically indicate your consent, your name will not appear in any report or publication of the research as I will replace it with pseudonyms. Your interview will be audiotaped and fully transcribed. Your data will be safely stored in password protected computer and only the researcher will have access to this information. Data will be stored for no longer than 2 years, after which it will be destroyed via shredding of documents and deleting all audiotapes and electronic files from the interviews. Confidentiality will be provided to the fullest extent possible by law.

Questions About the Research? If you have questions about the research in general or about your role in the study, please feel free to contact Dr. Carl James either by telephone at (416) 736-2100 extension 20279 or by e-mail (cjames@edu.yorku.ca) or Sonia Lewis by email (sonia_lewis@edu.yorku.ca). In addition, you can also contact the Faculty of Graduate Studies Education at (416) 736-5016. This research has been reviewed and approved by the Human Participants Review Sub-Committee, York University's Ethics Review Board and conforms to the standards of the Canadian Tri-Council Research Ethics guidelines. If you have any questions about this process or about your rights as a participant in the study, please contact the Sr. Manager & Policy Advisor for the Office of Research Ethics, 5th Floor, York Research Tower, York University (telephone 416-736-5914 or e-mail ore@yorku.ca).

Legal Rights and Signatures:

I _____ consent to participate in *What Factors Contribute to Afro Jamaican Female High School Students' Academic Success or Failure* conducted by *Sonia Lewis*. I have understood the nature of this project and wish to participate. I am not waiving any of my legal rights by signing this form. My signature below indicates my consent.

Signature _____
Participant

Date _____

Signature _____
Principal Investigator

Date _____

Appendix B**Participant's Demographics**

NAME: _____

AGE: _____

SEX: _____

SCHOOL YOU ATTEND: _____

COMPOSITION OF SCHOOL (RACIAL, ETHNICITY): _____

COUNTRY OF BIRTH: _____

CITY OF RESIDENT: _____

SOCIAL CLASS: _____

FAMILY TYPE (I.E. SINGLE PARENT): _____

FAMILY MAKE-UP: _____

RELIGIOUS BACKGROUND: _____

LANGUAGE OR DIALECT SPOKEN AT HOME: _____

IMPORTANCE YOUR PARENT PLACE ON EDUCATION: _____

LEVEL OF EDUCATION YOUR PARENT(S) ATTAIN: _____

DID YOU MIGRATE TO CANADA? IF YES? WHEN? AND AT WHAT AGE?

Appendix C

Sample Question for Students (Focus Group Interview).

1. How would you best describe your experience in high school?
2. What was your relationship like with your teachers/administrators?
3. What was your relationship like with your peers?
4. How involve were your parents in your education?
5. Do you feel that what you learned in high school was relevant to your life?
6. As student of Caribbean heritage did you see yourself reflected in your school curriculum?
7. Do you believe that your race and gender affected your high school experience?
8. What factors do you think contribute to your academic success or failure?
9. Did your teacher's race and gender matter to you? Why or why not?
10. How did your teachers' attitude, mannerism and interaction with you contribute to how you saw yourself in high school?

Appendix D

Sample Questions for Students (Individual-Interviews)

School Experiences

1. Describe your experiences in high school, what did you like? What didn't you like? What makes you want to attend school?
2. What activities did you participate in and why?
3. What was your favourite subject (s)? Why?
4. What types of courses were you taking?
5. As student of Caribbean heritage did you see yourself reflected in your school curriculum?
6. Did you feel included in your school? What made you feel included?
7. How did you feel in school as a Black student and specifically a Black female student?
8. Do you think that being Black and female made it easier for you in school?
9. How did Black females and Black males interact in your school?
10. Did racism exist in your school? Did sexism exist in your school?

Student/Teacher Relations

1. How did Black teachers and Black student interact in your school? Did Black teacher interact differently with Black female than with Black males? How did White teacher interact with Black students in your school? Did they interact differently with Black females than with Black male? Did they interact differently with White student than Black students?
2. Where there teachers who had been an inspiration in your life? If yes how?
3. Did you care about what your teachers thought of you? Why/ Why not?
4. Did your teachers acknowledge your work when it was good?
5. How did your teachers' attitude, mannerism and interaction with you contribute to how you see yourself? How did you behave in classrooms, cafeteria and hallways?

6. Share with me how these attitudes and mannerism impacts your attendance and attitudes at/towards teacher and school?

Parent/Student Involvement

1. Did you feel that what you were learning was important to your life?
2. Some say that if you try hard you will succeed, do you believe this?
3. How involve were your parent in your education?
4. Did they attend parent teachers meeting?
5. Did they communicate regularly with your teacher?
6. Did they monitor your academic progress?
7. What did school mean to you?
8. What factors do you think contribute to your academic success or failure?

Appendix E

Definition of Terms

Attitude - A consistent pattern of thought, belief, or emotion towards a fact, concept, situation, or group of people

Bias - an opinion, preference, prejudice, or inclination formed without reasonable justification that then influences an individual's or group's ability to evaluate a particular situation objectively or accurately; an unfounded preference for or against.

Discrimination - the denial of equal treatment, civil liberties and opportunity to individuals or groups. Behaviour that results from prejudiced attitudes by individuals or institutions, resulting in inequitable outcomes for persons who are perceived as different. Differential treatment that may occur on the basis of factors such as race, nationality, gender, age, religion, political or ethnic affiliation, sexual orientation, marital or family status, physical, developmental or mental disability, or other similar factors. Includes the denial of cultural, economic, educational, political and/or social rights of members of non-dominant groups.

Diversity - the presence of a wide range of human qualities and attributes within a group, organization or society. The dimensions of diversity include, but are not limited to ancestry, culture, ethnicity, gender, gender identity, language, physical and intellectual ability, race, religion, sex, sexual orientation, and socio-economic status.

Dominant Group - considered the most powerful and privileged of groups in a particular society or context; a group either largest in number, in a superior social position, or that successfully shapes or controls other groups through social, economic, cultural, political, military or religious power.

Eurocentrism - a complex system of belief that holds the supremacy of Europe's cultural values, ideas, and peoples. European culture is seen as the vehicle of progress toward liberalism and democracy. Eurocentrism minimizes the role of Europeans in maintaining the oppressive systems of colonialism and racism

Equity - a condition or state of fair, inclusive and respectful treatment of all people. Equity does not mean treating people the same without regard for individual differences.

Ethnic Group - refers to a group of people who share a common cultural heritage or ancestry, or a shared historical past, often with identifiable physical, cultural, linguistic and/or religious characteristics. The word ethnic (or ethnocultural) is often used to denote non-dominant or less powerful cultural identities in Canada, although technically, everyone belongs to an ethnic or ethnocultural group.

Ethnicity - the multiplicity of beliefs, behaviours and traditions held in common by a group of people bound by particular linguistic, historical, geographical, religious and/or racial homogeneity. Ethnic diversity is the variation of such groups and the presence of a number of ethnic groups within one society or nation.

Gender - describes those characteristics of women and men which are socially constructed; sex refers to those characteristics of males and females which are biologically determined.

Inclusive Education - is based on the principles of acceptance and inclusion of all students. Students see themselves reflected in their curriculum, their physical surroundings and in the broader environment, in which diversity is honoured and all individuals are respected. According to UNESCO: "Inclusive education is central to the achievement of high-quality education for all learners and the development of more inclusive societies.

Intersectionality - the interconnected nature of forms of oppression (eg. cultural, institutional and social) against identifiable groups, such that they operate in compounded ways (eg. gender and race, race and religion, sexual orientation and race, and so on).

Institutionalized Racism (structural racism or systemic racism) - refers to a form of racism which occurs specifically in institutions such as public or private bodies, schools, corporations, and universities. The term (s) describes covert or overt societal patterns that have the net effect of imposing oppressive or otherwise negative conditions against identifiable groups on the basis of race or ethnicity.

Minority Groups - refers to identifiable groups of people within a society that are either small in numbers or that have little or no access to social, economic, political or religious power. In some areas, they are not in the minority numerically. Minority rights are protected by the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, Canadian and provincial Human Rights Acts and Codes, and the UN Convention on the Rights of Minorities.

Oppression - the domination of certain individual or groups by others by the use of physical, psychological, social, cultural or economic force.

Power - that which allows one group to name and classify subordinate groups and/or to subject them to differential treatment.

Race - a social construct; refers to a group of people of common ancestry, distinguished from others by characteristics such as colour of skin, shape of eyes, hair texture and/or facial features. The term is also used to designate social categories into which societies divide people according to such characteristics. Various types of broad-based groups (e.g. racial, ethnic, religious, regional) are rarely mutually exclusive and intersect, with the degree of discrimination against any one or more varying from place to place and over time.

Racialization - the process through which groups come to be designated as different, and subjected to discrimination on the basis of race, colour, creed or ethnicity.

Racism - a set of erroneous assumptions, opinions, and/or actions stemming from the belief that one race is inherently superior to another. Racism may be present in organizational and institutional structures and programs as well as in the attitudes and behaviour of individuals. It results from the combination of racial prejudice and power, and is manifested through individual action and/or institutional policies or practices.

Racist - refers to an individual, institution, or organization whose beliefs and/or actions imply (intentionally or unintentionally) that certain races have distinctive negative or inferior characteristics. Also refers to racial discrimination inherent in the policies, practices and procedures of institutions, corporations, and organizations which, though applied to everyone equally and may seem fair, result in exclusion or act as barriers to the advancement of marginalized groups, thereby perpetuating racism.

Sexism - stems from a set of implicit or explicit beliefs, erroneous assumptions and actions based upon an ideology of inherent superiority of one gender over another and may be evident within organizational or institutional structures or programs, as well as within individual thought or behaviour patterns. Sexism includes any act or institutional practice, backed by institutional power, which subordinates people because of gender.

Stereotype - A mental picture or image of a group of people, ascribing the same characteristic(s) to all members of the group, regardless of their individual differences. An over-generalization, in which the information or experience on which the image is based may be true for some of the individual group members, but not for all members. Stereotyping may be based upon misconceptions, incomplete information and/or false generalizations about race, age, ethnic, linguistic, geographical or national groups, religions, social, marital or family status, physical, developmental or mental attributes, gender or sexual orientation, or other similar factors.

Systemic Discrimination - The institutionalization of discrimination through policies and/or practices which may appear neutral on the surface but which have an exclusionary impact on particular groups, such that various minority groups are discriminated against, intentionally or unintentionally. It occurs in institutions or organizations where the policies, practices or procedures (e.g. employment systems; job requirements, recruitment and hiring practices, promotion procedures, etc.) exclude and/or present barriers to racialized groups.

Systemic Racism- racism that consists of policies and practices entrenched in established institutions that result in the exclusion or advancement of specific groups of people. It manifests itself in two ways: (1) institutional racism: racial discrimination that derives from individuals carrying out the dictates of others who are prejudiced or of a prejudiced society; and (2) structural racism: inequalities rooted in the system-wide operation of a society that exclude a substantial number of members of particular groups from significant participation in major social institutions

Visible Minority - A term used to describe non-White groups in White-dominant societies. Although this term appears in some pieces of legislation and human rights codes and is therefore still used from time to time and in certain contexts, currently the terms racialized groups or people of colour are preferred by people labeled by others to be 'visible minorities'

Glossary Adapted From the Following Sources

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