BLACK STUDENTS AND THE EDUCATION SYSTEM – THE PURSUIT OF SUCCESS

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ABSTRACT

Through in-depth qualitative interviews, I examined the contributors to the success of seven Black university alumni to discover how we can increase Black students' university attendance in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA). When the participants were asked which factors contributed to their success, they attributed it to their resilience, upbringing, positive role model(s), enriching learning experiences, and academic aptitude. Acknowledging the importance and significance of these factors, the thesis elucidates systemic factors, in both the participants' home and school life, that either hindered or propelled them in their pursuit of a university education.

All seven participants' responses demonstrate their ability to be resilient as well as the competency required to be culturally and linguistically literate in academic spaces. In the context of the study, literacy is regarded as a discourse and is observed as the ability to act meaningfully in given situations. This malleability in comportment and in speech was evidenced by all seven participants and was exemplified through the participants' awareness of the need and ability to code-switch in both their home and school lives. Five of the seven participants mentioned their awareness that they spoke *standard Canadian English*: a variety spoken by anglophone Canadians who are second generation or later in urban middle-class areas. Four of the seven participants used financial instability as their motivator to attain more financial stability in their future lives while three participants benefited from financial stability and parental support. Four of the seven participants had a strong cultural identity that was reinforced by both their home and school lives through explicit interactions with their ethnic culture. Self-regulation, sport and school involvement were also evidenced as factors that could assist prospective university students in overcoming barriers to post-secondary education.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

"The black skin is not a badge of shame, but rather a glorious symbol of national greatness".
– Marcus Garvey

I dedicate the thesis to Black students of yesterday and today who struggle(d) in their pursuit of success in the education system. I write the thesis as affirmation that the most common Black stereotype is resilience.

I would like to acknowledge the Jamaican Maroons of the late 18th century onward who endured racial subjugation in Canada after centuries of slavery in their 'homeland'. Their hardships were not in vain for their quest for salvation led to the liberation of every Black Canadian today. The story of Jamaican Canadians, of Black Canadians, has always been a story of bravery and puissance in the face of tyranny and ignorance.

I am grateful to my grandmothers who immigrated to Toronto, Canada in the 1970s to build a better life for their children. Their self-sacrifice led to my self-actualisation.

I could write a novel about the unmeasurable impact my parents have had on my life. And I might. But for now, a short paragraph will have to suffice. My mother's life of instability led to my stability and I will be forever indebted to her. Thank you, Mom, for the unconditional love you continue to give so effortlessly. I am also appreciative for my father who has taught me skills that I continue to use in my career today. Writing this thesis made me realize that my father has been my greatest teacher. He has instilled me with a passion for knowledge and an irrepressible spirit to persevere. Thank you, Dad, I love you dearly.

I would also like to thank each one of my participants for taking the time to share their education experiences with me. It is a privilege to tell their stories and I am honoured to have them now be apart of my education journey.

I wish to show my gratitude to my committee member, Dr. Sandra Schecter, whose creativity and ability to push parameters inspired me to delve into my own personal experiences to share my truth.

Lastly, the completion of the project would not have been possible without the unwavering support of my supervisor, Dr. S. Nombuso Dlamini. On the first day in her class, she animatedly described how her native tongue, Zulu, affected her intonation in English, which is an issue in Canada where we tend to speak delicately and sensitively to appease our listener. We immediately clicked – literally. She attempted to teach our class how to pronounce all of the different types of clicks in Zulu, to no avail. Nevertheless, it helped us understand her background and the impact her mother tongue has had on her socialization in Canada. Although humorous, I believe very few people in that class understood that as a Black female professor, she needed to dispel preconceived notions of the 'angry Black woman' to connect with us. I instantly felt a bond with her, inspired by (her)story. Throughout the process of the thesis, we both experienced our own hardships and moments of unpredictability. Her strength and poise in the wake of turbulence was a constant reminder of the resilience that resonates throughout the Black race. She has become my mentor, confidant and aspiration. It has been a privilege working with Dr. Dlamini whose faith in my abilities guided me throughout this project.

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PROLOGUE

"Why do black people always feel the need to be excellent? Why can't we just be ourselves?".
– Daniel Kaluuya in the film *Queen & Slim*

After twenty-two years of being in the education system, I find myself in the position of the teacher – the other side of the desk (see Dlamini, 2002). This shift has made me reflect on my experiences and how the latter has framed my pedagogical views (Bannerji, 2000; Dlamini & Martinovic, 2007; Khayatt, 1994; Milner & Hoy, 2003; Monture-Angus, 1995; Rezai-Rashti, 1995). Although I have gone through the education system aware of my race, as an educator, I have become acutely aware of how being Black *and* in a position of power is political. This brings on the pressure of not only being a teacher, but to be an *excellent* teacher. I need to be excellent to legitimize my presence in a space where I do not feel like I belong. I need to be excellent to legitimize the presence of my Black students where they may feel like they do not belong. I need to be excellent to legitimize the presence of Black teachers in predominantly White schools. I need to be excellent to be present in the absence of Black representation. I need to be excellent to squander the standard that Black excellence is the only way to be legitimized in education spaces. The pursuit of excellence is a pittance when compared to the centuries of Black sacrifice.

As I listened to the stories of the participants for the thesis, I began to notice that excellence was necessary in order for Black students to have access to a university level education. I began to realize that their stories mirrored mine. Before this study, I never considered my accomplishments to have been mandatory components of my success in the education system. In high school, I was valedictorian, athletic council president, athlete of the year, on honour roll and heavily involved in the dominant culture of the school. And so were my participants. Their resumes were pristine; their resumes were excellent. In time, it became clear that Black excellence was the prerequisite to achieve success in the education system. "Despite the protective and empowering function that a Black identity

can provide in the context of a racist society, most participants share a complex and conflicted relationship with Blackness" (Gosine, 2005). Conflicts of association and dissociation with aspects of Black culture is a scale that Black students consistently weigh in response to their external environment. Decisions of when to speak, how to speak, and who to speak to were directly dependant on their own navigations of race and place in society. Six of the seven participants spoke the language they felt that they *needed* to speak to be understood in education spaces. As a result, they distanced themselves from Black Vernacular English out of fear of being misunderstood and perceived as uneducated by their predominantly White educators. Three of the seven participants expressed that their motivation to go to university was to not be "another statistic"; cognizant of what it means to be identified as "another Black kid" in the education system. As you read the narratives of the university graduates, I encourage you to reflect on how they navigated their Blackness in order to exist in the education system. I also implore you to reflect on why the phenomenon of Black excellence is the standard for academic success. Is there space for Black students to be unapologetically themselves in schools and still succeed in the education system?

CHAPTER ONE: THEORY AND METHODOLOGY

"We are not there yet. Not yet Uhuru. Uhuru meaning freedom. We see it every day with our children at school. The trials and tribulation that they go through… with African Canadian young men not graduating. … We are not there yet. My work is for that. My work is for us to reach that Promised Land".
– Afua Cooper

In the Bible, the Promised Land was said to be the place promised by God to Abraham and his descendants. The idea was that this land would bring upon prosperity and abundance, a life filled with pleasures and luxuries. The land of milk and honey; the land of salvation and liberation. The land of wealth; the land of freedom. For centuries, Black people have been searching fiercely to find their Promised Land, believing with fervour that Canada could bring upon great fortune. Our understanding of the Promised Land in today's context has evolved from a government state to a state of consciousness – a double consciousness – that provides the ultimate freedom (Dei & Kempf, 2006; Du Bois, 1994 [1903]; Freire, 1976). Levinson (2011) emphasizes the importance of recognizing that identities have both ethnoracial and civic components to help majority and minority groups learn how diversity creates different worldview points. Multiple perspective-taking has been described as a means to address "long-standing historical inequalities that continue to permeate social structures and relationships despite legal and other reforms" (p. 81). Although our ideas of freedom are subjective, the objective is to obtain emancipation from the social, economic, political, and psychological ramifications of slavery. This emancipation to truly reap the benefits of the Promised Land is believed to only be achieved through education (Asante, 1991; Blair, 2001; Dei & Kempf, 2006; Freire, 1976; Memmi, 1969; Tatum, 1997, p. 64; Wa Thiong'o, 1986). Marian Wright Edelman once said, "Education remains one of the black community's most enduring values. It is sustained by the belief that freedom and education go hand in hand; that learning, and training are essential to economic quality and independence". Education is seen as the Underground Railroad that leads Black people to

the Promised Land. However, the path towards emancipation has always been a difficult road and the journey through the education system in Canada is no exception.

The pursuit of success in the Black community has been a relay – the preceding generation handing over the baton in hopes that the new generation of Black youth will continue the race. Throughout this pursuit, studies have shown that there are inequitable practices in schools and the education system (Blair, 2001; Dei & Kempf, 2006; James & Turner, 2017; Tatum, 1997). These studies look at the lack of Black representation in the education system (Asante, 1992; Banks, 1993; Dei, 1996; Dragnea & Erling, 2008; Gershenson et al., 2016; James, 1994; James & Turner, 2017), the lack of Black presence in the curriculum (Asante, 1992; Banks, 1993; Blair, 2001; Dei, 1996; Dei & Kempf, 2006; James & Turner, 2017), and the lack of Black students in academic and gifted streams (Anguino, 2003; Asante, 1992; Bui et al., 2014; James & Turner, 2017). The research literature focuses on the changes that need to be implemented, recommending systemic reform as a means to address core issues that gravely affect the career prospects of Black students, condemning school boards' inaction on equity progress (Armstrong & McMahon, 2002; Dei & Karumanchery, 1999; Harper et al., 2009; Hatcher, 1998). With the Black population continuing to grow, addressing these inequities should be of utmost importance for Ontario, and for Canada. "Canadian immigration levels have tripled over the past decade, and the result has been that many schools have a large number of students who present a *challenge* to the school system" (Dlamini, 2002, p. 52; my emphasis). In the 2016 census, Statistics Canada (2019) reported that approximately 1.2 million Canadians identified as Black thus making up 3.5% of Canada's population (p. 4). Slightly more than half of Canada's Black population is located in Ontario (p. 17). Still, more than half of the Black Canadian population reported having a Canadian lineage for three generations or more (p. 5). In Ontario, the generation status for the Black population is reversed compared to the rest of the country: 53.4% are first generation, 38.4% are second generation and 8.3% are third generation or more (p. 17). These statistics demonstrate the

growing number of new Black students in Ontario and the urgency to understand how to teach to diversity (Cochran-Smith, 1997; Dlamini & Martinovic, 2007; Garcia, 1991; Grant, 1997; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Nieto, 1992; Sleeter, 2001; Villegas & Lucas, 2002; Zeichner, 1993; Zeichner & Melnick, 1996). In the thesis, I will contribute to the research literature that examines the lived experiences of high-achieving Black students in education (Anderson & Martin, 2018; Archer-Banks & Behar-Horenstein, 2012; Conchas, 2006; Everette, 2016; Gosine, 2005; James & Taylor 2008; Kim & Hargrove, 2013; Lewis, 2013; Marsh et al., 2012; O'Connor et al., 2011; Riley, 2019; Smith et al., 2005; Strayhorn, 2014). My research explores the question of how Black students are able to achieve a university education in hopes of increasing university enrolment rates in the community.

Through listening to the experiences of Black university graduates, I evaluate their stories and identify the conditions that attributed to their success. In the thesis, I use the term *success* to identify Black university students who were able to obtain success in the education system. This does not mean that only students who go to university are successful. On the contrary, I hold the firm belief that the education system should endorse multiple pathways that suit the ambitions of all students. Nevertheless, statistically, Black students are underrepresented in university enrolments. Only 23% of Black students confirmed enrolling in an Ontario university from 2006 to 2011 (James & Turner, 2017). This has drawn my attention to the efforts that have been made, and still need to be made, to increase the presence of Black students in Ontario universities. This study answers the following questions:

1. How do successful Black students navigate the education system?
2. What factors have helped them achieve a university education?

Through listening to the education experiences of successful Black students, I have evaluated social capital, resiliency and literacy as factors that could help promulgate continued academic growth in the Black community here in the GTA.

Framing the Research

To comprehend the complexities of race and to help conceptualize the Black experience, I use Critical Race Theory (CRT) to theorize racialized experiences and the experiences of the racialized. CRT examines these experiences through a critical lens, continuously reverting back to the multiple structures and systems in place that impact how people navigate the world with darker skin. When we explore the stories of Black students later on in the thesis, race becomes increasingly arbitrary and arguably an inadequate classification to account for the ethnic, linguistic and religious differences that exist. All of the students are classified as Black as a juxtaposition to White; pigmentation historically used as a means to create class differences and a sense of superiority (Bridges, 2019; Dlamini, 2002). In recent years, there has been a push against being labelled as Black, some considering it as a misnomer that incorrectly depicts their identity (Bridges, 2019). I feel compelled to situate blackness and racism to humanize the experiences of my participants before sharing their stories.

For centuries, scientists conducted numerous studies to try to establish genetic racial differences. The dehumanization of the body of Sarah Baartman[1] is only one example of the great length scientists underwent to scientifically prove the existence of racial difference. "The biological race is a fiction appeared to receive its ultimate, and most unanswerable, verification with the Human Genome Project's revelation in 2003 that all persons, irrespective of racial ascription or identification, share 99.9% of the same genes" (Bridges, 2019, p. 124). The Human Genome Project showed that there is only one race that exists: the human race. Under the CRT framework, I will be approaching race as a social construct that was forged by colonization to legitimize the division of freedoms. A social construct whose historical implications continues to shape the experiences of Black people in a

[1] Saartjie Sarah Baartman was a young woman from southern Africa whose body was displayed in European freak shows in the 19th century due to her large buttocks. Even after her death, her brain, skeleton and sexual organs were left on display in a Paris Museum up until 2002 (Parkinson, 2016).

'post-racial' society (Fordham, 2010; Joseph-Salisbury, 2018; Kamaloni, 2019; Kaplan, 2011). During the Jim Crow period in the United States, the *one-drop rule*, or hypodescent, was used by Whites to categorize those of mixed heritage as Black to place them in subordinate positions in society (Campbell, 2003; Gullickson, 2003; Hickman, 1997; Miller, 2010; Roth, 2005; Taylor, 2008). In recent history, those of mixed heritage continue to be subjected to racial discrimination suggesting that hypodescent subsists. (Baxley, 2008; Fairlie, 2009; Joseph-Salisbury, 2019; Long & Joseph-Salisbury, 2017; Post, 2009). These divisions were associated with stereotypical Black physical features such as a person's skin colour, hair texture, facial features, comportment and of course, the presumption of a 'recent' lineage to Africa (Hebl et al., 2012; Johnson et al., 2013; Kahn, 2011). I use the word *presumption* as race is based on skin colour more than ancestral geography. A person with generations of Canadian ancestors will still be considered Black if the colour of his or her skin adheres to the historical classification of *Blackness*. Therefore, since these historical implications persist in affecting the socializations of those of presumed African descent, this categorization will be used to define *Black* as a social group in the context of the thesis. This social construction is engrained in our nation:

> Society was ordered at a time when people of color were unable to participate in it … we should have little faith that the institutions that we created during that time of racial exclusion are legitimate. We might, in fact, expect that the dominance is embedded in these institutions – that it comprises the very essence of our systems and conventions. (Bridges, 2019, p. 40)

Crucial systems, like the judicial and education systems, were created by individuals who carried these inherent biases. For example, it is only recently that Canadian schools have begun acknowledging the lands of the First Nations, Métis, and Inuit peoples. The education system silenced the voices of Indigenous peoples for centuries (Hunt & Oyarzun, 2020; James & Turner, 2017, p. 8; Sterenberg, 2013). In school, I was only taught how Indigenous peoples hunted for food as if they were animals, dehumanizing their experiences and erasing their contributions to Canada. The social classification of

Indigenous peoples, and Blacks, led to the erasure of their presence in Canadian history and in the curriculum. Marginalized Canadians, and immigrants alike, are currently navigating an education system that was never meant for their existence; a system historically created to disadvantage and eradicate their culture (Bridges, 2019). Due to this social construction, "physical traits of race always have been imagined to correlate with non-physical traits. … Psychological attributes and tendencies that society has imagined racial groups to possess have been taken to justify … all manner of social inequalities" (Bridges, 2019, p. 129). The darker pigmentation of a person's skin leads to imagined non-physical traits, commonly known as stereotypes. In the study, participants shared prevalent Black stereotypes in the GTA: The Black gangster, the promiscuous Black man, the violent Black man, the aggressive Black woman, the Black basketball/football player, the angry Black woman, the loud Black woman, the underachieving Black boy. The list goes on. The research literature suggests that stereotype threats impact the achievement of Black students in assessments and evaluations (Craemer & Orey, 2017; Kahn, 2011; McKay et al., 2003; Smith & White, 2001; Steele & Aronson, 1995; Thames et al., 2013; Whaley, 2018). Race is only legitimized by the subconscious and conscious ascriptions of negative traits to people with darker skin colour of presumed African descent. This form of prejudice is called *anti-Black racism*.

It is difficult for me to explain to a non-Black person what it feels like to be Black. This is particularly difficult because blackness is more than a colour: it is a state of being. You would rarely hear somebody say, "The colour of my skin is Black" but more so "I am Black". As a result, it becomes challenging to explain a person's race when it has only been constructed by their experiences and historical implications. For this reason, I have decided to illustrate the stories of the participants as a first-person narrative to allow the reader to view the world from their eyes. Storytelling is common in CRT, often seen as "pedagogical inasmuch as it educates readers about what racial disenfranchisement in the modern era looks like and, perhaps more importantly *feels* like when one has to endure it"

(Bridges, 2019, p. 63). Through reading the stories of the participants, you may find commonalities, dismantling this idea of the *other* and becoming apart of the *us* (Delgado, 1989). Whether it is through speeches, film, music, videos or stories, Blacks have needed to make people feel their experience to create change. For example, video evidence in confrontations with police officers are used by the Black community to confirm their innocence in a judicial system where a person should be innocent until proven guilty. Similarly, in the education system, there are individuals who hold the belief that performance disparities are a direct result of the negligence of the Black community:

> The theory that CRT in education has critiqued most thoroughly and denounced most vehemently is the cultural deficit model. This theory contends that Black and Latinx children do not perform as highly as their White and Asian counterparts because there is something wrong with their families and communities. … CRT in education invites us to notice as well if that the deficit model and/or theory of oppositional culture are correct, then we do not need to "fix" the education system nor the techniques that teachers use to instruct children; instead, we need to "fix" individual students. (Bridges, 2019, p. 462)

CRT denounces the idea of 'fixing' the Black community to be more successful. In the thesis, I share how Black students have navigated the education system to obtain success. The study is meant to increase awareness of the factors that have facilitated the education journey for past Black university graduates. The knowledge of the Canadian education system is not innate, especially for students who are first- and second-generation Canadians. Four of the seven participants had parents who did not have a full understanding of the opportunities schools could offer and how to advise their children of the steps required to be accepted into a university. Along the way, these participants were able to meet individuals that bequeathed knowledge, which assist them on their trajectory towards a higher level of education. Still, as data from the study show, anti-Black racism has been an obstacle for participants in forming relationships. Whether conscious or subconscious, race has either hindered Black people from

interacting with White people out of fear of encountering racism or hindered other races from interacting with Black people due to negative perceptions (Blair, 2001; Putnam, 2000, p. 23).

In the thesis, I analyze how the participants bond and bridge social capital using Putnam's (2000) dimensions. Bonding social capital exists to reinforce solidarity among individuals who belong to the same social group, "reinforc[ing] exclusive identities and homogenous groups" (p. 22). Bridging social capital could cross societal restraints like class and race to assist Black students in climbing the social ladder. It is comprised of connections that are built across a cleavage "for linkage to external assets and for information diffusion" (p. 22). Putnam attests that "both bridging and bonding social capital can have powerfully positive social effects" (p. 23). Putnam's conceptualization of social capital assists in viewing the reciprocity and nonreciprocity between *in-groups* and *out-groups.* In the foreground are the stories of participants and the various interactions they have had with teachers, students, and parents. In the background are the undertones of political, social, and economic division:

> For the general category in advance offers the specific instance a limited terrain in which to operate: no matter how deep the specific exception, no matter how much a single Oriental can escape the fences placed around him, he is *first* an Oriental, *second* a human being, and *last* again an Oriental. (Said, 1978, p. 102)

The dichotomy of Orient and Occident – White and Black – continues to come into play in interactions and will until there is a conscious effort to empathize – to *humanize* – those we interact with. The lesions inflicted by hegemonic and colonial powers is the foundation of how we socialize and how people conceptualize trustworthiness. According to Putnam, trustworthiness is considered one of the most important factors in building social capital (2000). These systematic barriers have created distrust between the Black community and social services (Putnam, 2000). Through a critical analysis of the stories of participants, we will observe that the success of the Black students was not serendipitous – it was systematic.

Methodology

In the thesis, I wanted to choose a methodological framework that would work harmoniously with CRT to ensure I portrayed an accurate depiction of the participants' experiences. I found myself consistently returning to my research questions, thinking about how to convey the lived experiences of Black students. "'Why do we do educational research?' and, 'How do we articulate and pursue our research questions?'" (Atkins & Wallace, 2012, p. 2). We do educational research for a plethora of reasons. However, I would suggest that educational research is meant to inform teaching and learning practices in hopes of identifying areas of concern that require new educational reforms. As I continuously reviewed my research questions, I arrived at the conclusion that answers to these questions were not meant to be articulated by me. That is, if my primary goal was to illustrate the unique experiences of Black university alumni, then it was best to have the participants tell their own story.

Evaluating experiences is integral in gaining a more intimate understanding of the current factors that hinder, and promote, academic progression in the education system. Dewey, an educational theorist who took an interest in the art of experience, speculates that "experience is both personal and social. … People are individuals and need to be understood as such, but they cannot be understood only as individuals. They are always in relation, always in a social context" (cited in Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 2). The experiences of racialized students can be used to inform us on the social contexts that have contributed to their success. Furthermore, experiences also provide a unique position in viewing a student's personal transformations in multiple social contexts. In the study, I share the home life and school life of the participants, two separate social contexts that illustrate different personal experiences. My motivation to focus on experience was to move from looking at Blacks as a collective towards looking at the individual. Individualizing the racialized experience bridges a gap where the reader can empathize with the student on a human level – regardless of race. This process of reliving experience is

inline with Dewey's criterion "of experience *continuity*, the notion that experiences grow out of other experiences, and experiences lead to further experiences" (cited in Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 2). This idea of experience continuity is applicable to the participant, the researcher, and the reader whose past experiences shape the reception of new experiences. Jordan (2013) did a comparison on how Hume and Dewey evaluate experience from their distinct conceptual frameworks. Hume was a 'skeptic realist' who held a similar belief of past experiences informing new ones (Jordan, 2013, p. 32). Hume's (1742) philosophical approach to education is applicable in a CRT framework that looks to address systemic barriers that influence racialized experiences. These systemic barriers may be unbeknownst to educators, readers and even the participants of the study. Philosophy could aid in questioning experience by evaluating the knowledge acquired through education and how its existence takes new form for racialized students based on their lived realities. In the decolonization of education as perceived by Freire (1976) as a practice of freedom, deconstructing skepticism to elucidate new knowledge is integral in breaking down systemic barriers and creating new spaces of freedom. Hume (1742), acknowledging his own skepticism, postulates:

> When I reflect on the natural fallibility of my judgment, I have less confidence in my opinions, than when I only consider the objects concerning which I reason; and when I proceed still farther, to turn the scrutiny against every successive estimation I make of my faculties, all the rules of logic require a continual diminution, and at last a total extinction of belief and evidence. (p. 474)

This eloquent explanation of the process from skepticism to conviction is required in anti-colonial work. A priori, inquiries on racialized experiences initialize a critical reflection on the fallibility of current systemic structures to, in time, dismantle and implement new systems based on evidence. Therefore, for the study, I have chosen a modern framework founded on these historical principles of experience, embodying the journey of self-awareness.

Narrative inquiry is the methodological framework that I used for the thesis. I draw my conceptualizations of narrative inquiry from Clandinin and Connelly (2000) to emphasize the importance of validating experiences and the stories of the research participants. The narrative inquiry framework gives a heartbeat to the experiences of successful students, turning their lived experiences into a story (p. 128). Understanding the intimacy of sharing a racialized experience, it seemed only fitting to choose a methodological framework that created a platform for successful Black students to dictate their own stories. According to Clandinin and Connelly (2000), narrative inquiry is best described as:

> [A] way of understanding experience. It is a collaboration between researcher and participants over time, in a place or series of places, and in social interaction with milieus. An inquirer enters this matrix in the midst and progresses in the same spirit, concluding the inquiry still in the midst of living and telling, reliving and retelling, the stories of the experiences that make up people's lives, both individual and social. (p. 20)

The inquirers responsibility is to understand the experience of the participants through social interaction and transmitting their oral histories to paper. The focus on experiences is at the centre of the thesis as their experiences are used to inform the factors that contributed to their success. The objective in narrative inquiry is to humanize the experience of participants by creating an intimate interaction between the text and the reader (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Huber et al., 2013; Xu & Connelly, 2010). This methodological framework is frequently used in education to provide an intimate view into the lives of students (Caine et al., 2018; Huber et al., 2013). Xu and Connelly (2010) identify narrative inquiry as a form of phenomenology, the study of a distinct experience. "It is phenomena because experience is what is studied; experience is

the phenomenon" (p. 354). In the thesis, the phenomenon being studied is how successful Black students succeed in the education system. While implementing narrative inquiry in her research, Guthrie (2010) attests that there was a "strong link with narratives and self, contending that 'self' is a storied phenomenon" (p. 11). Thus, narrative inquiry is the study of experience through the form of an inquiry on a particular phenomenon.

I have chosen a biographical narrative approach to allow the participants to share their own story. "Biographical narrative research explores lived experiences and perspectives that people have of their daily lives, including their past, present, and future, focusing on how they make sense of the meanings they give to the stories they tell" (Kim, 2016, p. 10). In constructing narrative research, Striano (2012) suggests that narratives regarding cultural social discourses should be co-constructed through a different disciplinary framework – hence my implementation of CRT (p. 153). Through obtaining field texts from research interviews, I wanted to ensure that the participants' voices were not lost. "According to a constructivist approach, reinterpreting narratives is a means by which one is able to arrive at a construction of the self" (Guthrie, 2010, p. 21). Narrative inquiry endorses storytelling as a learning tool to reaffirm identities, gain new views of the world and of ourselves (Clandinin & Huber, 2002; Guthrie, 2010, p. 15; Siegel et al., 2015). Focusing on specific episodes of a person's life is an accurate depiction on how we reflect on our past, making meaning of old experiences to gain new understandings (Brunner, 1994; Carr, 1986; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Conle, 1999). These reflections included taking into consideration the temporal, personal and social dimensions that create not only experience, but also how we regard speech (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). The preservation of speech and experience are integral in understanding and theorizing lived experiences in relation to historical, social, and cultural contexts (Kim, 2016; Xu & Connelly, 2010). To examine the lived experiences of racialized groups, Bhatia (2011) shares how she uses narrative inquiry as cultural psychology:

> Narrative inquiry is fundamentally a cultural act and also rooted in a cultural psychology that must aim to understand the constitution of self-other relationships by carrying out "thick descriptions" of identity formation in diverse cultural settings — migration, displacement postcolonialism, and globalization. (p. 348)

Through evaluating the cultural settings of participants, cultural psychology can look to explain how socializations transform to help define what makes certain cultural settings more identity affirming than others.

Byrne (2017) cautions narrative inquirers to not 'give voice' to participants but rather "explore the ways in which we can represent data and the voices of others that are honest, authentic and meaningful" (p. 14). Adhering to this warning, I decided to reorder the participants' narrative, without changing their speech, to maintain fluidity and to reduce redundancy in the participants' stories. I regarded my role as storyteller as transmitting the importance of reporting social occurrences to those who have not experienced it for themselves to promote transformation as a social justice practice (Caine et al., 2018). The choice of using a biological narrative was to make the participants' experiences tangible. As the thesis focuses on the experience of the racialized, it is crucial to allow a space where Black students can speak honestly about their experience in the education system. This led me to fictionalizing their names to protect their identities and as "a way to engage in imagination that enriches inquiry spaces and research understandings" (Caine et al., 2017, p. 215). Four of the seven participants expressed moments of forced silence to preserve their reputation in their respective schools. Narrative inquiry becomes a medium in which marginalized students can share their experience without fear of ostracism. In turn, researchers have classified narrative inquiry as a practice of social justice to catalyze social action (Caine et al., 2018; Tilley & Taylor, 2012). This coincides with Dewey's conceptualizations of taking the future into consideration after learning about social injustices through lived stories (Dewey, 1988). Through the telling and retelling of stories, the personal

becomes interpersonal by closing the cleavage between the participant and the reader. Narrative inquiry is a methodological framework that continues to grow in popularity as storytelling becomes arguably the only method that places a value on experiences that were silenced by power dynamics within the education system (Hughes, 2011). The following sections further describe the methodology used in the study.

Recruiting Participants

The participant group is comprised of seven Black university graduates whom I selected to account for the various ethnicities, religions, socio-economic and linguistic diversity that exist within the Black race. I sought millennials who both lived and studied in the GTA in their academic career. "A small sample that has been systematically selected for typicality and relative homogeneity provides for more confidence that the conclusions adequately represent the average members of the population" (Maxwell, 1998, p. 87). The selection of Black Ontario university graduates ensured that I demonstrated the range of experiences that have all resulted to the same outcome: an Ontario university degree. The participants of the study are comprised of both men and women who have chosen various academic disciplines to pursue in university. All of the participants come from different areas of the GTA and attended different elementary and secondary schools. In the context of the study, the participants who are Jamaican, Christian, lower-class, Canadian-born and who were raised in a two-parent household form the *in-group*. *Table 1* outlines the characteristics of each participant, including myself, to illustrate how intersectionality determined my position as an insider or an outsider in my correspondence with the participants. Out of the seven participants: three are of African descent, three are of Jamaican descent, and one is apart of the Latinx community. Six of the seven participants are second-generation Canadians while only one participant is a first-generation Canadian who immigrated with her family. With age, race, education attainment, and geographic location being the only factors

controlled in the study, I was able to have a small sample represent the diverse education experiences that Black students continue to endure today.

Table 1

Social and Demographic Characteristics of the Participants

Participants	Age*	Sex	Religion	Parental origin	Canadian lineage	Social status	Household structure
Researcher	25	F	Christianity	Jamaica	2nd generation	Lower-class	Single-headed
Daniel	25	M	Christianity	Jamaica	2nd generation	Lower-class	Single-headed
Idil	26	F	Islam	Somalia	2nd generation	Lower-class	Dual-headed
Ciara	25	F	Christianity	Jamaica	2nd generation	Lower-class	Single-headed
Jaden	25	M	Atheism	Jamaica	2nd generation	Middle-class	Dual-headed
Samuel	28	M	Pentecostal Protestantism	Ghana	2nd generation	Lower-class	Dual-headed
Mariam	25	F	Orthodox Christianity	Eritrea	2nd generation	Lower-class	Dual-headed
Sofia	24	F	Christianity	Dominican Republic	1st generation	Middle-class	Dual-headed

*Age at the time the interview was conducted.

Daniel.

> *"Dawg wid to much massa sleep widout suppa".* [A dog with too many masters will go hungry.]
> – Jamaican Proverb

Daniel is a twenty-four-year-old teacher who grew up in a large Jamaican family. He strongly identifies with his Jamaican roots more than his birthplace – extremely proud of where his family comes from. The proverb above means that a person must use their own judgement to make a decision and to refrain from the influence of others. Daniel grew up in a lower income neighbourhood and did not have many Black role models that could help him navigate the education system. His success is mostly attributed to his best friend, whose wisdom and impeccable judgement helped Daniel receive the knowledge he needed to succeed.

Idil.

"To be a poor man is hard, but to be a poor race in a land of dollars is the very bottom of hardships".
– W.E.B. Du Bois

Idil is a twenty-six-year-old aspiring artist and philanthropist. She grew up in a Muslim household in a lower income area of the city. Her parents are both Somali and met in Italy before immigrating to Canada. Growing up in a predominantly Black neighbourhood, Idil attended schools that were underfunded and marginalized. Attending predominantly Black schools meant that Idil was always apart of the racial majority and thus never experienced what it felt like to be an 'other' – until she entered university.

Ciara.

"In the end, we will remember not the words of our enemies, but the silence of our friends".
– Martin Luther King Jr.

Ciara is a twenty-five-year-old postgraduate student studying Counselling Psychology. Her parents enrolled her in French Immersion which allowed her to access higher academic performing schools in her jurisdiction. French Immersion is a program that typically commences before Grade 1 where non-French speakers are immersed in classes instructed in French. This program has been promoted as being advantageous, assisting students in becoming fluent in both of Canada's official languages.

Jaden.

"Great things come from hard work and perseverance. No excuses".
– Kobe Bryant

Jaden is a twenty-five-year-old of Jamaican descent who grew up in a middle-class neighbourhood. From the very beginning, sports played a crucial role in his life and instilled in him the belief that great things come from hard work and perseverance. He was taught that no hard work equates to no reward. This mentality was a direct reflection of his parents' philosophies. His parents

also enrolled him in the French Immersion program and worked diligently over the summer to ensure he was prepared for the following school year. He attributes his success to his parents, school experiences, time management and the people who helped him throughout his education journey.

Samuel.

"You don't choose your family. They are God's gift to you, as you are to them".
– Desmond Tutu

Samuel is a twenty-eight-year-old entrepreneur whose education experience is particularly unique as he is the only participant who lived in a foreign country and returned to Canada. He grew up learning both English and *Ga*, a Ghanaian language spoken by an ethnic group located in the southeastern part of the country. Samuel's education story demonstrates the complexity of (re)immigration and the clashes between African traditionalism and Western culture.

Mariam.

"You've got to learn to leave the table when love's no longer being served".
– Nina Simone

Mariam is a twenty-five-year-old graduate student who grew up in an Eritrean family. She grew up in a linguistically diverse household where she spoke Tigrinya, an Afro-asiatic language that is phonetically similar to Arabic. Mariam received a Catholic school education and was enrolled in the Extended French program. The Extended French program typically begins in Grade 4 where students receive 50% of their courses instructed in the French language. Students who perform academically well prior to Grade 4 tend to enroll in this program. Similar to French Immersion, Extended French allows students to attend schools outside of their catchment area, schools that are often recognized as being high achieving. Mariam's academic drive and sophistication left her in a precarious position for her academic excellence was identified as an anomaly, a racial exceptionality.

Sofia.

"Judgement comes from experience, and experience comes from bad judgement".
– Simón Bolívar

Sofia is a twenty-three-year-old immigrant from the Dominican Republic. She identifies herself more as Spanish, although she recognizes that even this label does not fully acknowledge her diverse ancestry. Due to the Dominican Republic's colonial history, there is disdain towards Black people which immensely affects the citizens' perception of beauty. This sentiment is very much alive in her mixed-race family who still does not embrace their African heritage. Once she arrived in Canada, she was forced to re-evaluate her identity in the wake of the dominant White-Canadian culture.

Data Collection

Throughout the data collection process, I used field texts to weave the body of research literature and personal narratives together to demonstrate the interconnectedness between theory and reality. I prepared interview questions for a more holistic view of the factors that contributed to their pursuit of a university education. For each interview, I used a structured, sequenced approach in interrogating the participants. This method facilitated the data analysis process as the information for each participant was in a sequential order that assisted in analyzing participants individually and collectively. Furthermore, I became increasingly familiar with the structure of the interview which helped build a more fluid conversation that re-emphasized the importance of listening to experiences within the narrative inquiry framework. While interacting with the participants, I observed how four of the seven participants deemed their stories insignificant due to having not experienced major hardships in the education system. This illustrated the still prevailing notion that Black studies are inherently about racism as well as the participants' concerns that their stories were inadequate for not fitting into this narrative. To ensure the participants told me *their* story, I asked students about their home life, financial capital, school life, school culture, parental involvement, grades and assessments, and their

role models. With experiences being inherently subjective, the participants were able to focus on recounting their own past as opposed to trying to fulfill the role of an archetype they have become habituated to seeing. Although the interviews were recorded, I made notes throughout the interview to write down the themes and thoughts that their stories evoked.

After recording each interview, I converted the audio file into transcripts. Due to an audio malfunction, I was unable to convert Idil's audio into a transcript. Therefore, I relied solely on the notes made during the interview to portray her story. The interview questions and the transcripts allowed me to see how I observed the information during the interview and to locate new discoveries through reading the interviews and reliving their experiences. Preparing a series of questions in advance assured that the interview did not turn into a conversation as I was able to consistently use the interview questions to delve into their past. The objective of the research interview was to allow the participants to tell their *own* story. The interview questions aided participants in elaborating on their education experience thus gaining more insight on how they succeeded in pursuing a university education. To help participants begin telling their story, I engaged them in creating "annals and chronicles as a way to create a framework on which to construct their oral histories" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 112). Their oral histories allowed them to recount isolated incidents that were impactful in their lives. This added richness to the data collection process and a more honest depiction of their experiences.

Data Analysis

During the data analysis process, I compiled all of the field texts to find the most prevalent topics to be addressed in the thesis. I compared the participants' responses individually and collectively to find commonalities and differences among them. I also did additional research on the reputation of their schools and communities to gain more insight on the potential external factors that impacted their education experience. In the process of analyzing field texts, I began thinking about the form of the

final narrative text. The relationship with my research participants shifted "from the intensity of living stories with participants to retelling stories through research texts" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 129). This inspired me to have my participants narrate their own stories by amending their transcripts to create a first-person narrative. That is, the narrative that are presented in each chapter resemble the transcripts. However, I restructured the narratives to follow the main themes of home and school life. Due to the audio malfunctioning during Idil's interview, I have chosen to provide a summary instead of a first-person narration of her story. During the data analysis process, I sent a draft of my thesis to the participants to ensure that their stories were not misconstrued. Each research participant agreed to participate in the study to help students in the Black community. With this in mind, I wanted the thesis to stay in line with their values. This included asking participants: "Is this you? Do you see yourself here? Is this the character you want to be when this is read by others?" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 148). These questions were asked to confirm that the identities of participants were not compromised in the process of finding topics that coincided with their oral histories (p. 147).

Overview of the Chapters

The chapters are structured through the eyes of the participants and the central stories they tell about their experiences. The chapters address separate themes, focusing on the elements that have contributed to their pursuit of a university education. Every chapter contains a personal narration of a participant's story, providing a more intimate recount of the moments that molded their experience. In Chapter 2, Daniel and Idil share their experiences of attending predominantly Black schools in lower-income areas in the GTA. The chapter addresses how family life could be used as a resource for navigating the education system. As told through the eyes of two participants, Chapter 3 highlights how social class affects a student's access to resources that facilitate their accessibility to a higher level of education. Ciara and Jaden's class differences serve as a template for the discussion on how financial

disparities influence learning conditions. In the following chapter, Samuel and Mariam share their experiences of growing up in an African household while becoming acculturated to Canadian culture. Chapter 4 identifies the effects of African traditionalism and the dichotomies that emerges when juxtaposed to academic attainment. Lastly, Chapter 5 illustrates the story of Sofia: a Latinx immigrant who began to learn more about her African heritage throughout her education experience. The chapter suggests the necessity of re-evaluating racial division and how racial ambiguity contrasts the experiences of darker-toned members of the Black community. In the concluding chapter, I will address the limitations and implications of the study. This chapter provides an overview of the research conducted and recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER TWO: LEARNING WITHIN THE COMMUNITY

"*My home situation was one of the driving forces for me to actually go and study because I wanted a better way of life*".
– Daniel

When narrating their trajectory to school success, Daniel and Idil repeatedly returned to their family life as both a facilitator and a barrier. Both stories have similarities and differences. They differ on religion and cultural heritage: Idil is a Somali-Muslim while Daniel is a Jamaican-Christian. However, both participants grew up in predominantly Black lower-class neighbourhoods, attended non-specialized school programs[2], and lived in chaotic homes where parents lacked knowledge of how the Canadian education system works. Both participants' working-class status left their parents heavily preoccupied with the upbringing of their younger siblings. Consequently, such perceived neglect motivated them to look for ways that they could emancipate themselves from the socio-economic restrictions that plagued their families. Both participants narrated that they were socially apart of their school's Black cultural majority which shielded them from having to navigate racial prejudice among their peers. They had the opportunity to solidify relationships within the community and to continue engaging in their cultures without fear of social isolation. In this chapter, Daniel narrates his story while Idil's story is summarized due to an audio error during the data collection process. Their stories emphasize how their school and home life assisted them in developing confidence, resilience, and persistence to attain their academic goals.

Inside Daniel's Experience

Home Life

Both my parents are from Jamaica. I think they came in their teen years. When I was in school, I lived with my seven siblings and my mom for a huge portion of the time. The home I grew up in, I

[2] In the thesis, a specialized program will be defined as a program provided by public-schools that typically involves an application process to receive more academic or linguistic intensive courses.

would describe it as dysfunctional. I would also say full of love but also full of confusion at times. I feel like as a family, we didn't know where we were going. We never had a family vision or had things to kind of work towards as a family. Like in terms of setting goals, I feel like we just lived with the circumstances that were presented to us and we just found our way. But there was no guidance and no structure to help the family develop and grow. Some families will sit down with their children and say, "You are expected to do this". Or like, "You will go to this school and get married". Like, okay. It was confusing in the sense that there was no clear guidelines or directions as to what was expected from us as we were growing up, other than the basic stuff like go to school, and get a job. But there was nothing beyond that, you know?

My home wasn't a reflection of my immediate community. I think my home was a reflection of a specific Jamaican community. At home, you're surrounded by the Jamaican Patois and the expressions are different. Yeah man, it's a nicer language for me. I'm biased obviously. I think it has more expression that connects more to who I am as a person. I feel like I can express myself more speaking Patois but not all the time cause I'm not born there, but I feel like I'm most comfortable in that environment. Like I'll thrive well. But overall, the relationship I had with my mom growing up was pretty all right. Well, we butted heads a lot, to be honest. I feel like I expected a lot from her as a mom, but I wasn't understanding that there was more to the story than I could've ever imagined. And she had seven of us, eight including me. I'm the third of eight.

Once I ended up in high school, I started to work because growing up, I feel like finances were always a problem. I remember asking my mom, "Can I have $20 for dis trip?". And she'll always say, "I don't have the money right now". And like for me, every time hearing that she doesn't have the funds, made me think, "Yo… I just don't want that for my life, personally". As a result, I was kinda independent financially and I didn't like asking my mom for things. Because I realized that if you're in a certain financial bracket, you can get certain opportunities and access certain things. And I feel like

because we didn't have the money on lock, we couldn't access certain opportunities or the things that could have enhanced our life. I would say that I grew up meager poor. I mean we weren't poor, like living on the street poor. But when it came to the funds, we were always on the low-end – like all the time. So, I mean, even extracurricular activities. Couldn't afford it. My mom never had the foresight to see that these are important. Or she never had the time to kind of research things that we could have done outside of school. You know? Like, I grew up loving French. But we didn't know at the time that there was a program I could take. I didn't have any teachers who were saying, "Oh, you should probably consider this". We didn't have our hand in the pot. We were just raised to go to school and do well. But I don't think my mom even knew what the process for doing 'well' looked like. I feel like she just expected us to just go to school and graduate.

But for me, I feel like my home situation was one of the driving forces for me to actually go and study because I wanted a better way of life, a better living opportunity. So definitely it was kind of tough and I knew that if I wanted the largest slice of the cake, I had to study. I feel like it was hard for me sometimes to study in my home because there was a lot going on. At some points, I had to just learn how to shut out the noise and to create my own lickle environment. Or I would just become nocturnal and study at night because that was the only time where the house was quiet.

School Life

I'll talk about my experience as a learner, the experiences I've had with teachers. As a learner, I really didn't like school and I didn't like being there because I felt like the environment was just not for me. Because I feel like the academic portion of it was challenging. I feel like I had a serious disadvantage when it came to subjects like math, English and science. I feel like I had some good teachers. The majority of them were White, Caucasian. But I had some bad ones too.

When I got into grade seven, one of my teachers was from Mauritius. We had an assignment and it was sick. We had to sing an olden day song that was talking about fighting for what you want in

life. The artist's name was Mike Grant. And I remember we had to practice, practice, practice – nonstop. And it was a big part of our oral mark. You know what, that was one of the most transformative experiences that I've had. After that, I think the seeds were planted for my love for French. At that point, I decided that this is something I'm going to go into. In high school, I knew I had to pass my courses. I just went to the classes that I knew I liked the most. My guy – once I figured out the system, I knew how to navigate it. And then in grade eight, we had a Black principal. She was very serious when it came to Black success. And I feel like she pushed Black people to become better than what society has been; better than what they ought to be. She said positive things and inspirational things like, "You should try to go for the honour roll!". I didn't even know what honour roll meant at the time. And then I realized oh… it's the average combined. I can get the honour roll. And I did. She was planting seeds. I just had to do the work to make sure that the fruits would bare.

I didn't really have many Black teachers who I could identify with in elementary school. The schools I went to weren't good. Let's just say that because of the community, the schools were associated with a lot of bad imaging. All of my schools were right by where I lived. My schools were predominantly Black and Tamil. I grew up seeing a lot of fights, gang related issues, cases where kids would be caught with weed in their locker… all this kind of stuff. It was nothing that I didn't know or nothing that I was never exposed to.

I feel like there was a lot of racism in elementary school. I remember one time I was in music class and the teacher – White teacher – sees us whispering and gets angry. But we weren't the only ones. I vividly remember there were two Tamil girls, studious and diligent students, talking and giggling louder than us. I said, "Why aren't you saying anything to them? You're picking on us because we're Black!". The teacher got upset and sent me to the office. And then I ended up getting suspended. Yeah. This is probably in grade four. I don't remember their reasoning. I just remember my mom. I just remember saying that I had to stay home for three days. My mom, she was disappointed. I

know the principal probably spun the story in a way to make it seem like I was… you know. Like when other races commit the same act, say the same words, they always get a lesser penalty. I've experienced that throughout my entire educational career. It's sad, but, you know, whatever. I think that after that one time, I kind of shifted up and kind of became obedient.

I feel like education took a big turn for me when I met a specific friend, Teisha. She came from Jamaica and she was in one of my classes. I realized that her education level, her knowledge, was different than everybody else's. She basically became the person who inspired me to take the book seriously cause we ended up competing to see who could get the higher mark, and I love competition. But because we were friends, it was no longer competing against each other, but competing to be our best selves. There was a point where we ran for president and vice-president in grade 11. I feel like it was at that point in life where we kind of confirmed, as Black people, that we had our shit together. We didn't… we didn't end up getting it because there were student votes, and also teachers' opinions were a factor. I remember one of the principals despised us and made a statement that these kids, me and Teisha, do not deserve to get this position. And… she was kinda right. But yo, our campaign was out of this world. We overproduced. But as Black people, you have to. You have to come in like a rapture. At that point, we knew that when it comes to work, we can work. It was not a problem and we weren't afraid.

I also had a lot of Black guys as friends. I think we didn't know. We didn't understand what school was there for. We didn't know the type of leverage it could give us. We were just going through the courses aimlessly, just trying to graduate. And even that – we didn't really understand what it meant to graduate. You know? I feel like the Tamil people or the Chinese people dem, they know from the start of high school what to do. They come with a purpose and I feel like because of the intergenerational trauma for Black people, we don't have the educational knowledge that we need in order to approach education successfully. Along the way, my friends kind of just weeded out, but we are still bredrins. But they weren't the main friendship. I never really subscribed to the idea of a

positive or a negative influence. I would say that in terms of education, for the type of lifestyle that I wanted, they weren't on the same page. If I did remain friends with them, it would have obviously been harder for me to branch off into my own educational journey. So, I guess in terms of that… bad crowds can corrupt your good behaviour. I guess in that way, they would not have been – let's say not congenial – for where I was going. Not conducive, but not a bad influence.

Inside Idil's Experience

Home Life

Idil grew up in a Muslim household in a lower income area of the city. She is the eldest of three siblings and was raised by Somali immigrants. Her parents initially met in Italy before they built a new family in Canada. Idil's Islamic background allowed her a sense of community while also limiting her own personal desires. When she was a young girl, Idil wanted to join the school's soccer team. When her father saw the uniform, he forbade her from joining as his religious beliefs did not condone women showing their legs. In spite of these gender restrictions, Idil lived in a household filled with laughter: they played board games and truly bonded as a unit. Being the eldest child and the only daughter in the family brought on the pressure of alleviating the burden on her parents. She frequently spent time indoors helping her mother around the house and taking care of her brothers and visitors. Her home was a place where families in the Somali community would seek refuge during hardship. Although her family struggled economically, her mother would always give whatever she could to help others in need. With Idil's sibling being diagnosed with severe autism, the majority of the family's income went towards him. Idil grew up resenting her brother, finding it difficult to explain his condition to other people. In time, her sibling became the centre of her work, inspiring her to create spaces wherein people of all different abilities are valued.

School Life

Witnessing her parents worry about her siblings, Idil viewed her school success as a way to reduce their concerns. In high school, Idil took part in the Sears Drama Festival where she was able to find her voice through drama and spoken word. Her role model is a Drama teacher who taught her all throughout high school. She helped Idil find a way to create an impact with her voice by utilizing her poetry writing gift to convey powerful messages to the masses. Idil always excelled in school and was raised in a household where her parents consistently pushed her towards pursuing a university degree. Attending predominantly Black populated schools, Idil was never in a position where she felt obliged to reorient her race. On the contrary, her school environment reinstated pride for her culture and race thus motivating her to become a leader in her community. She has had friends who were also lower-class that would at times engage in activities that could be deemed as unethical. Her faith and moral obligation to her parents has always guided her in making the right decisions and to not follow the crowd. Lack of social security led to the emergence of gang activity within her neighbourhood. The rise in gang-related violence created a reality where Idil felt reluctant to be outside late, concerned by the premeditated, and accidental, murders in her community. Still, Idil believes that gangs are akin to any other group of people. She explained that socio-economic status and lack of parental guidance could lead young men to finding a brotherhood for solace. In the interview, she condemned society for their ignorance in exacerbating the mythology of gangs that further perpetuates anti-Black racism in society.

Idil confessed that if given more information, she would have chosen a different university degree. The elementary school and high school that she attended were often underfunded because they were all located in lower-income immigrant neighbourhoods. Nevertheless, her schools were rich with cultural events and activities where she was able to hone her leadership skills within the Black community. In grade 11, Idil received one-on-one access to a tutor to ameliorate her science and

mathematics competencies. This experience allowed her to learn new skills and to flourish in these subjects. Idil attributes her success to having access to tutoring services and to her role model who gave her the tools that she needed to thrive.

Black Pride

In Daniel's story, he demonstrates a great amount of pride for his Jamaican heritage. Although born in Canada, he adopts a Jamaican way of speaking, expressing how the dialect brings him a sense of comfort and familiarity. "I feel like I can express myself more speaking Patois but not all the time cause I'm not born there, but I feel like I'm most comfortable in that environment. Like I'll thrive well". In this citation, he expresses language and his cultural community as a medium in which he will thrive. His heritage gives him pride and an identity that he is more aligned with.

Idil is another participant in the study that had a similar upbringing. She was also raised in a lower-income neighbourhood and attended predominantly Black populated schools from elementary to high school. Daniel and Idil are the only participants who grew up their entire lives without being 'othered' by their classmates. They were never victims of racism from their peers nor felt outcasted due to their socio-economic status. University was the first time they experienced a predominantly White school setting. In spite of the bad reputations that plagued their schools, they benefitted from growing up in non-White milieus. Attending largely Black populated schools meant that they did not encounter racial barriers to connect with their peers. While interviewing Idil, I asked her if she ever felt like race influenced the way she communicated. She responded no, stating that she never felt the need to change because most of her peers were Black. Their education experiences were not inundated with fear of being misunderstood or outcasted because of their race or class. They were among a cohort who knew exactly what it meant to walk in their shoes – to navigate the world in their skin. "The Black students turn to each other for the much-needed support they are not likely to find anywhere else" (Tatum, 1997,

p. 60). With Black culture being the dominant culture, the school established Black student-led clubs and events. Both participants participated in such functions that initiated engagement in their culture. When analyzing each participant, Idil and Daniel profited from being among like-minded students who shared a similar goal: getting out of poverty. The notion of being "better than what [Black people] ought to be" expressed by Daniel demonstrates the continuous motivation to build bonds with members of the community that share this vision of success in the education system.

Growing up in Black communities, Idil and Daniel showed a strong collective mindset founded on the principal of Black solidarity. Whether positive or negative, they remained protective and loyal to their communities. Idil lived in a neighbourhood that has witnessed gun violence and gang-related activity. Despite admitting the effects that gang violence has had on her sense of comfort, she is resolved in her conviction that gangs are just like any other group of people. She shares that there is this mythology of gang culture, a perception that gangs are bad, that they are violent. But she attests that gangs are no different than any other group: they are just looking for a place to belong like everybody else. She continues by acknowledging that social class, race, and family instability are factors that bring these individuals together to find a space of belonging. Her pride for her community is the motor behind her career motivations and aspirations. Through the power of the arts, she intends to continue (re)building her community, mobilizing the youth to find elation in the face of deprivation.

Daniel also illustrates this notion of a Black brotherhood while demonstrating reticence in labelling his *bredrins*, his friends, as negative influences. He states:

> I never really subscribed to the idea of a positive or a negative influence. I would say that in terms of education, for the type of lifestyle that I wanted, they weren't on the same page. If I did remain friends with them, it would have obviously been harder for me to branch off into my own educational journey. So, I guess in terms of that… bad crowds can corrupt your good

> behaviour. I guess in that way, they would not have been – let's say not congenial – for where I was going. Not conducive, but not a bad influence.

Daniel acknowledges that his friends were not congenial to his educational goals. He recognizes that his friends could have negatively impacted his educational trajectory if he had chosen to prioritize those friendships over his education. He makes a very clear distinction between his friends not being conducive to his education and being bad influences. His motivations for emphasizing this difference is unclear. I could deduce from his other comments throughout the interview that by admitting his friends were bad influences, he would be admitting that they are inherently bad people. Being aware of the negative stereotypes held about Jamaicans, particularly Jamaican men, Daniel remains protective about prioritizing positive views of his culture. He has never seen his race nor his ethnicity as a hindrance, but as a motivator to prosper. While explaining the difficulties of studying at home in a busy household, he concentrates on the competencies he acquired from his experiences. “I feel like my home situation was one of the driving forces for me to actually go and study because I wanted a better way of life, a better living opportunity”. This sentiment of solidarity allowed Daniel and Idil to be confident within their cultural identities – and consequently themselves – using race as affirmative influences on their educational goals.

The Weighting Game: Take the Load off Parents

Idil had an experience that was particularly unique as she grew up with a sibling with special needs. Since her family supported her sibling and members of the community by offering their home as an asylum, Idil was often assisting her mother with household duties. By age 16, she was already working to alleviate the financial burden on her parents. Likewise, Daniel began working in his early teens to gain more independence. Daniel’s mother was a single mother of eight children and bared the full financial responsibility on her own. With Daniel’s father out of the picture, this limited his access

to resources, making him solely reliant on his mother for finances. Idil was reticent about sharing information on the role her father played in her life during the interview. She reveals that she lived with both of her parents and siblings but seemed uncomfortable about delving into her father's contributions to her academic journey. It gave the impression that in spite of his presence, there was still an absence. This is inferred as she expresses that her mother had the more difficult role of staying at home to take care of her brother and the day-to-day activities. The minute details are negligible as the fact still remains that both Daniel and Idil felt obliged to work to support their own desires in reaction to insufficient financial sustainability. Their jobs allowed them to avoid feeling like a financial burden to their parents, acutely aware of the difficulties they faced providing for the family. They had an aversion to feeling like an inconvenience thus leading them into their early submersion into the work force.

The overriding need to avoid being a burden became a positive influence in Daniel and Idil's education. In Idil's case, her academic success meant that her parents could steer their attention onto her sibling who required special attention and support. She felt compelled to always do the right thing, driven by the fear of disappointing her parents. In the interview, she shared an incident where her friends wanted to break the rules and her instantly repudiating any negative associations to their poor decisions. Coming from a family with Muslim values that restrains certain female freedoms, she discovered that her academic success granted her additional privileges like hanging out with her friends or less responsibilities around the house. The participants' academic successes also meant that they could keep their school life and home life separate. Good grades meant that their parents would not feel obligated to communicate with the school. School became a space where they could socialize freely without fear of being reprimanded by their parents. In the interview, Daniel shares that he used to skip class in high school. These rebellious behaviours were seemly inconsequential as his exceptional grades granted him immunity from penalties.

Living with seven other siblings, Daniel needed to learn how to adapt to complete his homework. This meant that he learned to focus regardless of his noisy surroundings. He did not look to his mother for the solution – he found the solution within himself. On his own, he created strategies on how to make his living situation more conducive to his success. From working late at night to working at the library, he adapted as a learner, knowing that education would help improve his quality of life in the future. Likewise, Idil created strategies to complete her homework, her home environment at times hectic with people coming and going. In high school, she had a tutor for science and mathematics who was able to give her tips on how to improve her study habits. She was also able to transform her home by establishing a time and space that would be devoted to her studies. These participants always approached their education as their own responsibility. They were motivated to take the load off their parents thus incentivizing a university education.

Turning a System of Oppression to Ascension

Teachers as Role Models

At the time of the interview, Idil and Daniel expressed aspirations to uplift children and to continue helping Black people in their local community. They had an affinity towards teachers who encouraged them and led classes that resonated with their beliefs and worldviews. Daniel narrated lessons he learnt from his favourite Mauritian teacher that remain with him to date. The educators who deeply affected both Daniel's and Idil's lives the most did not share their race. However, Daniel's principal inspired Black students through comments affirming academic excellence, thus encouraging him to thrive for honour roll, a goal that he did not know existed until proposed by the principal. Daniel shares an experience of learning a song called *Serre les poings et bats-toi* [Clench your fists and fight] by Mike Brant (1974), a 24-year-old Israeli singer and songwriter who gained popularity in France. After many

suicide attempts, Brant took his own life, jumping from his Parisian apartment window on April 25, 1975. This was the same day as his new album release (Kaye, 2007). Here is a sample of the song:

La vie de chaque jour est un combat / *Daily life is a struggle*

Et si l'on te fait tomber quelque fois/ *And if you are dropped sometimes*

Même si tu as très mal relève-toi/ *Even if you are in very bad shape stand up*

Relève-toi/ *Stand up*

Il faut te battre pour la verité/ *You have to fight for the truth*

Te battre pour défendre tes idées/ *Fight to defend your ideas*

Alors tu finiras, tu finiras par gagner/ *Then you will finish, you will finish by winning*

Bats-toi, serre les poings et bats-toi/ *Fight, clench your fists and fight*

Contre ceux qui veulent, t'empêcher d'être heureux/ *Against those who want to keep you from being happy*

Bats-toi, serre les dents et bats-toi/ *Fight, clench your teeth and fight*

Contre ceux qui disent, que toujours tu perdras/ *Against those who say, that you will always lose*

After reading the lyrics, I felt moved by the message and understood the impact this could have had on a young boy. Daniel felt like there was a lot of racism in elementary school. However, in grade 7, his Mauritian teacher exposes him to a song that reinstills him with the hope of defying the odds and standing victorious. Like the lyrics in the song, the notion of life as a battle was something familiar to Daniel because nothing in his life came without effort. In the interview, he confirms the experience of learning and singing the song as “one of the most transformative experiences that [he has] had”. This message was further validated as the assignment “was a big part of [his] oral mark”. The value of the assignment in correlation with the morale of the song demonstrated the importance of self-confidence and resilience. In the context of the thesis, the term resilience is used to encapsulate a student’s ability to “bounce back, recover, or successfully adapt in the face of obstacles and adversity” (Cunningham &

Swanson, 2010; Miller & MacIntosh, 1999, p. 160; Zunz et al., 1993, p. 170). This experience infused Daniel with a love for French as he was able to relate to his course content and apply it to his personal life.

At a young age, Idil developed a love for writing and performing. Once she arrived in high school, she encountered a teacher who guided her in finding her voice through spoken word. She used this art form to raise awareness about social injustices and as a means of self-healing. When analyzing Daniel and Idil's experiences, the common denominator that the teachers share is care and understanding. Idil's teacher and role model was White, nevertheless, she was able to connect with her on an emotional level. Her lessons engaged her on a holistic level, evoking emotions that gave her confidence in continuing her pursuit towards a university degree. Sharing a racial identity with a teacher did not necessarily make that teacher a role model. Daniel hints that he did have Black teachers, just none that he connected with during his elementary school experience. Although he attended a high school that employed a number of Black teachers, he still states that his best friend was his only role model. Thus, Daniel and Idil's teacher connection experiences suggest that culturally responsive teaching, and the application of critical race theory in the classroom, could be an answer for marginalized children to create purposeful educational spaces (Knaus, 2009). Culturally responsive teaching is defined as "using the cultural characteristics, experiences, and perspectives of ethnically diverse students as conduits for teaching them more effectively (Gay, 2002, p. 106). Teachers that comprehend the sociological realities of their students are equipped to promulgate inclusivity and equity, their curriculum a reflection of the students in the class and their pedagogical values. Put differently, teachers that care for their students and take time to understand and guide them, can change students' trajectory for the better (Knaus, 2009).

In addition to culturally responsive teachers, of all ethnicities, when I asked the participants if they believed that Black role models were important, all seven participants said yes. Daniel said, "Big

time. Because you know what, Black people need to see it. I feel like it needs to be modeled, they need to have a model in order to imitate the pattern to be successful". This belief in the power of Black role models inspired Daniel and Idil to assume this role in their respective communities. They want to bring a presence that uplifts children that grew up like them: disadvantaged and directionless. Although none of them mentioned a Black teacher as a role model, just merely having a Black teacher reaffirmed their presence in the building. Black teachers created a space where students and teachers alike could be themselves without worrying about being seen as "unprofessional". In the interview, Daniel describes a space where Jamaican students were able to speak the way they wanted without facing admonishments. Idil explains moments where having a Black teacher in the building gave her an outlet, a person to talk to who could directly relate to her experience. Teachers that share the race of their students become role models on how to behave in professional spaces and how Black people exist in these spaces. There is a vast amount of literature that speaks to the importance of representation in schools and the value of culturally responsive teaching for racialized students (see Clewell & Villegas, 1998; Egalite et al., 2015; Egalite & Kisida, 2018; Wilder, 2000 on representation and Abdulrahim & Orosco, 2020; Gay, 2018; Hammond, 2015; Kulkarni et al., 2020; Literacy and Numeracy Secretariat, 2013 on culturally responsive teaching).

Knowledge is Power

Parents play a critical role in grooming children for adulthood by transmitting knowledge and values founded on their lived experiences. The research literature suggests that students without post-secondary degree educated parents are exposed to more stressors that could impact their high school success and career trajectory (Morazes, 2016). Daniel and Idil's parents did not obtain a post-secondary education consequently reducing their capabilities of providing clear direction. Despite parental support towards their academic ventures, lack of experience with post-secondary institutions made it difficult

for Daniel and Idil to navigate becoming the first university graduates in their families. Furthermore, their lower-income status reduced their access to their parents who were working long hours to bring in income to the family. The two participants were at a loss of both social capital and human capital where the absence of the diffusion of intergenerational knowledge forced them to seek the latter from their peers and educators. In *Social Capital in the Creation of Human Capital*, Coleman (1988) elucidates:

> Social capital within the family that gives the child access to the adult's human capital depends both on the physical presence of adults in the family and on the attention given by the adults to the child. The physical absence of adults may be described as a structural deficiency in family social capital. … The lack of strong relations can result from the child's embeddedness in a youth community, from the parents' embeddedness in relationships with other adults that do not cross generations, or from other sources. Whatever the source, it means that whatever human capital exists in the parents, the child does not profit from it because the social capital is missing. (p. S111)

The participants admit that they did not have the strongest relationship with their parents: Daniel's mother was consistently working while Idil's father was seemingly absent as well. Their parental relationships decreased the participants' human capital, social capital and financial capital for the wealth of knowledge about economics is integral in sustaining social class progression.

Daniel grew up in the education system in the same position as his friends: lost. Things took a turn when he met Teisha, his sole source of information on how to navigate the education system to be successful. Coming from parents with university degrees and a sister who is a Canadian university alumnus, Teisha witnessed first-hand how to use education to bolster her career and social status. She understood the steps it took to achieve her goals because her family had a vision and established expectations while Daniel's home life appeared to be the complete opposite. "I feel like as a family,

we didn't know where we were going. … I feel like we just lived with the circumstances that were presented to us and we just found our way". He grew up in a family that was blinded by daily struggles, disabling them from looking forward. Idil also expressed some regret with the degree she chose, feeling that if she had known about other options, she may have pursued a different avenue. Without parents who understood the education system, the Black students were obliged to learn how to navigate school while simultaneously navigating their school environment. Albert Einstein was infamously misquoted as saying, "You have to learn the rules of the game. And then you have to play better than anyone else" (in fact, the quote was said by US Senator Dianne Feinstein). This could not be truer for Black students who enter the education system without being provided any rules on how to 'win' the game. This lack of knowledge is partly due to the fact that some Black students are second-generation Canadians with parents who themselves have not found success in the education system. Lack of knowledge about the schooling system is also a consequence of lower-income parents working tirelessly to provide for their families financially and not having the opportunity nor the freedom to spend time learning about the opportunities to support their children. As Daniel explains, "My mom never had the foresight to see that these are important. Or she never had the time to kind of research things that we could have done outside of school". Although a new immigrant to Canada, Daniel's friend Teisha was able to navigate the Canadian system effortlessly. The information she acquired from her parents allowed Teisha to play the 'game' better than anyone else through her academic achievements. This demonstrates the power of information and how the latter can be used across different cultural contexts.

The power of knowledge on how to navigate the education system is also demonstrated by Daniel when he compares himself to other cultural groups in his high school:

> I feel like the Tamil people or the Chinese people dem, they know from the start of high school what to do. They come with a purpose and I feel like because of the intergenerational trauma for

> Black people, we don't have the educational knowledge that we need in order to approach education successfully.

Daniel's narration reminded me of my own high school experiences. When I was in high school, my Tamil friends attended Tamil Tuition Classes every week. These classes were directed by members of the Tamil community, offering tutoring services in primarily STEM subjects[3]. To my surprise, when I visited their families in Paris, they participated in the same cultural practice. I observed how the sharing of educational knowledge was embedded in cultural gatherings to continue pushing their youth into highly regarded fields. Their efforts are with intent. Their efforts are deliberate. They have an understanding of the value of cultural representation and the education system that is imbued with a cultural understanding that bonding social capital is a robust resource in academic success.

Discussion

A student's home life could work to hinder or to facilitate their education journey. Daniel and Idil's homes were indicative of the impacts of their parents' lack of education. They observed barriers of their socio-economic circumstances and deduced that their current situations could ameliorate through investing in their education. Their home lives motivated them to become financially independent, allowing them to use the money they earned to lessen the financial burden on their parents. The research literature suggests that lower income families headed by a single mother is the least conducive family structure for a child's success (Blake, 1985; Coleman, 1988; DiMaggio & Mohr, 1985; Horn & West, 1992; Pong, 1998; Thompson et al., 1992). Findings from my study, however, suggest the opposite, thus contradicting this literature. Daniel's story indicates that his unfortunate low-economic status brought him the motivation to strive for fortune. These findings

[3] STEM is an acronym used to describe the following academic disciplines: Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics. There have been efforts made to improve the presence of Black students in these respective programs (Lundy-Wagner, 2013).

propose that resilience could be used to overcome adverse conditions towards success in the education system (Cunningham & Swanson, 2010; Garbarino et al., 1992; Luthar & Zigler, 1991; Safyer, 1994). Both participants demonstrated an intimate connection to their racial identity by sustaining positive views of their race. For example, when I asked Daniel if he believed his friends were bad influences, he rejects this notion while acknowledging that they may not have been conducive to his success. Likewise, Idil maintains positive views of gang culture in which she acknowledges the disadvantageous conditions that lead to such activity. These participants illustrate the ability to sustain positive views of Black culture in spite of their 'negative' social environment. Their socio-economic internal and external environment served as their motivation to be resilient to transcend "their present situation to facilitate better life opportunities for themselves" (Miller & MacIntosh, 1999, p. 162).

This establishment of a strong cultural identity was further reinstated by their teachers who adopted culturally responsive pedagogy. Culturally responsive teachers inspired them by transmitting material that resonated with their realities. As they recollected the fond memories of these teachers who provided a positive experience, both participants were deeply impacted by these teachers for their care and the transference of knowledge that was relevant to their life experiences (Gay, 2002; Hollins et al., 1994; King et al., 1997; Pai, 1990; Smith, 1998).

Self-affirmations, the internalization of a positive Black identity, could help counter stereotype threats to build resilience (Anderson & Martin, 2018; Cohen, 2009; Miyake et al., 2010; Siege et al., 2005; Siegel et al., 2015). Daniel and Idil were exposed to external negative influences such as gang violence and premature substance use. Chestang (1972) posits that character development in hostile environments is intimately connected to resiliency. As Daniel and Idil were oscillating between two worlds – their home life and school life – they acquired skills to learn how to socialize with their predominantly White educators in order to create the connections necessary to excel in their studies. In the interview, Daniel explains how he learned to be "obedient" when interacting with educators. Idil,

on the other hand, expressed always having the ability to navigate both spaces with ease. Miller & MacIntosh (1999) postulate:

> The academically achieving adolescent may realize that success in the mainstream must include a degree of adherence to its values and beliefs. Nevertheless, he or she must also develop a sense of self and connection within the community as insulation from the negative conditions certain to be encountered because of race. (p. 162)

Their teachers demonstrated the ability to adequately respond to the school's cultural surroundings. The participants both indicated the desire to transfer what they have learned from these culturally responsive teachers to their communal efforts to help their respective communities. This reveals the lasting impact of positive educational experiences and the ability for educators, of all cultural backgrounds, to become catalysts for positive change in marginalized communities.

With Idil and Daniel being immersed in the Black community in all facets of their lives, they have had the opportunity to bond social capital to solidify their cultural identity. Yet, bonding social capital is considered the lowest form of social capital (Putnam, 2000). Living in a lower-income Black community limited their access of knowledge to learn how to successfully navigate the education system (Putnam, 2000). Both participants only gained information within their respective communities that were both socially and economically disadvantaged. That is, the diffusion of information being circulated within racial groups could further widen the cleavage between races thus exacerbating the Black community's ability to bridge social capital. Putnam (2000) asserts that "ethnic community niches stunt economic growth" (p. 322). This is particularly integral as both Daniel and Idil had parents who lacked the know-how to help their children use education for future economic growth. Daniel was fortunate enough to have met Teisha within his cultural community who provided him with the tools he needed to succeed. Witnessing the Tamil and Chinese populations in school gave Daniel, and myself, more insight on how Black communities could empower youth to strive for university through the

transference of knowledge. This knowledge comes from social interactions with external groups by bridging social capital outside racial and ethnic lines. The lack of access to information on how to navigate the education system is a result of recent immigration, historical oppression, social class, and socio-geographic location. Both bonding and bridging social capital are of utmost importance for Black students in desperate need of guidance to actualize their academic aspirations.

In this chapter I have offered the narratives of two participants, Daniel and Idil. Both narratives show how home life, role modes, and knowledge of the school system can facilitate entry into learning spaces. In the following chapter I will be discussing how financial capital determines the necessity of extracurricular supports in education attainment.

CHAPTER THREE: FINANCIAL STATUS

"I was just another Black student in the school and probably another statistic…".
– Ciara

Ciara and Jaden attribute their school success to the financial support they received throughout their education. Both participants were involved in French Immersion, a program that gave them access to schools that were outside of their catchment area. Jaden attended predominantly Black elementary schools and a Portuguese populated Catholic high school. Ciara attended a middle school that was located in a poor neighbourhood while her high school was largely Asian populated and high-achieving academically. The support systems for the two participants differed in magnitude, frequency, and accessibility. Although Jaden and Ciara both come from Jamaican backgrounds, Jaden's parents' financial capital granted him access to a plethora of resources that Ciara needed to scrounge to find. Ciara's parents were both involved in her life but it was mainly her mother who was carrying the family's financial load. When encountering hardships, Ciara did not have support until she joined a club sport[4]. Contrarily, Jaden always had numerous contacts where he could draw support from both inside and outside the sporting realm. While both participants were capable of finding success through sport, the availability and necessity of sport engagement were almost entirely determined on social class. In this chapter, I document the two participants' educational journey to illustrate how social class and race can render Black students (in)visible in the education system.

[4]This term is defined as a sport that operates at a highly competitive level to be scouted/drafted by colleges and universities. Club sports, also commonly known as *rep sports*, is representative of the local community and compete in a reputable league. A league is comprised of top teams arranged in age and skill level. Club sports opportunities are expensive and require a high level of skill and time commitment.

Inside Ciara's Experience

Home Life

My parents came to Canada from Jamaica at a very, very young age. They went through the whole Canadian school system as well. I know on my mom's side, a lot of her family had already moved here, to the UK and to the States. I guess it just made sense for her to come over as well. My parents didn't have the best school experiences which meant they did not particularly like speaking to the school. They felt like the school would just call home about nonsense.

I grew up living with my mom, grandmother and my siblings. After everything we've gone through as a family, I would say we're a totally tight knit. We've grown so much together. No family is perfect. Obviously, we have our moments, but I love my family. When I was younger, I went to church all the time. I was at church every single Sunday up until I started playing club. My family is Christian – I believe in God and I feel like being involved in religion has given me morals and values. Growing up, I did encounter people who had no sort of background in religion. I'm not saying that it's necessarily bad, just different.

Honestly, all power to my mom. She worked so hard to be able to put us through everything that we wanted to pursue. She just did not have the time to really sit down with us and help us with homework every single day. My mom made it a point to make sure our family was close. She made it a point to make sure we experienced more than what she did growing up. She tried her best at everything. I would say if my mom wasn't at work, she was home with us or taking us out to do something. And I'm so grateful for that.

School Life

I vividly remember my elementary experience. I remember being SK to about grade two and absolutely loved being in school. In grade two, I had a Black teacher who made learning fun. I would rush home to do my homework all the time. I would show my mom everything that I would do at school

and tell her many school stories. I just loved being with my friends and learning new things every single day. I got to grade three and there was this teacher… absolutely did not like her. She made my education experience pretty much hell. It was the first time I got a bad grade in a class and it really threw me off. Like, I started to think: "Am I not smart anymore? What's going on? What am I doing wrong?". She would put me in very low reading groups when I was an exceptional reader at the time. She would be very short with me, particularly when we weren't able to understand something quickly. It was a problem. She would yell and just make our experience pretty much hellish. And when I look back on it, it wasn't just me who had experienced that. I had a lot of Black friends in my class and we experienced the exact same thing. And now when I look back on it, I wonder if it was a little bit targeted. I remember when we left grade two, we were some of the smartest kids in the class. And as soon as we got to her class, things changed.

By grade seven, I met a lot of people and was exposed to a lot of different things that I've never seen before. For example, one girl got pregnant in middle school. It was not the greatest school because of the communities surrounding it but the teachers did their best. By grade eight, I had to have very serious surgery that had me out of school for a long time. The teachers and my family did their best to make sure I got the materials that I needed. But in all reality, I really couldn't do all that much. Being off for four to five months meant that I was pretty much bedridden. I wasn't able to get up. I wasn't able to go to school or do anything. This experience made the transition to high school very difficult, especially in specific subjects like math and science where it's so important to know the foundation to be able to pursue a career in those fields.

In grade nine, I started to get involved in club sport. I started playing club at the beginning of my grade eight year, but because of my surgery, I wasn't able to play the full season. I loved the time I spent playing club, but it did take up a lot of my time – club was heavily my focus. Once I was introduced to club, I made a lot of friends with people from various backgrounds. People who were

very well off and very, very comfortable. They came from two parent households, in the more luxurious areas of the city. Like nothing I've ever experienced or even knew that life could be like. So, you know, now I'm trying to pursue that in a way. And now that I look back on it, it is such a luxury to be able to be dropped off and picked up at school by your parents; to make sure that you are at school and back home on time. There were moments where I felt very boxed in a way because I felt like they would just never understand my experiences. And I felt like I couldn't really confide in anyone. I just wasn't really trusting enough to really divulge and share my story because I did not think anyone would understand. And that was very hard. Because of this, I also felt like my demeanor completely changed because I didn't want to be seen as the aggressive Black girl or the loud Black girl. Even when I was upset or things annoyed me, I would be very quiet just because I was trying to keep some sort of 'name' for myself. I kind of let a lot of things go and looking back on it, I should've spoken up and said more when I've heard some shit that should've never been said – period. I definitely wanted to fit in as much as I could. And in reality, if I knew this when I was younger, I just would have never… like I'd never fit in. I would have never fit in at the time.

I think what was so unique about my high school experience is being in a school full of Asian students. I feel like it was good in a sense where I pushed myself to try to be better. But then again, it was also hard because the student body was so high achieving and I felt like I was kind of falling behind. Whereas, if I went to a different school with maybe more Black students or a variety of students, I probably wouldn't have felt that way. My experience probably would have been different. At my high school, you'd have the band kids and the choir kids that were super popular. Because I was involved in music, I was kind of separated from negative Black stereotypes, if that makes any sense. We had all of our athletic Black students and I was obviously athletic as well, but I never really associated with those students. And looking back on it, I don't know why. I really don't know why. Was it because I was afraid to or was it because of the group of people that I associated myself with? I feel like those

students got such a bad rep and I don't think they were necessarily bad kids or bad students. I feel like they were just kids who knew what they wanted, but their interests did not match up necessarily with the school's culture. My high school was heavily academic and well known for their music program. And so, they just didn't ever fit in.

In grade 11, my dad got into a really bad accident. It really shook me up a lot – it was something that I wasn't expecting to ever happen to anybody in my family. And I remember just like, not wanting to be in school – at all. When I think about it, I was pretty much absent for a lot of days between grade 11 and grade 12 and none of the teachers cared. Nobody said, "Hey, we've noticed that you don't seem like you're okay. Did you want to talk about it?". Nothing. It's so important for someone who is older who sees a high school student clearly struggling with something to reach out. I would reach out and the fact that my teachers at the time said nothing pretty much shows that I was just another Black student in the school and probably another statistic. Another kid that doesn't want to be there. Another kid that just wants to skip school. They didn't know what the hell was going on in my life at the time. I feel like it was so important to have some sort of relationship because maybe my path would have been different. But at the time, I didn't want to be at school anyway, to be honest.

When it came to choosing a university, I was completely lost. What's interesting is that at the time, I kind of knew that I wasn't gonna go to the States anymore [which is what I had wanted]. The States would have provided me with an opportunity to go to school with a full scholarship. But being at a Canadian university and being in athletics, it's not the same at all. You could get academic grants, but you're definitely not getting funding for being an athlete, which I think is complete bullshit because athletes put in a ton of work to make the school a ton of money. To be honest, I never really thought about school outside of graduating high school until I was involved in sport. I knew that it would allow me to play a lot longer.

All in all, I was just freaking resilient. I definitely got some help getting into university, but I

don't know how I managed. To me, that's just super resilient and that's just showing that I wanted something so much more than I've grown up seeing. I've taken a lot of bullshit. And to be honest, I think I just owed it to myself to kind of say "fuck you" to a lot of people and I'm happy that I did. Nobody had an experience like I've had, and I just never felt understood. But, I'm so grateful for my hardships because I think it's making me the person that I am today. I want people to know if you're willing and you want it, there will be opportunities for you, even if just one person looks out for you, it goes a long way.

Inside Jaden's Experience

Home Life

Both of my parents are from Jamaica. My dad moved here when he was seven and my mom moved here when she was eleven. Growing up, I lived with both of my parents and younger brother. My parents had decent jobs and they both went to either college or university. My home was pretty comfortable. I had my own room; it was a good living space. Throughout my childhood, the basement was set up for us to play sports there. We're all pretty close as a family which is really good. Like, it's easy to have conversations with each other and talk about things which I really value. Some of my friends say that we're weird because we seem too perfect but it's just my normal. We don't eat together as much now cause I travel so much but every once in a while, when I'm home, it's nice to just hang out with the fam; family dinners and Christmas time are always such good cherished times to be together.

When I was in school, it was mostly my mom who helped me with my homework. She helped me with my English and school projects while my dad would help me with math stuff. I also did Kumon[5] *at some point. My parents put me in French Immersion but French was always challenging for me so I*

[5] A private Mathematics tutoring service.

had a French tutor for a while which helped me a lot. One of my neighbors was a teacher too so sometimes in the summer, I would go there and work on English. I always had the support whenever I needed it. When I was a kid, I had to read two books per summer. Grade one summer I'd be doing grade two stuff; grade two summer I'd be doing grade three stuff. My mom was always prepping me for the next level. It was a big push from my parents that school's a priority. Whenever it was exam time in high school and I was studying, my parents were pretty cool with me just taking over the basement or the dining room. I used to call it a 'study fort'. It was really cool, just to spread out and make space. Also, it was never really loud or busy at my house so I never had to worry about that. My friends also found it easy to come over and do group study stuff together.

In elementary school, I wanted to play hockey and my dad said, "You don't know how to skate". My school taught us how to skate, ski and snowboard. We got a lot of exposure to a lot of different things. I learned how to skate in school and I came back home and said, "I can skate now!" so he signed me up for hockey. I got pretty good at it, but I wasn't focusing on school at all. That year, I got asked to play for the next level up and my dad said, "Nope, you're not focusing on school so you don't get to play". Even in that experience, I learned that if I don't focus on my education, then good things won't happen and later on you get punished for it. There was even another time where I remember I was playing hockey and my dad was like, "Did you clean the bathroom?" and I replied "No". He asked why and I said, "Oh, I forgot". He just said, "Okay". I woke up the next morning and said, "Oh, we're late!". And then he told me, "You forgot to do your chores. You're not going to hockey".

Overall, my parents were always supportive and would always defend me. On our way back home from hockey games, my dad and I would debrief about what I did well, what I could work on and what I thought about the game. That was really helpful. Just learning how to self-reflect through sports is a skill that I do in my own life. I always felt like I wasn't alone and that I didn't need to go through things in silence. From a young age, my dad told me, "you're going to have to work twice as hard to

get half as far as everybody else". It's just something that I knew from being younger and when I started to see it for myself, it wasn't a surprise. I think it was more surprising for everybody else. Like, "Oh my God, I didn't know racism still exists". I'm like, "Yeah, cause you're White". Hockey exposed me to a lot of racism. It was always an uphill battle, especially traveling to places like Acton or Orangeville. I'd be getting shit from referees or parents or other players. I remember being like 10 years old and I was playing North York and somebody called me Blackie. He said, "What are you doing here Blackie?". I think I scored like two goals in overtime in that game and then I went up to him and said, "That's what Blackie can do". It was just something that I had a lot of conversations with my parents about. I feel like it shaped my personality in a good way. Yeah, I think a little adversity is good for people too. I mean it's shitty that's the way it comes about but that's kind of like how life is – or was.

School Life

As I talk about it, I am finding out that my elementary school experience was really unique. My school was very much centered around extracurriculars. I had a gym teacher that really made sure that whenever it was an Olympic year, we had a lot of sports to play. If we were learning about medieval times, we got to make swords out of cardboard. We did dance choreography and social networking stuff. The school really valued the aspect of working hard. And if you work hard, you get the rewards. You would get your name on the board or on the announcements. The whole experience from the start was if you work hard, good things happen. It was a pretty good school. There was not any discrimination. I'd say that there wasn't any pressure against me. The majority of the students at my elementary school looked like me. I'd say there'd be like maybe two White kids, one or two Asians; everyone was either Black or brown skin for the most part. I felt very much at home and comfortable with the people around me. Growing up with diversity was really nice.

I went to a Catholic high school because it offered French Immersion and it was in my area unlike my elementary school that was further out. That was a switch up. I was now in a school where the majority of the school population was Portuguese. Very different than the super multicultural school I went to before. I got to get really involved in high school and learned about student council. I learned how getting involved in student council meant you got to do fun things. When I was in grade nine, I saw this cool kid enter my class. When he left, my teacher told me that he was the school president. I asked her how do you become school president and she said you essentially have to do a speech if you want to run. I didn't like public speaking but I still did a speech in front of the whole school – 1400 people. I won student council every year and became student council president, athlete of the year and valedictorian in my final year. I didn't get into the university I wanted, I missed it my 0.35%. But still, I found that getting involved in the school helped me learn a lot about the system and the teachers. In grade 12, someone connected to my dad and called me saying, "Hey, I went to this university program. You should consider it". I didn't know much about the university but I got accepted into the program and really liked it. Somebody in a five-minute phone call told me it was good and I'm pretty grateful to them for it.

Being athletic, I feel like is a positive stereotype that works in my favor. I guess I identified with physical attributes of what a Black male is and used it in a positive way. I always found school easy and doable. It's never been a massive challenge, or negative. I just knew if I work hard, I get good marks. Definitely there were challenging parts but there was a lot of support so I didn't feel like I was alone in that. I feel like I just met people at the right time that were able to help me and guide me. I can trace back all my success now to the people who took time out of their day just to help me become better.

The Impact of Finances on Learning

All throughout Ciara's life, her financial status limited her accessibility to the education support she needed to succeed. After a surgery that left her bedridden for months, she was ill-prepared for secondary school. Her financial status limited her accessibility to a tutor that could have helped bridge the learning gap, preparing her for the following school year. Jaden, a middle-class participant from the GTA, always had the support he needed to succeed. Jaden lived in a house with his brother and two parents who held respectable jobs that allowed them to provide their children with the resources they needed. During the early years of his childhood, Jaden was enrolled in Kumon, a private mathematics program geared to improve children's math competency through daily and repetitive practice. With his parents having obtained a post-secondary degree, Jaden was able to consult them for advice while applying to university. If his parents were unable to assist him, they would either find a tutor or consult a friend. This is starkly different from Ciara who desperately needed support but her lower-class neighbourhood and lack of funds made it increasingly difficult for her to receive the latter. Once she joined club, she was able to utilize her connections with middle- to upper-class families to flourish in her sport. Being raised by a single mother, Ciara could not rely on her mom to assist her with her homework because she was often too busy. "[My mom] worked so hard to be able to put us through everything that we wanted to pursue. She just did not have the time to really sit down with us and help us with homework every single day".

Merely having the option to use extracurricular activities as a motivator demonstrates a blatant class divide between Ciara and Jaden. Rewards for Jaden were luxuries in Ciara's world. She was bereft of the privilege of choice as her financial status allotted her with very few options. Therefore, Ciara's lower-class status disabled her from accessing the resources that she needed to succeed. She explains that even upon entering university, her social class was an obstacle that she needed to overcome:

> I didn't have the greatest materials or resources to use in order to get through my studies. I would say my grades kind of fell behind because of that. And the minute I was able to afford the resources I needed to be able to do well in school, my academic grades just shot right up. … So just having access to internet, a laptop, just being able to afford eating on a regular basis.

In this quote, Ciara demonstrates how her grades were a direct reflection of her financial struggle. After Ciara's father experienced a tragic accident, she felt obligated to work and support her family in spite of her dreams of receiving a full scholarship to study abroad. Her financial status meant that she was unable to focus solely on school; she needed to focus on survival. As she was able to work and earn more money, she was able to buy the resources she required to excel in her courses. For Jaden, his financial capital also directly connected to his success; the absence of financial stressors meant he could purely focus on being exceptional academically in school.

Sportsmanship vs. Scholarship

Throughout Jaden's life, sports were frequently used as his motivator to continue working towards his academic goals. His father would only allow his son to play a sport if he continued to work relentlessly in his academics. As a result, Jaden established the conviction that hard work equates to success. Although this holds true for each participant in the study, it undermines the adverse effects that may prohibit an individual's hard work to materialize into success; the barriers that may be impossible to overcome regardless of a person's most assiduous attempts to prevail. These beliefs are tightly held in sport communities where all exceptional athletes have dedicated hours towards perfecting their craft. In Ciara's story, her notion of resilience is problematic as it stresses individual strength and neglects structural factors. This returns to the recurring theme of the promotion of resilience to achieve Black excellence. In Ciara's story, this belief overlooks the necessity to overhaul the systematic barriers that demand resilience for success in the first place. Both participants focus on this idea of resilience, of individual determination, without reflecting on the barriers, or lack thereof, that dictated their path.

While recounting her experience of attending a high-achieving Asian populated high school, she expresses that a more multicultural school may have been easier academically. “[I]t was also hard because the student body was so high achieving … [w]hereas, if I went to a different school with maybe more Black students or a variety of students, I probably wouldn't have felt that way”. Ciara internalized a sentiment that regards predominantly Black populated schools as academically lower-achieving. Her childhood experience of being perceived as unintelligent by her teacher because of the colour of her skin may have perpetuated this narrative of Black academic underachievement, a stereotype threat creating another mental barrier to surmount to regain confidence in her intellectual abilities (DeSantis et al., 1990; Fordham, 1988; James & Taylor, 2010). Ciara and Jaden were both resilient, but their success was largely due to their access to social capital through their interactions with people that held the human capital necessary to actualize their full potential. Jaden’s extensive middle-class social network gave him the power to utilize connections to assist him on his education journey. Ciara’s connection to middle- to upper- class members of her sport environment were able to provide her access to the stakeholders that could give her the opportunity to play on a university team. These members of society hold the human capital that Black students need to employ to build social capital through sport. These individuals have the money, networks and resources to invest in talent that will in turn benefit their investors. Ciara was scouted by a university coach but in turn, her athletic performance was ground-breaking for their franchise, increasing sport viewership and the development of the university’s athletic program. Resilience is important, but it is futile without stakeholders to aid lower-income students in honing their skills and investing in their abilities.

Unlike Jaden, Ciara needed sport in order to be successful in the education system. Entering high school, Ciara already fell behind due to her surgery the preceding year. She began playing club and found that it was an outlet where she could feel free. Her lower social class meant that sports could not be used as a motivator – it was indispensable. In order for sports to be used to motivate a student’s

academic success, additional supports need to be present to assist the athlete in actualizing his or her goals. For example, Ciara could not improve in math without having access to more assistance. This assistance required money and resources that were absent throughout Ciara's educational experience. Instead, she devoted hours towards perfecting her sport by practicing consistently and participating in tournaments. In time, all of Ciara's siblings became involved in club – a unifying family endeavour. Her parents reinforced this view by ensuring Ciara remained focused on excelling in her sport. When asked about the conversations she had with her parents growing up, she replied, "Being focused on club. Literally, club all the time". Her parents' trust in her abilities gave Ciara the ammunition she needed to fully invest in her sport. Academics took a backseat as sport was perceived as her golden ticket into post-secondary. In contrast, Jaden's financial status and parental support meant that his academic performance was sufficient since sport was not a mandatory component to his success in education. This afforded Jaden's parents with the privilege of using sport as an incentive.

His economic status gave him the agency to use sport as he pleased. His post-secondary aspirations were not solely reliant on his athletic performance. Although he received scholarships for university, he was also receiving assistance from his parents – a leverage that was absent from Ciara's life, and the lives of all of the other participants.

Sport gave Ciara access to information and resources that were once absent. Simply driving in a car was a privilege that she did not receive until she joined her club team. Entering the sport world, Ciara began to witness the opulence that exists in Toronto, apprehending her inferior status in society. "Once I was introduced to club, I [met]… people who were very well off and very, *very* comfortable. They came from two parent households, in the more luxurious areas of the city. Like nothing I've ever experienced or even knew that life could be like. So, you know, now I'm trying to pursue that in a way". Viewing the lives of her teammates gave her a vision of a life she could attain under the condition that she succeeds in her sport. Ciara played on a predominantly Black populated team and for

the first time, was exposed to Black 'wealth'. Prior to beginning club, Ciara was unaware of the life she could live. Her economically subordinate position was her normalcy and any life outside of her socio-economic area was foreign. This suggests that Ciara had to engage in an extracurricular activity to be successful in the education system. "To be honest, I never really thought about school outside of graduating high school until I was involved in sport. I knew that it would allow me to play a lot longer". Her passion for sport outweighed her disdain towards school, motivating her to outperform her competitors on the court. This indicates that sport could be used as a tool for students to achieve a university education if they do not have the academic supports required.

Through analyzing the experiences of both Jaden and Ciara, the study suggests that sport has been an important factor in both of their successes. Sports allowed Jaden to build connections, adapt to new White dominated environments and acquire the drive he needed to continue working towards his academic goals. Sport became the place where he learned about social injustices and anti-Black racism. Although Ciara also encountered anti-Black racism in sport, Jaden's experiences of growing up in predominantly Black schools meant that his school life limited these occurrences among his peers. I would propose that learning these lessons outside of the education system were beneficial as retaliations against discrimination could have negatively affected his school experience and academic success. The consistent support of his parents aided him in overcoming adversities within his sport. At the end of sharing his experience of encountering racism in hockey, he concludes with "that's how life is – or was". This illustrates that Jaden regards racial discrimination as an issue of the past and no longer considers it as a relevant issue in his current life. This re-illustrates how Jaden's social class has enabled him to navigate racism; his sport performance and unlimited support provided him with the sense of security that racial discrimination cannot hinder his progress. This phenomenon is privileged as lower-income Black students do not have similar supports and thus risk being deterred from moving towards a higher level of education when combatting racism. Sport could be an outlet for Black

students to develop the essential skills required to handle racism in a society where discrimination still exists and to enhance said skills through the direct or indirect acquisition of financial capital.

Discussion

Engaging in the stories of the two participants raises awareness on the affects of financial capital in education attainment. The research literature advocates social capital as a remedy to counteract the ramifications of poverty (Brisson et al., 2009; Putnam, 2000). “Financial capital is approximately measured by the family's wealth or income. It provides the physical resources that can aid achievement: a fixed place in the home for studying, materials to aid learning, the financial resources that smooth family problems” (Coleman, 1988, p. S109). In the study, Jaden had an extensive amount of resources that was readily available to him because of his financial capital. Ciara needed to bridge social capital with the members of her team to receive the resources necessary to pursue a post-secondary degree. Her club’s involvement in her life helped alleviate financial stresses for her mother. Both participants were engaged in special programs, but financial status was the determinant factor in ensuring that the program was advantageous. Jaden having access to a French tutor helped him continue on in the program – without a tutor, it would have been increasingly difficult for him to succeed. It becomes that much more incredulous that a student who missed more than half of a school year received no extra supports to ease her transition into high school. Ciara was taking 80% of her courses in a foreign language and was left to survive on her own. Her lower financial status intensified her disadvantaged position as her mother had no access to resources thus relying solely on the education system for academic support. Financial status coupled with academic performance within the school affects students’ (in)visibility to educators and administration.

The participants were able to succeed by bridging social capital, creating connections outside of their social groups to receive the resources necessary. Jaden’s middle-class status gave him access to a community where he was capable of bridging social capital across racial and ethnic lines. What “high-

achieving suburban school districts have in abundance is social capital, which is educationally more important even than financial capital" (Putnam, 2000, p. 306). Through his engagement in student council and sports, Jaden was able to reap the benefits of the social capital his school had to offer, acquiring the skills to be socially malleable to achieve his goals. Ciara's disconnection from her school during the period of health challenges hindered her ability to create social networks within her school environment. For "disadvantaged [students], 'bridging' social capital may be the most lucrative form" (Putnam, 2000, p. 322). The inaccessibility to material and social resources inhibit students' ability to build social capital (p. 322). A richer social network was imperative to Ciara's success in the education system for these networks were intricately related to access to goods, services, employment, and opportunities for social mobility.

In this chapter, sport was observed as one of the most powerful ways a Black student could bridge social capital. Black athleticism was a tool they used to combat systemic barriers to overcome adversity. Jaden also described Black strength as a stereotype that he was able to work in his favour throughout his education experience. Ciara and Jaden had to learn how to exist in White spaces thus meaning that these participants had fewer ethnic ties and were forced to create connections outside of the Jamaican diaspora (Tatum, 1997, p. 71). This disconnect was uttered by both participants during the interview. Jaden admitted that he felt hurt when some of his friends would call him 'whitewashed' for playing hockey, a sport scrutinized for being a 'White man's sport' (James, 2005). Likewise, Ciara particularly felt invisible throughout her experience, distancing herself from negative Black stereotypes to fit into the school's dominant culture. "A Black student can play down Black identity in order to succeed in school and mainstream institutions without rejecting his Black identity and culture." (Tatum, 1997, p. 64). Dealing with the financial barriers, Ciara felt the need to acclimatize to her school environment to avoid social barriers. Since Ciara was neither seen as a student who 'acted out' nor as a star athlete like Jaden, she was invisible, completely disregarded by both educators and

administration. Her sport success existing purely outside of the school context meant that she did not receive the social acceptance that Jaden gained for his athletic performance. Ciara's experience also illustrates how being 'othered' in the education system pushes Black athletes to strive for full scholarships from American universities. This reveals concerns of insufficient financial support from Canadian universities and also the socialization among Black students "to perceive their chances of success as existing elsewhere", outside a Canadian setting (James, 2005, p. 4). A perception that athletic performance is only appreciated within school contexts when it contributes to the institution's level of recognition. Simply put, a Black student's access to resources is directly correlated to his or her athletic contributions to an institution. This is another example that demonstrates how Black excellence and stereotype threats are the primary conditions that receive attention in the education system; one dispelling stereotypes of Black inferiority while the other affirms the former (DeSantis et al., 1990; Fordham, 1988).

In this chapter, I have outlined the experience of two participants, Jaden and Ciara, and how financial capital impacted their education attainment and sport experiences. Through sport, the participants were able to develop "self-confidence, discipline … [and] inspire high educational and occupational aspirations", instilling a renewed dedication to post-secondary attainment (Fejgin, 1995; James, 2005, p. 8). The study illustrates that sports are integral for Black lower-class students that lack academic support in their quest for a university education. Financial capital coupled with sports offer an increase in social capital where the participants were able to gain knowledge from members of their discourse communities due to their social position in society (Gee, 1989). In the following chapter, I will be highlighting the experiences of two participants of African descent and the impacts of Afrocentricity in education attainment.

CHAPTER FOUR: AFRICAN ROOTS, CANADIAN TONGUE

"Bring your English, but leave your tongue at home".
– Samuel

Samuel and Mariam have experiences that differ from the preceding participants as their backgrounds are directly linked to continental Africa while the others are Diaspora Africans. Samuel's family comes from West Africa while Mariam's family comes from East Africa. The two participants both expressed living in households that demanded academic excellence. Having parents who immigrated to Canada in adulthood led to a family vision of Canada as the Promised Land, the land of milk and honey. Both sets of parents were capable of working themselves out of poverty by owning property and attaining financial stability before the end of their studies. These parents pushed their children to pursue a university degree. Consequently, tensions ensued as the participants' journey for academic excellence entailed acculturation. Mariam appeared to have assimilated into her school culture with ease, quickly understanding how to appease her parents and her educators. On the other hand, Samuel had a rebellious spirit which often led him feeling outcasted from both his school and family. Furthermore, he spent the first five years of his life in Africa, making his Canadian citizenship inefficacious in his reimmigration to his native land. In this chapter, Samuel will share his story of his incessant search for community followed by Mariam's story of being subjected to *White saviourism* in her Catholic schools. Their stories will introduce a discussion on African traditionalism, Afrocentricity, and their effects on education attainment.

Inside Samuel's Experience

Home Life

I grew up for the most part with my mom and my dad. When I was in grade six, up until maybe grade ten, my two older brothers lived with me too. The shift of having my older brothers living with me was tough. And I think the other side of it too was that one of my older brothers, the oldest brother, he kinda tried to play a role as my father, and I wasn't having that. As a young rebellious kid, I was like, "No, stay in your lane". Right. So, it caused some friction at home. I wasn't getting all of the attention anymore. So, you know, their 11-year-old son was a major priority, but the priority was to go to university, finish university, go be a lawyer or a doctor, and nothing else. So, it was almost like a hundred or nothing. And that translated into school too. If you didn't get a hundred it wasn't enough. You know what I mean? Speak about pressure. I ended up starting to work at an early age cause I just kind of figured I'd do things myself without having the pressure of asking my parents. It was just too much pressure, so I just did it myself. Feeling misunderstood, feeling just a sense of wanting to belong to something or to connect with something that was bigger than me.

I also grew up in a very religious household, a Christian household. My dad is Pentecostal, and my mom is Anglican. Because of the huge age gap between myself and my parents, it was difficult for us to relate to each other. They have a more Afrocentric lens when it comes to Black culture. A Christian lens. So, anything kind of outside of the Afrocentrism or Christianity lens was kind of frowned upon. Our church was Ghanaian and when I went to church, or whenever we had like baby showers and things like that, they'd invite me so I was exposed to that cultural practice. And then we were speaking the language at home. I think I got to a place where I didn't want to speak it anymore, but they still made me. Like my dad more so – he still spoke the language. He's like, "I'm not stopping,

I don't care. I'm going to speak the language anyways even if you reply back in English". That's really how I engaged back in the culture and as I got older, I was like, "I gotta learn where I'm from".

School Life

I have a lot of positive experiences. But the ones that I remember the most are a bit more negative, to be honest with you. I was born here in Toronto. I went to Ghana for the first five years of my life. They have a pretty good education system over there. When I came back to Toronto, I spoke English better than all the other grade ones in my classroom. I got student of the month, like every other month. But I came back with an accent and as a result, I was put in ESL for two years. It really put a damper on my confidence because I knew that I was smart. And I think what it did to me culturally – it made me want to forget my tongue and maybe want to forget that I had a history that predated Canadian history or the Canadian education system.

The language I grew up speaking is called Ga. No one else at my school really spoke the language. And I think the other thing in the air right now is that it has become really cool to be of African descent. But 20 years ago, it wasn't so. I lived in one world where it had a lot of history, culture and heritage. And so, based off of that, I had that context. But when I went to school, it was very different. When I went to school, I was kind of told by my teachers to not speak my language. I was to just be Canadianized and to just leave my tongue home. And it didn't… it didn't inspire me to want to speak my language either. So that was something that I found to be really challenging. It actually hindered me from wanting to speak my language. I was ridiculed for being African or speaking another language in the first place and it really deterred me from wanting to speak. I was African so the Caribbean kids would be mean and make fun of me for being African. I guess that's not necessarily racism, but more like discrimination, you know, cultural discrimination.

Middle school was challenging altogether cause I was getting into a lot of trouble. But grade eight was when things really shifted for me and I went to a high school that was small. When I entered, the school I think had just under 800 students. When I left, the school had about 450 so it had this really communal vibe to it. And I think as a result of it being so communal, it just forced me to want to do better. You know, I wanted to be better. The teachers cared, the teachers checked in, you're walking down the hall and teachers are saying hello to you on a first name basis, you know what I mean? And I think that it really created community that I never had in any other school. So, when I graduated high school, I was decorated with awards. I got a scholarship when I graduated high school. I think just being able to have that community in my school is what really allowed me to flourish and thrive.

I chose my high school because it was known for basketball and I loved playing ball at the time. I played basketball a lot from grade seven moving on. And it wasn't until I got to high school that I get more involved in basketball and the leadership stuff. Leadership as in like social activism. There's a teacher who really saw something in me in grade 10. We'd do things like go outside of school and make sandwiches for the houseless. So, it just helped me realize that I really love giving back and that I had a means of helping the community.

I went to India when I was 17 years old. My school and the school board assisted me with that – or paid for it I should say. So that was great. Yeah, I went to Orlando, I went to India and then I went to Las Vegas. So those are the three trips that I went on. It was all school-related trips. So, there's something called the National Society of Black Engineers (NSBE) and that brought me to Orlando and Las Vegas. The NSBE conferences were about getting young Black students to get involved in engineering. So, we'd go to these different breakout sessions, different conversations by Black leaders who were working in their fields, who were teaching us about what it meant to be a professional, what it meant to dress a certain way. There were also some engineering courses, but I wasn't really into engineering, so I just focused on more of the personal development and tips on postsecondary stuff.

India was solely a volunteer trip. I think it was a life changing trip and I never came back the same. It was the fact that the people had so little, but were so, so, so grateful. There's a whole world outside that I had no idea about, that just had so much to offer me.

I had a friend that went to a school up in North York. And when I talked to him about what courses he had, he had anthropology, science and sociology. These are big advanced courses. What it helped me realize was that the school really is a pipeline. You know, when you think about kids that live in Bayview[6], you're going to teach them about anthropology because ideally, those students are going to be the CEOs and leaders of certain companies. Whereas kids who live in lower tax brackets, you're going to teach them the very basics of what they need to know. We had to advocate for Writer's Craft[7]. There were 25 of us. We wrote a petition to say we wanted Writer's Craft and they gave it to us. We had to fight for it. And that's a very basic course. That was one of the most advanced classes I had to be honest with you. I'll never forget her, Linda, she was a writer. She rallied us together and that's kinda how it happened. Yeah. But we never knew. We just kind of took what they gave us.

Inside Mariam's Experience

Home Life

My parents are from Eritrea, a country in East Africa, right in the horn of Africa. They came to Toronto a few years before I was born. I suppose that they were adults when they came. They got married, came here, had my brother and then they had me. They were refugees. There was a war in Eritrea so they escaped after the war and then from there, they came to Canada. Eritrea was very fragile after the war ended. My mom and my dad were some of the first refugees from there to settle

[6] In Toronto, Bayview Avenue is perceived as an affluent area of the city. The Bridle Path, colloquially referred to as Millionaires' Row, is a gated community just off of Bayview Avenue that has housed artists such as Drake, Prince and Gordon Lightfoot.

[7] Writer's Craft is a Grade 12 university preparation course that focuses on students "identify[ing] effective ways to improve the quality of their writing"; an essential skill for prospective university students to develop (Ministry of Education, 2007, p. 175).

here. So, they sponsored a lot of people. Sometimes, it was just the four of us and then sometimes we'd have like 10 people in our house. It depended on the year. But there were a couple of years where my mom's sister and brother came with their children. There were eight of us for quite some time in there. But yeah, we had a lot of people coming in and out of our home. My mom really encouraged me to engage with the community. We would go to an Eritrea Orthodox Christian church. There was also an Eritrean youth coalition in Toronto and that's how I got a tutoring job when I was 15. So yeah, my mom would try to force me to do things through people. I did some things with the coalition but not very much.

Because my mom was originally from Ethiopia, her first language is Amharic and my dad speaks Tigrinya. Both languages use the same alphabet. In our home, we mainly spoke Tigrinya since my mom knew both languages, but I still grew up hearing her speak to other people in Amharic. Tigrinya has no semblance to English; there is nothing even remotely close to it. My parents do speak English, not at first, but they're better now. I went to a Tigrinya language school for a couple of years when I was a kid but I didn't really learn very much. We would usually just speak Tigrinya at home and then I would usually respond in English. I don't speak Amharic but I can speak and understand Tigrinya pretty well. Though, I've lost it over the years.

Since we had a lot of people staying in our home, I grew up doing basic chores. My mom went to a community college when I was a kid so when she wasn't home, I would just cook and clean. When my cousins lived with us, I would help them with their homework since they didn't speak English. It sounds like a lot of responsibility but it didn't feel like too much.

I would describe my family as… weird. Pretty typical in some ways. Atypical in other ways compared to other families. My mom was very happy that I was getting a graduate degree. My dad is still a little bit confused by it. There's also, you know, a lot of expectations of being a wife and a mom which is weird. It's a weird thing to expect both things at the same time. I mean I think it's hard to

explain my family. There are these particularities that are hard to describe, but it's just different expectations that I had versus the other friends I grew up with. Academic success was always a thing when I was a kid. It wasn't really an option. I was a little scared of my parents with the whole school thing. I had to do well. I didn't understand kids who were like, you know, excited when they did well. I'm like, "Oh, I don't have a choice".

My parents always tried to keep my brother and I very involved so we played sports and stuff like that. I think it's only affected us positively. Even though we were in a small apartment, my parents were very academically driven. When I was a kid, they always made sure I did my work and even if there were things they couldn't help me with, they made sure I followed the instructions, that I had enough time and whatever resources that I needed were available to me. I think in that way, they were supporters. I don't know what it's like to go home and ask someone for help. I would just ask for help at school if I needed it.

School Life

I mostly feel ambivalence towards my school experience, unfortunately, but a tad bit of resentment. I feel like I was treated differently than other students because I was doing well in school and I had always done well in school. For students who weren't doing so well, especially students who I was friends with, I could see the way teachers treated them. I was actually discouraged from being friends with other students cause they were like, "Oh, you're not like them. You're one of the good ones". Seeing the way students were treated – and even myself, like I wasn't always treated very well – left a really bad impression. They wouldn't want me talking to the kids who they thought weren't good students. Whatever it was, it was ridiculous. And as a kid, I just was kinda thinking, "Why shouldn't I be friends with that person?". You know, when you get older it's like, "Oh, that's what that means. You're a 'good' one". I also felt ambivalence towards my French education – I didn't particularly care

for it. I didn't really want to remember it. I mean, I'm pretty grateful to my mom now that she made me do it, but I do feel like it took something away from my experience.

I was pretty successful academically so in fifth grade, I was transferred to another school that was an Extended French school. So that's why I had half a day in French, half a day in English. I still did well in school, but I didn't enjoy it as much. The subjects I really liked to learn were in French and I feel like I didn't get what I wanted out of them. And then in high school, I continued and it got a little bit better because it was only two courses in French per year. I realized this as a kid, but I just didn't know how to say it – overall, I just found the program very rigid in the way that we learned. French was very rigid and it wasn't a fun way to learn a language. The teachers were very strict about things. Our classes were very divided. The English class and the French class never mixed. When you're in French class, we were supposed to think in French. And I just hated it. I just want to be able to use this language in a way that I want to. I didn't like being told how to learn and I didn't like doing the same French things all the time. Like grammar drills, dictées[8], book reports where you have to translate words… things like that. Even at that age, I didn't think it was a helpful way to learn French and I realized that later when I had other teaching methods in post-secondary.

My family isn't Catholic, but they're Christian. And our lent period is different from the school's period. So, when we would be fasting every year, it'd be different from theirs. And I would always tell my grade 8 teacher that we were Orthodox but I guess cause he heard my parents or myself speaking Tigrinya, which sounds pretty close to Arabic, that he just assumed that we were Muslim even when I would tell him repeatedly that we weren't. He'd still say things like, "How's Ramadan going?". I'd be so confused. I wouldn't know what he was talking about. My family is Orthodox and it was a weird kind of racism for a Black family cause it was just so bizarre. No matter how many times I would

[8] A language assessment where students write down words dictated by the teacher.

explain to him that my family celebrates the same holidays just at a different time because our calendar is different, he would just not get it. He would make it very apparent that I was different and would make me feel very different from everyone else. I was the only Eritrean and it was just uncomfortable. That was a weird racist, xenophobic thing. Like a combination of the two.

In school, I mainly dealt with teachers giving me underhanded compliments about my grades. Like "Oh my God, this is a great paper!". There were a lot of stereotypes at my school about Black people: the super athletic kids being bad kids, the kids who misbehave or whatever. I think that's what my peers thought. From teachers, I think they thought, you know, they weren't going to university which was kind of the opposite of me. They were going to be streamed into the applied or locally developed level, they wouldn't be going to school afterwards, you know, surprised when they were really smart or really outgoing or really sweet. A lot of expectations were pretty low generally. But I think the stereotypes from peers were pretty standard. Usually the guys are rough and they're not as smart. And then the girls are just rude or loud. I'm like hyper aware of speaking. I speak a little bit more academically and, in many ways, more like myself in the ways that I think about things.

The class that had the most impact on me was an AP[9] History class that I was put into by accident because it fit my schedule and my grades were good. We started the course learning about the scramble for Africa and just learning things that I had never ever been exposed to. That same year, I was in a World Issues course, which were both taught in their own kind of problematic ways, but I was really exposed to so much. I had never heard of these things before and I was pretty shocked when it was pointed out. It took 18 years of my life to get to that point. I think those are probably the most meaningful courses for me, especially with what I'm doing now.

[9] Advance Placement (AP) is a specialized course offered to high school students. Upon completing an exam, the course can apply towards their university degree.

Holding on to Tradition

Throughout Samuel's life, he felt constrained by his parents' high expectations. The notion of academic excellence being the standard often made him feel inadequate and underappreciated in his parents' eyes. Mariam experienced similar pressures to perform exceptionally in school. The parental pressure to perform remarkably could be attributed to the cultural beliefs held in Africa. Both of their parents immigrated to Canada for economic prosperity. Academic excellence could be imbued in African culture, driven by the belief that education would improve the lives of their children. Both parents moved to Canada during adulthood thus never experiencing the Canadian education system. Their education standards were purely founded on their own experiences of growing up in Africa and their motivations for migrating to Canada. Furthermore, both participants reported never engaging in conversations surrounding racism and how to confront discrimination with their parents. Growing up in African countries, their parents did not experience racism and did not consider how racial prejudice could affect their children's academic trajectory. Academic excellence was absolute and there was no room to discuss potential barriers that could inhibit the goal parents had for their children.

Although stressful to the participants, African traditionalism in migration provided structure and direction; a mentality that inadvertently assisted the participants' pursuit of success in the education system. In Samuel's story, he shares many instances where he would get into trouble throughout his youth. His parents relocated in order to help him regain focus on his education, never wavering on their expectations of him becoming a lawyer or a doctor. The pressure from his parents, in combination with the sense of community he was able to receive in high school, helped him flourish in his studies. Mariam and Samuel displayed a desire for parental approval; a factor that pushed them to continue working towards success. They wanted to make their parents proud and feared the outcomes of disappointing them. Over time, the participants found themselves in a dichotomy that created a rift

between traditionalism and modernization with their home environments contradicting the lessons being taught at school.

Speak Their Language

With academic excellence as their vocation, Mariam and Samuel apprehend how to achieve their goals through interactions with their teachers. Both participants were taught by predominantly White teachers throughout their childhood thus obliging them to adapt to a new cultural environment. They both learned that assimilation was crucial for their educational attainment. This process was more arduous for Samuel who had to learn how to lose his Ghanaian accent. At a young age, Samuel equated cultural erasure to academic success, his reimmigration creating a cultural dissonance. He learned that he needed to speak in a certain manner in order to be taken seriously; in order to be deemed educated. This inadvertently left him in a dichotomy. On one hand, his parents were pressuring him to excel in school. On the other hand, his parents were pressuring him to engage in his culture. These entities could not co-exist without one infringing on the progress of another. This was also the case in Mariam's educational journey. As aforementioned, Mariam was enrolled in the Extended French program when she was in grade five due to her high academic achievements. She did not enjoy her experience in the Extended French Program because she found the program rigid and divisive. Mariam began to experience cultural dissonance through her interactions with her teachers. The more she was viewed as academically inclined, the more educators felt obliged to ensure she remained unscathed by 'bad' influences. Mariam expresses emotions of ambivalence and resentment towards her education experience. Her academic achievements led to her educators feeling obligated to sustain her status as "one of the good ones", her race "*perceived* to be a category of disadvantage" (James & Shadd, 2001, p. 76). This demonstrates the prejudice of Black achievement being an anomaly and educators feeling the need to 'save' Black students from their own community. This phenomenon is called *White saviorism,* a trope that "has the tendency to render people of color incapable of helping themselves" by

deeming White educators as progressive heroes to liberate Black youth from their own demise (Cammarota, 2011, p. 244). “There is the idea that those who are being helped ought to be consulted over the matters that concern them” (Sondel et al., 2019, p. 7; see also Cole, 2012). Mariam did not ask to be saved nor did she need to be saved. White saviorism is imbedded in media and popular culture, a social practice where helping the ‘disadvantaged’ absolve members of the White community from truly reconciling with their implicit biases:

> Accordingly, these adherents to the people’s cause constantly run the risk of falling into a type of generosity as malefic as that of the oppressors. The generosity of the oppressors is nourished by an unjust order, which must be maintained in order to justify that generosity. (Freire, 1976, p. 60)

Movies such as *Dangerous Minds* (1995), *Finding Forrester* (2000), *Freedom Writers* (2007), *Half Nelson* (2006) and *Hardball* (2001) are just a few of many American films that illustrate White ‘generosity’ in an education context (Sondel et al., 2019, p. 7). Rather, the protagonists of their films play “heroic liberal warriors who will save students of Color from failing” (Matias, 2016, p. 9). Mariam’s ability to adapt into her school’s community gave her educators the impression that intra-racial social distancing was integral to her success. In actuality, Mariam still identified with other Black students, her eloquence in standard Canadian English was a skill she acquired in order to fulfill her parents’ wishes – to achieve academic excellence.

Speak Our Language

As Samuel and Mariam began to further adapt into their school’s cultural context, they became increasingly confused about how to continue living in two worlds that appeared to deeply contrast one another. For example, Mariam attended a Catholic school throughout her entire schooling. However, her family celebrates Orthodox Christian holidays meaning that she celebrated holidays at different times than her classmates. Above, she shares a story of her annoyance of the ignorance she endured

from an educator who was unable, or unwilling, to become more educated about this minor cultural difference. Being a minority in the Black community left some of her teachers perplexed about how to categorize Mariam. Since Tigrinya sounds similar to Arabic, her teacher in this anecdote categorized her as Muslim and was reticent to learn more about the diversity within the Black community. It appeared that the teacher felt that he was accepting multiculturalism, but it was more so a "vulgar multiculturalism" that resisted the acknowledgement of social privilege in the intercultural interaction (Dei & Kempf, 2006, p. 48; see also Banks & McGee, 2001). This could unconsciously make a student reluctant to speak their mother tongue in school spaces out of concern of how their educators may categorize and treat them. This experience made Mariam feel othered in her class, her teacher frequently reminding her that she is an outcast in her education space. In Samuel's household, he began to respond to his parents in English because at school, he felt that he was taught to lose his accent to transfer out of English as a Second Language classes. Since both Mariam and Samuel's parents came from Africa, they did not understand how the education system could have an effect on their children's culture through the full engagement in White cultural norms (Aldridge, 2000). The resistance to engage in their culture coincided with their persistence to succeed in the education system. Arguably, they needed disengagement, to an extent, with their culture in order to bridge social capital with their educators to achieve success. The research literature suggests that "language proficiency issues exacerbate educational difficulties, create family difficulties, reduce employment opportunities, produce low self-esteem, and increase discrimination" (Dlamini et al., 2010, p. 410; Kilbride et al., 2001). With both of their parents always reinforcing the importance of speaking their native language, the students were able to overcome the negative impacts of acculturation. Staying true to their cultural roots helped these members of the African diaspora cultivate political and social connections to their 'homeland' (Dlamini et al., 2008, p. 407-408). Samuel's father reinforced the latter by continuously speaking Ga even when his son responded to him in English. Their parents also used religion as a

means for them to interact in their ethnic communities: Samuel attended a Christian Ghanaian church while Mariam attended an Orthodox Christian Eritrean church. The two participants expressed having lost fluidity in their mother tongue over the years throughout their education experience. Their parents also heavily encouraged friendships within their ethnic community as they regarded other Black students as different. They concurred that Black culture in Toronto equates to Jamaican culture consequently leading African diasporic groups feeling compelled to establish their own distinctive ethnic identity.

In Ontario, Jamaicans make up 33.9% of the Black population followed by Nigerians, Haitians, and Ethiopians (Statistics Canada, 2019, p. 17). The Black diaspora, in turn, becomes "an environment that fosters the invention of tradition, ethnicity, kinship, and other identity markers. It is a place where multiple African communities become a monolithic entity and ethnic differences are replaced with ethnic pride" (Massaquoi, 2004, p. 140). The need to establish a distinct identity could be due to ethnic communities feeling exempt from the negative Black stereotypes that Caribbean students face both inside and outside of school. In reality, most individuals who exercise racial prejudice outside of the Black race are uneducated on these 'minute' ethnic differences within the Black community, as evidenced by Mariam's teacher who mistook her as Muslim (Gilroy, 1990). Samuel expresses feeling discriminated for his ethnicity by his Caribbean friends, excluded due to his 'pure' African heritage. Ethnic prejudice permeates throughout all Black ethnic communities, taking different forms. It could be said that their parents' belief in their children being different from other Black students gave their children the impression that the labels thrusted upon them did not fully represent who they were and what they were capable of. Interestingly, I encountered this ethnic division first-hand during my interview with Mariam. When I asked her why she described her family as weird, she replied:

> Your family's Jamaican, right? Let's say you're asking someone else who was Jamaican about their family and they said something, and you'd be like, "Oh, I get it". But it's like hard for me

> to explain it, you know what I mean? There are these particularities that are hard to describe, but it's just different expectations that I had versus the other friends I grew up with. Academic success was always a thing when I was a kid.

Pointing out our ethnic differences positioned me as an outsider incapable of truly comprehending her cultural upbringing. She continues in drawing attention to ethnic differences by reaffirming her distinct Eritrean identity that was heavily focused on academic success. By emphasising the latter, she was insinuating that these values are not as robust in other cultures. I deduce from both participants' commentaries that Afrocentricity gave the participants a space where Black excellence, or African excellence, counteracted the Black underachievement stereotype threat that was the undertone of their education environments and interactions. Samuel acknowledges his parents' roles in keeping him connected to his roots. "My parents weren't afraid to be who they were. Like they were very much themselves and without saying it, I think they taught me how to just stand in my truth". Afrocentricity kept the participants from being a self-fulfilling prophecy in the midst of negative Black stereotypes that assumed their academic failure. Returning to African traditionalism meant that they had a framework where their parents had an unwavering belief in their academic abilities and were resistant to Western views of Black culture. The two participants were always able to return to their roots as a place to resist the Western cultural suppression of Black progression.

Discussion

Altemeyer and Hunsberger (1992) conducted a study to observe the relationship between right-wing authoritarianism, religious orientation, and prejudice. While the study focused on the White population, their conceptual framework helps to dissect how the combination of religion and ethnicity could be used in an African traditionalist context. The participants reported attending an ethnic church with parents who were devoted to their faith. Religion was used as a means to bond social capital and to reinstate a strong ethnic identity. While analyzing the stories, the findings suggest that African

traditionalism brought about an authoritarian parenting style where the participants felt obliged to obey parental authority. Questioning authority has been promoted in Western education as an integral process in a democratic society (Giroux, 1980) but deemed disobedient in an African household. In Dlamini and Anucha's (2005) study of *Intergenerational links of youth from African communities,* the youth in the study were concerned about the confrontational manner in which their classmates communicated with teachers. It brings attention to the renavigations students undergo between their home and school environment and how the latter can disrupt the former (Dlamini & Anucha, 2005; see also Dlamini & Martinovic, 2007, p. 169). This dynamic may be controversial however, the study illustrates that authoritarianism provided the participants with a strong tie to their cultural traditions and a clear vision of their responsibilities as students.

Their parents were resolute in their standards for their children which led the participants feeling stressed about the pressure of making their parents proud. The study indicates that a process of acculturation was a requirement for the students to bridge social capital and to assimilate into their school's linguistic culture. Dlamini and Martinovic (2007) argue:

> In now-accepted multilingual Canada the language practices of schools are bound up in the legitimization of power among different speakers of English; those who use a variety not normalized in schools find themselves at the margins of school discursive practices. It is the differential positioning of speakers within schools that facilitates practices of symbolic domination resulting in continued hegemonic practices. (p. 170)

This hegemonic practice has forced participants to be literate, that is, to be well-versed in apprehending their school cultural community (Freire & Macedo, 1987). During their education experience, the participants learned how to exist in multiple discourses, blending into new linguistic cultures (Gee, 1989). Cultural and linguistic literacy can be considered as a factor that contributes to the success of Black students for discourse communities "are intimately related to the distribution of social power and

hierarchical structure in society" (Gee, 1989, p. 19). Speech is a marker of social class, ethnic origin and geographic location (Dollinger, 2011). Therefore, leaving Black lower-class students in the precarious position of learning a different manner of speaking to converse with their White middle-class teachers that dictate the school's academic linguistic discourse. The process of acclimatizing to different discourse communities is facilitated by the process of code-switching:

> In a country where the standard language (so defined because the dominant group speaks it) is spoken by those in power, another language or dialect spoken by those not in power will be ranked lower than that standard within the dominant culture context. Although the dominant group in [Canada] does not have to learn non-standard English, most members of the subordinate groups are obliged to learn the standard dominant language to get along in school, at work, or in any mixed group settings. (Flowers, 2000, p. 2)

Flowers reaffirms that code-switching is a skill that has become imperative for students to create liaisons with their educators and to dispel perceptions of academic inferiority. In the process, Black students' risk being stigmatized by their racial and/or ethnic community for seemly eradicating their mother tongue to adopt standard English as a first language (Greene & Walker, 2004, p. 436). This is evidenced with Samuel's tension with his father as he rejects speaking Ga. "While classroom time may not allow for in-depth lessons on the history of the language development of different cultural groups, instructors should foster a classroom atmosphere which validates students' language, as it is a part of their identity" (Greene & Walker, 2004, p. 438). In 2016, Statistics Canada (2019) found that third generation Canadians or more spoke mostly English, French and Creole languages. This is a drastic difference from the linguistic diversity of first- and second-generation Canadians that reported over one hundred mother tongues (p. 12). It is of utmost importance to create spaces for linguistic diversity in education spaces to allow Black students to strengthen their ethnolinguistic identity and to remain

proud of the cultural diversity they offer Canada (Cummins, Chow, & Schecter, 2006; Fisher & Lapp, 2013; Greene & Walker, 2004).

The participants were able to hold on to their mother tongue because their parents continued to actively engage their children in their linguistic community. In this respect, their home life became an environment where Afrocentricity took precedence. Afrocentricity "is about location precisely because African people have been operating from the fringes of the Eurocentric experience" (Asante, 2007, p. 32). Their home environment continued to place an emphasis on holding onto their ethnic culture regardless of their children's reticence to engage in their cultural practices. Their parents' efforts to ensure their children had a strong ethnic identity was an asset to the participants as they were able to create their own identity to counteract negative Black stereotypes. In the study, the participants expressed that their parents view Black culture as Afrocentric. When asked about her parents' views on Black culture, Mariam stated:

> That's a complicated question. I mean, they consider themselves in a lot of ways as East African conservatives. They would look at other Black students as being different, which I think they've learned very quickly when they got here that me and my brother are the same as every other Black kid in school. But I think before they had very similar stereotypes as a lot of other people do about Black students and families. Maybe they still do to this day which is unfortunate.

Mariam discloses that ethnic prejudice exists within the Black community and acknowledges that her parents still hold negative stereotypes about other Black ethnic groups. Stereotypes that are held about the Black community on academic underachievement has been ascribed to Black Jamaicans within African ethnic communities. In the process of African traditionalism creating division from 'modern' stereotype threats, ethnic groups attribute these negative views to a specific ethnic group to position themselves in a more advantaged position. Thus, the study suggests a paradox: African traditionalism

engages and disengages with prejudice for academic advancement within their ethnic groups (Altemeyer & Hunsberger, 1992). There has been little research done on the dynamic of religion, ethnicity, and prejudice within the Black community. This conversation becomes increasingly essential as reductionist views between Black ethnic groups could impede the academic advancement of the Black community as a whole. Racial solidarity is a potential remedy in debunking the Black incompetence myth to push for more progressive policies that will ameliorate Black student success.

In this chapter, African traditionalism and Afrocentricity were regarded as factors for education attainment. This ideology encouraged the participants to remain engaged in their culture and to thrive for academic excellence. Their quest for success instigated the necessity to become literate in their discourse community as speech was used to counter the Black academic inferiority stereotype held by some of their educators (Gee, 1989). The final story of the study will highlight the complexities of colourism in the establishment of a cultural identity within the Canadian education system

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CHAPTER FIVE: RESISTING LABELS

"I'm just another person so I don't like categorizing myself".
– Sofia

Sofia's educational journey is unique as it contrasts the experiences of the aforementioned participants. Five of the seven participants in the previous chapters grew up as lower-class citizens for most of their childhood. All seven are darker-skinned with ancestral ties to Africa or Jamaica and are first generation Canadians. Three of the seven participants identify themselves as Black while placing an emphasis on their religious and ethnic status that opposes the dominant Jamaican-Christian culture in Canada. The three participants of African descent identify with their ethnicity while the four participants of Jamaican descent identify as Black. Sofia is light-skinned when compared to the other participants and identifies more with her native language, Spanish, due to an ancestry that varies from European to African heritage. In the interview, Sofia bonded with me through our shared Caribbean heritage, stating "you know how Caribbean parents are", demonstrating that geolocation and language were points of connections that she identifies with the most. At age 14, she immigrated to Canada and began to learn about race in the Canadian education system. Coming from the Dominican Republic, many citizens of Black heritage refute being labelled as Black which led to her apprehension of using this as a classification on how she navigates the world. In this chapter, I will discuss how racial ambiguity exists in the education system and how her parents' education led to her economic and academic prosperity in spite of being the newest Canadian citizen among all the participants in the study.

Inside Sofia's Experience

Home Life

My dad came here after the 2008 recession, you know, when the market crashed. After that, he got laid off from his job in Punta Cana and then he moved to Europe by himself to get all the papers

done. After like two years, we came here. So, after he came, he set it up to make sure that we could have easily moved here. And then we came here. In Dominican, obviously since my dad was here, it was mostly my mom and I've kind of gotten used to being more with my mom cause my dad was always travelling, out there trying to provide for the family. But then once we moved here, it was a good balance. A little bit of both. I feel like I found more stability here once we moved than back in the Dominican when my dad was traveling nonstop. It was like… I almost got used to not having a dad.

When we first moved here, we moved into an apartment. Yeah, I think that was the first apartment I've ever lived in and it was good. I mean, the people were nice. It had a pool in the summer. It was close to my schools. But around grade 10, we moved into the house and that was nicer. Cause like in the apartment, it was harder cause I had to share rooms. My younger sister and I would usually just pick a time and would do homework together. And then in high school, I don't remember much. I just remember more and more about when we moved cause once I got my own room, I was able to have my own desk and just study. I think it's more about having that personal space that helps more. Cause that way, you can just stay up all night to study without bothering people. And as long as I got my chores done, everything was fine.

Growing up in the Dominican, it was mostly my grandma who helped me with my homework. Yeah, mostly my grandma, and my dad too. She passed away. And then when we moved here, my dad helped us with our homework. My mom doesn't like school. My mom kinda speaks English, but she's kind of like embarrassed to talk in front of people because of her accent. But she's gotten better. Growing up, we would always just speak Spanish. We have to speak Spanish just so we don't forget it. Cause even now like, it's hard for us to speak Spanish because we have the little one, my baby sister, and every time she comes home from school, we have to speak English. She came here when she was only six months, so Canada is all she's ever known. But we have to speak Spanish so she knows

Spanish. At home, I was basically the second mom. No doubt. I helped clean, cook, brush her hair – everything. I think that is just how it has to be for the older one.

Both of my parents went to university. My dad works as a computer engineer and my mom used to be a lawyer but now, she's a cleaning lady – but she's the manager. She used to be a lawyer, but when she came here, she couldn't… yeah. Sad reality. It was rough. Because as I said before, she doesn't like school. So, for her to finish her degree as a lawyer and then coming here and letting go of all of that… you can kind of feel it in her. Like, she just feels like she doesn't even want to try anymore. But that didn't really affect us because then again, she was able to be more of a mom. She seemed to have all this free time now, but you could still see how everything financially went on my dad and sometimes they'd argue about that. So, I wouldn't say we were poor… and middle class here is so high. Like the middle class here is rich anywhere else in the world. I would say we lived decent enough to support a family… but not downtown!

I would say my dad is definitely my role model. He graduated, got through university, got his masters. He's always just working hard. You can see that. I'm my dad, just not as hard working. I even went to school for sales cause he was into sales. Most of his stuff kinda just brushed off on me. I have to admit it, I'm a daddy's girl! I would say its important to have role models that look like you because I think the whole part of a person being a role model is for you to identify with them. To kind of feel like you're not alone. Cause then if you have a role model who is the complete opposite of you physically, there's no way in this life that you can be them because they're just not like you. You can't force yourself to be like them.

My dad's side of the family is from St. Kitts. My great grandpa is from St. Kitts, I guess that's where we get the African from. And then my dad's mom I think is from the European side. You know, the Caribbean culture is all mixed in there. And then… I don't really know my mom. I'm not really familiar with my mom's side of the family. I know a lot more about my dad's side of the family. After

everything that happened in the Dominican, they try to not relate themselves – like to be seen as Black raced. Nobody wants to be seen like that. I took a course on this actually. So basically, it was when Christopher Columbus got the land and whatever that the Haitians came. And most of the Haitians were Black, right? There was a time where Dominican got independence and had to fight the Black people, so all the hatred came from that. So, they don't like the Haitians. If they see a Black person, they'll think they're Haitian. And that's why we don't want to be seen as Black because we see it as the enemy. And they were considered the enemy because they didn't want to share the land. Also, because of the differences. I am like the mix between the slaves and the Europeans. But anyways, I wasn't there when all of this happened. I'm just guessing that how we look at Black people has something to do with that. Mainly it's just in our culture too. People don't want to be seen as Black in Dominican. I just accept it because I feel like after I left Dominican, I learned more about our history and why we see things the way we do. But if I were to stay there, I'd probably think things the same way, you know? It gets past through history.

As for my parents, they want to be seen as either Dominican or like this mixed culture instead of actual African, right? So, they wouldn't admit to that they have it in their blood. So, like I don't want to… like put words in their mouth by saying that they're Black. Like, even when I moved here too, people would come up to me and say, "Are you Black?". And cause of the way I was raised, I don't know, I had no knowledge. I'm like, "No, I'm not Black. I'm Dominican". And then after taking so many courses and getting to know myself more I realised, "Alright, I am Black. I come from Black descendants. Why am I denying it?". It's probably the same thing for my parents, they're probably just not up to that level of education, I guess. I don't know. It says a lot about history in the Dominican, right?

Overall, my parents are great. They're interesting cause they are very young compared to the parents here. So, they are very outgoing. They have a lot of energy. Obviously, they have their ups and

downs. Nobody's perfect. They're very protective. That's like a Caribbean thing. I don't know where they get this super protectiveness from. That's why I moved out because they wouldn't let me sleep over anywhere. I couldn't be with friends that they didn't know. They always had to know where I was, and I had a curfew. I had to be home by midnight, even in university. So that's why I moved out closer to the end of my degree. I wanted space to grow.

School Life

Growing up, I moved a lot. I started out in the Dominican Republic and then I came here in January of grade 7. I'm the oldest of three, the littlest one is still in elementary school. Then I went to high school and the experience was good. I mean, just changing countries was a little bit difficult because the culture is different, the way people see you is different. So yeah, just getting used to a different environment. I went to a private elementary school in the Dominican due to safety and all that stuff. Also, I went to private school for the stuff they teach you. And then when I went to school here, I was in a public school. I've never seen public schools like that. Like public schools here is like a private school there. My mom put me in a Catholic school when we got here because she thought that it would be better than the real public schools. I feel like because I was more grown up, it was all fine. My high school was more Filipino and more diverse than my elementary school. So, it gave me the flexibility to talk to all different kinds of people rather than the same people I was forced to be with in class. And, yeah, it was a good experience because I still kept the friends that I had from elementary school and for the ones I didn't like, I just moved on. But when I first got here in grade 7, I was at a school that was mostly White. Some people were Spanish speaking and I usually hung out with them because they spoke the language.

Since I went to a Catholic school, like especially my friends that I had from elementary through university, their houses are huge. I wouldn't say that their houses are like mansions cause they're not that big compared to actual mansions here. But they were a lot bigger and obviously you can tell their

parents worked hard and were financially stable. But as a newcomer, it's like… wow. Especially cause their homes were so close to the city. Like, their house is probably so expensive. I think probably when we got our home, I think I felt more okay. But still its like… it's different having a house close to downtown than one all the way out of the city. And even when it came to clothes, all the girls would wear TNA[10]. So, I had to have at least one single piece of clothing from TNA. And I think that's it. Gotta make sure that I looked like everybody else, I guess.

My school experience was pretty normal. I went to elementary school and was put into ESL. It was a really good experience because back home, I went to bilingual schools so I already knew English. When I came here, it was more getting used to speaking it… mostly understanding the past tense and all that stuff. Once I got that right, I was pretty set. It's different when you learn English in a Spanish-speaking country than when you actually come to an English-speaking country. You learn what you're saying wrong and what you're writing wrong. Cause what I did back home is just read. Like, they'll teach us English but obviously my past tense and all that stuff would be wrong because I wouldn't speak it. After ESL, I fixed all those little mistakes and I was ready. I feel like if they kept me in ESL after high school, that would've hurt me more because I wouldn't improve. When they took me out of ESL when I entered high school, it was great cause I was at the same level as everyone else.

When I moved to the house in grade 10, I had to commute an hour. I didn't want to change schools and lose all my friends. And it was fine. I got used to it and because I was older, it didn't bother me much. So yeah, I just commuted every morning for like an hour just to stay there. In high school, I used to play a lot of sports: track, volleyball, basketball, soccer. I never did extracurricular activities cause all the school ones were after school. Like, you don't really have time during school to do sports, you know? There's no time to do both. Closer to the end of high school I started to work. I

[10] A clothing brand sold by the company Aritzia. TNA stands for Talula National Athletics.

wasn't given an allowance in the beginning but like at the end, my dad realized that he had to teach us how to manage our money. I got like, $10 a week. Sometimes he'd attach it to chores. It all depends. And I spent it all on food. And I spent it when I'd hang out with my friends at the movie theatre… stuff like that. But still, my dad was always pushing me to focus on school.

Growing up, my friend groups were all White. So White to the point where people said that I needed more Black friends so they could help me with my hair. Yeah… cause I recently cut my hair and kept asking people, "What should I do with it?". But they don't know cause they're White. I really do need more Black friends… I also have some Spanish friends but I don't know, for some reason I don't mix with Spanish people which is crazy. Like, I do have Spanish friends but some of them are just very extra. And I'm the kind of person that just goes with the flow. Like, I'm not their enemies. But if you don't want to talk to me, it doesn't bother me. It all depends on the person. I found that out more now. All my friends from high school and all that shit, especially the ones I've know for years, we don't have that much in common. In high school, we got along cause we watched the same TV shows. I find that now, I see these people once a year and we don't have much to talk about. We don't relate to each other anymore. We have different point of views… they don't understand. Friendship is just about understanding other people.

My friends were good influences for the most part while I was going to school. Some of them got into relationships. I just wasn't into it. I was just focused on school. They started dating their boyfriends in high school. You kind of see how that affected their performance. And they were always honour roll students until they started dating them. And then when I graduated, I got honour roll and they didn't. You see, you just gotta stay focused. But personally, it was hard having them as friends cause they're all White. Right? So, every time you compare yourself its like… it's hard cause you can't be like them, like physically you can't. And it was a lot. It's very hard for your self-confidence. But you know, as I've grown, I've been able to deal with it cause it took a lot for me to cut my hair. I recently

cut my hair because I had it permed before. And I don't know… a part of me always wanted to be like them. And then I realized that I don't have to be like them. I'm my own person. Cutting my hair was something that I always wanted to do. Every time you perm your hair its like, ugh, the same process. You just get tired of it and I've never seen my hair not permed. Ever since I was 4 years old, I permed my hair. And then my middle sister cut it and I was like okay… I could do this. It gave me more of an idea of what it'd be like. And then after I cut it then my mom did it, and then my little sister did it too. You can see it more in the media now, people coming together. But its also just more accepted in Canada. Cause I even go to the Dominican for work and people still look at my hair and judge it and call it bad hair. It just gets me so irritated cause they're not educated. It's not bad hair, it's just different hair. But it's just the way they think about it there. It's how they were raised.

All in all, I'm just grateful cause I know it would be so much different in Dominican. Even though people make you feel different ways, I'm still thankful cause this could have been so much worse. I probably got to learn so much more here in Canada. My parents probably saved so much money on the public school here compared to paying for private school there. I don't have any complaints about my school, but that's why when you asked me to be apart of this, I was thinking, "I had a pretty good school experience".

Discussion: Colourism and Mixed-Races

Sofia's story illustrates the complexity of racial classification and the socializations of individuals of mixed heritage. As mentioned earlier in the thesis, Sofia, in spite of European ancestry, is perceived as Black in accordance with the historical basis of hypodescent. Sofia's Black and Latin heritage appeared to have been the predominant labels ascribed to her throughout her education experience. Her Latin culture was more intimately connected to her identity while her Black identity was ascribed by her external environment. With Latin and Black being viewed in society as two separate entities, Sofia was left navigating two milieus that afforded her different societal obstacles.

Because of historical implications of privilege and subordination, some traits are more identifiable that could in turn deem an individual as a part of the in- or out-group (Kelly, 1997, p. 108). In her experience, perfecting her English and chemically straightening her hair were traits that allowed her access to the in-group, the dominant culture of the school. Still, there is no guarantee that Sofia will be perceived by society the way that she intends. When she first immigrated to Canada, Sofia was put into an ESL program to improve her English. She shares that becoming more fluent in English was an arduous task and that she began to feel more comfortable in Canada once she improved her linguistic abilities. Flege et al. (1995) attests that acquiring a language after childhood results in a variety of English that differs from native speakers. Sofia only began feeling confident in her speaking abilities when she reached a point where she fixed the 'accent *problem'* (Dlamini & Matinovic, 2007, p. 170, emphasis added). With minoritized students being typecast as the 'other', blending into the dominant linguistic discourse dispels xenophobic remarks about Canadian citizenship. This coincides with Dei's (2000) belief in fostering the diversity of learners while recognizing that 'immigrant' does not equate to 'ignorance' or 'backwardness' (see also Dlamini & Martinovic, 2007, p. 166). The ability to mask an accent helped Sofia navigate her school environment and to participate in the school's dominant standard Canadian English culture.

Mixed-races have a unique experience as they also have difficulties fitting into one category (Monroe, 2016; Sims & Joseph-Salisbury, 2019; Taylor, 2008). Sofia describes feeling out of place in every social group and thus choosing to remain ambiguous in classifying herself. She states, "In high school, we had the Black people, White people and the Filipinos. That's it. So, because I didn't belong to any of those groups, I would just jump around everywhere". In the Dominican Republic, she was in an environment where everyone looked like her therefore, she did not feel the need to reflect on race. This further sustains that the marker of being in a privileged position in society is having the option of whether or not to engage in racial discussions. Anti-Black sentiments are prevalent in Dominican

culture where some citizens refuse to acknowledge their African heritage. Even in the interview, Sofia is apprehensive about declaring her parents as Black, afraid of "put[ting] words in their mouth". This demonstrates that her parents also have the choice of resisting labels, the option of engaging or disengaging with Black culture. This permits a certain level of freedom from anti-Black racism and racial prejudice that is not afforded to all members of the Black community.

Before coming to Canada, Sofia did not reflect on her race. In fact, she explains that the Canadian environment and confrontations with people who perceived her as Black stimulated this process of racial awareness. Throughout history, having a lighter skin tone has brought along certain privileges that were unattainable for those with darker skin tones (Monroe, 2016). In the interview, she spoke a lot about her hair and the difficult decision she made to cut it. "I recently cut my hair because I had it permed before. … I realized that I don't have to be like them. I'm my own person". Sofia began perming her hair when she was four years old. Perming her hair made her hair straight which is a Eurocentric look that is often considered as 'good hair', or in Spanish *pelo bueno*. With natural hair becoming more widely accepted, Sofia decided to cut her hair and embrace her curls: a symbol of her African heritage. In her story, her acceptance of her African heritage appeared to happen simultaneously with her decision of embracing her natural hair (Miller, 2016). Mbilishaka (2018) posits that *psychohairapy*, the intersections of hair, mental health, and well-being, could "acknowledge the significance of hair and make use of the existing social support of hair stylists, the natural helpers in the community" (p. 390). When Black girls become proud of their hair(itage), or any other 'Black' physical characteristic, it helps them gain a stronger cultural identity and sense of self (Hutchinson, 2016).

The research literature suggests that those of mixed heritage are also subjected to anti-Black racism sentiments (Baxley, 2008; Fairlie, 2009; Post, 2009). However, Sofia's experience counters this literature as she expresses never feeling ostracized for her race. In fact, she attests that she became

acutely aware of her race in university where she began learning more about colonial history. In a sense, her oblivion to her racial identity, as ascribed by society, could have contributed to her success as she never felt subjected to Black stereotypes nor anti-Black racism. It is unclear as to why Sofia's experience counters the research literature. I presume that her straight hair and linguistic distinction were factors that made her racially ambiguous to society. It is important to note that Sofia is the only participant in the study who did not encounter discrimination in school. In the interview, she acknowledges her hair as being one of the most difficult obstacles to grapple with, her curly afro being a symbol of presumed African heritage. Through chemically straitening her hair, she was able to manipulate historical traits of African heritage to mesh with the dominant White culture of her school. She states, "I'm just another person so I don't like categorizing myself". This statement demonstrates her presumed liberty of categorizing herself whereas the other participants have been categorized by society in spite of their best efforts to control how the world perceives them. Through chemically straightening her hair, she was able to ascribe more to her Latin heritage due to her physical features, native tongue and nationality. On the contrary, the six other participants with darker-skin tones were unable to manipulate their race in the same manner as their skin tone was a constant indicator of their race.

Being the only immigrant in the study, Sofia's experience provides insight to the obstacles of recent immigration. Aside from the aforementioned mentioned social integration, Sofia faced difficulties integrating socio-economically as well. In her story, she describes witnessing the beautiful homes of her classmates and feeling more content when her family moved to a house. This explains sentiments of feeling in the out-group due to financial status. Sofia's ability to attain a university education seems largely contributed to the sacrifices her father made to ensure the financial security of his family. Before moving to Canada, Sofia's mother was a lawyer and her father was a computer engineer. Both of her parents held economically sound careers that allotted her access to private

schooling in the Dominican Republic. Even though her mother had to step away from her career, Sofia's father was capable of maintaining a standard of living that was conducive to her success as she was able to have her own room to study. Kellaghan (1993) suggests a parent's involvement in creating a learning space in the home could assist in academic achievement. Furthermore, with both of her parents obtaining university degrees, Sofia had parents who were capable of transferring their human capital to their children thus providing her with the home support required to pursue a higher level of education. Robinson (2015) posits that human capital, in this case, the transference of academic knowledge from parent to child, could be a contributor to success. In Sofia's experience, financial and human capital assisted in her pursuit of education as she was able to acquire the supports necessary to excel in her studies.

Sofia's story opens up many questions about how Black students navigate the education system and the importance of human capital in educational attainment. As the only mixed-race participant in the study, her experience reveals the complexities of how a person's physical characteristics affects how they navigate through the education system. For members of the Latinx community, changes in self-identification vary based on immigrant status and the "rendering of race and ethnicity that already exist in the home country and [Canadian] context" (Fergus, 2016, p. 118). At the time of the study, colourism was still prevalent in her family, revealing favouritism for a Eurocentric esthetic of straight hair and lighter skin. In Sofia's story, she shares that although her mother also decided to wear her natural hair, she still tries to make her hair straight thus demonstrating an internal struggle to maintain a colonized perception of beauty. The literature indicates that colorist attitudes can be held by individuals both inside and outside racialized groups (Monroe, 2016). Monroe (2016) encourages educators to tackle colourism in school as a way to confront the implicit biases and the "racialized emotions of shame, guilt, and anxiety" that students who fall victim to colourism may endure (p. 17). Colourism affects socialization for Black women especially because they are obliged to maintain a high self-

esteem in the wake of family members, friends and society projecting their own colonized conceptualizations of beauty that drastically contrasts their cultural reality (Monroe, 2016). It is a phenomenon that exists in all races thus requires more cultural awareness of how different ethnic groups perceive beauty and the biases that are associated with skin colour and racialized physical characteristics.

Sofia's education experience also elucidates how human capital can facilitate new immigration. The experiences she had pre-migration assisted in her ability to socialize in Canada upon her arrival as she already had exposure to the English language. With both her parents having held highly regarded career professions, Sofia was exposed to parents who were capable of transmitting their knowledge and positive study habits as they understood the necessary steps required to obtain a higher level of education. It is observed that human capital – parental and home support – was an asset in navigating the Canadian system that led to her success. Sofia's story sheds light on the complexities of immigration and the intricacies of socialization in Canada.

Table 2

Factors the participants attributed to their success in the education system

Participants	Factors	
Daniel	• Culturally literate in academic spaces • Financial instability as motivation • Friendship(s) • Linguistically literate in academic spaces • Resilience	• Self-regulation • Strong cultural identity • Understanding of the school system structure
Idil	• Afrocentric upbringing • Culturally literate in academic spaces • Financial instability as motivation • Linguistically literate in academic spaces • Resilience	• School involvement • Self-regulation • Standard Canadian English proficiency • Strong cultural identity
Ciara	• Culturally literate in academic spaces • Financial instability as motivation • Linguistically literate in academic spaces • Resilience • Sport	• Self-regulation • Standard Canadian English proficiency
Jaden	• Culturally literate in academic spaces • Financial stability for education • Linguistically literate in academic spaces • Parental and home support • Resilience	• School involvement • Sport • Standard Canadian English proficiency • Understanding of the school system structure
Samuel	• Afrocentric upbringing • Culturally literate in academic spaces • Financial instability as motivation • Linguistically literate in academic spaces • Resilience	• School involvement • Standard Canadian English proficiency • Strong cultural identity
Mariam	• Afrocentric upbringing • Culturally literate in academic spaces • Linguistically literate in academic spaces • Parental and home support • Resilience	• Self-regulation • Standard Canadian English proficiency • Strong cultural identity • Understanding of the school system structure
Sofia	• Culturally literate in academic spaces • Inexperience with anti-Black racism • Financial stability for education • Linguistically literate in academic spaces • Parental and home support	• Resilience • Understanding of the school system structure

CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSION

"Rather, my teaching is about challenging belief systems that are part of everyday living".
(Dlamini, 2002, p. 64)

A multitude of factors have contributed to the success of the seven participants in the study. I contend that there is no 'one size fits all' model that can be applied to every Black student. Rather, I have discovered over-arching themes that could inform us on potential next steps to increase Black university enrolment rates in the GTA. To conclude the thesis, I will focus on the positive contributors that have helped the participants in their pursuit of success in the education system. The individual factors that were drawn from the participants' stories are outlined in *Table 2.* From these factors, social capital, resiliency, and literacy were the overarching themes that assisted the participants in achieving success. The participants used social capital for resiliency by bonding and bridging social capital to obtain the resources necessary to remain resilient in the face of adversity. Resiliency was also used to obtain the literacy skills necessary to surmount the barriers that impeded their journey. In turn, these hurdles taught them crucial life lessons that assisted them in becoming more culturally literate in their academic and ethnic spaces. As the participants became increasingly literate in multiple discourses, they were able to bridge and build social capital, creating social networks that propelled them towards their future ambitions. These participants have reached the Promised Land with education enabling them to achieve the upward social movement that affords them more freedoms than they may have had during their upbringing. The participants' stories indicate that the acquiescence of social capital, resiliency and literacy were contributors to their pursuit of success.

Social Capital for Resiliency

The establishment of a strong cultural identity was a factor that contributed to the success of the participants. For the three participants of African descent, Afrocentricity and their parents' commitment to African traditions played pivotal roles in their positive views of Black culture. African

traditionalism, the conceptual framework giving way for Afrocentricity, was a contributor to the success of the participants who came from distinct African communities. Three of the seven participants reported having parents who immigrated from Africa. In the interviews, these participants, along with the participant from the Dominican Republic, expressed that their culture was a distinct entity. Although the participants of African descent were subjected to anti-Black racism, they were able to draw on their strong ethnic identity to remain resilient. Daniel was the only participant of Jamaican descent in the study that drew heavily on his ethnic culture to sustain a positive image of Black culture. The two participants of Jamaican descent did not have strong ties with their ethnic culture as these values were not reinstated as heavily in their home lives in comparison to the aforementioned participants. Rather, their integration in predominantly White milieus took precedence to assist them in their progression in their respective athletic and academic careers.

The participants of African descent shared how their cultural background, school demographic and home life influenced their navigation of the education system. I am careful in not stating 'Black culture' because, as aforementioned, the non-Jamaican participants identified more with their ethnic identity than their racial identity. The reinstatement of a strong cultural identity was facilitated for students who attended predominantly Black schools. Four of the seven participants attended a predominantly Black populated elementary school where they were able to interact with students who shared their cultural background. These experiences helped the participants establish friendships with students without apprehension of encountering racism from their peers. The three other participants who did not attend predominantly Black schools were lumped into the 'multiculturalism' category where all non-White students coexist. Their home lives were often their only connection to their cultural background and thus requiring these participants to prioritize bridging social capital over bonding social capital with their cultural community. In the study, predominantly Black schools also offered more opportunities to engage in cultural practices and extracurricular activities that encouraged

community engagement. In his defense of multiculturalism, Dei (2011) urges a "need to shift the gaze away from multicultural/inter-cultural education onto critical anti-racist education" to create an action-oriented approach for systemic reform (p. 18). James and Schecter (2000) also recognize that multicultural education does not adequately represent cultural groups, with these policies being historically focused on English and French bilingualism (p. 29). The participants who attended Black populated schools demonstrated more confidence in their racial, or ethnic, identity and greater desire to 'give back' to their communities. In the study, the participants who attended Black populated schools reported having encountered more Black teachers in their education experience than those who attended schools with smaller Black populations. Rosen (2017) sustains that Black students who encounter at least one Black teacher are more likely to graduate. Thus, the presence of Black teachers in education discredits presumptions of Black failure and credits student beliefs of academic excellence (Diamond et al., 2004; Downey & Pribesh, 2004). Black teachers modelling their status and roles of teacher-power in schools serve to affirm that success in the education system is attainable.

Access to information, particularly information regarding how to navigate the education system, was crucial to the success of the participants in the study. The participants gathered information based on the resources that were readily available to them. I also observed how the participants distanced themselves from unpromising friendships to remain focused on their career objectives. Every participant in the study expressed building close friendships to those who were conducive to their success. These friendships were largely based on their friend's academic achievements and support in their future ambitions. Daniel was the only participant who relied solely on his friendship to learn how to navigate the education system. Other participants were able to gain access to information through a variety of outlets. Jaden, Sofia and Mariam had at least one parent who obtained a post-secondary level education. These parents were able to transfer their human capital to their children for academic achievement (Coleman, 1988). Jaden, however, had the social support of members in his immediate

middle-class community, members who were capable of tutoring and mentoring him whenever he required assistance.

For the participants who were in a financially disadvantaged position, bridging social capital became the most lucrative form of social capital for education attainment (Putnam, 2000). These students needed to put forth an extensive effort to distance themselves from negative Black stereotypes to create places of belonging in their schools. Each one of the lower-class participants expressed feeling out of place in their university. Thus, their home life was such a contrast to their school life that these students needed to be malleable to exist in these two entities. They needed to learn new ways of being in order to resist the covert and overt implications of being both poor and Black. These views were held in their home environments with their parents sustaining that education was the only means to escape poverty. Thus, it could be deduced that the notion of education as emancipation in lower-income homes could assist students in being resilient in manipulating their racial identity to subsist in a colonial education system.

Although bonding social capital is integral in establishing a strong cultural identity, Black students living in lower-income neighbourhoods needed to make connections outside of their discourse community to access additional resources. Through sport, Ciara was able to social network which resulted in her being scouted to play in a Canadian university. Sport allowed her to meet people who were more financially established that could connect her to the stakeholders necessary to bolster her athletic career. Without bridging social capital, Ciara would not have succeeded as she was bereft of the school support she needed to succeed in her academics. Bridging social capital is especially important in student-teacher interactions. Samuel and Jaden were two participants who engaged in student council. Their school involvement allowed them to interact with teachers and to gain a better understanding of extracurricular advantages. The data suggests that bridging social capital could be facilitated with teachers who engage in culturally responsive pedagogy. Three of the seven participants

reported a teacher as a role model that was outside of their race. The participants expressed sharing intimate moments with these educators that made them feel valued and understood. Therefore, culturally responsive teachers can facilitate the bridging of social capital to promote Black education attainment and resiliency. This was equally significant for the two middle-class participants, Sofia and Jaden, who reported their fathers as their role models throughout their education experience. The consequences of teachers ill-equipped to teach to diversity are Black students over-compensating their cultural identity to comply to the dominant school discourse (Parsons, 2005). This was evidenced in three out of four participants who attended non-Black schools who became fluent in standard Canadian English. Sofia did not become fluent in standard Canadian English due to her late immigration to Canada though, she still displayed a longing to lose her Spanish accent. All four of these participants admitted to downplaying negative Black stereotypes through changing their physical appearance, (anti-)social interaction with Black students and/or through academic performance.

Financial capital is intimately connected with access to resources, knowledge, and opportunity (Bennett et al., 2012; Lareau, 2002). Daniel, Idil, Ciara, Samuel and Mariam lived in poor, Black neighbourhoods, and experienced poverty within their households. Their lower-class status was a motivator throughout their education experience because they aspired to achieve more than what they grew up seeing. Their parents worked tirelessly to support their family which created an absence of parental involvement during their childhood. Their lower financial status limited their access to parental support. In Dlamini and Anucha's (2019) study, they suggest that resilience is learned through the observation of family members who also demonstrate resilience:

> [P]articipants in the study spoke of the resilience of their family members, especially their mothers and aunts who were said to have fought and struggled through difficult times. Most of these acts of resilience were located in the social and cultural fibre of their loved ones – as

> migrants without required English language skills to navigate Canadian life, and as ill-educated women trying to hold jobs in a shrinking economic market. (p. 113)

In the study, three of the five lower-class participants were in households where their parents immigrated to Canada and needed to learn English to succeed in society. Daniel, Idil and Ciara spoke mainly about the diligent efforts of their mothers during their upbringing in providing for the family. However, every lower-class participant observed resilience from at least one parent, a resilience that was necessary to succeed in adequately providing for their family. Four of the five lower-class participants stated that economic progression was a motivator to pursue a higher level of education. The study suggests that lower-class students desire for financial emancipation was a contributor to their success in the education system. Normally, the financial and societal barriers put before them initiated the need to be resilient and to overcome adversity to obtain financial stability. They observed the lives their parents lived and vowed to use education as their gateway to the middle-class. Four of these participants were in predominantly Black spaces in high school which assisted them in bonding social capital with their classmates and teammates. Through bonding social capital, these participants were able to draw their strength from the pride they exuded for their community – and in Ciara's case, her sporting community – centering their career ambitions around mentoring Black youth. Three of the seven participants learned how to draw positives from their societally disadvantaged positions by sustaining positive views of Black culture. These participants resisted to comply to negative Black stereotypes inadvertently transforming this positive mentality into resiliency as they were able to remain resolute in their pursuit of success in the education system.

Resiliency as Cultural Literacy

Through reliving their stories, we observe how each participant endured their own hardships in their pursuit of success. Through these difficult moments, the participants became increasingly more literate in their school's cultural environment that fostered a set of skills that, in time, were integral to

their success. Six of the seven participants experienced a form of racism from an educator. The power dynamics between the teacher and the students increases the difficulty of navigating racism as mishandling these scenarios could result in devastating repercussions for the student (Hughes, 2011; James & Taylor, 2010). In the study, Daniel's suspension was an example of the consequences of speaking out against racism (White, 2012). Jaden was the only participant who did not feel obliged to remain quiet in these situations as he was able to rely on the support of his parents to advocate on his behalf. For five out of the seven participants, remaining resilient while confronting racism was translated into silence and obedience (Gaylord-Harden, 2009; Haviland, 2008; Knaus, 2009). These participants learned that by internalizing racism, they were able to appease their educators, and their parents, remaining on course to their pursuit of success. I do not think this method is ideal – yet it is a reality that these participants endured. Mariam remained quiet as she received back-handed compliments on her education achievements. Daniel learned to be obedient after being suspended for speaking out against his teacher's implicit biases. Samuel remained quiet as his principal told him that he was the worst student she has encountered in her entire teaching career. Ciara learned to be obedient after witnessing how other Black students were ostracized for their presumed 'disobedience'. This resiliency bred a cultural literacy, an understanding of how to socially navigate the education system. Consequently, silence and obedience become defense mechanisms against the power imbalances that threatened to jeopardize a student's pursuit of a university education. These students were also culturally literate in their home lives – effortlessly code switching to remain connected to their culture. In result, each participant learned how to socialize in their home life and school life to sustain a sense of belonging in both contexts in order to remain resilient in their pursuit of a university education.

Black women's hair has also been a medium in which resiliency led to literacy. The women in the study were left to combat both beauty standards and cultural stigmas of women with Black 'unkept hair'. In a contemporary example, there were discussions and articles assessing Michelle Obama's hair,

like how it was coiffed, using her hair as a determinant factor of how she represents Black women in America (i.e. Desmond-Harris, 2009). Each woman in the study had to learn how to navigate these politics to attain a sense of belonging as Eurocentric beauty standards were also implicitly, and explicitly, held in their home lives. Sofia was able to embrace her hair(itage) as she gained more exposure to media images that promoted natural hair as beautiful. Hair created conditions for resiliency and in turn, the women in the study learned how their hair was intimately connected to their socialization in various spaces. Joseph-Salisbury and Connelly's (2018) article partially entitled "If Your Hair Is Relaxed, White People Are Relaxed. If Your Hair Is Nappy, They're Not Happy" is apart of an extensive body literature that addresses the colonization of Black hair and the redefinition of Black beauty (see also Frisby, 2004; Lester, 2000; Patton, 2006; Randle, 2015). The study indicates that the politicization of Black bodies creates experiences where Black students are obliged to become literate in the colonized way of schooling in order to exist in education spaces without creating a disruption. This includes and is not limited to physical strength, hair, clothing, physical features, and speech. Meanwhile, the home became a place to engage in a decolonized way of being where their engagement with their families focused on the content of their character, and literacy in their cultural discourse, instead of the colour of their skin.

The five participants who grew up in lower-class neighbourhoods all witnessed, and experienced, the hardships of being poor and the limitations it had on their access to resources. Nevertheless, this adversity brought upon an urgency to be literate in their school cultural context. All five of the participants who were from lower-class families entered the job market in their teens to lessen the financial burden on their parents. Their lower-income status also forced the participants to approach learning as purely their responsibility. These participants learned how to be self-sufficient and how to self-regulate. Self-regulation was a pivotal skill that was formed through their experiences of being resilient and by learning how to rely on their strength and abilities to be malleable in new social

environments. Yet, this navigation of barriers also demanded the ability to sustain a positive self-image that could withstand denigration. Thus, this resiliency also led to participants' efforts to remain literate in their own cultural environment by sustaining a strong cultural identity during their pursuit for social advancement.

For the participants who lived in traditional African households, the pressure of academic excellence was a stressor and a motivator that pushed them to be resilient in their pursuit of a university degree. The authoritarian position of their parents provided structure and a clear understanding of their expectations. Two of the three Jamaican participants stated that their parents did not have expectations for their academic performance. Jaden's Jamaican parents, however, were strict about their expectations and were capable of using their financial capital to provide their son with the support that he needed to be successful. Contrarily, Afrocentricity explicitly established a standard of academic excellence, and of resilience, which never waivered throughout the students' education experience. This cultural practice was grounded on the participants' respective ethnic communities. Afrocentrism being at the centre of their home life provided a re-orientation where African heritage is positioned at the centre – contrary to school life where Black culture only exists in the periphery (Asante, 2007). Through religion and language, the participants were able to establish an ethnic identity that countered the negative stereotypes of Black academic underachievement. Their ethnic distinction helped counter negative Western views of Black culture and stereotype threats. At the same time, their incessant drive for academic excellence also led them to becoming literate in their school culture, an understanding of how to effectively navigate the school system. African traditionalism is a framework that outlines Black excellence as a standard, not as an exceptionality.

Linguistic Literacy for Social Capital

Integration into the school's dominant cultural was a factor that attributed to the success of the participants. In the previous section, I spoke to cultural literacy as the social competencies required to efficaciously navigate a discourse. In this section, I will be focusing on literacy as the linguistic competencies to bridge social capital (Smith, 2019). Six of the seven participants admitted to changing the way they speak to educators to appear more professional and educated. These participants became literate in the school linguistic culture, understanding that adopting a standard Canadian English variety would help to suppress anti-Black racist sentiments on education attainment (Ogbu, 2004). However, in the study I identified five of the seven participants as fully proficient in this variety of English with lack of proficiency being determined by the presence of an identifiable accent. Daniel reported that he spoke Patois with his Jamaican classmates in high school. Sofia achieved success after discontinuing ESL classes. Thus, it is observed that a lack of proficiency in standard Canadian English may not be an inhibitor but rather being proficient in this English variety could be an asset in academic spaces. All of the participants expressed having to become literate in their school's academic linguistic culture in order to communicate with their educators (Smith, 2019). It is evidenced that all of the participants were obliged to remain linguistically literate in their home lives as well. With each parent of the study being an immigrant, it can be deduced based on the stories of the participants that their families still engaged in cultural traditions that are strengthened by language acquisition. With Patois being a dialect of the English language, linguistic literacy was not as enforced in Jamaican households as a lack of proficiency in Patois does not greatly hinder a person's ability to communicate. For the four other participants of African and Spanish heritage, their parents emphasized the importance of engaging in their mother tongue to remain connected to their cultural roots. This assisted these participants in bonding social capital within their ethnic communities and to sustain cultural ties. Simultaneously, students were acquiring Canadian standard English to sustain positive views of their academic

achievement. Linguistic literacy morphed into codeswitching as the participants shared the need to speak a certain way in order to be understood in academic and cultural spaces. In turn, their acquisition of this variety of English facilitated the bridging of social capital with their educators and aided in rejecting stereotype threats. At the same time, acquiring Canadian standard English created a divide between the participants' home and school life as the participants often needed to prioritize their academic discourse over their cultural discourse for economic progression. Each participant from a non-English speaking household reported feeling less connected to their linguistic background throughout their education experience. There could be many hypotheses for this phenomenon but it is evident that maternal languages become lost in the process of education attainment. This raises the question of the social navigation students from non-standard English-speaking households need to withstand in order to remain linguistically literate in contradicting discourse communities. How does the pursuit of linguistic literacy in school affect a student's ability to remain linguistically literate with their mother tongue?

A key step to becoming literate in the school's dominant culture was school involvement. Jaden and Samuel were heavily involved in sports and student council which provided them with roles of responsibility in the school that provided more opportunities to bridge social capital. These two men obtained these roles through public speaking – they needed to speak in front of educators and the student body to gain the votes necessary to assume these roles. Arguably, their ability to convey a message through the use of standard Canadian English assisted them in bridging, and bonding, social capital with their peers and school administrators. Similarly, Ciara felt obliged to use this variety of English when interacting with the affluent stakeholders in her sport. In the interview, she explained moments where she would accept sport awards while being the only Black person in the room. Acknowledging the racial difference in these scenarios, Ciara learned how to utilize standard Canadian English to sustain positive views of her character and her competence in the realm of sport. Though

Sofia and Mariam were not as involved in school activities, language was intimately connected to their socialization in their school environment. Their efforts to achieve standard English directly impacted how educators perceived their abilities and their own personal beliefs in post-secondary attainment. In the interview, Mariam shares how she feels hyper-aware of how she speaks, especially in education spaces, and understands how it impacts her connection with others. Speech becomes another entity that is constrained by stereotype threats. Mariam explained that in education spaces, she found it difficult to speak candidly and understood how the manner in which she speaks can come off as 'aggressive'. Race and speech are intimately connected and directly affect how Black students bridge social capital. Thus, tonality also played a distinct role for Mariam, along with four other participants, who used speech to debunk stereotyped behaviours (Bargh et al., 1996; Kahn, 2011; Steele & Aronson, 1995). Although this social practice has assisted the participants in their pursuit, this acculturation process comes at the expense of compromising their own native tongues, and ways of being, to feel legitimized in education spaces (Chestang, 1972; Fordham, 1988; Howarth et al., 2014; Ogbu, 2004).

Implications for Future Research

In this study, I wanted to offer readers a candid depiction of the current realities of Black students who have endured the education system. Contrary to the research literature, the thesis demonstrates that parental engagement with the school had little effect on the participants' education attainment thus signaling a need to re-evaluate the importance of parental involvement in both the presence and absence of social capital, resiliency and literacy (Lee & Bowen, 2006; Marcucci, 2020). Although education reforms are both necessary and imperative, it can take decades for them to be adequately implemented (Vinovskis, 1999). Research literature proposes that the increase of Black educators in schools could help increase student engagement and academic achievement (James & Turner, 2017; Nicholson-Crotty et al., 2016; Rosen, 2017; Wilder, 2000). More importantly, the

implementation of educational reform practices to address anti-racism is only made possible through teacher training for teachers of all cultural backgrounds (Dlamini, 2002). Hiring more Black teachers is a means to promote culturally responsive pedagogy, the school being a direct reflection of their commitment to responding to the demographic changes in the school's community. The research literature illustrates that Black teachers hold higher academic standards than White teachers (Beady & Hansell, 1981; Gershenson et al., 2016; Rosen, 2017; Wilder, 2000, p. 209) and had increased social interactions that ameliorated absenteeism and discipline rates among Black students (Farkas et al., 1990; Foster, 1993; Tinto, 1998; Wilder, 2000, p. 209). The participants' stories reflect that both culturally responsive teaching and Black representation in schools are equally significant for Black students to develop a strong cultural identity in education spaces. The aforementioned literature suggests that racialized and non-racialized teachers alike need to concede that the Canadian education system is oppressive and actively work towards creating relationships that value cultural contributions to increase Black student university enrolments.

Studies on youth academic achievement in the past decades neglect to examine the process of "'becoming' Canadian", that is, the process of acculturation in the education system that both newcomers and natives endure. (Nombuso et al., 2008, p. 410). Studies investigating the impact of anti-racism and equity policy initiatives unveil marginal support, and at times resistance, from educators and administration (Acker, 1988; Dlamini, 2002, p. 52; Sleeter, 1992; Solomon & Levin-Rasky, 1996). This study pleads the case to create more radical measures to equip Black families with the knowledge that is imperative for social progression during ongoing efforts to decolonize the education system.

Helms (1990) defines racial identity as a "group or collective identity based on one's perception that he or she shares a common racial heritage with a particular group" (p. 3). Racial identity, or ethnic identity, became the foundation in social interaction in the participants' lives to provide "the security and self-confidence [that] potentially could provide protection against racial prejudice and

discrimination" (Miller & MacIntosh, 1999, p. 161). Throughout their experience, bonding social capital was an asset because they were capable of establishing a strong cultural identity that could withstand external racial denigration.

Data in the study has revealed the importance of resilience in the pursuit of success in the education system. Yet, I am cautious in praising resilience as it is imperative to acknowledge the systemic barriers that create the need for Black university students to be resilient (Dlamini & Anucha, 2019, p. 113; McGee & Stovall, 2015). In the academy, the notion of resilience is often denounced for neglecting to acknowledge the systemic barriers and "uncontextualized notion of resource distribution" that lead to a capitalist idea of success (Dlamini & Anucha, 2019; Clay, 2019; Cretney, 2014; Joseph, 2013; MacKinnon & Derickson, 2013). Furthermore, this notion of resilience suggests that Black students need to be 'fixed' and to conform to the dominant culture to overcome systemic barriers – a notion that is highly rejected in Critical Race Theory (CRT) (Bridges, 2019, p. 462). I would argue that these standards are not required for other races – that is, a notion to remain resilient and excellent *in spite* of your race. In Clay's (2019) research evaluating the politics of Black resilience neoliberalism (BRN), he advises:

> It is crucial that Black politics divest from BRN. …Though it is important that educators and education leaders encourage students to persist in the face of personal challenges, it is unfair for us to expect them to overcome structural barriers with savvy and academic effort. The unintended (or intentional) impact of promoting grit is that we absolve the state from addressing educational inequity and place our collective gaze on young folk to endure the trauma of having to be gritty to rise above centuries-old injustice. (p. 105)

Clay admits to being complicit in BRN but urges to reject this capitalist view that focuses on production instead of focusing on resisting the hegemonic powers that have institutionalized White supremacy (p. 106). To contrast, Pon's (2000) research speaks to Asian students experiencing pressures

of sustaining a Confucianist inspired work ethic, an ethic that has labelled them as the *model minority*. These students feel pressures to succeed and to be resilient *because* of their race (Pon, 2000). “This discourse therefore implicitly blamed oppressed Blacks and other racial groups for supposedly having inferior cultural values and no hard work ethic” (Pon, 2000, p. 280).

These perceptions of Black underachievement have infiltrated the community, with ethnic communities on the fringe ascribing negative stereotypes to Jamaican-Canadians, who are the cultural majority within the Canadian Black population. This is deduced from the data, with all of the participants of African descent admitting that their parents held negative views of Black culture and considered their ethnic identity as a separate entity. In reality, each member of the Black community is impacted negatively from stereotypes that assume academic underperformance, regardless of their ethnicity. More research investigating ethnic divisions and beliefs in the Greater Toronto Area could assist in squandering racial self-deprecation to a point where Black alone connotes excellence. There is little research conducted on the interaction between Caribbean and African ethnic groups to dissect the implications it has on education attainment. I contend that the study demonstrates the need to conduct more studies on Black ethnic groups, especially since African ethnic groups do not fully identify with the dominant Black culture. Within the sample size, each parent of Jamaican descent received formal Canadian schooling while the other ethnic groups reported parents who immigrated to Canada in adulthood. A larger sample size would have allowed me to observe if African traditionalism is a phenomenon that is equally practiced by African parents who underwent formal schooling in Canada. There is a lack of research literature that observes how formal Canadian schooling affects the inter-generational transmission of cultural practices and the instatement of a distinct cultural identity. Clarification on the educational experiences of ethnic groups could assist in determining if Afrocentricity is a sustainable practice or only privy to second-generation Canadians.

Based on the data collected, I would assert that systemic barriers demand resilience when combatting anti-Black racism sentiments that are intricately connected to teacher-student power dynamics (Hughes, 2011; James & Taylor, 2010). Consequently, by being complacent about the success of Black resilience, we encourage Black students to internalize racial discrimination (Gaylord-Harden et al., 2009). This complacency sustains a demeanor of resilience that silences the oppressive structures that continue to demand Black students to remain resilient when confronted with overt and covert racism. I fear that successful Black students may have done so well at being resilient that it downplays how arduous it is to overcome these systemic barriers. I contest that educators, not students, should be resilient in combatting anti-Black racism in spite of the discomfort that may arise (Picower, 2009; Solomona et al., 2005). I hope that the education system continues to take responsibility in being resilient in their efforts in social justice work (Tilley & Taylor, 2012).

Sofia is the only participant who did not encounter racist incidents in her education experience which opens the question of how colourism, and mixed heritage, play a role in the education experiences of Black students (Caballero et al., 2007). Sofia is the only participant who has a lighter skin tone and who identified herself based on her linguistic culture. More research is required to gain a profound understanding of how colourism affects education attainment, if at all, and how it shapes the socialization of students in education spaces. Observing the lived experiences of mixed-raced students could aid us in reflecting on how to adequately support this population through targeted policy initiatives to account for mixed-races.

My analysis of Black excellence and education attainment is to further research towards establishing policies, initiatives and interventions that address university enrolment disparities in Ontario schools. We must discuss these systemic and cultural barriers to adequately comprehend how the participants of the study navigated the education system. I argue that analyzing the experiences of successful Black students involves examining the race *and* ethnic practices that shape their world view

points. As we await systemic reforms, I hope the study informs of potential alternatives to assist students in the Black community to thrive for a university level education. This study looks to inspire more studies to examine the diversity within the Black community to ensure that every single child has the supports necessary to pursue success in the education system.

APPENDIX A
INTERVIEW GUIDE

Steps:

1. **Introduce myself and explain the purpose of the research.**
   I would like to thank you for taking the time to meet with me today. Right now, I'm a graduate student at York University hoping to learn more about the experiences of Black students who have chosen to pursue a university education. I am looking forward to getting to know you! If you have any questions or concerns, please don't hesitate to let me know. I want to make sure that you feel as comfortable as possible.

2. Guide the participant to construct their oral history in the following order: **background, elementary school, middle school** *(if applicable)***, high school.** Ask the probing questions below if necessary.

"Tell me more about that" – "And how did you feel about that?" – "What do you mean when you say [xxx]?"

√	**Theme #1: Basic Knowledge**
	What is your full name?
	How old are you?
	What are currently your hobbies?
	What is your current occupation?
	Which university did you attend? What did you study?

√	**Theme #2: Home Life**
	Where are your parents from?
	What did they hope to find in Canada?
	Who lived in your household when you were in school? - What are they like?
	Who helped you with your homework?
	What were the similarities/differences between the dialect you would use at home and at school?
	What responsibilities did you have at home?
	How would you describe your family?
	What were routines that were typical in your household?
	How would you describe the home you grew up in?
	How did your home compare the homes of your classmates?
	Was your home a reflection of your community? Explain.
	How has your home life affected your studies?

√	**Theme #3: Financial Capital**
	What did your parents do for living?
	How would you describe your economic status throughout your education experience?
	Were you involved in extracurricular activities outside of school? - which activities? - why? - where? - were your parents heavily involved? - how much did it cost?
	Did you ever have the assistance of a tutor?
	How long was your commute school from home?
	Did you have to work during your studies? If so… - why? - where? - what?
	Were you provided an allowance? Explain. - was it enough to buy the things you desired? - did you save the money you received?
	Have you travelled outside of the country? If so, - where? - why?
	How did you finance university?

√	**Theme #4: School Life**
	Did you have friends? - What were they like? - What was their ethnicity? - What did you have in common? - How often did you see them? - What drew you to them? - How did they see you? - Would you describe them as positive or negative influences? Why? - How did they feel about school?
	Did you have any romantic relationships in school? - What were they like? - Were they distractions or contributors to your education? - How did your parents feel about the relationship/dating?
	Did you participate in cultural activities in your school?
	What emotions do you feel towards your school experience?
	What activities did you participate in throughout in school?
	How would you describe the language used with your friends at school?
	Did you learn any foreign languages in school?

	Have you participated in foreign exchanges? If so… - where? - why? - when? Describe your experience.
	What volunteer experiences have you had? - why? - where? - how many volunteer hours have you accumulated in high school?
	Which class has had the most profound impact on you?
	Did your school offer any special programs?

√	**Theme #5: School Culture**
	What did it feel like growing up in your neighbourhood? - How do you think you were viewed by people in your community?
	How would you describe the language used with your teachers at school?
	How would you describe the different social groups in your school? - which social group did you belong to?
	How would you describe your school's reputation?
	How would you describe your school's culture? - which cultural groups were dominant?
	What was the socio-economic status of most of the students at your school?
	How do you think you were perceived at school when you spoke?
	Has your race influenced the way you communicate?
	What are your views on Black culture in schools based on your experiences?
	Have you ever felt pressured to change your appearance to fit in at school? - what changes have you made? - what impact did this have on you?
	What advice did you get from principals, teachers and/or guidance counsellors regarding your future goals? - How did it make you feel?
	What stereotypes were prevalent about Black culture at your school? Did you associate with these stereotypes? Explain.
	Have you had experiences dealing with racism or discrimination? Explain.

√	**Theme #6: Parental Involvement**
	Do your parents have a postsecondary degree? If so, what degree did they obtain?
	What was your parents' role in choosing your career path?
	How did your parents support your education?
	How was your parents' relationship with your school?
	Did your parents get involved in parent council at your school?
	Did your parents interact with other parents from your school?
	Did your parents attend parent-teacher interviews?
	What are your parents' views about Black culture?

	How did your parents engage you in your cultural background?
	What were your parents' education expectations of you? - What did your parents want you to be when you grew up?
	How did your parents interact with your friends? - Did your parents express who they wanted you to befriend? If so, why? - Did they set limitations on your friendships and outings?
	What was your relationship like with your parents?
	What kind of conversations did you have with your parents throughout high school? - What lessons did you learn from them? - Did they help you learn how to navigate racism?
	Describe how your parents engaged you in religion.
	When did you know that you would enrol in a university?

√	**Theme #7: Grades/Assessments**
	Is speaking eloquently important to you?
	How would your teachers describe you as a student?
	What was your average?
	What were your strongest subjects? Why?
	What were your weakest subjects? Why?
	Did the adults at your school believe you would move on to university?
	What drove you to achieve a university education?
	Explain your study habits.

√	**Theme #8: Inspirations/Role Models**
	Who has helped you on your career path?
	Who is a role model for you? - race? - gender? - sexuality?
	Have you ever changed your habits/behaviours to be more aligned with your role model?
	Have you had strong Black role models in your life?
	Do you have relations with people outside of Canada? Where? - Do you feel connected to your cultural background?
	Do you believe having role models who share your race is important? Why?

3. Conclude the interview with these questions listed below. Thank the participant and express that we will be remaining in contact.

√	**Closing Remarks**
	What factors do you think have contributed to your success in school?
	What obstacles did you have to overcome in your pursuit of a university education?
	Do you think race affected your education experience? Why?
	How do you think your education experience can help other Black students in their pursuit of a university education?

APPENDIX B
INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Date:

Study Name: BLACK STUDENTS AND THE EDUCATION SYSTEM – THE PURSUIT OF SUCCESS

Researcher name:

Korina Thomas – Reynolds
Master of Education at York University – Principal Investigator
Email: korina95@my.yorku.ca

Purpose of the Research:

The purpose of the study is to explore the experiences of Black university students to understand the conditions that contributed to their academic success.

This research will be conducted in a series of interviews with Black university students that will serve as the participants for this study. Each participant will share their oral history of their school experience and respond to clarifying questions if necessary. The research will be presented and reported in the form of a thesis and stored within the Faculty of Graduate Studies Theses and Dissertations Database at York University.

What You Will Be Asked to Do in the Research:

The role and responsibilities of research participants include:

- Engaging in a face-to-face interview that will be video/audio recorded for data collection
- Ensuring the authenticity of your statement prior to publication
- Responding to emails, messages and/or phone calls promptly up until April 2020.

Estimated time commitment: 5 hours

Risks and Discomforts:
We do not foresee any risks or discomfort from your participation in the research.

Benefits of the Research and Benefits to You:
This research can help gain understanding of the factors outside of race that may negatively impact the prospects of Black students in the education system. This study aims to discover factors that help make education more accessible in order to create more equitable spaces for all students. Your participation in this study helps to continue the fight to break systemic racism and poverty through sharing your story of success.

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

In the event you withdraw from the study, all associated data collected will be immediately destroyed wherever possible. Should you wish to withdraw after the study, you will have the option to also withdraw your data up until the analysis is complete.

Confidentiality:

- Methods of documentation include video recordings, voice recordings and meeting notes.
- This data will be securely stored on my personal recording device and only the researcher and the research supervisor will have access to this information.
- The data will be destroyed by December 30, 2020. By this date, all voice and video recordings will be permanently deleted and all meeting notes will be shredded and recycled. All electronic data will be permanently erased from the hard drive on the password-protected laptop on which information is stored.
- Confidentiality will be provided to the fullest extent possible by law.
- Unless you choose otherwise, 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.
- The data collected in this research project may be used – in an anonymized form - by members of the research team in subsequent research investigations exploring similar lines of inquiry. Such projects will still undergo ethics review by the HPRC, our institutional REB. Any secondary use of anonymized data by the research team will be treated with the same degree of confidentiality and anonymity as in the original research project.

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 me at korina95@my.yorku.ca or my supervisor, Nombuso Dlamini at nombuso@edu.yorku.ca and/or 416-736-2100 Ext. 22850. You may also contact the Graduate Program in Faculty of Education at gradprogram@edu.yorku.ca and/or 416-736-5018.

This research has received ethics review and approval by the Delegated Ethics Review Committee, which is delegated authority to review research ethics protocols 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, Kaneff Tower, York University (telephone 416-736-5914 or e-mail ore@yorku.ca).

Legal Rights and Signatures:

I, _____ , consent to participate in the research study *BLACK STUDENTS AND THE EDUCATION SYSTEM – THE PURSUIT OF SUCCESS* conducted by Korina Thomas-Reynolds. 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_____ **Date**_____

Participant

Signature_____ **Date**_____

Principal Investigator

Additional consent:

1. Audio recording

☐ I consent to the audio-recording of my interview(s).

2. Video recording or use of photographs

I, _____ , consent to the use of unobscured images of me (including photographs, video and other moving images), my environment and property in the following ways (please check all that apply):

In academic articles	[ ] Yes	[ ] No
In print, digital and slide form	[ ] Yes	[ ] No
In academic presentations	[ ] Yes	[ ] No
In media	[ ] Yes	[ ] No
In thesis materials	[ ] Yes	[ ] No

Signature: Date:

_____ _____

Participant: (name)

3. Consent to waive anonymity

I, _____, consent to the use of my name in the publications arising from this research.

Signature: Date:

_____ _____

Participant: (name)

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