

BEYOND THE "USUAL SUSPECTS": BLACK YOUTH PERSPECTIVES ON
AFRICENTRIC SCHOOLING

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Abstract

Much has been said about the establishment and ongoing development of the Toronto District School Board's Africentric Alternative (Elementary) School in Toronto, which was intended to address the achievement gap for Black students and provide an alternative pedagogical approach. Currently on the horizon is the expansion of this initiative by the TDSB, through the implementation of a secondary school program tentatively called the *Leonard Braithwaite Program*, which will not operate as a stand alone school, but as an academic stream within an existing school on the East end of Toronto. Given, the heavy criticism from media, academics, parents and policy makers, it appears that adults are dominating the discourse about Africentric Schooling. Therefore, my masters' thesis aims to give voice to the very students that the Leonard Braithwaite Program aims to reach. Using a phenomenological qualitative approach and Critical Race Theory as a conceptual frame, my study queries how Black students between the ages of 16-20 from the Greater Toronto Area, come to understand Africentric Schooling as an academic option. The participants in this study divulge how their current and past racial, cultural and social climates coupled with their previous schooling experiences shape their thinking about Africentric Schooling. The participants also incite new ways of understanding how youth in the GTA are taking up this issue and what they feel is missing from the current discourse.

Dedication

For Rae.

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Introduction

Research has shown that over the past 40 years, Black students in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA) have struggled with poor educational outcomes, high levels of disengagement and dropout rates reaching higher than 40% (Dei, 1996a, 1996b, 1997; James & Brathwaite, 1996a, 1996b; Mata, 1989). In 2009, the first Africentric Alternative Elementary School opened in Toronto, Ontario, Canada and currently serves grades K-8 and houses 190 students with a budding waiting list. Also on the horizon is an Africentric Secondary School initiative called the *Leonard Brathwaite Program*, which is currently in the recruitment and development phases and is slated to open its doors in the fall of 2013. Currently, judging by standardized test scores (2010 EQAO) of the Africentric elementary school, which beat provincial and board-wide standards, Black students appear to be achieving academically in this setting (Hammer, 2011b), although more longitudinal study is required to truly gauge the school's overall success.

The current formal curriculum has been criticized as being too Eurocentric and disadvantageous to many students across racial, ethnic and immigrant status lines (James, 2005, p. 12) and TDSB's Africentric Alternative School (AAS) initiative attempts to counter that by providing culturally relevant material that still complements and adheres to the formal curriculum (Thompson & Thompson, 2008). However, the public response to Africentric schooling has generally been negative. Media coverage reveals that many are critical of the school, viewing it as an exercise in segregation, and feeling that it conflicts with the current, dominant schooling model (CBC News, 2009, 2011; CTV

News, 2008a, 2008b, 2009; Gee, 2011a, 2011b; Globe and Mail, 2008; Goldstein, 2011; Hammer, 2011b; Hayes, 2008; MacDonald, 2010, 2011). These responses from policy makers, parents and media imply neutrality in the current formal curriculum, which relies on a false sense of multiculturalism, which implies colorblindness and meritocracy. These criticisms put forward by critics tend to rely on examples of African-American history, such as Jim Crow segregation and the American Civil Rights and Black Power movements of the 1960s and 70s, divorcing Canada from a social and historical legacy of marginalizing racialized communities, and thus trivializes the experiences of racialized students.

As a racialized woman of Caribbean descent, my own schooling experiences were coloured by the constant negotiating of identities by both my peers and myself. I noticed a hollowness in the formal curriculum that was delivered, in the way that there were constant silences and gaps around racialized bodies, whether it be through staff, peers or the subject matter being taught. I often wondered why my learning experiences in school were so vastly different from my lived experience outside of the classroom. As a result, I frequently observed and eventually developed the chameleon-like ability of conscious performativity. Performativity within the context of my experiences is the practice of shifting one's identity in order to mimic that of the dominant group in order to "fit in" or accomplish something (Ehler, 2006; Warren, 2001, 2003). The situational shifting of identity, for short or long-term gain was something that I often saw amongst racialized groups. I understood it as a coping and assimilation mechanism that penetrated far beyond the masking of strong accents and odorous spicy foods. Underlying this

performativity was a fear of the repercussions of disrupting established and dominant social norms and out of that fear, often came the wholesale eradication of identities, silencing or the over-performance of identities.

It was not until I began university study that I was able to better piece together and articulate what these gaps and silences meant, which led to my further interrogation of these ideas that I had been grappling with. Why is it that it was not until university study that issues of race, space, education and class were critiqued and made part of a formal curriculum? Why did it take so long for these internal questions to be validated as real and significant in a formal schooling setting and what does that say about the formal schooling system prior to university? What happens to the students who never get a chance to pursue higher education and have that opportunity to have their experiences with the complexities of race, racism, space, education and class validated?

I continuously grappled with these questions throughout my studies and as I noticed the push for an Africentric elementary school and then later, an Africentric secondary school, I questioned the necessity for such a pedagogical tool. Would I have attended this school if it had been in existence? What does it do differently than mainstream school? Does it enrich the educational experiences and outcomes of Black students? Does it promise the validation and visibility that I often felt was missing in my schooling experience? What do Black youth today, who the school is designed for, know and think about Africentric Schooling? Would they attend such a school, now that it exists? The latter two questions were most prevalent in my mind and served as the foundation for this research.

Purpose of the Study

In the Greater Toronto Area (GTA), it is quite clear given the public response displayed through media, that many adults (media, policy makers, parents, etc.) are having difficulty imagining an alternative pedagogy in Africentrism, because the current curriculum is understood as universal. With Africentric schooling in Toronto still in its infancy and adults (parents, policy makers, media, etc) dominating the discourse, this qualitative study seeks to gauge how Black youth are thinking about this initiative. This research is significant because as Africentric schooling initiatives continue to develop in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA) within the Toronto District School Board, it is important to give voice to the kinds of students that this initiative aims to reach. It is also important to develop an understanding of how these students think about Africentrism as pedagogy in the Canadian context. It is with the above in mind that I pose the following question: How do Black youth, ages 16-20, in the (GTA), come to understand Africentric schooling? This is the overarching question of the study. My focus here is to understand the essence of how the Black youth in my study are coming to their understanding of Africentric schooling. Many Black students in American and Canadian contexts continue to have challenging and poor educational experiences and outcomes with the formal curriculum. Since Africentric schooling is now being offered to Black youth within the TDSB as an alternative to the formal curriculum, I seek to elucidate how Black youth come to understand the alternative that is being offered to them.

Some of my sub-questions include: Which social and cultural factors shape their understanding? How have their past schooling experiences informed their thinking?

How does the media coverage of the schooling debate contribute to their views? What role does ethnicity and culture play in shaping their thinking about Africentric schooling? Would they attend a high school if the option were available to them? Why or why not? What are some of their reservations about the school? How would they construct an Africentric school? These sub-questions help shape the parameters of the study and allow for the participants to self-report their own experiences, while also seeing if the common themes and rationales that emerge in the literature are influencing how they are thinking about Africentric schooling. These questions “seek to reveal more fully the essences and meanings of human experience” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 105) and attempt to render a more complete picture that allows for complexities and intersections to emerge.

Philosophical Assumptions and Conceptual Framework

The nature of this study makes philosophical assumptions that embrace a social constructivist epistemology and ontology. Epistemology considers what counts as knowledge, while ontology questions the nature of reality (Creswell, 2012, p. 20–21). A social constructivist’s epistemological and ontological beliefs assume that “multiple realities are constructed through lived experiences and interactions with others” and that reality is shaped by personal experiences and co-constructed between the researcher and the researched (Creswell, 2012, p. 36). Therefore, through querying how Black students come to understand Africentric schooling, this research makes the assumption that these students have multiple identities and experiences that shape their realities and thinking about this issue.

A Critical Race Theory (CRT) conceptual framework also informs this research.

This framework also makes specific epistemological and ontological assumptions. For example, epistemologically, CRT constructs reality through the study of social structures, oppression and power (Creswell, 2012, p. 37), while ontologically assuming that reality is based on power and identity struggles as they relate to race (Creswell, 2012, p. 37). CRT gives credence to the relevance and salience of race and acknowledges that it still has real social, political and psychological consequences (West, 1992). With the presupposition that race is still a salient issue that can negatively impact racialized groups, CRT provides an ideological space for the critical analysis of the dominant social structures that produce and reinforce racialized identities with differential outcomes. CRT, "challenges liberalist claims of objectivity, neutrality, and colorblindness... and argues that these principles actually normalize and perpetuate racism by ignoring the structural inequalities that permeate social institutions" (Abrams & Moio, 2009, p. 250).

In regards to education, CRT posits that the official schooling curriculum engages in master scripting, which silences and erases the stories and ways of knowing of marginalized groups that challenge the dominant cultural authority (Parker, Deyhle, & Villenas, 1999, p. 21). This idea speaks directly to the way in which Africentric schooling initiatives, as an alternative to the dominant schooling model, are often resisted as a viable and sustainable educational option. Therefore, CRT provides a framework that challenges these assertions and deconstructs the ways in which the resistance to Africentric initiatives can sometimes be an exercise in silencing marginalized groups. In so doing, it also gives voice to the silenced and marginalized. This framework looks for intersectionality, taking up the dynamic relationship between race, power and racism, and

the difficulty to recognize these oppressions unless overt (Delgado & Stefancic, 1993; Delgado, 2001, pp. 5–7).

Therefore, through its underscoring of issues pertaining to race and racism as relevant and significant factors that affect life experiences, CRT creates a scaffold for developing a critical understanding of how the Black youth in this study come to understand Africentric schooling, what is shaping their understanding and how that understanding intersects with other constructs (class, ethnicity, etc.).

Approach

This qualitative study uses a phenomenological approach. Phenomenology seeks to understand the “common meaning for several individuals of their lived experiences of a concept or phenomenon” and focuses on “reducing the individual experiences with a phenomenon to a description of a universal essence [of the participants]” (Creswell, 2012, p. 76). Moustakas (1994) describes the phenomenological approach as one that obtains comprehensive descriptions of a phenomenon and then uses such descriptions as the basis for analysis that explains the essences of the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994, p. 13). The researcher gathers data through open-ended questions and uses that data to construct an understanding of the participants’ accounts (Moustakas, 1994, p. 13). It is through this process that the researcher is able to contextualize and describe the mechanics of the phenomenon.

Phenomenology can be approached in two ways. First, it can be approached hermeneutically, which is primarily focused on “the art of reading a text, so that the intention and meaning behind appearances are fully understood” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 9).

An interrelationship exists between “the conscious description of the experience and the underlying dynamics or structures that account for the experience” that facilitates a true understanding of the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994, p. 9). The second approach to phenomenology is transcendental. Transcendental phenomenology underscores the process in which “the object that appears in the consciousness mingles with the objects in nature, so that meaning is created and knowledge is extended; thus a relationship exists between what exists in conscious awareness and what exists in the world” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 27). The distinction between the two approaches is that with the hermeneutical approach, what appears in consciousness is considered absolute reality, while the transcendental approach suggests that what appears in the world is a product of learning (Moustakas, 1994, p. 27). Therefore, for this study, I have chosen to use the transcendental approach to phenomenology. Africentric schooling is a current phenomenon and concept that incites polarizing social and political reactions and my study seeks to extend and create knowledge about *how* Black youth come to understand this phenomenon, with the assumption that my participants’ understanding is a product of their environmental learning. The CRT conceptual framework coupled with transcendental phenomenology, gives voice to the marginalized and best facilitates the uncovering of the complexities of the realities that shape how these Black youth come to understand the phenomenon of Africentric schooling. In this study, I am most interested uncovering the complex relationships the participants have with the sources that inform how they come to understand Africentric schooling and creating a textural description that contextualizes the overall essence of their experiences (Creswell, 2012, p. 80) of the

conflicted context in which they come to understand Africentric Schooling.

Another key element of transcendental phenomenology is bracketing or *epoche*, where researcher “sets aside their experiences as much as possible to take a fresh perspective toward the phenomenon under examination” (Creswell, 2012, p. 80). This suggests that researchers should divorce personal experiences from research to allow for a more organic emergence of the perspectives of the participants that is not too heavily overlaid with or occluded by the philosophical assumptions of the researcher. With this in my mind, it is safe to say that my experiences as a racialized woman that has been educated exclusively in the Canadian schooling system, have shaped my approach and thinking about this issue. However, rather than fully detach my experiences from the research, I opt to, at times, include their relevance and the ways that they may inform how the data has been interpreted (see Methodology section).

Outline of Thesis

This thesis contains five chapters. In Chapter two, I present the literature review, where I aim to make clear the current key debates surrounding Africentric Schooling and Africentrism, Eurocentrism and their relations to Black student academic achievement and ideas about race in both Canadian and American contexts. Providing a historical look at Africentric initiatives inside and outside of academic realms facilitates the understanding of the contentious and long history that Africentric initiatives have had in both American and Canadian contexts. In addition, providing a historical context makes clear that the efforts to shift the formal schooling curriculum have been on the table for quite a while. This process of contextualization also elucidates the various ways that

both Africentrism and Eurocentrism are conceptualized and understood by scholars and the complex ways in which these concepts relate to issues surrounding Black student academic achievement and outcomes. The aim here is to ground my research within the current Africentric schooling debate, which has strong proponents, opponents and critical intermediaries.

In chapter three, I will discuss the methodology to describe how this research was conducted, which is then followed by chapter four, findings and discussion, where I will present and analyze the results of my study and discuss my research results. Chapter five encompasses the conclusion, which will address contradictions, lingering questions that emerged from the study, suggest areas for further research and discuss the limitations of the study.

Key Terms

Some of the key terms that will be used in this study are as follows: Black, race, racialization, Eurocentrism, Africentrism Africentric Schooling, intersectionality and streaming. These terms have been included in this section for contextualization, as many of the terms are highly contested.

- **Black** within the confines of this study, refers to those who self-identify as Black and/or belong to the African, Caribbean and other diasporas. This term is often used interchangeably in the American context with African-American and to a lesser extent, African-Canadian in the Canadian context.

- **Race** within the confines of this study, refers to the social constructions that segment, marginalize and ascribe traits to members of society based on a combination of phenotypical, linguistic, cultural and ethnic features.
- **Racialization** refers to a process that makes race become a central feature in how reality is defined, organized and lived, while attaching race-based meanings to people and issues (James, 2009).
- **Eurocentrism** refers to a social reality that purports that human civilization is fundamentally built in Western Europe and attributes the blossoming of human society to European thinking (Amin, 1989). Eurocentrism presents itself as universalist, implying a superiority and prosperity in Western European culture that should be mimicked (Amin, 1989).
- **Africentrism** refers to an ideology and political movement that resists and challenges feelings of alienation, disorientation and a lack of agency experienced by racialized people in a perceived Eurocentric society (Asante, 1998). Africentrism, as it applies to formal schooling, attempts to “decentralize Eurocentrism by educating others through philosophically basing knowledge on African worldviews, thoughts and ways of knowing” (Ajirotutu & Pollard, 2000, p. 201), and rejects capitalistic, individualistic ideals in favour of operating as an articulated group, seeking best collective interest and promoting the idea of the sustainability of Africa and its diaspora (Ajirotutu & Pollard, 2000). Africentrism also has a variant spelling (Afrocentrism) and can sometimes be used

interchangeably with Black-focused schools, when referring to Africentric schooling.

- **Africentric Schooling** refers to schooling initiatives, which tend to be ideologically and pedagogically aligned with Africentrism. These schools have been in existence in various forms, both formally and informally, from at least the 19th century (see Ajirofutu & Pollard, 2000; Ginwright, 2004).
- **Intersectionality** refers to the ways in which multiple social constructs such as race, gender, class, sexuality, ability, etc. are dynamic processes that interact with one another. These interactions together, produce variable outcomes (Collins, 2000).
- **Streaming** refers to a process where students are grouped according to perceived academic ability. Streaming is often practiced in schools so that students with various learning differentials can be better nurtured and taught. Historically, however, some racialized groups tend to be over-represented in academic streams that block post-secondary study and special education programs that indicate intellectual delays and behavioural issues; and under-represented in streams and special education programs that promote advanced learning and/or giftedness (see Childers, 2011; Dei 1997, p.10-11; Toronto District School Board, 2012)

Literature Review

Method

This literature review was conducted methodically. My search strategy began with using the ERIC (Education Resources Information Center) and JSTOR databases to find articles, books and theses relevant to my research question. My search terms included “Africentric”, “Afrocentric” (variant spelling) and “Black-focused” with other terms like “school”, “pedagogy”, “Black youth” and “curriculum”. The search results were initially small, so I began to pay special attention to the keywords that were attached to the initial search results that did come up. Some of these new key words were “social movements U.S.”, “African-centered pedagogy,” “African-American race identity”, “teenager”, “Eurocentrism” and “Africentrism study and teaching U.S.”. I then began to mix and match my initial search terms with the new, emergent terms and the search results steadily grew. In order to whittle down the literature and decide what was useful, I read the abstracts, introductions and/or descriptions in order to decide how closely they spoke to my research question. I also paid attention to how often the authors were cited, audience, educational level discussed and journals that the articles were published in. These strategies allowed me to not only find relevant articles, but also identify key authors and journals.

This literature review will explore the various ways that Africentrism has been defined and practiced in various contexts and will also explore its applications and extensions to the educational experiences of Black youth.

In the American and Canadian contexts, there is an abundance of research that tackles questions of race, schooling, educational outcomes and Africentric schooling and pedagogy. Some of the key authors discussing Africentrism and/or Black youth experiences in schooling are Shawn Ginwright, Molefi Asante, Kmt Shockley, Asa Hilliard, George Dei and Carl James. The key themes that will be covered in this review of the scholarly literature include: the historical context of Africentric movements in the U.S. and Canada, the educational experiences of Black youth and responses to Africentric initiatives. I will begin with the American context because it historically grounds Africentrism as an ideology and pedagogical tool.

American Context

Historical and social movements in the U.S. Ginwright (2004) traces Africentric movements back to as early as the 18th century and makes note of various movements in public, political and academic realms. He notes the various movements that erupted since then were heavily rooted in the principles developed by Marcus Garvey, which sought to dismantle the oppressive institutional structures that perpetuated systemic inequalities, promoted notions of cultural pride, economic and political development, while noting the fundamental role of the Black church in proliferating ideas of Black self-determination (p. 9–12). Ginwright (2004) characterizes the Black Power movements of the 1960s and 70s as a time of the resurgence of cultural and political consciousness for Black Americans, which was characterized by their cohesion based on their race and status as an oppressed group (p. 10). This cohesion amongst Black Americans aimed to accomplish the goal of acquiring cultural, political and economic liberation from the

dominant group through the development of intra-group sovereignty, solidarity and by using Africa as the center of one's racial identity construction as a rejection of European culture (Ginwright, 2004, p. 11). As the Black Power movement shifted ideologically from mobilizing around desegregation to rejecting Eurocentric norms, the roots of Africentric thought were born (Ginwright, 2004, p. 12).

The Black Power movement also contributed to institutional shifts in the American landscape. For example, at that time it shifted electoral politics to include more government representation and also bolstered the representation of Blacks in institutions (professional organizations, student unions, political parties), forcing the doors open for the emergence of a Black middle class (Ginwright, 2004, p. 12). Also, these shifts came on the heels of the *Brown vs. Board of Education* ruling (1954), which desegregated schools in the U.S., but still has not succeeded in providing overarching equality in terms of educational experiences and opportunities for Black students (Ford, Grantham, & Whiting, 2008; Jarvis, 1991; Ladson-Billings, 2006).

Departments of Black Studies began to emerge in universities across the country in the late 1960s, but faced resistance. The larger academic community questioned the integrity and rigor of Black Studies and also argued that the initiative was separatist because it endorsed activism and service in Black communities (Ginwright, 2004, p. 13). Ginwright (2004) states that while academe questioned the legitimacy of the discipline, many advocates argued that it served as a bridging mechanism between the community and the ivory tower and impelled a more critical approach to studying issues relevant to the Black community such as history, culture and language.

The larger Black community also took issue with the emergence of Black Studies in universities as their ideological beliefs were split. Cultural nationalists such as professors Maulana Karenga and Amiri Baraka advocated for revolution and defined the Black struggle in cultural terms (Ginwright, 2004, p. 14). Conversely, Marxist Black intellectuals diverged and defined the Black struggle as needing to critique capitalism, shift toward socialism and develop a separate Black Nation through "the establishment and ownership of Black businesses, institutions and communities" (Ginwright, 2004, p. 13). As a result of these two polemics, ideologically the Black community was not on the same page concerning their views on Black Studies and their path towards improving their socio-economic and political condition. This represents the heterogeneous nature of the Black community. Often, the Black Power movements of the 1960s and 70s are characterized as a homogenous ideological scenario and thus present the Black community and their political stances as homogenous. The fact that in its inception, Black Studies in universities, ideologically had multiple perspectives highlights the complexity of Black social and political thought and that it is not and has not been a monolithic entity. Black Studies, however, continued to struggle for legitimacy in disciplines like Sociology, Anthropology and Political Science, while internally contending with its complexity and diversity of perspectives and the difficulties of challenging dominant and respected academic canons (Ginwright, 2004, p. 13). These shifts and tensions mark the beginnings of Africentric educational initiatives being incorporated into existing mainstream educational institutions and demonstrate the resistance by both the mainstream institutions and members within the Black community.

The 1970s - 1990s were characterized by a conservative political climate that directly challenged and reacted to liberal reforms in education, arguing that in creating educational opportunities, they had decreased educational standards and directly threatened the advances made in Black Studies (Ginwright, 2004, p. 15). The conservative political shift caused financial cuts in education, attacks on affirmative action, less government support for socio-economic equality and a change in name from Black Studies to African-American/Africana Studies (Ginwright, 2004, p. 15). Ginwright (2004) posits that the identity politics that emerged in the 1980s and the shift towards pro-capitalist ideologies by Black leaders caused the once vigorous Marxist frameworks to be abandoned, resulting in cultural nationalism to be seen as a more legitimate approach to critiquing Western ideology. This ideological shift was eventually formalized by multiple Black Studies departments through scholars such as Maulana Karenga, Nathan Hare and Wade Nobles and then theorized by Molefi Asante as *Africentrism*. The official theorizing of Africentrism by Asante served the purpose of not only legitimizing Black Studies departments, but also attempting to resolve the ideological conflict between the Marxists and cultural nationalists through the incorporation of ideas from both perspectives (Ginwright, 2004, p. 16).

Ginwright (2004) asserts that the 1990s saw Africentrism moving beyond the ivory tower and into contemporary Black life in the forms of Black bookstores, kente cloth, popular media and schools (p. 16). Since 1985, hundreds of Africentric schools have emerged throughout America, coupled with a higher demand for Black educators, learning resources and curricula (Ginwright, 2004, p. 16). Africentrism had its

proponents, but it also had many opponents that maintained a Euro-originist orientation and suggested that Africentrism mythologized history, and highlighted the limitations of it, by suggesting that it essentializes race and overlooks the influences of socioeconomic status (Ginwright, 2004, p. 22). According to Ginwright (2004), Africentrism as a pedagogy is problematic because, while there are some positives to the approach, many Africentric educators fail to understand the complexities of the youth they seek to teach, such as the way in which hip-hop culture heavily shapes their thinking (Ginwright, 2004, p. 132). Therefore, Ginwright asserts that while Africentrism serves to confront Eurocentrism in the formal curriculum, it also can serve as means of homogenizing the Black youth it attempts to serve by flattening out the complexities of their identities.

Africentrism, as theorized by Asante, can be framed as a fairly new ideology and political movement with historic roots in the Civil Rights and Black Power movements in the U.S. of the 1960s and 70s (Olaniyan, 2006) and is still in development and transformation. As a conceptual framework, it resists and challenges a society that is perceived as Eurocentric and is a response to feelings of alienation, disorientation and lack of agency (Asante, 1998). Africentrism attempts to carve out a space where people of African descent can attempt to imagine a reality not influenced by the intervention and legacy of colonialism and enslavement, and tries to remove Europe from the center of thinking (Asante, 1998). Through the removal of Europe as the center, Africentrism challenges the objectification of people of African descent and promotes subjectivity and the idea of consciousness, by encouraging those of African descent to be conscious and critical of their location and to resist through the exercising of agency (Asante, 1998).

The idea of location is of central importance, because it is the base of this ideology. Location in Africentrism looks for where the individual is situated in society socially, politically, economically and ideologically. Identifying the location first, allows for the deconstruction of *how* location informs hegemony, power and privilege and the experiences of the individual (Asante, 1998). In this way, Africentrism considers intersectionality and how experiences are shaped by a host of factors that are dynamic and interactive.

Therefore, the key objective of Africentrism is to decentralize Eurocentrism by educating others through basing knowledge on African worldviews and ways of knowing (Ajrotutu & Pollard, 2000, p. 201). In these conceptualizations of Africentrism, the amalgamation of both Marxist and cultural nationalist perspectives are evident in the way in which the framework critiques individualist capitalist epistemologies and ontologies by incorporating elements of cultural and economic self-preservation and collective best self-interest. Because Africentrism is a direct response to Eurocentrism, I will now briefly define and discuss Eurocentrism and its links to Africentrism and race.

Eurocentrism, Africentrism and race.

Defining eurocentrism. Eurocentrism is a modern phenomenon and ideology rooted in the ascent of European dominance in world trade and politics during the 15th to 20th centuries such as the European Renaissance, the development of colonial empires and capitalism, modernity and industrialization (Jones, 1987). It is essential to capitalist ideology, as it manifests itself as the central, dominant attitude of all of the societies in the developed capitalist world (Amin, 1989).

Eurocentrism is also a social reality and ideology that asserts that human civilization and the blossoming of human society is as a result of Western European attributes and thinking (Amin, 1989; Hunn, 2004). It is a culturalist phenomenon, assuming the existence of “irreducibly distinct cultural constants” that shape the historical paths of different peoples (Amin, 1989, vii), implying that culture shapes the progress of a people and that this progress can be hierarchical, depending on the specificity of the culture. Eurocentrism, therefore presents itself as universalist, positing that the imitation of the Western model is the solution to the challenges of our time (Amin, 1989; Hunn 2004), implying a superiority in European culture that produces a prosperous and superior legacy that should be normalized and mimicked. It penetrates deeper than modes of production, social formations, systems of formations, the state and social classes, as it penetrates these systems and institutions to their very core, so much so that nation states and social classes are articulated models that reflect European sensibilities (Amin, 1989, p. 256). This ideology also discounts affective knowledge, promoting fragmentation and compartmentalization, asserting that detachment and objectivity are essential to understanding and knowledge (Hunn, 2004, p. 67). Therefore, success within a Eurocentric framework is framed as acquiring material wealth; gaining social status and power over others and thus promoting the idea that humans are basically individualistic and competitive (Hunn, 2004).

Africentrism directly challenges Eurocentrism as an ideology because it promotes the idea of sustainability of Africa and its diaspora through a rejection of capitalistic, individualistic ideals via operating as an articulated group, seeking the best collective

interest. It also adheres to tenets such as the mission to humanize the world and the encouragement of agency, self-sufficiency, autonomy, and self empowerment through giving voice to the African diaspora and highlighting their historical contributions (Ajirotutu & Pollard, 2000; Hunn, 2004). Both Africentrism and Eurocentrism are deeply tied to ideas about race and can manifest themselves in many ways, such as Blackness/Whiteness, race a location and a performative act.

Eurocentrism as Whiteness. Eurocentrism is deeply tied to the concept of Whiteness. Whiteness is a social construct and culture that positions itself as the center (Warren, 2003, p. 15) and is tied to the concept of race. Race marks bodies and ascribes traits to them based on phenotypical features. Whiteness is a dynamic racial category that usually includes those of Western European descent, but membership changes based on a host of factors, including socioeconomic status, ethnicity and phenotypical features, such as straight hair, light skin and small angular facial features that are believed to be biological (Shaw, 2005).

Whiteness, like Eurocentrism, is also seen as normative and invisible because its central positioning makes it the standard by which all other cultures and people are measured. This invisibility and centrality is often named White privilege, which Peggy McIntosh (1988) describes as an “invisible weightless knapsack” that contains special tools and provisions that White people subconsciously cash in on throughout their life course. It includes the psychological comfort and understanding that your culture, ways of knowing and history are validated, respected and superior, shielding those who embody it from the consciousness of the realities of marginalized and racialized groups,

promoting a reluctance to alter societal structures that may help those who are marginalized, but may put privilege in jeopardy.

Africentrism as Blackness. Africentricity can also be taken up as Blackness, which is intrinsically linked to the social construct of race, which marks bodies of African descent as the opposite of Whiteness (Bernardi, 2008, p. 168; McNally, 2006) based on phenotypical features that are also believed to be biological such as darker skin colours, curlier hair textures and rounder, fuller, less defined facial features (Coard, Breland, & Raskin, 2001; Smedley & Smedley, 2005; Tate, 2007; Van den Berghe, 1978). Therefore, Blackness and Whiteness are relationally linked, as they need each other in order to define the other. This means that in order for Whiteness to be constructed as superior, it needs Blackness to be constructed as inferior in order to maintain its central positioning. This suggests that Whiteness tends to be self-defined (as the center), whereas Blackness is defined in relation to Whiteness as the periphery.

Stuart Hall (2002) suggests that we look at racial categories such as Whiteness and Blackness as floating signifiers, which are a part of a classifying system that ranks cultures according to their meaning-making practices, which gain their meaning through the dynamic relations of difference that they establish with other concepts and ideas in a signifying field (such as gender, sexuality and class), rather than through a supposed innate essence. Hall (2002) argues that these given meanings can never be fixed and are subject to constant redefinition and appropriation because they are relational and not innate. Taking up race as floating signifiers suggests that Whiteness and Blackness as races are not fixed categories, but discursive and fluid categories that shift and change

depending on the relations with which they interact. Therefore, Blackness and Whiteness are not homogeneous categories, as they each can intersect with gender, sexuality and class, creating an array of experiences and life circumstances, suggesting that not all Black people believe in Africentric principles and not all White people are Eurocentric. It is important to highlight however, that statistically, in both Canada and the U.S., racialized communities continue to be on the margins socioeconomically and politically (Campbell & Kaufman, 2006; Darity, 1982; MacDougall, 2010).

Whiteness and Blackness as social distances. Whiteness and Blackness have also been taken up as social distances, which are defined by Lindholm and Sacks (2002) as “the result of the structural reality that is constructed by patterns of disparate experience dictated by identity” (p. 130). In this context, Whiteness operates as a location based on racial identity and the belief in a hierarchical society structure that is based on one's social distance to privilege or oppression. Lindholm and Sacks (2002) also suggest that social ranking is defined by using the measure of one's proximity to the ideal of triple privilege, which is comprised of race, gender and class and embodied in the White, upper-middle class man (p. 130). They argue that social constructions of race, gender and class all operate in a way that defends and distances positionality, while upholding the stratification system by attenuating the distance between the privileged and the oppressed (Lindholm & Sacks, 2002, p. 31). A key feature of triple privilege is that members of the privileged group tend to have less rigid identities because their positionality affords them flexibility in identity formation and a lower social cost than their less privileged counterparts who have a rigid and distinctive identity formation, due

to the high social cost and reality of oppression (Lindholm, & Sacks, 2002, p. 31). This suggests that White racial identities are more flexible because they are positioned as the center, and thus set the standard. This also suggests that Blackness tends to take on a more rigid and homogeneous identity, because of its peripheral positioning and necessity of taking its cues from the center. Identity in White spaces can therefore more comfortably be heterogeneous, as long as it does not threaten privilege. In Black spaces, however, due to peripheral positioning, identity is shaped by constant juxtapositions with Whiteness and thus, has higher social costs and is more constrained.

An example of identity construction being influenced by location and the center is the way in which a perceived proximity to the construction of Whiteness is privileged in some Black spaces. For example, the way in which mixed-race bodies are often read based on phenotype demonstrates how Blackness and Whiteness act as social distances on a spectrum that privilege some and oppress others in gradients and in various ways. The combination of skin colour and facial features and how closely they resemble the phenotypical construction of the dominant group (lighter skin, straighter hair, eye colour and smaller facial features) have real effects on the lives of those constructed as Black. For example, skin tone (Coard et al., 2001; Hall, 1995; Harris, 1995) and hair texture, meaning how straight the hair is and thus, how tightly curled it is not (Caldwell, 1991; Patton, 2006; Thompson, 2008, 2009) have real implications on employment opportunities (Harrison, Reynolds-Dobbs, & Thomas, 2008), beauty perceptions, self-esteem, socioeconomic status, educational attainment and marriageability (particularly for Black women) (Hunter, 2002; Neal & Wilson, 1989; Okazawa-Rey, Robinson, &

Ward, 1987; Rosette & Dumas, 2007; Udry, Bauman, & Chase, 1971).

Names also have real implications for post-secondary admission and employment in America. Despite the applicants being qualified, names that sound “too ethnic” have lower instances of positive outcomes (Fryer Jr & Levitt, 2004; Kane, 1998). Another example is how many Black students and professionals that communicate in perceived “proper English” are ostracized as acting or talking White (Murray, Neal-Barnett, Demmings, & Stadulis, 2012; Tyson, Darity, & Castellino, 2005), inferring that Blackness by default is inferior and Whiteness is proper and superior. These constraints (phenotype, names and language) placed on Blackness not only inferiorize Black identities, but also reify the positioning of Whiteness as the center and standard, suggesting unobvious social pressures on racialized/marginalized bodies to avoid the social consequences (social cost) of their identity, by mimicking the center through language, behaviour (such as naming children) and physical appearance. Imagine how these constraints permutate as they intersect with other signifiers like gender, class and age. How do these ideas translate into the classroom? This speaks to the subtlety of the power dynamics of race, in the way that Whiteness as a location has the power to control and influence the identity construction of the margins (Brohman, 1995).

The role of power. Power manifests itself in Whiteness through cultural imperialism. Cultural imperialism establishes the experiences of the triple privileged (white, male, middle-upper class) as the norm (Young, 1990, pp. 58–59), granting the privilege of ambivalence to the experiences of those on the periphery. The power lies in not having to notice the experiences of others and to always have your experience

positioned as normative (Lindholm & Sacks, 2002, p. 139). The power also lies in the fact that marginalized (and racialized) identities are constructed in relation to privileged identities, which implies that privileged identities are more self-determined and have the power to influence identity construction, suggesting the existence of push and pull factors in identity formation, which determine social ranking based on one's social distance to oppression (Lindholm & Sacks, 2002, p. 139). Therefore, privileged identities have more of an internal ascription (ability to be heterogeneous), whereas marginalized (and racialized) identities experience an external ascription (push towards homogeneity), which means that, "privileged identity formation provides a lens through which to view beliefs and actions that reinforce inequality" (Lindholm & Sacks, 2002, p. 139).

Power also operates through Whiteness in the way that the privileges of Whiteness are invisible because they are systemic, rendered as the norm and thus constructed as objective reality. For example, undergarments, pantyhose, band-aids and makeup are often labeled as being neutral or flesh coloured when they are some shade of beige, assuming that particular shades of beige for skin are the norm. Darker colours, on the other hand are often labeled with some connotation to food or something exotic such as chocolate or caramel, if they are available as alternatives at all. These mundane goings-on that most encounter regularly, usually go unnoticed or unchecked, because it is generally understood and accepted that nude or neutral implies White skin. This subtlety and general understanding highlights the ways that Whiteness is always being reinforced as the invisible and neutral norm, while simultaneously marking non-White bodies as different. How can you see something that is taken up as something that *just is*?

There is also intersectionality in this power (Wildman & Davis, 1997) , because as the power intersects with gender, class and other markers, privilege and power can increase or decrease, making Whiteness and its privilege and power elusive and hard to identify. For example, a White, working class woman with immigrant status may have vastly different experiences with power, autonomy and Whiteness in comparison to another White, middle class woman that is of non-immigrant status. This is because these two women would be socially located in different ways, by different people, in different environments, thus informing their experiences and opportunities in different ways. These various elements create variable experiences because they are complex intersecting realities that are dynamic, malleable and create gradations of Whiteness, power and privilege.

Blackness can also shift in meaning and experience based on how markers such as social class, skin tone, facial features, hair texture, name, gender and sexuality intersect, which informs one's socio-political location or proximity to or distance from privilege. Aside from physical characteristics, one can become more or less Black, through the way that their unique intersectionality socially locates them, suggesting that race is therefore, fluid and although Blackness is always visible, there are instances where Whiteness can also be seen. These instances are characterized by the center being forced to experience the consciousness that they too are raced (Gallagher, 1997, p. 9; Lewis, 2004; Mahoney, 1997, p. 331). Being able to see Whiteness threatens its positionality, invisibility and exercising of power and is thus resisted and understood through the idea of reverse racism.

Another idea that must be considered is that race and the categorizing of people into groups based on phenotypical traits is biologically incorrect. Race is a social construct that was used by the dominant class to legitimize colonization and exploitation, and is not a true concept that can prove “racial difference” at the biological level (Smedley & Smedley, 2005, p. 16). Colonial expansion marked a time when European explorers were discovery and financially driven, which resulted in the development of a capitalist system of labour, in order to generate surplus through maximum exploitation of labour and land to their benefit (McNally, 2006). For example, in British North America, Indigenous people and the Irish were primary labourers in the exploitive system, but in order to circumvent resistance and to legitimize the ill treatment of other humans as Christians, the colonizers had to implement a point of difference (McNally, 2006). According to McNally (2006), this point of difference was the invention of hierarchy based on a racialized social order. This is made evident by the fact the Irish, who would phenotypically *fit in* as White today, were at one point racialized and exploited. Characterizing the oppressed (Irish included) as subhuman and uncivilized justified the coercive and barbaric nature of capitalism and colonialism (McNally, 2006) and constructed Whiteness as inclusive of all those that phenotypically match the construction of Whiteness, thus replacing the Irish with African slaves. Including the Irish in Whiteness and reassigning inferiority to non-Whites, gave Whiteness a psychological capital (privilege) and promoted a social distancing from the oppression of non-Whites (Indigenous people and Africans), thus discouraging intergroup solidarity (McNally, 2006). This model of race making highlights the malleability of the concept of race and

how its parameters change situationally and operate on a spectrum.

Whiteness and Blackness as performative acts. Whiteness and Blackness have also been taken up as performative acts. Butler (1993) defines performativity as not a singular act, but always something that reiterates a norm or a set of norms (p. 12). Therefore, race is not read from bodies, which assumes that it exists prior to our reading, but comes into being through the expression and performance of it. Through the repeated performance of race, the illusion of embodied race comes into being (Warren, 2003, p. 29). This suggests Whiteness and Blackness become normalized and understood through their repetitive performances and through the privileges and consequences that come from performing that race properly (Warren, 2003, p. 28). For example, Black English Vernacular (BEV) is an example of race performance. In order to perform Blackness, many African-Americans are immersed in a national culture that through media representation and hearing it from their peers, marks BEV as an integral part of Blackness (Warren, 2003, p. 30). Through this repeated immersion and reification of BEV as a marker of Blackness, society begins to normalize and take up BEV as an embodied feature of Blackness (Warren, 2003, p. 31). Conversely, stipulating how Whiteness is performed is difficult, because it is akin to questioning the air around us; it's always there, but nobody acknowledges it (Foster, 2003, p. 2). This means that Whiteness is understood through the understanding of what it is not, meaning that it is through the repeated performance of non-White racialized groups, which marks their bodies in specific ways, that the construction of a neutral and invisible Whiteness is reinforced. Therefore, as a performative act, race is constructed as an unconscious

process that names and ascribes power to bodies through repetitive performance, and does not pre-exist prior to performance. What I find problematic about performativity however, is the fact that it obscures the pre-existing economic roots of race-making (capitalism) and how these roots inform a reality and existence that does exist prior to performance. I argue, however, that perhaps racial identities, such as Blackness and Whiteness are perpetuated and reinforced through being immersed in various media representations, social environments and schools, rather than created through performance and immersion.

The complexities and contradictions that lie within the development of Africentrism as an ideology are numerous and winding. In the aforementioned review of literature I took up the historical context of Africentric movements in the U.S., assessed the social climate around race relations and presented a general analysis of the different ways that race is understood. I addressed how Africentrism came into being, ideological divergences within the framework and how the framework critiques Eurocentrism and informs the racial politics and understandings.

The educational experiences of Black youth in the U.S. The educational experiences of Black youth in the U.S. are varied, complex and tinged with the politics of race. Many education policy makers and scholars identify a persistent achievement (or opportunity) gap for Black students that is complicated by racial politics. These racial politics often undermine the educational experiences of Black youth by creating and perpetuating a social context that practises colourblindness, which silences the salience of racial inequalities. These racial politics are also exhibited in various ways, such as the

‘acting White’ phenomenon and the resegregation of schools. I will discuss these issues and the subsequent calls for educational reform, which sometimes include requests for Africentric or Black-focused schools.

The achievement gap for Black students and proposals and responses to Africentric initiatives. Many scholars assert that despite the persistent growing presence of Black youth in schools, in comparison to their White counterparts, there is a persistent pattern of Black youth underachievement, coupled with little change in the formal Eurocentric curriculum that meets the needs of Black youth (Asante, 1991; Hale-Benson, 1986; Hilliard, 1998; Shockley, 2007). The unequal outcomes for Black students are often characterized by disproportionate underrepresentation in gifted (by as much as 55%) and advanced placement classes and overrepresentation in special education geared towards learning disabilities. Black students often exist within a social environment that has detrimental effects on their educational outcomes and promote disproportionately poor graduation and post-secondary attendance rates. Some of the features of this detrimental social environment include: issues of poverty and socioeconomic status, being disproportionately on the receiving end of poor schools with limited resources and new and underqualified teachers, lowered expectations from teachers and high drop-out rates (Ferguson, 2003; Ford, Grantham, & Whiting, 2008; Jencks & Phillips, 1998; Johnston & Viadero, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 2006; Lavin-Loucks, 2006; J. M. Patton, 1998; Perry, 2003; Reid, 2008). There is also a gender dimension to the achievement gap, as recent research has found that while boys in general are underperforming in comparison to girls, African-American boys and girls are following the same trend

(Baumrind, 1972; Francis, 2002; Hare & Castenell, 1985; Stevenson, Chen, & Uttal, 1990).

Many scholars propose that the formal schooling curriculum needs to be pluralized in order to include multiple perspectives in their pedagogies. Hilliard (1991) argues that the media, entertainment and schools are integral parts of the information process and in oppressive societies, also function as tools of domination. He argues that in order for a pluralistic curriculum to emerge, it is first necessary that the old system be purged and that the new curriculum, go beyond quotas and encourage critical thinking in students and exposure to multiple perspectives (Hilliard, 1991, p. 13).

Many also argue that cultural discontinuity persists as an issue for Black students because their language, behaviour and learning styles can be inconsistent with the teachers, administrators and school structure, which are Eurocentric and may not address the specific learning needs of the students, thus signifying the need for the context of schools and pedagogy to change (Graybill, 1997; Hale-Benson, 1986, 2001; Hilliard, 1991, 1992, 1998). This can be problematic because teachers often bring their culture with them into the classroom and the behaviour of some Black students can interfere or limit their learning or affect teachers' expectations, which have a great effect on academic performance (Hilliard, 1992). Calls for interventions, such as more African-American teachers, same-sex education to address the gender gap for Black boys, teacher training in diverse learning styles, continuity between home and the classroom and White teacher training in Africana studies are proposed (Graybill 1997; Hale-Benson, 2001; Hilliard, 1991, 1998).

While interventions and research continue to be conducted, the problem persists and some scholars have proposed Africentric schools as a response. Shockley (2007) argues that while Africentric schooling is seen as controversial and politically charged, it is no different than Catholic or Jewish focused education that serve to reinforce specific ideals or promote a particular sensibility in its students (p. 104). Hilliard (1998) echoes these sentiments by pointing to the continued resistance towards Africentric schools, while schools with an Asian or Latino sensibility do not meet such resistance. Asante (1991) asserts that education not only reflects the society that develops it, but also functions as a socialization tool that prepares learners to become part of a social group (p. 170). It is in this vein that he promotes Africentricity as way of orienting Black students with an epistemology that functions as a tool that provides them with a lens that facilitates better learning and educational outcomes (Asante, 1991, p. 179). The overarching argument continues to be that educational settings and practices often reify Eurocentric worldviews and values, which must be resisted through changes in education that confront and challenge Eurocentrism; a need for educators to learn about African-American culture, experience and history; and for changes in curricula that is more inclusive and encourages higher academic achievement in Black students (Hunn, 2004; Ladson-Billings, 2000). It appears that in the American context, given the larger Black population and more established history of Black-focused schools, universities and institutions, that while there is criticism and resistance to these initiatives, they are at the very least, tolerated and sustained.

Irvine (2000) suggests that despite the achievement gap and the emergence of African-centered schools around the country, there are some more critical questions to be addressed. First, she argues that proponents make too many assumptions about Black children in order to validate the viability and merit of Africentric curriculums, such as: Black children suffer from low self-esteem, which causes poor performance and that they will be more motivated through the studying of their history and contributions of African-American achievers (Irvine, 2000, p. 202). She refutes the claim that Black children suffer from low self-esteem, as evidenced through research, and that despite poor performance in school, many Black children think highly of themselves. She argues that self-esteem has a correlative relationship with academic performance, rather than a causal one and that Africentric education overemphasizes this relationship. She posits that educators need to be more critical about the complex and paradoxical relationship that Black children have with self-esteem and educational achievement and that Africentric curriculums may not necessarily translate into higher tests scores, despite more engagement and interest from students. This perspective, however, oversimplifies the idea of self-esteem because it does not consider the fact that while some Black students may be confident in very specific areas of their lives, given their academic performance and persistent overrepresentation in particular statistics, their self-esteem in other areas may be low. Also, Africentric educational initiatives are not only concerned with raising test scores, but also with taking a holistic and communal approach students. Irvine's assessment focuses on the relationship between Africentric curricular content, self-esteem and student engagement, while I suggest that perhaps it is the holistic and communal

approach that has a positive effect on academic performance and self-esteem rather than the Africentric curricular content itself.

Irvine (2000) also questions *who* should teach an Africentric curriculum, as teachers often have much flexibility in how they deliver curriculum and that Black teachers may not always translate into better delivery of an Africentric curriculum. She ponders how Africentric curriculum should be taught and who should decide what is taught? She ponders these questions with the understanding that African-Americans are not homogenous as a group and while Africentric curricula has its merits; these questions need to be taken up.

Mary Lefkowitz (1997) also asks some critical questions about Africentrism as a whole. She posits that many of the beliefs of Africentrism are historically inaccurate and promote historical mythology. She argues that while mythologies such as the Ancient Egyptians and Northern Africans being Black bring satisfaction to some groups, in the long term they are harmful because they block African-Americans from learning about true ancient African civilizations, promote a distrust in Black students of Europeans, and robs students of European descent of their heritage, and thus do not belong in academic curricula due to their unscientific, inaccurate and false nature (Lefkowitz, 1997). She also argues that academic freedom does have limits and that Africentrism is akin to "flat-earth theory" and that areas of study, like Africentrism, which promote the distortion of history should be taken up with departments and discussed and debated within academe to resolve issues around viability and necessity (Lefkowitz, 1997, p. 155-175).

While critical, this perspective reduces Africentrism to the arbitrary practice of

historical cherry-picking, resulting in an obscuring of the historical contributions of African peoples. This perspective also does not engage or adequately address Eurocentrism or its social, psychological, economic and political effects, nor does it address the fact that Africentrism goes beyond arbitrary historical name-dropping and actually aims to challenge Eurocentric points of view and provide a means for people of African descent to find ways to unite around collective best interest. In these ways, this analysis presents a myopic interpretation of Africentrism and ignores the fact that with any ideology, there will be limitations. Lefkowitz's analysis lacked a thorough understanding of Africentrism and therefore missed the mark in its criticism as it did not engage the complexities of both Eurocentrism and Africentrism, their effects or salience and instead came off as an exercise in policing and silencing.

Overall, the scholarly literature presents a broad picture of the educational experiences of Black students in the U.S. An achievement gap persists between Black students and White students, as well as between boys and girls (regardless of race) and many propose that curricular changes coupled with changes to teacher training and institutions (implementation of Africentric schools and streams) as possible solutions. Others feel that Africentric thought oversimplifies the complexities of the problems that Black students face and may not be a viable solution.

The “Acting White” phenomenon, the resegregation of schools and colourblindness. Acting White refers to a complex set of social relations that Black students face, where they are marginalized, ridiculed and sometimes shunned through the accusation of acting White. Behaviours that solicit this kind of criticism for students,

include, but are not limited to, high achievement in school, speaking what is considered to be proper English, dressing or having interests in particular sports, hobbies or music that diverge from the stereotypical expectations of Black youth (Fryer, 2006; Murray et al., 2012; Ogbu, 2004; Tyson, Darity, & Castellino, 2005). What is problematic about this phenomenon is that it pushes some Black youth to perform a very particular identity to avoid being excluded from their peer groups and can negatively affect educational outcomes. This phenomenon also has a tendency to associate positive attributes with Whiteness and negative attributes with Blackness, thus reifying and perpetuating stereotypes, blocking and limiting the development of youths' interests and abilities and fostering an environment of intergroup hostility.

Another contextual consideration is the persistent issue of the resegregation of schools (see Chandler, 2013; Chasmar, 2013; Goldsmith, 2004; Kozol, Tatum, Eaton, & Gandara, 2010; Paulson, 2008). Tatum (2008) argues that despite the increased diversity in the U.S. population and in media representation, neighbourhoods and schools continue to be segregated along racial lines, which overlap with economic lines (p. 12-13). The likelihood of White students having interaction with marginalized communities (social networks, friends and acquaintances) will be much less than the previous generation, and much of their information that shapes attitudes and knowledge regarding marginalized communities will be virtual, meaning that it will be greatly informed by media representations (Tatum, 2008, p. 14). This means that because neighborhoods are often segregated by race and ethnicity, which is directly tied to socioeconomic status, many White students will continue to attend schools that are predominantly White, while many

racialized students will continue to attend schools that contain other racialized students. Also, 90 % of schools that are predominantly Black and Latino tend to have high percentages of poor students and poor resources, while highly segregated White schools tend to have a high proportion of middle-class students, which means that the resegregation of schools, results in unequal educational opportunities and outcomes for racialized students (Tatum, 2008, p. 14-15).

Colorblindness is also a contextual concern. Social settings within the broader contemporary American landscape encourage a particular brand of colorblindness, which asserts a seemingly admirable attitude that race should not and no longer matters. This is problematic given the persistence and continuance of racism, which makes ignoring the salience of race in people's lived experiences impractical (Neville, 2000). Markus, Steele and Steele (2000) argue that while the desire to remedy prejudice through the idea of not seeing color or group differences is taken up as progressive, this mentality further excludes marginalized groups, as it promotes the ideas of meritocracy, where any group can be successful regardless of their differences (p. 234). What is problematic about this brand of equity is that it obscures institutional factors that disadvantage racialized groups in multiple ways, and thus produces and reinforces unequal outcomes. Markus et al. (2000) also refers to colorblindness as, "tacit, psychological barriers" that can disadvantage students in the classroom. For example, the teacher's racial and class background and the students who share that background (from the dominant group) experience a sense of belonging that is taken for granted. This, in turn, obscures the different lived experiences and psychologies of non-dominant students, confuse and

disrupts their identity construction and thus negatively affects their learning (Markus et. al., 2000). The authors argue that issues of social location should be taken up to create more inclusive learning environments. Valli (1995) echoes these sentiments as she explores the context of teacher candidates who interpreted her focus as a researcher on cultural diversity as stereotyping students rather than treating them as raceless individuals. She argues that teacher candidates need to be more carefully selected and steeped in training that makes them more culturally responsive through a teacher-training curriculum that is more multicultural and encourages cross-cultural teaching. Much of the literature discusses challenging White privilege, colourblindness and ethnocentrism and discussing issues of race frankly, in order to find ways to address challenges of race and ethnicity in schools and in broader society (see Castro Atwater, 2008; DeCuir, 2004; Ladson-Billings, 2006; Ryan, 2007).

Acting White, the resegregation of schools and colourblindness are common themes throughout the American scholarly literature. Many scholars assert that these issues contribute to negative schooling experiences and outcomes for Black students. They suggest that teacher education and curricular changes are needed to address these issues and promote better learning environments for Black students in order to encourage higher rates of success. I will now discuss the Canadian context, focusing on the historical and social context of Africentric movements in Canada, attempts at Africentricity and responses to Africentricity.

Canadian context

Historical and social context of Africentric movements in Canada. In the Canadian context, the key authors discussing Africentric schooling and/or Black student experiences are scholars George Dei and Carl James. Dei has been a long-time proponent of Africentric schooling and its counter-pedagogical possibilities, while James takes on a different approach that is more interested in the local complexities of the schooling experiences of Black youth in the Greater Toronto Area. James and Brathwaite (1996) describe the education of Black students as, “one of the most contested areas of education today” (p. 13). They assert that there is a persistent sentiment among the Black community that the formal education system is unwilling to accommodate the needs of Black students and results in students becoming disengaged and/or dropping out (James & Brathwaite, 1996, p. 13). They point to a persistent and well-documented pattern of underachievement among Black students, beginning as early as the 1960s and continuing into the 1970s and 1980s. These issues began at a time when Canada experienced an influx of Black Caribbean immigration and many students experienced streaming, racialization and lowered expectations from teachers (James & Brathwaite, 1996, p. 15-20). Despite these barriers, many Black students still valued education and believed that education and continued hard work could result in success (James & Brathwaite, 1996, p. 16-21). Eventually, however, many became ambivalent and discouraged and consequently disengaged from the schooling process, resulting in many turning to alternatives such as sports to “make it”, or eventually dropped out (James & Brathwaite, 1996, p. 16-21). Many Black parents found that: (1) the multicultural policies

implemented did not sufficiently address the needs of their community, (2) that Eurocentrism in the curriculum promoted assimilation and conformity to Anglo-Canadian values and norms, and (3) that multiculturalism only provided a superficial engagement with difference (James & Brathwaite, 1996, p. 24).

James' later work reveals that issues of racialization and an achievement gap for Black and other racialized students persists (James, 2011, 2012). He suggests many of the conventional constructions of Black males in particular, "operate to categorize, essentialize, and disenfranchise young Black male students as they navigate and negotiate the school system . . . and work together to affect educators' conceptions of the youths' abilities, skills, and aspirations and, in turn, the youths' responses to these categorizations" (James, 2012, p. 471). While the structural nature of the process of racialization serves to inform educators' approaches to racialized students, these structural processes also produce poor outcomes for racialized groups. Therefore, James underscores not only the persistence of Black student underachievement, but also the recursive nature of the issue.

For example, the most recent *Toronto District School Board (TDSB) Grade 9 Student Cohort Study (2006-2011)*, where the TDSB studied the educational outcomes of secondary students in a grade nine to 12 cohort for a given period of time (2006-2011). This study included variables such as self-identified race, ethnicity, gender, parental education and sexual orientation. Black students, were grossly over-represented in special education programs that cater to learning disabilities in comparison to their White and East Asian counterparts (Rushowy, 2013b; Toronto District School Board, 2012).

Conversely, the study also shows that White and East Asian students are disproportionately overrepresented in gifted special education programs, while Black, Latin, Middle Eastern, South and Southeast Asian students are grossly underrepresented, if represented at all (Rushowy, 2013b; Toronto District School Board, 2012). When looking at graduation rates, White (81.9%), South East Asian (84.1%), South Asian (87%) and East Asian (91.2%) students had the highest rates of graduation, while students who identified themselves as Black (64.5%), Latin (69.9%), Mixed (73%) and Middle Eastern (77.5%) had lower graduation rates. Students born in the English-speaking Caribbean (50.8%), Eastern Africa (69.2%), and Central and South America (70%) were the least likely to graduate (Toronto District School Board, 2012). The trend continues with educational paths, with the lowest percentage of confirmed admissions to postsecondary programs in Latin (38.7%) and Black students (41.4%) and East Asian, South Asian, and South East Asian experiencing rates almost twice that of confirmed admission to post-secondary programs (Toronto District School Board, 2012). This data suggests that generally speaking, many diasporic Black students are overwhelmingly marginalized and underperforming. These issues are further compounded by other discrepancies. For example, in the 2006-2007 year, although Black students account for 12% of the student population (similar to the African-American general population rates in the U.S.), they accounted for 31% of school suspensions, while White students account for 29% of suspensions and make up over one-third (33%) of the schooling population, which is roughly proportional to their representation in the schooling population (Rankin,

2013). This means that Black students were suspended at a much higher and disproportionate rate than their White counterparts.

Given the data, the representation for Black students in these special education programs should mirror the representation of the groups' presence in the student body. Instead, the outcomes suggest unequal educational opportunities, streaming and a lack of access to programs, resources and educational support for many racialized students and more specifically, Black students, which mirror the inequalities for Black students in education in the American context. These inequalities can block racialized students from reaching their full potential. What accounts for these similarities in educational outcomes and experiences across different contexts? Canadian scholarly research (as does the American literature) proposes reforms to pre-service teacher programs and perhaps the recruitment of more teacher candidates belonging to marginalized groups, in order to address some of the inequalities that persist in schooling (see Bascia, 1996; Carr & Klassen, 1997; Conle et al., 2000; Finney & Orr, 1995; Ghosh & Tarrow, 1993; Howard & del Rosario, 2000; Solomon, 1995).

George Dei echoes this depiction of the educational landscape for Black and racialized youth in the Greater Toronto Area. He points to a persistent pattern of a student body that continues to become more and more ethnically, linguistically, racially and culturally diverse and a curriculum that is resistant to change and does not address the varied needs of its student population (Dei, 1996a, 1996b, 1997, 1998, 2008; Kempf & Dei, 2011). Dei is continually critical of Black students' underachievement and disengagement from schooling and the extent to which they are pushed to function as

students who are physically present, but absent spiritually and mentally, as a result of racialization and lowered expectations (Dei, 2008, p. 349). Dei (1997) sets the tone in *Reconstructing the Dropout* when he points to the ethnic diversity in Ontario, which makes up 37% of Canada's total population, with 50% of Canada's total 'visible minorities' residing in Ontario and over 66% of peoples of African descent (African, Black and Caribbean) also living in Ontario (Dei, 1997, p. 10). Dei finds that despite this presence, 36% of Black students were at risk of dropping out due to poor credit accumulation within six years, in comparison to Whites (26%) and Asians (18%) (Dei, 1997, p. 10). He also finds that nearly half (45%) of Black high school students were being streamed in their schooling, which blocks entry to post-secondary education, compared to 28% of the entire student body (Dei, 1997, p. 11).

Dei cites Eurocentrism and structural discrimination as key reasons for this disparity and proposes Africentric schooling as a possible solution. He suggests that the current school system is "mono-cultural" and that Africentrism can expand the curriculum to, "include the valid achievements and knowledges of all societies and to use the voice of the community/culture itself to present various histories and struggles for affirmation" (Dei, 1998, p. 201). He also asserts that Eurocentrism often posits itself as universal and political and academic projects that seek to challenge that universality, are often fiercely discredited (Dei, 1998, p. 202). Dei suggests that the "current structures reward individualism . . . and avoid any institutional responsibility for failure . . . and [therefore] offer dominant indicators of success that basically allow youth to mimic dominant conceptions and values [encouraging] students to perform Whiteness, thus

focusing on defining oneself in relation to Western standards” (Dei, 2008, p. 354). This argument is directly linked to the research in the American context that speaks to the persistence of Eurocentrism in the formal schooling curriculum and also in broader society, suggesting that despite the contexts being different (U.S. and Canada), the way in which inequality is produced and perpetuated is similar. He also argues that the underlying issue in the debate around Africentric schooling in the Canadian context is the “continued devaluation of African identities and experiences in the school system, which contribute to the problem of Black students' disengagement from school” (Dei, 1998, p. 202–204).

Dei is most concerned with the possibilities of Africentric epistemological constructs privileged and practiced in African cultures and communities, such as group conformity, communalism and co-operation. He believes that these marginalized ideals encourage a plurality of perspectives (Dei, 1998, p. 202–203), creating a scaffold for multiple ways of knowing. Therefore, Dei posits that Africentricity functions as a disruptor of a dominant hegemonic and Eurocentric epistemology.

Social climate. Further deepening the rendering of the Canadian context, is the social and political climate in Canada, which promotes deeply embedded ideologies of multiculturalism and neoliberalism. Multiculturalism refers to an official policy and idyllic model in Canada that portrays the country as an inclusive and tolerant space for multiple cultures, ethnicities, religions, and languages (see Branch, 2003; Canadian Multicultural Act of 1988; Government of Canada, 2008; Warburton, 2007). Through the creation of this illusory, Canada is presented as a pluralistic and egalitarian society.

Multiculturalism is practiced through the promotion of multicultural days, caravans and festivals, such as the annual Caribana parade in Toronto. These observances provide a superficial engagement with marginalized groups, promoting a feel good inclusiveness through cultural food, music and dance. What is problematic about multiculturalism is that it engages these groups in a superficial way and creates a sense of a multicultural, pluralistic and egalitarian society (Warburton, 2007, p. 275) which Himani Bannerji (1996) calls an imagined community (p. 105). She argues that many visible minorities in Canada live as “insider-outsiders”, and that multiculturalism marks non-Whites as different and perpetuates the multiculturalist discourses that polarize visible minorities from the construction of true Canadianness (Whiteness) and obscure the presence of a dominant group or ideology (Bannerji, 1996). This means that Eurocentrism, Whiteness and thus, White privilege become invisible.

In contrast to multicultural principles, the resident and socioeconomic profile in the Greater Toronto Area suggests that integration has yet to occur. For example, in the Greater Toronto Area, ethno-cultural groups largely cluster in various enclaves (Hou & Picot, 2003; Hulchanski, 2010) with visible minorities and immigrant families representing a larger proportion of poor and urban neighbourhoods, with 44% of children of African descent living in poverty (MacDougall, 2010, p. 29). This echoes the U.S. context in the way that racial and ethnic lines that are intrinsically linked to socioeconomic status often segregate neighbourhoods. These segregated Canadian neighbourhoods, just like in the U.S., also often lead to segregated schools, with unequal resources and outcomes for students.

Also, between 1981 and 2001, poverty rates for members of racialized groups in Canada rose 362%, while poverty among families of European descent, decreased 28% (Maxwell, 2009, p. 5). Research conducted by the United Nations has also found that Blacks in Ottawa (the nation's capital) are five times more likely to be poor than the non-visible minority population and approximately 60% of all employed Black Canadians earn less than \$20,000 per year, compared to 55% of all visible minorities and only 37% of Whites (MacDougall, 2008, p. 9). In the labour market, 51% of Black workers experienced racial discrimination and were most likely to be in, “low-status, low-skill, or precarious jobs” (MacDougall, 2008, p. 11). Further, only 7% of members of Parliament are visible minorities and out of all elected officials nationwide, only 9% are visible minorities (MacDougall, 2008, p. 18). These statistics suggest that the ‘insider-outsider’ experience that Bannerji (1996) describes is real and that racialized communities experience Canada differently. This difference is tempered by provisional superficial engagement with their supposed difference through cultural celebrations, but the institutional factors that shape lived realities continue to be starkly different than the dominant group. Therefore, multiculturalism in the Canadian context serves to create the illusion of racial and ethnic harmony and inclusivity, while bolstering the contradiction of the reality that many in racialized groups experience poverty at much higher rates and more often live in poor and urban neighbourhoods. McDougall (2008) identifies discrimination, racism, educational inequality, political structures that rarely select minority candidates and socioeconomic barriers, such as employment, economic status and lack of inclusive consultations with minorities in policy making, as the key factors

contributing to the imbalance of lived reality between dominant and racialized groups (MacDougall, 2008, p. 11-18). These findings suggest that multiculturalism as Bannerji (1996) suggests, is an imagined community that does not live up to its ideals and while it identifies and engages with difference superficially, it also functions to maintain the status quo. This social context speaks to the way in which Whiteness in both the U.S. and Canada is the center and how race is experienced on a spectrum, with racialized groups having very different lived realities and less power than the dominant group. In the U.S., colourblindness functions as a silencer of these disparities, while in the Canadian context, silencing of disparities operates through assertions of colourblindness embedded in multiculturalism, while also pretending to engage with racialized groups. As a result, this process makes talking about race and inequalities more difficult in Canada.

Neoliberalism also shapes the Canadian social context. It is a "political philosophy that aims to unleash and 'liberate' the process of capital accumulation" (Braedley & Luxton, 2010, p. 3) and is the "common sense of our era" (Connel, 2010, p. 22). Neoliberalism, in the past 25 years, has become a dominant global agenda of economic and social transformation that promotes deregulated free markets that widen existing markets and create new markets where none existed before (Connel, 2010, p. 22-23). Neoliberalism is problematic because it is driven by individualism and institutionally built on centuries of colonial, imperial, economic and political domination and exploitation. This obscures the effects of racialization and institutional structures and practices in producing unequal outcomes amongst groups by thrusting full responsibility onto the individual, through the assertion that opportunities, and therefore disparities, are

primarily the result of people's individual choices (Braedley & Luxton, 2010; Connel, 2010). Therefore, in relation to Africentric Schooling, the schooling experiences of Black youth become an individual or group problem, which is the result of the (poor) individual choices of the students, families or communities themselves, creating a social environment which makes difficult the critique of institutional structures, such as the formal schooling curriculum. Disparities in educational outcomes and experiences, regardless of disproportion become individual pathologies and silence broader questions that look beyond the individual. This silencing therefore promotes a social landscape that removes the language necessary to be critical of institutional structures and how they shape lived experiences (educational, political, social, economic, etc.). Like multiculturalism, neoliberalism in the Canadian context functions to reinforce inequalities, while silencing critique of the status quo.

These market and financialization ideologies relate to the U.S. context as economic and ethnic resegregation (citizens living or students attending schools in ethnic enclaves) presents itself as a growing problem and individualism creates a social reality that not only makes race and its related challenges difficult to discuss, but also promotes colorblindness, which obscures historical and systemic inequalities and barriers. For example, many in the Canadian context are not aware of the fact that historically, segregation operated within Canada, both formally and informally in social life as well as in schools (Hamilton et al., 2007; Winks, 1997) because the multicultural context creates an illusion that Canada is different from America and does not have this legacy, while neoliberalism makes the process of identifying issues and even creating language to

describe and name inequalities difficult, as racial inequalities are framed as individual problems. Another common approach is to compare Canada to the U.S., while endorsing the idea that it is somehow better or at the very least, nicer. The contradiction lies in the way in which Canada is marketed to Canadians and the outside world as an inclusive, pluralistic space, while it simultaneously silences the experiences of marginalized and racialized communities, through the reframing of the inequalities as individual failures or deficiencies, rather than institutional ones.

Attempts at Africentricity. Historically, speaking Black-focused schools existed before the current initiatives being put forth. In Nova Scotia, Black schools, albeit, informally segregated, were in operation up until 1983 (see Hamilton et al., 2007), while in Ontario there were Africentric/Black-focused schools in the GTA as early as 1935 and 1968 (Moitt, 1996) and a former city of York School Board alternative school aimed at the Afro-Caribbean community, called the Afro-Caribbean Alternative Secondary School in 1986 (Dei, 2013; Shuttleworth, 2010). The Afro-Caribbean Alternative Secondary School was housed inside of D.B. Community School and while little is known about the school, it appears to have followed a similar format to the current Africentric Alternative Elementary School, such as a community-led movement to push the then York Board of Education (now folded into the Toronto District School Board) to provide Africentric options to Black Canadian youth (Dei, 2013). This school was also built on American ideas about Africentrism as an ideological foundation for the curriculum; complied with the standard curriculum, while infusing African-centered culture and critical studies; built linkages with communities and institutions to promote post-secondary education; and

experienced public backlash (Dei, 2013). The school did experience some successes, such as housing 45 students over 16 years of age including adult learners, but after 18 months was moved to another location, no longer operating as a stand-alone school, but as a program within an existing school. Eventually, due to an array of problems such as persistent public resistance and severe underfunding, the initiative eventually collapsed (Dei, 2013). Dei (2013) asserts that this untold story is instructive because it mirrors the current Africentric initiatives in many ways, such as its roots in American Africentrism and community organizing and most importantly, the expansion of the initiative through the development of an Africentric Secondary program, which as of now will not operate as a stand-alone school offering complete continuity with the AAS, but rather, as a academic stream within an existing school. This suggests that given the similarity between these Africentric initiatives and the outcome of the former school, opponents and proponents of the current Africentric schools should use the Afro-Caribbean Alternative Secondary School as a case study to analyze how to best approach and manage the current Africentric initiatives.

In the fall of 2009, after much rigorous community organizing, the Africentric Alternative Elementary School, eventually housing students from K-8, opened its doors in Toronto, Ontario, attempting to counteract an achievement gap and high dropout rate among Black students (Dei, 2013; Toronto District School Board, n.d.-a). The school shares space with another TDSB school, accommodates full day kindergarten and a nutrition program, which provides breakfast snacks and lunches for students (Toronto District School Board, n.d.-a). Ideologically, the school's motto is, "together we succeed

and lead", asserting the belief that the school is "shaping the leaders of tomorrow through teaching our students to succeed today" and aims to firstly, "[have] teachers integrate the diverse perspectives, experiences and histories of people of African descent into the provincially mandated curriculum, use authentic and relevant teaching and learning that reflect our Africentric commitments and social realities to engage and extend the critical numeracy and literacy skills of our students, while being open to students all over the city and achieve high academic achievement, self-pride and motivation to succeed in its students" (Toronto District School Board, n.d.-a). The school also adheres to seven principles called the *Nguzo Saba*. These seven principles originate from the teaching of Julius Nyerere of Tanzania, which were adapted by American scholar Maulana Karenga in the 1960s as a formula for the cultural and economic sustainability of African-Americans (Lawrence, 1998). These seven principles were also incorporated into the creation of Kwanzaa, an African-American holiday which celebrates the reconnection of diasporic Blacks with their culture and heritage (Karenga, 2008). The Nguzo Saba principles are as follows:

- **Umoja** means unity. To strive and maintain unity in our family, and communities.
- **Kujichagulia** means self-determination. To define ourselves, name ourselves; speak for ourselves and to create for ourselves.
- **Ujima** means collective work and responsibility. To develop and maintain our communities together.
- **Ujamaa** means cooperative economics. To cooperatively build and maintain our businesses.

- **Nia** means purpose. To develop our communities for purpose.
- **Kuumba** means creativity. To always do as much as we can, in order to leave our community more beautiful than when we inherited it.
- **Imani** means faith. To believe with all of our hearts in our parents, teachers, leaders, and ourselves.(Toronto District School Board, n.d.-a)

The Africentric Alternative School has also had some early successes. In its first year, students were able to achieve standardized test scores that were 7-11 percent higher than board and provincial averages (MacDonald, 2010, 2011). With over 200 students now in attendance and the first group of students now heading into high school, a secondary school program for grades nine to twelve has been developed and will be piloted in the fall of 2013, with research continually being conducted on the initiative.

The secondary Africentric School program named, the *Leonard Brathwaite Program*, is slated to begin in the fall of 2013 and is currently in the recruitment phase. The initiative is currently being housed in an existing school in the east end of the city inside of an existing school and is currently planned to operate as an academic stream. The program appears to create continuity for students already in the Africentric elementary school, but also provides academic options for those that have never attended an Africentric program. The grade nine to twelve program has students learning their core subjects through an Africentric lens and is destreamed which means "that the learning and teaching has been reconfigured to meet the needs of all students in the classroom", but "will be designated as academic in order to provide students with the most choice for future pathways" (Toronto District School Board, n.d.-b). Through the

use of layered curriculum, “students will reach the required expectations in their own way, even if they are currently not at the academic level” (Toronto District School Board, n.d.-b). This means that students who may not be at an academic level will receive additional supports and challenges to build up themselves to reach the expectation levels. Students will also have access to AP (advanced placement) courses in order to further enrich their studies. Despite criticism to the contrary, this program, just like the elementary school will be open to all students, and the students will be fully integrated into the school environment (Toronto District School Board, n.d.-b).

Both programs appear to share the goal of trying to empower Black students through the acquisition of culturally relevant pedagogical practices in order to facilitate high achievement. However, early criticism of the school suggest that because the elementary school is in the west end of the city and the secondary school program is on the east end, prospective students currently attending the elementary school may have difficulty attending the high school, as it is so far away. Also, many are concerned with the lack of marketing around the secondary initiative and many are unaware of its existence, offerings or how to register.

The efficacy of these initiatives remains to be seen, but in the meantime, they are providing Black students that have historically been overrepresented on the lower end of academic achievement, options and pathways to success and higher education.

Responses to Africentric schooling. Much has been said about Africentric Schooling by the media, stakeholders and researchers. I will briefly review the literature gauging responses to Africentric schooling in the GTA.

The popular media has been very vocal about Africentric schooling since rumours began concerning an Africentric school became public knowledge in 2007. Much of the criticism has been centered around ideas that the initiative is a racist, an exercise in segregation (Gee, 2011b; Goldstein, 2011), unnecessary and allude to some kind of familial or cultural inferiority that creates the achievement gap (see Hammer, 2011a; Hammer, 2011b; MacDonald, 2011; Rushowy, 2013a; Toronto Sun, 2011). What this commentary fails to recognize is the historical, social and political context that creates and perpetuates a social reality that marginalizes Black students. The criticism also clings to neoliberalist and multicultural ideals, which are individualist and purport that one's failure or success is solely determined by one's work ethic and individual choices. These views silence and make difficult a critique of institutional structures that produce unequal outcomes and perpetuate an "us versus them" dichotomy. Academic analyses have offered a more critical perspective on Africentric Schooling, which explore ideological, parent, teacher and student perspectives.

Peart (2010) argues vehemently against the notion that Africentric schools promote segregation by elucidating how segregated schooling operated within Canadian history and that despite desegregated schooling being implemented by law, historically speaking, Black students continued to informally attend segregated schools and experience policies and schooling environments which privileged White groups. Peart

(2010) also explores the possibilities of Africentric Schooling, but argues that the initiatives do not do enough to challenge static racial identities that are cast on Black bodies and may actually serve to reinforce and restrict them, thus constraining identity formation and heterogeneity within Black diasporic communities as does Eurocentrism. Peart (2010) argues that racism in Canada is a very complex situation and therefore does not have a straightforward answer such as Africentric schooling.

Agyepong (2011) explores the perspectives of 20 African-Canadian parents on how they come to understand Africentric schooling. She found that many parents indicated that they generally felt positive about the establishment of Africentric Schools as an alternative to mainstream schools, but seemed confused about what it really meant and had some reservations about whether or not their children's experiences needed to be included in the schooling process. Many parents believed that Africentric schools could serve to alleviate some of the oppression faced by Black students and present better opportunities for academic achievement, while others were concerned about how the schools would be funded. Lastly, many parents were concerned that their children and their credentials would be stigmatized by larger society, thus making them less valuable.

Gordon and Zinga (2012) probed Black students' attitudes about Africentric schooling. The students identified Eurocentrism in the curriculum as a problem and were able to highlight many of the positive attributes of Africentric schooling, such as learning more about Black heritage in a comfortable space. The students were also optimistic about the possibility that initiatives like this may change racist attitudes (Gordon & Zinga, 2012). However, many of the students also feared that attending the school would

stigmatize them and experienced great difficulty in conceptualizing how such a school functions. The students also had reservations about a separate school, noting that the positive elements of Africentric schooling should simply be implemented into the broader curriculum (Gordon & Zinga, 2012). Overall the participants wanted a more inclusive schooling experience, and while they supported the social and cultural tenets of Africentric education, they were unsure if they would attend a potential secondary school (Sharma, 2010). They were also concerned about the stereotypes, stigmas and implications attached to Africentric schooling. In both studies, the participants tended to use American-American figures as examples of history, such as Martin Luther King and Rosa Parks, suggesting an unfamiliarity with Black Canadian historical figures.

Discussion

The literature in both the Canadian and the American contexts, highlight the persistence of an achievement (or opportunity) gap between Black youth and the dominant group and a long standing history of poor educational experiences and outcomes. The reasons for these disparities are multifactorial, but the key reasons cited in both contexts suggest that Eurocentrism, colorblindness, ethnocentrism, socioeconomic factors and an unwillingness to move beyond superficial engagements with difference and challenge dominant institutional structures are impeding improvements in this area. American literature is more expansive and explicit in discussing issue of race in comparison to the Canadian context. Some scholars in both contexts suggest that Black-focused schools can help to bridge the gap, but proposals for these alternative schools are often met with resistance.

The inclusion of research from the American context is intentional in this review of literature, as to underscore the pervasiveness of the achievement gap of diasporic Black students and to speak to how the overarching themes that emerged in the literature, such as Eurocentrism and structural inequality, continue to permeate the social landscape of societies that have a legacy of European colonialism, African enslavement and marginalization of racialized groups (U.S. and Canada). The inclusion of American literature also indicates that despite the fact that the Black American and Canadian contexts have specific historical and cultural nuances and particularities, the structural and social inequalities faced by Black students in these contexts are similar, thus suggesting that race generally continues to play an integral role in the educational and social experiences, opportunities and outcomes of Black youth. What is unique about the Canadian context is that the disparity in achievement does not appear to be as starkly Black and White as it seems to be in the U.S., with the disparity in Canada emerging as between Black (English-speaking Caribbean, East African and Latin American (and diasporic) students) and White, Asian and South Asian (diasporic) students. Further research into how these trends function in the U.S. context could be helpful in future comparative study. Also, because Africentrism is an ideology deeply rooted in the historical, political and social experiences of African-Americans, I found it important to situate my research within this broader context. Lastly, I wanted to illuminate the way in which Africentric and Black-focused initiatives also struggle for legitimacy in similar ways in both contexts. It appears that in both contexts, the criticism (at least in part) of

Africentrism stems from the way in which the ideology makes Whiteness visible and disrupts the status quo.

In the Canadian literature, the adult perspectives around Africentric schooling and Black youth schooling experiences dominate the discourse, evidenced through media reports cited earlier and scholars like George Dei and Carl James. The recent youth response adds to the discussion and also names Eurocentrism as a key problem in the curriculum. Youth and adults hold differing perspectives concerning how to solve the problem of Black youth academic underachievement. The youth propose that the existing formal curriculum in the current system be more inclusive, while the adults (such as policy makers, educators, researchers and parents) propose alternative schooling, due to a schooling system that is resistant to change. While Gordon and Zinga (2012) provide some insights into the youth perspective of the Africentric schooling debate, they do not shed light on *how* and *what* informs the viewpoints held by Black youth. My research aims to fill this gap and understand what factors (social, political and cultural) are shaping the viewpoints of Black youth on Africentric schooling. While the literature in the American context is well established and growing, I seek to contribute to the literature on Africentric schooling in the Canadian context, by giving voice to the student perspective, paying special attention to how students come to understand Africentric schooling and the specificities of their Canadian context.

Another gap that persists in the Canadian literature is that the roles of the specific cultural nuances that exist in the Greater Toronto Area are not discussed in depth. Many of the Black students in the GTA have diverse backgrounds that are commonly rooted in

a mélange of Caribbean, African and other identities and many are first and second-generation Canadians. How does this diversity inform their thinking about Africentric schooling? My study aims to pay special attention to the ways in which ethnicity plays a role in informing thinking about Africentric schooling.

Methodology

Participants and Data Collection

Sampling. In order to find my participants, I relied on purposive sampling. This method of sampling was useful because it facilitated in-depth study rather than empirical generalizations (Patton, 2001, p. 230). It is purposefully biased because it focuses on selecting participants using a specific criterion that will best illuminate the questions and concepts under study (Patton, 2001, p. 230). Therefore, sampling using this approach sought participants that I felt would provide the most in-depth information relevant to my research questions.

This method began with setting aside the key criteria that the sample must have. For this study, I sought six participants, comprised of three boys and three girls. My key criteria were that the participants be between the ages of 16 and 20, attend or have attended a secondary school in the GTA; self-identify as “Black” and know something about Africentric schooling. I chose the age bracket of 16-20 because I wanted to speak to students who have attended secondary school in Canada and have taken enough courses to get a sense of what secondary school is like. I included youth over the age of 18, but only up to 20, because they may have recently completed high school and can still retrospectively provide insight into their schooling experiences. In presenting them with a hypothetical scenario of having the option of Africentric schooling (see Appendix B), I inquired about what they wanted in a school, how they came to their understanding of Africentrism and whether they would have attended if they had the opportunity. Students under 16 were excluded because they have just begun secondary school and may not have

enough experience in order to provide detailed insights into the implications of what an Africentric high school could mean for them as an option.

The participants also self-identified as Black and I chose not to specify an ethnic or linguistic group, not to homogenize the identities of my participants, but to allow the room for the participants to self-identify and speak to the role and degree to which their cultural and ethnic specificity, as they understand it, shaped their thinking. It was also important that the participants had some type of knowledge concerning Africentric schooling in order to be able to properly participate in the study. Because I have tutored, mentored and coached various youth in my community, participants were then recruited through my various contacts to solicit participants, and then in order to decipher whether the youth chosen fit the above criteria, I had the potential participants fill out an introductory questionnaire. This questionnaire identified the age, grade, sex, race, ethnicity, current status, future goals and what is currently known about Africentric schooling. This questionnaire was a preliminary measure used to gauge the appropriateness of the potential participants for the study.

Once I identified two participants who properly fit the criteria, I asked them to identify other youth that fit my criteria (Browne, 2011, p. 57). This is how the sample eventually built up with the population I was interested in studying. One of the advantages of this method is that it locates difficult-to-find participants, but these participants are not representative of the general population and are susceptible to sharing similar bias, as the sample is self-selecting (Browne, 2011, pp. 57–58).

One difficulty throughout the recruitment process was finding adolescent Black male participants. While potential Black female participants were abundant, they had difficulty identifying Black males in their age group that they felt would be suitable, as they characterized many of the boys as, not being serious about school, drop-outs or idiots. This trend may support scholarly literature which suggests that in recent years, Black females are outperforming Black males in academic settings (see Morris, 2007; Rothon, 2007; Slater, 1994).

Profile of participants. I eventually ended up with four participants comprised of two girls and two boys:

- **Lisa** is a 17 year-old, female student in grade 12. She attends a suburban school in a middle class neighbourhood in the GTA. She is a second-generation Canadian of Caribbean descent and is a university-bound student. She describes the demographics of her school as having predominantly South Asian and White staff and students.
- **Rohan** is a 17 year-old male student in grade 12. He is also university-bound and is enrolled in the French immersion program at his school. He attends school with Lisa and is also a second-generation Canadian of Caribbean descent.
- **Tianna** is a 17 year-old female student in grade 12. She attends a suburban upper-class school in the GTA and is enrolled in their Arts program. She is a high-achieving student that is university bound. She is a second-generation Canadian of Caribbean descent. She describes her school as having predominantly White, East Asian and Persian students and predominantly White staff.

- **Mervin** is a 16 year-old male student in grade 11. He is Tianna's brother and also attends school with her. He is also enrolled in the Arts program at his school and is a high achieving, university-bound student. He is a second-generation Canadian of Caribbean descent. He remarks that the school that both he and Tianna attend offers many abstract and advanced courses that extended learning opportunities.

Data collection

Data was collected through the use of a focus group. Focus groups are relaxed and planned discussions/interviews that are moderated by the researcher (Krueger & Casey, 2009, pp. 4–5). They feature open-ended questions and allow for the interaction between participants in responding to guiding questions, thus sparking interactive discussions that promote self-disclosure (Krueger & Casey, 2009, pp. 4–9). I chose the focus group approach, rather than individual interviews as my primary form of data collection because I am seeking to understand how this phenomenon (Africentric schooling) is understood by several individuals (Black youth between the ages of 16-20). I felt that the interactive group environment would facilitate self-disclosure and allow for the insights of the participants to emerge naturally. The interactive nature of the focus group and the sharing of multiple viewpoints simultaneously allowed for the intersections, contradictions and silences to be heard. I feel that this produced rich, detailed and complex data. My questioning route in the focus group was sequenced and themed, moving from general to specific and positive before negative questions (Krueger & Casey, 2009, p. 43). The focus group was conducted at York University in a meeting

room and lasted approximately two and a half hours. It was recorded using Nokia N8 recording software, transcribed and produced a 42-page document. The transcripts were not shared with participants. Participants were compensated for their participation with ten-dollar Tim Horton's gift cards.

An advantage of using focus groups for data collection is that they provide a "more natural environment than individual interviews because the participants are being influenced by each other, just as they are in real life" (Krueger & Casey, 2009, p. 11). Another advantage of focus groups is that they provide fertile ground for uncovering the factors that influence behaviours, opinions and motivations (Krueger & Casey, 2009, p. 24) .

An issue that I considered throughout this process was the role of my race as the interviewer. Phenomenology suggests that researchers bracket themselves from the research and I pondered the fact that both the participants and myself belong to the same racialized group and that we all have extensive experience with schooling within the Canadian context can present some unique methodological challenges. For example, Bhopal (1995) argues that when both the researcher and the researched operate from shared realities, sometimes, too much may be taken for granted because the researcher may overlook certain aspects of participants' realities, due to the presumed familiarity with those realities (p. 160-161). This familiarity with the phenomena under study risks 'researcher blindness, but can also serve to enrich the data. For example, Collins (1986) argues that this "outsider-within" status can be beneficial because it allows the researcher to operate with a unique form of objectivity (p. 15). This objectivity is defined as an

uncharacteristic combination of nearness and remoteness, concern and indifference, which allows the researcher to be the "stranger" that people confide in more freely, while also using that "stranger" status to see patterns that may be more difficult for those immersed in the situation to see (Simmel, 1921). This is coupled with my insider status as a Black Canadian female graduate student of Caribbean descent, which allows for a particular level of familiarity with the social, political and cultural norms and cues of the participants, thus creating an effective framework for rich data collection. Therefore, rather than constructing my "outsider-within" status, which phenomenology suggest that I bracket, as an impediment or threat to validity, I argue that it serves as a valuable and accessible resource for collecting and analyzing the data.

Ethical Considerations. My study included human participants and before collecting any data, I obtained informed consent from all of the participants. I also debriefed my participants on the nature and purpose of the study, which was to discover how they came to understand Africentric schooling. I made clear any risk to them. My research presented low-risk to my participants and I also assured my participants of the confidentiality of the data and maintained their privacy through the use of pseudonyms, and by removing any identifying attributes from the study.

Data analysis

Data analysis was conducted using the data analysis spiral. The data analysis spiral encourages the researcher to move in analytical circles instead of using a linear approach (Creswell, 2012, p. 182). First, I began with bracketing myself, through the description of my own experiences as a Canadian racialized, female student, which I included in the

introduction section of this thesis. This was to create an awareness of my experiences and think through how those experiences would inform my analysis of the data. I then developed a list of codes by scouring the focus group transcripts, giving equal weight to each one (Creswell, 2012, p. 192). I then grouped the codes into larger themes and organized the codes into these larger themes (Creswell, 2012, p. 193). This was followed by an interpretation of the data, which includes individual textural descriptions of the phenomenon as experienced by each of the participants, followed by the creation of a composite textural description that incorporates the individual textural descriptions in order to craft a universal textural description or essence that is reflective of all of the participants (Moustakas, 1994). I represented the data through this composite textural description, explicating the complexities and contradictions of how the Black youth in this study come to understand Africentric schooling in themes, paying special attention to the context, discussed in the Findings and Discussion section (see p. 68).

Findings and Discussion

Upon analysis of the data, three key themes emerged, which reveal the complexities of how my participants come to understand Africentric Schooling. Although the basis of this study was concerning Africentric Schooling, the data revealed more complex thought processes around: (a) the impacts of overall schooling experiences, (b) constructions of Black identities and (c) constructions of Africentrism and how these three thought processes shape and inform participants' thinking about Africentric schooling. I will also discuss some of the contradictions that arose in the data, and suggest what they may mean.

Schooling Experiences

Past schooling experiences played an integral role in shaping how the participants came to understand their conceptualizations of Africentric Schooling, and by extension, their Black identities. Throughout the study, the participants continually insisted that they wanted the opportunity to learn from multiple perspectives through the incorporation of various narratives into the existing curriculum and did not understand why it wasn't happening. Their attitudes were illuminated through discussions about the formal curriculum, Black history month, teacher expectations, acting White and the racialization of space and render their perception of the social and racial climate of their schools.

Curriculum, the "usual suspects" and Black history month. When discussing the formal curriculum, the participants named their learning experiences as, "the usual suspects." In so doing, they describe the ways in which they felt that the formal curriculum does not take up the history, culture and contributions of Black people in the

Canadian context and when it does, it is very ephemeral, lacking depth, breadth and context. The idea of the “usual suspects” was described by participants as only learning very specific and repetitive elements concerning Black history, such as Harriet Tubman and underground railroad, which is Canadian, but presents Canada as the antithesis to African-American slavery. Martin Luther King, the Black Panthers and to a lesser extent, Malcolm X were also used as examples, which are mostly American and do not speak directly to Black Canadian histories and experiences. Mervin:

I just remembered that we haven't studied anything Black, since grade seven! We haven't really had a Black topic in school. Like when we were talking about slavery that was the last time we heard anything . . . We had to read *Underground to Canada* . . . but since that we haven't had anything; any real study. When I was in grade ten (*compulsory grade ten history course*) I was waiting for it in February and it never came. Even in February? Not even once?

Here, in response to the other participants who also shared their experiences, Mervin was describing his frustration about not getting the opportunity to have enough in-depth study about Black history. He indicates that even in his compulsory grade ten history class, Black history was not touched on, and he lamented that he waited and hoped that at the very least, it would show up during Black history month, but was disappointed. When asked about the Americanness of their exposure to Black history in the formal curriculum and if they had opportunities to learn about Black Canadian history, rather than African-American slavery and segregation, the participants asserted that it was hidden. Lisa:

They tell us that there was none . . . like you know the Jim Crow thing? [They tell us] that there wasn't that, but there was because you know there was that thing . . . that woman? What's her name?

I: Viola Desmond?

L: Yeah, her! And nobody knows about her.

The other participants agreed and Tianna suggests that Canada has "too much pride in itself" because '[the British] were the first to abolish slavery,' so they never talk about it. Mervin expresses frustration that they are always pushing the story of how "all the slaves were running to Canada." and mentioned that bias could be an issue, because it is mostly, "White people that write the textbooks", which meant that they would write in their favour.

What was interesting to me was the way in which the participants were so keenly aware of the gap between what was being taught to them in school and the history that they were aware of on their own. They were very poignant and quick to point out the historical inaccuracies and silences in the formal curriculum. Here the participants are rendering the way in which Black Canadian history is presented to them in their schooling experiences, which is very American and is silent around Canada's role in marginalizing Black populations. The participants are also alluding to power, by suggesting that the authors of most of the textbooks are White, and write with a White bias. This suggests an awareness of the power dynamics of race and the way in which White privilege informs their learning experiences. The participants also mentioned that they felt too much was packed into the curriculum and that this only allowed for very superficial exposure to topics of study.

Another problematic discussed was the way that Black history month was taken up in their schools. There was an overall sentiment that it was not taken seriously, that

nobody cared or listened and that it was observed as an obligatory after-thought. Mervin described it as, "the only time that you hear about Black people." Lisa described her most recent Black history month experience:

I had to do an announcement in February and nobody heard it and like every day for February, me and this girl did it and no one even noticed . . . Last year, we didn't get a Black History Month assembly until March! It was like the second week of March! [Laughs]

When asked how these kinds of things made her feel, she explained:

Like they always make a big deal about us. We're always talked about, but then when it comes to actually learning about things, we can't even get an assembly. . . . In my opinion, you're always hearing about White people or Black people. They're just like the most known groups, to me. And you're always hearing about Black people on TV doing wrong things on the news and you automatically assume that it's them, if you hear a story that's negative; you automatically assume it's a Black person. . . . But when it's actually time to learn about Black things, we don't get to learn anything. It's just, 'we're bad' and that's the end of it.

Here Lisa is speaking to how taking up Black history month in a half-hearted way impacts her. Again, she is illuminating how opportunities to learn about Black histories and cultures are taken up in nonchalant ways and how that informs her self-perception and that of the dominant group. There is a sense that this is "just the way it is" and that "they" don't care. Rohan and Tianna offered different perspectives, as they both felt that it was good that they had a month, but given who was in control, self-initiative may be necessary to learn more about Black history.

The participants demonstrated a reluctance to name the dominant group, as they often referred to them as "they", although they sometimes named the "they" as White Canadians. There was a sense of collective knowing amongst the participants of who

"they" were, which reinforces the notion of the invisibility of the center (dominant group) and how that centeredness has the power to define how experiences of those on the periphery are perceived and experienced.

Teacher expectations and racial microaggressions. The expectations of teachers also coloured the participants' experiences. Many experienced expectations of failure or low achievement, surprise at high scores, and penalizations for demonstrating advanced abilities in their work such as being accused of plagiarism. Rohan:

I don't want to say that about teachers because that's me assuming, because no teacher is going to say, I don't like you. [Everyone laughs] . . . I've experienced it with my writing. I've been accused of plagiarism. Not because it was connected to something, but just because I wrote a certain way and I was just thinking that I like to write and using a big word doesn't mean that you took it off the Internet. It doesn't take a lot of work to take a word from the dictionary and use it. I get mad at that, because it's happened three times in my life and it was before high school. In high school, it's kind of expected that you write a certain way. I just feel like teachers expect you to . . . they just want [to keep you] at a certain level. Maybe being Black has something to do with it, but it hasn't been obvious enough for me to identify it and say it would be racist or prejudicial.

Here Rohan is detailing how he felt targeted for plagiarism accusations because he used "big words" in his assignments and the teacher did not believe it was his work. He speaks to the way in which he has felt that teachers want to keep him in a particular "place", but he is unsure if race is the reason why this incident happened three times. His experience not only speaks to the literature in the American and Canadian contexts discussed in the literature review that highlights the prevalence of lowered expectations by teachers, but also the subtlety in which racism operates. Critical Race Theory is a framework that recognizes the difficulty to recognize race and racism unless overt

(Delgado & Stefancic, 1993; Delgado, 2001, pp. 5–7). There could have been many reasons why his work was questioned, although it was not linked to any other work, but the perception is what had the effect. Because Rohan perceived that his work was questioned due to disbelief that *may* have been predicated on his capability based on his race, the damage was done and the message was sent that the teacher *may* believe that he was incapable of performing at a particular (higher) academic level. The complexity lies in the uncertainty as to whether the incident was linked to race. Experiences such as these are called *racial microaggressions*, which are “everyday insults, indignities and demeaning messages sent to people of color by well-intentioned White people who are unaware of the hidden messages being sent,” which can have a negative impact on people's mental health, job performance and quality of social experience (Angelis, 2009). This made me ponder why Rohan's big vocabulary was flagged three times as plagiarism, rather than being framed as the work of a bright student that may need more challenging academic supports or advanced placement. I also pondered what long-term impact does the teacher's failure to acknowledge talent and aptitude in Black students may have.

Mervin had similar experiences, where he described situations where he noticed that when Black students were performing poorly, the teachers didn't do much to help them, because it was expected. When other groups of students were doing poorly, teachers would go out of their way to help them. Lisa shared an experience with a "racist" teacher who would often make racial jokes and upon confrontation, became implacable and told Lisa that she did not belong in academic level courses, despite having good

grades. Both Lisa and Rohan conclude that this particular teacher is unaware of boundaries and when she's "crossing the line."

Sometimes, the racial microaggressions in school were not always linked to perceptions of inferiority or inability. For example, Tianna remarked that when she was a new student at her school, the basketball coach was exceptionally receptive and kind to her, because he expected that she was a really good basketball player and wanted her to play on the school team without even seeing her play. Tianna:

There was this time, when we first moved to the school . . . I signed up for the basketball team at our school and like I was almost guaranteed a spot even though I SUCK at basketball, really bad! I'm really terrible. It was so weird because everyone expected me to be extremely good (inaudible). . . I even felt like the teacher was nicer to me on the team. Well, before he saw me play, that is . . .

This plays into the stereotypes that are often thrust upon Black student identities, that their Blackness makes them innately athletically gifted. Their physicality is assumed to be exceptional, but given their experiences, their intellectual abilities are not (see James, 2012).

The participants also discussed the importance of the race of teachers. They found that there weren't many Black and Caribbean teachers and administrators, but the few who they were exposed to were generally nice to them and would make efforts to "help them out" and act as allies. However, they noticed that teachers of particular ethnicities had a positive bias. Rohan:

It really doesn't matter. For the most part, the teachers aren't racist. They might focus on you a little more, like the South Asian teachers are very on the Brown students to succeed and the Asian teachers, too. It's kind of a good thing, like a positive bias. It doesn't make me mad because I don't care about math. . . I think

it's cool. . . If you want to support students that are similar to you in respect to ethnicity or race, why not?

When probed if they would like more Black/Caribbean teachers, they focused on the traits of the teachers, wanting an array of teachers to teach them and positing that the race/ethnicity of the teacher did not matter to them.

The “acting White” phenomenon and the racialization of space. Acting White, as discussed in the literature review section in the American context, emerged in the interviews. Tianna defined acting White through her experiences of being called a "cracker", "whitewash" or an "Oreo". In her experience, “acting White” referred to others not perceiving her behaviour as “Black enough.” Tianna:

An Oreo is someone who is Black on the outside and White on the inside. I don't believe that, because there isn't one particular way that Black people should be. I mean I'm Black everywhere. It's just the way I act I guess. I don't know.

When probed as to what behaviour constitutes her "Oreo" status, the markers given were the way she speaks, the fact that she liked rock music and watched Japanese anime. She remarked that students from all groups called her this. This echoes research conducted in the American context, which stigmatizes Black students for not conforming to stereotypical Black identities. What was different in this context is that rather than it being mostly Black students stigmatizing Tianna, it was people from all different groups.

Acting White can also be linked to academic achievement. Lisa:

It's really hard, because if you're smart . . .if you get a really good grade, sometimes they would say that you're not Black. People still do that. Teachers probably still do that because my friend told me how the teacher is always so surprised when she gets really good grades, so it's like they're expecting us to fail.

These experiences suggest a policing around their identities as Black students. There is an assertion by their peers and teachers that being Black is not positively associated with high academic achievement or a diverse range of interests. Others perceive them in relation to the White norm. Therefore, being intelligent or getting good grades is a White thing, so if a Black person does it, they can't be Black or must be trying to act White. The inference here is that success and intelligence are mutually exclusive to Blacks and the internalization of those messages can be damaging. This process locates and reifies Whiteness as the center and benchmark, while simultaneously locating Blackness as the periphery and deficient. Therefore, the responses from the participants suggest that there is a social cost for deviating outside of a stereotypical Black identity. They are summoned to perform a particular Black identity in school, which is linked to poor academic achievement and behaviour. When they fail to do so, they are then relocated as a different kind of Black, one who is trying to be White. This is similar to the idea of the performativity of race and how Black performance is always constructed as the opposite of Whiteness. Whiteness is never clearly defined, but is understood and shaped through the understanding of what it is not.

Tianna was unable to definitively describe what behaviour she was exhibiting that made others perceive her as "acting White," but her perceived Whiteness was based on the perception that she was not properly performing a Black identity. What is problematic about this is the way in which it juxtaposes their Black identities with White ones. It removes their ability to self-define, while reinforcing the dichotomy of the center and periphery. When compounded with lowered teacher expectations and other racial

microaggressions, it appears that the schooling experiences of the participants are quite challenging. Rohan refutes the “acting White” label:

If you dress a certain way and talk a certain way and that way is uneducated [everybody laughs] people think “Black.” They think you have to speak a certain way and they’ll say, “You don’t sound Black.” When people say that, it’s actually ironic, because the people that say these things are usually White. They say they that you don’t talk “Black”; so there’s like this whole thing. I don’t like being associated with that, because I feel like I’m as Black as it gets [laughs and points to self, referring to phenotype], so for someone who’s not Black to tell you that you belong or subscribe to another group that is outside of your ethnicity . . . to tell you that you’re not Black when you look at yourself every day in the mirror and you see a Black person? And you live a Black life? So there’s no such thing. Like even if you listen to Rock music or watch [Japanese] anime, that doesn’t make you White. Like if you have more of an eclectic palate for culture, that doesn’t mean that you’re not Black. It just means that you’re more diverse in your interests and open-minded. I feel like being Black is just being proud of who you are. It’s not just dressing a certain way, or listening to a certain kind of music. That doesn’t make you Black. White people listen to rap music. Brown people listen to rap music. It’s very universal, right? You’re as Black as you want to be.

He resists those labels and feels that Black youth should have the freedom to self-define and not be boxed into essentialized Black identities.

Tianna admits, however, that she does feel some pressure to conform to the expectations of others concerning how she performs her identity. Tianna:

I’ll be honest, like we used to live in a less well off neighbourhood and then we moved and went to a well-off school and in the old area and I did try to blend in a bit. But, when we moved, it was so different and I was able to change a bit. I guess you kind of adapt to your surroundings. But at the same time, I was always like this. I never listened to rap music just because everyone else did, but I was also reluctant to point out what I was doing all the time [the elements that she perceived made others perceive her as “less Black”]. So I would say not really all the time [do I feel pressure to conform because . . . at the school we’re at now, there are not a lot of Black people. There’s like 17 [out of approximately 2000]!

While the participants noted that many of their peers did indeed fit stereotypes and perform their Black identities as expected by others, such as being truant, having low academic standards and being badly behaved, they did not see those students as deterrents to success or distractions. They felt that their behaviour would eventually catch up to them.

The racialization of space also emerged as a theme throughout the interview. Tianna and Mervin moved into a suburban and self-described "well-off" upper class neighbourhood and now attend a "well off" arts school. Their previous school was in an urban area. They describe their new school as predominantly White, Persian and East Asian and despite remarking that Black students make up less than 1% of the student population, they are happy that they are afforded more educational opportunities. When comparing their previous urban school, which had a large Black student body, they noticed significant differences in the quality of education. They noticed that in their new school, they had much more interesting course selection, more engaged teachers and elaborate school trips (although sometimes cost prohibitive). Mervin remarks that, "we have a Japanese course at my school and the Japanese people get to go to Japan! For March break, they get to go to Greece and Italy. They're there right now!" The school climate is very competitive and students are pushed to excel by their peers and teachers. At their previous school, which was an urban school in a working class neighbourhood, they witnessed a lot of fighting, disengaged teachers, large class sizes and did not get the academic offerings that they now enjoy and benefit from.

Lisa and Rohan also attend a suburban French immersion school in a middle class neighbourhood. They described their school as predominantly South Asian and White with Black students representing approximately 20% of the student population. They do not have the academic opportunities that Tianna and Mervin have, such as trips and non-standard course offerings.

Hou and Picot (2003) and Hulchanski (2010) argue that the Greater Toronto Area is divided into ethnic enclaves, which is linked to socioeconomic status. This may explain the differences experienced by Mervin and Tianna, such as enriched course offerings, trips and learning opportunities once they moved to from an urban school to an upper class school. Even in comparing their school to Lisa's and Rohan's, the fact that Lisa and Rohan's school is in a middle class neighbourhood, may explain why the learning opportunities are so different. This suggests that schools and the opportunities they offer students are stratified along racial, ethnic and class lines and makes me wonder what the social costs and benefits are to racialized students attending upper class schools that may offer greater academic benefits, but are stratified racially.

Socially there are costs. For example, at Lisa's and Rohan's school, there is a "Brown hall", where South Asian students frequent. They were able to point out areas and cliques in the school that were divided along racial and ethnic lines. In Tianna and Mervin's school, there are specific locations where Asian, Persian and White students congregate with each other. Because there are so few Black students, they do have an area, but it is fairly small. They reason that the small Black population is because of the high academic

standards. As a result, both sets of students feel like they have to weave in and out of groups and have to become good at adapting to their surroundings. Tianna:

Because there aren't a lot of Black people, I *have* to weave in and out because if I just hang out with the Black people, there's only a select few and there's none in your class, right? But for me, I've always been okay with talking to everyone from other cultures. I have a lot of Asian, Somalian and Persian friends. To be honest, I have less Black friends than Asian friends [because of their dominant group status in the school].

These experiences appear to mirror the ethnic enclaves (Hou and Picot, 2003) that Hulchanski (2010) argue exist in the Greater Toronto Area. How does this reality shape how Black students see themselves, the spaces they occupy and the spaces their peers occupy? If schools based on neighbourhood, ethnic and racial composition, and socioeconomic status, drastically differ in the academic opportunities they offer students, how is that internalized by Black students, such as Tianna and Mervin? Lisa and Rohan? Throughout the discussion, Tianna and Mervin continually raised the idea of higher academic standards and support, with the inference that the schools in better neighbourhoods were "superior". How does that reify the way in which racialization, produces unequal outcomes systemically? While it was made clear that being in more Black spaces felt more comfortable, it was assumed that those spaces were usually poorer and may have lower standards. This suggests that given the social reality of the participants, their schooling experiences play an integral role in shaping how they view Blackness as a constructed identity and sets the tone for their views in the next two sections.

Constructions of Blackness

Culture, ethnicity and language. The participants shared an array of views concerning Black identities, how they are constructed and how they are resisted. A key point raised by the participants was that they felt that the Black community in the GTA was very heterogeneous based on ethnicity and culture. However, many of the reference points for all of the participants seemed to be centered on food (Caribbean-style), music (hip-hop, reggae, soca) and language. The group struggled to definitively outline what Blackness is or how they constructed themselves. The perception of others weighed heavily on how personal self-perceptions were taken up. When asked about how they feel about Africentrism as a form of collective Black identity or thought, the participants asserted that they felt detached from Africa, as it was "too far back" in their heritage to count. This sentiment mirrors opponents of early scholarly approaches to Africentrism that suggest that Africa should not be the base of Black people's identity construction.

Tianna:

Yeah! My mom is from Jamaica. She came [to Canada] when she was 20 and I kind of feel detached from Jamaica, too, so it's hard to go back all the way back to Africa . . . I learn about our roots a lot, but then at the same time if someone asked me if I was African, I would say no.

Lisa shares these sentiments:

I've never known where my family comes from, straight from Africa and I'm not (from Africa), so it's like . . . I know that's where everybody came from, but it's like so far back.

When asked if they felt more connected to their Caribbean heritage, the participants agreed, but also said that they felt Canadian. It appeared that their responses to the question were sometimes shaped by outside opinion. Tianna indicates that she feels split:

I only say Jamaican first because I know what they're asking, but I feel like an identity from Canada, because I've never been to Jamaica, but then at the same time, the culture's in me because I'm mostly around Jamaicans because of my family and church. But then, it's a weird question, because I feel so split, you know? I say Jamaican, but I'm barely Jamaican. It's weird.

Mervin echoed her sentiments, describing himself as a mix of Canadian and Jamaican culture and food:

Yeah, it's like I have the Jamaican culture and the Canadian culture, just like. . . I eat Canadian and Jamaican food and the cultures blend . . . It's a mix of everything.

Lisa felt conflicted because she doesn't feel that she fits in anywhere:

Like I haven't been to Jamaica or Trinidad and I feel like if I were to go there and I were to say, 'I'm Trini or Jamaican', they would be like, no you're not, you're Canadian, but if I'm in Canada and someone asks me what I am, if I were to say 'I'm Canadian,' they're going to be like, 'really, what are you?' So, it's like you don't even know where to go.

Rohan asserts that he feels disconnected and unsure of where to place himself:

Like I can rhyme off parishes from Jamaica and then I know some streets. I've been going there every year for like twelve years, so I know Jamaica, but like to say I'm Jamaican? I'm of Jamaican heritage, but when people say they're from Jamaica and try to speak patois? You don't know Jamaica! [Laughs] You can say your, 'Waa gwaan' and listen to a Bob Marley song and you smoke weed . . . that's not even really Jamaica. I mean he [Marley] did big things and put Jamaica on the map, but I'm from Toronto. Sometimes I don't even feel like I'm a Torontonion either. I'm just me. I don't really know where I come from. I'm disconnected from everything.

The varied responses from the participants indicate an uncertainty and confusion around how to define Black identity. They all self-identify as Black and second-generation Canadians of Caribbean descent, but feel disconnected from Africa, somewhat disconnected from the Caribbean and connected to Canada by birth, but indicate that the Canadian label may not quite fit, either, leaving them displaced. Markers such as language, food and culture (music, dress, etc.) seemed to be the key elements used to define themselves. This alludes to the "insider-outsider" status that many racialized groups experience in Canada, according to Bannerji (1996). Because authentic Canadian identity membership is reserved for White Canadians, many racialized groups are left to float somewhere in between a Canadian identity and their various ethnic and cultural backgrounds. The participants seemed aware of the insider-outsider status, but did not feel any particular allegiance to the countries in their backgrounds. Rohan:

Jamaica is alive and strong, so it doesn't need me. It's not dying . . . we're not being extinct. There's a lot of people in dancehall, especially White people, so like the music is strong and the food is strong. Even if you're Guyanese or Trini, all these countries are strong and they have their following, so if you choose to follow it, all the power to you. There's no dying heritage that I can think of that really needs representation that it doesn't have already. There's so many people that I know that love oxtail and White people that love curry goat. That's not Jamaican, that's Caribbean food, so . . . I think those cultures are well represented and they're fine. I feel like my culture is hip-hop related, like a lot of the things I think, I experience, the way I dress, it's some derivative or sub-culture of hip-hop. It's not that I live hip-hop, but in the culture, there's a lot of different aspects of it that I'm taking bits and pieces and making into my own thing.

Many of the reference points regarding the Caribbean were shaped around essentialized notions of culture and at times indicated undesirable perceptions of cultural elements. For example, the ways that Caribbean languages are juxtaposed against

English are value-laden implying underlying tensions around how Caribbean identities are taken up and expressed. Rohan:

Patois [Jamaican Creole] is not hard to understand. It's just like lazy English, but like the accent is hard to pull off, but the words are very simple. So, I don't know, It's not that hard for me to understand. When it's really, really quick, even Jamaicans have trouble understanding other Jamaicans. So people think like everyone in Jamaica speaks Patois, but I know some Jamaicans that speak really, really elegant and you wouldn't know that they're from Jamaica. It's not Jamaican; it's just lazy English."

Here, we see how language can also sometimes act as a marker of marginalization. While Caribbean languages are inferiorized here by Rohan, his using a big vocabulary in school was also met with surprise, while at the same time, he perceived those who do not speak in Jamaican Creole as elegant or superior. This assessment of language is similar to the way that Black English Vernacular is taken up in the American context. Although it has cultural and historical significance as a language, just as English language varieties such as Caribbean Creoles (i.e. Patois) do, Black English Vernacular is often used as a marker of inferiority for Black bodies from the outside and within, and speaking in these languages can be used as a measure of one's value, intelligence and level of assimilation. Generally, the participants feel uncomfortable claiming African, Canadian or Caribbean identities, but particularly take up Caribbean identities in problematic and essentialist ways. Their views on Black identity also encompass behaviour and dress.

Black behaviour. Participants were quick to indicate their awareness of how Blackness was constructed as bad. They referenced the constant media coverage of Black people and how they were always portrayed in negative ways as Lisa mentioned earlier:

Like you constantly hear . . . in my opinion you're always hearing about White people or Black people. They're just like the most known groups, to me. And you're always hearing about Black people on TV doing wrong things on the news and you automatically assume that it's them. Like if you hear a story that's a negative story; you automatically assume it's a Black person . . . but when it's actually time to learn about Black things, we don't get to learn anything. It's just, 'we're bad' and that's the end of it.

This particular comment by Lisa was met with laughs, excitement, vigorous heads nods and "amens", indicating a familiarity and agreement with the statement. Rohan extended her statement indicating that the social climate makes him feel invisible:

Like Du Bois! He's a really smart man! But, there's also a lot of Black literature, like *The Invisible Man*. That's a great book. That's how I feel in society. We're kind of ignored. Like we think that we're so important, just because we have Black History Month, but that's just because we wanted recognition for so long. They're not going to give us Black History Year (*everyone laughs*) and now we're saying Black History Month is not enough, but it's what we asked for. What we take from it, we have to take it upon ourselves to take it a step further. We can't expect a White-run school . . . there's no Black man at the top of the Board- we have to do it ourselves . . .

When asked to clarify what he means by white-run, Rohan continues:

Like even Obama. Poor Obama, he's like a scapegoat. No offense to the man. He's a great speaker and he's great at reading off the teleprompter, but he's like one in 1,000? So, there are not many representatives in high places. Even Oprah. There are not a lot of Black TV hosts, but we see one and then we feel like we have our fix, like that's enough. That's not enough.

Rohan's comments were also met with vigorous head nods, "amens" and laughs of familiarity from the other participants. Throughout the interview, all of the participants alluded to a sense of invisibility and a feeling of people and things being put into place, as Rohan suggests "to get a fix" or maintain some kind of quota. This is one of the few

times in the interview that a participant explicitly named the dominant group as a gatekeeper and in so doing, references the power of Eurocentrism and Whiteness being at the centre. Rohan's references tokenism in the way that he describes Obama, Oprah and Black History month speak to the way in which multiculturalism only engages difference in superficial ways while, reinforcing the status quo and resisting wide-reaching systemic changes. Having tokens, such as Obama, Oprah and Black History month create the illusion that systemic change has occurred by allowing these people and initiatives to operate, however, given Rohan's statement, may actually serve to reinforce and remind racialized groups of the inequalities they face.

The responses from the participants and Rohan's statement indicate that they too, see the underrepresentation of Black bodies in powerful spaces and regard society as "White-run". Here is one of the few times that the participants clearly named White people as the dominant group, rather than referring to them as "they". The implication by the participants that things are White-run, suggest a distrust in the dominant group to make equitable decisions. Also, it is important to note, that yet again, the reference points used, were all American suggesting that there is difficulty around naming a well-known Black politician or media figure in the Canadian context.

The role of hip-hop. Often throughout the interviews, hip-hop music was mentioned as a marker of Blackness. Initially it was mentioned in passing as a way to measure the Blackness of the participants and others. For example, when some participants were describing themselves and other Black people, hip-hop was almost always somehow named as a descriptor, with other forms of music such as Rock being

associated with "White" groups. Hip-hop as a descriptor was also often associated with negative traits like being uneducated and "low-riding" (of pants). The inference was that other groups were diverse in their musical tastes and had the *room* to explore those interests, while Hip-hop as Blackness, was constraining, especially in regards to how others perceive the art form and attach it to Black people in general. Rohan offered criticism of these attitudes:

I think that even those people who always say or associate Black people with rap music, like half the people that listen to it, don't even understand rap. If you were to ask what's the meaning of this rap song you listen to. . . . People always say that if you listen to Tupac [American rapper], you know rap music, but they don't even understand half of the poetic devices he uses, right? So they make rap music seem like such a Black thing and that it's so negative and low down and uneducated, but to do half of the things they do in rap music, it requires intelligence, right? So if there's such a gap between them (rap and its listeners) and we try to bridge it all the time, we either end up dressing a certain way because we try to compensate for what we're really lacking, which is Blackness (identity). So we don't really know our own identity. So we think we're Black, but not really.

Here Rohan is asserting that hip-hop music and culture is often intrinsically linked to Blackness, but highlights that much of the negativity is unwarranted due to ignorance about what hip-hop really means and how it operates. He points to an under-appreciation and marginalization of hip-hop that not only ascribes negative traits to Black bodies, but also pushes Black bodies to perform a particular identity that is related to hip-hop culture. This speaks to the confusion around what Black identity really is and the idea of performativity which is not a singular act, but something that reiterates a set of norms (Butler, 1993, p. 12), which pushes a racial identity onto bodies through repeated expression and performance of particular behaviours and markers (Warren, 2003, p. 29),

such as the performance of hip-hop culture through musical tastes, language and fashion. Therefore, this performance of hip-hop culture marks Black bodies in specific ways and all of the negative associations with hip-hop become attached to those Black bodies as embedded components.

The participants also discussed the ways in which popular hip-hop culture can create a false sense of reality, pointing to how figures such as American rapper Jay-Z and other entertainers and athletes are lauded for making it without an education, which makes many of their peers feel like they can also "make it" without an education, too.

Rohan:

They saw Jay-Z accumulate half a billion of net worth and he didn't graduate, so they think they can be an entrepreneur. So when you see other Black symbols-not just music- you see them go through hardships and they make it, so they think high school is not essential. They don't understand that times change and like it all depends on your environment. These people not having an education . . . I can't think of any artist or politician or scientist that has had education and regretted it, and then those that didn't have and did regret it . . . We need to stop looking at these alternate ways out.

They suggested that this false sense of reality makes some Black youth not take their educations as seriously as they should, because they think there are other possibilities, like basketball or singing/rapping on YouTube and getting famous. All of the participants lamented that many of their Black peers had low expectations and standards for themselves and are more concerned with being "cool" than going to class. Mervin suggests that some students may simply be discouraged because of a past history of getting bad grades. Mervin:

That's what I was just about to say, like they don't know that they can actually get the good grades. They think they're going to just get bad grades for their whole life.

Generally, the participants found that Blackness was a hard to define and constrained identity that could sometimes be oppressive in the way that it limits possibilities and interests and insists on a particular identity that does not accurately reflect their interests, abilities or experiences. According to them, their identities are very much a hybrid of the many cultures, languages and ethnicities that they have been exposed to. When asked what kind of culture Africentric Schooling promotes, after a lengthy discussion about Black identity, they were unsure. Lisa:

I don't think anyone knows, because no one knows what Black is. There are so many people who are Black that are from so many different places, so you can't really say that. So, they [Africentric initiatives] don't know what they're doing.

Constructions of Africentrism

The participants in my study were very unsure about how Africentrism as a general concept, should be constructed as an ideology. They lamented that Africa, being a continent and therefore very heterogeneous in culture, language and practice has great diversity and that there is not one particular way to describe an African state of being.

Tianna:

I don't think there's a specific way they would be behave. Africa is a continent, right, so there's so many different cultures blended into it, so I don't think there's one certain way. Just like, there are stereotypes about Black people; I don't think there's one certain way a Black person should behave in that context.

The other participants agreed, but also struggled with coming up with a definitive answer, although they did feel it was important to be aware of their culture and history

and made efforts to learn things outside of school settings, there was some uncertainty regarding the long-term utility and relevance of such knowledge. Rohan suggests that the way people take up Africentrism makes it difficult to define:

Like take Spike Lee for example. Some people have this idea that Africentric means that you're a Black Panther or you're against White people. Like, so it's more extreme, far left . . . But I think it's more assertive and just someone who's in touch with their roots and they're educated on more Black things, as opposed to European history. So they know more about the Harriet Tubmans, maybe their music is more Nat King [Cole]. Just different . . . I don't know, Malcolm X, Martin Luther King. . . There are a lot of different things that reflect Africentricity, so you have to be specific with it. It's a broad question . . . Is it music, is it culture, is it the people, is it how we act?

Here, Rohan is able to articulate how Africentrism is sometimes taken up as anti-White and extreme politics, but posits that Africentricity is very complex and can be related and exercised through various mediums. Generally, the participants were unable to come to a consensus as to what Africentrism is in principle. Tianna:

Well there are different parts of Africa, right? So, Somalia is in Africa and then so is Nigeria too, right? So, it depends on what part you're looking at, because there's slightly different cultures depending on which section.

Also, many of their examples related to Africentricity were heavily American, potentially indicating a lack of connection and reference points to a Black Canadian historical and cultural perspective, which begs the question, should Black Canadian forms of Africentricity be distinguishably different from Black American forms of Africentricity? What does that look like in practice and how are these differences established? These responses relate to the ideological split that occurred in academic circles during the inception of Black Studies in universities in the U.S. (see Literature

Review section). Within Black academe, Black Studies was ideologically split between different schools of thought, while many outside of Black academe questioned the legitimacy of Black Studies as a branch of learning, thus demonstrating both external and internal push and pull. The dialectic between those that support the school and those that oppose the school seem to mirror the historical conflict that has plagued Africentrism from its inception and plagues Africentric Schooling debate in Toronto. Internally, there is a tension regarding *how* to effectively take up and practice Africentrism, while the outside pushes against this internal tension questioning the legitimacy and viability of the concept as a whole. This ideological split is also evident in how the participants discuss their understandings of Africentric Schooling.

Understandings of Africentric Schooling. Moving away from Africentrism as a general concept and towards questions more specifically about the Africentric Schooling initiative within the TDSB, the participants were quick to point to a lack of agency for proponents of the school in the process of development and seemed to be distrustful of the initiative. Rohan:

I think it's still infantile, so like it's a baby, so we can't throw a label on it. I think it's a good concept, but it's not even really run by Black people. Like, there are Black names behind it and it might be named after a Black person, whether it's a woman or man, but they're like a figurehead for it; like a face, but it's not really run by Black people. I feel like people think that it's just supposed to be like this pro-Black school where you only learn about Black things, but it's pretty similar curriculum to what we have in middle schools and high schools, but like adding more of a Black element to it, right? So, I feel like people don't understand that. And the initiative is not to alienate Black people from the rest of society, but it's supposed to . . . since amongst African-Americans, there's such a high dropout rate and low graduation rate, they're trying to increase that. I think it's like 40%. . . But, I feel like it's a tool-they're trying to help us- but we're not

really using it because it's moving at a really glacial pace where not a lot of Black people want to go to the school, so it kind of defeats the purpose. Not to say there's no people in the school, but there's not many and it hasn't really reached us yet because we don't really understand what it is, because we think it's something that it might not be.

Here Rohan is suggesting that it is too early to define the school and that a problem that could be impeding it is the misinformation and confusion regarding what the school is and offers, the seemingly slow pace that it is developing at and the assumption that the initiative is not truly run by Black people and that Black people are being used as figure-heads, rather than truly integrated into the developmental process.

The other participants generally agreed with Rohan's deduction of the school and felt that the efforts were good, but were concerned about learning more history in general and being exposed to histories and cultures. Mervin:

What I've heard of the school is just that's there's more of a Black perspective and not just learning about Black people in February, like we do in our school! (*Everybody laughs*) The only time they talk about Black people is in February and . . .

Tianna:

And who's even listening . . . Don't they just add more Africentric studies within the school? I'm not too sure, but I've always felt like we should learn about everybody's history, not just our own. But at the same, I think it's [Africentric schooling] is really good because to be honest, I feel like I don't know enough about my roots, but then again, I think we should learn history in general, too . . . Like we should learn more about the Natives in Canada, because I know I don't know a lot about them. We should learn more about Chinese history. Like, instead of just focusing on Canadian history, we should learn about everybody else and especially African history, too.

What is interesting about this exchange is the way that Tianna constructs Canadian history as something separate from other histories such as Chinese and African history,

which speaks to the normativity of White Canadian history being understood as just Canadian history, with all other histories are outside of that Canadian norm.

The participants felt that the school "came out of nowhere" and was "random" and were suspicious of the timing and developmental process. Rohan:

Like I feel like the one problem is that the message from the school is very ambiguous. They haven't- well, not to my knowledge, maybe in Toronto where they heard about it- but I haven't seen a lot of news coverage, a forum discussion, like what is the point of the school, why is it established, where do you want to be in five years . . . like we haven't really been educated about the school. I feel like this topic, I saw it in the newspaper all of a sudden and we talked about it in class and then it just blew up, but I never saw like the preliminary stages. Where did it come from? It was really random! (*Laughs*) All of a sudden, my friend tells me there's an Africentric School, and it's like, 'say word?' I didn't know that. Why wasn't I told about these things, because they had to have been thinking about it for a while, right? So there's always new ideas that you never hear about, but this is something you *have* to tell the community . . . I feel like it's . . . they don't know what the school is.

The participants also saw Africentric Schooling as a useful tool, but potentially not appropriate for one's entire academic career. Tianna suggested that if students attended an Africentric School for the majority of their schooling, they would not learn how to integrate with other groups, due to a lack of interaction through play in the younger years and that this experience will result in students that have narrow views. This perspective is informed by the presumption that the students that attend an Africentric School will only be Black and led to a discussion about segregation.

Tianna:

Like segregation. I don't think we're going to go back to slavery. I'm not saying we're going back to segregation, but if we stay like that, I don't think children will learn as much, like to know how to play with the other kids. I think there's

really a little racism still left, but if kids don't play with other kids, like in schools and they are only with Black kids their whole lives? I think there's still some people out there that tell their kids not to play with the Black kids and if those White kids don't get to actually play with these other kids, they'll never know that what their parents are telling them is wrong, because they've never come in contact with them. At the same time, I think that we should learn about it, but maybe a few years, but it should just be inside of the curriculum, like I don't think we should have these schools for our whole careers.

What is interesting here is that the need for integration and interaction with different groups seems to be more necessary for White children than Black children, which implies an understanding that problems of racism originate from the White group.

Lisa felt that Africentric schooling shouldn't be forced by having a separate school. Lisa:

That's like a tough question. I don't know to be honest. I don't think we should have to do that, though. Like we all shouldn't have to go to a school to learn something. You should do it yourself. I don't like the segregation part . . . like the fact that we have to go to a Black school to learn Black things.

Lisa listed segregation as the only negative aspect of the initiative and when probed for further clarification on how she was constructing segregation she explained:

It's like, isolation. It's kind of forced, because like children, if they're going to a school in kindergarten, they're not going to really make the decision to go there and then when they get older and they continue on, it's almost a forced act, right?

Mervin replied to Lisa's deduction with the statement, "you don't know where you're going until you know where you've come from," but he agreed with Lisa's deduction that the school did come off as segregation. The participants also felt that attendance at an Africentric school could be used as a measure for how well-versed an individual is on

Blackness and that it should not be used to create a hierarchy of Black-consciousness amongst those that attend and those that do not.

The participants also questioned the academic rigor of the Africentric school. Lisa:

It would probably be like . . . it's not that they are like helping you not deal with it; it's that it's hidden obviously, because you're at an Africentric School. It's not that they won't be as critical; it's just that they're more lenient. It's not really that you're not dealing with the issues, it's just that they're like, "ok, you're already at this school and you wrote this essay on Black history". They're not going to be . . . I don't know how to describe it . . .

When probed, both Lisa and Tianna stated that while they hoped the school would be just as academically rigorous as others, they feared that it might not be. There was a perception that the school may not be as academically rigorous as mainstream schools. Participants discussed their schooling experiences at length and remarked that they noticed differences in schools based on the neighbourhood, student and teacher racial/ethnic composition. They were apprehensive as to whether, in comparison to mainstream schools, Africentric Schools may be more lenient in their academic standards. This relates to the scholarly literature in the American context, which indicated that when Black Studies departments emerged in American universities, many inside and outside academe questioned the academic rigor of the discipline. Also, as a graduate student, I notice a significant difference in the way that Black and various forms of "ethnic" studies and research are taken up. There is a sense of skepticism and assumption that the work is less rigorous, valuable and/or scholarly (see Cleveland, 2004; Flores, 1997; Margolis & Romero, 1998; West, 1987; Zeleza, 1997). Just as Lisa

describes and demonstrates, that sense of doubt is exists, but is difficult to name or specifically describe.

Much of the information that the participants knew about the Africentric school came from informal sources such as peers and parents. Despite hearing about it in the news media, such as radio and televisions, these sources did not seem to heavily influence their opinions of the school. It appears that the participants heard about the initiative through word of mouth and then formed an opinion. These opinions, however, seemed to be informed by the impact of the perceptions of others. For example, Rohan suggests that while we are in a multicultural society many are not open to initiatives that dig deep into non-dominant groups and that many are simply opposed to it because it is "Black" and foreign. Rohan:

We say that we're in a multicultural society, but there's so many opinions . . . when these things come up. It's supposed to be advantageous for us, right? It's multicultural, so we should be able to have this opportunity, but then people start bringing up foolishness like why isn't there a Hindu school, or an Islamic school or a Persian school or Korean. It's just a lot of BS to me (*laughs*). It's like they bring that on, because they don't have a stronger argument to refute it, so they have to bring up the hypotheticals and possibilities, like why not do this or that, but really what they're saying is that they don't know why they're against it, they just want to be against it because it's foreign to them. We never question the establishment of [other] schools, but as soon as someone wants a Black school, it's like [White people are like], 'yo, why do they want they leave?' [Everyone laughs] They're all for celebrating Black history annually, like just in our own little way; not necessarily every day . . . [laughs] it's more like, they support that, but not the school idea.

This passage suggests an awareness of the multicultural context of Canada, and the contradictions that lie within it. Somehow, Canada is a multicultural society, but then when non-dominant groups try to assert themselves or create initiatives that speak to a

deeper engagement with difference beyond cultural or one-off events (Black History Month or Caribana) such as Africentric schooling, those deeper engagements are resisted. Therefore, multiculturalism engages non-dominant groups in superficial ways and creates a sense of a multicultural, pluralistic and egalitarian society or "imagined community" that pushes visible minorities in Canada to live as "insider-outsiders" (Bannerji, 1996, p. 105; Warburton, 2007, p. 275).

In the case of Africentric schooling, the needs of Black students are assumed to be met by the curricular pieces already put in place. When Africentric Schooling tries to dig deeper, it is relegated to *outsider* status, as something foreign to the Canadian context, suggesting that Black Canadian students are not also Canadian and the culturally relevant pedagogy that they would be taught is not Canadian, either. This begs the question, who counts as Canadian? Since Black Canadians have a historical, social, cultural and political legacy in Canada, a school that tries to tap into that and ground students in that knowledge should not be taken up as anti-Canadian. Their histories should be counted as Canadian history. This is the insider-outsider status that Bannerji (1996) alludes to. You can gain membership to Canada if you do not challenge the status quo or if you assimilate to the dominant culture, but where does that leave second and subsequent generations that have historical, social and cultural ways of knowing that shape their ontologies and epistemologies? This response speaks to the way that Whiteness in Canada continues to operate as the invisible center.

Another example of reservations being informed by the perceptions of others, is when Lisa indicates that the name is problematic:

I just don't like . . . I think it's the title. Like when people hear Africentric School, they think it's like a bunch of Black kids with like an Afro. [Everyone laughs] They're not getting it. Like they think like *everything* there is like Black and it's really not because there's no 'Black math', so it's like more history and stuff. They need to change the name. I think the name is making it . . . [scare people away].

Here Lisa is indicating that the imagery attached to the title may scare prospective students and outsiders from the school. What is interesting is how the image of Black kids and Afros are perceived as threatening. Further, her awareness of the fact that Black kids and Afros are markers that create a threatening image is telling of how she perceives Blackness is taken up and policed by the dominant group through her use of "they." If Canada is a multicultural society, why do Black kids and Afros (natural hair texture) pose a threat, and to whom? What does this mean for how Black youth see themselves and how the fear of being perceived as threatening informs their choices and behaviour? This suggests that, as discussed in the literature review section, Blackness is constructed in relation to the center or the *norm*, which is seen as Canadian Whiteness. Throughout the interview, the participants continued to refer to a mythical *they* when speaking, alluding to the dominant group in Canada, but often felt uncomfortable naming the dominant group, which not only speaks to silencing, but also the way in which multiculturalism and neoliberalism silences and polices racialized groups and how race continues to be a salient issue, despite assertions to the contrary.

When asked if they would attend an Africentric School, the participants were split. Rohan and Lisa said that they would attend because the Africentric School was something new and different and reasoned rather than complaining about not liking what they learn in school, why not do something about it. Mervin and Tianna were uncertain.

Tianna was mostly concerned about the area the school was in, the average GPA of the students and the reputation of the school, but liked the idea of what Africentric initiatives could teach her. Mervin also had concerns around how Africentrism would be defined, how heavily it would be implemented and would at least test it out to see if he liked it. All of the participants again demonstrated uncertainty around how Africentrism was being defined.

When asked to construct their own Africentric Schools, all of the participants asserted that they wanted to see changes to courses like English, Art, Music and the Social Sciences, but suggested that Africentrism could be infused into the existing curriculum through the use of Black scholars, poets, artists, politicians and writers as reference points. Rohan:

Umm, I think in History and English, I want to learn about more Black poets and more Black authors. There's some Black scientists and more Black politicians. Really, all the same stuff, but switch up the names a bit. Instead of Abraham Lincoln, it might be Booker T. Washington. Instead of Robert Frost, it might be . . . Langston Hughes, that's my boy! Umm, just switch up the names!

Tianna:

I think one thing that they would learn differently is art. I think we'd learn more about other art styles. For example, we went to the ROM and we went and saw their African art exhibit. . . And the African art was just from one section. . . It was just from Southern Africa and they just named it African art and it was so annoying. Where's all the Northern art?

Mervin:

I would just change up a few things. In the music courses, maybe they'd have a little bit more jazz. And to be Africentric . . . maybe in the lunch room . . . maybe get some Black run companies to run it.

Lisa:

They'd learn different ways of learning. Like not just the linguistic way, like not just the teacher stands at the front of the class and talks, but like we can do hands on stuff. We can learn through . . . a musical way. Visual way. [I would] infuse Africentrism like in history, music for sure and like yeah . . . English, I would really take out Shakespeare, because we don't even need him!

The participants asserted however, that these ideas could be implemented into the existing formal curriculum. For example, they described how their assignments could be based around various Black figures, so that students get the chance to learn about the people and work they produced within the curriculum, rather than going to another school. Again, they were confused about why this is not being done at the institutional level and offered in mainstream schools. They also mentioned that they were interested in taking that approach across multiple contexts (cultural and ethnic groups) and that this style of learning could be applied across the board to include other racialized groups. They also mentioned that it could be infused in informal ways, such as the foods offered in the cafeteria, so that they better reflect the diversity of the school. The participants insisted that the race of the teachers in their imaginary schools did not matter.

Further thoughts and contradictions

These experiences suggest that these students are not colorblind or post-racial despite their multicultural and neoliberalist social context. They appear to be very aware of racial divides, stereotypes, the perceptions and limitations placed on their Black identities by those both inside and outside their own groups. Although they are more polite and nebulous in their use of language, the salience of race and how it informs their

educational experiences continuously surfaces. Contradictions emerged surrounding ideas of Canadianness, racialization and Africentrism as segregation.

Framing of Canadianness. How Canadianness was framed was inconsistent. In many instances, in describing their educational experiences, the participants felt that they most closely identified with a Canadian identity because they felt disconnected from their African and Caribbean heritage. However, their insider-outsider status (see Bannerji, 1996) is palpably evident. There is awareness that Canadian Whiteness operates within society as the invisible center, with racialized groups being intersectionally situated on a spectrum in gradients from center to periphery. This is evidenced by the way in which the participants always locate themselves in reference to the dominant group and other racialized communities, point to other racialized communities as outside of the curriculum and norm and how the current curriculum is taken up as mainstream or just "regular". In their discussions of how other groups interact with each other and with them, such as teachers and other students, the participants suggest that authentic Canadianness is synonymous with Whiteness, which is a common theme in scholarly literature.

The contradiction lies in the way that the participants express feelings of detachment from African and Caribbean contexts, resist essentialized Black identities and vehemently insist that they want multicultural schools rather than Africentric ones, yet show great interest and desire to learn about African and Caribbean contexts, frame Black identities within the same essentialized parameters (hip-hop music, style of dress, etc.) that they resist, while seeing the merits in Africentric schooling initiatives and name

White people as the ones that "write the textbooks" and "run the school". How the participants constructed their identities is key in trying to understand these contradictions, because their identities were tied up in an understanding of race that is premised on social distances. When discussing their identities, the participants often described the Caribbean and Africa as being "too far back" to really count, suggesting not only an understanding of race that tries to quantify and locate racial and ethnic identity, but also do so by basing such an identity on its proximity to Whiteness.

These contradictions suggest that their Canadian identities and self-perceptions are heavily influenced by the way in which the center perceives them, suggesting that there is some guilt or discomfort that comes along with resisting assimilation. How can Black identities be counted as Canadian while still being aware of their hybridity?

The role of language. Often throughout the interviews the participants demonstrated a discomfort around the naming of who they perceived was the dominant group or in control and would often refer to such a group as "they". They were reluctant to name racialization and racism as a problem, despite having multiple experiences of exclusion and marginalization and relied on colloquialisms and voice impersonations to signal that they were referring to a White person. My status as an outsider-within, allowed me to pick up on these subtle inferences, while still maintaining a rapport that allowed them to feel comfortable to share their stories. They often would laugh and joke as they shared their experiences and assumed that because of my insider status as a racialized Black student of Caribbean descent that I could relate to their experiences.

Because the racism the participants experienced was not overt, they were often reluctant to name the incidents as racism, which propelled a belief in meritocracy. Success for all of the participants was framed around going to university and getting a degree, despite their framing of things being "white-run" and their awareness of social inequalities. These social inequalities and which group they felt was responsible for them were only reticently named and identified as racism and racialization. Therefore, resistance through Africentric initiatives is seen as perhaps too radical or threatening and as having negative social consequences. Consequently, how other groups see the initiative and measure its legitimacy, *greatly* informs how they come to understand and think through Africentric schooling.

Africentric schooling as segregation. As a result of how other groups perceive Africentric schooling greatly informing how the Black youth in this study come to understand the initiative, Africentric schooling being taken up as segregation is to be expected. The contradiction lies in the way that the participants and some stakeholders, while ignoring the reality that Canadian society is largely segregated in many ways, construct Africentric schools as segregationist and separatist. The participants and the scholarly literature discuss the ways in which society (neighbourhoods and schools) is fragmented along racial and ethnic lines. In the GTA, many live in ethnic enclaves, which segment the population by race and ethnicity, which is also linked to socioeconomic status, indicating unequal opportunities such as access to resources and the quality and safety of neighbourhoods and *schools*. This was evidenced by the way

that the participants described their schools as environments where students generally clustered in their own ethnic/racial groups.

The participants described their schools as microcosms of larger society, which are inherently segregated and produce unequal outcomes and opportunities based on socioeconomic status, race and ethnicity. This is also evidenced by the way in which the participants posited that the majority of their teachers were White and that they noticed differences in the way the teachers interacted with students belonging to the same racial/ethnic group. They indicated that while a teacher being Black didn't necessarily mean that they were a good teacher, those teachers "helped them", and while they noticed sometimes negative attitudes from White teachers, South Asian and East Asian teachers often helped students from the same group. Despite this inequality in teacher practices and support, the students insisted that having more Black teachers to "help them" was not the solution and that they wanted all kinds of teachers. This thinking is echoed by Irvine (2000) that questions who should teach Black students. Irvine (2000) critiques Africentrism and insists that just because a teacher is Black, does not mean that they will be more effective in reaching Black students. Perhaps the participants feel that more Black teachers may not necessarily translate into better teaching or educational experiences.

Segregation is also evidenced by differences in neighbourhood and how the composition of the school can result in drastically different educational opportunities and support. This is seen by the differences in the educational experiences of Tianna and Mervin versus Lisa and Rohan. This means that our current multicultural context allows

us to pretend we are living up to the multicultural ideals embedded in Canadian culture and encourages us to neglect the responsibility of addressing systemic inequalities in order to maintain a sense of comfort and progress. This promotes a neoliberalist sensibility, which shifts the blame for systemic inequalities onto the individual and thus silences the narratives of non-dominant groups and makes difficult the acknowledgment and rectification of inequalities. Africentric initiatives, therefore function to disrupt the dominant ideologies that produce the inequalities that persist in our society and pressure us to confront and address them. Rather than take up the way in which society is segregated in our neighbourhoods, politics, media, and *schools*, Africentric initiatives become a scapegoat to deflect the focus from broader society in order to reify the notion that multiculturalism is working. Africentric initiatives then become framed as a threat to that process. If Africentric Schools allow *all* students to attend, it does not practice segregation. If many of our schools and communities are segregated along racial, ethnic and socioeconomic lines, how are these communities and schools any different from Africentric schools? If Africentric schooling is being taken up as problematic or separatist for making provisions and creating opportunities to meet a specific community's needs, then many of the institutions in Canadian society that are monocultural or focus on serving a particular class, religious group, etc. need to be taken to task as well. Perhaps the segregation argument is more deeply rooted in the way in which Africentric initiatives pinch a nerve in Canadian society by challenging the mythological belief that Canada is post-racial and multicultural and that equality has been achieved.

Conclusion

Upon sharing my thesis topic with others, I was often asked why I was studying students that did not attend an Africentric school. In response, I often wondered, why not? If the Africentric schooling initiative is to grow and be effectively measured as an academic option, the views of *potential* students, should matter just as much as those that already attend the school. How can the initiative grow and attract students or at the very least, know how to reach them and what they are looking for in the school, if prospective students are not included in the process?

This study began with the primary question: how do Black youth between the ages of 16 and 20 in the Greater Toronto Area, come to understand Africentric schooling. Upon investigation, it is evident that the Black youth in this study are thinking about this issue within the context of their larger educational experiences as racialized youth. Generally speaking, it appears that the participants are confused about: (a) what Africentric means, (b) what the school offers, (c) how the Africentric schooling initiatives can directly benefit them as students, and (d) how to locate themselves within the current educational (and social) landscape. Their views about Africentric Schooling are a product of their environmental learning (through school, social environment, media, etc.) about race, identity, Africentrism and Africentric Schooling. The key things that shape their opinions are media (not on how it reports on Africentric Schooling, but how it overall influences their self-perception), previous schooling experiences, and the social and historical context of Canada. These responses indicate that perhaps Africentric initiatives need to better reach their target demographic with a thorough and

comprehensive conceptualization of what Africentrism means, how it is being defined in this specific (Canadian) context and what the direct benefits are to youth.

There is great confusion around the issue of segregation and stereotypes cloud the understanding of the objectives of the initiative. It needs to be made explicitly clear that Africentrism as a pedagogy, philosophy and ideology is not something that is *only* beneficial to Black students, but a viable ideological tool that has merit in multiple spaces.

Lastly, the process of development of Africentric initiatives needs more transparency and stronger advertisement in order to create more informed awareness, trust and accurate measurement. Media coverage suggests that the secondary initiative is a failure, due to lack of interest (MacDonald, 2012), but neglects the fact that the secondary school initiative is significantly far from the elementary school, with no transportation provided and very little information readily available to the general public about registration, curriculum, requirements, etc. Therefore, reports of the initiative being unsuccessful (Alphonso, 2013) are not reasonable, as they do not consider the context in which the school and its success are being measured. Perhaps in order to more accurately gauge interest, the initiative should communicate with prospective students at the community-level and in the Africentric elementary school to offer transparency and comprehensive information, so that stake-holders such as parents, researchers, and students can make *informed* decisions about whether to support the initiative. Therefore, misinformation, a lack of access to comprehensive information and a lack of transparency appear to be a deterrent to the credibility and access to the school. The participants

mentioned that the school seemed "random" and appeared distrustful of the process of creating the initiative. This is especially true for the secondary initiative, the *Leonard Braithwaite program*, which is currently in the recruitment phase.

All of my participants are university-bound students, yet their schooling experiences have been influenced by what scholarly literature has outlined as par for the course for Black students. How they resist and confront these experiences is a complex process, but it is evident, that my participants are unsure if Africentric Schooling is an appropriate avenue for them to resist and confront the current formal curriculum. They are keenly aware of the inequalities, but seem to have difficulty naming the sources, although they often allude to the dominant group. Their perceptions of the sources of these inequalities are often shared with coded language, which infers that White racism and Eurocentrism act as barriers to more equal practices and voice.

Further, the participants appear to be silenced through the fear of being seen as "racist", "Black supremacist" or "Black panthers", which indicates a difficulty around language, suggesting that neoliberalist ideas of individual accountability could be informing their reluctance to address, confront and resist the inequalities that they experience, because a neoliberalist framework discourages collective mobility and asserts that social inequalities exist because of poor individual choices, rather than systemic structures. We must question why negative consequences tend to follow when truth-telling happens and better understand where power lies, how it operates and the role that the embeddedness of neoliberalism plays. My participants are not clear on how Africentric schooling addresses the problems that many Black students are facing in

school. They are living within neoliberalist and multicultural discourses, but try to resist them at the same time in various ways, which on the surface appear as contradictions.

Perhaps these perceived contradictions indicate resilience. Michael Ungar (2013) argues that resilience is the capacity to *navigate* your way to the psychological, social, cultural and physical resources that sustain your well-being and your capacity, both individually and in groups, to *negotiate* for these resources to be provided . . . in culturally meaningful ways. He heavily emphasizes the words navigate and negotiate and the idea of autonomy, in that the individual does not need to have things done for him/her, but needs the infrastructure and scaffolding to develop the tools to navigate and negotiate. The ability to navigate and negotiate therefore becomes the essence of resilience and schools then become an important place for this process, because they are a medium where opportunities for growth and develop can be fostered. Perhaps we need to shift the way we measure interventions that seek to address unequal outcomes and practices and create opportunities for students, and think critically about how effectively mainstream schools provide all students with the tools needed to negotiate and navigate their social realities, rather than bolstering or obscuring them. Maybe then we can look at Africentric schools through a lens that interrogates how effectively they provide *all* students with those tools. Perhaps the tension lies, not in the existence of the school itself, but in *how* we think through and measure the school. What factors are used to measure the legitimacy and viability of Africentric schools and are they appropriate? Are we measuring the right things and if not, what should we be measuring?

Limitations of the Study

There are limitations and threats to validity in this study for the following reasons:

- a) This study cannot be assumed to speak for all Black youth in the Greater Toronto Area because of its limited scope (4 participants) and use of a purposive sampling model, which seeks information-rich participants, based on specific criterion. This is an interpretive and exploratory study that is susceptible to the bias and subjectivity of interpretation.
- b) The participants in the study all attend schools and live in neighbourhoods that are considered middle or upper class, which means that their experiences will be shaped by their socioeconomic status, which means that the experiences of working class Black students were not included.
- c) The participants in this study were also all high-achieving, university-bound students. This means that their schooling experiences, ideas about the Africentric schooling, race and identity, may be shaped differently by their history of academic performance in comparison to students that are not university-bound, or have lower levels of academic achievement.
- d) All of the participants are Canadian-born, second generation Black students of Caribbean descent. Their immigration status, ethnicities, citizenship and generation all have implications on how they interpreted and reflected on their previous schooling experiences and experiences around race and ethnicity. These factors also shape how they understand and construct their identities and think about Africentric schooling.

For these reasons, the results of this study are not representative and are limited in generalizability.

Areas for further research

This study has also incited many empirical questions that probe more deeply into some of the themes and ideas that emerged from the data, which get at how Canadian Black students are thinking about their educational experiences and identities in this neoliberal and multicultural context. There is a need for more research that contributes to a better understanding of the specific and dynamic ways that racialized bodies are constructing their identities, while being oriented in Canada's social and historical context. Here are some of the suggested areas for further study:

- a) The idea of political correctness and how it promotes silence is an area for further research. There is a reluctance or inability to frankly discuss inequalities for fear of being labelled as radical. This climate creates a false sense of progress, promotes complacency and silences people. Do students have the words to describe their experiences in the multicultural, neoliberal contexts in which they live and when they speak, can we listen?
- b) How can the current Africentric initiatives in GTA be incorporated into the broader curriculum? How should their success be measured? Should they continue to operate as alternative schools? What are the possibilities for higher education? Could HBCUs (Historically Black Colleges and Universities) such as Howard University, Morehouse or Spelman College in the U.S. become a reality in Canada?

- c) What are the experiences of racialized youth attending schools in predominantly upper class and White neighbourhoods? How are their experiences informed by their socioeconomic status (whether low or high)? Do these students perform better in these environments? Why or why not? Which factors are the greatest indicators? The participants discussed noticing differences or having personal experiences with attending schools that were in upper class neighbourhoods and/or being severely underrepresented in those spaces. What does that mean for their educational experiences and school choices?
- d) Questions around how Black history month is taken up in schools also emerged. Is the message and purpose of Black history month being lost in translation? Does it need to be rethought? How can Black history month be taken up in ways that promote a deeper engagement with Black Canadian histories and cultures?
- e) The phenomenon of acting White was broached throughout the study and has been discussed in American scholarly literature. What does acting White look like in the Canadian context and how does it inform educational trajectories? Identity construction? Social relationships? What is the social cost for high-performing and/or non-conforming racialized students?
- f) What is the role of African-American culture in influencing how Black Canadian youth construct their identities? What are the convergences and divergences? Throughout the study, it became evident how strongly African-American culture shapes Black Canadian identities, alongside Caribbean and other cultures. How is this hybrid identity mediated?

- g) The role of hip-hop seemed to be prevalent in how the participants constructed their identities. Perhaps there is an underestimation of the influence that Hip-hop as a musical genre and subculture, have on identity formation and more research needs to be conducted to understand the relationship between the two.
- h) The American scholarly literature alluded to the role of the Black church in shaping Black identities and as a form of social capital. Throughout the study, the Black church was briefly mentioned as a form of social capital. What role does the Black church in Canada play in the lives of Black youth? Does it exist or has it lost its fervour?

While there may be specificities and particularities in both social and historical contexts, there are overlapping elements in both Canadian and African-American communities, which serve as indicators of areas for common ground. Further research could lead to a better and more comprehensive understanding of the ways in which diasporic Black bodies construct their identities and mediate their social and educational experiences.

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Appendix A: Introductory Questionnaire

Name:

Age:

Grade:

M/F/Other:

Race and Ethnicity:

Languages Spoken:

Current Type of School Attending/Attended (Private, Public, Religious, Alternative, Arts, etc.):

Current Status (in school, graduated, working, etc.):

Future Goals:

What do you know about Africentric Schooling?

Appendix B: Focus Group Protocol

Constructions and Critiques of Africentric Schooling

1) What does Africentric mean to you?

- a) What does that look like in real life?
- b) Is Africentrism relevant to your life (specific)? Is it important for Black students to be Africentric (general)?
- c) What do you think Africentric schooling is?
- d) Should all Black students go to an Africentric School at some point in their education?
- e) Do you think an Africentric school is necessary?
 - i) What are the pros?
 - ii) What are the cons?
- f) How/Where did you learn about Africentric Schooling?
 - i) What have you seen about Africentric Schooling in the media?
 - ii) Does the media (social media, newspapers, television, music) influence you?

Social, Cultural and Ethnic Influences

2) How do you feel your culture is represented in school?

- a) How would you identify yourself?
- b) How relevant has your culture/language been to your learning experience?
- c) How relevant has race been to your learning experience?
- d) What are your experiences with race and schooling?

- i) Would an Africentric school help?
- ii) What other things do you think have influenced your experiences in school?
- iii) Is it important for Black students to learn about Black history and culture?
- iv) Do you feel pressure from to maintain their culture or do you make your own?
 - (1) From who/where?
- v) What kind of culture do you think Africentric schooling promotes?

Constructions and critiques of Africentric Schooling

3) How do you think Africentric schooling compares to your school? What is similar and what is different?

- a) What are some of the things you are happy with that you learn in school now?
- b) What are some of the things that you are unhappy with that you learn in school now?
 - i) What are some of the things you wish you could learn? What is left out?
- c) What are some of your past experiences with teachers in your school?
- d) How do you feel that your peers (other Black youth) are performing in school?

4) If you were to make an Africentric School, what would it be like?

- a) What would you learn?
- b) What would the teachers be like?
- c) What are some of the factors that influence how Black youth think about education?
- d) What are some of things that you don't understand about Africentric schooling?