DISRUPTING THE DISCOURSE:

CANADIAN BLACK WOMEN TEACHERS IN THE LIVES OF MARGINALIZED STUDENTS

KIMBERLEY TAVARES

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

GRADUATE PROGRAM IN EDUCATION
YORK UNIVERSITY
TORONTO, ONTARIO

December 2013

ABSTRACT

This dissertation begins with a specific question: What can education learn from experiences of Black women teachers about meeting the educational needs of marginalized learners? It explores this question by focusing on the pedagogical practices five Canadian Black women teachers employ to meet the learning needs of their students, particularly those most marginalized and underserviced. While their voices are generally missing in Canadian educational research literature, the present inquiry is guided by an understanding that the teaching practices of Black women teachers are individualized and contextual; they encounter and develop professional expertise from many different subjective and educational trajectories, and they learn to teach students, on multiple terms and at varied levels of success. The research pursues three lines of investigation organized by the diverse experiences of Black women teacher respondents: (1) biographical and identity formation as teachers who are Black women; (2) attitudes, strategies and negotiations as "minority" teachers in a white majority profession; (3) and what matters most to these Black women about the academic success of marginalized students while teaching and interacting with them in the classroom. Drawing upon observations and interviews, insights from the teachers highlight the educational problematic as more about the long-standing "teaching-gap" than about challenges students present. The study yields recommendations toward closing this "teaching gap" to more generally improve educational provision to all students, and more specifically to marginalized students in Canadian schools.

Acknowledgements

It takes a village to raise a child

- African Proverb

I humbly thank the many grandmothers, mothers and fathers who made this dissertation possible. *Joy*, you read, re-read and questioned me to the point of clarity and precision. *Quinn*, you asked no questions, you pushed me forward and you believed in me. *Shae, Tsahai and Saige*, you tolerated my absences, my blind focus and my dedication; your patience and love astounds me.

Dr. James, from the time I was an undergraduate student you made me believe this was possible; thank-you for your time, mentorship and guidance.

Dr. Mishra-Tarc and Dr. Crichlow, your support, advice and encouragement made an overwhelming task possible. To my friends and colleagues who edited, offered ideas, and tolerated my crazy (*Regine, Rebeca, Jane, Gurprit, Saira, Sharmin, Camille*) I am blessed to have you in my life. To the Black women teachers in this study and to those who came before – thank-you for paving the way and for teaching us what an inclusive education really looks like.

You all have raised me and I hope I have made you proud.

Walk good,

Kim

Table of Contents

Introduction

"Black students, looking for the truth, demand teachers least likely to lie, least likely to perpetuate the traditions of lying; lies that deface the father from the memory of the child....It is not that we believe only Black people can understand the Black experience...[but] we have born the whiplash of 'white studies'...therefore we cannot, in sanity, pass by the potentiality of Black teachers"

June Jordan (1989)

In this study, I examine the experiences and practices of Canadian Black women teachers whose voices are largely missing in the research literature on the Canadian educational experience. Secondly, I explore the pedagogies and practices these women employ which are most successful in meeting the learning needs of marginalized or underserviced students, particularly Black boys[1]. Thirdly, I probe how their experiences can inform our understanding of the ways in which our educational ethos impacts the learning and teaching of marginalized students and teachers.

---

[1] Throughout my dissertation I use the term *Black* to signify people of African ancestry, living in Canada, regardless of country of birth. I recognize that this term (and others used throughout the dissertation e.g., White) are highly problematic and have varied and conflicting meanings for readers depending on their geographical and political positions. My use of the terms is not an attempt to essentialize. Instead, I use these categories as a means of identifying the particular individuals, as defined by the categories available through census and other data sets, being addressed in my study. The term Black denotes a racial and cultural group, consequently, and as with all racial, ethnic, cultural groups, it is capitalized to indicate it as a proper noun (James, 2011).

By marginalized Black boys, I am specifically discussing those Black male, secondary school, adolescents whose academic experiences have not been positive in terms of grades (meeting the Ontario provincial standard) and/or social inclusion (feeling a part of the school experience) as a result of social and academic exclusion (Young 1990) .

To achieve these three objectives, this dissertation is structured into six chapters. In this introduction, I map out my entry into the topic of Canadian Black women teachers. I then move into a brief conversation about the current conflicting experiences, reflections and conceptions of the successful teacher of marginalized Black male students[2] in order to situate my stance on why the voice and experiences of Black women teachers need to be central in the discourse on how to teach marginalized youth. I then follow with chapter one which contains a review of the literature addressing the academic and professional experiences and representations of Canadian Black women teachers and Black students as a means of locating this research within current bodies of study. The first chapter ends with a presentation of the theoretical frames - Black Feminist theory and Critical Race theory - that underpin the workings and thinking of this dissertation.

The second chapter articulates my research agenda, methodologies, research questions, participants and timelines used in the development of this dissertation. The third chapter, one of three data chapters, articulates the research findings pertaining to the multiple and interconnected roles that the Black woman teacher participants in the study find themselves navigating daily. The fourth chapter, on the burdens and negotiations of Black women teachers, grapples with the tensions and contradictions these Black women in a predominantly white

---

[2] I use Black males as the basis for thinking about marginalized students as this group consistently, over time falls to the bottom of Canadian data sets on student achievement (Brown & Sinay, 2006; Dei, 2006; Dragnea & Earling, 2008; James, 2007; 2012).

educational system navigate. The fifth chapter shares the lessons that the participants feel can help meet the learning needs of Black youth in Ontario schools. The sixth and final chapter concludes the dissertation by attempting to think about the lessons presented by these women as a means to develop the beginnings of transformative pedagogical practices that better meet the learning needs of marginalized youth in the Canadian education system.

Situating the Research Questions

The context for my current dissertation questions extend from a research project I conducted in 2009 (Tavares-Carter, 2009). At that time, I was particularly interested in the schooling and professional experiences of Black male educators and the possible correlation between these experiences and the under-representation of Black male teachers in secondary schools. When asked why these men chose to teach in the primary division instead of the secondary division, the respondents' answers were unequivocal: They chose to work in elementary schools instead of secondary schools because: (1) they felt under-qualified to teach in secondary schools, and (2) they believed that in elementary school, they could be better mentors and role models to Black boys, many of whom like themselves, were missing male figures in their young lives as a result of being raised in households with "only a single-mother".

In thinking about the reasons contributing to the dearth of Black male educators at the secondary level I, like my respondents, did so with the belief that

"Black male teachers are more likely than their white counterparts to decrease [Black male student] alienation and contribute to their academic success" (Irvine, 1989, p. 55). Such a belief, I realized later, is rooted in a patriarchal discourse, whereby the place, power and position of men are thought to be paramount in the raising of boys (Gilroy, 1993). Prior to beginning my research, and thinking of myself as a Black woman teacher, I questioned my ability to fully support the needs of marginalized Black male students. I felt, in earnest, that since I was a woman educator, I lacked the ability to, what Lynn (2006) calls, 'other-father' or provide the masculine-oriented care that my respondents and researchers such as Holland (1996), Solomon (1992), and Zirkel (2002) argue balances out the female influence on Black boys' educational needs. Indeed, as one of my respondents at the time phrased it thus: "A boy can't come to his mom and talk to mom like dad... [for] no one other than a Black man can teach a Black boy how to be a responsible Black man" (Tavares-Carter, 2009, p. 54). I wondered at the time whether it was possible then that the lack of qualifications and concerns the male respondents in my study expressed about their ability to be successful secondary teachers was, at least in part, a result of the missing male mentors and role models in their own secondary schooling lives. When I began the research, my answer to the aforementioned question was indisputably yes. However, overtime my thinking has been challenged. As I conducted my research, delved into the literature on Black masculinities, and reviewed the responses of my

participants, I noted an interesting and important contradiction in the respondents' arguments.

The (Under) Valuing of Black Female Teachers

While arguing that Black male students needed Black male mentors and role models (the primary reason they all became educators), each male respondent simultaneously credited the females-- teachers, aunts, sisters, mothers and grandmothers-- in their lives with being their prime supporters and mentors contributing to their successes. One respondent, Omar for instance, in the early part of his interview indicated that his decision to enter teaching stemmed from a desire to "break the stereotype" of what Black men in Canada are" and to teach Black youth "what it means to be a Black man" in Canadian society (Tavares-Carter, 2009, p. 46). Throughout the interview, Omar argued for the unique position that Black male teachers hold in guiding Black male youth in ways that are different from that of their white counterparts. His comments echo Lynn's (2006) research which indicates that the Black male teacher-Black male student connection tends to show a cultural competence on the part of the teacher which allows the student to more likely feel comfortable and so trust and respect the teacher. Yet, as Omar continued his interview, he insisted that it was his "strong mother and grandmother who pushed him on" (Tavares-Carter, 2009, p. 74). In fact, the only male influence Omar had while growing up was one male teacher in

grade nine; all the other influential individuals who contributed to his later success were females.

In Omar's and the rest of my respondents' cases, the perceived need for a male-figure to support and encourage their successes ran contrary to their reality of what it took for them to be successful. More troubling, however, is that their assertions point to what I now see as a negation of the role that the support they received from female figures played in their lives. Such assertions and negations are tantamount to what James (2012) calls the hegemonic discourse of our society whereby the respondents' internalization of fixed gender roles undermines individual attempts to resist racialization in their aspirations to be successful. For underlying their arguments about the need for male role models is the patriarchal and sexist supposition that the contributions of men are more important than those of women. These successful Black men, who claimed that they were marginalized while in school yet fully supported at home, effectively confirmed through their comments and successes Lawson-Bush's (2004) argument that "no aspect or component of Black male life eluded mothers in their ability to teach lessons that were necessary for manhood or the development of masculinity" (p. 384). So why then did the men in my study not recognize fully the value of the female mentors in their lives? Why was I ready to devalue my own contributions as a teacher and mother to the development of Black male youth?

In thinking through the above questions, I was drawn to further arguments by Lawson-Bush (2004) who notes that the "double-edged sword of sexism and racism work to de-centre, devalue and disempower Black mothers" in the wider society (p. 389). Even before Lawson-Bush, hooks (1981) makes the case for how the "racist, sexist socialization condition us to devalue our femaleness" (p.1). Henry (1998) going even further, argues that such sexism "debilitates collective efforts for Black libratory education" (p. 57). As a result the need for and place of womanhood is a must in the continued development of Black male youth (hooks, 2004; Hopkins, 1997; Irvine, 1989; 2002; Watson & Smitherman, 1992). In other words, Black women's presence should not be diminished or negated during the quest for Black male educational success.

With these thoughts in mind, I began to question how and in what ways does the same "double-edged sword of sexism and racism" impressed on Black women influence Black female teachers while working in schools? Relatedly, in their promotion of the 2011 summer edition of *The Journal of Negro Education,* Yolanda Sealey-Ruiz and Chance W. Lewis of the University of North Carolina assert that "Over the past five decades . . . there has been a decline in the academic achievement levels of Black students and there has been a disappearance of Black teachers, particularly Black males" (p. 1). They suggest that there is a correlation between the declining achievement of Black boys and the lack of Black male teachers. Such suggestions continue to support the claim

that without Black men in the lives of Black boys, these children are destined to a life of underachievement and marginalization. Such claims reify the scholastic history of patriarchy and patriarchal thinking about who can help Black boys (Lemons, 2008). To propose that only Black male teachers can *fix* the "problem" of under-achieving Black males is simplistic and limiting. Not only does such a suggestion make the Black youth achievement gap a 'Black-male issue,' thereby confining the scope of the problem to within Black communities and absolving all other stakeholders of their responsibility, doing so also ignores the role that systemic and institutional factors, such as academic racism, the over representation of minorities in Special Education and biased assessments etc., play in Black male academic underachievement (Brown & Sinay, 2004; Cowen & Parlette, 2010; James, 2012). Further, such deterministic and uni-dimensional approaches to the ever-widening gap between Black youth and their white counterparts offer no place for any other caring adults in the life of the child who might also be working to support his/her academic needs or to the Black woman who has historically been the most dedicated to the success of the Black man. What impact do such discourses then have on the teaching experiences and efficacy of Black female teachers?

In his text, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness,* Gilroy (1993) criticizes the long-held suggestion that Black men are "'the true backbone of the people' capable of leading the community to its rightful position"

(p. 194). By quoting Ali (1989) Gilroy suggests a transformative position for the Black woman in the social movement of Black people and positions the figure of the Black man as a means of reconstituting our sense of self:

> When the Blackwoman accepts her rightful place as queen of the universe and mother of civilization the Blackman will regenerate his powers that have been lost to him for over 400 years directly. The Black woman should not mimic the ideas and attitudes of Western civilization. The Whiteman clearly understands that the preservation of the family order is what allows him to rule the word. This fact is not hidden knowledge (in Gilroy, 1993, p.193).

The tensions Gilroy articulates between genders, familial relations, race, time, space and place speaks directly to the historical and systemic dehumanizing of the Black body (both male and female). Denigrating Black family arrangements and gender relations, Western society continues to hold the heteronormative nuclear family as a model of civil society and human life. Denigration works externally through racism and internally through the internalization and perpetuation of racist ideas, as a means to keep racialized, gendered bodies in conflict with each other and so occupied, out of contention with the oppressor (hooks, 2004; Gilroy, 1993).

Later, Henry (1998) supplements Gilroy's argument by extolling the strengths and historical relevance of Black women in the political and social

development of Black communities. From the time of slavery, Black women in the Americas have been instrumental in the development and sustenance of Black youth, particularly at time when the greater society legally and socially debased them (hooks, 1981). In this way, Black women, through the employment of successful practices do not "mimic the ideas and attitudes of Western civilization," but instead turn to Africentric models of care, community and kinship as the means to ground and further the development of Black youth (Henry, 1998; hooks, 1981). As Henry (1998) states, "Black women's activism in Canada has fostered educational achievement and community continuity" (p.81). Illustrations of the exemplary Black women include Mary Ann Shadd, who in the 1800's opened the first integrated school in Windsor, and Jean Augustine who came to Canada as a certified teacher, but came to work as a domestic before 're-earning' her teaching degree, becoming a school principal in Toronto and later elected the first Black female member of Canadian Parliament (Braithwaite & Benn-Ireland 1983). These examples evidence the long-enduring social activism of Black female teachers in Canada.

To be clear however, I do not use these stories to contribute to the stereotype of 'the strong Black woman'[3], for I do recognize, as Harris-Perry

---

[3] As a counter to the mammy (caregiver) image and Jezebel (promiscuous) image that American society created of Black women, Harris-Perry (2011) argues that Black women themselves developed the 'strong Black woman image' to serve as a "constructive role model to draw encouragement and assurance from" (p. 184). However, she warns, like all stereotypes there are many dangers to this image in that "what begins as empowering can quickly become prison" in

(2011) points out, that the proliferation of stories such as these can "encourage the false belief that Black women always face adversity with strength and that their strength is always victorious" (p. 230). On the contrary, I use these Canadian Black women stories (few that we have) as examples and representations of the kinds of work Black women, famous and not, have done to further the place of Black people in the social and political sphere.

Further, Sudarkasa (1996) positions Black women as "critical" to the socialization of Black children in that from birth Black women have challenged the position of white authority by teaching Black children how to maneuver and survive the oppressive societies in which they lived. As Cooper (1991) explains:

> They were all Black and as such their lives were a daily struggle against racism and slavery. And as teachers, acutely aware that the majority of their people on the continent lived in slavery and the rest disadvantaged, most felt they had a mission to work among their race to help and elevate those less advantages than themselves....Blacks were defying the system (p. 6).

With these powerful positions of Black women in mind, I think then of the role of Black female teacher as strong, dedicated and working towards the successful development of all, but particularly Black youth. I want to learn from them. This dissertation is designed to listen to the voices of these women and

---

that Black women find themselves under heavy expectations to show themselves as always in control, never inferior and never hurt .

honor the lessons they can teach us about meeting the needs of marginalized learners.

I enter this work with the understanding that the teaching practices of Black female teachers are individualized and contextual; Black women teachers encounter and experience the profession from many different places and angles and so will engage with Black youth on varied terms. I am not attempting to homogenize Black female teachers. Instead, my project seeks to examine: (1) the experiences of Black female teachers; (2) the negotiations Black female teachers make daily while trying to navigate the tensions of being minority teachers in a white majority profession; and (3) the lessons Black female teachers can offer for the education of Black boys, that are undermined by current patriarchal and hegemonic discourses.

Questions

While discussing the complexity in thinking about Black masculinity and education, as it is positioned and defined by Black tradition, Gilroy (1993) argues that "it seems important to reckon with the limitations of a perspective which seeks to restore masculinity [through proven failed methods] rather than work carefully towards something like its transcendence" (194). In saying this, I take Gilroy to mean that attempts to address the marginalized schooling issues that Black boys face by re-inscribing the very practices that lead to their marginalization are counter-productive. Instead, we have to develop new,

revolutionary and holistic practices that go beyond our current frameworks, yet still speak to the realities and challenges of our learners. Consequently, my research project is the beginnings of an attempt to envision transformative education for marginalized youth through an examination of the successful practices of Black female teachers. Consequently, my research is driven by two main questions:

- What can we learn from Canadian Black women teachers' experiences in teaching?

- How can their lessons transform our thinking about meeting the educational needs of marginalized students and teachers?

Beyond the two main questions leading the research, my dissertation is also driven by several additional questions:

- How do Black women teachers experience teaching?

- How have their experiences shaped their practice and understanding of education?

- What do Black women teachers see as the successes and challenges of teaching in a Canadian context?

- How do Black Women Teachers negotiate the demands and intricacies of supporting marginalized students in a culture of "accountability" and "consistency"?

- Given the current discourse about the need for educational support for Black males, what role do women teachers play in the education of Black male youth?

These questions are designed to probe the place, positions and experiences of Black female teachers in relation to their educational experiences with Black youth. I explore their relationships with Black male youth, noting in what ways, if any, the current discourse of Black boys needing Black men has influenced their connections and relationships as teachers and students. Further, I examine what we can learn from Black female teachers that would allow us to best support Black marginalized males in their learning. I use the platform of my doctoral dissertation to examine the experiences and roles of Black female teachers, shedding light on their pedagogy and practices while teaching and interacting with Black male youth.

It is important to note that while this study set out to investigate Black female teachers' practices with Black boys, for reasons that will become clear in later chapters of this dissertation, the focus shifted to these teachers' practices with *all* marginalized students. The respondents were emphatic that their pedagogies and methodologies were open and hospitable to all students who experienced schooling from the margins, including but not limited to Black boys. The respondents explained that because, they understood marginalization, either as a consequence of their own schooling experience in Canada, or as a

consequence of teaching in Canada, they care about any and all students who are

outcaste and so use this pedagogy of empathy to meet the learning needs of all

who enter their learning spaces. Consequently, throughout this paper I use the

term Black interchangeably with marginalized to signal the respondent's

orientation of care towards all marginalized learners, including Black children.

Significance of the Study

Once complete, I intend for my research to contribute to, yet unsettle, current

educational discourses about meeting the needs of marginalized students. By

highlighting the contributions of Black female educators and probing the place,

positions and experiences of these educators in relation to their educational

experiences, I broaden thinking about why and how we meet the learning needs of

marginalized youth, Black males in particular. Secondly, I challenge theories

about racial affinity as the impetus behind Black women's efforts to support

marginalized Black boys. Finally, I would like to critically examine how the

complexities of skin color, in a time that some categorize as Post-Racial,[4] still

determines the constraints and possibilities of Black female teachers.

---

[4] I use the term post-racial as defined by Lum (2009), who suggests that with Barak Obama's
inauguration as President of the United States "racial differences are becoming less important"
(p.1). Consequently there is an erroneous belief that we in North America are living in a time
when equity and multiculturalism policies have created an equal playing field for all members of
society making race no longer paramount in defining possibilities (Wise, 2010).

Conclusion

  This introduction began with an overview of my entry into the topic of the place and position of Canadian Black women teachers. The current and pervasive discourse arguing the need for Black male teachers and highlighting the correlating decline of Black male student achievement relegates the contributions of Black women teachers to the margins. However, Black women teachers such as Mary Bibb, Jean Augustine and other Canadian Black women cannot be undermined as they historically and currently serve as the backbone for Canadian Black youth education. Consequently, this research project is designed to learn from them in order to support all teachers in their quest for student achievement.

Chapter One

A Brief Historical Overview of Canadian Black teachers

and Canadian Black learners

The literature review for this dissertation begins by elucidating the

academic concerns facing young Canadian Black males. My entry point into this

scholarship seeks to contextualize the importance and place of Black female

teachers when supporting the learning concerns and needs of this most under-

serviced group (Brown & Sinay, 2006; Dei, 2006; Dragnea & Earling, 2008;

Henry, 1998; James, 2007; 2012; Solomon, 1992). This discussion is followed by

a review of the literature on the Canadian Black teacher in general and the

Canadian Black woman teacher specifically, as a means of situating the role and

experiences of Black woman teachers within the greater context of teaching in

Canada, a society that prides itself on its multiculturalism.

Black Learners in Ontario

Black learners have historically held a dubious position in the Ontario

education system. Although Blacks have been in, and a part of, the building of

Canada since the early 1600s, Black education in Ontario remained separated

from White schools well into the 1950s (Winks, 2000). The Separate School Act

of 1850 legislated already present segregated schooling in Ontario and due to

chronic underfunding of Black schools, countless Black children in Ontario were

denied schooling as Black schools were neglected by the government (Cooper,

1991; McLaren, 2004). By the 1950s, the majority of schools in Ontario were integrated as "it was no longer good Christianity, good politics, good international affairs, good image-building, good human relations, or even good sense to discriminate openly against Negroes", yet the experience of "Negro education" did not improve as dramatically as one might have hoped (Winks, 2000, p. 381).

Indeed, into the 1990s contestations about the education and representations of Blacks in education were being levied. "Both Africans and Asians were pictured doing only manual labour" noted a 1994 Ontario Royal Commission on Learning report, *For the Love of Learning*, during a review of Educational practices and resources in Ontario schools. Further, this same report revealed that:

> 36 percent of Black secondary school students were 'at-risk' [of dropping out] based on their grades in English and math courses; this pattern was repeated when only students in the advanced level were considered and when the Black student category was broken down into those born in Canada, in Caribbean countries, and in Africa. Even black students who have university-educated parents, or parents in professional occupations, or who live with both parents, continue to do disappointingly, according to the Toronto data (Vol. IV, Ch 16, p. 7).

These results were made in comparison to 26% of white students and 18% of Asian students, deemed at-risk by the province. The Commission also

found that 45% of Black high school students were in the basic and general

learning streams as compared to 28% of the general student body. And the most

startling statistic posed by the report showed that 42% of black students were

dropping out of school compared to 33% of the overall population (Royal

Commission on Learning, 1994). Still, the report and the numerous calls for

reform after the report, both in the media and in academia[5] did little to change the

educational outcomes for Black students in Ontario.

In 2007, the Toronto District School Board[6] (TDSB), the largest school

board in Ontario, found that 12% of their secondary school students, when asked,

defined themselves as Black and 15% of elementary students did the same (p.12).

These statistics can be further broken down to indicate that of the 12% of Black

high school students, 4% identify as Black Africans, 6% as Caribbean, and 2% as

Canadian-born (p.19). These numbers roughly match Milan and Tran's (2004)

findings taken from Government of Canada's most recent census report, which

put the total Caribbean Black population at 20%, and the African Black

population at 15%, showing a steady increase in the number of Blacks in Canada

over the years (p.5). Yet despite the significant number of Black students in

---

[5] Even before the Royal Commission on Learning report was published, Henry, 1993; Solomon, 1992 and other scholars began making the case for Africentric schooling to be imbedded into the educational framework of Ontario as a means to counter the under and negative representations of Blacks in schooling and to serve as a tool to stymie the disengagement of Black learners in the system.

[6] At present, 2012, only 2 school boards in Ontario – Toronto District School board and the Ottawa-Carleton District School Board collect race-based data on their students. Currently, only the TDSB has publically released their findings.

Toronto schools, only 7% of Black students were working at the highest academic level in high school, while 16% and 18% were working at the second lowest and lowest levels respectively (Vol. IV, Ch 16, p. 8).

Moreover, a 2006 Toronto District School Board (TDSB) study, *Linking Demographic Data with Student Achievement,* headed by Brown and Sinay, articulated a further pronunciation in the gap between the results of Black students and their white counterparts. The researchers found that students who self-identified as Black "have the highest at-risk (level 1 and below) rates in all four [reading, writing, mathematics and science] subject areas (p.16). All of these results suggest that the academic situation of Black students remain a fairly negative one, relative to the norm. More importantly, these results, spanning almost two decades, are damning insofar as they clearly indicate no improvement in the academic results of Black learners in the Ontario Education system despite numerous calls over the years to address the systemic underachievement of Black youth in Ontario (Bernard & Hill, 2004; Dei, 1996, 1997; James, 2007, 2009; Solomon, 1992).

Black Male Learners

In this section, I highlight the experiences of and research on Black male learners in the larger context of the systemic marginalization of Black students in the Ontario school system. Canadian studies have shown that Black males are more likely than other groups to be (historically) classified as 'mentally retarded'

or (more recently) diagnosed as suffering from a learning disability, more likely

to be placed in special education classes and more likely to be absent from

advanced-placement and honours courses (Dei, 1997; James, 2007; Solomon,

1992). Undeniably, research has made clear the case of the systemic

underachievement and underservicing of Black male youth. As Canadian

researcher Codjoe (2006), quoting Ogbu (1992) argues:

> The tendency [in research] is to emphasize the poor academic performance
>
> of black students and issues and problems related to reasons for academic
>
> failure or stereotype them as 'loud, lazy, muscular, criminal, athletic,
>
> dumb, deprived, dangerous, deviant and disturbed.'…Thus, it has been
>
> observed that 'the disproportionate school failure of [black (male)
>
> students] has become one of the most active research issues in education
>
> as researchers attempt to understand the underlying causes and to provide
>
> policy makers and educators with reliable and useful information (p. 34).

Thinking with Codjoe, I would be remiss at this moment in my research

not to acknowledge my own implication in furthering the narrative of the 'failed

Black male'. My intention however, is not to add to this pathologizing narrative,

but instead, I use the data and statistics as a means of showing how longitudinally,

systemically and institutionally, Black males in Ontario have been underserviced

by Education initiatives, policies, pedagogies, practices and resources. James

(2012) cautions that these same stereotypes of young Black males as 'at-risk'

"operate in a context informed by a multicultural discourse that masks the fact that race matters. As such, race and concomitantly racism inform educational opportunities, possibilities, and successes for these students" (p. 22). It is this same multicultural discourse and racism that also undervalues the place and voice of Black female teachers in the education of Black males. By not acknowledging the work and contributions of Black female teachers who: struggled to teach during segregation; fought to support Black youth during their curricular absence in the 1980s; and provided advice and pedagogies during the era of labelling Black youth as 'at-risk, education continues its exercise in creating the academically marginalized Black body.

Yet, despite the negative learning climate in which Black youth are immersed, some Black children are able to attain successes. In his study on academically successful Black students, Codjoe (2006) disrupts the narrative of the failed Black Canadian student by focusing on the factors that contribute to their achievement. While being clear to acknowledge that his findings are particular to only one group of Black students and so is not an attempt to homogenize, he does find that "a secured, clarified and developed self-identity and pride in African cultural/racial identity positively affects academic success among Black students" (p. 48).

Similarly, in my earlier study of the experiences of Canadian Black male teachers, the respondents who found minimal difficulty in navigating the

Canadian school system as both children and teachers proclaimed to be able to do so because while growing up they felt that their teachers and mentors (primarily female) provided environments that allowed them to feel racially and culturally secure and validated during schooling. Each respondent had teachers who understood their experiences and histories and so nurtured their potential and worked with them to encourage their academic and life skill sets (Tavares-Carter, 2009). What do these findings mean for the educational possibilities for disenfranchised Black youth?

Academic discourse claiming to solve or stymie the under-achievement of Black male students have been dominated by two initiatives in particular. Starting in the 1980s scholars have called for African-centered education as a "reconstructive" and "transformative" educational model for Black students (Dei, 1996; Durden, 2007; Marks & Tonso, 2006; Shujaa, 1994). These academics argue that such an education would allow Black youth to see themselves reflected in the curriculum and so develop a relationship to their learning which would be more positive than that of the current Eurocentric models in which they see themselves having no place (Dei 1996). In doing so, the argument goes, the "appropriate cultural foundation for learning via an African-centered learning environment" would be nurtured in the students (Codjoe, 2006, p. 48).

Critiques of this argument seem to largely focus on Black focused schools as an unwanted "return to segregation" and an affront to the multicultural fabric

of Canada (*National Post*, April 1, 2011). It is useful in this moment, however, to recall hooks (2003) who reminded us that "conservative manipulation of mass media has successfully encouraged parents and students to fear alternative ways of thinking, to believe that [doing so] will lead to failure....These tactics have harmed the movement for progressive education as the practice of liberation" (p. 6). Indeed, the backlash against media representations of Black focused schools by both whites and Blacks almost led to its demise and delayed the opening of a Black focused secondary school in Toronto (McNaughton, 2012).

And while I agree wholeheartedly with hooks, we must remember however that the Canadian versions of Black focused school initiatives do not fully acknowledge or take into account the effective strategies that have been used successfully by Black female teachers in working with Black youth. The Africentric curriculum focuses heavily on the program to meet the learning needs of Black youth; little emphasis is explicitly given to the primacy of the teaching and learning relationship formed between the deliverers and recipients of that curriculum (Toronto District School Board, 2008; Dei, 1996). It is undeniable though that "the quality of children's relationships with their schoolteachers is increasingly recognized as a contributor to school adaptation" (Pianta & Stuhlman, 2004, p. 445; see also Birch & Ladd, 1997; 1998; Howes & Matheson, 1992). Therefore, the place of a caring, supportive and knowledgeable teacher cannot be seconded to the curriculum presented.

Codjoe (2006) hypothesises that in order to successfully teach Black children, "teachers must hold similar expectations for all of their students and provide black students and their parents with positive feedback" (p.50). This dissertation asks have and do Black female teacher provide this kind of supportive and inclusive teaching and if so why are their practices not at the forefront of the education of Black youth?

In other attempts to stem the underachievement of Black youth, researchers call for race and gender matched role models who can provide clear messages about the opportunities available to 'people who look like me' in order to support Black male youth in school (Holland, 1993; Majors & Billson, 1993; Holland, 1996; Zirkel, 2002). As a result of these suggestions, school boards, Faculties of Education, and the Ontario College of Teachers have worked to recruit more minority male teachers to function as role models for Black youth (Bernard, Hill & Wilson, 2004; James, 2007).

There are many critiques of the role model discourse. One highlights the potential of the discourse to "over-emphasize a teacher's race and gender as singular and/or a stable identity" thereby diverting attention away from the "pedagogical conditions necessary for improving the quality of education for minority students" (Rezai-Rashti & Martino, 2009, p.59). Another is the critique

that during our current era of 'new racism[7]', corrective agents, such as role

models, imply that "individual disposition or community cultural standards are

responsible for the reduced circumstances of Black and other minority youth

(James, 2011, p. 92). Further, Balibar's (1991) definition of new racism as

"racism whose dominant theme is not biological heredity but the

insurmountability of cultural differences" (p. 21) is useful to explain the

positioning of Black men then as those who are most able to relate to and

understand the "different" experiences of Black male youth, and so the most

likely to be able to help them.

The scholarly emphasis on Black male role models as a response to the

plight of Black boys in schools has undervalued the place and work of Black

teachers (see Henry 1998; hooks, 1981; Sudarkasa, 1996). My argument in this

paper is not to exalt now the position of the Black female body. Rather, my

argument seeks to remind scholars of the monumental efforts of Black female

teachers in supporting Black children and to give long overdue attention to their

teaching practices. In a sense, I want to bring the silenced narrative of and role of

Black female teacher activism to the fore of educational research and inquiry.

Consequently, my argument then seeks not to dissect the possibilities for

academic success through racial/gender affinity between Black students and

---

[7] James (2011) defines New Racism as an "inconspicuous, even covert approach to issues of
inequity that unambiguously accepts racial preconceptions pertaining to issues of minority group
members" (81-2).

Black teachers, but instead, I wish to explore the attributes of the caring,

supportive and sympathetic teacher of Black youth. It is in light of these

observations that my research will work to reconfigure the *practices* of Black

female teachers as integral to the development of Black youth and in doing so

highlight the contributions that Black female teachers do and can add to the

success of Black and other marginalized youth.

The Place of and Need for Black Teachers in Ontario

If the educational experiences and possibilities for Black learners were

trying during the early days of Black education in Ontario, the experiences of

Blacks teacher could only be described as grim. Furthermore, and similar to the

experiences of Black students, many parallels can be sadly drawn between the

experiences of early Black teachers and today's Black educators.

As both a negative and positive consequence of Ontario's racism in the

1800s, Black teachers were principal to the education of Black children (Cooper,

1991; Winks, 2000). Since the majority of the Black population in Canada

consisted primarily of fugitive slaves from the United States, many of Blacks who

worked in education took it upon themselves to "enhance the opportunities" for

other Black people, or participate in "racial uplift" (Cooper, 1991, p. 95; see also

hooks, 1994; Irvine, 1989; Steady, 1985; Winks, 2000). Like their counterparts in

the United States:

These racial uplift teachers, taught in segregated schools to prepare black

children for freedom, respectability, independence and self-reliance. This

same tradition of black teachers as racial uplift professionals continued

and thrive (Irvine, 1989, p. 54).

Canadian Black teachers such as Josiah Bruce, Mary Bibb and James

Grant "devoted [themselves] to the 'physical, mental and moral education of the

fugitives from American slavery… [and as] teachers for the oppressed" (Cooper,

1991, p. 95). These Black teachers were completely committed to their socio-

political calling. Documentation from the time, shows that they worked for

"starvation wages," and took it upon themselves to "rent a building to keep school

and also buy firewood to heat the classroom" using these minimal wages (Cooper,

1991, p. 50). The conditions under which teachers worked were poor. Letters

written by teachers to the government asking for assistance, cited lack of proper

heating in the winter and leaking roofs in the spring. The teachers likened their

teaching environment to "chicken coops" (McLaren, 2004, p. 43). Further,

beyond the weather conditions of the area, the heavy demands of the job took

their toll on these teachers causing their "minds and bodies [to be] overtasked"

(Cooper, 1991, p. 63). At the time, Black parents and school supporters made a

strong case for the need of Black children to have Black teachers to "serve as role

models. This demand to be role models placed significant pressure on Black

teachers to support the needs of the community even if at times doing so was to

their detriment (Cooper, 1991, p. 59)—an expectation that in the present-day places a tremendous burden on the responsibilities of Black teachers.

This historical context of marginalization continues to place the collective responsibility of responding to Black children on the backs of Black teachers. Black teachers continue to see their role as providing an education for Black children not only for the purpose of their own betterment but as a means of uplifting their communities (Henry, 1998; Irvine, 2002; Lynn, 2006; Solomon, 1997; Tavares-Carter, 2009). And while the physical plant challenges of Black teachers may have abated somewhat, the social and racial challenges still abound; Black teachers continue to work in a field where discrimination and racism make their presence a trying must.

The testimony of Kyle, a grade 12 student featured in *George* Dei's (1997), article *Reconstructing Drop-Out* depicts the negative experiences of Black students, and resonates with the comments of Black parents searching for a good education for their children in earlier times in Ontario. Kyle asks for "…more black teachers…mostly because they'll understand more than any white teacher will understand …." (p. 210). Furthermore, Stewart, Meier and England (1989), attest that "the single most important factor for all second generation discrimination is the proportion of Black teachers" in the school environment (p.140). And as alluded to earlier, in Irvine's (1989) article, *Beyond Role Models,* she states:

Black teachers are more likely than their white counterparts to decrease

minority students' alienation and contribute to their academic success by

serving as cultural translators for mono-cultural at-risk black students who

often fail because the culture of the school is vastly different from the

culture of their home and community (p. 55).

Ironically, it is this same *need* for Black teachers that is pressuring many

Black teachers away from the field. In my research on the experiences of Black

male teachers, one of the primary concerns the respondents had with teaching

today was the depth and breadth of the academic and social expectations placed

on them by students, colleagues and parents. Impossible expectations to serve as

experts in "Blackness", and fears about being seen as 'not being Black enough'[8]

by students but "too Black"[9] by parents and teachers, conflated into what Allen

(1995) and Solomon (1997) refer to as the, "psychological burden" placed on

teachers of color (cited in Tavares-Carter, 2009). And much like the experiences

of the teachers in Ontario in the mid-1850s, one of the greatest causes of this

burden is the Black community itself. As Solomon (1997) asserts, members of the

Black community feel that Black teachers have

---

[8] In being seen as not Black enough, by becoming teachers, respondents feared that students, not used to seeing Black people in the profession would consider them as teachers too removed from their reality and so not really Black (Tavares-Carter, 2009).
[9] In thinking about being 'too Black', respondents discussed concerns about constantly having to pay attention to their language and grammar, being sure to never slip into slang, in order to prevent colleagues and teachers from demeaning them as being not 'suited' for the classroom (Tavares-Carter, 2009).

first-hand knowledge of the Black community could offer social

perspectives arising from a common experience consonant with that of the

students' homes… thrust[ing them] into the role of cultural resources and

experts to their more experienced colleagues (p. 396 & 403).

As a result of these high and often insurmountable expectations, Black teachers

find the burden of teaching overwhelming, yet at the same time, what these

teachers see as their "ontological obligation" to uplift the community keeps them,

like their ancestors, rooted in the field of education (Solomon, 1997; Tavares-

Carter, 2009).

It is important to note as well that the make-up of Black communities in

Ontario have changed over the years. While the majority of Blacks in Canada

were American fugitives in the 1800s, today 57% of Blacks in the Greater

Toronto Area are foreign born with 73% of them coming mainly from Jamaica

and Trinidad (Milan & Tran, 2004, p. 4). These statistics are relevant insofar as

many immigrant, Caribbean students who are mistreated at school are likely to

demonstrate resistance (Folkes, 1993, p. 5). Furthermore, at the high school level,

severe is the adjustment difficulties for Black immigrant students because their

self-identity is well developed (Cummings, Lee & London, 1983). At

adolescence, Demie (2005) argues that there is a need for Black teachers who

possess an 'insider' position to "challenge assumptions and raise expectations of

[Black students] by invoking a traditional view of what would and would not be

acceptable back 'home' in their countries of origin" (p. 499). As well, Black teachers can use the tool of cultural knowledge as a powerful lever in confronting negative behaviour. Demie explains, "The experience of living and being educated in two countries, which many Black staff share, can be seen as a resource giving these teachers a bicultural competence" (p. 499). Teachers with bi-cultural competence can have a powerful impact on achievement, which is crucial in keeping students engaged. Consequently, the place of Black teachers seems to be rooted then in the need for individuals who can bridge the cultural divide that many students continue to face, while also supporting Black children's need for racial, social and cultural upliftment.

Drawing on the ideas of racial, ethnic, cultural and interpersonal competence, this research project will explore the place of the willing Black teacher who becomes essential in supporting the academic needs of the marginalized Black child. As Henry (1998) argues, Black teachers who are conscious of the possible difficulties that Black students may encounter and works to help children mediate those challenges has an important place in the academic development of Black children; not because they are Black, but because they are empathetic.

Black Female Teachers

Historically, Black women teachers in Ontario are undervalued in

education and specifically in regards to their work with Black youth. Although

Black women teachers made up more than 50% of the Black teaching population

in Ontario by 1871, Black women most often made less than half of the wages of

Black men (Cooper 1991). Even more disheartening, evidence from the time

shows that both white officials and members of the Black community(ies)

preferred the employment of Black men as teachers. Black men were felt to be

"better managers of children" and could better handle the administrative work of

teaching (Cooper, 1991 p. 55). Although the impact of racism and sexism will be

taken up further in subsequent chapters, it is important to pause for a moment to

consider the reasons given for the disavowal of Black women teachers' work by

Black communities of the 1850s in order to draw parallels or a bridge between the

experiences of teachers then and now.

Cooper (1991) attributes the negation of Black female teachers' work to a

combination of the prevailing sexist and racist thought and policy structures of the

time (p. 56). hooks (1981) argues that such negations were informed by the

"social control" objectives of the government, as a means of maintaining white

supremacy during a time of newly minted Black liberation. The cohabitating

oppressions of race and gender created an environment whereby Black males

became pitted against Black females which prevented them from working

together to address the injustices of the educational system (hooks, 1981, p. 59-60).

Similarly today, Black female teachers in Ontario makes up the vast majority of the Black teaching population in schools, yet their value is often overlooked or undermined by the unyielding request for Black male teachers. In this way, the place of Black female teachers continues to be manipulated by the gender politics of white heteronormative patriarchy. According to a 2007 Toronto District School Board Report on teacher demographics, Black teachers in the Toronto District School Board number 6% and although the TDSB did not disaggregate their data by race and gender, they did report that male teachers make up less than 30% of their overall teaching population. Consequently, it would not be far-fetched to assume that Black female teachers, while low in number, are still a greater presence in the lives of Black students than that of their Black male colleagues. It seems logical and prudent then, to learn from these women who are currently an available resource and a proven advocate in the quest for Black student achievement.

In her text, *Taking Back Control: African Canadian Women Teachers' Lives and Practices,* Henry (1998), while discussing the benefits of having Black teachers working with Black children, cautions that issues pertaining to "who can successfully teach Black children are not so 'Black and White'" (p.117). She challenges educators and scholars to "interrogate the positionings of minority

teachers and the very discourses which exclude them and which set their oppositionality in place" (p.108).

Henry's works serve to contextualize the contradictory place of Black female teachers in schooling Black male children. My earlier expressions of concern about the Africentric curriculum discourse is with the curriculum's implication that *any* caring adult can teach marginalized Black male youth provided they have the right resources. While in many cases such an assumption may be true, significant bodies of research (see Dei, 1997; Demie, 2005; Irvine, 1989; James & Spowe, 2000; Stewart, Meier & England, 1989) argue that there are advantages to having teachers whose racial, cultural and historical understandings and experiences resonate with the students they teach, particularly in cases where the students are under-classed and marginalized in the school community. As a respondent in Henry's study claims: "That is what we as Black educators have over the white teachers. We hook them into real life situations" (p. 117). Furthermore, the perpetuation of dismal results and experiences by Black students from the 1800s until today, serves as testimony to the reality that current practices and philosophies of majority educators are not successful in meeting the needs of Black learners.

In her conversations with five "womanists" – teachers who work towards the cultural, educational and spiritual survival of Black children - Henry (1998) skilfully articulates the multiple and varied ways that Canadian Black female

teachers can and do support the needs of Black youth (p. 3). Further, in an earlier

article, Henry (1993) argues that the "'surreptitious activism' performed by Black

women…is often unacknowledged" (p.212). However, the work of Black women

teachers, who recognize the particular ways in which race, class and gender

structure students' academic lives, and work to mediate its potential difficult

consequences, is critical to teacher preparation and development. In this study, I

will explore the work of these teachers to provide important insights into the

pedagogical efforts, practices of care and ethical orientations needed to respond to

the educational needs of a marginalized group. As with the teachers of the 1800s,

Henry (1998) found that "often Black women's educational decisions and career

choices are not for individualistic gain, but for Black community empowerment"

(p. 22). Such a finding is in line with Collins' (1986), Senior's (1991), and

Sudarkasa's (1996) explanations that for many Black communities "childrearing

is usually a shared responsibility between mother and others. In many cases an

other does become the substitute mother, moving from caring for to rearing the

child" (in Henry, 1998, p. 24). It is in this light then that Mogadime's (2000)

defining of Black female teachers as othermothers signifies an "ethics of caring

which Black women teachers impart to Black children as a part of their

commitment to the survival and wholeness of the communities" (p. 223).

Consequently, Black female teachers, dedicated to social activism, through her

desire to better the position of Black students and dedicated to her work as an

othermother, can be very influential in supporting Black, and all youth in schooling.

Theoretical Framework

This dissertation employs Black Feminist Theory and Critical Race Theory to analyze the complicated and often conflicting experiences of Black women teachers in schooling. I use Black Feminist theory to frame the lives of teachers interviewed in this study. Critical race theory supports the analysis of the discourses of race and racism that confront teachers as they enact their educational response to marginalized students in public schools. My analysis addresses the multiple, conflicting, and intersecting world views present in the classroom informing the experiences of the minority Black woman teacher in a majority setting (Dei, 2002; Harris-Perry, 2011; hooks, 1981). Consequently, the use of these two approaches complement each other and generate critical insight into how gender and race intersect and play out on the bodies of Black women, particularly in the social context of schools.

Black Feminist Theory

Black feminist theorists claim that, "sexism operates independently of and simultaneously with racism to oppress" Black women (hooks, 1981, p. 8; Collins, 2000). In other words, sexism, along with racism, is an important dynamic of oppression in the lived realities of Black women. As Wane (2009) articulates:

Black women's simultaneous embodiment of blackness and

femaleness leaves them between the categories of race and sex, thus

forcing them to divide and prioritize their identities that are integral to

their self-concepts and life experience (p. 150).

Intersectionality of social difference is critical to this project concerned

with the work and place of Black female teachers in that oftentimes, because of

media over-representations, Black women's struggle with sexism is often

seconded to her fight for racial equality, without the realization that one form of

dehumanization is just as oppressive as the other (hooks, 1981; Lemons 2008).

Following Few (2007), Wane (2009), emphasizes, "Black feminism is a

standpoint theory that transcends the arguments of mere identity politics and

actively examines the politics of location in the lives of Black women and the

groups of which they are a part" (p. 150). Black women teachers occupy the

location of school in precarious ways. Their inclusion in the education system is

an attempt to garner political freedom and mobility for their community, but also

secures their complicity in the very system that oppresses their communities.

Black feminist theory "reflects women's efforts to come to terms with lived

experiences within" these intersecting oppressions (Collins, 2000, p. 12); a task

with which this dissertation also grapples.

Beginning with slavery as the catalyst for Black female subjugation, Black

feminist theory shows how the practices of Black female slaves were undervalued

in relation to their male counterpoints. This undervaluing of Black women's work continues today (Davies, 1994; hooks, 1981). Further, the systematic rape of Black women by white male slaveholders during and following slavery, "led to the devaluation of Black womanhood that permeated the psyches of all Americans" (hooks, 1981, p. 52), and by migratory extension, Canadians. As mentioned earlier, systemic depreciation of Black womanhood was not just a result of racism; it was a deliberate process of social control which worked to keep Black men and women at odds "instead of working together to challenge imperialist white-supremacist capitalist patriarchy" (hooks, 2004). As a result, I am vigilant that my focus, Black female teachers' education of the Black child, is not at the expense of Black males (hooks, 1981). My work seeks to find a collective response to and responsibility for the education of Black children.

In Black Feminist Theory, Black woman's position highlights the significance of child-raising rather than the absence of husbands and fathers (Collins, 2009). Certainly, Black Feminist Theory does not argue for divisive politic with Black men but instead sees the acute need for:

> Black women and Black men to work together to oppose all forms of domination in and outside of our communities-across gender and sexual differences...to ensure that our fight for self-determination is not trapped in sexist and homophobic dogma (Lemons, 2008, p. 32).

Because Black Feminist Theory positions itself as a heterogeneous theory, open to the voices and experiences of many, it does not "subsume all sorts of submerged identities. Instead it is a series of intersecting circles with a range of positions and locations" (Davies, 1994, p. 31). Using Black feminist theory this dissertation rejects divisive identity positions to explore how Black women are, "complex, diverse and multifaceted" (Henry, 1998) in their teaching of Black children. Accordingly, the stories and lessons my work offers are not for "the dominant group's consumption" but for our communal development (Henry, 1998).

Finally, and central to this study, Black feminist theory also emphasizes the historical relevance of the work – paid and unpaid, formal and informal - that Black women have done, and also explores the ways in which these efforts, much like the work of Black female teachers, have been overlooked and silenced (Davis, 1994; hooks, 1981).

Critical Race Theory

Complementing Black feminist theory, is critical race theory (CRT) which explores the intersections of race, class and gender by examining and critiquing "racism in contemporary Western capitalist societies," acknowledging at its outset, racism's inherent position in structures and institutions like school (Gillborn, 2008, p. 22). CRT begins by situating race as the "central construct for understanding inequality" and by asserting that racism is an 'ordinary and

everyday' occurrence for people of colour (Abrams & Moio, 2009; Ladson-Billing & Tate, 1995, p. 50). Consequently, Black children's and teachers' daily school experiences are tainted by the negative shadows and outcomes attributed to racism and racist policies and practices (Ladson-Billings and Tate, 1995).

Critical Race theory also allows for a perspective of race as 'fluid', a distinction crucial to a dissertation project concerned as much with the actions and intersections of racialized teachers teaching racialized minorities, as it is with the socially constructed aesthetics affected by it (Delgado and Stefancic, 2000). Abrams and Moio (2009) describe differential racialization as, "the process whereby dominant social discourses and people in power can racialize groups of people in different ways at different times depending on historic, social or economic need" (p. 251). On one hand, Black teachers are seen as "lesser than" their white counterpart, but at the same time are also seen as the only ones able to 'save' Black learners. How the respondents in this study conceptualize their own and others' Blackness varies and changes as a result of and in response to their context, histories, experiences, impositions etc. Avoiding the pitfalls of universalizing Blackness, the orientation of my study is to listening to the varied stories to qualify Black female teachers' identities and experiences of Blackness and to learn how teachers use these experiences as resources for teaching mediating their actions inside and outside the classroom. As Ladson-Billings (1998) explains:

CRT suggests that current instructional strategies presume that Black

students are deficient. As a consequence classroom teachers are engaged

in a never ending quest for '*the* right strategy or technique' to deal with

(read: control) 'at-risk' (read: African American) students (sic). Cast in a

language of failure, instructional approaches for African American

students typically involve some aspect of remediation.... [Instead] affirm

the integrity of effective teachers of [Black] students... underscoring the

teachers' understanding of the salience of race in education and the society

and underscoring the need to make racism explicit so that students can

recognize and struggle against this particular form of oppression (p. 19).

Accordingly, I use CRT to think further about what we can learn from

Black female teachers who, as a result of her own contradictory lived experiences

and her historic dedication to the success of Black youth, offers a window into

helping marginalized Black youth navigate their own racialized experiences at

school and in society.

CRT argues that our multicultural education system creates a vacuum

whereby conversations about race and concomitantly racism, get obscured or

ignored thereby re-imposing the very discrimination it is claiming to remove

(Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Further, CRT "highlights the ways in which

teachers are ill-prepared for the realities of their increasingly diverse learners"

(Abrams and Moio, 2009, p. 252).

Like with, Multicultural Education, Equity education, seeks "equity of outcome" which mirrors Multicultural Education's quest for sameness and equal treatment (Ladson-Billings, 1998). However, Equity education does not explicitly address the impact of racism on the lives of the students who "may be at-risk of lower achievement" (p. 5). Further, while Equity Education mandates that school boards, schools and teachers ensure their curriculum "is reflective of the students in their learning environment", no mention is made of explicitly addressing the systemic barriers and structural inequities that keep students from learning and achieving (p. 5). In these ways then, Equity education is doomed to repeat the failures of Multicultural Education. More problematic, since racism is so deeply embedded in the social fabric that it operates invisibly, Equity Education is likely to help reify the already fixed conceptions of race which are at the root of current inequalities (Abrams & Moio, 2009).

Finally and most important to this research is the value that both Critical Race Theory and Black Feminist Theory place on storytelling. Through the value placed on human voice and experiences:

> myths, assumptions and received wisdoms can be questioned by
>
> shifting the grounds of debate or presenting analyses in ways
>
> that turn dominant assumptions on their heads (Gillborn, 2008, p. 31).

In this way, the lessons to be learned from the narratives of Black Women Teachers serve as testimony[10] of the lives and experiences of some racialized, marginalized Black students and teachers in Ontario. Their counter stories can provide a means to challenge demeaning and silenced discourses and representations about the capacities of Black youth are capable and the generative teachings Black female teachers bring to the profession.

Conclusion

Through a historical overview of the experiences of Black learners and teachers in Ontario, this chapter highlights the perpetuation of marginalization schooling enacts for Black people in Ontario. From the early 1800s up until today Black learners continue to find themselves barred from the curriculum and pedagogical imperatives of mainstream schooling. Further, Canadian Black women teachers continue to finds their efforts with Black youth in the classroom denigrated when historically these teachers used teaching as a means of racial uplift, and have proven themselves valuable in the success of Black youth. Through the theoretical frames of Black Feminist Theory and Critical Race Theory, this dissertation seeks to bring to the fore of the education of Black youth

---

[10] I use Felman (1992) to think about testimony as "bearing witness to a crisis or trauma" (p.1). Insofar as the (mis) education of Black youth in Ontario has been a crisis of education for over 150 years, I see the Black female teacher as a witness (both unwilling and complicit by her presence) to the disservice and so in a position to "speak for other and to others" (p. 3). What the Black woman teacher has to offer is greater than the individual in that it has the power to transform a system, if the listener is prepared to listen.

the voices and lessons of Black female teachers. These teachers' lessons, stories

and experiences can guide future practice on meeting the needs of marginalized

learners.

Chapter Two

Research Agenda

This chapter discusses the methods used in the study of five Canadian

Black women teachers' pedagogical orientations and practices with Black youth.

This chapter seeks to specify how and in what ways the research questions were

addressed through a discussion of the methodologies, ethical considerations and

research design.

Research Questions

As detailed in chapter 1, the main research questions for this study into the

experiences of Canadian Black women teachers are as follows:

- What can we learn from Canadian Black Women Teachers' experiences in

  teaching?

- How can their lessons transform our thinking about meeting the

  educational needs of marginalized students and teachers?

Additional Questions guiding the research are:

- How do Black Women Teachers experience teaching?

- How have their experiences shaped their practice and understanding of

  education?

- What do Black Women Teachers see as the successes and challenges of

  teaching in a Canadian context?

- How do Black Women Teachers negotiate the demands and intricacies of supporting marginalized students in a culture of "accountability" and "consistency"?

- Given the current discourse about the need for educational support for Black males, what role do women teachers play in the education of Black male youth?

Methodology

Addressing the above questions, the study used qualitative research methods involving human participants. Qualitative research methods better allow the researcher to "approach the inherent complexities of social interaction and to do justice to that complexity, to respect it in its own right" (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992, p. 7). As noted in chapter one, I entered this study understanding that the experiences of Black women teachers are individual. While there are some common experiences, I conducted this study with the recognition that the individual life and unique social contexts of each teacher shaped both their experience and their understanding of the experience. The use of qualitative research allows me as a researcher to enter into the teachers' conversations about their experiences. My aim to theoretically inform and qualify the complexities of their lived experiences themselves is at the heart of the study.

Bryman and Teevan (2005) indicate that qualitative research "embodies a view of social reality as constantly shifting and emergent property of individual

creations" (p. 15). Adopting the perspectives of these researchers, I see the relationship between Black women teachers, the teaching profession, and Black youth – males in particular - as a multifaceted one, fraught with political, social, gendered, raced, and historical tensions. In order to tease out the nature and shades of some of these multi-layered relationships, approaches that allow for the hearing of these teachers' voices must be utilized. Bryman and Teevan, also note that the stress in qualitative research "is on understanding the social world by examining the participants' interpretations of their world" (p.144). To meet this aim, my methods consisted of semi-structured, in-depth individual interviews and one focus group interview. Using two interviewing styles enabled me to use a variety of speaking forums in which to elicit Black women teachers' narratives depicting their experiences in their schools and classrooms.

Silverman (2000) suggests that qualitative interviewing allows the researcher to "focus on actual practice, looking at how social interactions are routinely enacted" (p. 283). Greenspan and Bolkosky (2006) further argue that the interview has the potential to be a "collaboration" between the researcher and the respondent. They call for an ethically just research process that goes beyond merely being "open" to the voices of the respondents towards being "in the process, in the rhythm, in the co-labouring that good interviews entail" (p. 432). The goal of the research then is not for the researcher to "take-over" the

interview, but to listen otherwise[11] to what the respondents tells us. Using this

ethical orientation, I endeavoured to listen to the voices of participants in order to

explore the dynamics of their relationships in the school, classroom and with

marginalized Black male youth.

I prepared for each individual interview by conducting pre-meetings with

each participant. These meetings served to: (1) confirm though our dialogue that

the women worked with Black youth in accordance with the principles of

community uplift (see Chapter One); and (2) establish a rapport as a means of

limiting any discomfort she may have felt about the interview. At the pre-meeting,

respondents were shown a copy of the interview questions to help them prepare

for the sessions to come and know in advance what to expect.

Once participants confirmed their involvement, I conducted in-depth,

individual interviews with each respondent. I began each interview with the

assumption that the participants had "unique and important knowledge about the

social world" (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2006, p. 119). In-depth interviews are "issue

oriented" so this methodology becomes useful when there is a particular topic that

needs to be addressed or insights need to be gained (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2006).

In this case, the topic discussed in-depth was the underachievement of Black

---

[11] Lipari (2009) explains the concept of listening otherwise as a process whereby the listener/researcher opens him/herself to hearing, attending, observing, attuning and so receiving the otherness of the other for "without listening there simply can be no response." Like Lipari, I use the terms collaborating and being in the research to exemplify my obligation to the participants as one who will hear and record their stories justly (47).

youth in Canadian schools. As well, "in-depth interviews are very useful for accessing subjugated voices and getting at subjugated knowledge. Those who have been marginalized in a society...may have hidden experiences and knowledge that have been excluded from our understanding of social reality" (2006, p 123). The academic decline of Black students, males in particular, is a societal issue that has already been proven to need addressing (Brown & Sinay, 2006; Dei, 1997; James 2007; 2011).

In-depth interviews also helped me highlight the largely ignored role of Black women teachers in addressing the systemic marginalization of Black youth in school. In-depth interviews with Black women teachers allowed me to unearth stories that might have otherwise been left unheard. As well, with only 6% of the Toronto teaching population being Black, Black activist[12] women teachers sit in a unique position -- they work daily to construct knowledge while surrounded by and often battle the proliferation of white hegemonic discourse (Henry, 1998). Use of in-depth interviews allowed for some of these stories to be heard and carefully analyzed, which further attests to the scholarly value of the voices of these women.

---

[12] As discussed in chapter one, I do not consider *any* or *every* Black women teacher as innately dedicated to the success of Black students. On the contrary, I do believe that any teacher, caring and dedicated to the success of students, regardless of their colour, are best suited to addressing Black youth's needs. That being said, historically, it has been the Black woman teacher, dedicated to Black success, who has proven to be the most dedicated to Black youth academic success.

I took themes emerging from the individual sessions to form the basis of our focus group conversation. Participants were asked to elaborate upon their experiences with particular topics and ideas discussed in the individual interviews. My questions focussed on the place and position of Black women Canadian teachers (exceptions include Cooper, 1991; 1994; Henry, 1993). While I can speculate, because of my own experiences as a teacher, about some of the concerns and experiences these women have had, I am aware that there is much more to their experiences taking into account the variations in our experiences, positions and teaching subjects. Consequently, I tried to utilize the focus group interview in order to elicit a "depth and breadth to a subject very little is known about" (p.98).

After each individual interview, and prior to the focus group session, respondents received a copy of the transcriptions from our first session. Attached to their copy was a note indicating the key themes that were drawn from their individual sessions, to be redressed by participants at anytime. Each participant's transcriptions were read multiple times, both in isolation, in relation to the other respondents' transcriptions and in relation to my own field notes, gathered during each session. In the field notes, I recorded sentences that struck me, or that I noticed as the interviews progressed seemed to be repeated by multiple respondents.

It is these field notes and my review of the transcriptions that formed the basis for the theme extractions (Miles, Huberman and Saldana, 2013). Phrasing or ideas that were repeated on multiple occasions by multiple respondents were combined and developed into theme statements. The key themes which emerged in the individual interviews were:

- Empathy for Black learners

- Paying attention - focus on the Black learner

- Relationship building with parents, staff and students

- Culturally relevant and engaging pedagogy

- Identity and burdens of the Black female teacher

Once I had determined these to be the key themes coming from the interviews, the respondents were then given copies of the transcripts including a short note which indicating the themes I pulled and asking for their input in case they disagreed.

Giving each respondent time to review, clarify, strike or make changes to their words supported me to verify my own theme extractions and findings with the participants' interpretation of their experiences. The participants were provided the opportunity to contribute their own thoughts and feelings towards my findings to lessen anxiety whatever anxiety that they might have experienced during the research process.

As stated, after conducting individual interviews, participants came together for a focus group interview. Focus group interviews allowed for "shared

impressions" to be articulated and explored (Rubin & Rubin, 1995, p. 28). There are diverse views on the effectiveness of focus group interviews. Rubin and Rubin (1995) warn that participants may not be fully honest during a focus group interview, since they are in the presence of strangers. Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2006) counter by noting that the strength of the focus group interview is its ability to tease out unforeseen issues in a topic. This ability, the authors claim, outweigh such a concern as participants have of the rare opportunity to meet and share with others who may also have experienced the same challenges they have. I was also fortunate in this study to have recruited respondents who, with the exception of one, had interacted with each other casually on numerous occasions prior to the interview. The focus group interview, as a kind of "cultural interview," works to elicit "examples and stories that reveal how people understand their world… [and] the values that underlie their accounts" (Hesse-Biber and Leavy, 1995, p. 28). It is these stories and these values that are of greatest interest to the research, as the stories highlighting the practices of successful Black women teachers inform knowledge claims made in this thesis.

The women in this study felt that the themes I uncovered in reviewing their transcripts were true to their foci while in school and so no one requested changes to the themes. It was however during the focus group discussion of each of these themes that the focus narrowed and some themes collapsed into the three that form the chapters of this dissertation. Conversations about having empathy

and paying attention to Black boys formed the basis of chapter three: "The roles and responsibilities of Black women teachers" as the women in this study saw both paying particular attention to Black youth and being empathetic towards Black youth as their responsibility. Discussions on culturally responsive and engaging pedagogy as well as relationship building melded into chapter 5: "Lessons from Canadian Black women teachers." The only theme which remained as was shared in the individual interviews was the theme on the "Burdens and negotiations of Black women teachers."

Using both in-depth individual interviews and focus group interviews proved useful in that I understand that no one method has the ability to provide all the insight and information needed to get at another's experience (Darbyshire, MacDougall & Schiller, 2005). Indeed, there is no measure encompassing enough to untangle the varied and interwoven experience that is the intersecting oppressions that the women in this study face (Hesse-Biber, 2000). However using multiple qualitative methods did provide spaces where ideas and contradictions could be uncovered in the individual interview and re-considered in the focus group interview.

Further, Hesse-Biber (2010) argues that, "a researcher must be willing to be reflective and ask whether adding a second method will serve to enhance the qualitative understanding of his or her project" (p. 467). Using only one method to explore the experiences of Black women teachers in this study, would have left

much of their ideas and sharings open to my interpretation. In understanding my position as teacher-researcher, I was conscious of not imposing my experiences onto the participants (Kirby, Greaves & Reid, 2006). Using a second method, which gave the respondents the space to clarify, expand or adjust early arguments, left less room for researcher interpretive error.

Finally, I employed a semi-structured format for both sets of interviews because the latitude afforded by the semi-structured format enabled me to "ask additional questions in response to what is seen as significant replies" (Bryman & Teevan, 2005, p. 71). Such capacity is important, for although I am an "insider" to the larger community of Black women, activist teachers, I do not presume to share identical experiences to those of the respondents. As Kirby, Greaves and Reid (2006) note, "insiderness is not a fixed or static position, but an ever shifting and permeable social location" (p. 38). Differences in context, age, class, ability, and/or culture will invariably mark their experiences as different to my own. The latitude given to me by the semi-structured interview allowed me to acknowledge these differences and learn more through questioning, thereby getting to the heart of the participants' experiences.

Questions for the interviews primarily took the form of narrative inquiry and life-history questions (See Appendix B). Narrative inquiry "focuses on the use of stories as data…as a means of understanding experiences as lived and told (Baden & van Nierkerk 2007, p.459). Coupled with narrative inquiry, life history

questions allow respondents to reflect on their life path and explain how they understand their world as a result of these experiences (Bryman & Teevan 2005). Combined, these two questioning methodologies provided the opportunity to understand a trajectory of events that brought these women to teaching, how they understand the development of their relationships with Black youth, specifically boys, and most importantly, their experiences or understandings of the ways educational discourses shape their pedagogy and practices.

Research Participants

To focus the conversation on Black female teachers' pedagogies and practices, five Black women teachers, engaged in work with Black youth, were selected from secondary schools in one Greater Toronto Area school board. Studies indicate that academic and social problems arise for Black students in their junior and intermediate years of schooling. Researchers identify adolescence as a time when many parents, teachers, community members, and researchers agree, is crucial to the positive cultural identity and social development of the adolescent male (Dei, 1997; 2006; James, 2011; Lawson-Bush, 2004; Marks & Tonso, 2006; Rezai-Rashti & Martino, 2009; Solomon 1992; 1997; Yon, 2000). Therefore, learning from the practices of secondary school teachers who are most likely to be present in Black youth's lives at the time is most relevant to this study.

In order to ascertain each participant's level of commitment to the success of Black youth, during the pre-meeting I discussed with each of them the project and spent time discussing her entry into teaching and work as a teacher. During this preliminary conversation, each participant expressed her explicit desire to support the learning needs of Black students as the impetus for deciding to become a teacher. She also discussed strategies and supports she currently employs, both inside and outside the classroom, to support the learning needs of marginalized students. I made the decision to select teachers from the same school board to ensure all participants came from a common discourse community, in regards to policies, procedures and expectations.

In the following section I provide a brief demographic and biographical information outline for each teacher. At the end, a chart is included for comparative purposes. In accordance to the ethical guidelines of this study, pseudonyms are used in the place of the teachers' real names.

Lynette

Lynette is a 27 year old high school Physical Education, Family Studies and Alternative Education teacher. At the time of the interview she had been teaching for less than five years. Born in the United States of America and immigrating to Canada as an adolescent, Lynette experienced schooling in both locations; elementary school in the United States, secondary school in Ontario Canada. Her early schooling took place in Florida, in what she described as a "predominantly

white area" where racism and assumptions about her Blackness ran rampant. Her

mother's Jamaican background and her father's Southern American upbringing

formed the basis of her understanding of Blackness and herself. Lynette indicated

that she became a teacher because she had two high school teachers that "*took the*

time to build a relationship with" her and were "*able to connect with [her] as a*

student with some of the issues that [she] had going on in high school as well"

(Individual Interview, Lynette, p. 2).

Melanie

Melanie is a 44 year old Business teacher and Chair of the Business Department

at her school. Melanie was born in Jamaica and emigrated to Canada at 7 years

old, just a month before her father passed away. Consequently, while Melanie

experienced some elementary schooling in Jamaica, she received schooling

mostly in Ontario, Canada. She came to teaching later in life after working as an

accountant for twelve years. Melanie indicated that she became a teacher, less

than 10 years ago, because she "*had a calling...feeling that there was something*

[she] could do to help students." She wanted to "*share her accounting and*

leadership experiences in the corporate world with students...especially Black

students" (Individual Interview, Melanie, p.1).

Angela

At 57 years of age, Angela is the most senior teacher respondent in this study. A

French and Spanish teacher and the Chair of the Modern Languages Department

at her school, Angela's teaching career spans more than 23 years with all of those years spent at the same secondary school. Emigrating to Canada from Trinidad in the 1970s, Angela's schooling experiences took place primarily in Trinidad and she completed two Master's degrees (one in Second Language Teaching, the other in Education) in Ontario, Canada. Angela indicates that she wanted to be a teacher "*like Mrs. Walker. She taught penmanship and the way [Angela] writes now is because of her*" (Individual Interview, Angela, p.1).

Keisha

Keisha, 36 years old, is one of 2 teacher-respondents who recently became a Vice-Principal. Keisha has been teaching for a little over 10 years. As a teacher, Keisha taught in the History, Special Education and Guidance departments, holding down Headships in the latter two departments before moving into Administration. Born in Toronto and having lived in New York and Edmonton, Keisha's readily admits that her schooling history was complex and often difficult. Her elementary schooling experience was split between Edmonton for kindergarten to grade three, while grades four to eight were spent in New York and high school was completed in Toronto. Keisha wanted to become a teacher after completing a work-placement in an elementary school. She felt "*inspired along the way and felt [she] could be of some assistance at the high school level*" (Individual Interview, Keisha. p.4).

Michelle

The fifth respondent, Michelle is 42 years old. She began teaching in 1992. Over the course of her 20 year career she has taught in the elementary program (grades two and eight) as well as in the English, Guidance, Alternative Education, and Visual Arts Departments of secondary schools. She held headships in both Guidance and Visual Arts before becoming an Administrator. Being schooled in Jamaica during her elementary years, Michelle, like Angela and Lynette, credits the wonderful teachers she encountered with sparking her interest in teaching. Michelle migrated to Canada when she was 9 and worked closely with her dad, whom she says "*saw a disparity in the services for youth from the West Indies*" and so she decided to commit to education as a means of challenging these discrepancies (Individual Interview, Michelle, p. 2).

The following figure provides a comparative chart of the teachers' general life history and experiences in schooling. The chart has been included to help situate the relations between the teachers as well as contextualize their individual experiences.

Name	Age	Length of Teaching Career	Teaching Subjects	Additional Qualifications	Where attended school	Age of Migration to Canada
Lynette	27	< 5 years	Physical Ed Family Studies	Honours Specialist Health & Phys Ed	Florida, US Toronto, CA	12 yrs
Melanie	44	<10 years	Math Business Studies	Honours Specialist Business Guidance	Jamaica Toronto, CA	7 yrs
Angela	57	20+ years	French Spanish	Honours Specialist Spanish Dramatic Arts	Trinidad Spain Toronto, CA	21 yrs
Keisha	36	+10 years	History Individual & Society	Honours Specialists Special Education & Guidance Principals Quals	Toronto, CA Edmonton, CA New York, US	Born in Canada
Michelle	42	+20 years	Visual Arts English	Honours Specialists English, Visual Arts & Guidance Principals Quals	Jamaica Toronto, CA	9 yrs

Research Setting

Individual meetings with respondents took place in a quiet location of the

respondents choosing. All respondents asked to have the meeting at their school

location, after school hours. Although I proposed to have the sessions off school

site to prevent the location from influencing the perceived freedom of the

conversation, ease and accessibility for the respondents made school their

preferred choice (Kirby, Greaves & Reid 2006). Because we were in empty

offices and classrooms, long after school ended, most respondents felt at least moderately comfortable to record the session there. On one occasion, Melanie and I were interrupted by the custodian cleaning the school. The distraction, I felt, interrupted her confidence causing me to pause the interview until after his exit in order to confirm whether or not she was still comfortable to continue.

On another occasion, I met Keisha in her office at school, adjacent to the Principal's office. While Keisha appeared quite comfortable and ready to share, I was uncomfortable conducting the interview in direct proximity of her superior given the frank conversation we were having about her many experiences, in that school. Although I asked Keisha on multiple occasions if she would like us to reschedule or relocate, her defiance towards moving the interview location indicated to me (very positively) that she was defiant towards school administration and strong and confident with her views. For both Michelle and Angela being at school was generative. The school context held mementos and artifacts of teaching that these teachers relied on, pointed out, and referred to during the session. These teaching objects animated experiences and provided evidence of their work, motivation, and impact in education. The numerous displays of the physical manifestations of their work provided testimony of their triumphs and learnings as educators.

In contrast, the focus group session took place at my home. Because of the distances between home locations for each respondent, we felt that my home was

central for all. My past interactions with the participants allowed them to feel

comfortable talking there. Prior to the interview, a meal was served as a means of

bringing the group together and forming a relationship before the session. During

dinner, respondents chatted in a cursory way about many of the issues to be

delved into during the session. Once we began the interview, respondents sat

comfortably in the kitchen for much longer than the prescribed two-hour recorded

session. The group was very relaxed with each other, and because of the

demographic data sharing and commonalities in experiences, the women teachers

involved were all very vocal. The interview resembled a kitchen table

conversation where women are engaged in what the other has to say, adding to or

questioning each other's comments; no one got lost in the process as all were very

willing to share. By the end of the session, the women found the dialogue to be

such a positive and uplifting experience that they suggested that we continue

meeting as a kind of support and learning group over the coming year.

Data Gathering Procedures

Dazin (1970) recommends that a "combination of data gathering methods

be used to examine a single research focus" (cited in Kirby & McKenna 1989, p.

81). With Dazin's recommendation in mind, I designed interview questions

(Appendix B) and also collected demographic data such as age, country of origin,

teaching subjects etc. Narrative and life history questions composed the rest of the

human participant research. Early on during both interviews (as a means of

establishing commonalities and points for conversation departure), I asked

demographic questions as a means of easing the participants into the interview

process. During the individual interviews, once I sensed a readiness on the part of

the respondent towards the process, the life history and narrative questions

worked to "construct case histories" of the respondents, allowing me to document

their experiences in school, both as learners and teachers (1989, p. 82). All forms

of data collection was then used to create a portrait of some of the historic,

systemic and personal experiences that drive the instructional practices of these

Black women teachers when working in school.

During each session, anecdotal notes were taken to capture the

conversations. However, since "writing interpretations, descriptions and

narratives of respondents silences then and puts them at risk" audio recording,

with the permission of the participants, simultaneously occurred in order to lessen

the risk against and increase the probability for honesty and accuracy in my

account of their words and ideas (Magolda & Robinson, 1993, p. 9).

Data Analysis Procedures

Qualitative research is often charged with being a subjective analysis of

reality (Bryman & Teevan, 2005). And Bogden and Biklen (1982) demand that

researchers "tell the truth when writing up reports…for the important trademark

of a researcher should be his or her devotion to reporting what the data revealed"

(1982 p. 50). This said, Glesne and Peshkin remind us that "writing is a political

act," that has consequences" (cited in Magolda & Robinson 1993, p. 16). As a result, I transcribed the data, making sure that my transcriptions were true to the participants' articulations. Further, to ensure the safety and comfort of the participants, each respondent was given opportunities to review and edit the transcripts throughout the research process and the writing of the final draft of the dissertation. Participants were told that if they were uncomfortable with any part of the transcript, the section would be stricken from the record without fear of recourse.

I understand that "fieldworkers have an ethical commitment to further dialogue and interact with respondents after the writing" (Magdola & Robinson, 1993 p. 16). To this end, and as a consequence of my ongoing professional and personal relationships with the respondents, I periodically communicated with the respondents to find out how they were doing and discuss issues pertinent to our working or family lives. By doing so, I was following up with each respondent to assess the possibility for residual harm from the memories and stories relived during the interview (Glesne & Peshkin, 1993).

Kirby and McKenna (1989) indicate that "it is advisable to delay using [documents] until the initial data gathering is complete and [the researcher has] a better first hand sense of how individuals with the specific experience make sense of that experience" (p. 102). For this reason I waited until the interviews were completed and analyzed to look to the supporting literature discussing the themes

and the experiences of Black women teachers in Canada. However, Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2006) remind us that "qualitative data analysis is an iterative process" of data collection and data analysis (p. 104). Consequently, "memoing"-- the act of writing memos to myself about my ideas or hunches—(after each interview) became a part of my procedure (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2006). Using the memoing method, I felt "more reflexive about [my] positionality and how it was impacting" my research as I was able to continually think through and question myself on my interpretations of the ideas and thoughts presented by the respondents (Hesse-Biber and Leavy, 2006 p. 142).

As indicated, I did textual research as a part of the methodology for this dissertation. Jones (1985) explains that textual research stems directly from its original French meaning of *"recerchier,* which means to seek out or search again" (p. 104). Labovitz and Hagedorn (1976) discuss the relevance of textual research as having "great potential for social inquiry…because the researcher cannot sensitize his subject" (p. 84). Jones concurs, indicating that:

> If the data were collected for a purpose other than what you have in mind and if they have already been collected and filed away, then it is impossible for you to bias the data collection process. In that sense the use of pre-existing records and texts is relatively non-reactive or unobtrusive (p.104).

Regardless, Katzer, Cook and Crouch (1998) warn that "the printed word has an enormous power...secondary sources were not put together with the researcher's problem in mind...getting something in print does not necessarily mean that it is truthful" (p. 47). For as Kirby and McKenna (1989) point out, "much of what has been written and documented, has not incorporated the voices or experiences of those on the margins" (p. 102). Consequently, I am aware that text, and my interpretation of text, is as value-laden as is all human participant work. I strived to keep in mind that "All too often, research documents don't speak to the actualities of [those] involved, even though they may claim to represent that experience" (p.102). To counter this caution, I completed "an evaluative literature review" whereby I move beyond descriptions of the literature, to instead put them in conversation, looking for gaps, discrepancies and commonalities (p.102).

Ethical Concerns in the Research Process

Ethics in research requires the researcher to *first do no harm* to the participants. The nature of my research did not require that I manipulate or misinform the participants of my intentions. All participants were informed of the nature of the project and the mandate for my work. I wanted participants to be as honest as they were willing to be with me, and so I clearly divulged: (1) my motivation - a desire to alter the discourse about the place of Black women

teachers in education, specifically the educational development of Black youth;
(2) my goal - to explore the successful and useful practices of Black women
teachers when working with black youth; and (3) my intentions - to learn from
their practice to broaden our understandings of what is successful practice in the
schooling of Black adolescent males.

A consent form, attached in Appendix A, was given to prospective
participants explaining the design of the research and asking for their willingness
to participate. Guba and Lincoln (1989) argue that relationship between
researcher and participants is paramount in and takes precedence over traditional
research goals such as the quest for truth. I took anecdotal notes, with the
furtherance of a recorder to document the sessions once the participants agreed to
ensure accuracy and honesty to their words. Kirby and McKenna (1989)
emphasize the notion that "there is always interpretation involved in doing life
histories.... It is important that who is doing the research and how the
interpretations are made receive equal billing" (p.83). As a result I understood that
it was my responsibility as researcher to ensure that my "focus on the
participants' intentions in making the recording must have paramount
consideration and place in the reporting" (p.83).

The issue of anonymity is a complex one when the pool of respondents is
as small as my project and the school board they are coming from employs so few
Black women teachers. Magolda and Robinson (1993) point out that "it is critical

for the researcher to understand the limits of confidentiality" (p. 12). For as Eisner (1991) notes, in good qualitative research "the people described become real, and even if no one can identify the situations or the people studied, those studied can: hence the potential for pain and elation is always there" (cited in Magolda and Robinson 1993, p.12). I recognize that the number of Black women teachers in the Greater Toronto Area is relatively small and so it is possible, though unlikely, for readers of my dissertation to attempt identification of one or more of the participants. As a result, school names were not used, nor were real names or specific grade assignments given; pseudonyms were used.

Secondly, participants were asked to adhere to the request that research discussions be kept confidential. I endeavored to ensure that all data generated from this study remains confidential to the fullest extent possible. Only my supervisor and I had access to the data collected. Audio recordings of the interview(s), following completion of the transcription, were destroyed. The hard copy was not labeled in any way that identified the participants and hard copies are being kept in a locked filing cabinet, and will be for two years at which time they will be shredded.

Egalitarian Setting and Relationship between Interviewer and the Participants

Although I hold an insider position as a Black woman activist teacher, I recognize that during the research process I also held the identity of researcher.

My selections of the in-depth interview, coupled with the focus group interview, were purposeful in that "the degree of division and hierarchy between researcher and researched is typically low, as researcher and researched are placed on the same plane" (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2006, p. 119). My desire for an egalitarian relationship is rooted in a need to have a comfortable relationship with my respondents whereby I am trusted enough to be honestly and fully spoken to, without making the respondents feel that I am being "invasive" (Kirby & McKenna 1989).

Through the research activities my desire was to listen carefully to the stories and experiences of these Black women teachers who have been working tirelessly and diligently to support the learning needs of Black youth.

Conclusion

This chapter reviews the various methodologies employed in this dissertation. In order to listen justly to experiences and lessons that Black women teachers provide, qualitative research methods were employed. By utilizing in-depth and focus group interviews, I was able to hear and document the teaching experiences of five Canadian Black women teachers. Once complete, textual research complemented their stories in order to assist in the development of theoretical understandings of how their lessons can transform current pedagogy and practice in the classroom.

Chapter Three

The Roles and Responsibilities of Black Women Teachers

In this first of three data chapters, I draw from the narratives of the teachers in the study to explore how the respondents came to teaching and how they understand their roles in the profession. In order to set the context, I begin with a brief discussion of narratives of becoming teachers. I then organize, analyze, and narrate the teachers' articulations into three main themes that persisted in the data. The themes are: their role as mother-figures to students, as advocates for students, and as Black teachers. In each of the sections, and subsequent chapters, I draw upon the respondents' words to bring meaning and expression to each of these themes and to corroborate my findings with secondary sources.

Catalysts for Teaching

Studies find that teachers' motivations for teaching greatly impact their practice (Bernard & Wilson, 2004; Hobson, Tracey & Kerr, 2004). The respondents entered the conversation of how each envisioned her role in teaching by first articulating her motivations for entering the profession. Angela, Michelle and Melanie initiated their individual interview conversations about what motivated them to become teachers by reflecting on their own past teachers whom they felt "built that kind, caring supportive relationship" with them and the

teachers "who believed in" them (Individual Interview, Angela, p. 1; Individual Interview, Michelle, p. 31). In turn, these women wanted to emulate these supportive teachers' practices within their own classrooms. All three women, born and raised in predominantly Black communities in Trinidad and Jamaica respectively, wanted to re-create a space where their "students felt that they could speak quite openly" with them (Individual Interview, Michelle, p. 2). These expressions are consistent with a study conducted by Canadian researchers Bernard and Wilson (2004), as well as studies by British researchers Hobson, Tracey and Kerr (2004). In their qualitative study Hobson and colleagues found that the majority of teacher candidates became teachers after "being inspired by a good teacher" (Hobson, Tracey & Kerr 2004, p. 3). Such an observation is foundational to this study because Angela, Michelle, and Melanie, all experienced early schooling outside of Canada in predominantly Black communities. Significantly, and unlike teachers born and raised in Canada, Angela, Michelle and Melanie had formative experiences with Black teachers that left a lasting, positive, and deep impression.

In stark contrast to the narratives of safety and support offered by these teachers are the experiences of Keisha and Lynette. Keisha and Lynette experienced the vast majority of their early and middle schooling in Canada or in predominantly white communities in the United States and had no or little access to teachers who resembled or had insight into their lived realities.

Keisha recalled schooling memories of school, which were often "overrun with feelings of being discriminated against, isolated and feeling lonely" (Individual Interview, Keisha, p. 17). Similarly Lynette, raised in a "predominantly white area of Florida", recalled her teachers' racially charged stereotypical comments directed at her such as, "oh look at the Black girl, she must be good at sports" (Individual Interview, Lynette, p. 12). The negative experiences of Keisha and Lynette confirm that for many minority students, the efficacy of the educational exchange between themselves and their schooling is only productive when the student sees value and worth in the person-to-person transactions (Felice, 1981). In other words, the respondents who felt mistreated by peers and teachers at school saw less value in their schooling, while those who felt supported found their schooling experiences to be worthwhile.

Moreover, Keisha and Lynette's reflections serve as an interesting contrast to the male participants in the study I conducted earlier (Tavares-Carter, 2009). Unlike the men who shifted away from secondary teaching as a result of their negative schooling histories, Keisha and Lynette articulated that they were motivated towards teaching at the secondary level because they wanted to make sure that the students they encountered would not repeat the same kinds of damaging experiences. As Keisha phrased it, "I wanna make sure that no other kid goes through what I did" (Individual Interview, Keisha, p. 22). Or as stated by Lynette, "I work hard to make sure kids don't have to feel like I did in school"

(Individual Interview, Lynette, p. 32). The respondents' clear focus on making school a less marginalizing place for students articulates their desire to help students find the value in schooling (Tavares-Carter, 2009).

Keisha and Lynette's desire to confront the inequities in education, and Angela, Michelle and Melanie's desire to replicate school as a positive space, attest to the strength of character that many Black women teachers possess, and also to the value that Black women have historically placed on education as a means of empowerment despite the obstacles to equitably accessing it (Collins, 2009; Dixson & Dingus, 2008; Henry, 1998; hooks, 1981).

Importantly too, these women's stories underscore some of the divergent positions from which some Canadian Black women teachers enter the profession. While individuals like Michelle and Lynette come to teaching from a positive place, wanting to continue the cycle of support and caring, others like Keisha, come to teaching to disrupt the cycle of marginalization and discomfort that they see many Canadian Black students experience.

On Being 'Othermothers'

Regardless of their divergent entry points into teaching, each respondent coalesced around what they saw as their primary obligation or role as a teacher-being a mother-figures, or 'othermothers' to students. During the focus group interview, Melanie explained that she wants Black children to see her as "one level up" and as "doing extra" for them (Focus Group Interview, Melanie, p. 44).

Michelle, readily agreeing, spoke about the work that Angela does at their school.

Using an anecdote she called a "hallway rescue." Michelle told of bringing

Angela into an all too familiar situation where

> Sometimes there is no safety for children at school. But what we can do is
>
> give them the gift of being excited for them and getting them excited
>
> about their potential as well... You [Michelle gesturing to Angela] didn't
>
> even know him from Adam and I just pulled you into the conversation. It
>
> was a hallway rescue (Focus Group Interview, Michelle, p. 50).

Angela: And I never even taught him, but she dragged me into it. First he was a

> little resistant. I told him, I said, 'We are not letting you fall
>
> through the cracks, no way.' And he says he didn't care but every so
>
> often he walked by my room and peeked in (Focus Group Interview,
>
> Angela, p. 50).

In the above situation, Michelle, as the administrator, was speaking to a

disengaged Black male student in the hallway. Seeing Angela walk by, Michelle

called Angela into the conversation. Without fully knowing the student, the

situation, or the context, Angela immediately let the child know that he is cared

for, and will not be allowed to 'fall through the school's cracks'. Such an

interaction exemplifies what Collins (2009) calls the Black woman teacher's

"ontological responsibility to care for children" (Collins, p. 194).

Further, Michelle and Angela's anecdote about caring for a student reflects how Canadian Black woman teachers' political consciousness—the unwillingness to let a student "fall through the cracks"-- can emerge through everyday lived experience (Collins, 2000; Henry, 2000). As well this teacher interprets the student's act of 'peeking' in Angela's classroom after the interaction, as a sign of a budding connection between the student and herself; a sign that her care towards him had a positive effect.

Practices of care expressed by the respondents highlight a kind of essential visibility that manifests as community leadership or what Black feminist scholars define as "othermothering" (Mogadime, 2000; Troester, 1984). Troester (1984) defines othermothering as the acts of care that Black women partake that assist birth mothers in the developmental (academic, social, psychical etc.) nurturance of Black children for the betterment and survival of the greater Black community. Michelle and Angela's 'tag-team' effort embodies the value othermothering places on co-operative childcare (James, S. 1993). It is not just the 'birth mother' of the child in the hallway who assisted in this situation; Black female teachers support each other as Angela supported the first responder Michelle's, calls for back-up of another community othermother.

Listening to the dialogue between the other respondents, Keisha jumped in to comment on what she saw as her obligation to support the mothering needs of her Black students: "The Black female teacher should be a fighter for Black

children. Should go forward and cut that path" (Focus Group Interview, Keisha, p.

52). Michelle agreed, stating that her role as a teacher is to "try to balance and be

that caring adult and to give [students] a safe place to talk while we try to teach

them the curriculum as well as the unofficial curriculum" (Focus Group

Interview, Michelle, p. 55).

Still, Angela claimed that for a Black female teacher:

It is about caring about these students…and they can't learn what you

want to teach them unless you make them feel comfortable. You make

them feel safe. You care about them and they know that you care about

them. Melanie expounded that, "The Black kids that are sitting in front of

me – I want them to see me as that one level up. I want them to be able to

see me and hopefully think that she's gonna do extra for me or she's

gonna be there for me; she'll understand (Focus Group Interview,

Melanie, p. 62).

According to Mogadime (2000), othermothering occurs when a Black

woman's 'ethics of care' for all children in the community is a "part of her

commitment to the survival and wholeness of the communities" (p. 223; see also

Collins, 2009; Henry, 1998; hooks, 1981; Sudarkasa, 1996). All of the women in

this study directly or indirectly used the word "care" to describe what they saw to

be their primary objective in supporting the needs of all, but particularly the most

marginalized of their learners - Black students.

Keisha's use of a combined battle and journey metaphor to describe what she sees as the task of Black female teachers is in-line with Collin's (2009) definition of what she calls community othermothers' political activism. Community othermothers, she explains, "not only feel accountable for their own kin, they experience a bond with all of the Black community's children... community othermothers work on behalf of the Black community by expressing ethics of caring" (p. 205 & 208). It is this ethics of care that respondents repeatedly pinpoint as their obligation to students. Angela's focus on students "safety" and "comfort" at school speaks to an important recognition of the ostracizing and negative effects that she witnesses as a daily part of life in school. Female teachers' view themselves as obligated to mitigate their students' demeaning experiences (Brathwaite & James, 1996; James, 2007; Solomon, 1992). Such a focus is important since research spanning some twenty years indicates that many white teachers in the Greater Toronto Area still do not believe that racism is an issue for minority youth (Carr & Klassen's, 1997; Solomon, Singer, Campbell & Allen, 2011).

Yet there seems to be one key difference between Canadian manifestations of teacher othermothering and that of their American counterparts that needs to be articulated here. According to Sonia James (1993) a seminal tenet of African American community othermothering is the practice of othermothering to maintain and sustain the collective African American Identity. James argues that

because many Blacks in America share the experience of slavery and its genocidal

offspring, American othermothering is bound by an obligation to preserve an

understanding and a 'never-forget' mentality towards the legacy that slavery and

the Civil Rights Movement left behind. However, the Canadian Black experience,

particularly in urban centers like Toronto and the Greater Toronto Area is very

different. Blacks in Canada are diverse in origin. According to Milan and Tran

(2004), the Black population in Canada in 1901 was 17, 400 or 0.3% of the

population. These Blacks were primarily descendants of both slaves and Black

Loyalists.

By the 1960s, after immigration policy reforms, the number of Blacks in

Canada increased dramatically, to the point where the 1991 Census showed 504,

300 Blacks in Canada (2% of the total population), with a vast majority of them

coming from the Caribbean and Africa (Milan and Tran, 2004). By 2001 Blacks

"were the third largest visible minority group in Canada... enumerated at 662,

200 or almost 3% of Canada's total population" (2004, p. 3). However by this

time

> in 2001, nearly one half (45%) of Blacks in Canada were born in
>
> Canada....Among the Black population aged 15 and older, second-
>
> generation Blacks, or those who were Canadian-born with at least one
>
> parent born outside of Canada, accounted for 19% of the Black population
>
> (2004, p. 3).

Clearly, the Canadian Black population is disaporic, and comprises people from the African continent, the Caribbean, the United States of America, Canada and other countries; there is no unifying originating event that binds Blacks arrival on Canadian soil. And while it is true that all of these lands of origin experienced slavery, each experienced it so differently that a collective consciousness, beyond the brutality of racism, is complicated to share.

Keisha highlights the complicated histories of Blacks in Canada in the following reflection:

> I remember his name, Martin[13], a young black boy from Nova Scotia, and he talked and talked excessively. And I said to him in patois, because I just assumed that all black children understood Jamaican patois. I said, 'Yu museh nam parrot batty mek yu chat so much.' And he said to me: 'Miss, excuse me, is that....What is that? Is that patois, what did you just say?' And I laughed because here was a young man who I thought was black quote-unquote and he had no clue what I had said. I think what it showed me at that time is that my perception of Blackness was a Toronto urban, maybe in low income housing perception of Black children. And that was very different than black children who were not in that same low housing area, and might have been of different experiences (Individual Interview, Keisha, p.25).

---

[13] A pseudonym

Keisha's humorous anecdote hints at the complexity and intersections of Black relationships in a Canadian context (Foster, 1996; Wane, 2009). Not only are there socio-economic differences between Blacks, there are differences in language – Jamaican patois to Nova Scotian creole-, in cultural metaphors, and in lived experiences of racism. These experiences contribute to meanings of Blackness in part informed by social and geographical location. As a result of all of these originating variants and their subsequent effects, the inspiring work of othermothering in a Canadian context cannot be one of sustaining a collective African experience. Instead, Canadian othermothering takes into account the diversity of the student and teacher population.

Respondents spoke about what they are trying to achieve through their othermothering.

Melanie: I want to see them successful after school ends. (Individual

Interview, Melanie, p. 16)

Keisha: the curriculum is a means to an end and that is what is going to move

students from one level to another so that they're all gonna be successful

[pause] If I've truly helped you whether I'm helping you as an educator to

go on your own, whether I'm helping students there's a point when you no

longer need me and that's kinda what I see the role as the teacher. You get

a student to a point where he or she no longer needs you (Individual

Interview, Keisha, p. 19).

Michelle: I am very passionate about the power of literacy, the power of making

children culturally proficient, culturally bilingual to be able to go into any

setting and excel.

Their use of the words 'successful' and 'excel' highlights the main

objective of othermothering for these women. Their desires to support students

through the navigation of the school system seems focused on a push towards

successful inclusion[14]—the teaching of their students and the skills necessary to

make a space for themselves in Canada's multicultural mosaic.

Carl James (2011) argues that "old-fashioned racism, overt segregation…

is widely thought to be eliminated" and so argues how new racism – the idea of

racism without race or the color-blind ideology proffered with a cultural

difference epistemology - has replaced it (p. 81-2). Consequently, by using

'successful' Blacks like President Obama or media mogul Oprah Winfrey as

reference points, James shows how new racism places the failure of individuals to

live 'successful' lives not on racism but on "the moral shortcomings of minority

group members" since some members are able to work on their "merit" and be

successful despite their hardships (p. 83). As a result, new racism allows for

conversations about racism to be obfuscated, making it difficult if not impossible

---

[14] Because the students will always retain their label as minorities, they will always be 'outsiders'. However the best hope that the women teachers in the study have seems most connected to Collins (1990) concept of the outside-within – economically belonging even though still socially and emotionally marginalized from the majority. The women in the study focus their efforts on education as a means for economic control of self.

for Black youth to confront and verbalize the barriers that they experience daily in school (Collins, 2009; Yon, 2000). Worse, this "overlooking" of race is understood to be a "generous, liberal gesture" focused against noticing systemic inequities (Morrison, 1992, p. 9). The Black women teachers in this study appear conscious of the new forms of racism and are determined to use othermothering as a technique to overcome this barrier for Black youth.

For these teachers, their othermothering is a commitment to protect students from a world they are simultaneously preparing them to inhabit (Lawson-Bush, 2004). In other words, by using their skills as othermothers and teaching students the skills of "literacy" and "the game of mainstream," the respondents in this study are working within the confines of a racist structure – by teaching their students how to navigate the structure – in order to move them to spaces of success despite its existence.

On Being Advocates

An important offset of being an othermother is to be an advocate for silenced community members (Collins, 2009; Mogadime, 2000; Troester 1984). While discussing their role as caregivers, each respondent simultaneously defined herself as an advocate for Black youth. As Lynette phrased it, "sometimes you have to fight for them because they don't have the power or skill set to fight for themselves" (Individual Interview, Lynette, p. 24). Each woman in the focus

group agreed and, when asked, defined advocacy as their duty to support the marginalized students in their school.

Discussing the role of Black women teachers, Keisha argues that she, "should be a fighter" and "cut a path" for Black students. Such a belief resonates with the advocacy principles of othermothering in that the teachers in this study use their teaching as a means of creating "spheres of influence and power within institutions that traditionally have allowed little formal authority or real power" (Collins, 2009, p. 225). By using her position as a teacher and administrator, Keisha sees herself as having a responsibility to use her influence to advocate, or as she puts it "cut a path" and create a space for Black student academic success where traditionally there has been none. In other words, Keisha perceives her role as not to dominate, but instead to use othermothering to "bring people along…and instill values that will encourage children to reject 'their place' and strive for more" which is the very definition of advocacy (Collins, 2009, p. 200-8).

As well, Michelle's saw teaching the skills of self-advocacy as a part of her advocacy role. She explained:

> The students will come to find me. They want to talk to me, but I keep
>
> reminding them they have to go to their own [Vice Principal]. And they'll
>
> say 'but I want to talk to you, and then you just try to teach them the skills
>
> of how to ask for what they need…you wanna make sure they can

advocate for themselves appropriately (Individual Interview, Michelle, p. 32).

Teaching her students how to speak to other teachers and how to advocate for themselves "appropriately", Michelle went above and beyond her curricular job description. In community othermothering, Black women focus on the survival and wholeness of communities by, in part, teaching skills of "independence and self-reliance" (Collins, 2009, p. 201 & 223). It might have been easier for Michelle just to listen and help the student directly, but in giving the student a skill set that can be utilized in the future, Michelle arms the child with the tools for later success or as Keisha worded it, "no student should be dependent on you always…. Teach them the game of mainstream".

Historically in the education of Black children, the work of othermothering, has served as a bridge between self, change and empowerment (Collins, 2009). By using her role as a teacher and administrator to teach students the unspoken rules for communication and self-advocacy, Michelle was engaging in othermothering. Traditionally, minority students from low socio-economic areas, like the one in which Michelle teaches, do not necessarily come to school with the skill sets to have the kinds of conversations that they may need to engage in (Griffith & Smith, 2005). By teaching the students the skills to engage in conversations with their administrators, she was expanding their social capital

which is a proficiency that can be taken forward with them. In this way othermothering becomes an act of emancipation (Collins, 2009; S. James, 1993).

Traditionally and most often, othermothering "occurred under conditions in school which were layered with racial tensions" (Collins, 2009, p. 224). Consequently, advocacy work required that othermothers speak for silenced members and teach members how to fight for themselves (hooks, 1981; 2005). In order to understand and meet the learning needs of students, teachers must understand how barriers such as racism impact a child's learning environment and motivation (James, 2011; Solomon 1997). Currently, Black female teachers appear to be the most equipped and willing, based on their histories, experiences, and presence in the school to understand the needs of Black students and so advocate on their behalf (Banks & Lynch, 1986).

It is important at this juncture to return to and reflect on the importance of Melanie's and Angela's admissions. Like community othermothers before them, all of the women in this study emphasize the importance of taking extra care of Black students (Sudarkasa, 1996). At the same time, however, Keisha, Angela, Lynette and Melanie were emphatic that their decisions are not primarily racialized.

Keisha: I know it's easy to assume because we're Black, they're Black that

that's why you are advocating for them. But for example the work that

I'm doing now with a lot of Special Ed[ucation] students and other at-risk

students is not about Black. I think we know statistically Black students

are at-risk. And I think we have the advantage of being Black and being

able to know, not from data but from experience and going out there and

seeing what is really going on. I don't care that you are Black, I care that

you are marginalized and I will help any marginalized kid as I would a

Black kid (Focus group Interview, Keisha, p. 57).

Angela: I can't say it is only about race because I do the same thing for other

students too who are not Black.... If I feel the cards are stacked up against

them I am going to help Black, white, Brown it don't matter. One white

girl, she is in foster care and nobody, in her mind, really cares about her.

So when she comes to see me she feels at home. She doesn't feel

discomfort because I make her feel welcome....I want to help all my

students, but I want to know more about [Black] students because

compared to other students they tend to underperform; that's my thing

(Focus Group Interview, Angela, p. 58).

Lynette: I may help Black kids more but that is because I feel the cards are

stacked up against them. There is a stereotype about Black kids and they

get mistreated at school. But I am here for any kid who needs help (Focus

Group Interview, Lynette, p. 60).

Melanie: It's not just Black kids, but any marginalized kid whether they are

marginalized because of cognitive ability, whether they are marginalized

because they got anger management issues or behaviour issues--whatever

makes them marginalized whether it is their sexuality; it is their race; I

teach them the game of mainstream: how to play the game and fit in to

win (Focus group Interview, Melanie, p. 62).

Significantly, each teacher repeatedly made clear that her desire is to

support marginalized students. Their emphatic declarations claim that advocacy

support for Black children is about need and not race, while on one hand could be

read as projections[15], rationalizations or justifications; they could, more

interestingly, be read on the other as a startling contrast to the prevailing discourse

and assumptions that Black teachers are primarily effective because of their racial

and cultural affinity to Black students (for example see Ehrenberg, Goldhaber &

Brewer, 1995; Lynn, 2006). The following anecdote from Keisha supports this

point:

So for example, my Tamil population I work with now. I had a young man

who the teacher wronged him. The teacher absolutely was wrong in a

situation and wanted to further penalize the boy by not letting him write

---

[15] Freud (1989) argues that projection is the act of denying one's own attributes as a defense mechanism. By repeatedly stating that the respondent's additional care for Black students is not about race, one could argue that the respondents are projecting or denying their true racialized motivations. However, using the Derridean lens of hospitality—being open to before understanding, I chose instead to explore the possibilities of the respondents' statements as truth (Gilbert, 2006).

the test or the final exam. Then I talked to the teacher and we worked it out. He said, "Send the kid up." And the kid says, 'Miss, after the way he made me feel I don't want to go up there; I don't want to write it with him'. I said, 'Listen, he's got to mark it still. He can't know how you truly feel about him. So you're gonna go up and smile. You're gonna thank him for letting you write the test; and you realize that maybe some of the things you did weren't right and you're gonna write it! Because you need to make sure he's in a good frame of mind when he's marking your test. If you had written it down here with me he doesn't know what you're thinking. He probably thinks you were down here talking about him with me, and he's gonna be bitter when he's marking and that's gonna impact on you'. And it turns out that the kid has the same teacher this semester, and I said, 'Did you see why it was important for you not to burn that bridge before you completely cross it'? He said, 'Yes, Miss. Thank you.' So I teach my kids regardless of colour how to play the game (Focus Group Interview, Keisha, p. 63).

Through Keisha's story and the reflections of the other women in this study, teachers felt that they are best able to support and care for marginalized children because they have experienced or witnessed marginalization, discrimination and disenfranchisement. Thus their motivations are not racialized

but based in desires for student success – a rational teacher's base in empathy, not race.

The women also acknowledged that sometimes Black students will go to a Black teacher for assistance only to find "that this Black teacher maybe is not the supportive one that they want and so they find another teacher, Black or other who they can speak to" (Individual Interview, Lynette, p. 19). Sometimes, as Lynette continues to argue, stereotypical "assumptions that I'm Black, you're Black and so I am gonna know... your trials and tribulations" gets in the way of being able to help. Such a powerful reflection highlights the women in this study's understanding that similarities in race do not automatically equate to understanding, support or care (Henry, 1998). The women in this study do not necessarily come from the same place as the Black students they encounter. But they are willing to listen to their stories and try to understand the students' needs in an act of caring.

Consequently practices of care, and not racial affinity steers teacher practices. Black female teachers' practice of care mimics that of triage protocol in medicine—help the dying first, the injured next and those with lesser needs last (Warren, Jarvis & LeBlanc, 2008). Black students by all statistical and anecdotal accounts fall to the bottom of the academic pool. The Black women teachers in this study advocate for Black youth first and foremost not because they are Black, but because they are drowning (Codjoe, 2006; Dei, 1997; James, 2007 & 2012;

Solomon 1997). This study finds that a striking feature of Black female teachers'

practices is their commitment to provide for Black students othermothering

practices of care.

On Being (Black) Teachers

Despite seeing their role as othermothers to and advocates of Black

children as critical to their teaching practice, the respondents, for the most part,

did not elevate othermothering to their professional role as teachers. In fact,

during the focus group interview, most saw the three roles as conflated and further

acknowledged the complicated politic that this conflation creates.

When asked to discuss her role as teacher, Melanie explained:

I am who I am and I teach children regardless of colour or whatever.

(pause) But I have a soft spot in my heart for Black kids, and I try to reach

them, I guess, within the parameters of the classroom (Individual

Interview, Melanie, p. 6).

Angela, too, had a similar response about being a teacher. She said:

Well, I have no choice because that's what I am. But I am Black. [Pause]

I'm a Black woman but I am a teacher who happens to be Black….I didn't

come into teaching just to support Black kids at all. I came because I loved

language learning, and I didn't see that as a Black thing. [Pause] I do take

care of my Black children though. [Pause] What I notice with me, as soon

as I get a Black student, male or female, I automatically take more of an

interest. [Pause] I am interested in all my students. [Pause] I'm the only, or the first, Black [Subject] head in this school and you become aware of that. There is one other Black head now and so we call each other 'the Black heads' (Individual Interview, Angela, p. 7).

The responses indicate that the teachers experienced conflict when trying to reconcile their identity with their understanding of the role of Black women teachers. For example, rather than respond to the question in terms of her own identity, Melanie conflated the questions with having a "soft spot for Black kids." Her conflation of her own identity with those of her students is interesting given that she begins responding to the question with a 'colour-blind' orientation, suggesting that she is focused on teaching all students. After making this caveat, she quickly made links between her Black teacher identity and what she can "try" for Black children. And as discussed earlier, Melanie's use of the verb "try", like Angela's use of the verb phrase "take care" suggest an active politic, a politic of community othermothering (Troester, 1984). Further, Melanie's "soft spot" for Black children, makes murky her argument that her main motivation is care and not race.

Angela too articulated her understanding of the role of the teacher by repeatedly stressing that her priority is to teach all children. Angela seemed at first to imply that being a Black teacher was a 'biological accident' – "Well, I have no choice because that's what I am. But I am Black". Yet, like Melanie, the politics

of racial category compels her to think of the significance of race when she mentions that she is one of two 'Black Heads' at her school. Her recognition of the importance of holding such a position, given her social location, signals that she is all too aware of the relationship between race, power and influence in the context of public schooling. Despite their stated colour-blind orientations to teaching, Melanie and Angela confirm that a significant part of their role as Black women teachers is as one that 'tries' to ensure and support the educational needs of Black students.

With direct reference to teachers' reluctance to assume the role of Black woman teacher, Michelle provides a surprising analysis:

> There is a specific [Black woman teacher] identity. When people try to pretend that there isn't one, they are, I think, maybe thinking that somehow that would be a pejorative thing....The Black female educator, if they have come up in the [Canadian] system is gonna know the system in a number of different ways (Individual Interview, Michelle, p. 18).

Michelle views negative connotations associated with being a 'Black teacher' as impetus for distancing herself from racial identification. Similar to Copper's (1991) research about the popular views of Black teachers in early Canada being seen as less able to teach than their white counterparts, by racializing the profession of teacher with the category 'Black', Michelle claims that Black teachers experience an erroneous but automatic downgrading of their

efficacy. In mainstream society and in school Black equals 'less than'. She implies that her colleagues' dismissal of their Blackness signals a fear in being seen by others as "less than". She ends her statement, however, by countering this belief by noting the assets that Black educators, brought up in the Canadian system, bring to the profession. In this way, she does not see the label and role of Black teacher as pejorative, but one full of possibilities.

Solomon (1997) argues that the psychological burdens of teaching prevent many Black teachers from entering the profession. For many reasons including: the fear of being seen by their colleagues and students as only supporting Black students; unfair expectations of them being role models and mentors to Black students; and being experts in "Blackness" for their colleagues and administrators, Black teachers shy away from teaching as a profession as choice. In the case of the women in this study, this burden did not prevent them from becoming teachers and yet it does not lessen the worry of being seen as "one-dimensional," as teachers for only Black students - and so need to make clear that their role is to serve all children.

Keisha, the respondent with a difficult schooling past, further exposed the complicated role and position of Black teachers by explaining that for her being part of a Black teacher collective "never helped me [pause] because within your own you are not necessarily accepted" (Individual Interview, Keisha, p. 14). Keisha's connection to Black women identities and Black teacher groups is

interesting. Her admission that the Black collectives in her school board did not protect or help her during her difficulties is also striking. During her individual interview, Keisha explained that she refused to see herself as part of the 'Black teacher' grouping because while she was having difficulties as a teacher due to racist supervisors or policies, none of the Black collectives in her board stepped in to assist; actions that she read as "not being accepted" by the group.

Further, she indicated that many Black teachers only joined the collectives for their own political or personal gain. Clearly for Keisha, although the identity of Black teacher automatically connects her to a group, the fear of not being accepted by the group, or anger at not being assisted by the group in times of need is enough for her to actively distance herself. Her response reveals how difficult it is for some individuals to use their identities as a resource for teaching if that very identity has caused them personal harm or pain (Harris-Perry, 2011).

More importantly, Keisha's admission exemplifies the complexity of the conflated roles of Black women teachers. While she acknowledges that being a Black teacher automatically connects her to a collective and politic, the realities of Black teachers getting caught up in western hegemonic drive for success, combined with the isolation that sometimes comes from being a minority in a profession, actively drives her away from such associations (Collins, 2000; hooks, 1981; 1994; 2005).

Clearly, for the women in this study, the role of Black teacher is a complex one. On a personal level, the obligatory nature of association may be fraught with tension. Still, the political responsibility to support the needs of marginalized learners is empowering to these respondents. They see the role of Black women teachers as one that first and foremost supports the learning needs of students and as such, they remain willing to engage in the work, regardless of the possible personal cost to themselves.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have discussed three major themes that the women participants in this study discussed: their motivations as teachers of Black students were based on an ethics of care and othermothering that has a long history in the Black struggle for emancipation and power. Although as teachers they might have resisted this meta-analysis, their personal responses are aligned with discourses of care, struggle and resistance that have been held by Black women in the Americas for centuries. Not only does racial affinity matter to the kinds of care they were able to provide, but so does their own experiences of racism and lived reality. These experiences reveal pedagogical practices of othermothering in the classroom and gives insight into the kinds of nurturing and active strategies Black female teachers use to raise marginalized children up from their social situation.

Traditional notions of othermothering have their roots in African and African-American traditions (Collins 2009; hooks, 1981; Sudarkasa, 1996; Troester, 1984). However, the actions of the women in this study map directly onto most tenets as described by these American researchers. In this way then, Canadian Black women teacher practices fall in line with dominant and prevailing notions of Black women providing community care for Black students. Although the women in this study may have had difficulty in articulating their positionality in the politics of the role of Black Women teachers, for many reasons that will become clear in the next chapter, each woman made clear that her objective as a teacher was to support the whole child in her practice. In fact, for these women, each of whom were secondary teaching curriculum specialists, partiality to the curriculum was second to what they saw as their obligation to first and foremost support the mothering needs of marginalized youth and second to teach the unofficial curriculum to their students. Each woman made clear that her support of Black youth was not about racial affinity, but about a sympathetic response to the lived realities of marginalized students.

In thinking then about what Black women teachers bring to the profession, it may well be their ability to empathize with the experiences of Black and other marginalized learners. Pedagogical practices of othermothering, care and response support these teachers to break the cycle of underachievement that many youth, and Blacks, in particular, experience.

Chapter Four

The Burdens and Negotiations of Black Women Teachers

In the last chapter, I discussed Black women teachers' motivations and understanding of their roles as teachers. In this chapter, I examine the daily, lived experiences of the Black women teachers in this study. Through a discussion of their (1) confounding need for respect, (2) everyday confrontations with racism, and, (3) the nuances of building relationships with students, these teachers revealed how each grappled with and in a cycle of burdens and negotiations that simultaneously bore on them while defining them as Black women teachers.

The Need for Respect

Henry (1998) challenges us to "interrogate the positioning of minority teachers and the very discourses which exclude them and which set their positionality in place" (p. 108). Dominant American media tropes construct Black women as "Mammies", "Jezebels" or "Sapphires[16]." Concomitantly, research suggests that Canadian tropes fashion Black women as singularly "service class, caregivers and helpers" (Henry, 2000, p. 96). Consequently, Canadian Black women who ascribe to none of these labels often find themselves forced to fight against reinscription of stereotypes by overtly distancing themselves from the labels in an attempt to showcase qualities more in-line with dominant ideologies

---

[16] Harris-Perry (2011) defines mammies as Black women who are the self-sacrificing nurturing caretakers of white women and children; Jezebels as over sexualized, promiscuous women; and Sapphires as the angry, Black woman.

(Harris-Perry, 2011; Wane, 2009). These tropes and discourses, often

contradictory in nature, set the foundation for a tenuous and further marginalizing

experience for Black women as teachers navigating standards set by white men,

white women and Black men (Henry, 1998; Tastsoglou, 2002).

When I asked the women of this study to articulate their experiences as

Black women teachers, the need for respect tended to dominate their individual

and group conversations. Melanie helped to frame the discussion about the need

for respect from students by articulating her desire for, "Everyone, regardless of

what they look like to see me as a teacher. I want them to respect me for who I am

in terms of what I bring" (Focus Group Interview, Melanie, p. 34). Although she

began with a desire for "everyone" to respect her, she swiftly qualified her

statement by adding:

> You want to make sure that these kids are going to respect you for your
>
> knowledge and not, 'oh she is Black. She doesn't know what she is talking
>
> about. She is not going to be able to teach me effectively because she's
>
> Black' (Focus Group interview, Melanie, p. 35).

Keisha, the Vice-Principal in Melanie's school, concurred immediately with

Melanie's comments adding,

> You walk into that room on the first day and they see a Black teacher and
>
> some of those kids will judge you....I can tell you right now, in my

school, there is a person that became Head of a department, Black [with

an] accent. [He was] Done for (Focus Group Interview, Keisha, p. 34-5).

In contrast to Melanie's earlier statements, when discussing her role with all

students she shifted her teacher identity from one of mothering to one of

professionalism. Her fear of being seen as incompetent was echoed in Keisha's

comments about judgments of competency placed on Black teachers. Further,

Keisha's use of the idiom "done for" in discussing the dangerous nexus of race

and language speaks volumes about the pressures and difficulties Black teachers

face in the classroom as a result of racial and linguistic bias (Allan 1994;

Tennenhouse, 2013).

Aligned with Henry's (1998) statement referenced above, regarding the

vexed positionality of Black women, Roberts (1993) argues that historically,

society devalues the work of Black women as Black mothers are constructed as

"unfit and their children as inherently useless" (p. 873). If Black women are

inherently useless, then it would be fair to argue that Black women teachers by

extension risk being viewed in this same derogatory manner. If Black women are

unfit to raise their own children, how could they be fit to academically raise and

teach another's child? What possibility is there for Black women once they have

been conceptualized as incompetent and so not credible (Davis, 2005)? What

could be the dominant reception to their pedagogy?

After her statement, I asked Melanie who exactly she meant by "everyone". Before she had a chance to respond, Keisha jumped in reminding me and telling the group the story she gave, during her individual interview, about her first teaching placement.

Keisha recalled:

Initially, when I was placed at Harbourview, I had always said that I'd always want to work in Toronto. And I felt as a youth from [a low income community] who had faced challenges and hurdles, I felt that I was going to go in and be able to support and uplift the kids....When [the students] saw a young black female with a gold tooth; being educated and teaching them, it was too challenging or too hard for them to accept. And when the host-teacher asked why? They said 'She's from [Jefferson Heights[17]], you know what those people are like!'... And the teacher laughed and said all the stereotypes that people use against you you are using the same stereotypes to judge her. Even though you see her every day and she's here supporting you.... And when the teacher delved (because it was a social science class) when she delved a little deeper it pretty much came to realization that how could I be [in their school] when they had always been told that their people aren't there (Individual Interview, Keisha, p. 16).

---

[17] A pseudonym

While Keisha's story is rich with insight, for the purposes of this chapter, I focus on the interactions between Keisha and the students, as understood by Keisha. Keisha's excitement in returning to her community to teach and 'give-back' repeats the social justice impetus that, historically and in this contemporary moment, many Black women teachers are drawn (Collins, 2009; Henry, 1998; hooks, 1981; Mogadime, 2000; Sudarkasa, 1996). However, Keisha's dismay at being rejected by 'her own', leaves her devastated and (as garnered from later parts of her interview) reticent to work in the community again. Keisha's mentor teacher's discovery that the students could not accept Keisha because they were not used to seeing Black women as teachers shows the ongoing relevance of Henry's (1998) assertion that "Black children live in a society of contradictory discourses" (p. 31). While on the one hand Canadian Black children are taught about meritocracy – where everyone has an equal chance if they work hard - they are simultaneously bombarded with realities spotlighting the glaring absences of 'successful' Black leaders in their school, curriculum and outside lives (Henry, 1993; 1998; James, 2011). Consequently, Keisha's experience with Black children's mistrust of the face of the Black, female teacher may be, paradoxically, representative of the racist discourses playing on their psychological understandings of what is possible for the other and the self (Henry, 1993 & 1995; Yon, 2000).

For Lynette, the need for respect from Black students took a different form:

> They definitely first try to go in with that peer-type relationship so they
> think we are on the same level. So they wanna say 'Yow Miss' and talk to
> you in a certain way and then you just kinda have to let them know it is
> not going to happen. I'm still your teacher. I'm Black. I'm young. But
> there still has to be a certain level of respect that needs to happen between
> us....An example from last night like, 'Miss, I'm going to remember you
> as my prom date'. Like, 'No, I am your teacher. I'm your prom chaperone.
> I am not your friend'. And then there are some that think, 'Oh she is Black
> she is gonna make it easy on us because we're Black'. And then you get,
> 'Miss you are marking too hard –it's because I am Black'. So there's all
> different aspects that they come at you with...(Individual Interview,
> Lynette, p. 6).

Lynette's experience of gaining respect from Black students differs from those of Keisha's and Melanie's. Unlike the negative or hostile receptions received by Keisha and Melanie, students approached Lynette, possibly because of her youthful appearance, as someone to talk to. Their response was one of acceptance and enthusiasm. However, Lynette is challenged in her attempts to find the balance between being professionally supportive while still maintaining her professionalism. Lynette's admission that she is young might further challenge

her efforts to maintain professional distance with her students and is particularly useful in light of her earlier comments (referenced in the last chapter) about her focus on being a supportive othermother.

Wane (2000) notes that Black women trying to negotiate the expectations of mainstream culture, become too aware that their presence is "causing a negative effect or shock that can be the beginning of formation of identity and self" or what Harris-Perry (2011) sees as part of the process of shaming (Wane, 2000 p. 154). Further Wane argues "individuals prioritize different aspects of their compound identities depending on context" (p. 153). Since Lynette, at the time of the interview was only 4 years into the profession, she was still in the early identity formation process as a teacher and as a Black female teacher.

Trying to garner the respect of her peers and her students, Lynette was still establishing her place in her school. Angela, a teacher with more than 25 years experience, presented an interesting foil to Lynette and notes that students "wouldn't come to me with that. They have to have respect, because they see me like their moms or aunts or whoever" (Focus Group Interview, Lynette, p. 47). Consequently for Lynette, the burden of being young and 'professional' in a non-supportive environment mediates her relationships with her students, compelling her to establish herself as an authority in relation to her students. And while trying to develop as an authority, she finds herself caught between conflicting

expectations of conduct as presented by the mainstream teaching culture and the incongruous expectations of her students.

If the respect of Black students was important to the women, significant is these teachers' affording more importance to gaining the respect of both white students and colleagues.

Keisha: I think there is still colonization aspects where white is right

and...if you are a person of colour then that sub-categorizes you as

a teacher and sometimes takes away from your own credibility as a

teacher... I think I am very conscious of that, because I don't need to

make people think (Pause) I have to be aware of how I am being

perceived (Focus Group Interview, Keisha, p. 76).

Melanie: It's because of the environment in which we work. People are quick to

point the finger at you....Because you know, you are devalued or you're

not seen for who you are with the white teachers....You're still

proving your value in a way that others don't have to (Focus Group

Interview, Melanie, p. 77).

Michelle: It is not easy being a Black vice-principal....I was repeatedly told

by my (white) Admin team, 'people are saying you are only here for

the Black students' (Individual Interview, Michelle, p. 15).

Angela: When I first started I always felt that I had to prove myself. I didn't

want to be hired at York Region for example, as a token Black. So I

made sure I didn't have just one master's degree, I had two. I had an M.A. and a M.Ed., so that if they took me, it was not because I was to meet some quota (Individual Interview, Angela, p. 12).

In the same way that "the oppressed find in the oppressor their model for 'manhood'", Black women teachers in this study seemed to find their model for teaching in the conduct of white teachers (Freire, 2000, p. 46). The teachers in this study seem to have an understanding of teacher conduct as conforming to an idea of whiteness or what Daniel Coleman (2006) calls 'white civility' that works against their bodies. For all respondents, the tangible fear of being chastised, looked down upon, and not validated in the profession because of their colour or their unwillingness to conform to white teacher cultural norms serves as a real threat. Wilentz (1992) argues that

> Whenever people with shared values, cultural traditions and racial or ethnic identity are dispersed into hostile environments, there emerges simultaneously a culture which retains many of the residual traditions while attempting to cope with the alien -- and most often dominant-- society around them (in Wane, 2009, p. 153).

Each teacher experienced a contradiction or conflict between her priority of serving as community othermothers for Black children, and the dominant society's priority of them being seen as 'professionals' by their white colleagues and students. All of the women in the study indicated that they came into teaching

to support the needs of marginalized learners. As well as their race and gender, all participants shared common values. At the same time, all of the teachers reported that they had been dispersed into school environments hostile to their presence. Consequently, these "Black teachers are being initiated into the white supremacist culture of employment which connotes Black inferiority and unsuitability" (Henry, 2000, p. 95). Hence, it stands to reason that while these women share the collective culture of supporting the most marginalized, they also cope with their own marginalization by presenting as over-qualified. Credibility as a "teacher" required each to conform to expectations congruent to hegemonic notions of professionalism. All of the women in this study have multiple additional qualifications and/or graduate degrees. In other words, Black female teachers experience the burden of racial and gendered constructions making them "less than" their white female counterparts. This coupled with the need to distance themselves from demeaning popular culture tropes caricaturizing the Black female body forced these women to assume professionalism while responding to the needs of the whole Black child (Henry 1995). As Keisha worded it, "You need to be respected and seen as a teacher who is capable of teaching anyone…but at the same time you want Black kids to know 'I'm one of you man and don't worry, you're good because I got you".

Confronting Racism: The Benign and the Overt

Interestingly, it is this burdening need for respect that also mediates Black female teachers' navigations of their daily experiences with racism. Keisha galvanized the conversation about the women's daily lived experiences with racism by recalling the memory of her arrival at her current school.

> When I came to the school the first thing I was asked was, 'How you gonna get the Black birds and gorillas off the stairs?' I heard, 'Oh, she is here now they're gonna get away with everything'....[The staff were] dropping off committees because I am leading it and they don't want to be helping promote my career (Individual Interview, Keisha, p.23).

Angela echoed Keisha's reflections on racialization, by recalling her own initiation into her school.

> When I first came to Eastview I was pregnant with my daughter and I was the first Black teacher there. Somebody came up to me and say, 'Get to class, get to class' clapping as she thought I was a pregnant student. And I said, 'I'm in the Moderns Department'....So I thought all Black people who are pregnant, it must be teenage pregnancy. And it made me feel good because I was already 33 so I was looking good (Laughs) (Focus Group Interview, Angela, p. 88).

Despite the ability to find humour in Angela's unacceptable interaction, Michelle found no humour remembering occasions where

Students would really talk to you about statements that were being made

in the classrooms of my colleagues about the propensity for West Indian

girls to get pregnant out of wedlock. I had a group of girls who were very

upset. I think the teacher did not mean to be offensive; it was kind of a

benign racist comment if you will, but at the same time these were girls

who took such exception. They didn't feel that they were being seen as

individuals in the class and they were really distressed. These kids

happened to be Seventh Day Adventist's kids who had a very strong sense

of self and sense of what they needed to accomplish and they thought that

basically this teacher was just writing off Black kids (Individual Interview,

Michelle, p. 9).

In all three stories, glaring is the insidiousness and callousness of the racism and

gender discrimination faced by Black female teachers. Not only did Keisha bristle

at the racism she witnessed when teachers referred to Black boys as 'gorillas' and

Black girls as 'Black birds'; she was also deeply affected by the way she

experienced such statements herself. In some ways she felt her Black body was

implicated in the racist discourse to which she was violently subject. More

importantly, the expectation that her prime objective should be to get the students

"off the stairs" speaks to the contradictory expectation that Black teachers deal

with 'Black problems' while simultaneously addressing the expectation, as

Michelle articulates, that Black teachers not be seen as connecting too closely

with Black students (Henry 2000). In this regard, Henry's (1998) characterization that Black children live in a society of contradictory discourses also applies to the lives of Black women teachers. They are burdened with the requirement to address the 'issues' of Black students, but not be seen as giving preferential treatment in supporting their learning needs. The historical, contradictory construction of Black women's race, gender, age and class as structured to "clean up everyone's mess" while being categorized as "unfit" is still operational in schools today (hooks, 1981, p. 154 & Roberts, 1993, p. 873).

Angela's experience with her colleague's assessment of her as a pregnant teenager, despite being over 30, and her subsequent realization of her colleague's deprecating constructions of Black womanhood, exemplifies Black women's "arduous and turbulent journey of self-discovery to reposition and relocate themselves in Canadian contexts" (Wane, 2009, p. 151). Furthermore, many Black women, like Angela and Michelle, Wane (2009) argues, experience an identity crisis when coming to Canada because of the differential treatment they experience in work locations here, particularly after growing up in locations which enabled them to feel secure. In other words, feelings of disorientation and dislocation can occur in Canada, and by extension in Canadian schools, because of an unfamiliar form of racism (Wane, 2009). It is not surprising then that Angela follows her anecdote with a declaration of her coping mechanism for the racist comments, "You just let it go over your shoulder. You don't focus on that"

(Focus Group Interview, Angela, p.89). While Angela may not focus on these experiences her ability to recall them with vivid clarity after more than 20 years, speaks to the lasting impact negative social constructions have on one's identity.

Michelle's reflection bridges the racist experiences of the teachers and their students by highlighting the complicated role of the raced teacher navigating the racist institution (Bhattacharyya, 1996; Shipp 1999). Not only does Michelle have to endure the burden of her own racist encounters, she also has to help students navigate theirs. In this way, the Canadian Black women teachers in this study differ from those in Henry's (2000) study. Where Henry found that her participants "are often expected to do the hands-on work and less of the intellectual work," the women in this study seem expected to do both simultaneously (p. 96). While reasons for this discrepancy could vary, one wonders how these women's efforts to develop themselves 'professionally', might work 'against' them as they become expected to work twice as hard to prove the respect they demand is warranted.

Continuing the conversation on the overt burdens that the women in this study have to bear, Keisha recalled a powerful and painful story in which she and Michelle were referenced:

> The comment was made about two years ago and I've never forgotten.
>
> (Pause) I was told that you (Michelle) would be a good fit for my
>
> school...because you were a light skinned Black so...the teachers would

be more accepting of you....So I said, 'Oh I am sorry, I forgot I was a

field nigger; you want the house nigger in here helping you with the kids'

(Focus Group Interview, Keisha, p. 41).

The shock of everyone in the focus group was palpable after Keisha recalled the

incident. But more shocking was Michelle's response: "But the thing is, would

they then allow us to be at the same school together—no, no, no, That's too

much" (Focus Group Interview, Michelle, p. 43).

Keisha's characterization by white male administrators as being 'too

Black' harkens back to the colonial practice of shade-ism – the practice of valuing

and shaming Black women according to the degree of her lightness or darkness in

skin pigmentation (Collins, 2000; Harris-Perry, 2011; hooks, 1981; 2005; Lane &

Mahdi, 2013). Further, her white superiors' use of such racist, colonial ideologies

without fear of recourse or chastisement demonstrates racist discourses'

routinization in current educational practices (Collins, 2009; hooks, 1981;

Tastsoglou, 2002). Tastsoglou (2000) argues that racialized women experience

racism at one of the most personal and intimate levels - heterosexual

relationships" (p. 93) Although Tastsologlou's argument is made in the context of

romantic relationships, parallels can be drawn between her idea of racialized male

female relationships and Keisha's treatment at the hands of the white male

Administrators who made the comment. What made the comment particularly

hurtful for Keisha was that it was made by men with whom she thought she had a

close working relationship and so respected. For them to see her, in her eyes, as a "field nigger" wounded her deeply and the former respect, trust and admiration she had for her peers was destroyed instantaneously. Moreover Keisha's response in calling herself a "field nigger" and Michelle a "house nigger" speaks to the internalization of race roles between Black teachers positioned differently because of race, shade, and class within the teaching profession.

Collins (1990) refers to this internalization as the "outside within" position that most Black women teachers occupy. Black women teachers belong to the teaching community, but because of their raced and gendered constructions they simultaneously remain outside of it. Consequently, regardless of their qualifications, work ethic and passion, they retain the burden of being the 'cultural other' (Shipp, 2000). It is interesting to note too, that regardless of Keisha's numerous proclamations about using the technique of "kissing ass until yuh can kick it", once confronted by the blatant racism thrust upon her, she immediately, and not necessarily with intention, evokes the trope of Sapphire, the angry Black woman, as read by her colleagues (Focus Group Interview, Keisha, p. 32).

Finally, Michelle's seeming attempt to overlook the glaring racism of these comments to focus on what she calls the 'benign' racism of the Board's unwillingness to put two Black administrators together in a school needs to be addressed. Both incidents and the Black female teachers' responses to them reveal

"the pervasiveness of systemic racism and consequent ambivalence that people of African heritage often feel" (Henry 1995). Michelle realizes that the Board's failure to support two Black female adminstrators' collaboration is racially motivated because the competence of two white administrators working together will never be questioned or scrutinized in the same way. Rather than focus on the meta-narrative of racism that constructs her position in the school, she focuses on the more professional forms she experiences in her job. As with many Black teachers more concerning to her are systemic rather than personal forms of racism that prevent her from advancement and opportunities in her work. In reality both forms of racism feed into and fuel each other.

Building Relationships

The burden of dealing with racist colleagues and racist conceptions leads the women teachers in this study to navigate racism in a myriad of ways including using the most exerted and pragmatic of forms, relationship building.

Angela provided two anecdotes to exemplify how she worked hard to build relationships to change the racist dynamics in her work environment.

> Right after I was divorced the second time I was at the photocopy machine
> and a teacher came to me with the Sunshine boy. She always come and
> shows me, you know, 'Look at that, that's a nice guy.' I said, 'Wait a
> minute. How come you always show me the Black ones? What's wrong
> with the white ones?' And she looked at me. She said, 'Oh I guess

nothing.' [Laughter.] You know what I mean? You're picking a guy for me, how do you know that's who I'm attracted to? So I just shut her up and she and I became friends after that....In my early years at Eastview, if I wrote a note to anyone, I would sign B & B and then they would ask me , what's that for? – Black and beautiful, so some teachers used to call me B & B. And when they wrote notes to me they would put W & W – White and wonderful, so eventually I think staff got comfortable (Focus Group Interview, Angela, p. 20).

According to Henry (2000) Black women historically were placed in positions to bear the political responsibility of raising the awareness and consciousness of white people in their work environment, "making it the job of the oppressed to teach the whites about power" (p. 97; see also hooks, 1981). Because Angela was an "outsider" trying to make a space for herself on the inside, she bore the burden of making her colleagues 'comfortable' with her Blackness while concurrently attempting to broaden their understandings of Blackness (Collins, 1990; hooks, 1994). In confronting her white colleague about her raced and sexual assumptions about whom Angela might find attractive, Angela forced the colleague to tackle her own biases and suppositions. Further, 'everyday acts,[18] such as the ones referenced by Angela highlights the thorny

---

[18] Using Caldwell (1997), Henry (2000) argues that the 'everyday acts' or normal interactions of Black women need to be 'taken seriously' and theorized in order to end gender and racial discrimination against them.

issues of Black women as they build relationships with others at school (Henry,

2000). By performing acts, which make their daily exchanges less difficult, they

are synchronously performing the mammy trope of caring for their white

colleagues by allaying their 'fears'.

Not all relationship building was contentious for these participants.

Michelle spoke proudly about parents telling her that, "they feel comfortable"

talking to her and the subsequent advantage that a shared racial or cultural affinity

provided in building parent-school relationships. She said:

> For some of my West Indian parents, Indo-Caribbean in particular, I'm
>
> getting lots of time on the phone with [them] and chatting. And so when I
>
> see the students [I can say] I just got off the phone with your mom—not
>
> even five minutes ago—she asked me to see if you're here and low and
>
> behold here you are. So maybe there's a little bit of that West Indian
>
> vernacular that comes into play that parents are like: you do what it takes
>
> to get them there! And they give you in a sense that freedom to maybe
>
> deal with their children in a different way as well…but it is a disadvantage
>
> too- your peers who don't think that you have the credibility (Individual
>
> Interview, Michelle, p. 11).

Michelle's cultural and racial affinity with parents supports the findings of

researchers, Demie, 2005; Durden, 2007; Finlayson, 2011; Irvine, 1989; Stewart,

Meier & England, 1989, who argue that racial and cultural connections between

teachers and staff can lessen the academic difficulties students face. In the body of the Black female teacher, the parents in her school had someone who they felt 'understood' their concerns and so they could speak to her. Yet as positive as these relationship are and while helping to lessen the burden Michelle may have faced when working with students in school, her colleagues' corresponding negative judgments serve to consolidate views that Michelle is to "fix" the 'problem' of Black youth and by extension their 'difficult' parents, while not getting too close to them to be seen as 'one of them' (Collins, 2000; Henry, 1989; Solomon, 1992).

There were only two types of occasions, in terms of building relationships, which the respondents felt safe and/or comfortable letting down their guard to an extent, – those relationships they built with students and those they built with other Black colleagues. Lynette recalled using her position as a Physical Education teacher to both build relationships and disrupt the stereotypes of the students. She stated:

> When we got to that basketball unit, and I tell my students, 'You know what? I can't even do a layup.' And I show them that I can't do a layup. They're like amazed and mind-blown , 'Oh, you're a phys-ed teacher; but you're black and your dad is a coach' because I tell them all those things like ahead of time. It's breaking down that stereotype sort of thing (Individual Interview, Lynette, p. 8).

Michelle followed with her own tale.

> I had one child [Pause] put a bag of weed in my drawer in Guidance
>
> thinking, 'Oh, please Miss the police are coming'. It's like, 'You know
>
> what, I'm glad you have such faith in me.' [laughter] But you have to be
>
> the adult. [Pause] Sometimes the students tell you things they shouldn't
>
> have in a sense because they do feel comfortable with you…, and so you
>
> hold them accountable while protecting them (Focus Group Interview,
>
> Michelle, p. 68).

Note that although Lynette builds relationships by breaking down the stereotypes

through her demonstration, she does so only after she has already constructed the

same stereotypes by telling her students about her father, the coach.

Further, Lynette's narrative shows that it is not only teachers who need to

be supported during the re-construction of their understanding of Blackness; her

students are "amazed" at her lack of basketball prowess (Lemons, 2008). More

importantly, Lynette's responsibility to educate the students and staff of the

pitfalls of stereotypes highlights again the unyielding and burdening educational

expectations placed upon Black women that is not a professional requirement of

their white counterparts (Dixson & Dingus, 2008; Shipp, 2000; Solomon, 1997).

As for Michelle, her tale of the student placing drugs in her drawer further

underscores the precarious position of othermothers working to "protect their sons

from the racist world" while teaching them to "manage the racism the world has

to offer" (Lawson-Bush, 2004, p. 382). Michelle is all too aware of the disproportionate number of Black youth in jail for minor drug offences (Brodbeck, 2013). Yet, while she could not hide the drugs and lie for the student, Michelle did make clear that the student's subsequent arrest did not stymie her in her support for the child:

> I was there from the start though and throughout it, support, support. You know what, it doesn't wreck the relationship even though you have to do the right thing, and you let them see people make mistakes, it's how you come back from the mistakes. He now wants to be at Eastview as a social worker but he has lived it all (Focus Group Interview, Michelle, p. 71).

Michelle's willingness to stand by the student throughout his ordeal attests to the kind of relationship building that Black women othermothers do in the "rejection of separateness and individual interests" and highlights the kind of relationship or "committed connection" to Black students for the collective good that Black women teachers engage in daily (Collins, 2000, p. 207 & Dixson & Dingus, 2008, p. 811).

The second occasion where the Black women teachers in this study seem to feel somewhat safe when building relationships is with each other. Keisha explains, "I've seen [Melanie] where she won't fight for herself because she doesn't want to kind of…create waves, so that's when I pick up the fight. So that's I think where we as 'sistrens' help each other" (Focus Group Interview,

Melanie, p. 84). Michelle quickly agreed acknowledging too that at times when the burden of the job is too hard to bear and "you don't trust talking to your own team…that's where there is a phone call, 'Mayday, mayday'" (Focus Group Interview, Michelle, p. 84).

Keisha's acknowledgement that she at times picks up the fight for Melanie when she is unable to fight and Michelle's admitting to calling other Black educators when her white colleagues fail to offer support resembles what Harris-Perry (2011) calls 'Fictive Kinship' where there are "connections between members of a group who are unrelated by blood or marriage but who nonetheless share reciprocal social or economic relationships" (p. 102). Keisha refers to 'fictive kinship' in the Jamaican vernacular as "sistrens". These fictive kinships - are oftentimes, what Harris-Perry (2011) says, "what allows them to survive the crazy" as they share a "voluntary sense of shared identity" (p. 102).

Yet, just as much as these kinships alleviate some burdens, navigating them can lead to a cycle of greater burdens. Keisha elucidated the contradiction: "For me it goes back to personal safety. I could reach out to you and you not be receptive" (Focus Group Interview, Keisha, p. 72). Melanie furthered Keisha's insight by stating:

> You reach out thinking that you're going to try and improve something.
> You see there's a pitfall and you reach out and you talk to them frankly

about it and they run to the person as a way to bond with them. We can't

assume solidarity (Focus Group Interview, Melanie, p. 72).

Repeatedly throughout her interviews Keisha made clear her reticence to trust.

While at the onset of the discussion it appeared that her concerns were channeled

towards political acts of resistance, as detailed in chapter 3, each experience she

recounted widened the net of insecurity she faced. The lack of support she thought

she might not receive from Black activists, her exclusion when she returned to her

community to teach, and a fear of harm at the hands of other Black women, leaves

her taciturn to reach out again or reaching out further for or to help another.

Moreover, disturbing is Melanie's explanation that reaching out and being ill-

treated could be a direct result of a Black body using another Black body to

further their connections with white colleagues.

Furthermore, Melanie's interpretation maps directly onto the betrayal

story Frederick Douglass (2004) tells in his narrative of slave life where a slave,

wanting to gain favor with his Master, would tell his master where to find free

Black men for capture. The women's belief in the possibility that such a

perpetuation of betrayal is still possible and likely today, and their subsequent

protectionist stance against it, despite their knowledge of the power of collective

voice, illuminates the fear-filled existence they are forced to live as individual and

as a collective of Black women teachers. In other words the colonial strategy of

divide, and conquer appears to still resonates in the lives of these Black women

teachers working in a supposedly post-colonial environment; these women feel unable to harness the full power of collective resistance for fear that their 'sisters' may turn on them (Brand, 1988; Dei, 2006; hooks, 1981). For many, the burden of navigating within a space of paranoia and suspicion of combating racism and hatred from both white and Black colleagues takes an innumerable personal and professional toll.

Conclusion

As a result of the unyielding confrontations with racism that each Black woman teacher in this study navigates, their daily lived experiences are marked by a cycle of burdens and negotiations with racism. The burdens of proving their competence and demanding respect from students and colleagues are borne of the racist and sexist culture in which they work. As a result, the women in this study find themselves continually negotiating relationships as a means of mitigating the harm caused to them, but the negotiations themselves take a toll on the women, defining them and leading to a cycle of further burdens and more intricate negotiations.

The stories of struggle, survival and perseverance the women tell, beyond providing witness to their strength of character, illuminate the myth of our post-racial existence; racism is indeed still manifesting itself subtly and overtly on the backs of those charged with the task of eradicating it. Our schools and our classrooms are very much gendered and raced and the subsequent toll that such

experiences have made the work of these women -- committed to the learning needs of marginalized learners-- that much harder. Concomitantly, the use of these teachers to address the issues Black children face in schools, and the expectation that they serve as mammy-figures to their white colleagues, further points to what Collins (1990) calls, "the lack of political will to create fundamental changes in existing school relations and institutional structures" (p. 64).

Yet, regardless of the obstacles and barriers placed in their paths, the women of this study persevere and exemplify the possibilities for successful practice if one is committed, dedicated and caring. In the next chapter I will share lessons presented by these women as a mean of offering suggestions for practice in meeting the needs of marginalized learners.

Chapter Five

Lessons from Canadian Black Woman Teachers

In this final data chapter, I will examine the teaching practices of

respondents that might help educators better meet the learning needs of

marginalized youth, Black boys in particular. The lessons, taken from the

teacher's narrations and their classroom observations consider the political,

structural, and cultural changes necessary inside schools to earnestly address the

teaching gap that Black and other marginalized youth experience. The

respondents' lessons are organized into the following themes: (1) teach cultural

bilingualism; (2) provide leadership opportunities; (3) build strong community

relationships; and (4) be relentless while setting high expectations.

Teach Cultural Bilingualism

From the onset of the interviews, the most persistent and pervasive lesson

the Black women teachers offered is the importance of teaching marginalized

students, and Black youth in particular, how to be culturally bilingual, or

culturally literate. Michelle succinctly defined cultural literacy as "the ability to

go into any setting and by reading the room, the people in it and the context,

adjust their speech, behaviour and attitude in order to be successful in that

environment" (Focus Group Interview, Michelle, p. 13). Immediately, the other

women in the focus group concurred, and Keisha, responding first said:

One hundred percent! My job is to teach [students] the game of mainstream. So if you're a Black boy you need to understand the parts of your Blackness people fear, so you need to figure out how to keep those parts in check.... I'm not sayin to ever forget who you are. I am saying put you in check before, when you're trying to get what you need to go forward (Focus Group Interview, Keisha, p. 14).

Michelle's definition of cultural literacy provides an interesting extension to the definition provided by linguistic researcher Tennenhouse (2013). Tennenhouse argues that without cultural bilingualism, "an understanding of the cultural divide," those from different cultures participating in interactions, "diligently reproduce the differences between the two...that drive home the separateness of their respective histories, bodies of primary material, and methodologies" (p. 136). In other words, without the ability to understand the history, context and culture of the other party, students and educators engaging in interactions that require mutual support and cooperation tend to find great difficulty in their interactions. The differing entry points, lacking abilities to comprehend the other, and an unwillingness to engage the other, limits the two parties' ability to speak to and listen to the other. And it is the continued reproduction of difference and the corresponding disconnects between Black students and teachers that the women in this study are concerned.

When asked to elaborate on what she sees as 'the game of mainstream',
Keisha too nodded towards a kind of cultural literacy or competence that she
focuses on developing in her school. However, for Keisha the focus is on student
understandings of how to navigate dominant society by teaching Black students to
be cognizant of how they are seen and represented. As referenced in the last
chapter, Keisha gave an anecdote about her first month as a Vice-Principal in the
school. In retelling the story, it was clear that Keisha was still incensed by white
female teachers who, on her first day at the school, asked her when she was going
to "get the Blackbird and gorillas off the stairs" (Individual Interview, Keisha, p.
22). The metaphor of Black girls as birds is offensive and sexist, is as pejorative
as the reference to Black boys as gorillas. Historically, the likening of the Black
male body to apes has been used to signify a perceived lack of intelligence as well
as animalistic, sexual deviance towards white women (Cardyn, 2002; hooks,
2004; Majors & Billson, 1992; Patton & Yuly, 2007). Further, the teachers'
'concerns' about Black children congregating at the stairs, is reminiscent of
Solomon's 1992 study which found that teachers were more likely to perceive
Black student cliquing as exhibiting threatening behavior. As well, complicating
this racist dynamic between women is the white female teachers' reassigning of
their responsibility for Black students to their Black female administrator. These
kinds of racist tensions that arise between culturally and racially different teachers

play out insidiously on the bodies of Black students. The need to confront racism as it arises in the staffroom is paramount to changing systemic racism in school.

Keisha suggests that it is important for Black students to understand how they are perceived by their non-Black teachers, so they can work to lessen these teachers' fears, improving relations that can support their educational possibilities. Such a philosophy is rooted in victim-blaming discourses, which put the onus on the marginalized to lessen their experiences with racism (Wane, 2009; Yon, 2000). For example, consider the work of Staples (1986) and his popular essay, *Just Walk on By: Black men and Public Spaces.* Staples suggests that Black men use strategies such as "whistling Vivaldi" when walking past white women to lessen conflict and set the women at ease with their presence (p. 3). Critique of Staples' essay is much the same as the critique presented to Keisha when she made her statement: Such actions puts the onus on the 'victim' to address discrimination and absolves the perpetrators and the system from addressing their inequities (Conigliaro, 2012; West 2001).

While acknowledging the truth of this critique, the women in the study still articulate an important difference in what they are proposing. As Keisha argued,

Look, I am not telling Black children not to be proud of who they are or where they come from. And it might not be fair and it's not what we want for our kids, but fighting the system takes time. In the meantime, we have

children getting kicked out of school because they don't know how to talk

to people. They don't understand how the people see them. They don't

know how to play the game...and that's right through school into being an

adult (Focus Group Interview, Keisha, p. 15).

Cutting her off, Angela added, "yeah... my granny taught me, yuh kiss ass until

yuh can kick it" (Focus Group Interview, Angela, p. 16).

Apparently, both Angela and Keisha see an important difference between

teaching students how to navigate the system and teaching students to deny their

identities/identifications. The teachings of protectionist skillsets are historically

rooted in the effects of slavery (Harris-Perry 2011). As a part of (other)

mothering, Black women and mothers understood the need to prepare and protect

Black men from the racist and violent society that they are forced to live by

giving them skills to survive in mainstream society. For the women in this study,

it would be irresponsible not to teach students how to protect themselves. As

Michelle worded it, "That would be like having a baby and a pool, telling the

baby not to go in it, but not putting up a gate. You gotta do both" (Focus Group

Interview, Michelle, p 17). The women then, understand that racism needs to be

addressed at the system level, but they also recognize the need to protect students

in a system that has been resistant to change. Black female teachers see as their

responsibility the imparting of critical teachings that support students to

understand the lived realities of their Blackness in a country that espouses the myth of multiculturalism and post-racial discourses (James, 2000; 2007; 2011).

The respondents also wished to render explicit what Anyon (1987) called the "secrets of symbolic capital" (in Henry, 1998 p. 103). The teachers understand that being culturally literate will help students navigate difficult situations more effectively. Teachers support student to rely on less confrontational strategies of conflict management with teachers and students (Solomon, 1992; Tennenhouse, 2013). Cultural bilingualism allows individuals to hold two cultures in tension. As Ramirez-Esparza et. al (2004) note, "bicultural individuals are those who have two internalized cultures that can guide their feelings, thoughts and actions....[Consequently] the presence of culture-specific cues can elicit culture-specific attributions and values" (p. 100). Such cultural accommodations[19] are not the same as absolving those who inscribe inequity or discriminate against others. Black children, by their visible minority status in Canadian schools and through cultural difference emerging from their places of origin or belief systems at home, are automatically negotiating two cultures (Henry, 1998). Keisha and Angela recognized, what Du Bois termed the, "double consciousness" of students and support students to use it as resource to navigate difficult race relations in school. They teach students to be culturally bilingual so that they acknowledge the

_____

[19] Bond and Yang (1982) argue that bicultural individuals have the ability to read cues from multiple cultures and adjust their responses, frames and language to accommodate the needs of the moment.

difference as just that-- a resourceful difference--, not a deficit. And more importantly, cultural bilingualism supports students negotiate situations in order to get the best possible outcome for themselves. As Angela worded it, 'kiss ass until you can kick it'.

Focusing on developing the culturally competence of marginalized students runs contrary to the current prevailing discourse around teachers' cultural competency. Consistently, researchers tend to focus on making teachers more culturally responsive and empathetic to the needs of their students (Gay, 2002; Solomon, 1992; Villegas and Lucas 2002). While the women in this study acknowledge the necessity of teachers to become culturally competent, they also see an important place, at least in the immediate future to teach students the skill sets of cultural bilingualism. As Solomon (1992) argues, "students need a repertoire of alternative ways of responding to conflicts and tensions" (p. 118). By teaching students not only the skills of navigating the system, but also the skill of reading their environment, the women in this study hope to lessen the daily difficulties students currently encounter at school. Further, they hope that teaching them these skills will not just help them at school, but will also help them navigate the world of work where their minority status and dominant perceptions remain racially entrenched.

Providing Leadership Opportunities

However as important as teaching cultural bilingualism is for the teachers in this study, the women also see the necessity of providing leadership opportunities for students. Continuing the theme of protectionist skills building, Melanie began the conversation on providing leadership opportunities by expressing her belief that

> No student should have to be dependent on you always. And even my
>
> student success, if from grade 9 to grade 12 that student is still coming and
>
> seeing you as many times and not moving forward then you have not
>
> fulfilled your obligation. It goes back to the gradual release of
>
> responsibility. If I have truly helped you as an educator, there's a point
>
> when you no longer need me (Individual Interview, Melanie, p. 18).

Melanie's perceived obligation to help students become self-sufficient and independent echoes Lawson-Bush's (2004) assertion that although Black women want to protect Black boys from a racist world, "they also want their sons to manage the racism the world has to offer" (p. 382). Melanie's reference to a gradual release of responsibility speaks to her desire for students to enter the world of race cautiously, and with support. She understands that students will not be able to independently address the difficulties they will later face in life if they remain dependent upon her. Therefore, in order to prepare them for the world that

they have to inhabit, the women in the study want schools and teachers to provide leadership opportunities for Black children.

Discussing the importance of instilling leadership values in Black youth, Lynette explained that opportunities for leadership "builds confidence, gets them excited and inspires them and shows other teachers what they can do" (Individual Interview, Lynette, p.5). Further, Keisha saw it as her duty to "create situations where these kids have more choices for themselves" (Individual Interview, Keisha, p. 16). Use of terms 'confidence', 'excited' and 'inspired', underscores Lynette's understanding of the apathetic and marginalizing experience school is for many Canadian Black youth (Codjoe, 2006; Dei, 1996; 1997; 2006; C. James, 2007; 2011; Rezai-Rashti & Martino, 2009). Vincent and colleagues (2012) argue that Black children operating in white dominated schools often have their cultural and social capital "devalued, rejected and treated as illegitimate" when they enter schools (p. 352). Each respondent spoke about the comments they heard (or overheard) teachers making about Black students at their schools. Comments reinforcing stereotypes of Black youth as "lazy" was a common part of the discourse pervading the women's school communities. Such an observation highlights the lack of progress made in terms of altering such viewpoints since Dei (1996) found that low-expectations of teachers, "added to the bitterness that students feel about the negation and devaluing of their experiences, histories, and knowledges, as well as contributions they bring to school" (p. 46; also Bakker, J.,

Denessen & Brus-Laeven, 2007; McKown, & Weinstein, 2000). Consequently,

the women in this study think it is essential that Black youth have opportunities to

showcase their skill sets, not only to build their own esteem, but to display

narratives which counter the prevailing negative ones.

At the same time however, the women in this study noted that the youth

they interacted with "were not used to having opportunities to be leaders"

(Individual Interview Michelle, p. 5). The respondents felt that clubs and activities

in school were designed to be exclusive of Black youth. Angela's following

example elucidated the point.

> Last year, my school decided to put on a drama production. You know
>
> what they picked, *Harvey*. A play about white people and some imaginary
>
> white rabbit. One night after basketball practice, I went by the drama room
>
> and not one Black, not one anybody not white in the room. Now this is a
>
> school that has more everybody than white, yet only white people in the
>
> play? When I ask the teacher about the lack of diversity she tell me 'they
>
> never come out'. Now why would they come out when you puttin on a
>
> play that they can't relate to? Hell, I don't even want to watch it
>
> (Individual Interview, Angela, p. 27).

Angela's anecdote provides rich insight into the forms of extra-curricular and

leadership opportunities schools often provide for marginalized youth. Drama

teacher defends the lack of diversity in the cast by placing the blame on the

students for not 'coming out.' Angela blames the teacher for choosing a production that does not bring the students in.

In her article *Black Girls/Black Women-Centered Texts and Black Teachers as Othermothers*, Mogadime (2000) tells the story of a teacher, her mother, and her mother's work to support the academic and self-esteem needs of the marginalized girls in her class. Because Mogadime's mother, Goodie, "had a high ratio of students of Caribbean and South Asian descent", Goodie, selected the play, *When the Rattle Snake Sounds* by African-American playwright Alice Childress in order to "work towards revising the denigrated image of Black women and mothers as nameless and voiceless" (p. 224). By the time of the performance, students acquired, " a new sense of confidence grew out of the students' participation and performance of the play" (p. 228). Contrasting Goodie's finding to that of Angela's, stark are the differences in approach that the drama teachers took. Henry (1998) suggests that it important that our curricular activities appeal to students. She insists that "it is not enough to hear the voices of those once silenced. We must also critically examine the inner workings of the ideological systems themselves" (p. 107). While the teacher at Angela's school appears not to consider how the play would or would not encourage participation and inclusion from the students of color, Goodie carefully selected a play that was of interest to students and also supported them students to critically examine their lived realities of marginalization.

Moreover, Michelle's assessment that, "because [Black youth] had so few opportunities, they didn't know how to accept it" when opportunity did come, highlights the dire need to develop in Black students knowledge, skills and opportunities for leadership. By not providing Black students the opportunities to be leaders, Black students do not get to practice the development of their skill sets. Consequently when opportunities did arise, some responded inappropriately, which in turn perpetuates dominant and diminished teacher beliefs of the limited capacities these students (Solomon, 1992).

Michelle further noted that when she used to volunteer as the teacher advisor for her school's student council, and would actively provide supported opportunities for Black students to be a part of the leadership team, they would "get a little confidence in that kind of stuff which would spill over and have a positive effect on school and keep them connected to school" (Individual Interview, Michelle, p. 5-6). What is important to note in Michelle's observation is the long term effects that her efforts had on the youth and the school community. hooks (1994) defines transformative pedagogy as one which works to "respect and honor the social reality and experiences of groups in this society who are non-white" (p.35). The teachers in this study show that acts of inclusion support the learner in the moment and lessen immediate conflict, and further down the road, create a space where the students become a part of the school

community and so have better positive interactions overall (Desimone, 2010; hooks, 1994).

Critical is Keisha's point about creating leadership opportunities for students as means to present them more life choices. The vast majority of marginalized students that the women in this study work with are from low socio-economic homes. As a result, the respondents found, like many researchers before them, that their students' access to the kinds of opportunities that middle and upper-middle class students had, was greatly diminished (Bakker, Denessen & Brus-Laeven, 2007; Cooper & Smalls, 2010;Hughes & Kwok, 2007; Roberts 2012). Keisha stated:

> So I believe in creating situations where these kids have more choices for themselves. The other thing where I said, I'd take kids out of the mainstream courses is, I don't want ever a child to feel the financial burden like I did going to school. And you know what, if I can have kids who are good kids taking Alt Ed but are getting paid (saving money) to go to school while earning their credits, how empowered they feel? So I had a kid who was doing great and in fact got a scholarship and all that, I changed her second semester to Alt Ed. She can get the English and math credit that she needed to graduate but she was also working, and she saved $10,000. So what a wonderful thing—you got the English, the math, you got your scholarship and now you've got some money saved—some good

money that you can actually take and have a life. So that's also something that's very important for me—how can I help these kids to create that solid foundation so that they can have a life? (Individual Interview, Keisha, p. 15).

While some of the parents and guardians at Keisha's school had the income to support their children's post-secondary desires, Keisha was aware and understood that such was not the case for all her students. Keisha's ability to empathize with the student's financial situation enabled her to be creative in her timetabling assistance for the student. Keisha chose an Alternative Education program for the student which allowed the student to still earn credits towards her Ontario Secondary School Diploma, while earning a very needed income to help pay for her post-secondary aspirations. In order to be accepted into the Alternative Education program, the student needed to develop a resume to give to prospective employers. They were also required to pass two job interviews, one with the Alternative Education teacher and the other with the employer. Keisha's support of this student through these processes and the student's subsequent skill acquisition in the workplace provide examples of the leadership opportunities provided to students in school. Such opportunities create greater life chances for the student supporting them to apply for more and different kinds of jobs than those that she might otherwise pursue if left to her own devices. Consequently, the goal of providing leadership opportunities helps the student become a part of

the school community in the present and provides skill sets and choices for students who might not have had such opportunities without teacher/school support (Gladwell, 2008).

Build Strong Community Relationships

The third lesson shared by respondents in this study centered on building strong relationships with both students and their parents. Specific to engagement in the classroom, each woman spoke about the direct actions she took to encourage Black students' academic participation. For example, Melanie noted that she made an effort to "go out and chat with" Black students daily (Individual Interview, Melanie, p. 26). Michelle discussed, "taking the time to chat with, say hello to and not lump all students into a category" (Individual Interview, Michelle, p. 34). Angela discussed making "a connection with each one of them....[She] would talk to them whenever [she] could and find out what makes them tick" (Individual Interview, Angela, p. 12). And Melanie admitted to "going out of [her] way to socialize with the Black kids – just casual conversations - so I could find out more about them and where they want to go" (Individual Interview, Melanie, p. 6-7). As discussed in the introduction to this thesis, a strong relationship between teachers and students is the cornerstone of student academic success (Birch & Ladd, 1997, 1998; Desimone, 1999; Horvat & O'Connor, 2006; Pianta & Stuhlman, 2004; Vincent, Rollock, Ball & Gilborn, 2012). Participants' use of the term "chat" imply that the conversations were not necessarily about

school work. Instead teachers use communication to build relationships and build trusting relationships with their students. Each respondent's intentional effort to forge a relationship with Black and other marginalized students in their school highlights the respondents' understanding that "relationships with significant others were important for sustaining students emotional and intellectual well-being" (Horvat & O'Connor, 2006, p. 46). Regardless of the historical difficulty Black children have faced in school, research continues to suggest that Black students, like many students, value their teachers' assessments of them (p. 48). Consequently, Black teachers in this study work to actively lessen the divide between students and teachers by asking questions about their lives and taking a genuine interest in their students' futures.

Further, Michelle's resistance towards "lumping" students into one category directly counters pejorative comments and fears like those expressed by the teachers at Keisha's school when she first arrived. Recall that the white teachers at Keisha's school looked at the Black children in the stairwell and labeled them "blackbirds" and "gorillas". The racist fears they expressed about seeing Black children together prevented the teachers from getting to know the students or making an effort to support their learning needs (Clark, 1983; Solomon 1992). The women in this study not only built relationships with the students, but by publically engaging the students in dialogue, presented a model to their colleagues of how to engage students in their schools. As Lynette expressed,

> Some teachers or staff in the school kind go about [conversations with
>
> Black students] by yelling at them and using an authoritative tone and it
>
> doesn't work. It just escalates whatever the problem is. If you get to know
>
> them and build a relationship most times you don't have to say anything
>
> they know when they are doing wrong and will quick time correct it and
>
> apologize (Focus Group Interview, Lynette, p.9).

Michelle also commented on her observations of

> teachers needing some etiquette. Like even proximity to youth, like when
>
> they're giving directions and instructions. If you are just shouting at the
>
> [Black] kids in the back corner and speaking nicely to the kids in the front
>
> of the classroom or hassling kids who have shown up late again, you are
>
> not building connections. You don't want the student to feel that they are
>
> being judged harshly and so doesn't even want to participate (Individual
>
> Interview, Michelle, p. 35).

> The respondents understand that "caring is a value... it frames and gives

meaning to what happens in schools and classrooms. Caring requires educators to

think about teaching and schools in unaccustomed ways" (Noblit et. al, 1995, p.

680). As respondents are teaching students to be culturally bilingual, they also

covertly model to the staff othermother practices of caring and culturally literacy.

The respondent's hope was simple: "Maybe a white teacher will go out of their

way to help someone that they can identify with" (Individual Interview, Melanie, p. 28).

Desimone (1999) argues that daily student discussions with mothers are associated with positive achievement. Since the respondents in this study have already proven themselves to be othermothers, developing caring relationships with the students serves as the catalyst for student engagement in the classroom. Angela used her chats to "make [students] feel worthy of success" (Individual Interview, Lynette, p.23). Michelle was trying to "find out their strengths and interests" (Individual Interview, Michelle, p14). Lynette felt that students "just wanted acknowledgement and attention;" and Melanie wanted to show that "someone in the building will be polite, honest, and respectful towards them" (Individual Interviews, Lynette, p. 18; Me, p. 9). Such approaches run contradictory to current hegemonic ideologies that demean the capacities of Black children paradoxically because of their lack of engagement in a school system that they find demeaning (Clark, 1983; Hughes & Kwok, 2007). The women in this study have developed an orientation towards Black students that is based in the premise that they are teachable and willing to learn. They realize that hostile, stereotypical and negative approaches towards Black students push them out of education (Dei, 1997). These teachers' insist that a caring approach to the education of Black students is needed to repair the violence and damage of

marginalization, to renew teacher-students relationships and to provide meaningful and generative educational experiences to students in schools.

The respondents also work to build relationships with significant adults in students' lives by making concerted efforts to form bonds with parents and other community members. According to Epstein (1995) "the way schools care about children is reflected in the way schools care about children's families" (p. 701). The respondents made numerous references to the dysfunctional relationships that their schools have with Black families. Assumptions and stereotypes about poverty, single-mother homes and negative attitudes towards school permeated staffroom discussions on the underachievement of Black students. It is no wonder then that as research suggests "minority parents experience less positive relationships with teachers and engage in fewer school involvement activities than do white parents" (Hughes & Kwok, 2007, p. 40). Because "teachers tend to perceive parents in terms of a uniform standard," Black parents who engage in their children's learning using frames and models of engagement unfamiliar to teachers are judged as disinterested in their children's success when in fact nothing could be further from the truth (Bakker et al, 2007, p. 188; also Roberts, 2012; Solomon, 1992). Contrary to this assumption, over the years, studies have shown that Black parents and families care very much about their children's schooling and work to support their children through the schooling process, using means and methods different to that of their white counterparts (Cooper, 1991;

Cooper & Smalls, 2010; Fordham & Ogbu, 1986; Roberts, 2012; Solomon, 1992, 1997; Winks 1971).

Conscious of the socio-economic challenges presented to their Black students, the respondents in this study worked hard to bridge the home-school divide. They ensured that their practices did not prejudge Black parents according to dominant assumptions historically held against parents . As Michelle worded it, "you have to call home for good as much as bad *and* to provide parents with information about opportunities" (Individual Interviews Michelle, p 27). Her balanced approach to parent communication worked to lessen the reality "that minority, especially Black children and children of low socioeconomic status are less likely than Caucasian or higher SES children to enjoy supportive relationships with teachers" as Black parents are most likely called only when problems arise (Hughes & Kwok, 2007, p. 40).

Michelle's concerted communication to parents of the opportunities available to their children speaks to the reality that oftentimes Black parents are not as informed about school opportunities and policies as are white parents (Solomon, 1997). Access to technology, the ability to attend after school events when having to work, and not feeling welcome in school environments are all factors that contribute to Black parents remaining underserviced and ill-informed about possibilities for their children in school (Codjoe, 2006; Epstein, 1995; Gay, 2002; James, 2012; Mogadime, 2000; Moles, 1993; Villegas & Lucas, 2002;

Vincent et al, 2012). However, because white teachers "attribute lower levels of [Black] parent involvement to a lack of motivation to cooperate, a lack of concern for their children's education and a lower value placed on education", the teachers in this study take it upon themselves to actively contact parents and seek opportunities for them to engage and be involved (Hughes & Kwok, 2007, p. 41). Such a proactive stance towards communication with parents and exemplified this study's respondents creates a space where "students gain more in achievement when they and their parents experience supportive relationships with teachers" (p. 45).

The respondents in this study see the need for strong relationships between home and school. While on one hand the teachers recognize that their robust relationships with parents may have begun as a result of "parents seeing somebody like themselves and so felt at ease discussing issues with them," these teachers quickly acknowledge that what allowed the relationship to develop was their othermother ethics of care and understanding (Individual Interview, Michelle, p. 26). As with their feelings about their relationship with Black students, sharing a "common" race or ethnicity did not set the precondition for building a relationship. Teachers' empathy for these parents' lived realities compelled them to respond. For non-Black educators to support and respond to the learning needs of Black youth, they need to underpin their interactions with

genuine relationship with students, communicating opportunities and concerns with parents and caring about student challenges and possibilities.

Be Relentless and Set High Expectations

Finally, Black women teachers in this study felt that "being relentless" and setting high expectations for their students led to greater achievement among Black students. When asked to explain what was meant by "being relentless", Angela explained that, "Black children are not gonna approach you; you got to drag them in" (Focus Group Interview, Angela, p. 18). Michelle agreed adding, "to be relentless you have to continually invite—relentlessly invite, and to find out what the kids want to do" (Focus Group Interview, Michelle, p. 18). In the context of the classroom, Melanie felt that being relentless required that

> You constantly go over to them, see where they are. See what they're doing, giving continuous feedback, checking to make sure that they are on the right track. Asking them to give me something in advance to assess. Just constantly checkin in to make sure they are okay (Groups Interview, Me, p. 19).

Also agreeing, Lynette felt that "it is about constant encouragement, positive reinforcement, just telling them over and over that they can be successful and to keep working hard" (Focus Group Interview, Lynette, p.19).

The respondents' willingness to be relentless clearly harkens back to their ethics of care discussed in the last chapter. Furthermore, teacher relentlessness

supports teachers to "re-evaulate oppositional behaviours from a political context and see resistance as a precondition for long-term changes in school structures" (Solomon, 1992, p. 115). The women in this study qualify their task as relentless because they see as part of their responsibility as Black female othermothers is a response to students educationally injured by racist and stereotypical assessments of their abilities and promise (Dei, 1997; Hopkins, 1997; James, 2011, Majors & Billson, 1993, Solomon, 1992). In supporting marginalized students to engage in schooling, these teachers' refuse to assume the traditional schooling dynamics of teacher saying "do" and children doing (Byfield, 2008; Hale, 2001; Yon, 2000). Instead, these teachers build pedagogical relationships that take a basis in care for children, diminished by racism, claiming that care is paramount to their mandate to teach.

The pedagogy of care of Black female teachers lends credence to the notion that relationship building is more than just about racial-affinity. Although they share the same race as the students, they too have to prove to the students that their interest is genuine. One cannot care simply on the basis of race; care is embedded in a pedagogical ethic and orientation that one develops through constant dialogue with and response to the lived conditions of students.

The practice of being relentless is no different in Black contexts than it is in mainstream discourses about student-teacher relationships; in order for children to learn they have to have a connection to their teachers. However Black teachers

insert their relentlessness not in the general furor to teach but in the desire to respond to educational injuries, and to the learning potential of Black youth. Black student-white teacher relations operate in a historically antagonistic and racially charged context. Many white teachers fear or hold stereotypical and demeaning perceptions of Black youth. Under such conditions it is very difficult to build the kinds of relationships necessary for students to learn. Teachers willing to respond to students lived realities take responsibility for their implication in those realities.

But being relentless is not enough; teachers also need to set high expectations for their students. Angela argued that "once you build that relationship with [students], they want to know that you have high expectations and when they are not meeting those expectations they will hear about it" (Focus Group Interview, Angela, p. 19). Agreeing, Melanie felt that "teachers sell [Black students] short. You can't do that, you have to make them work just as hard as everyone else.... But of course support them all the way along" (Focus Group Interview, Melanie, p. 19). Keisha added that "it is not my job to discourage. I work to create realizations. If you want something then my job is to help you find the path to get there" (Focus Group Interview, Keisha, p. 20).

Respondents find holding high expectations for their students ran counter to the overwhelming discourse regarding teachers and their low expectations of Black students (Codjoe, 2006; Dei, 1997; 2006; Finlayson, 2011; Irvine, 1998;

Lynn, 2006; Solomon, 1994). By setting the bar high for Black students these teachers emphasize the students' self-worth. With high expectations, Black students are more likely to experience higher levels of academic curiosity and persist more on difficult tasks (Roberts, 2012). Further, such actions, Osborne (1995) argues, enables students to "become the subjects, not the objects of their own existence" (in Brathwaite & James, 199, p. 67). By supporting students and actively showing a belief in them by holding students accountable for their education and the expectations for learning, the teachers are altering the perception that the students are value-less and voiceless in school environments.

Conclusion

In this final data chapter, I have set out the four main lessons of the pedagogical practices of Black women teacher respondents in this study. hooks (1994) argues that teachers lack strategies to deal with antagonism in the classroom. Based on the reflections of the respondents in this study, I further argue that many teachers lack empathy, an orientation to cross cultural perspective and a commitment to their pedagogical promise to support all students. To support historically marginalized learners teachers must develop practices of care and increased communication with students. The teachers in this study outline these practices in four lessons: (1) teach students to be culturally bilingual so that the students can learn to navigate various contexts; and learn how to be culturally literate so they can engage in dialogue with Black youth without

escalating situations; (2) actively seek to provide Black students with leadership opportunities so that they can build their repertoire of skill sets as well as provide future opportunities for success; (3) build strong relationships with Black students, grounded in mutual respect and a genuine willingness to support their academic endeavors; and build strong relationships with parents and community members in order to learn about the strengths and needs of the family and so work together to support the students learning; and (4) be relentless in care for Black students while setting high educational and social expectations for them.

Earlier in this dissertation, Keisha made reference to teaching the book *Outliers* by Malcolm Gladwell in her class. In chapter 2, Gladwell discusses the concept of "concerted cultivation". He defines it as "an attempt to actively foster and assess a child's talents, opinions and skills" (p. 196). Gladwell finds that concerted cultivation has "enormous advantages" such as developing self-worth, learning the skill of teamwork and learning how to cope in stressful situations. My study finds that the women in this study are engaged in the pedagogical practice of concerted cultivation and provide a model of pedagogy for other teachers. By having high expectations and being relentless, they are developing in students self-worth. By creating leadership opportunities for students they are developing the skill of teamwork. And by teaching students to be culturally bilingual, students are learning to cope in stressful situations. In these ways these women are working to centre marginalized Black students in a schooling process that has

historically kept them on the periphery so that they, like their peers, can reach their full potential, academic and future success.

Chapter Six

Conclusion

The teaching experiences and pedagogical practices of Canadian Black women teachers are under-examined in educational studies. This dissertation addresses a gap in the scholarship and adds to the limited number of studies documenting the remarkable efforts of these teachers. Historically, Black women teachers have served as advocates and innovators of Black student education and yet these efforts continue to go unrecognized. Equally troubling is the recent hyper focus on the significance of Black male teachers as a "sole" educational response to Black male underachievement. Such a focus tends to create division in Black communities and obscure the ongoing and tireless care and support by Black female teachers to Black students in their classrooms. This dissertation seeks to bring much attention to and learn from the immense contributions of Black women in the lives and educational chances of Black male youth

To listen to and advance the voices of Black female professionals who have historically been relegated to the margins of education and research, this dissertation examined the narratives of five Black Canadian women. These teachers have worked in the field for a number of years and are successful in engaging marginalized youth, particularly Black males, in schooling. My dissertation asked three main questions to these educators: (1) How have Black

women teachers experienced teaching in Canada? (2) What skills and attributes do Black women teachers use to engage marginalized learners? (3) What lessons do Black women teachers feel educators needed to learn to better meet the needs of Black learners, particularly Black males. I then examined participants' respondents through literature that addressed many of the teachers' claims.

The dissertation gave an overview of the context that lead to the questions and explored what I claim is a contentious belief that Black boys need Black men in education in order to be successful. Such a fallacy is exploded as Black men themselves attribute their success in school and in life to the relentless care and support of Black women and mothers. Ironically, Black female parented families are the most maligned and misunderstood by parents. Mainstream teachers routinely adopt demeaning discourses towards Black students condemning their realities of parenting in single family homes or by claiming that their families show a blatant disregard for education (Sudarkasa, 1996).

Chapter one contained a review of the literature on Black schooling experiences, tracing the experiences of students and teachers in Canada from the 1800's until today. I saw the need for such a review on the realization that the Black experience in Canadian education, from its inception, has been an arduous one, fraught with racial, political, social and emotional tensions. Through this review, I also found that Black women teachers historically are at the forefront of the struggle to advance the quality of life and educational experiences of Black

learners. And this lesser known history, I insist requires acknowledgement and recognition on the part of the educational scholars and practionners. Black female teachers fought for their students despite unyielding assaults on their virtue, competence and motivations.

Out of recognition of the strength and worth of Black women teachers, Black Feminist Theory (BFT) was used to ground the thinking in this examination. I used BFT to underscore the conflicting and complicated experiences of sexism, racism and dehumanization that Black women teachers mediate daily inside and outside the classroom. Particularly, BFT is grounded in an understanding that the paid and unpaid work of Black women is central to emancipation of Black people As well, BFT recognizes the value of storytelling, a research methodology that is the very heart of this dissertation.

Complementing my work with Black Feminist Theory is Critical Race Theory (CRT). At its outset, CRT acknowledges that schools are racially organized as part of its hierarchical structure (Gillborn, 2008). CRT holds an important position in the design of this dissertation through its understanding that race and its accompanying signifiers are dynamic and not static, making the positioning of race as "more than a product of how Blacks make sense of themselves as racial subjects, but also as a consequence of how schools and their agents racialized Black subjects" (Horvat & O'Connor, 2006, p. 17). CRT supported my analysis of how the respondents viewed themselves and their

experiences in school, but also of how their visions of self were informed and constructed by their interactions both as teachers and as students in racialized environments.

In chapter two I reviewed the research methods used to make findings for this dissertation. My decision to use qualitative research, specifically individual, semi-structured interviews and a focus group interview allowed me to create spaces where respondents felt comfortable discussing their experiences and then had the opportunity to review initial reflections in order to alter or add to their first thoughts. Such latitude was crucial to a study focused on listening justly and openly to the experiences of a group whose voices have been historically silenced or maligned. Further, my conflicting positions as researcher (outsider) and Black woman teacher (insider) were allayed by the understanding that neither insider-ness nor outsider-ness are fixed positions, Through my fluid researcher position, I moved in and out of positions put forth in the interviews and my subsequent analysis of data (Kirby, Greaves & Reid 2006).

The respondents, all secondary teachers with the same school board, were selected because of their proven, unyielding care for Black and other marginalized youth as well as their willingness to openly share ideas for how others could replicate their successful practices. After conducting various interview formats with the five teachers, I structured teacher narratives into three data chapters. The first chapter explored the roles and responsibilities Black

women teacher respondents felt they had a responsibility to bare. Discussions about being mother-figures or 'othermothers' to Black youth, advocates for Black youth and being Black teachers explored the multitudinous and varying expectations placed on these teachers. Further their multiple roles highlight the continuation of the historical legacy of educational advocacy on the part of Canadian Black women teachers that is embedded in principles Black liberation (Cooper, 1991; Henry, 1993). Their willingness to sacrifice their time, space and oftentimes security for the needs of marginalized learners speaks to an altruistic sense of self that Black women teachers in Canada are seldom recognized and celebrated for. The complexity of being a Black woman teacher in a Canadian context is also stressed in this chapter that finds Canadian Black women teachers, work to build relationships with, understand, and unify Black youth from all over the world. These teachers also counter the pervasive and erroneous discourse that Canada as a land of multiculturalism is accepting of all people when in their experience minority students are subject to grave inequities in school and society.

In the second data chapter, I conducted a deeper exploration of Black women teachers' experiences. This chapter entitled *The Burdens and Negotiations of Black Women Teachers*, asked the respondents to share their experiences of being Black women teachers in a predominantly white profession. Teachers spoke about the need for respect and their experience of being perceived as 'less than' their white counterparts. They also addressed an experience of overt and covert

racism and their difficulties in building relationships with students and other teachers. They claim that these demeaning and difficult experiences of racism within the teaching profession shape and inform their practice in schools. These unyielding difficulties lead to a cycle of burdens and negotiations that test the will and energy of women yet never pushed them to leave the profession or give up. Instead, many times the difficulties they experienced pulled them further into the profession as they felt compelled and determined to disrupt cycles of oppression to which they themselves are subject.

The final data chapter articulated pedagogical lessons of Black women teachers that might be helpful to other professionals responding to the learning needs of Black marginalized learners. By teaching students and fellow teachers how to be culturally bilingual, providing leadership opportunities for students, building relationships with parents and being relentless in care, the women in this study find that Black children will receive the concerted cultivation needed to overcome the racial and systemic barriers currently placed in their path.

These lessons and the others provided throughout the dissertation are potentially transformative. Following Freire, Nagda et.al. (2003) define transformative pedagogy as "engaged learning" where there is, "an application of classroom reflections to everyday phenomena and immediate social environment" (p. 187). Further, the researchers argue, "engaged learning, uses individual and group reflections and applies generalized understanding to make sense of daily,

proximal environment attributes" (p. 187-8). In other words, pedagogy becomes transformative when classroom learning is rendered through application towards social justice action. For each respondent in this study, social justice steers their actions. Each became a teacher to better the possibilities for the students they reach. As a consequence of their marginalizing scholastic experiences or a result of their affirming academic experiences, they used their learning as the impetus for their practice. The lessons shared by the women all have the power to transform the ways in which educators approach the students in their classroom.

In the lesson on becoming culturally bilingual the teachers repositioned students' cultural literacy to the forefront of teachers' pedagogical practice. By utilizing everyday lessons on audience, tone and voice teachers have the potential to expand learning beyond textbook comprehensions of literacy to an existential conception that serves students bicultural competence beyond the classroom.

Lessons on providing leadership opportunities revealed that teachers have the potential to make new spaces for marginalized students. Teachers can support students to find their voices and actions rendered meaningful to the school community, but also the parent and greater community. By teaching students leadership skills, those who do not normally have opportunities to be leaders, are given access to more educational choices and opportunities. Further, such actions highlight to parents and school administrators that inclusive environment work when students become engaged in school life in wider contexts.

Building strong communities through student involvement supports more diverse developmental and pedagogical practices in school. Freire (2000) asserts that trust is the "indispensable precondition for revolutionary change" (p. 60). Although Black parents have been a part of the Canadian school system since the 1800s the inclusion of their voices in many ways are as silenced today as they were back then. Creating spaces where their voices are invited and encouraged the school has the possibility to showcase to both their students and the community the value we place in all of our stakeholders and their contributions to the educational table. Building trust between home and school is necessary to reform relationships and learning in the education system.

The final lesson, on being relentless and setting high expectations, has the greatest transformational possibilities. This study was conducted under the assumption that racial affinity is not the sole nexus for educational transformational. The teachers in this study also repeatedly highlighted the importance of adopting an ethics and pedagogy of care rather than attributed their efforts to sharing racial affinities. Black women teachers in this study do not attribute their success with students to the fact of their Blackness. They claim taking responsibility for and care of the educational experiences of black students support them to effectively respond to Black students in the classroom. Through the sympathy they hold for the students, or the empathy they garner because of their own experiences, the women in this study "tuck Black children under their

wing" in a way that provides pedagogical attention and comfort for the students that some mainstream pedagogical practices do not. If teachers interested in seeing all students succeed, really wish to see all students do well, then an ethics and practice of care, parallel to what the women in this study provide is needed. And more importantly this kind of care is possible.

The respondents in this study invite teachers to treat Black students as they would any other student for whom have a "soft spot for". Teachers hold soft spots for students with whom they empathize. Learning about the student, speaking to the student's family, helping the student and teaching them how to negotiate difficult environments develops in teachers the capacity for empathy. Paradoxically the practices of care that these teachers adopt supports and teaches them to care well for their students. As Keisha worded it, "If you were helping any other student, what would you do? Take your answer and apply it to the Black child" (Individual Interview, Keisha, p. 32). Such requests are not difficult. However for them to be implemented the teacher has to see the student as a person, not a "gorilla" or "blackbird". If non-Black teachers can see Black youth for what they are, boys and girls, they might also be relentless in their desire for their educational achievement and chance. Teachers offer these practical suggestions: Ask the student for their work. Offer additional support. Call parents to celebrate successes and to work together to meet student needs. In these ways,

the final lesson, the most possible for transformative practices can affect the educational chances of students.

According to the teachers participating in this study the education gap faced by Black youth is not an achievement gap: it is a teaching gap. Historically and in our contemporary moment, Black women teachers are revolutionary educational leaders. They "do not go to the people in order to bring them a message of 'salvation', but in order to come to know through dialogue with them both their objective situation and their awareness of that situation" (Friere, 200, p.95). When Black youth are taught with the contextual and historical understandings of marginalization in mind and in our practices of care, then the possibilities for praxis[20] are infinite. Teachers might include lessons on Africentricity in their program. They might confront inequity, bias, classism, sexism, ageism and racism in their curriculum. They might tailor lessons to meet the everyday realities of the students' communities and lives or as James (2011) calls it, use a Community-Referenced Approach. These small shifts in pedagogical practice can reap significant change in the educational experience of Black youth.

The findings from this study point to how Black women teachers understand, support and nature marginalized students in their effort to ensure that these students get the education that they need. These women teachers seem to

---

[20] Freire (2000) defines praxis as "reflection and action upon the world in order to transform it" (p.33).

operate with the idea that they and all teachers should treat Black and other

marginalized learners as they would any other child in their care. They posit that

Black children and other marginalized children, more often than not, are treated

like "gorillas and black birds" not boys and girls by individuals in a profession

that is mandated to care for the needs of the child. If marginalized children were

cared for, respected and assisted in the way that these teachers feel white, middle

class children are treated, positive schooling experiences could be had by

marginalized youth. Their argument, their experience is that such is not the case.

Limitations of the Research

As quoted in the Introduction to this paper, Gilroy (1993) points to the

limits and restrictions of gender and race-based pedagogies. Thinking about

academic solutions for the problems faced by marginalized students through the

socially constructed norms of race and gender restrict the possibilities for

transformative education. Those possibilities are only understood through

normative understandings of Blackness and through the place and position of the

heterosexual male and female performing their prescribed tasks (Gilroy, 1993).

As a result then, my research while focusing on the place of Black female

teachers in supporting the needs of Black male learners, recognizes that to be truly

transformative, teachers, administrators and others also need to be critically aware

of the limits that these constructs hold and so look to the practices performed by

these teachers as the nexus for change.

With the limitations presented by Gilroy in mind, my project sought to explore the relationship between transformative education and the practices of Black female teachers. In other words, I endeavored to pay attention to what we can learn from Black female teachers that can be used transformatively, by all teachers, in our thinking about meeting the needs of the marginalized learner.

Further, this paper examined the teaching experiences of only five Canadian Black women teachers. While much can be gleaned from their lessons, Gibson and Ogbu (1991) remind that there is "an intra-group variability in responses to schooling within each minority group. Blacks are no exception" (in Codjoe, 2006, p. 48). The lessons provided by these women are not meant to speak for all Canadian Black women teachers. Instead, their stories provide insight into what might be possible in developing inclusive educational practices.

A question remaining in this paper is: How might the emphasis on mothering influence the curricular emphasis of the Black women teachers in this study? The respondents made clear that they saw curriculum as "secondary" to meeting the socio-emotional needs of the students. Does this mean that they do not value curriculum? Are they focused on where the needs are greater but at the expense of curricular knowledge? How might their mothering focus later impact students' education and skills after high school? These and other questions need to be addressed to gain a more comprehensive understanding of Black women teachers' impact on their students' education.

The nature of oppression causes marginalized bodies to be constructed by while constructing oppression (Ladson-Billings, 1998). The Black women teachers in this study struggled with their place in reproducing the oppressions of the institution they are trying to disrupt. Contradictory comments about caring for all children equally while simultaneously "caring more" for Black children show how the women live their lives trying to reconcile the imposed multicultural[21] expectation of being equal with the reality that they use other-mothering as a means to be equitable (Green, 1993). Harris-Perry (2011) contends that Black women, when confronted with "race and gender stereotypes...are standing in a crooked room.... Bombarded with warped images of their humanity, some black women tilt and bend themselves to fit the distortion" (p. 29). Further she indicates that to appreciate the decisions that some Black women make, and to "better understand sisters as citizens" one has to understand "the crooked room in which they struggle to stand up straight" (p. 32). It is not far-fetched to argue that the schools in which the women in this study work are crooked rooms.

Also, not only are these women confronting warped images of the self, they are also confronting warped images of their students and their parent's humanity. They struggle to teach and make changes in a context hostile to their very presence. The complication comes in that their understandings of the

---

[21] Banks (1994) argues that one of the guiding tenets of multicultural education in educational sites requires the equal promotion the differences amongst individuals as a means of celebrating difference and building community

crooked room are raced. Their decisions in supporting Black and other marginalized youth are raced. And their ability to understand the self is constructed by race. As Morrison asserts, "race is always already present in every social configuring of our lives" (p. 52). So it may seem then that their arguments for helping all students equally but helping marginalized students "a little more" is contradictory. The expectations in schools demand that these teachers treat all students the same, however the teachers in this study understand that treating marginalized students the same is not treating them equitably (Henry, 1995).

While it is possible to argue that the women's decisions to othermother can be read as perpetuating the burdens placed upon them, the women instead see their decisions as necessary until such time as the crooked room becomes straight.

Black women teacher respondents see the long-standing teaching gap between marginalized students and white, middle-class students as a problem of teaching rather than a student problem. They challenge us as educators to confront our problem of teaching, dialogue bravely about it and learn from some tried and true methods used by Black teachers with students in the classroom. Through lessons learned from a dialogical and caring engagement with the lived and educational realities of Black teachers, the lives of students might be transformed, and with these lives, the educational system in Canada.

References

Abrams, L., & Moio, J. (2009). Critical Race Theory and the Cultural Competence Dilemma in Social Work Education. *Journal of Social Work Education*. 45(2), 245-261.

Africentric Alternative School Support Committee. (2008). *Africentric Education: Commonly Asked Questions*. Retrieved June 29, 2013, from http://www.tdsb.on.ca/boardroom/bd_agenda/uploads/generalinfo/080516%2 0africentric%20q&as.pdf

Baden, M., & van Niekerk, L. (2007) Narrative Inquiry: Theory and Practice. *Journal of Geography in Higher education*. 31(3), 459-72

Balibar, E. (1991). Is There a Neo-Racism? In E. Balibar and I. Wallerstein (Eds). *Race, Nation, Class Ambiguous Identities*. London: Verso, 17-28.

Bakker, J., Denessen, E., Brus-Laeven, M. (2007). Socio-Economic Background, Parental Involvement and Teacher Perceptions of These in Relation to Pupil Achievement. *Educational Studies*. 33(2), 177-192.

Bernard, J. L., Hill, D., Falter, P., & Wilson, D. (2004). Narrowing the Gender Gap: Attracting Men to Teaching. *Professionally Speaking*. Toronto: Ontario College of Teachers.

Bhattacharyya, G. (1996). Black Skin/White Boards: Learning to be the 'Race' Lady in British Higher Education. *Parallax*. 2(1), 161-71.

Birch, S. H & Ladd, G.W (1997). The Teacher-Child Relationship and Children's Early School Adjustment. *Journal of School Psychology* 35, 61-79.

_____(1998). Children's Interpersonal Behaviours and the Teacher-Child Relationship. *Developmental Psychology*. 34, 934-46.

Bogdan, R.C., & Bilken, S.K. (1982). *Qualitative Research for Education: An Introduction to Theory and Methods*. Boston: Allyn & Bacon.

Brathwaite, K., & James, C. (Eds.) (1996). *Educating African Canadians.* Toronto: James Lorimer and Company Ltd., Publishers.

Braithwaite, R., & Benn-Ireland. (1983). *Some Black Women: Profiles of Black Women in Canada.* Toronto: Sister Vision.

Brodbeck, T. (2013). 69% Increase in Black population in Federal Prisons. *Winnipeg Sun. http://www.winnipegsun.com/2013/03/11/69-increase-in-black-population-in-federal-prisons*

Brown, R. & Sinay, E. (2006) *Student Census: Linking Demographic Data with Student Achievement.* Toronto District School Board Research Report.

Bryman, A., & Teevan, J. (2005). *Social Research Methods.* Don Mills: Oxford University Press.

Bush, L. (2000). Black Mothers/Black Sons: A Critical Examination of the Social Science Literature. *The Western Journal of Black Studies.* 24(3), 145-55.

Byfield, C. (2008). *Black Boys Can Make It: How They Overcome the Obstacles to University in the UK and USA.* Trentham Books Limited.

Cardyn, L. (2002). *Engendering Traumatic Experience: Legal, medical, and Psychological Conceptions of Sexual Trauma in American Culture.* 1865-1950. Unpublished dissertation, Yale University, New Haven, Connecticut.

Carr, P. & Klassen, T. (1997). Different Perceptions of Race in Education: Racial Minority and White Teachers. *Canadian Journal of Education.* 22(1), 67-81.

Clark, R. (1983). *Family Life and School Achievement: Why Poor Black Children Succeed or Fail.* Chicago: Chicago University Press.

Codjoe, H.M. (2006). The Role of an Affirmed Black Cultural Identity and Heritage in the Academic Achievement of African-Canadian Students. *Intercultural Education.* 17(1), 33-54.

Coetzee, J.M. (2001). *The Lives of Animals.* Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Collins, P.H. (2000). *Black Feminist Thought Knowledge, consciousness and the politics of empowerment.* New York: Routledge.

Coleman, D. (2006). *White Civility: The Literary Project of English Canada.* Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

Conigliaro, M. (2012). Analysis of Black Men and Public Spaces. Retrieved from: http://conigliaromj.blogspot.ca/2012/03/analysis-of-black-men-and-public-space.html

Cooper, A. (1991). *Black Teachers in Canada West, 1850-1870: A History.* MA Thesis, University of Toronto.

Cooper, A. (1994). The Search for Mary Bibb, Black Woman Teacher in Nineteenth-Century Canada West. In P. Bristow (Ed). *We're Rooted Here and They Can't Pull Us Up: Essay's in African Canadian women's history.* Toronto: University of Toronto Press. 141 – 153.

Cooper, S., & Smalls, C. (2010). Culturally Distinctive and Academic Socialization: Direct and Interactive Relationships with African American Adolescents' Academic Adjustment. *Journal of Youth Adolescents.* 39, 199-212.

Cowen, D., & Parlette, V. (2010). *Toronto's Inner Suburbs Investing in Social Infrastructure in Scarborough.* Toronto: Cities Centre Press.

Cummings, Lee, L. & London, A. (1983). Children of the Caribbean: A Study of Diversity. *Journal of Black Studies, 13 (4)*, 489-95.

Darbyshire, P., MacDougall, C., & Schiller, W. (2005). Multiple Methods in Qualitative Research with Children. *Qualitative Research* 5(4), 417-436

Davies, C. (2005). *Black Women, Writing and Identity Migrations of the subject.* New York: Routledge.

de Zulueta, F. (1995). Bilingualism, Culture and Identity. *Group Analysis.* 28, 179-90).

Dei, G. (1996). The Role of Afrocentricity in the Inclusive Curriculum in Canadian Schools. *Canadian Journal of Education, 21 (2)*, 170-186

_____.(1997). *Reconstructing Drop-out: A Critical Ethnography of the Dynamics of Black Students' Disengagement from School.* Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

_____.(2006). Black-Focused Schools: A Call for Re-visioning. *Education Canada.* 46(3), 27-31.

_____. (2006). *Anti-Colonialism and Education: The Politics of Resistance.* Rotterdam: Sense Publishers.

Dei, G.,James, I., Karumanchery, L., James-Wilson, S., & Zine, J. (2000) *Removing the Margins The Challenges and Possibilities of Inclusive Schooling.* Toronto: Canadian Scholars Press.

Demie, F. (2005). Achievement of Black Caribbean Pupils: Good Practice in Lambeth Schools. *British Educational Research Journal, 31(4),*481-508.

Desimone, L. (2010). Linking Parent Involvement with Student Achievement: Do Race and Income Matter? *The Journal of Educational Research,* 93 (1), 11-30.

Dragnea, C. & Erling, S. (2008) *The Effectiveness of Africentric (Black Focused) Schools in Closing Student Success and Achievement Gaps: A Review of the Literature.* Toronto District School Board Research Report.

Durden, T. R (2007). African Centered Schooling: Facilitating Holistic Excellence for Black Children. *Negro Educational Review,* 58 (1/2), 23-34.

Education Quality and Accountability Office. (2012). *More than eight out of 10 Ontario students develop required literacy skills by grade 10. Applied English course should be reviewed.* http://www.eqao.com/NR/ReleaseViewer.aspx?Lang=E&release=b12R004

Felman, S. (1992). *Testimony Crisis of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis and History.* New York: Routledge.

Folkes, K. C. (1993). *Issues of Assessment and Identification of Anglo Caribbean Students in a Migratory Educational Environment.* Paper presented at a Symposium on Education of Students from the Caribbean, Queens, New York. ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED367170).

Foster, C. (1996). *A Place Called Heaven the Meaning of Being Black in Canada.* Toronto: Harper Collins.

Freire, P. (2000). *Pedagogy of the Oppressed.* New York: Continuum.

Gay, G. (2002). Preparing for Culturally Responsive Teaching. *Journal of Teacher Education.* 53(2), 106 – 16.

Gay, P.(1989). *The Freud Reader.* New York: W.W Norton and Company.

Gerdes, K., Segal, E., Jackson, K., & Mullins, J. (2011). Teaching Empathy: A Framework Rooted in Social Cognitive Neuroscience and Social Justice. *Journal of Social Work Education.* 47(1), 109-31.

Gilbert, J. (2006). *Let Us Say Yes to Who or What turns up: Education as Hospitality.* Journal of Curriculum Studies, 4(1), 25-43.

Gillborn, D. (2008). *Racism and Education: Coincidence or Conspiracy?* London: Routledge.

Gilroy, P. (1993). *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness.* Boston: Harvard University Press.

Gladwell, M. (2008). *Outliers.* London: Penguin Books.

Glesne, C., & Peshkin, A. (1992). *Becoming Qualitative Researchers: An Introduction.* White Plains, NY: Longman.

Green, T. (1993). Excellence, Equity and Equality. In L. Shulman, & G. Sykes, (Eds). *Handbook of Teaching and Policy.* New York: John Wiley.

Greenspan, H., & Bolkosky, S. (2006). When is an Interview an Interview? Notes from Listening to Holocaust Survivors. *Poetics Today.* 27(2), 431-449.

Guba, E.G., & Lincoln, Y.S. (1989). *Fourth Generation Evaluation.* Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Harris-Perry, M. (2011). *Sister Citizen.* New Haven: Yale University Press.

Hale, J. (2001). Learning While Black Creating Education Excellence for African-American Children. Maryland: John Hopkins University Press.

Henry, A. (1993). Missing: Black Self-Representations in Canadian Educational Research. *Canadian Journal of Education*. 18(3), 206-222.

_____. (1995). Growing Up Black, Female and Working Class: A Teacher's Narrative. *Anthropology & Education Quarterly*. 26(3), 279-305).

_____. (1998). *Taking Back Control: African Canadian Women Teachers' Lives and Practice*. New York: State University of New York Press.

_____.(2000). Black Women Teachers' Positionality and "Everyday Acts": A Brief Reflection on the Work to Be Done. In G. Dei (Ed)., *Power, Knowledge & Anti-Racism Education: A Critical Reader*. Halifax: Fernwood Publishing.

Hesse-Biber, S. (2010). Qualitative Approaches to Mixed Methods Practice. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 16(6), 455-68.

Hesse-Biber, S., & Leavy, P. (2006). *The Practices of Qualitative Research*. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.

Hobson, A., Tracey, L., & Kerr, K. (2004). Why People Choose to Become Teachers and the Factors Influencing their Choice of Initial Teacher Training Route: Early Findings from the Becoming a Teacher Project. *Department for Education*. Government of the United Kingdom.

Holland, S. (1996). PROJECT 2000: An Educational Mentoring and Academic Support Model for Inner-City African American Boys. Howard University. *The Journal of Negro Education*, 65(3), 315-321.

hooks, b. (1981). *Ain't I a woman: Black women and Feminism*. New York: South End Press.

_____. (1994). *Teaching to Transgress. Education as the Practice of Freedom*. New York: Routledge.

_____. (2004). *We Real Cool: Black Men and Masculinity*. New York: Routledge.

_____. (2005). *Sisters of the Yam Black Women and Self-Recovery*. Cambridge: South End Press.

Hopkins, R. (1997). *Educating Black Males Critical Lessons in Schooling, Community, and Power.* Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press.

Horne, F., & Cruse, H. (1997). Black History Month: Serious Truth Telling or Triumph in Tokenism? *Journal of Blacks in Higher Education* 18, 87-92.

Horvat, E., & O'Connor, C. (2006). *Beyond Acting White: Reframing the debate on Black Student Achievement.* Maryland: Brown & Littlefield Publishers.

Howes, C., & Matheson, C. (1992). Contextual Constraints on the Concordance of Mother-Child and Teacher-Child Relationships. In R.C. Pianta (Ed.), *Beyond the Parent: The Role of Other Adults in Children's lives.* 57, 25-40.

Hughes, J. & Kwok, O. (2007). Influence of Student-Teacher and Parent-Teacher Relationships on Lower Achieving Readers' Engagement and Achievement in the Primary Grades. *Journal of Educational Psychology.* 99(1), 39-51.

Irvine, J. J. (1989). Beyond Role Models: An Examination of Cultural Influences on the Pedagogical Perspectives of Black Teachers. *Peabody Journal of Education,* 66 (4), 51-63.

Irvine, J. J., (Ed.). (2002). *In Search of Wholeness: African American Teachers and their Culturally Specific Classroom Practices.* New York: Palgrave.

James, C. E. & Spowe, B. (2000). Multicultural education in Canada & Sweden: A conversation. *Multiethnica.* Centre for Multiethnic Studies, Uppsala University, Sweden, Nr. 26-27, Juli, pp. 8-13.

James, C. (2007). Negotiating School: Marginalized Students' Participation in their Education Process. In G. Fuji Johnson & R. Enomoto (Eds.), *Race, Racialization, and AntiRacism in Canada and Beyond.* Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

_____. (2011). Troubling Role Models: Seeing Racialization in the Discourse Relating to "Corrective Agents" for Black Males. In K. Moffat (Ed.), *Troubled Masculinities: Reimaging Urban Men.* Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

James, S.M. (1993). Mothering: A Possible Black Feminist Link to Social Transformation? In S.M. James & A. P. (Eds.), *Theorizing Black feminisms: The Visionary Pragmatism of Black Women.* London: Routledge.

Jones, S. (1985). The Analysis of In-Depth Interviews. In R. Walker (Ed.), *Applied Qualitative Research* (4th ed). Aldershot (Hants.): Gower.

Katzer, J. Cook, K., & Crouch, W. (1998). *Evaluating Information: A Guide for users of Social Science Research* (4th Ed). Boston, MA: McGraw-Hill.

Kirby, S., Greaves, L., & Reid, C. (2006). *Experience Research Social Change: Methods Beyond the Mainstream.* Peterborough: Broadview Press.

Kirby, S., & McKenna, K. (1989). *Experience, Research, Social Change. Methods from the Margins.* Toronto: Garamond Press.

Labovitz, S., & Hagedorn, R. (1976). *Introduction to Social Research.* New York: McGraw-Hill.

Ladson-Billings, G. (1998). Just What is Critical Race Theory and What's it Doing in a *Nice* Field Like Education. *Qualitative Studies in Education.* 2(1), 7-24.

Lane, L., & Mahdi, H. (2013). Fanon Revisited: Race Gender and Coloniality Vis-à-Vis Skin Colour. In R. Hall (Ed.), *The Melanin Millennium.* New York: Springer.

Lawson Bush, V. (2004). How Black Mothers Participate in the Development of Manhood and Masculinity: What Do We Know About Black Mothers and Their Sons? *Journal of Negro Education.* 73(4), 381-91.

Lemons, G. (2008). *Black Male Outsider.* New York: State University of New York Press.

Levine, D. (2003). *Building Classroom Communities: Strategies for Developing a Culture of Caring.* Indiana: National Educational Services.

Lipari, L. (2009). Listening Otherwise: The Voice of Ethics. *International Journal of Listening* 73(1), 44-59.

Lum, L. (2009). The Obama Era : A Post-Racial Society. *Diverse Issues in*

Higher Education. 25(26), 14-16.

Lynn M. (2006). Education for the Community: Exploring the Culturally Relevant Practices of Black Male Teachers. *Teachers College Record* 108 (12), 2497-2522.

Magolda, P.M., & Robinson, B.M. (1993). *Doing Harm: Unintended Consequences of Fieldwork.* Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association, Atlanta, GA.

Majors, R., & Billson, J. M. (1993). *Cool Pose: The Dilemmas of Black Manhood in America* (1st Touchstone Ed.). New York: Simon & Schuster.

Marks, J.B. & Tonso, K. (2006). African Centered Education: An approach to Schooling for Social Justice for African American students. *Project Innovation* 126 (3), 481-94.

Mazzi, L. (2007). *Inhabited Silence in Qualitative Research Putting Poststructural Theory to Work.* New York: Peter Land Publishing Ltd.

McAllister, G. & Irvine, J. (2002). The Role of Empathy in Teaching Culturally Diverse Students. A Qualitative Study of Teachers' Beliefs. *Journal of Teacher Education.* 53 (5), 433 – 43).

McNaughton, G. (2012). Toronto's Controversial Africentric High School Program Suffers from Poor Enrollment. *National Post.* A4.

McLaren, K. (2004). We Had No Desire to be Set Apart: Forced Segregation of Black Students in Canada West Public Schools and Myths of British Egalitarianism. *Social History.* 37 (73), 27-54.

McMullen, K. (2004). *Early Indicators of Students at Risk of Dropping Out of High School.* Ottawa: Statistics Canada.

Milan, A., & Tran, K. (2004, Spring). Blacks in Canada: A Long History. *Canadian Social Trends,* 72.

Miles, M., Huberman, A., & Saldana, J. (2013. *Qualitative Data Analysis.* Arizona: Sage Publications.

Ministry of Education. (2009). *Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy.* Toronto: Queen's Printer for Ontario.

Mogadime, D. (2000). Black Girls/Black Women-Centered Texts and Black Teachers as Othermothers. *Journal of the Association for Research on Mothering.* 2(2), 222-233.

Moles, O. (1996). Reaching All Families: Creating Family-Friendly Schools. Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office.

Moodley, K. (1983). Canadian Multiculturalism as Ideology. *Ethnic and Racial Studies.* 6(3), 320-331.

Morrison, T. (1992). *Playing in the Dark.* Boston: Harvard University Press.

Nagda, B., Gurin, P., & Lopez, G. (2003). Transformative Pedagogy for Democracy and Social Justice. *Race Ethnicity and Education.* 6(2), 165-191.

Noblit, G., Rogers, M., & McCadden, K. (1995). In the Meantime: The Possibilities of Caring. *Phi Delta Kappan,* 76(9), 680–685.

Noguera, P. (2009). *The Trouble with Black Boys...And Other Relfections on Race, Equity and the Future of Public Education.* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Books.

Patton, T. O., & Snyder-Yuly, J. (2007). Any Four Black Men Will Do. *Journal of Black Studies, 37*(6), pp.859-895.

Pianta, R., & Stuhlman, M. (2004). Teacher-Child Relationships and Children's Success in the First Years of School. *School Psychology Review.* 33 (3), 444-458.

Ramirez-Esparza, N., Gosling, S., Benet-Martinez, V., Potter, J., Penebaker, J. (2006). Do Bilinguals have two personalities? A Special Case of Cultural Frame Switching. *Journal of Research in Personality.* 40, 99-120.

Rezai-Rashti, G.,& Martino, W. (2009). Black Male Teachers as Role Models: Resisting the Homogenizing Impulse of Gender and Racial Affiliation. *American Educational Research Journal.* 47 (1), 37 – 64.

Radford-Hill, S. (1986). Considering Feminism as a Model for Social Change. *Feminist Studies/Critical Studies.* Ed. Teresa de Lauretis. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 157-172.

Roberts, D. (1993). The Value of Black Mothers. *Connecticut Law Review.* 26, 871 – 8.

Roberts, S. (2012). Reconsidering Parental Involvement: Implications for Black Parents. *OPUS.* Retrieved from: http://steinhardt.nyu.edu/opus/issues/2011/fall/reconsidering

Royal Commission on Learning. (1994). *For the Love of Learning: Report of the Royal Commission on Learning. Vol. 2: Learning: Our Vision for Schools.* Toronto: Queen's Printer for Ontario.

Rubin, H., & Rubin, I. (1995). *Qualitative Interviewing The Art of Hearing Data.* Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.

Shipp, V. H. (1999). Factors Influencing the Career Choices of African American Collegians: Implications for Minority Teacher Recruitment. *The Journal of Negro Education,* 68 (3), p.343-51.

Shujaa, M. (1994). T*oo Much Schooling Too Little Education: A Paradox of Black Life in White Societies.* Trenton NJ: Africa World Press.

Silverman, D. (2000). *Doing Qualitative Research: A Practical Handbook.* Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.

Solomon, P. (1992). *Black Resistance in High School: Forging a Separatist Culture.* Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.

_____.(1997). Race, Role Modelling and Representation in Teacher Education and Teaching. *Canadian Journal of education.* 22(4), 395-410.

Solomon, P., Singer, J., Campbell, A., & Allen, A. (2011). *Brave New Teachers.* Toronto: Canadian Scholars Press.

Staples, B. (1985). *Just Walk on By: Black Men and Public Spaces. Retrieved from:* http://cf.linnbenton.edu/wed/dev/vanrast/upload/Black_Men_and_Public_Sp aces_Brent_Staples.pdf

Steady, F. (1985). *The Black Women Cross-Culturally.* Cambridge, MA: Schenkman Books.

Stewart, J., Jr, Meier, K. J., & England, R. E. (1989). In Quest of Role Models: Change in Black Teacher Representation in Urban School Districts, 1968-1986. *The Journal of Negro Education,* 58(2), 140-152.

Sudarkasa, N. (1996). *The Strength of Our Mothers: African American Women & Families Essays and Speeches.* New Jersey: African World Press.

Tastsoglou, E. (2002). Race and the Politics of Personal Relationships: Focus on Back Canadian Women. *Affilia.* 17, 93-111.

Tavares-Carter, K. (2009). *The Dearth of Black Male Educators in the Secondary Panel.* (Masters Thesis) Toronto, York University Faculty of Education.

Tennenhouse, L. (2013). The Question of Cultural Bilingualism. *Early American Literature.* 38(1), 135-38.

Toronto District School Board. (2007). *Demographic Compositions of Toronto District School Board Employees.*

Toronto District School Board. (2008). *Africentric Education.* http://www.tdsb.on.ca/boardroom/bd_agenda/uploads/generalinfo/080516 %20africentric%20q&as.pdf

Troester, R. (1984). Turbulence and Tenderness: Mothers, Daughters, and 'Othermothers' in Paule Marshall's *Brown Girl, Brownstones. A Scholarly Journal on Black Women.* 1(2), 13-16.

Troyna, B., & Williams, J. (2012). *Education, Racism and the State.* New York:

Villegas, A.M., & Lucas, T. (2002). Preparing Culturally Responsive Teachers. *Journal of Teacher Education.* 53(1), 20-32.

Vincent, C., Rollock, N., Ball, S., & Gillborn, D. (2012) Being Strategic, Being Watchful, Being Determined: Black Middle-Class Parents and Schooling *British Journal of Sociology of Education.* 33 (3), 337-54.

Wane, N. (2009). African Canadian Women and the Question of Identity. *Atlantis.* 34(1), 149-58.

Warren, D., Jarvis, A., & LeBlanc, L. (2008). Revisions to the Canadian Triage and Acuity Scale Paediatric Guidelines (PaedCTAS). *Canadian Journal of Emergency Medicine.* 10 (3), 224-232.

Watson, C., & Smitherman, G. (1992). Educational equity and Detroit's male academy. *Equity and Excellence. 25(2)*, 40-46.

West, C. (2001). *Race Matters*. Boston: Beacon Press.

Winks, Robin. (1997). *Blacks in Canada.* Kingston: McGill-Queens University Press.

Wise, Tim. (2010*). Colorblind The Rise of Post-Racial Politics and the Retreat from Racial Equity*. San Francisco: City Lights Books.

Wright, M. (2004). *Becoming Black: Creating Identity in the African Diaspora.* Durham: Duke University Press.

Yon, D. (2000). *Elusive Culture Schooling, Race and Identity in Global Times.* New York: State University New York Press.

Young, I.M. (1990). *Justice and the Politics of Difference*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Zirkel, S. (2002). Is there a place for me? Role models and academic identity among white students and students of color. *The Teacher's College Record,* 104(2) 357-376.

APPENDIX A

LETTER TO PARTICIPANTS

<u>**Exploring the Role of Black Women Teachers in the Lives of**</u>
<u>**Black Male Students**</u>

Informed Consent Form

Purpose of this study:

Motivation: to explore the practices and experiences of Black female teachers who work with Black male students.

Goal: to highlight the place of Black female teachers in the schooling of Black male students

Intention: to unsettle the discourse of Black boys 'needing' Black male teachers, by highlighting the contributions of Black female teachers.

When and Where: *decided in consult with participants.*

Participation in this project encompasses two steps: First, participants are asked to take part in a no more than 1.5 hour, one on one interview where questions about their teaching practices and histories will be discussed. Secondly, after the first session, participants will take part in a no more than 2-hour focus group session where all participants will gather together to discuss in greater detail common themes found during the individual conversations.

Date: _____ *Time:*_____

*Location:*_____

Risks and/or Benefits to you:

    I ask your permission to use your words from our conversations in my project. Conversations may be audio taped and transcribed so that I can later recall what was said. These transcribed conversations will be used as a part of my thesis.

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. A decision not to participate, withdraw or have comments stricken from the record, will in no way influence the nature of my relationship with you or any relationship you may have with York University now or in the future. Should you wish to withdraw from the study all information generated as a result of your participation will be destroyed.

Confidentiality:

Please be advised that ethics can only be maintained to the extent allowed by law, however all data generated from this study will remain confidential to the fullest degree possible. Only my supervisor and I will have access to the data collected. I will destroy the audio tape(s) of the interview following completion of the transcription. The hard copy will not be labeled in any way that identifies you. I will keep it in a locked filing cabinet for two years after the interview at which time it will be shredded.

I may quote some of your responses to the interview questions in my final paper, which is a required part of my research project. No information that identifies you personally will appear in papers or publications resulting from this study. To keep your confidentiality I will use pseudonyms to refer to you, your school, your board and any person to whom you may refer. Participants in this study are required to keep all conversations and identities of other participants confidential. Therefore there are no anticipated risks associated with your participation.

This research project has been reviewed and approved by the Human Participant Review Sub-Committee, York University's Ethics Review Board and conforms to the standards of the Canadian Tri-Council Research Ethics guidelines. Should you have questions or concerns regarding the ethics of this study, please contact the *Manager, Office of Research Ethics, York University, 5th Floor York Research Tower* at 416-736-5914.

If you have questions about my research in general or about your role in the study, please contact me in 273 Winters College, at 416-736-2100 ext. 22215 or my supervisor, Dr. Carl James in 3153 TEL at 416-736-2100 ext. 20279.

I, _____ consent to participate in, *Exploring the Role of Black Women Teachers in the Lives of Black Male Students* conducted by Kimberley Tavares-Carter. I have understood the nature of this project and wish to participate. I am not waiving any of my legal rights by signing this form. My signature below indicates my consent.

_____   _____
(Signature of Participant)   (Date)

_____
(Printed Name of Participant)

_____   _____
(Signature of Researcher)   (Date)

APPENDIX B:

EXPLORING THE ROLE OF BLACK WOMEN TEACHERS IN THE LIVES
OF BLACK MALE STUDENTS

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Interview Guiding Questions:

Demographic Data:

1. Name:
2. School:
3. Age
4. Current subject assignment
5. Place of birth
6. Country, and city of schooling

Understanding the Black female teacher:

7. What (experiences) influenced you to become a teacher?

   a. Is there a relationship between these experiences and your desire to

   work with Black boys?

   b. How did/Did these experiences influence your interactions with

   Black (male) students?

8. What is teaching like for you now?

   a. What motivates you as a teacher? Does it differ from what

   influenced you previously? How so?

   b. What are your future aspirations?

9. How do you understand the identity of "Black woman teacher"?

   a. Do you identify as a Black female teacher? Why/Why not?

   b. How/Does that differ from simply being a female/ a teacher?

   c. What does it mean to you to be a Black female teacher of Black

   boys?

    d.   What does it mean to work with Black male youth?

10. What have you observed as the current schooling experiences and situations of Black boys?

    a.   What do you think led to these experiences?

11. What expectations, if any, do you find the Black boys have of you?

    a.   Do these expectations differ to those of other student groups?

12. What do you see as the needs Black boys have while in school?

    a.   Are these needs different to those of other students?

    b.   How do you determine when a Black boy needs help?

13. What are some of your experiences in working with Black boys?

    a.   What kinds of teaching practices do you use to engage Black male learners?

    b.   Which have you found most effective and why?

    c.   Which were lease effective and why?

14. What have you done to support Black boys in the schooling process?

    a.   What limits your ability to work with Black boys?

    b.   What supports your ability to work with Black boys?

    c.   What do you see as the greatest challenge in teaching Black male youth?

Impact of the need for Black male teachers discourse:

15. Current educational dialogue argues that we need more Black male teachers in school to serve as role models and mentors for Black boys, do you agree with this? Why or Why not?

    a. Is there a difference, and if so what is it, between what you can provide a Black male youth and what a Black male teacher can provide?

APPENDIX C:

EXPLORING THE ROLE OF BLACK WOMEN TEACHERS IN THE LIVES
OF BLACK MALE STUDENTS

FOCUS GROUP

INTERVIEW GUIDING QUESTIONS

(Sent by e-mail)

Thank-you again for agreeing to take part in my research project on the Black Female Teacher.

As discussed there will be a second session where all participants will get together to discuss common themes found amongst your individual interviews.

In preparation for that session, attached you will find a copy of your interview transcript. Please review the data making any changes, deletions or additions you feel relevant.

Also note I have pulled 5 themes from the individual interviews that, should you agree, will serve as the catalyst for our discussion during the focus group session.

The themes are:

- Empathy for Black learners

- Paying attention– focus on the Black learner

- Relationship building with parents, staff and students

- Culturally relevant and engaging pedagogy

- Identity and burdens of the Black female teacher

These themes were chosen as they seemed to be ideas that were repeatedly discussed by each of you. Again, as with your transcripts, if you are not comfortable with any theme or do not think the theme captures your ideas about being a Black woman teacher, please let me know.

With respect and thanks,