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Black Students' Perspectives on Academic Success

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BLACK STUDENTS' PERSPECTIVES ON ACADEMIC SUCCESS

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by

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Black Students' Perspectives on Academic Success

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ABSTRACT

This thesis investigates the academic achievement of Black high school students. It employs a theoretical framework of social constructivism grounded in anti-racism to conduct five case studies of achieving black Canadian high school students to examine how these students managed to achieve in the midst of a system that predicts their failure. I asked three questions: (1) What factors do achieving black Canadian high school students identify as being helpful to their academic achievement? (2) How do these students perceive their racial identities? (3) What is the significance of these students' racial identity at school? I found that these students identified their own hard work and their parents' support as the main contributors to their academic achievement. Each student conceptualized his or her racial or cultural identity differently, but none identified with an Afrocentric identity. Most students expressed a desire to see more visible minority representation in the curriculum and to receive more support for black students in the school community. The results of this study offer educators insight into the areas where they can partner with black students, their families, and their communities to inspire academic success for all.

Keywords: black students, African Canadian, motivation, high school, achievement, identity

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to the memory of Dr R. Patrick Solomon, my mentor and cheerleader

well before I realized that I might have something to offer.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Thank you Dr Rezai-Rashti and Dr Martino for taking on an educational psychology student and giving her a second education after all classes were through.

Thank you Mom for bringing me back from a major slump by helping me realize that the snowball method could be applied outside Southwestern Ontario!

Thank you Maxine for believing in this project so much, for providing unending encouragement for me, and for promoting it non-stop until I had 5 wonderfully articulate and eager participants.

Thank you Dad for the hours and hours of telephone chats that culminated in something I think we can both be proud of.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

The purpose of my research is to identify the factors that achieving black students believe

contribute to their academic success, and to explore their conceptualizations of their racial

identity within an education system where some minorities face structural and institutional

inequalities. I interviewed a small sample of achieving black students and analyzed their

responses in light of the social constructivist and anti-racist framework that informed my

research. I aim for my findings to be used as a preliminary source of Canadian research to help

Canadian policymakers and educators concerned with minority student achievement better

address the specific educational needs of black Canadian students.

Background

The topic of black student achievement has always been an integral part of my life story.

My dad was a race-relations coordinator for the former Etobicoke Board of Education, and my

mentor was Dr R. Patrick Solomon, a pioneer in the field of urban diversity in Canadian

education. However, they always encouraged me to diversify my interests and as such, I

completed studies in the fields of life sciences and psychology before I came back to study what

had always been in the forefront of my educational experiences. Growing up as a first-generation

Jamaican-Canadian, I was involved in ethnic and cultural organizations such as the Congress of

Black Women, the Jamaican-Canadian Association, and the John Brooks Foundation, but I also

remained active in predominantly white environments through many years of classical piano

competitions and attending French immersion schools in the 1990s. Although I received the

message that white peers and teachers would try to hold negative stereotypes about black

students against me, I did not struggle with a conflict between my racial and academic identities

because I had grown up knowing that whatever the obstacle, Jamaicans rallied to get the job done. I applied this belief to my schoolwork and never looked back.

That is, until 2010 when I was a teacher candidate, teaching and tutoring students in the Student Pathways for Success Program. This is a Thames Valley District School Board (TVDSB) "initiative focused on helping all students in Grades 7 through 12 close the gaps for literacy, numeracy, credit accumulation and graduation" (Thames Valley District School Board, 2010). The topic came up again when I volunteered as a facilitator for the TVDSB's first Student Voice Conference. During both of these experiences, I sought out the opportunity to have in-depth conversations with students who pointed out the ways in which the education system was *failing* them. I decided to pursue black students' academic outcomes as a research project after witnessing the media coverage surrounding the Toronto District School Board (TDSB)'s response to its 40% dropout rate for black students (Hammer, 2011). The TDSB developed an "Urban Diversity Strategy" to "increase the secondary graduation rate for all demographic groups to a minimum of 85% in five years." (Toronto District School Board, 2008, p. 2) and made definitive plans to open an African-centered (Africentric) high school program within Oakwood Collegiate Institute.

The TDSB's research team justified the need for an Africentric school based on the notion that black students' racial identity needed to be connected to their academic environment in order to experience success in the classroom. They viewed black racial identity as a singular entity, where all of the different ethnicities of black students united under a collective black identity in response to marginalization in the classroom. Accordingly, Solomon & Tarc (2003) report that Canadian educational institutions "homogenize blacks and treat them all the same." (p. 15) However, the TDSB's report included almost exclusively American sources and admitted

that "[t]he article collection largely reflects the US's perspective given the US's history of dealing with race issues. Limited references to Canadian resources regarding the effectiveness of Black-focused education were found." (Dragnea & Erling, 2008, p. 2) They concluded that "[t]he Canadian approach to setting up viable educational alternatives for Black youth requires more research" (Dragnea & Erling, 2008, p. 12). Even though plans for the Africentric school were eventually approved, the public and media response to the proposal was vociferously negative for two main reasons:

1) Many students at Oakwood Collegiate were primarily incensed because they were not consulted before the Africentric school initiative was implemented (Hammer, 2011).

2) Most of the media stories made claims about the importance of recognizing Canada as a 'multicultural society'. These stories implied that all Canadian black students did not necessarily conceptualize their black identity as a purely collective one, because their cultural backgrounds and historical experiences with racism did not match that of black students in the US who identified as African Americans. Rick Salutin made the connection explicit in a Globe and Mail column, reprinted in *Our Schools, Our Selves* (2008):

> What's wrong with a separate Afrocentric or "black-focused" school in a public system — as the Toronto board recently approved? Well, no one should be reduced to a category. I've learned this especially from black students. Those from the Caribbean say they never thought of themselves as black, in a central or existential way, till they came here and were labelled. That is not the sort of thing a public education system should reinforce. (Salutin, 2008, p. 25)

These two reasons provided me with a clear starting point for my research. First, I wanted to ask black Canadian high school students *directly* about their own conceptions of their racial identity in a Canadian educational context. Solomon & Tarc (2003) argue that since black students' conceptualizations of their identity are "rapidly changing, fluid and diverse" (p. 17), anti-racist educators should view students as collaborators, since they "are very articulate and

adept at describing the conditions of their own being in the world." (p. 18) In addition, we must see students as an essential part of the discussion because they are personally *affected* by educational reforms. They possess vital knowledge about themselves and the world around them that we cannot access by only assuming what is best for them (Cook-Sather, 2002). Next, I knew that many researchers had already asked black students about the reasons why they dropped out of school, or they had talked to black students at risk of dropping out. I chose to focus my research on achieving black high school students who were experiencing the same educational climate as black students who were ambivalent about staying in school or who had dropped out already. I wanted to look for students who were unequivocal about their decision to stay in school, and to ask them how they managed to achieve despite a system that predicted their failure. Who supported their learning? What role did their racial identity play in their educational experiences? I found an answer to this approach by using Stinson's (2006) suggestion of a *discourse of achievement.*

Defining the discourses

Historically, researchers studying black students have found that their academic achievement can be negatively affected by certain attributes associated with their gender and racial or ethnic culture (Dei, 1996a). For example, Cokley (2008) asserts that black students often find that "their values, patterns of interaction, vernacular, and numerous other traits are in conflict with the mainstream view of the model student."(p. 352) Stinson (2006) demonstrates how these explanations of academic failure most often fall into one of two categories: a "discourse of deficiency" (p. 477) or a "discourse of rejection" (p. 477). Contrasted with these explanations for school failure is a "discourse of achievement" (p. 477), which investigates the factors contributing to black students' academic achievement.

Discourse of deficiency. Researchers using a *discourse of deficiency* investigate the traits, skills, values, belief systems and cultural experiences that black students lack. They report on how these deficits put black students at a disadvantage when attempting to achieve success in the classroom (e.g., see DeCuir-Gunby, 2009; Worrell, 2007).

Discourse of rejection. Does a problem arise when a black student's sense of racial or ethnic cultural identity is ostensibly at odds with his or her conception of what it means to be a good student? Stinson (2006) calls this the *discourse of rejection*. Here, black students must choose between rejecting their cultural identity and rejecting school, as these two seem to be mutually exclusive (Cokley, 2003).

Discourse of achievement. A *discourse of achievement* documents and analyzes the factors contributing to students' achievement in the classroom. It counts black students' cultural identity and community influences as strengths and valuable sources of legitimate knowledge, rather than distractions or contributors to school failure (Dei, 2010; Carter Andrews, 2009).

The discourses of deficiency and rejection have been invaluable in the movement to bring well-needed anti-racist changes to the Canadian education system. Anti-racist educators have used deficit models to respond to "the pedagogic need to confront the challenge of diversity and difference in Canadian society [by] recogniz[ing] the urgent need for an education system that is more inclusive and is capable of responding to minority concerns about public schooling."(Dei, 1996a, p. 33). However, these discourses have also been abused by education stakeholders with antagonistic interests to justify the continued marginalization of black students by making it appear that black students either *cannot* achieve as much as other students, or *will not* try, regardless of the resources offered (Howard & Terry, 2011).

I use a discourse of achievement to take power away from the enticing stereotype of failing black students, and to instead bring to light the stories of black Canadian high school students who are succeeding in the midst of systemic challenges. My purpose is to showcase the academic potential of all black high school students by demonstrating to educators what is possible when they choose to invest in the welfare of all of their students. Therefore, my first research question is: **What factors do black students identify as being helpful to their academic achievement?** My study will investigate how students think about their school environment, and it will look critically at the systems that support black students as well as those working against them.

Theoretical Framework

My theoretical framework consists of two complementary perspectives: *social constructivism* and *anti-racism*. This theoretical framework includes both social constructivism and anti-racism because students' academic experiences are influenced by *both* their perceptions *and* their environment. A social constructivist perspective accounts for students' perceptions, while an anti-racist framework recognizes the impact of racism and power relations in the everyday lives of students. It demonstrates how these power relations are institutionalized with consequences for students' educational experiences and their academic outcomes.

Why are students' perceptions important?

My academic background is in psychology and neuroscience, where I studied how an individual's thinking can influence how he or she acts. As a Queen's University Residence Life staff member for three years and a summer camp staff member for nine years, I have seen firsthand how motivation and mental health can affect all aspects of life. Smith & Lalonde (2003) assert that black Canadians' mental health as it relates to racial identity is a "much

neglected topic" (p. 160). Originally conceived by Fordham in 1988, racelessness - where a

black student rejects his or her cultural identity in order to succeed in environments where

"blackness is devalued" (p. 144) – can lead to depression, paranoia, low self-esteem, and anxiety

(Smith & Lalonde, 2003). Since students' perceptions affect numerous aspects of students'

everyday lives, I consider their perceptions to be essential when examining black students'

achievement. A social constructivist framework demonstrates how students' perceptions can

affect their academic outcomes.

Social Constructivism

I approach my qualitative research from a social constructivist perspective (Santrock,

Woloshyn, Gallagher, Di Petta, & Marini, 2010; Patton, 2002). This perspective is based on the

premise that a person's view and knowledge of the world is based on his or her subjectively

constructed perceptions, and informed by his or her interactions with his or her environment.

Students perceive the world via their own unique representations of reality (Patton, 2002).

Therefore, the nature of students' experiences is determined by their perceptions and thus by

their socially constructed view of reality. This construction is sociocultural: A student's family,

culture, and beliefs can greatly impact the importance, value, and meaning the student places on

different aspects of life (Santrock et al., 2010).

There are two main theories within social constructivism that inform my research:

identity development and Bronfenbrenner's bioecological model of development. I will define

and discuss the significance of each theory below.

Identity development: Who am I*?* James Marcia (2006) expanded on Erik Erikson's

theory of socioemotional development, emphasizing an adolescent's development of her or his

identity (Santrock et al., 2010). Marcia postulated that the more coherent an adolescent's sense

of identity, the better equipped he or she is to navigate her or his environment (Santrock et al., 2010). Similarly, Dei (1996a) asserts that one of the principles of anti-racism education is to focus "on an explication of the notion of "identity", and how identity is linked with/to schooling."(p. 31) Some researchers posit that it is the incoherence of a black student maintaining a raceless identity at school and a race- or ethnicity-central identity at home that impacts detrimentally on a student's cognitive development and functioning.

According to Marcia's theory (as outlined in Santrock, 2010), an adolescent moves through four states of identity development: *identity diffusion, identity foreclosure, identity moratorium,* and *identity achievement*. Identity development can be influenced by the people and circumstances in a student's life, and a student can exist in different stages of identity development for different aspects of his or her identity. When a student reaches a stage of *identity achievement*, he or she has made a commitment to an identity after having meaningfully explored alternative identities (Santrock et al., 2010).

Racial Identity

Carter Andrews (2009) considers the most successful black student to be one who has embraced his or her *racial* identity and has made a decision to succeed in school. Dei (2010) agrees, but notes that having a teacher with high expectations can stand in for a student who does not have a strong affiliation with his or her racial or ethnic community. Dei asserts that minority students who do not consider their race or ethnicity to be a fundamental part of their identity can achieve academically when paired with a teacher with high self-efficacy and high expectations for the student. However, Dei cautions that these students are motivated to achieve because of *stereotype threat* – they work hard to achieve at school in order to avoid confirming negative stereotypes (e.g., lazy, unintelligent) about their racial or ethnic group.

Racial identity is a reference group orientation (RGO) because it pertains to a person's preference to be affiliated with a certain social group (Vandiver, Cross, Worrell, & Fhagen-Smith, 2002). It involves:

    (a) *Centrality*: the extent to which race is part of one's self-concept, and

    (b) *Meaning*: characteristics that one identifies as belonging to that race (Sellers, Smith, Shelton, Rowley, & Chavous, 1998).

Some earlier researchers have asserted that the specific development of black racial identity was a unique process that proceeded in well-defined stages, but many contemporary researchers have moved away from a stage model of black identity development. They acknowledge the existence of a range of black identities that do not necessarily progress from the most immature (or incomplete) to the most mature (or complete) stage (Gardner-Kitt & Worrell, 2007). Each black identity is better conceptualized as a collection of attitudes and beliefs (Gardner-Kitt & Worrell, 2007).

It could be that black adolescents go through an identity development process like Marcia's and decide on their own racial identity as a result of this process. Indeed, Parham (1989) argues that a black child's sense of his or her own racial identity prior to being "thrust into the world of adult concepts"(p. 195) – that is, prior to adolescent identity development – is most often only a copy of his or her parents' racial worldviews. An adolescent's simple reproduction without self-reflection of beliefs and attitudes inculcated by external sources describes Marcia's *identity foreclosure* stage of development. In contrast, an adolescent in Marcia's *identity achievement* stage has adopted a racial identity that corresponds to his or her own worldview.

Current researchers investigating the link between black racial identity and academic achievement most often refer to one or both of the following theories as their conceptual framework: *nigrescence theory* (NT) and the *multidimensional model of racial identity* (MMRI). I will introduce each theory and describe the scale designed to measure its constructs.

Nigrescence Theory (NT)

William E. Cross's theory of nigrescence (NT) was coined from the French word for "turning black" (Vandiver , 2001). Its first incarnation was published in 1971 in the context of the recent civil rights movement, and it has become the theory most often used in counselling and psychotherapy to explore issues of racial identity (Vandiver, Cross, Worrell, & Fhagen-Smith, 2002). Cross recognized the need for a separate identity development theory for black adults because he believed that blacks have a shared experience of historical cultural differences and structural inequalities that render their identity development process unique. Nigrescence theory was originally conceived as a process of self-actualization within an environment of oppression whereby a black adult progressed in stages to achieve psychological health and high self-esteem through self-acceptance (Sellers, Smith, Shelton, Rowley, & Chavous, 1998; DeCuir-Gunby, 2009). The most recent update to the theory (NT-E) eschews a stage model of development and asserts that all of the black identities included in the model can be psychologically healthy, except for *self-hating*.

The expanded version of nigrescence theory (NT-E) describes several possible black identities organized around three themes: *pre-encounter, immersion-emersion,* and *internalization*. The names of the themes are based on Cross's original conceptualization of a stage model of black identity, which moved from a period of inaccurate and psychologically damaging beliefs about blacks (pre-encounter) to a reactionary stance based on a personal

experience with racism (immersion-emersion), and resulted in an acceptance and advocacy of

black identity (internalization). In NT-E, although Cross no longer supports a stage model of

identity development, the three *pre-encounter* black identities are all still characterized by a

"lack of a positive Black RGO" (Vandiver, Cross, Worrell, & Fhagen-Smith, 2002, p. 80). That

is, because *miseducated* and *self-hating* black individuals believe negative stereotypes about

blacks, they place a low value on associations with their black peer groups (Anglin & Wade,

2007; Grantham & Ford, 2003). Black *assimilationists* do not consider their association with

black peers to be important because another identity (usually nationality) is more important

(Anglin & Wade, 2007). A summary of pre-encounter black racial identities is included in Table

1 of Appendix A.

Cross's expanded nigrescence theory still emphasizes the significance of a black

individual's encounter with racism. After this profound event, a black individual feels unfairly

evaluated based on his or her race. This causes the individual to realize that his or her black

identity is in fact important – otherwise the individual would not have felt personally affected by

the discriminatory action (Parham, 1989). Next, the individual begins to re-examine his or her

RGO in order to investigate what it means to be black based on his or her personal worldview

(Anglin & Wade, 2007; Vandiver, Cross, Worrell, & Fhagen-Smith, 2002). There is no black

identity associated with the encounter stage – it is a process of racial identity investigation.

Vandiver, Cross, Worrell, & Fhagen-Smith (2002) note that when re-examining an RGO

causes intense cognitive and emotional stress, individuals normally proceed to a period of

immersion-emersion. Individuals with this racial identity (*Intense Black Involvement* and *Anti-

White*) immerse themselves into all aspects of perceived black culture and embrace extremely

pro-black and anti-white attitudes. Individuals reject negative black stereotypes and discover the

importance of advocating for their own community. These attitudes are pursued aggresively, but an ultimate commitment to these extreme attitudes has not yet been made. In adolescents, this is comparable to Marcia's *identity moratorium* stage, where "adolescents are in the midst of exploring alternative courses of action but their commitments are either absent or only vaguely defined." (Santrock et al., 2010, p. 86) Some researchers hypothesize that the lack of commitment is due to the emotional conflict characterized by the immersion-emersion period (Sellers, Smith, Shelton, Rowley, & Chavous, 1998), while others say that it is the individual's reactionary stance against whites instead of a true appreciation for black culture and community that hinders immersion-emersion individuals from developing an authentically Afrocentric identity (Mahalik, Pierre, & Wan, 2006).

A sense of internal peace and satisfaction characterizes all three *internalization* black identities (Sellers, Smith, Shelton, Rowley, & Chavous, 1998). Attitudes towards blacks become less idealistic, and whites are no longer vilified as the source of all problems (Grantham & Ford, 2003). Awad (2007) says that "hatred [experienced during immersion-emersion] turns into controlled anger toward oppressive and racist institutions" (p. 190). All three black identities share a positive racial RGO but differ to the extent that other identities are equally salient. Individuals with *afrocentric* black identities work to empower their own black community, while *multi-* and *bi-culturalists* work to build bridges between black and other communities (Vandiver, Cross, Worrell, & Fhagen-Smith, 2002). A description of internalization black racial identities is included in Table 2 of Appendix A. The current measure of the racial identity theoretical constructs identified in the NT-E is the Cross Racial Identity Scale (CRIS). The scale was tested for validity and reliability using mostly female (3:1) middle-to-upper class African Americans attending predominantly white colleges (Vandiver, Cross, Worrell, & Fhagen-Smith, 2002), but

it is also considered to be applicable to middle school and high school male and female students (Gardner-Kitt & Worrell, 2007).

Some researchers critique nigrescence theory because it "ignores the multiplicity of Black experiences" (DeCuir-Gunby, 2009, p. 106) that do not fit neatly into NT-E's definitions of black racial identities which often confound racial centrality with its subjective meaning. Additionally, an examination of the literature written after Cross's most recent update of his theory reveals its repeated misuse by disregarding Cross's own modifications which no longer conceptualize racial identities as stages progressing from the least to most psychologically healthy. Out of these concerns, Sellers, Smith, Shelton, Rowley, & Chavous (1998) developed the multidimensional model of racial identity (MMRI) for African Americans in order to address the privileging of certain racial identities over others and to allow for a continuous range rather than a discrete number of identities.

Multidimensional Model of Racial Identity (MMRI)

Chavous, Bernat, Schmeelk-Cone, Caldwell, Kohn-Wood, & Zimmerman (2003) identify three assumptions that characterize the majority of racial identity research:

a) African Americans are a stigmatized or devalued group, and all African Americans with high racial centrality also believe that African Americans as a group are stigmatized or devalued. This knowledge either helps or harms their academic beliefs and behaviours.

b) All African Americans see and experience "social or structural barriers" (p. 1078) in highly similar ways.

c) There exists is an optimal level of racial identification (i.e., high racial centrality, positive racial valence) for African Americans.

In contrast, the MMRI does not presume to know how each individual views African Americans, and acknowledges that different environmental conditions can influence how African Americans experience the world. As such, it is not structured to predict the same optimal racial identity for every African American (Chavous et al., 2003).The MMRI contains four dimensions: racial salience, racial centrality, racial regard (public and private), and racial ideology (*nationalist, oppressed minority, assimilationist, humanist*). These dimensions are independent but interact with each other to produce a range of racial identities for African Americans. Here, *racial salience* refers to the importance an African American individual places on race in a certain situation at a particular moment in time, while *racial centrality* is the extent to which an African American individual identifies him or herself as a member of the African American racial group (Vandiver, Cross, Worrell, & Fhagen-Smith, 2002).

In the MMRI, racial salience is situational because it varies depending on the context, while racial centrality is more stable across situations (Sellers, Smith, Shelton, Rowley & Chavous, 1998). An African American's attitudes and beliefs about African Americans in general and his or her experience of being African American describes *private regard*, while African American's attitudes and beliefs about how others view African Americans represent the *public regard* dimension. It is worth noting that in contrast to the theory of nigrescence, the MMRI's division of private and public regard acknowledges that an African American's beliefs about how *others* view African Americans might agree *or* disagree with his or her *personal* beliefs about African Americans.

Sellers, Chavous, & Cooke (1998) emphasize that when conceptualizing black racial identity, racial *centrality* is a separate factor from its *meaning* – the importance of race in an individual's life cannot be assumed by simply examining an individual's subjective conception

of what it means to be black, and vice versa. *Racial ideology* describes an African American's subjective definition of what it means to be black. African American individuals with a *nationalist* ideology believe that the experience of being African American is unique and distinct from other races and cultures. As such, African Americans should avoid the influence of – and therefore control by – other groups. An *oppressed minority* ideology emphasizes African Americans' similarities with other oppressed minority groups – here, each individual defines exactly which minority groups are included in this philosophy. *Assimilationist* African Americans believe that as Americans, every individual has a role to play in American society. This ideology does not always correspond to low racial centrality or an ignorance of the impact of racism in an African American's daily life, as the MMRI considers racial centrality to be independent of racial ideology (Sellers, Smith, Shelton, Rowley & Chavous, 1998). In contrast, nigrescence theory assumes that an assimilationist must have low racial centrality. Finally, African American individuals with a *humanist* ideology primarily consider themselves to be members of the human race. In this perspective, overarching issues such as environmental concerns, peace, and world hunger are more important than individual interests (Sellers, Chavous, & Cooke, 1998). The Multidimensional Inventory of Black Identity (MIBI) is the scale measures the range of the three stable, cross-situational dimensions of the MMRI: *racial regard*, *centrality*, and *ideology* (Sellers, Chavous, & Cooke,1998).

Racial Identity as 'Fluid'

A smaller number of theorists assert that the fluidity or complexity of race renders it impossible to predict how racial identity influences academic outcomes. For example, Gosine (2002) argues that it is counterproductive to characterize certain behaviours, traits and attitudes as the domain of blacks. Indeed, DeCuir-Gunby (2009) says that "African-American adolescents

should not be viewed as a monolithic group. In essence, there is no one African-American experience. This key fact is fundamental to any investigations in [black racial identity]" (p. 116). Gosine opines that carefully categorizing certain characteristics into racial domains renders it more difficult for black students who do not fit these categories to maintain affiliations with their own racial group. This lack of agreement surrounding black students' conceptualizations of their racial identity informs my second research question: **How do achieving black Canadian high school students perceive their racial identities?**

In addition to investigating black Canadian high school students' perceptions of their racial identity, I wanted to examine how these students think about their racial identity in their social contexts, especially at school. I am interested to examine how these students' academic orientations are shaped by their teachers, families, and communities. Bronfenbrenner's bioecological model of development provides a fitting way of analyzing this.

Bronfenbrenner's bioecological model of development. This model "focuses on the social contexts in which students live, the people who influence their development, and the interaction between students' characteristics and their environment" (Santrock et al., 2010, p. 68). It recognizes the connections between a student's school, family, community, peers, religion, culture, and socioeconomic status, and how these connections affect the student's social and emotional development. Indeed, Murrell (2007) asserts that students are motivated to seek out situations in which they feel competent, and avoid environments in which they experience failure. Therefore, Murrell encourages us to study the "child-in-context" (p. xii), because how a student sees the world can be greatly affected by the conditions in which he or she is placed. For example, Dei (2010) found that many black students in his study faced economic barriers to achievement. Students who were required to work at part-time jobs during high school and/or

university had less time to spend on schoolwork and fewer opportunities to participate in extracurricular activities. In some cases, this can lead to a feeling of disengagement from the wider school community and perhaps a disadvantage for students applying to certain professional schools and prestigious educational programs (Dei, 2010).

Dei reminds us that "the school problems experienced by the youth cannot be understood in isolation from the material and ideological circumstances in which the students find themselves."(p. 35) Therefore, in my research, it is important to not only understand the way black students think about their academic experiences, but also to examine the context in which these students operate. An anti-racist perspective provides an effective way of looking at black students' academic contexts.

Anti-Racism

Although there is ample evidence that a student's cognition can greatly influence his or her academic achievement, it is important to connect individual student perceptions and behaviours to inequalities and prejudices in the school system to avoid the dangerous conception that the student is the only one to blame for his or her failure (Solomon & Tarc, 2003; Rhamie & Hallam, 2002; Byfield, 2008). Dei (1996b) urges anti-racist educators to question "pathological explanations of the "family" or "home environment" being the source of the "problems" that youths face in the schools. It is argued that such explanations divert attention from a critical analysis of the institutional structures of schooling that treat youth inequitably and justify the status quo by attributing causal priority to the victims themselves." (Dei, 1996b, pp. 254-255)

For example, in Oates's 2009 quantitative test of the "five prominent explanations for the black-white academic performance gap" (p. 415) he explained that it was "firmly established" (p.

420) that black students in the U.S. are significantly more likely than white students to attend poorer-quality schools with less budget spending per student, less qualified teachers, and larger class sizes. Sperling and Vaughan (2009) assert that white students receive more emotional support and are more often rewarded for their efforts than black students. Accordingly, a perspective purely devoted to the student's own beliefs as the main source of all academic problems also takes the responsibility away from the teacher to make sure equity is being practiced in his or her own classroom.

How do social constructivism and anti-racism fit together?

A constructivist framework must be grounded in anti-racism because it has to recognize "the social effects of "race", despite the concept's lack of scientific basis."(Dei, 1996a, p. 27). Specifically, it is not students' genetic race that causes different races of students to experience their world in different ways. These varying experiences are caused by prejudicial and discriminatory school social structures that disadvantage or reward certain students according to their race (Carter Andrews, 2009; Byfield, 2008; Rhamie & Hallam, 2002). A constructivist anti-racist framework describes how black students view themselves as racialized beings during their experiences at school, and demonstrates that their peers and teachers also view them through a racialized lens, communicating messages about their own perceptions of black student attributes and social status based on their race (Carter Andrews, 2009; McCarthy & Crichlow, 1993; Harper, 2010; Worrell, 2007). This leads to my third research question: **What is the significance of achieving black Canadian high school students' racial identity at school?**

For example, Grier-Reed, Madyun, & Buckley (2008) found that some black students at a predominantly white university felt that their white student peers perceived them to be dangerous or unintelligent, and they felt that this was the reason why white students avoided socializing

with their black student peers. Convergently, Oates (2009) found that even after controlling for "a range of factors that "justify" specific teacher-perceptions"(p. 433), U.S. high school teachers continued to perceive black students significantly more negatively than white students.

Dei (1996a) asserts that anti-racism education "acknowledges the traditional role of the education system in producing and reproducing not only racial but also gender, sexual and class-based inequalities in society."(p. 34). For example, Czopp (2010) found that white teachers, school sports coaches and guidance counsellors tended to 'track' black students towards different (and often less demanding) academic goals than white students. In this case, he proposed that this was not a result of "hostile prejudiced attitudes"(p. 495) where educators were determined to keep educational resources away from black students, but it was in order for educators to confirm their own 'positive stereotypes' (i.e., good at sports, more likely to find success in non-academic areas) about black students. Sperling & Vaughan (2009) might disagree – they contend that a backlash by the white American population is occurring in response to the American government allocating funds to at-risk schools which often ostensibly serve a high percentage of black and other minority students. Sperling & Vaughan argue that whites would rather maintain the status quo of allocating more educational and social resources to white students over black students.

Why use anti-racism instead of multiculturalism?

Multiculturalism is based on the notion that the solution to resolving racial prejudice is to be exposed to racial and cultural differences (Dei, 2010). Unfortunately, this has commonly resulted in high school curriculums being supplemented with exoticized elements of the three f's: food, festivals, and fashion, rather than a rewriting of the core curriculum to reflect Canada's genuine diversity (Dei, 2010). In fact, Oakwood Collegiate students prioritized a revamping of

the common curriculum for all students to include Africentric elements, rather than segregating

certain black students in an Africentric school (Hammer, 2011).

Multiculturalism advocates tolerance, but tolerance by itself will continue to replicate

existing power inequalities, including certain forms of knowledge and points of view being

acknowledged and rewarded by academic gatekeepers as more legitimate than others (Gillborn,

2006). Identities outside the hegemony are viewed as 'other', firmly outside the status quo, and

are never intended by educational stakeholders to be incorporated into what is considered to be

the self, or the norm. In contrast, anti-racism seeks to remove these inequalities by questioning

and striving to rupture the hegemonic order (Dei, 1996a; Dei & Johal, 2005). McCaskell (2010)

writes that "[m]ulticulturalism saw racial discrimination as originating in cultural

miscommunication and unexamined stereotypes. Anti-racist education saw racism as an

entrenched system of ideas that had been developed in the past to explain and support European

colonial domination, and that in the present continued to serve to benefit those marked as

"White" through the systematic exclusion of racialized peoples from a range of opportunities."(p.

32)

On the other hand, Lee, Menkart, & Okazawa-Rey (1998) offer an expanded definition of

multiculturalism that focuses on school staff and students working together across racial and

ethnic backgrounds as allies to develop the agency to remove barriers that cause some students to

be marginalized at school. This kind of multiculturalism can create an environment where the

school community keeps the dialogue open regarding cross-cultural issues to promote the respect

of different cultures. This conceptualization of multiculturalism reveals a foundation in anti-

racism because Lee et al. (1998) see the goal of education as to "confront and dismantle

[institutional] systems and structures which promote racism" (p. 406). They encourage students

and staff to evaluate their own assumptions about the reasons for the establishment of a dominant (Eurocentric) ideology which continues to shape educational theories and curriculum.

Lee et al.'s definition of multiculturalism also requires each member of a school community to critically evaluate his or her own experiences and all parts of the curriculum to discover how "skin color, shade, texture of hair and shape of eyes" (p. 406) have determined individuals' opportunities for academic and career success, access to resources, respect from peers, and representation in institutions. Lee and her colleagues specifically argue for multiculturalism because it offers hope that it is possible to mitigate the factors causing the marginalization of some students by encouraging different racial and ethnic groups to work side by side in solidarity to remove barriers to academic achievement. However, I have chosen anti-racism as a framework for my research because it "best reveals the system of power relations and racial minorities' differential experiences in contemporary educational settings."(Rezai-Rashti & Solomon, 2008, p. 168)

My own research study uses a social constructivist and anti-racist framework to investigate the factors that achieving black students identify as helpful to their academic progress. It also asks how these students conceptualize their racial identity in their academic contexts. In Chapter 2, I will review the existing research that uses a discourse of achievement to investigate the academic outcomes of black students. In Chapter 3, I will describe the methods I used to carry out my research. In Chapter 4, I will discuss and analyze my findings. In Chapter 5, I will provide a summary of the previous chapters, discuss the implications of my findings, and offer suggestions for future research.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

This literature review provides an overview of current research surrounding the factors that contribute to black high school students' academic achievement. It is organized under two themes: (1) the influence of racial identity on achieving black students' school outcomes, and (2) achieving black students' sources of academic motivation. In reviewing the literature, I follow the researchers' convention of using the term "black" as a collective identity that spans multiple ethnicities of students who identify as "black". In Appendix B, I have included definitions of the psychology terms that I use in this literature review.

The Influence of Racial Identity on School Outcomes

A review of the literature reveals enduring discussions and debates about the influence of black students' racial identity on their perceptions of – and behaviours in – their academic environment (Thompson, Anderson, & Bakeman, 2000; Dei, 2010; Grantham & Ford, 2003). Recent research has reported that racial identity, especially for black Americans, is tied to academic outcomes including academic self-concept (Cokley & Chapman, 2008), grade point average (Sellers, Chavous, & Cooke, 1998; Worrell, 2007), GRE scores (Awad, 2007), attitudes towards school (Harris & Marsh, 2010; Ashburn-Nardo & Smith, 2008), graduation rates and college attendance (Chavous, Bernat, Schmeelk-Cone, Caldwell, Kohn-Wood, & Zimmerman, 2003).

Wright (2011), Cokely (2008), and Dei (2010) all argue that black students' racial identity and academic achievement are inextricably linked because of the racialized nature of their everyday environments, including their experiences at school. In this case, students' racial identity and subsequent conceptualization of their academic climate is developed "in reaction to racial oppression" (Cokley, 2008, p. 350). Similarly, Hall (2000) discusses how Caribbean adults

who arrived in Britain in the 1960s developed a "defensive collective identity against the practices of racist society" in the 1970s (p. 148), and passed on this message of the importance of a black collective identity to their children. In this case, black students may feel discriminated against based on their colour, irrespective of individual ethnic origin. Therefore, Anglin & Wade (2007) argue that black racial identity is a collective identity that encompasses multiple ethnic origins. Black students can reference themselves in relation to a distinct group of people all sharing certain "physical attributes as well as shared racial experiences, including social, economic, and political experiences."(DeCuir-Gunby, 2009, p. 103)

Many studies may continue to conflate race and ethnicity because of the notion of a black collective identity (Solomon & Tarc, 2003). However, other studies have begun to acknowledge that different ethnicities within the black community may conceptualize their personal and academic identities differently (Horvat & O'Connor, 2006). For example, Waters (1994) found that in the face of "overwhelming pressures in the United States to identify only as 'blacks'" (p. 796), some first-generation black American students in the 1990s identified with their Caribbean roots to distance themselves from black American students. They identified with the ethnicity of their Caribbean parents because their parents viewed Caribbeans as "hard-working, ambitious, militant about their racial identities but not oversensitive or obsessed with race, and committed to education and family" while they viewed "black Americans as lazy, disorganized, [and] obsessed with racial slights and barriers" (p. 797). Students who identified as "black" (the term "African American" was not in regular use at the time and location of the study) viewed "ethnic" American students as naïve about the impact of racism on all black Americans, regardless of ethnic origin. "Black" American students rejected their schooling because they viewed any social

mobility resulting from an education as "blocked" due to the racism that they experienced in their personal lives on a daily basis (Waters, 1994, p. 812).

In Horvat & O'Connor's book published in 2006, Butterfield discusses the notion that "resisting assimilation to African American culture boosts West Indians' socioeconomic status" (Horvat & O'Connor, 2006, p. 133). She found that first-generation West Indian students – that is, American students who had at least one parent born in the Caribbean – differed in the ways that they conceptualized their racial or ethnic identities. In this case, it depended on the type of school that these students attended. Black students who attended predominantly black schools rallied around their West Indian or African American identities to compete with each other for academic domination. However, students who attended predominantly white schools "overlooked their ethnic differences and aided one another in the quest for academic achievement." (Horvat & O'Connor, 2006, p. 148) Still, the academic consequences of black Canadian students whose primary identification lies with their Caribbean or African roots have not as yet been widely investigated using a discourse of achievement.

Is there an optimal racial identity that promotes academic achievement?

Researchers examining the link between racial identity and academic outcomes have contributed a multitude of propositions to the debate surrounding whether there is an *optimal* racial identity to achieve academic success. The answer remains highly contested. In past research, it was common to find a tacit assumption that high racial centrality was vital to mental health and self-esteem. That is, black individuals whose self-concept was primarily defined by their race were assumed to be the most psychologically healthy (Mahalik, Pierre, & Wan, 2003). Meanwhile, low race centrality was found to contribute to a heightened risk of "substance abuse,

marital discord, academic difficulties, and low self-esteem" (Thompson, Anderson, & Bakeman, 2000, p. 199).

When research in racial identity was extended to academic achievement, many researchers assumed the same was true. This assumption remains prevalent in contemporary research. For example, implicit in Carter Andrews's (2009) description of Foster's (2005) *race-conscious high achievers* is high racial centrality for each student. Dei (2010) makes the same assumption when he argues that the few black Canadian students with low racial centrality only manage to achieve as a result of fear of confirming their peers' and teachers' negative stereotypes about black students (e.g., lazy, academically unprepared, unintelligent, only admitted to college because of athletic ability (Griffin, 2006)). Grantham & Ford (2003) make the assumption of optimal racial identity explicit when discussing how gifted students' racial identities affect their school outcomes – they argue that "[c]ounseling strategies and initiatives need to be designed to help Black students with poor racial identities" (p. 24). They suggest mentors for black students to help them achieve healthy, "higher racial identity stages" (Grantham & Ford, 2003, p. 24).

Afrocentric identity promotes a positive self-concept for black students

Why do many black identity researchers approach their investigations from a position of high racial centrality and positive racial valence? Harris & Marsh (2010) explain that when educators attempt to reform black students' behaviours for optimal academic achievement, they may inadvertently send the message that black students' identities are detrimental or destructive. When these preferred behaviours are mandated by white teachers or administrators and are modeled by white peers, black students can feel that their own black identity is being erased in favour of white culture (Howard & Terry, 2011). Black students might look to their family

customs, mannerisms, type of dress, and ways of speaking as artifacts of their collective identity (Waters, 1994). On the surface, the replacement of these artifacts may seem fairly innocuous and without malicious intent, but the result can send an unintended message that a black student's own racial identity should be shed in favour of a white identity. In fact, Wright (2011) puts it more plainly: "School personnel often view [black racial-ethnic identity] negatively, as a deficit to be overcome" (p. 616). Lee, Menkart, & Okazawa-Rey (1998) categorize a system where "Whiteness [is] a preferred way of being human" (p. 27) as a racist one, where "a hierarchy in which beauty, intelligence, worth, and things associated with Whiteness are at the top."(p. 27)

The danger of black culture erasure and the struggle against Eurocentric institutional and ideological domination may explain why many black identity theorists promote the idea of an optimal black identity including black activist elements, where black culture is paramount to all other aspects of self-concept and there is a concentrated effort to improve conditions for black society (Solomon & Tarc, 2003). This framework ensures that black students believe that their own identity is an equally valid contributor to academic success rather than failure (Lee, Menkart, & Okazawa-Rey, 1998; Wright, 2011). In fact, Harris & Marsh (2010) argue that schools tend to survey, regulate, and discipline black children's behaviour more harshly than other races. They theorize that in this climate of constant surveillance, black students who achieve in the classroom must develop a high racial salience and a positive racial valence in order to maintain their self-esteem.

Nigresence theory (NT-E) racial identities contributing to positive educational outcomes

In general, researchers have found students with *internalization* racial identities to have the most favourable academic outcomes. For example, Thompson, Anderson, & Bakeman (2000) found that because internalization racial identities are more pluralistic and less absolute, black

students with these identities tended to have significantly less acculturative stress when adjusting to life at college than black students with *pre-encounter* or *immersion-emersion* racial identities. Anglin & Wade (2007) add that black students with internalization racial identities are more likely to have high self-efficacy, feel a sense agency over their academic goals, and form constructive and satisfying relationships with their peers and academic community. Particularly, Anglin & Wade found that only a *multiculturalist* identity could predict positive college adjustment, while pre-encounter and immersion-emersion identities significantly predicted poorer college adjustment. I will describe how black students who use multicultural strategies find success in the classroom in a later section.

MMRI racial identities contributing to positive educational outcomes

Using the Multidimensional Inventory of Black Identity (MIBI), Sellers, Smith, Shelton, Rowley, & Chavous (1998) found that for black students with high racial centrality, having an *oppressed minority* ideology was positively associated with grade point average (GPA), while a *nationalist* or *assimilationist* ideology was negatively correlated with GPA. For students with low racial centrality, racial ideology could not predict GPA. Sellers and his colleagues hypothesize that for students with an oppressed minority ideology, their identification with other minority groups that face discrimination within the education system alleviates feelings of social isolation, which spurs them on towards academic achievement.

Chavous, Bernat, Schmeelk-Cone, Caldwell, Kohn-Wood, & Zimmerman (2003) studied the effects of racial centrality and regard on academic outcomes. They found that while racial identity did not predict GPA, it significantly influenced black students' educational beliefs. Particularly, black students with a negative private regard for African Americans showed the poorest academic outcomes including decreased academic self-concept, school attitudes, and

school enrolment. In contrast, black students with high race centrality, positive private regard, and negative public regard for African Americans were the least likely to drop out of high school, and the most likely to be enrolled in college. Chavous et al. (2003) conclude that regardless of a black student's beliefs about how others view African Americans, it is a black student's *private* regard towards African Americans that influences his or her academic self-concept and attitudes towards his or her school environment.

Using racial identity to bolster achievement goals

Carter Andrews (2009) discussed how some black students channel their resistance against marginalization by becoming "race-conscious high achievers"(p. 298), a term coined by Foster (2005). Here, these students use their academic *achievement* as an expression of their resistance to hegemonic influences within their educational system. They acknowledge racism in their everyday environments, but they do not view it as an insuperable influence over their academic goals. In fact, Carter Andrews (2009), Wright (2011), and Horvat & O'Connor (2006) all found that black student high achievers conceptualized their achievement in school as a fundamental part of their racial identity: Students' "definition of blackness included high academic performance." (Horvat & O'Connor, 2006, p. 145) Therefore, when academic achievement is a core component of black students' sense of racial identity, they can procure high self-esteem from doing well in school (Wright, 2011). Carter Andrews sees this as the next evolution of resistance – "transformational resistance" (p. 298). While students from previous generations may have begun "acting white" to demonstrate that certain pro-education behaviours were not solely available to white students, today's generation of students have begun to use their racial identity to bolster their academic achievement.

Maintaining a black identity in white cultural school settings

We have seen how cultivating a strong black racial identity can help black students to achieve their educational goals. How do black students maintain this racial or black cultural identity while interacting with peers in predominantly white cultural school settings? Thompson, Anderson, & Bakeman (2000) argue that when black students are placed in a predominantly white academic environment, they experience "acculturative stress" (p. 197) – the stress that comes from the pressure to adopt a Eurocentric worldview in order to be successful at school. This acculturative stress can lead to "lowered mental health status, feelings of marginality and alienation, heightened psychosomatic symptom level, identity confusion…anxiety, and lower self-concepts" (Thompson, Anderson, & Bakeman, 2000, p. 197).

For example, Ashburn-Nardo & Smith (2008) found that it was common for African American students in predominantly white institutions (PWIs) to use *intropunitive* and *extropunitive* responses in the face of "racial microaggressions"(p. 490) from their white peers. Black students using an *extropuntive* response externalized their frustration at marginalization by their white peers by developing a deep distrust of whites and interpreting their ambiguous behaviours as racist (Ashburn-Nardo & Smith, 2008). This suggests that extropunitive black students in PWIs would be at an increased risk of leaving school before graduation because they would be less likely to form the social communities with their peers and teachers needed to provide educational support (Cokley, 2000). Ashburn-Nardo & Smith found that black students using *intropunitive* responses internalized their peers' and teachers' negative stereotypes about black students (e.g., lazy, unprepared for course work) in order to maintain their belief in a just world. They justified the Eurocentric domination of their educational system by accepting that there must be an equitable reason why whites deserved their superior status over blacks

(Ashburn-Nardo & Smith, 2008). This system justification contributed to the maintenance of black students' marginalized status.

On the other hand, Byfield (2008) reported that high-achieving black male students in the UK and USA found ways to embrace the dominant cultural ideology of academic achievement while maintaining their non-dominant black cultural capital. For example, while working hard to achieve their academic goals and maintaining positive relationships with peers and teachers, black male students also displayed their black racial identity in various ways, including their choice of music, food preference, club and society memberships, clothing style, and speech patterns. Byfield argues that this maintenance and demonstration of black cultural identity infused black male students with confidence and comfort in their own skin, allowing them to access resources and support offered by both the school community and their own racial or ethnic community without the threat of being accused of "selling out" (p. 136).

Employing multiculturalism in the classroom

Carter (2008) describes two categories of equally successful black students who negotiate their racial or black cultural identity at school in different ways. Some black students who identify primarily with their own racial or ethnic community use multicultural "tool kits" (p. 487) in highly contextual ways at school (*code switching*). Code switchers use multiculturalism as a strategy by temporarily employing others' cultural norms to facilitate their social interactions. Other black students embrace multiculturalism as their worldview (*bridging*). Here, students' black racial identity is just one of a number of identities by which they define themselves. Both categories of black students find value in learning from others' experiences and feel comfortable using "mainstream speech, behaviours, and interaction patterns" (p. 487) when necessary to help them navigate through and negotiate with their school environments.

Worrell (2007) describes students with a "willingness to interact with and learn about ethnic groups other than their own"(p. 29) as having an "other group orientation (OGO)" (p. 23). In his sample of gifted black high school students, he found that the higher their OGO, the higher their self-esteem and their GPA. Cokley & Chapman (2008) also found that OGO correlated positively with GPA. They hypothesize that students with a high OGO tend to be more open to new experiences and have high academic self-concepts, two factors that have already been documented to correlate positively with GPA. In contrast, they found that anti-white attitudes correlated negatively with GPA.

In summary, the great majority of research using a discourse of achievement has found that racial identity is linked to black students' academic achievement. American researchers using quantitative methods have found that black Americans' racial identities can predict students' academic self-concept, grade point average, GRE scores, attitudes towards school, graduation rates and college attendance. The great majority of qualitative researchers, including one large Canadian study, argue that black students' racial identity and academic achievement are inextricably linked because of the racialized nature of their everyday environments. As such, they propose that black students are best served by an identity that includes high racial centrality with a positive racial valence.

There is a lesser amount of current research using a discourse of achievement that focuses on black students who identify primarily with their Caribbean or African backgrounds. While reviewing the literature, I found that black students who identified as something other than "African American" were often excluded from American studies of racial identity. The few American and British research studies that I did find argued that black students who identified as Caribbean or African did not tend to view a conflict between their racial and school identities.

Like Foster's (2005) race-conscious high achievers, these students used their black identities to spur on their academic achievement. This is in contrast to Canadian studies using deficit models not included in this review that explain that black students with roots in the Caribbean responded in ways akin to Waters's (1994) "Black" American students. These students' rejection of their schooling was a "counter-hegemonic stance against their marginalization."(James, 2009, p. 117) Researchers agreed that unlike earlier suggestions to adopt a 'raceless' or 'white' identity in the classroom, black students should be encouraged to maintain their black cultural capital in white school environments, and employ multiculturalism in the classroom to facilitate interactions with white peers and teachers.

In the next section, I will discuss the literature using a discourse of achievement to identify the internal and external factors that motivate achieving black students to succeed at school.

Achieving Black Students' Sources of Academic Motivation

Achieving black students rely on multiple sources of academic motivation. Researchers have identified certain attitudes and beliefs that black students use to galvanize their academic achievement, and have documented how black students' community, family, and teachers motivate them to achieve school success.

Internal sources: What attitudes and beliefs drive black students to succeed at school?

Concrete belief that education is necessary to achieve long-term goals. Contemporary researchers in black education research assert that for the most part, black students already have positive attitudes and beliefs towards the value of education (Carter, 2008; Cokley, 2003). However, Ashburn-Nardo & Smith (2008) point out the distinction between *abstract* and *concrete* educational attitudes. They argue that an abstract belief that education provides a gateway to future success for *others* is not actually related to academic achievement, because this

is already a common ideology embraced by most North Americans (Ashburn-Nardo & Smith, 2008). Instead, achieving black students must believe *concretely* that their education system will work for them personally, resulting in their own social mobility (Griffin, 2006).

Viewing academic success as available to any hard worker. Dei (2010), Carter Andrews (2009), and Smith & Lalonde (2003) all found that black student achievers viewed academic success as a goal independent of race, available to anyone willing to work for it. Carter Andrews (2009) moves from characterizing achievement as a goal to naming it as a personality trait, arguing that successful black students perceive achievement to be a "human, raceless" (p. 299) essential part of their identity.

Positive academic self-concept. Cokley (2000) defines *academic self-concept* as "how a student views his or her academic ability when compared with other students."(p. 149). Cokley & Chapman (2008) assert that a positive academic self-concept consistently and powerfully predicts black students' academic achievement. Similarly, Fisher (2000) and Awad (2007) both found that academic self-concept was the most robust predictor of GPA. Fisher (2000) found that achieving black students felt supported by their school community, were given opportunities to experience success in the classroom, and were recognized for their academic accomplishments. This promoted black students' positive academic self-concept, giving them confidence in their academic abilities and nurturing positive attitudes towards schooling. Accordingly, Dei (2010) found that successful students had a "strong sense of self, self-worth, [and] purpose" (p. 369), and identified comfortably with their academic community. They saw themselves as being entitled to their education, and held educational gatekeepers accountable for the quality and transparency of the education provided (Dei, 2010).

On the other hand, Fisher (2000) found that black female students had significantly higher academic self-concepts than black male students because of how their teachers perceived and responded to them in the classroom. Accordingly, Cokley (2000) found that the quality of teacher-student relationships predicted students' academic self-concepts. Fisher explains that a student's academic self-concept is often formed by "internalizing the perceived evaluations of significant others" (p. 324). While black female students in Fisher's study felt encouraged by teachers' positive evaluations of their character and behaviour, black male students felt distracted by their teachers' unease with their presence in the classroom. Black male students felt that teachers expected them to be disruptive – even to the point of being physically dangerous – and uninterested in education, which lowered their academic self-concept (Fisher, 2000). This points to the vital link between students' internal and external sources of academic motivation. An individual student's positive attitudes towards school are easily affected – and disrupted – by external influences (Rhamie & Hallam, 2002). An achieving black student has both *internal* thoughts conducive to pursuing education goals and *external* support driving him or her towards academic success.

External sources: Who can support black students in their quest for academic success?

Teachers using effective pedagogy. Fisher (2000) found that after parents, teachers were the second-most influential source of academic motivation to students. In fact, Fisher says that teachers are the primary basis by which students form their attitudes about their academic environment. Effective teachers know how to recognize students' individual talents and put them to good use in the classroom (Byfield, 2008). They are passionate and enthusiastic about teaching, and engage their students with teaching styles that correspond to their students' learning styles (Byfield, 2008). Achieving black students have encouraging teachers with high

expectations who seek positive relationships with their students (Fisher, 2000). High

expectations provide a source of affirmation for black students' self efficacy and can eliminate

the achievement gap between low- and high-SES black students (Fisher, 2000). Positive teacher-

student relationships foster a sense of trust and respect that allows students to reach their goals

by motivating their students to persist during difficult tasks (Byfield, 2008; Cokley, 2008;

Rhamie & Hallam, 2002).

Racially sensitive teachers. Byfield (2008) and DeCuir-Gunby (2009) highlight the

importance of teachers who display racial or cultural empathy and non-judgment. Byfield

explains that racially sensitive teachers acknowledge that marginalization continues to occur in

some black students' everyday environments, and that this inequality is reproduced in power

structures in the school system, including the validating and legitimizing of only certain sources

of knowledge. Racially sensitive teachers make an effort to learn about their students' cultural

traditions and values, and offer support in issues of social justice (Grantham & Ford, 2003).

Black teachers. Byfield (2008) opines that black teachers can add value to the

educational experiences of black students because of their "shared experience of being Black in a

White dominated society" (p. 82). This comfort in shared experience can promote a sense of

security between teacher and student, allowing black students the freedom to discuss and

brainstorm solutions to incidences of racism or peer pressure that would normally distract from

academic goals without support or intervention (Byfield, 2008; Grantham & Ford, 2003). When

this shared experience produces a bond of solidarity between a black student and a black teacher,

black students might allow black teachers to hold them to higher standards of academic

performance because of the certitude that the teacher has the student's best interests in mind

(Byfield, 2008).

Black staff members interested in promoting social justice can work to change school policies, procedures, and practices to improve the welfare of marginalized students by critically examining how the curriculum can demean black students with negative portrayals of their culture or deny their country's "multicultural heritage"(p. 26) by omitting blacks' contributions to society (Grantham & Ford, 2003). These staff members' actions can be a reminder for other staff members to regard black students as fully and equally capable academic achievers (Grantham & Ford, 2003).

Black teachers can also influence their colleagues by demonstrating how to relate to their black students using culturally specific teaching methods like call-and-response, an interactive communication style with deep African American roots (Byfield, 2008; Coard, Wallace, Stevenson, & Brotman, 2004). Black teachers may be more likely to view teachers and students as active participants in the same learning community, seeking ways to add cultural relevance and representation into the curriculum and transforming black students' cultural experiences into cultural capital in the classroom (Byfield, 2008; De-Cuir-Gunby, 2009; Lee, Menkart, & Okazawa-Rey, 1998; Howard & Terry, 2011). For example, black teachers can introduce students to black literature and biographies of successful black adults who have overcome structural barriers (Grantham & Ford, 2003).

Grantham & Ford (2003) and Rhamie & Hallam (2002) propose that the most relevant role model to a black student is one whose success directly resulted from his or her education. Without actual evidence of black representation in career fields requiring many years of education, messages about the benefits of staying in school can fall on deaf ears. Therefore, black teachers can act as roles models to weaken the effect of negative black stereotypes while changing black students' perceptions about who can hold positions of power and influence in the

educational system (Byfield, 2008; Rhamie & Hallam, 2002). Teachers interested in mentoring black students can provide insight into how they dealt with social injustice and demonstrate their commitment to the advancement of education for the black community by exposing students to a wider range of post-secondary educational and career opportunities (Grantham & Ford, 2003). This can motivate black students to set concrete goals about the marks and study habits needed to obtain entry into their desired post-secondary programs and careers. Black mentors might also introduce black students to black friends and acquaintances willing to act as role models in career fields that students are interested in pursuing (Grantham & Ford, 2003). Cokley & Chapman (2008) agree that African American students should be exposed to other African Americans who have experienced "intellectual and academic successes"(p. 362) because seeing the "legacy"(p. 362) of successful African Americans should increase black students' academic self-concept.

Can non-black teachers be equally effective? Some researchers argue that *every* teacher interested in favourable academic outcomes for black students can incorporate the great majority of the strategies used by effective black teachers (Lee, Menkart, & Okazawa-Rey, 1998; Rezai-Rashti & Martino, 2010). For instance, Wright (2011), writing about the academic experiences of high-achieving black male high school students, says that "culturally responsive learning communities can be established when school personnel are sensitive, knowledgeable, and accepting of the home and community cultures of African-American males"(p. 616). He explains that teachers interested in engaging black students can do so by paying attention to black students' "language, styles of presentation, traditions, rituals, histories, and norms"(p. 616), and finding ways to positively incorporate black students' knowledge and experiences into the classroom. He does not, however, specify that black teachers are the only ones who can provide

such an academically stimulating environment for black students. Rhamie & Hallam (2002) add that the data suggesting that black role models contribute to black students' success or that the lack of black role models contributes to black students' underachievement is mostly anecdotal rather than scientific.

Parents' educationally supportive attitudes. Earlier studies contended that while teachers of black students were doing their best to foster positive educational attitudes, black students continued to lag behind their white counterparts or rejected their schooling outright because their families did not understand the value of education (Howard & Terry, 2011; Solomon & Tarc, 2003). On closer examination, researchers have found that black parents from all socioeconomic backgrounds – especially black immigrant and first-generation parents from Caribbean and African countries – highly value education, and see it as vital to future success (Waters, 1994; Solomon & Tarc, 2003; James, 2009; Horvat & O'Connor, 2006). This phenomenon has been reported in the UK (Rhamie & Hallam, 2002), Canada (Dei, Mazzuca, & McIsaac, 1997), and the United States (Cokley, 2008).

In the U.S., Fisher (2000) found that achieving black students were most likely to cite their parents as their number one source of academic encouragement and motivation, and that black low-income families often had very strong beliefs in education as a gateway to future success. Accordingly, Byfield (2008) found that in single-parent families in the UK and the U.S., high achieving black male students most often named their mothers as their prime role model because of their consistent involvement in their education.

In Canada, Smith, Schneider, & Ruck (2005) found that across all socioeconomic groups, black Canadian parents who had high expectations and positive views about education tended to have children with positive academic outcomes. Smith and her colleagues, citing Ogbu's theory

of involuntary minorities, argue that unlike blacks in the U.S. considered to be descendents of involuntary immigrants (a factor contributing to the rejection of hegemonic white cultural attitudes and behaviours in order to preserve a vitally separate cultural identity (Stinson, 2006; McCready, 2010)), more blacks in Ontario immigrated voluntarily, which may change the immediacy black male students may feel to subverting the hegemony (Lalonde, Jones, & Stroink, 2008). In fact, Coard, Wallace, Stevenson, & Brotman (2004) excluded African-Caribbean parents from their American study on racial socialization because of research showing that they differ based on "socio-historical and measures of cultural mistrust, racial identity, and ethnic identity"(p. 281).

Smith et al. (2005) continue that immigrants who leave their home country are especially invested in the economic improvement they intend to secure for their children when they move to Canada, and thus the population of black immigrants in Ontario may already be self-selected for success. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) (2010) adds that "because the majority of immigrants are selected on the basis of their ability to contribute economically, many immigrant children have highly-educated parents" who set high expectations for their children and provide them with access to "equal or greater" educational resources than Canadian-born parents (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2010, p. 70). In fact, according to the OECD, "the value placed on high achievement for immigrant children seems to have positive spill over effects for expectations for native-born children, rather than vice versa." (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2010, p. 76) Therefore, many first- and second-generation and immigrant West Indian and African students come to school with positive attitudes towards education, and do not view their personal and academic identities as conflicting. What can put these students at risk of

eventual school underachievement or rejection is their experience of marginalization once they enter the classroom (Solomon & Tarc, 2003; Rhamie & Hallam, 2002).

Parents' educationally-supportive behaviours. When black students encounter low, negative, or inconsistent support at school, how do they nevertheless manage to achieve at high levels? Rhamie & Hallam (2002) propose a "home-community model" (p. 151). Here, students' goals emerge as a result of support systems in the home and in the community. Black parents expose their children to opportunities in their community, instilling pro-social values that translate to success at school. For example, black students might learn the value of service and initiative by completing a community service project, understand the importance of self-discipline by memorizing bible verses, experience the success that comes from diligent self-study by completing examinations for a musical instrument, develop public speaking skills by presenting at church services, or demonstrate leadership by taking care of siblings. Rhamie & Hallam say that these activities can produce a sense of self-efficacy that black students use to motivate themselves to persevere with educational goals.

Byfield (2008) and Rhamie & Hallam (2002) also name a number of other common behaviours that characterize the parents of achieving black students. Black parents have high expectations for their children's academic outcomes, and they keep their children focused on their ultimate goals by reminding them that education is the only way to achieve them. Thus, parents reinforce education-positive messages that can become part of their children's own belief systems. Parents of achieving black students manage their children's free time by limiting activities they consider to be outside academic goals, and by supplementing or complementing their children's schoolwork with additional educational activities or lessons designed to reinforce understanding or to drill academic concepts (Rhamie & Hallam, 2002; Byfield, 2008).

Additionally, Rhamie & Hallam found that black parents provide their children with cultural capital by providing visits to the museum and the art gallery.

Both research studies found that black parents recognize the importance of modeling the benefits of education in order to inculcate its value for their children. Byfield (2008) found that black parents wanted their children to reject the notion that there were certain goals that blacks could not achieve. Parents modeled this by working to defy barriers in their own occupations, or by going back to school as mature students (Byfield, 2008). Rhamie & Hallam (2002) found that parents joined organizations with other black professionals to provide more role models for their children, and African-Caribbean immigrant parents took their children to their home countries to expose them to "positive black role models of black people at all levels of society"(p. 163).

Finally, Byfield (2008) describes how parental involvement through their children's school can contribute to black students' academic achievement. She found that black parents sought to enrol their children in the best possible school available, according to their family resources. For some parents, this meant sending their children to private schools, even at the cost of considerable financial hardship. For others, this meant that parents would enter lotteries to gain admission to charter schools that specialized in targeting academic achievement for all learners, move to a school district with better resources and more effective teachers, or simply select the best school among the ones in their area, even when this resulted in the black student having to leave a close-knit circle of childhood friends. Some parents volunteered at their children's schools or joined parent-teacher organizations, and middle- and upper-class black parents were not afraid to challenge school authority when they felt that their children were treated unfairly. Byfield hypothesizes that these parents' social capital and knowledge of the educational system

allowed them to advocate for their children's best interests at school without fearing the consequences of being negatively stereotyped as aggressive black parents.

Anglin & Wade (2007) agree that black students with parents who support and encourage their children are more likely to have positive academic experiences. However, they point out that in order for this support to produce good mental health and academic achievement for their children, black parents must also prepare their children for the likely possibility of experiencing racism during their time at school.

Parents using racial socialization. Lee, Menkart, & Okazawa-Rey (1998) define racism as "the use of institutional power to deny or grant people and groups of people rights, respect, representation and resources based on their skin color. Racism in action makes Whiteness a preferred way of being human."(p. 27). All of the researchers included in this literature review agree that black students will have to contend with at least one instance of discrimination based on their "dark skin and/or African features" during their academic life (Coard, Wallace, Stevenson, & Brotman, 2004, p. 279). On first glance, it may seem that "by emphasizing the barriers or struggles that children will face on the basis of race, some parents [would] cause their children to constantly expect conflicts with Whites or to be overly sensitive to perceived injustices" (Thompson, Anderson, & Bakeman, 2000, p. 207). However a survey of the literature reveals many more studies that show that racial socialization is vital for black students' success at school, inside and outside the classroom (Carter, 2008). Accordingly, Coard et al. (2004) insist that it is of primary importance for parents raising black children to teach them how to "make psychological sense out of and cope with the dominant culture's openly disparaging views of their group, hostility, prejudice and discrimination"(p. 279). Every black parent interviewed in their study practiced some form of racial socialization.

Fischer & Shaw (1999) define racial socialization as "the process of communicating behaviors and messages to children for the purpose of enhancing their sense of racial/ethnic identity, partially in preparation for racially hostile encounters" (p. 396). In other words, racial socialization involves what parents tell their black children about what it means to be black in the society in which they live (Thompson, Anderson, & Bakeman, 2000). Anglin & Wade (2007) explain that racial socialization is composed of *proactive* messages which instil a sense of pride and empowerment about black students' racial and cultural heritage, and *protective* messages which inform black students about what to expect from their white and black peers, what to think about negative black stereotypes, and how to respond to racist incidents. Carter (2008) and Thompson, Anderson, & Bakeman (2000) agree that providing black students with strategies to overcome racism in the classroom provides them with resilience and psychological health. Coard, Wallace, Stevenson, & Brotman (2004) add that racial socialization promotes positive "socio-emotional, behavioral, and academic outcomes"(p. 280).

Fischer & Shaw (1999) found that the number of recalled past racist events in the personal lives of black college students had no effect on their mental health when these students had been racially socialized by their parents. In contrast, the number of recalled personal encounters with racism had a significantly detrimental effect on the mental health of black students whose families left them unprepared or uninformed about racism. Both Carter (2008) and Fischer & Shaw point out that unlike earlier studies of mental health, self-esteem alone does not provide an adequate buffer for the increased risk of depression and anxiety that can occur when black students encounter racism during their education. Anglin & Wade (2007) and Coard, Wallace, Stevenson, & Brotman (2004) assert that it is racial socialization that provides the true buffer against discrimination. Fischer & Shaw conclude that parents should racially socialize

their children during childhood and early adolescence since it was the early experiences with racism that had the greatest impact on black college students in their study. At the same time, they caution that placing an exclusive focus on the responsibilities of black students' parents and extended communities is "no substitute for large-scale social change…progress will have been made when there is no need for protective racial socialization."(Fischer & Shaw, 1999, p. 402)

Racial and ethnic community support. The second part of Rhamie & Hallam's (2002) home-community model involves the educational motivation provided by the support of a black student's local community. Griffin (2006) found that because of this support, some black students were explicitly working to enter academic and career fields that were currently underrepresented by blacks, while others oriented their career towards 'giving back', planning to seek employment within their community as an expression of gratitude for their longstanding academic support. Byfield (2008) found that black American churches were often a source of academic motivation for the black male students in her study. Some churches would publicly acknowledge high school and university graduates to the church congregation, while others provided academic tutoring programs and homework clubs for black students in conjunction with their religious activities.

A community within the school. Can schools become part of a black student's community? Dei (2010), Cokley (2000), and Grier-Reed, Madyun, & Buckley (2008) all found that black students enjoyed having a place within their school where black students could socialize with each other and be mentored by black teachers. Rhamie & Hallam (2002) go beyond categorizing such an organization as a response to being shut out of the mainstream white cultural system by highlighting the assets of providing black students with an environment where they are not viewed as the 'other' – in these locations, "blackness is the 'norm'"(p. 167).

For example, Smith & Lalonde (2003) found that black Canadian students found it helpful to see fellow black students achieving in their scholastic environment. Black students in Grier-Reed et al.'s study explained that this environment (in this case a student club called AFAM – the African-American Student Network, "signifying African-American and "A Family"" (p. 476)) was a source of support, comfort, and motivation that allowed students to be themselves and to escape the daily burden of stereotype threat – that is, when students' self-beliefs and their perceptions of how others negatively view their natural abilities and 'typical' behaviours combine to result in anxiety and often stereotype-confirming behaviour for the black student (Harper, 2010, see also DeCuir-Gunby, 2009). Indeed, Smith & Lalonde (2003) hypothesized that having a strong connection to other members of their racial group was a buffer against the daily discrimination that black Canadian students faced. The benefits of community were so valuable that even students who had dropped out of the school in Grier-Reed et al.'s study continued to attend AFAM.

In summary, the literature tells us that black students rely on both internal and external sources of motivation to achieve academic success. Achieving black students believe that their education will allow them to achieve their long-term goals, and that academic success is available to anyone willing to work hard enough for it. Achieving black students tend to have positive academic self-concepts, but some studies have found that black female students have higher academic self-concepts than black male students because their teachers treat their female black students more favourably. Black male students were more likely to be subject to damaging negative stereotypes about black students.

On the other hand, racially sensitive teachers using effective pedagogy contributed positively to black students' academic achievement. Some researchers propose that black

teachers can add value to black students' educational experiences because black teachers can advocate for black students' interests, use culturally relevant pedagogy in the classroom, and instruct black students on how to deal with racist incidents. Other researchers argue that any teacher interested in black students' academic achievement can provide the same kind of support to black students. Parents were often cited as the number one sources of academic motivation for achieving black students. These parents show their support for their children's academic achievement through an innumerable amount of education-positive attitudes and behaviours. Achieving black students also tend to be racially socialized by their parents to learn how to cope with racist incidents in their academic lives. Finally, achieving black students are often supported by black communities. Some researchers suggest that achieving black students also need the additional support of a black community *within* predominantly white schools.

Conclusion

While opinions vary on the exact definition and scope of a black racial identity, researchers agree that black students continue to view their school experiences in the context of their racial, ethnic, and/or cultural backgrounds. In response, black students are finding new ways to align their sense of identity with their academic goals. They motivate themselves by embracing education-positive attitudes, and receive invaluable support from their schools, parents, and local communities. While past researchers have used deficit models to successfully advocate for systemic anti-racist improvements, new research using a discourse of achievement makes the case for increased partnership with all levels of educational stakeholders by pointing to specific areas where black students rely on educational support to achieve their academic goals.

It is a positive and welcome development that Canadian schools are interested in focusing

on academic achievement for black students, but the research and theories used to develop

solutions are based largely on American studies. This research often involves students who

identify as *African American*, an identity that may not have much relevance in a Canadian

context where black students' identification with their African or Caribbean roots cause them to

conceptualize their education differently.[i] This speaks to the need for Canadian research in

educational psychology to investigate which parts of well-established theories about black

American student identities apply to black Canadian students. My research study seeks to

interview the kinds of high school students who would have been *excluded* by American studies

because of their identification as Caribbean or African. I am asking black Caribbean or African

Canadian students to explicate their own conceptualization of their racial identity, and to talk

about the significance of their racial identity in their academic lives. Do they feel that their racial

identity and academic achievement are inextricably linked as previous research would predict, or

are other social identities more relevant to these students in their academic contexts?

American research tells us that achieving black students employ multiculturalism in the

classroom, but that many black students only use it as a strategy to facilitate interactions with

white peers and teachers. This implies that black students' authentic ways of being are

substantially different from that of the mainstream, and that in order to be accepted, they must

temporarily assume Eurocentric behaviours and ideals by 'code-switching' (Gosine, 2008).

Because the majority of black Canadian students attend schools with predominantly white peers

and teachers, it is easy to assume that a Eurocentric identity will overshadow a black Canadian

student's racial identity. However, is it possible that black Canadian students have had a tangible

impact on their peers and their school environment such that certain black cultural norms

including styles of communication, dress, music, and food preferences have come to be considered part of the mainstream in their school community?

Next, I described the education-positive thoughts that contribute to black students' academic success. The literature also tells us that a positive academic self-concept is the most robust predictor of academic success. I would be more interested in finding achieving black students who, according to a *quantitative* measure of academic self-concept, would *not* be predicted to achieve because of a negative academic self-concept. These students do not see themselves as having abilities superior to their peers, but they achieve good grades because they access resources to help them close the self-identified gaps in their learning.

Finally, I discussed the external sources of motivation for achieving black students. Numerous studies show the positive effect of good teachers on black students' academic achievement, but Canadian research does not tell us a lot about how black students achieve (instead of fail) when these students do not consider their teachers to be significant positive influences in their lives. I am interested in how achieving black Canadian students describe the support system that fills the gap left by inconsistent or low school support. Are these students mainly compelled to succeed by their parents and their community as Rhamie & Hallam (2002) suggest in their study of African-Caribbean students in the UK, or are achieving black Canadian students also driven by their own education-positive attitudes and beliefs?

In my own research study, I seek to answer some of these questions by asking achieving black Canadian students to identify the factors that they believe contribute to their academic success, and to reflect on the significance of their racial identity in their academic contexts. In the next chapter, I will explain why I chose qualitative research to answer my research questions, and I will outline the methods used in my study.

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[i] **Why use non-Canadian sources?** Initially, I sought to compile research from Canadian sources only, but even after widening my search to include books as well as journal articles, I found that there was a dearth of research that employed a psychological framework to investigate black high school students' academic outcomes. As an educational psychology student, I considered it essential to include these sources because of the social constructivist theoretical framework of my own research. The few existing studies using a psychological framework borrowed extensively from American theories to come to conclusions about Canadian students. For example, the Toronto District School Board's own research team justified the need for an Africentric school based on the notion that black students' racial identity needed to be connected to their academic environment in order to experience success in the classroom. Their report included almost exclusively American sources and admitted that "[t]he article collection largely reflects the US perspective given the US's history of dealing with race issues. Limited references to Canadian resources regarding the effectiveness of Black-focused education were found." (Dragnea & Erling, 2008, p. 2) They concluded that "[t]he Canadian approach to setting up viable educational alternatives for Black youth requires more research, in-depth comparisons between Canadian context and their "US and international counterparts and further analysis of private, charter, independent and public African-centered schools in order to learn from their successes and failures" (Dei, 2006, p. 30)."(Dragnea & Erling, 2008, p. 12) Therefore, I broadened my search to include American empirical studies.

An analysis of the American psychological literature surrounding black students' academic outcomes revealed that American researchers often excluded black participants who primarily identified with their Caribbean – rather than African American – roots. These

researchers acknowledged that the perspectives and outcomes of black students identifying as Caribbean were often significantly different from black students primarily identifying as African American. However, I recognized the importance of including Caribbean students in my own research because of the large population of Caribbean-Canadians in Toronto. Therefore, I expanded my research to include British studies because of their extensive work in studying the large population of black British students who identify with their Caribbean roots.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

In this chapter, I outline the reasons for using qualitative research to answer my research questions. Next I describe how I recruited my sample of participants, and provide some basic demographic information for each participant. Finally, I describe how I interviewed my participants and how I analyzed my data.

The purpose of this study was to identify the factors that achieving black students believe contribute to their academic achievement, and to explore their conceptualizations of their racial identity in academic contexts. I have three research questions:

1. What factors do achieving black Canadian high school students identify as being helpful to their academic achievement?

2. How do these students perceive their racial identities?

3. What is the significance of these students' racial identity at school?

Justification for Qualitative Research

I chose a qualitative research approach for three main reasons. First, there has been extensive research done in Canada, Britain, Australia, and the U.S. on the academic outcomes of black students. However, most of the research done in Canada has been of a quantitative nature (e.g., Smith, Schneider, & Ruck, 2005), from a primarily social justice perspective (e.g., James, 2009), or has not sufficiently taken into account the voices of the black students in their analysis (e.g., Smith & Lalonde, 2003). My research uses an anti-racist framework to answer educational psychology questions. For example, when I ask about the factors that promote black students' academic success, I am only interested in students' perceptions of the people and things that help them achieve. The same is true when I ask about students' views on the significance of race in their academic contexts. Instead of observing students at their schools and then drawing

conclusions about their racial identity from their behaviours, I want to know how students *perceive* racial issues in the context of their academic lives.

Second, I use qualitative research to find the meaning behind students' words and actions (Shank, 2002; McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). Instead of simply producing a list of positive academic thoughts and behaviours that my study participants demonstrated, I aim to investigate the process by which they came to be achieving students (Shank, 2002). For example, who demonstrated or supported these pro-education behaviours? What kinds of decisions did students make to achieve academic success? Similarly, I could use a highly respected quantitative measure of black racial identity like the CRIS or the MIBI to determine my participants' racial identities, but these quantitative measures cannot show me how my participants interpret the meaning behind their racial identities (Shank, 2002).

I have already used my literature review to present examples of research studies that used quantitative measures to investigate black students' responses to educational psychology questions. However, the problem repeated in many of these researchers' conclusions was that they had collected certain findings but they were hesitant to offer interpretations because they had not asked the students to expand on their survey responses. Using a Likert-type quantitative scale, students can indicate the extent to which they agree or disagree with statements, and they can indicate the number of times they demonstrate a certain behaviour or feel a certain feeling. However, we cannot ascertain the meaning behind their answers until we ask them (Shank, 2002). Therefore, I constructed my interview questions using findings from the literature, but I used qualitative research to ask about students' interpretations of concepts such as success, intelligence, and racial identity.

Finally, I chose a qualitative approach because I specifically designed this research project to give achieving black Canadian students the chance to speak about their own experiences in their own words. McMillan & Schumacher (2010) say that "[q]ualitative researchers try to reconstruct reality from the standpoint of participant perspectives, as the participants they are studying see it. They do not apply predetermined definitions or ideas about how people will think or react…The goal in qualitative research is to understand participants from their own point of view, in their own voice" (p. 323) This is critical to my constructivist framework – it is most important for me to get students' perspectives on how their individual experiences and perceptions shape their school performance and knowledge. I expect my research to confirm some findings that other researchers had already reported, but I use qualitative research in the hope that participants will bring to light "other unexamined issues" (Shank, 2002, p. 187) that I had not considered.

Why use case studies?

I chose to look at five different *cases* of individuals who self-identified as achieving black high school students in order to conduct an in-depth investigation into issues of racial identity and academic motivation, and to make sense of the similarities and differences between individual cases (Patton, 2002). By looking at more than one case of the same phenomenon and trying to make sense of the things they had in common and the ways in which they differed, I hoped to contribute to a fuller understanding of black Canadian high school students' perspectives on their academic experiences.

Patton (2002) argues that case studies are "holistic and context-sensitive" (p. 447): First, I needed an approach that was *holistic* because I recognized the complexity of the issues under investigation, especially considering the dearth of research that matched both the context and the

framework of my study. I chose an approach that was more exploratory in nature because there was not enough information previously gathered by other Canadian sources to be able to distill the issues under investigation into "a few discrete variables and linear, cause-effect relationships."(Patton, 2002, p. 41). If anything, previous research suggested that the relationships between the variables under investigation were complex, often in flux, and in some cases unknown. Therefore, a case study's holistic nature best fit my research aims. Second, it was important for me to ask about each participant's *context* because it provided insight into the reasons for participants' perceptions of their racial identity and academic motivation, and for their academically-related behaviours in the classroom and in other educational contexts (Patton, 2002).

Similar to Martino & Rezai-Rashti (2010), I used case studies to purposely complicate our 'common sense' conceptions of the issues surrounding black students' achievement in Canada (Gillborn, 2006). Often these common sense conceptions grow out of quantitative studies that are necessarily more concise, seemingly more objective, and thus considered to be more generalizable to an entire phenomenon. However, the reality of black students' academic outcomes often belies simpler explanations that can be condensed and operationalized by quantitative measures.

Furthermore, like Carter Andrews (2009), studying and relating the words and behaviours of black students who are achieving serves as a purposeful alternate, counter-hegemonic view of the 'typical' black underachieving student (Solomon & Tarc, 2003). Gillborn (2006) notes that documenting the "viewpoints and experiences of minoritized groups…not only adds essential data and perspective, [but] it can offer a fundamental challenge to the "common sense" assumptions through which so much racism operates and the mechanisms by which it is

legitimized."(p. 23) Therefore, I chose to interview achieving black students so that education stakeholders can see how black students are succeeding in the midst of structural inequalities. My hope is that by doing my part to eradicate the stereotype of an underachieving black student beyond redemption, education stakeholders will be able to recognize these structural inequalities, and use these achieving black students' stories to improve the areas in which schools continue to work against black student success (Horvat & O'Connor, 2006; Howard & Terry, 2011).

Design limitations

My chosen method of a case study is limited by the fact that it cannot result in a generalization or summary of all achieving black Canadian students' perspectives. Instead I aim to fill in more of the story surrounding the diversity of experiences of Canadian black students in high school. The scope of my study is limited because I am only focusing on students' perceptions of the reasons why they achieve. I did not observe my participants at school, nor did I interview the people they talked about; therefore I was not able to provide a triangulated data source. Instead, I had to make a judgment about each statement by paying attention to participants' body language and tone of voice, and asking for examples to support the statements they made (Shank, 2002).

Participant Sample

In this section I discuss how I recruited my sample of participants, and I present their demographic information.

Study eligibility and recruitment

In order to be eligible to participate in my study, students had to be attending high school in Canada, self-identify as "black", and be passing all of their courses. Since I had no access to students' official school reports, participants confirmed this information by self-report. I had

originally planned to include observations of all study participants at their schools in order to triangulate my data, but the school boards to which I applied rejected multiple revisions of any research ethics proposal I submitted that included observations because of concerns for the safety of the participants. When I clarified that the study participants would be observed in teacher- and staff-supervised areas of their schools only, they denied my request because they believed that it was highly unlikely that I would be able to obtain consent from all of my study participants' peers and teachers.

When I removed the observation stipulation, I was finally approved by two school boards in Southwestern Ontario. However, no principals allowed me to conduct research in their schools. This forced me to use what McMillan & Schumacher (2010) call *snowball* or *network sampling*. Using this technique, "each successive participant or group is named by a preceding group or individual. Participant referrals are the basis for choosing a sample. The researcher develops a profile of the attributes or particular trait sought and asks each participant to suggest others who fit the profile or have the attribute." (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010, p. 327) I asked all of my contacts in Southwestern Ontario to alert me if they knew of any black high school students who might be interested in participating in a study about "black student achievement". Whenever a contact would tell me that he or she knew of a possible participant, I sent the letter of information and my contact information to the contact, and asked the contact to pass them on to the potential participant. I told my contacts to tell potential participants that they could contact me if they had questions about the study or were interested in participating in the study. I used this method after consultation with a representative from the Faculty of Education Research Ethics Board to ensure that potential participants did not feel pressured to participate in my study. After only obtaining one participant using this method, I applied the snowball sampling

technique to personal contacts in the Greater Toronto Area to obtain four more participants.

Participants did not receive any form of compensation for participating in my study.

Demographic information

Three males and two females participated in my study. The average participant age was

16.2, with ages ranging from 14 to 17. Three participants were in Grade 12, one was in Grade 11,

and one student was in Grade 9. Four participants were born in Canada, and one was born in

London, England. Four participants had never attended school outside Canada, while one

participant (Clayton) completed close to six years of elementary school in the US. Four

participants attended high school (HS) in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA), and one attended

school in Southwestern Ontario (SWO). Four participants' parents hailed from the Caribbean,

while one participant's parents were born in Nigeria. A summary of participants' demographic

information is presented in Table 3. All of the demographic information was obtained by self-

report. To ensure anonymity, I assigned and referred to each participant by a pseudonym during

the interview and during transcription.

Table 3
Study Participants' Demographic Information

Name	Age	Grade	Gender	Country of birth	Mother's education	Father's education	Attends high school in…
Joshua	14	9	Male	Canada	University	University	GTA
Clayton	16	11	Male	Canada	College	College	GTA
Althea	17	12	Female	Canada	College	Some HS	GTA
Bryon	17	12	Male	Canada	HS	HS	GTA
Noemi	17	12	Female	London, England	University	University	SWO

Interview Procedures

I conducted an individual semi-structured interview with each participant. Shank (2002) recommends this approach for novice researchers because it ensures that the important topics selected by the researcher will be addressed in each interview, and it gives participants the freedom and agency to discuss topics that they deem to be personally relevant. In turn, this gives the researcher well-needed insight into issues that the researcher might not have considered to be important to the questions under investigation (Shank, 2002).

I assured my participants that they did not have to answer any question that they did not want to answer for any reason, and that they could terminate the interview at any time. The interview questions are presented in Appendix C. I began each interview identically by asking the demographic questions shown in Appendix C. Next, I always asked: "What makes you successful at school?" From there, I allowed my participants to lead the interview as much as possible so that they could talk about what came to their minds, and so that I could follow up with questions clarifying the issues they proposed (Shank, 2002). This means that throughout the interview, I would change the order of the questions according to their responses, or I would eliminate a question they had already answered on their own (Shank, 2002).

Reliability

I was conscious of ensuring my study's reliability. Consequently, I recorded each interview using an mp3 voice recorder to keep an accurate record of what each participant said. I also asked my participants for clarification and asked follow up questions. During the interview, I would repeat a participant's statement, starting with: "So is what you're saying that…?", and then I would ask: "Did I get that right?" I encouraged my participants to disagree with me and to correct me when my words did not match their statements, when I omitted a point that they

thought was important, or if I had over- or underemphasized a point they had made. I reminded

my participants that I was most interested in what they had to say, and that my own opinions

were of no use to me because this project was about *their* ideas. I was also careful not to assume

that I knew how a student would answer a question, and instead just asked the question even if it

felt redundant (Shank, 2002).

Because I wanted my participants to be truthful with their responses, I worked to create a

positive and relaxed atmosphere throughout the interview by making a personal connection with

each student (Shank, 2002). I paid attention to their interests, and thanked them for engaging in

deep thinking when they allowed me to doggedly pursue a train of thought with several

subsequent questions. At the same time, I judged students' body language and tone of voice to

gauge the appropriate time and method to ask each question. This included knowing when it was

time to move on from a question that I had posed. The most common comment post-interview

was: "Wow, has it already been an hour?" as each participant told me that they had enjoyed the

conversation. The interview recordings lasted from 45 to 65 minutes, and the discussion often

continued after I had stopped recording the interview. I did not include the content of any of

these post-interview discussions in my data analysis.

Data Analysis

Validity

During data analysis, I was conscious of looking for ways to ensure my study's validity. I

returned to the original audio record of each interview multiple times to ensure the accuracy of

each transcript, and to hear the tone of voice participants used to give their answers. Similar to

Griffin (2006), I used the data from multiple case studies to increase external validity by looking

at what all of the case studies had in common. I used a coding system for finding and organizing the themes that emerged from participants' responses (Shank, 2002).

Analysis

My data went through three rounds of content analysis: The first round was primarily concerned with identifying patterns in my data, while the later rounds of analysis involved making sense of these patterns (Patton, 2002). In the second round of analysis, I analyzed the interview data in light of my theoretical framework and research questions. In the third round, I synthesized overall themes that characterized the entire collection of interview data.

After each interview, I transcribed the interview and wrote down the major themes that emerged as I listened to the audio recording. I bolded quotes in the transcript that corresponded to these themes. After I finished transcribing all of the interviews, I used *pattern analysis* to identify the topics that all of the interviews had in common (Patton, 2002). Once I had a list of these topics, I assigned a title, a colour, and a brief description to each topic (Shank, 2002), and inserted this information into a spreadsheet. I also applied the same colour-coding system to each transcript. Then I inserted all of the colour-coded quotes from each transcript into the appropriate spreadsheet topic, and constructed a flowchart to help me visualize the connections between the topics. Figure 1 in Appendix D shows the results of my pattern analysis. Next, I used *deductive analysis* to analyze my interview data in the context of the theoretical framework and the research questions I applied to my research (Patton, 2002). Figure 2 in Appendix D shows the results of my deductive analysis. Finally, I used *inductive analysis* to organize the interview data into overarching themes (Patton, 2002). Figure 3 shows the five major themes that emerged:

1. Participants' passion to reach their personal goals

2. A culture of excellence in the home and in the community

3. The role of the teacher

4. Participants' perceptions of the significance of race in their school contexts

5. Participants' surprising conceptualization of their racial identity in the face of feelings of marginalization at school

Summary

In this chapter, I discussed the reasons why I chose qualitative research to address my research questions. I specified why I used a case study method, and commented on the limitations of this method. I described the ethical considerations that forced me to change my research design, and the methods I used to recruit participants. Next, I outlined the demographic information of the participants who volunteered to be a part of my study. I described how I conducted each interview and how I ensured reliability and validity in my data. Finally, I outlined my method for data analysis, and named the themes that emerged. In the next chapter, I provide an analysis of the data.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

In this chapter, I will discuss the findings of my research by reviewing the five themes that emerged from the data analysis of my interviews with five achieving black Canadian high school students:

1. Participants' passion to reach their personal goals

2. A culture of excellence in the home and in the community

3. The role of the teacher

4. Participants' perceptions of the significance of race in their school contexts

5. Participants' surprising conceptualization of their racial identity in the face of feelings of marginalization at school

All of my participants mentioned the importance of their own hard work and determination, as well as the support of their family and community. Three students mentioned their teachers as personally contributing to their academic success, but all participants were able to contribute to a discussion about the characteristics of effective teachers. All of my participants recognized the role of race in their academic environments and four participants agreed that black teachers could add significant value to their educational experiences. However, despite identifying as black students, receiving support from people in primarily afrocentric environments, and sharing feelings of marginalization in the classroom, none of my participants identified as afrocentric. Instead, each of my participants had a unique definition and interpretation of his or her racial identity.

Theme 1: "It's Just Up to Me": Students' Passion to Reach Personal Goals

Bryon summarized all of my participants' first reactions when I asked them about what made them successful at school. While recognizing the importance of a strong family background, they

identified their own hard work and determination as being responsible for their academic

success. Bryon said:

> What makes me successful is having a strong background and knowing myself. Knowing that I can accomplish whatever it is that I want to accomplish and it's just up to me to accomplish that goal through hard work and actually paying attention in class.

In accordance with Griffin's (2006) findings in her study of high-achieving black American

college students, all of my participants described themselves as "self-motivated, goal-oriented

learners."(p. 391)

Metacognition

 All of the participants in my study demonstrated "metacognitive knowledge" (Sungur & Senler,

2009, p. 45). They were honest and accurate about their strengths and weaknesses (*knowledge of

cognition*), and they provided detailed descriptions of the strategies they used, evaluated, and

modified when necessary to achieve their goals (*regulation of cognition*).

   Knowledge of cognition. I was surprised to find that many of my study participants did

not consider their intelligence to be higher than most of their peers. Two students mentioned that

their communication skills were above average, but when I asked all participants to rate their

"smartness" on a scale of 1 to 10, everyone gave themselves a rating of between 5 and 7. They

did not express a uniformly positive academic self-concept by attributing their achievement to

their intelligence. Instead, similar to what Dei (2010), Carter Andrews (2009), and Smith &

Lalonde (2003) found, my sample of achieving black students attributed their academic success

to a different internal cause: their own hard work. Joshua explained that "if you work hard and

put your mind to it, you can accomplish anything." Similarly, Clayton said that he was motivated

by "knowing that if I try hard, the outcome is more likely to be better. And I have a better chance

than if I didn't try." He added that "at the end of the day I think you gotta work hard to get what

you want because nothing's going to come easy or free." In fact, Althea characterized smartness

as a function of a student's willingness to work hard.

> I think that smartness is rated on the scale of how much or how long you study for. So if you…people consider themselves smart if they get good grades, but I consider people smart if you're willing to work. And to actually *work* for what you want. Because at the end of the day, it all depends on getting what you want and putting the amount of time and effort and doing it to the point where, you know, you can't even sleep.

Clayton described the persistence he applied to difficult tasks.

> I think for me it's more something natural, I guess. I feel that if there's something on my mind that I don't know, or that I always have to keep thinking about like: "How should I figure this out?" If it's on my mind, I feel like I have to do it sometimes.

All of my participants demonstrated high self-efficacy by being absolutely convinced that

success was possible through perseverance. As Bryon put it, "no one can stop me."

Regulation of cognition. Bryon provided an excellent overview of the successful

strategies that my participants employed when he asserted that "knowing [him]self" made him

successful at school. When I asked for the definition of "knowing yourself", he said:

> Knowing who you are, meaning knowing what your strengths are, knowing your weaknesses, and knowing what triggers you to study or triggers you not to study, what are your distractions, and putting yourself in an environment where you will be the most successful. Surrounding yourself with positive people, isolating yourself from negative influences, and having determination to accomplish whatever it is.

Althea and Noemi also described specific strategies that that they used, evaluated, and modified

to reach their goals.

Althea originally had a study routine that worked for all of her courses, but added extensive

additional revisions to her routine for her Grade 12 Advanced Functions course because she

knew math was her weak point. She figured that she could afford to spend less time on her other

courses because she already had good marks in those classes. However, when she received a

final mark of 70 in her Biology class, she re-evaluated her strategy and realized that the extra

time devoted to deciphering Advanced Functions on her own took too much study time away

from her other courses. Althea came up with two solutions. First, she recognized that her current

Biology mark would not allow her to get into the Bachelor of Science university programs she

planned for, so she decided to take Grade 12 Biology again in night school.

> I put so much time in Advanced Functions until my Bio was like "ughh" because I figured I was better in Bio, stopped studying as hard as I was, put all this focus on Advanced, did well in Advanced, didn't do that well in Biology – I got 70, but I mean that's not good enough for me so I'm doing it again in night school. I have to. I have to.

Second, she decided to hire a tutor for her next math course. She determined that this would

prevent her from repeating the same predicament where she spent too much time on her own

trying to understand Grade 12 Calculus while her other subjects suffered.

> To get a tutor, I figured because I know I'm not…math is not my strong suit, so I'm like: "There's no way I could have done it without a tutor", because I've been doing it this far without a tutor and I mean like it's not that great. So I got a tutor, and I did much better – a lot better. I mean, I'm paying him all this money – might as well just do well. If I didn't do well, I'd be like, "Shame on me."

Althea also connected her performance in math class to her self-esteem. This served as an

additional incentive for her to achieve good marks as she put a judgment value on what it meant

to herself if she did poorly. Finally, Althea demonstrated detailed and specific knowledge about

the actions that resulted in her academic achievement. In the next quote she describes her present

study routine, but noted that she continued to monitor it to make sure that it remained effective.

> I have my little schedule. For my courses I do everything my teacher tells me to, *and* more. So for example, Chemistry: For the test he'll give us these lessons to work in, or these handouts to fill out. I'll fill them out, after school go in the textbook, make my own notes, print out all my notes – I have my own study sheets. I put in more time, I put in more hours within the day to study for that specific course. Calculus, I do the questions [my teacher] gives me, the questions my tutor gives me, and what I give myself. So I'm sometimes doing questions three times over […] Yeah, I think that's working so far.

Noemi explained that she also had a history of struggling in math class since elementary school.

Her "mom forced [her] to go to [Private Tutoring Company A]," but Noemi "really hated it" and

stopped attending the tutoring classes after a few months. She monitored her performance in

math class, and noticed that when she attended the private tutoring classes, her "marks went up really high in math," but "after I quit, they started going down again, so it's like, I need to try something else." Noemi never considered avoiding math classes – she immediately looked for an alternate strategy to reach her goal of getting higher marks in math. After almost failing Grade 11 Math, Noemi weighed the costs and benefits of returning to the tutoring classes. She recognized the good results she obtained with the help of a private tutoring company, and decided to find a *different* private tutoring company to help her prepare for her Grade 12 math class. She also planned to access extra help at her school as soon as the course began.

> I […] almost failed [math] last year – I got a 54 so I passed but it's like…my teacher, on the comment was like: "Congratulations, you got the credit." [*Laughs*] That's just what she…[*laughs*] there was nothing she could say [*laughs*] because I did so badly [*laughs*]. But yeah, I'm not good at [math]. And now I'm going to [Private Tutoring Company B] – well, once a week but I want to go twice a week now – in preparation for taking math next semester. I'm taking [math] in a couple of days [from now], so I need to be in extra help for that because I need that to…for the course I'm taking, I can't *not* take it.

I found it remarkable that Noemi never considered *not* taking the course. To her, the decision to take a Grade 12 math course was very simple and logical. It was anchored around her goal to be admitted into a business program at a certain university where she could specialize in marketing. Her reasoning proceeded like this: Noemi had a long history of struggling with math, but she needed math as a pre-requisite for university. Her prior experiences showed her that she had the most success when she used a private tutoring company, therefore in her mind there was no other option but to find another tutoring company that met her needs. There was never any thought of changing her university plans, and it did not seem to matter to Noemi that she had always struggled with math – Noemi saw no real obstacle to achieving her goals once she identified the kind of help that she needed. She took for granted the fact that if a school subject did not come easily to her, she would educate herself about the resources available to her, and then access them. She always remained confident that accessing the proper resources would result in her

academic achievement. Similar to the students in Dei's (2010) study, she took ownership of her studies, and was not afraid to ask for help.

It's all about the goal: Extrinsic motivation

Like the students in Griffin's (2006) study, all of the students in my study expressed being motivated by extrinsic factors: They set their sights on future goals *outside* school to anchor their reasoning for doing well *in* school. They explained that they were motivated to achieve because they linked their good grades in school to their post-education goals including a career, providing a home for their future families, and making their parents proud by returning the emotional and financial investment their parents had made in their education. Althea explained that she was motivated to well in school by her future plans, including making her parents proud, and being able to raise her future children a positive environment with an educated husband.

> What motivates me to do well is my future. As in…I want my parents to be happy at the end of it all. I want my future kids, you know, set them up, you know! Give them a nice house! Give them a good schooling – I don't want to be in the ghetto. I mean, whoever my husband may be, I want him to be educated – I want him to be black too but [*smiles*], you never know [*laughs*].

Althea concluded that her ultimate goal was not success, but "significance." Similar to what Gosine (2008) found, Althea felt that significance gave her the opportunity to become an "agent of social change" (p. 307) by helping other members of her community in need.

> I want to be significant. I mean, I don't wanna be just successful – I want to have a significance where I help others, help this person do well, or help [the] vast majority improve – I want that, really badly. I want to be able to stretch out a hand where no one else is stretching out a hand for this person. I want to be able to be significant – that's the main thing I'm going towards – significance, not just success. Because I think that with significance, success follows.

Although research typically characterizes successful students as having a *mastery orientation* where they are motivated by mostly intrinsic factors such as interest in and enjoyment of their

academic subjects (Hwang, Echols, & Vrongistinos, 2002), most of my participants cited

extrinsic factors (e.g., getting good grades) as their motivation to do well in school. Therefore,

they primarily exhibited a *performance orientation*, where they were more concerned about the

outcome (i.e., the grade) of their learning experience rather than the process. However, like

Hwang and colleagues found in their 2002 study, these achieving black students' extrinsic

motivation *facilitated* their intrinsic motivation, leading to school success by linking their

achievement to their long-term goals. Griffin (2006) classifies these students as "integrated

regulators" (p. 386). For example, Noemi noted that she was never motivated to get good grades

in school until she developed a career-related goal.

> I never really was self-motivated until I had a goal. Then I focused on that, and that's
> how I am, where I am today.

Similarly, Bryon described how when he felt discouraged by a bad grade in school, his drive to

achieve his goals made him rally.

> Like, one…for example you have a bad result on something, you're just: "[*Hisses teeth*]
> Yeah, you know, I can't be bothered with all this – I'll just be a garbage man or
> something like that." But then again it hits you [*snaps fingers*] – you know you gotta, as I
> mentioned the *goal* that you want to be – it hits you like: "You know what? Hey, you
> gotta pick it up, you gotta try harder next time, you gotta study harder" et cetera.

Bryon's attributions of the cause of his "bad result" are also adaptive to future academic

achievement (Santrock, Woloshyn, Gallagher, Di Petta, & Marini, 2010). He demonstrated an

internal locus of control by characterizing school success as a factor of how hard he tried. He

attributed a low test score to a *variable* and *controllable* cause, as he believed that he could

improve the outcome of the next test through hard work.

Clayton explained why thinking about his future lifestyle goals made him stay focused in school.

> Because if you think about it right now, university's not now, so some people don't really
> think about it – like: "Oh, well that's later, I'll figure it out when I get there" but if you
> take time to think about what's going to happen like 3, 4 years down the road, you're

gonna say: "Well I'll be university, and if I do good and get all my qualifications, after university it's gonna make life so much easier."

While all of the participants in my study identified their future career and lifestyle goals as the *motivator* behind their desire to do well in school, all five participants also agreed with Ashburn-Nardo & Smith (2008) that their education was a mandatory *step* to achieve these goals.

Goals are impossible without education

Bryon explained that even though his goal of a career in finance acted as his motivator to do well in school, he recognized post-secondary education as the only way to achieve his career in finance.

> It's the goal […] that needs the education. The goal's the motivating factor for me. The education is the process to get to the goal.

Clayton wanted to play professional football as a career, but planned to achieve this by first getting an athletic scholarship to a Canadian or American university. When I asked him if he had ever considered bypassing university to start his football career earlier, he said: "No, not at all, [university has] always been like a goal."

When I asked Noemi if an education was necessary to do well, she said:

> Yeah! I do actually. I don't care what kind of education, like, I say like go to college, go to university, doesn't really matter. People are successful when they go to college, or else they'd be closing colleges. It's like…you wouldn't be homeless, but it's good to get an education, no matter what kind, so I personally want to go to university as well – it's not like [my parents are] forcing me.

Joshua agreed that he had never considered *not* going to university, as his career goals require post– secondary education.

> I always wanted to go to university. […] I'm going to go to medical school after university. After four years. […] I want to become a doctor. I like the subject.

Althea specifically noted that she also wanted to obtain a four-year university degree.

> I want to get honours. I'm so determined.

When I suggested to Althea that people can obtain jobs without an education, she countered that

it was an outdated notion that her generation of students can get access to good jobs without an

education.

> I think…well…education [is] definitely important. Because although you said a lot of
> people dropped out of high school and have a job, I think that's moreso back then when
> they were able to swing [that]. But now, education is a vital sign. People are wondering
> what sort of education do you have. And a resume – you have to show some sort of
> educational proof or proof of, you know, background of where you want to go. Even with
> my dad's work, they're only bringing in kids with education and they're taking out the
> older people. […] For you to just throw away your future, especially free schooling, I
> don't know why you'd do it. It's free! I'm fretting for university because it's not free. I
> mean why would you just give up free schooling?

We have seen how the participants in my study motivated themselves to achieve their academic

goals. However, no child exists without a social context. As Bronfenbrenner's *bioecological*

model of development suggests, learning is sociocultural, where students influence and are

influenced by their environments. Next, I will describe the impact that my participants' families,

communities, and teachers had on their academic achievement.

Theme 2: Parents' Contributions to Students' Academic Achievement

Like Fisher (2000), Byfield (2008), and Smith, Schneider, & Ruck's (2005) studies in

the US, UK, and Canada, all of my study's participants cited their parents as being major

contributors to their academic success. The combined influence of family and community on

black students' academic achievement is comparable to Rhamie & Hallam's (2002) *home-*

community model, when teacher support is inconsistent or unavailable. In my study, this was also

true regardless of my particpants' parents' level of education. Both of Bryon's parents graduated

from high school and did not attend university or college, but he credits them for engendering his

adaptive behaviours reponsible for his school success.

> My parents are definitely the source of everything I've become – they've allowed me
> access to knowledge, wisdom – they've gone through it themselves – they give me all

that they've known, so everything I am is a credit to them. […] I'm fortunate that I had the parents that I have 'cause they taught me to be determined, be focused to do what I want to do.

Parents inculcated education-positive goals

Noemi's parents told her that no matter what career she wanted to pursue, university was the way to achieve it. They encouraged her to attend university immediately after Grade 12. She said that this message was transmitted through her family, their friends, and their church.

> My parents have always had this thing where it's like you have to go to university. Even my sister, she wanted to be an actor and they were like: "You have to go to university first, so take acting!" […] My parents were like: "No grade thirteen, no year off – just go to university." And that's how the general feeling…it's like my family and friends as well. My youth pastor as well. She's like: "I don't care – just go to university!"

Bryon explained why he trusted his parents' judgment that education was necessary for future goals.

> Personally I think [a post-secondary education is] the way to go nowadays because I don't think you can really…what my parents always told me: "Make sure that you, you know, have a goal in life and make sure you know what you're doing in the future." I've always wanted to be a financial analyst and I've always wanted to know what's the way to get there and it's through university. […] [My parents] know what's best so they wouldn't put such importance on having a goal if it wasn't important.

Supporting schoolwork

Joshua relied primarily on his parents for help with schoolwork. He said parents helped him "do [his] homework and study for tests or exams." When faced with a problem, he explained that his "dad is very good at math, so he'll help me figure out the problem."

Clayton said that while his parents were always willing to help him with his homework when they could, they also encouraged him to take responsibility for his own learning by reaching out to others who could provide assistance.

> [My parents] try to help me out as best as [they] can, when it comes to my books and my studies. If I have trouble they try to offer as much help as they can, to what they can

understand. If not, they tell me that if there's something I need help with, that I must go and ask someone that *can* help so I'll be better off.

Althea's mom paid for a tutor when Althea requested one. Consequently, Althea felt doubly

motivated to get a better mark in math class because of the financial sacrifice her mother made

on her behalf.

> I'm like: "Mom, I need a tutor really badly." Like: "Mom it's expensive but please do it." And she was like: "I'd rather give my money to your education than send as much money back home", so I'm like: "Ooh, I can't disappoint this lady now!" It was like $50 every Saturday, so $200 a month. $1000 for last semester and I'm still doing it.

Limiting students' free time activities

Noemi said that although her parents did not direct her to study, they did limit activities available

to her on school nights, which usually resulted in her getting her homework done anyway.

> I know some people [whose] parents who are like: "School all the time – always comes first", and they're doing a lot of stuff and getting in their kids' education, but when my parents try to all of a sudden be like, "Study!" then I'm like: "You don't really ever tell me to do that…so" [*laughs*] it's weird. And it's annoying. They do have some rules in the house – just general rules that kind of help. Like I'm not allowed to watch tv during the week, which means I do not watch a lot of tv at all. Because on the weekends there's like a couple shows that I like, like *The Bachelor* – I love that show. But then other than that, there's nothing really good on the weekends [*laughs*]. […] And, lastly, we're not allowed to use the computer past a certain time, so we have to ask for special permission and they'll give it, but it's also a hassle so it's like, "I'll just do my homework now."

Modeling the value of education

Noemi described how her mom modelled the family tradition of academic excellence.

> My mom will talk to me sometimes, like about when she was younger – how it wasn't easy for her. She's one of those people who was really smart. Back then, you went to university just…with your grades, so she went to university [in Nigeria] when she was f…[*pause*] either, I think fifteen? And she graduated when she was 19? […] Also her parents, her dad […] owned… his business was tutoring. So he was really smart and had a lot of access to education and books and stuff. But she would tell me about how for her, she had to study hard or else she didn't do well, but she was really smart so she *did* spend a lot of time studying. A lot. And she has that habit now. Even when she's getting her CGA and stuff. […] She already got [her CGA qualification] though, but she's still doing courses though. You have to…I think you have to do a certain amount of courses every year or something like that.

Noemi's dad equally valued education, and emphasized the importance of picking an academic

subject and a career to pursue that would provide personal satisfaction.

> And my dad would tell me about how, like..."Pick something you like", because his parents forced him to do medicine at first, and I don't know how far he got, but…he has done like surgery before and stuff like that, but he eventually quit and did what he wanted. […] And then after that, he got into business and finance, which is where he is now. So he's done a lot of school as well.

Being cheerleaders and sounding boards

Althea viewed her mom as her number one source of encouragement because her mom believed

that her work ethic would bring her good school results.

> My mom is a good backbone. She'll be like: "Althea, how's this?" I'll be like: "Mom, it was hard. I just wrote the test, mom. I feel like…I don't know, I'll just have to see the test." She'll be like: "Well you know, you've studied – I've seen you study." I think…she's my spine at home.

"It comes back every time": A culture of high expectations

To promote solidarity, socialization, and support for my participants' academic goals, my

participants' parents insisted on bringing their children to black community gatherings where

they repeatedly received the message that academic achievement was expected of them. In this

section, I will use the example of church communities since all of my participants identified with

this social experience even though they attended different churches. Corresponding to Byfield's

(2008) findings about achieving black males in the US, my participants found that their churches

provided them with motivation to keep focused on their academic goals.

Bryon explained how his predominantly black church encouraged his academic focus.

> Around the last week of August – before school starts – we have a little back-to-school barbeque where we have games, activities all that stuff. But the second part, we get school supplies and we talk about the upcoming year and how we're gonna improve on last year, and how we can accomplish what we set out to do. So definitely, absolutely the church environment helps academically.

I asked Bryon if the topic of academics ever re-emerged at church after the August barbeque. He

noted that it was a normal topic of conversation among the church congregation.

> Does the academics come back? It comes back *every time* – every time you go to church!
> It's: "How are you doing in school? What universities are you going to? What's your
> marks looking like?" Well for me, it's that, every time I go to church. You gotta make
> sure you're focused on…they're on top of what's going on in school.

Noemi agreed that academic achievement was a frequent topic of discussion at her church.

> And the people I go around with [at church] are the people who make [academic
> achievement] important – [they] say that it's worth it to go to school – we talk about it a
> lot. They're like: "Oh, how's your school going?" Grades and stuff like that.

The weekly reminder of academic expectations from both church peers and adults established

academic achievement as the norm for all student members of both Bryon's and Noemi's church

congregations.

Noemi recounted the more-than-gentle encouragement to go to university that she received from

her youth pastor:

> My youth pastor does put a lot of like…she's like: "Go to university. If you don't, I will
> kill you!" She's really serious [*laughs*].

Receiving repeated messages of the importance of post-secondary education from multiple

sources transmitted pro-education values to my study participants. Consequently, these

education-positive values became what my study participants viewed as their own values.

In addition to setting high academic expectations for students, Althea and Joshua both mentioned

that their church provided support and encouragement in the form of regular prayer. Althea said:

> Yes, they do encourage academics. A lot of…the majority – they really do push academic
> success. And they pray for us before we go to school. You know, if you have a test: "I
> have a test, I have a project – I don't know what I'm going to do!" Well, they'll pray.

Joshua also described how his church sought to inspire the student members of the congregation

during Black History Month by introducing them to the biographies of prominent black leaders

and innovators.

Racial socialization

As Coard, Wallace, Stevenson, & Brotman (2004) found in their study of low-income African American mothers, all of my participants' parents practiced racial socialization, and considered it to be a key part of their educational support. This helped prepare their children for the role that racism would play in their schooling. Bryon took it for granted that every black student would undergo racial socialization by their parents.

> Yeah, definitely, we're black so…they tell you that you're going to face obstacles as you grow up, and it's not going to be as easy as, for example, your white friends so you gotta be prepared and know yourself and know that you gotta try a little harder than the rest.

Agreeing with Coard and her colleagues (2004), Clayton explained that racial socialization was needed to empower black students with the ability to understand and cope with incidents of racism during their lives.

> [Racial socialization is] definitely needed because wherever you go, […] racism still exists, so just to be aware about it – I mean, you will come across it sometimes, but just to be aware about it earlier in your life – it definitely helps because you'll be prepared like to handle certain situations. So I guess like education-wise, I mean sometimes it does happen, like I've encountered it before when I was really young, and […] it happened, but I didn't really understand why. […] At the time as a kid it felt like: "This person is just being mean," but as I grew older, I understood why, what it was, and why they did that.

Bryon remembered that his formal introduction to *protective messages* (Anglin & Wade, 2007) of racial socialization began just before he entered middle school. As Fischer & Shaw (1999) recommended, Bryon's parents deliberately chose a time to deliver protective messages when they anticipated that he would soon experience discrimination in the classroom.

> When I went to middle school [my parents] let me know: "You know, things might be a little different now as you're entering into that, you know….You'll face a colour barrier because you're black and stuff like that, so you kinda just be careful about it" and stuff like that so I think it was definitely during that time.

Even prior to his formal talk with his parents, Bryon's parents told him stories about the

discrimination that they endured as illustrations of the kinds of situations Bryon might have to

face as he got older.

> Yeah, 'cause even my parents would tell me stories about them, when they first came to Canada, and how they faced difficulties from different groups, and so it kinda engraved into my head that this problem's gonna eventually happen to me. Even though society's getting to a place where they're becoming more accepting of colours, I think it's definitely engraved into you from a little child that: "Hey, I'm black so this might happen to me sometime."

Bryon's parents' experiences with racism are comparable to Hall's (2000) discussion about

Caribbean adults arriving in Britain in the 1950s and 1960s. These adults made a political

statement against discrimination by uniting under a black collective identity in reaction to racist

incidents in the 1970s. But unlike the adults that Hall described, Bryon clarified that even though

his parents told him to be aware of racism, they never taught him to be wary of white people. He

explained that this would be counterproductive to his education goals.

> No, no, no. I don't think that would be right to teach them to be prejudiced against, well I wouldn't call it prejudiced but kinda…standoffish against other people – I don't think that's very… [*trails off*] […] The more you're more segregated into yourself, the more you're going to be hostile towards someone else. It's not everybody who's the same colour as you. How's that going to translate into good marks?

In summary, all of my participants enthusiastically mentioned the contribution of their parents to

their academic achievement. These achieving black Canadian students' parents inculcated

education-positive attitudes and demonstrated pro-education behaviours. At church, participants

were impelled to maintain pro-educational values because of a culture of high academic

expectations. This culture was created and sustained by congregation members' steadfast interest

in their studies, where students felt encouraged by prayerful education allies. Parents also

recognized the importance informing their children about racism to cope with incidents of

discrimination that would occur in their academic lives.

Theme 3: Teachers' Contributions to Academic Success

Three of my participants named their teachers as key contributors to their academic success.

Bryon supported Byfield (2008), Cokley (2008), and Rhamie & Hallam's (2002) findings that

his teachers motivated him to persist with difficult tasks.

> I think a [good] teacher is someone that can be strict when it's necessary, because as students and teenagers we're prone to be lazy and not want to focus on a task, and you need teachers that gear us and focus us because our teachers are definitely one of the reasons or ways to be successful – it's through teachers helping us out.

Similarly, Joshua said that his teachers "help [him] to work harder and do better" by keeping him

on task during classroom work periods.

Clayton hoped to earn a living playing professional football, but he consulted his guidance

counsellor to help him formulate a back-up plan based on his interests and abilities. As a result,

he chose a career in engineering as his alternate plan, and his guidance counsellor helped him

map out his courses to obtain the pre-requisites needed for university entry.

> Like, if you're not too sure what kind of courses you want to take or what your future… you're not too sure exactly what you want to do, and you just need a bit of advice. Or just things like if you want to take certain courses towards something, [guidance counsellors] can…you know, they do little activities with you – little tests just to see what your best interests are and what they think you should go for. And also just to see what you'd be better off in the long run and what you can handle.

My other study participants did not see their teachers as particularly helpful or harmful to their

academic success. According to Cokley (2000), the quality of teacher-student relationships

largely determines students' academic self-concepts because students internalize their teachers'

perceived evaluations of their students. The fact that some of my students did not feel a personal

connection with their teachers could explain why they did not demonstrate the traditional

definition of a positive academic self-concept, where students view their academic abilities as

superior to their peers. Contrary to Fisher's (2000) findings, it was the black males in my study

who felt more encouraged by their teachers than the black female students in my study.

Noemi and Althea explained that when they had an unhelpful teacher in one class, they found ways to work around it. Noemi recounted how she developed a reputation for arriving late to school in the morning, but changed her ways for her most important classes. Althea commented that she would do everything possible (including eliminating bathroom breaks) to avoid being a target for her teachers. Althea said:

> I don't worry about them too much. […]I'd rather not go to the washroom [*laughs*] – I've made it my duty to not go pee in class [*laughs*] – ever. But there's some emergencies! […] I just worry about what [my teachers] have to say. You're done your lesson? Cool. I'm going to do my homework. Rather not talk in class, because clearly you have a problem with me? So I'd rather not talk. Do everything to not make you… "on" me.

Although only three of my participants named their teachers as being responsible for their academic success, all of my participants had clear ideas about the kind of teacher attitudes and behaviours that *would* motivate them to succeed in school.

How teachers can help

Fisher (2000) states that teachers who seek positive relationships with students affirm their students' self efficacy. This relationship fosters trust and respect that facilitates students' academic achievement. Accordingly, Bryon valued teachers who created a positive class environment.

> [A good teacher is] someone that is... and I kinda had this down from when I was a little kid – someone that listens to the class, someone that is fun, someone that will kinda get personal with you, kinda have like a one-on-one…I wouldn't say relationship, but like, you know? Like someone that would go, "Hey, how's your mom doing?" or something like that. Someone that is kinda like a friend.

Similarly, Noemi respected teachers who encouraged trusting relationships with their students.

> Some teachers are open. Like my English teacher this year – she constantly tries to say like: "I hope that we have a good enough relationship that if you *did* need something, you could ask", and I've never taken her up on it, but she's the one who's like: "Basically I'll give you an extension if you have a good enough reason if you ask." I've never actually had a teacher just come out and say that. It would make it a lot easier if I did have a reason, if I needed an extension, so, just trying to be…like, make a conn…what do you call it? Like make a basic relationship with…on some level. And letting the student know

that. Some teachers are just really nice and really sweet. And then, some are funny. And that helps too.

Though Noemi appreciated teachers who were open and had a good sense of humour, Noemi never felt inclined to forge a personal connection with any of her teachers.

I'm not really one of those people who really like talks to teachers and makes friendships with them. I'm just kind of like shy; I don't want to talk to them. So…I wouldn't say it's anyone specifically [who has had an impact on my academic life].

Clayton's response supported what Byfield (2008), Cokley (2008), and Rhamie & Hallam (2002) found that the teachers that have helped him the most are the ones "that actually look out for their students and try to help push for the best." Teachers who forge a personal connection with their students can make their students feel respected, and a bond of trust can form. This allows teachers to challenge their students to achieve higher academic standards, as the students feel motivated to persist during difficult tasks. These students are able to thrive in an environment where they feel secure that their teacher has their best interests in mind (Fisher, 2000).

Joshua agreed that good teachers showed that they cared by setting high expectations for their students and by showing students how to fulfill their expectations.

[A good teacher is] one that actually cares about what comes out of you, one that actually helps you right through the semester. […] If it was a good teacher, he would help you…she would give you tips on what tests are going to be on, and what's going to be on your test and help you with…give you hints on what's going to be on the exam, and give you tips on stuff like that.

Similarly, Clayton welcomed teachers' input because they helped him gain *metacognitive knowledge*.

Like some teachers they'll…if you have mistakes or you're doing things wrong, they'll actually confront you and speak to you and show you where you went wrong so you can know how to correct that for the next time. […] It helps because you're never gonna come across the same situation, but if you know you need help in that same department or in that same situation, it's gonna help to know that you made that mistake already so you know how to handle it differently.

Clayton sought the knowledge needed to reflect on past learning experiences in order to inform future situations to reach goals more effectively. De Andres Martinez (2012) calls this 'double loop learning', where an individual "meditates on the actions and paths followed to achieve specific goals […] Reflection is linked to the development of metacognition, understood here as the skill to identify and create connections between experience, knowledge and goals." (p. 202) Althea respected teachers who put their students' needs before their own. She saw this as a way for teachers to show that they were listening to their students by practicing empathy.

> [A good teacher is] one who's willing to put her students' needs or his students' needs before their own. Not saying as if, I mean between the 8:30-2:30 timeframe, because after you do have a family – I understand. But I think once you put your […] students' needs before their own – before *your* own, as in keeping your feelings out of situations, not too quick to put your input, see the input of the students, see where they're coming from, I think that makes a good teacher.

Clayton gave an example of the benefits to the class when a teacher puts his or her students' needs first. To him, effective teachers create motivating class environments when they invest the time in getting to know students as individuals, and then plan ways to bring different groups of students together.

> A big thing is how you make students interact with each other, like how you make different kinds of students connect with each other. Like if you have people that are athletes and then you try to make them have a connection with people who are interested in art, like drawing….Or music – people that are just in music relate to people that are interested in like being more hands on like crafts and things like that. Making all those people in the classroom mix together, I guess it's a good thing because it just helps to know that you can work with that type of person.

Here, Clayton put the onus on the teacher to take responsibility for the classroom environment and to nurture positive social relations between different groups of students.

Therefore, while only some of my sample of achieving black Canadian high school students specifically identified their teachers as major contributors to their academic success, all participants had clear ideas about the ways that teachers could help them achieve. The disconnect

that some students felt from their teachers could be due to how my participants observed racial issues being handled at their schools.

Theme 4: The Significance of Racial Identity in the School Context

All of the students interviewed for my study linked their racial identity to their academic achievement, similar to Carter Andrews's (2009) description of Foster's (2005*) race-conscious high achievers*. These students rejected notions that academic achievement was in the domain of whites, and they used positive thoughts about their racial identity to bolster their academic goals. This was necessary because some of my participants found themselves underrepresented in the curriculum and/or school culture because of a lack of school support. Some participants also described teachers' enduring negative stereotypes about black students. Consequently, four participants strongly believed that having black teachers could improve their educational experiences.

Similarities to race-conscious high achievers

Althea agreed that academic achievement is no longer exclusively in the domain of whites, and attributed this shift to the increasing diversity in her school.

> Yeah, I don't think it's a white thing anymore. I think they're slowly disappearing – I don't know where they're going, really. Probably Caledon [*laughs*]. Because out of my school, it's all Asians and blacks. Brown people – rare, white people rare – yeah I don't know where they're going.

At her school, Althea also saw Asian students as *model minorities*, examples of other students considered to be stereotypically high achievers at school (Gosine, 2008).

> Yes, Asians – they dominate everything in my school! […] It's like all the awards: Asian [*repeats*]. I think they're sort of taking the baton out of the white people's hands.

Althea admired the work ethic that her Asian peers demonstrated. She reasoned that these

students and their parents were "seizing the moment – they're getting that better life, and they're

doing everything they can to get it."

Bryon saw his Jamaican heritage as an advantage at school. He viewed his cultural group as

leaders in contributing to a positive environment and forming good relationships with his peers.

> I think we're more open to, for example, working with other people – we're more
> talkative, we're more […] easy to get along with, and stuff like working in groups, stuff
> like teamwork, stuff like that – definitely some of our strong suits.

Noemi described how her Nigerian identity caused her to set higher academic standards for

herself than her peers.

> I just have different standards for myself. Because there are some people who are just
> like: "Oh yeah I got a 60, I passed – yay!" I'm like: "If I ever did that, my folks would be
> *so* pissed off."

She explained that her family friends "consider[ed her] apart from white people. They're like:

'This is what your friends might be doing, but no, this is not what you should be doing, grades-

wise.'"

Noemi expressed regret that she was not "living up to" her Nigerian culture because she had not

visited the country recently and she was not "learning the language." She expressed a desire to

meet more black students in university to learn more about her African heritage.

> I'm excited for that – 'cause I want to talk to other [black] people and learn their experiences
> and see what it's like. Because I haven't been able to yet.

Althea also expressed sadness that she had no other black students as her peers in her university-

level Chemistry class. She talked about her decision to sit at the front of the class to avoid

reflecting on what it meant to be the only black student in her class.

> I think if I stay up front, I won't think about it, so I'm like right at the front. But it's sad –
> I find it sad.

While other students linked their own identity to a national heritage, Althea referenced the idea

of a black collective identity when she related the significance of her racial identity to a sense of

empowerment when she saw other blacks rise to international prominence.

> I think it is [important]. I think it is important because when people are able to see '*black*' in front of 'woman', or '*black*' in front of 'man', you know – I think that holds a significance – I think that's important to me. […]I think it's just empowering to when you see '*black* president', you know you'd rather hear "black president" instead of like "Obama", you know? I think that *is* empowering.

Lack of black representation at school

Three of my participants mentioned the lack of representation in the curriculum and their school

environment, as described by Solomon & Tarc (2003) and Grantham & Ford (2003). Joshua

wanted Black History Month activities to be expanded.

> We need more in our school of black history month stuff – there's really not much. […] My school they barely do anything [for black history month] – they just have like this little meeting and barely anyone goes.

Noemi talked about how her school's lack of black peers made her feel underrepresented in her

school's population.

> I don't know if you really know the school I go to, but it's a lot of white people. […] I'm one of the few black people at my school – probably the only black girl in my grade. […] We don't really have any black teachers at my school either. That's another thing I've noticed. We don't really have any Asian, black – anything really. It's just white. Like our school's really white. Definitely. I think there might be high schools in [Southwestern Ontario] that are better, but our school's just really white.

Though Noemi characterized her school's population as being "really white", she observed that

some ethnic and religious groups who had a higher population of students than black students

were "way better represented in [her] school" through certain customs and traditions being

integrated into her school environment. Noemi longed for the sense of connection and

community that these students shared as a result of the support of their peers and teachers. She

felt that this school support enabled these students to "make their voices heard" much more than

black students. This corresponds to Grier-Reed, Madyun, & Buckley (2008)'s findings that

having a place within the school where "blackness is the 'norm'" is important to black students'

social development and "sense of belonging." (Rhamie & Hallam, 2002, p. 167)

Joshua's comments supported Grantham & Ford's (2003) findings that learning about black

individuals' accomplishments can inspire academic success in black students. Joshua said:

> I'd like to learn more about the contributions of blacks because it might inspire me to do something like build the first time machine!

Joshua animatedly expounded on biographies of black inventors, mentioning the inventor of the

Super Soaker, pioneering black inventors in the field of video games, and black scientists

studying neutrino reactions as inspirations for his motivation to do well in science class.

Similar to what Byfield (2008), Rhamie & Hallam (2002), and Grantham & Ford (2003) found,

Althea agreed that learning about black individuals finding success in the career field she aspired

to provided evidence that she could achieve the same thing.

> If you see someone where you wanna be, it makes it that much, well not easier, but it definitely helps. Because if I see someone, especially a black person, I don't know, I just have that connection – if I see a black person in the career I want to be in, I feel like "if you can do it, I can do it."

Four of my participants mentioned that they were inspired to achieve by looking to other black

adults of prominence. Consequently, these participants wholeheartedly agreed with Byfield's

(2008) notion that a black *teacher* can add value to their educational experiences. My

participants specified, however, that the advantages offered by black teachers were purely

hypothetical, as none of them had ever had a black teacher who was not a supply teacher.

How black teachers could help

In her study of successful black male students in the UK and the US, Byfield (2008) describes

the added value that a black teacher provides for black students. Black students can feel

motivated to achieve because of the cultural connection that they share with their black teachers.

In turn, black teachers can advocate for black students' interests. My study participants'

descriptions of what a black teacher could provide revealed the aspects that they were lacking in

their present school environments.

Joshua explained how a black teacher would create a bond of solidarity.

> Seeing how we're both black, [the black teacher] can help us 'cause a white teacher – it could be the same, but not giving off maybe the same energy as one or something. […] We can't really connect in the same way like if we're black. Well I'm not saying that it's bad to have a white teacher but it's like, it's a different connection with a black teacher.

Bryon agreed on the advantages of having a teacher sharing the same cultural heritage. He

explained that if there was a culturally relevant reason why he wasn't able to do his homework

one day, a Jamaican teacher would be better able to understand his reasoning.

> Oh, yeah! Definitely! They kind of understand where you're coming from. Like you'll be like […] "Why didn't you do your homework?" "Oh you know my mom blablabla," and some kind of […] Jamaican experience that you'd have in common, like you know…something you can relate on. For example if you had a white teacher they would be like, "What are you talking about?"

Noemi, attending a school where she felt underrepresented and overshadowed by other racial,

ethnic and religious groups, illustrated the personal connection and advocacy that a black teacher

could provide. She echoed Cokley (2000) and Grier-Reed, Madyun, & Buckley (2008)'s findings

on the personal significance of being mentored by black teachers. Even though she could not

articulate all that it would mean to her to have a black teacher, she recognized that the presence

of a black ally within her school was missing.

> I could talk to [a black teacher]. We'd have something to actually talk about – we'd be like, "Oh yeah!" We could help make people understand as well. I don't know. Understand what, I don't really know.

Joshua described Byfield (2008) and Grantham & Ford's (2003) findings that a black teacher

would create an environment where black students felt safe discussing productive ways to

counteract marginalization.

> Because I would know that if I have a black teacher then maybe he can…we can one-on-one talk about certain things that happened that he went through that will help me in school. […] Because we're the same race, we can connect more. So he can tell me how he got through racism or some stuff like that.

Althea imagined that having a black teacher would be a welcome respite from white teachers' prejudices and negative expectations of black students.

> I think [black teachers are] not as quick to judge as a white teacher. […] I think it's what [white teachers] were raised with, and the racist things that they have towards black people: "Black people are loud, they're rude, they don't care – they only care about themselves, they're quick to yell, and get into fights." I think that's really what they see, and they're like: "That's you. That's you. That's definitely you."

Similarly, Joshua found it rare to encounter a non-black teacher who did not hold negative stereotypes of black students.

> If a teacher likes you and you're black, that's actually pretty good because usually if you are a black student, they would see you as not a good student that doesn't get high marks and stuff.

Althea concluded that the existence of many teachers' racist attitudes towards black students compelled her mother to pray that her teachers would not hold negative stereotypes against her.

> That's why since we were younger, my mom made sure to pray that we had good teachers that actually liked us, good teachers that are willing to let *us* learn. She definitely had put that to God.

Awad (2007) defines *stereotype threat* as "a social-psychological threat that arises when one is in a situation in which a negative stereotype about his or her social group is made salient and the individual fears that he or she will confirm those stereotypes or be treated stereotypically." (pp. 193-194) The fact that Awad notes that high-achieving students are more susceptible to stereotype threat could explain why my study participants agreed that having a black teacher would significantly improve their academic experience. These students may picture a black teacher's classroom as a much-needed sanctuary in the midst of other teachers' negative expectations of black students. Freed from these negative expectations, my study participants

might have felt that they could fully realize their potential as academic scholars. This echoes

Dei's (2010), Cokley's (2000), and Grier-Reed, Madyun, & Buckley's (2008) findings that

achieving black students needed a place within their school to escape the daily burden of

stereotype threat. To me, this demonstrates the importance of creating a *school-wide*

environment where all students are free from the burden of negative stereotypes and expectations

of failure.

What could cause black students to feel that their teachers held negative expectations of

black students? First, Lee, Menkart, & Okazawa-Rey (1998) and Rezai-Rashti & Solomon

(2008) discuss how some white teachers tell their students that they are 'colourblind', meaning

that they treat all of their students the same, regardless of their race. Unfortunately, promoting

this kind of ideology in the classroom can make students feel invisible because it disregards the

value of students' cultural capital (Dei, 1996a, Lee, Menkart, & Okazawa-Rey, 1998). It also

makes students feel silenced in the classroom because by touting a 'colourblind' ideology, the

teacher creates an environment where it is taboo to talk about race (Rezai-Rashti & Solomon,

2008). When we remove the power to talk about race in the classroom, we remove the right to

talk about racism. This sustains a culture of marginalistic practices throughout the school

(McCaskell, 2010). Therefore, the very thing that some teachers do to show their students that

they are not racist leads their black students to perceive them as racist. This agrees with Byfield's

(2008) assertion that achieving black students need teachers who acknowledge that

marginalization continues to occur in students' everyday environments.

Second, akin to what Rezai-Rashti & Solomon (2008) found in their study of preservice

teachers, my study participants may have had teachers who could describe institutional racism

and express a commitment to anti-racist education, but did not demonstrate this commitment in

their teaching practices. Solomon & Tarc (2003) suggest that "[b]ecause [white teachers] do not see themselves as personally implicated in white racism, they do not invest in antiracism as interventionist pedagogy." This uncertainty about the depth of these teachers' true beliefs undermines teachers' credibility in students' eyes. This leaves students unsure that their teachers are truly committed to their academic achievement. Lee, Menkart, & Okazawa-Rey (1998) remind educators that anti-racist education can (and should) be practiced by all races of teachers. Similarly, Howard & Terry (2011) say that "[a] growing number of scholars have posited that teacher thought and practice be constructed in a manner that recognizes and respects the intricacies and complexities of culture, and the differences that come with it, and structure pedagogical practices and ideological stances in ways that are culturally recognizable and socially meaningful"(p. 347) Therefore, it is not enough that black parents are doing an outstanding job of supporting their children academically. Teachers and schools that claim to be invested in the academic achievement of all of their students must recognize that race continues to be a part of students' perceptions of their academic experiences (Rhamie & Hallam, 2002). Although all of my study participants talked about their friendships with different races of students, none of my participants claimed to be 'colourblind' or other similar notions of racelessness, such as forgetting the race of their peers or teachers.

Clayton was the only student who was unconvinced that having a black teacher would significantly alter his educational experience. Still, he recognized the possible benefits of having a black teacher who understood his cultural background.

> In most cases it doesn't really matter. Their opinion seeing me as a…like understanding me from a student perspective might be a little different compared to another race of teacher, but for the most part it doesn't really matter.

In summary, my study participants were cognizant of the role that their racial identity played in their academic environments. Some expressed ways that they felt forgotten in the curriculum or in the school culture, and others described working past stereotype threat caused by teachers' negative stereotypes about black students. Therefore, similar to Rhamie & Hallam's (2002) home-community model, academic support provided by participants' schools was not always available, and if it was, some participants were hesitant to embrace it because of the negative stereotypes they perceived their teachers to hold about black students. Instead, black parents stepped in to provide the educational support that students needed, and my participants recognized their major contributions to their academic success. Consequently, these students maintained meaningful contacts with educationally supportive black communities, where their culture was recognized and celebrated. However, as my participants began to describe how they thought about their black racial identity, I realized that these achieving black students' conceptualizations could not be fully encompassed by any static theories of racial identity. This gave support to Gosine's (2002), Hall's (2000) and DeCuir-Gunby's (2009) viewpoint of the complexity of black racial identity.

Theme 5: Black Students' Reinterpretation of Static Racial Identities

This last theme is the most surprising finding in my study: Despite extensive research to the contrary, none of my participants primarily identified with an afrocentric ideology. My participants deeply identified as black students, expressed feelings of marginalization in their school environments, and were primarily supported academically in black-centered environments. I assumed that this would cause them to consequently and necessarily identify with an afrocentric mindset. This is what the TDSB assumed when they planned for an Africentric school.

On one hand, many of the TDSB's assumptions matched my participants' responses. My sample of achieving black high school students did find that their cultural capital was not respected in the classroom, nor was it reflected in the curriculum. However, this did not lead my participants to identify with nigrescence theory's definition of an *afrocentric* identity, nor with the MMRI's definition of a *nationalist* ideology, where black individuals believe that their culture is unique and therefore should not be influenced by other cultures. Although these students expressed pride and satisfaction in their black identity and drew strength from their cultural heritages, they re-interpreted what their black identity meant to them personally.

I was surprised to find students describing their central identity as "Canadian" and believing in a multicultural society despite experiences with the opposite. Some students even prioritized other global issues as having more personal relevance than their own racial identity. My study participants' conceptualizations of their racial identities were sometimes conflicting, often confusing, and definitely complex, but it led to great insight into why their racial identities may be much more dynamic than quantitative measures of racial identity might suggest.

Discussions surrounding students' racial identity were more personalized than the method I employed to ask participants about the factors responsible for their academic achievement. Some participants started talking almost immediately about the significance of their racial identity in their academic lives, while others required some prompting to make the connection. One of the techniques I used to broach the topic of racial identity was to discuss some of the research surrounding racial identities and ideologies. A concept that consistently provoked discussion was the multidimensional model of racial identity (MMRI)'s definition of an *oppressed minority* (Sellers, Smith, Shelton, Rowley, & Chavous, 1998). In the next section, I will use this as an example of how these black students' racial identities were not accurately

reflected in existing static theories of racial identity. What emerged from an in-depth examination of their beliefs looked quite different from a superficial survey of their identity.

Students' reactions to the oppressed minority *ideology*

When I asked Bryon if he believed that blacks are an oppressed minority, he agreed strongly.

> Definitely. […] Speaking from a historical sense, obviously we had the whole slavery issue with black people, Africans specifically being much mistreated. And I think it's continued over into our mentality nowadays, as I did mention about thinking about academics and all that stuff. And so I think us from back in the day, in a historical sense, thinking that we're no good and that we can't accomplish something, has translated? Transferred? Into nowadays where we're still thinking the same thing that we're not as good as the others.

However, Bryon's belief that blacks are oppressed caused him to respond in a way that deviated from past research: It caused him to adopt a mindset that sought the interdependence of all racial groups. On first examination, it could appear as if he responded *intropunitively* (Ashburn-Nardo & Smith, 2008) because Bryon recognized that his peers held negative stereotypes about him.

> Definitely people see me that way. Like when people first meet me, some people think the worst of me. And then when they hear stuff like: "Oh wow, you got blablabla, you're doing so and so, you got this mark", they're like: "Oh, wow, Bryon you did that?" Yeah, but I mean why wouldn't you think so? And then it clicks into my mind, oh maybe because I'm black.

But instead of severing ties with his white peers and teachers (an *extropunitive response*), he embraced a multicultural perspective by surrounding himself with close friends who share his values,

> I know all my friends feel the same way because we're all different nationalities. […] I have Asian, whites, [a] South Asian person in there – all of us, there's about five of us and we're all different colours.

and formed strong ties with his white teachers.

> I *love* having a personal connection with my teachers. I see them as – I wouldn't say friends – but I see them as people within your life that you gotta *know* them [in order] to be successful.

Similar to students using intropunitive responses, Bryon also believed in a just Canadian society.

> And that plays into my whole thinking about Canadian society and that we shouldn't be judging people based on the colour of their skin.

However, his response diverged from an intropunitive one when he explained how he refused to internalize negative stereotypes.

> It's kinda that whole stigma that black people can't be smart and you know, blablabla about black people and how either you're an athlete or you're no good and stuff like that – that kind of stigma that you can't really be something in life. Because you see most CEO's and big bank people are all white people. But just myself – I have the motivation within myself that I can be something different than [what] you see.

Bryon embraced a "counterhegemonic construction of Black identity" by making it his goal to prove negative stereotypes wrong (Gosine, 2008, p. 307). He also demonstrated his resistance to "the discursive constraints" of an essentialist construction of black identity by choosing to pursue a career as a financial analyst in a field where he felt that blacks were underrepresented (Gosine, 2008, p. 307). Similar to what Griffin (2006) and Gosine (2008) found in their case studies of high-achieving black adults, Bryon planned "to use [his] educational and career success to challenge racial stereotypes."(Gosine, 2008, p. 307)

Other study participants had different interpretations of the *oppressed minority* ideology. Noemi said that she did not "really think of [her]self in connection to other [minority] groups", and instead related this term to black Americans. She believed that the degree of blacks' oppression has decreased. She opined that black civil rights leaders should shift their focus to advocating for contemporary issues within the black community.

> We're not really as oppressed as we used to be. Like those people who used to be fighting for African American civil rights should change their views a bit and focus on the new issues that we have.

Noemi named the drop-out rate, single parenting, access to education, and poverty as issues that black Americans are facing today.

Althea related the concept of an oppressed minority to a black person who does not take

advantage of the rights and freedoms that civil rights leaders advocated for.

> Past black members have worked so hard for us to just stop improving. Oppressed? I
> mean we are oppressed because we've come this long way and just turn back. I kind of
> feel like society, or the black community in general, sorta helps oppress ourselves.

Again, based on these statements, it was tempting to simply infer students' racial identity based

on their answers to less direct questions about their thoughts on racial ideologies. Instead, I chose

to ask students directly about how they defined their racial identity.

Students' explanations of their racial identity

In this section, I will present what each student had to say about his or her own racial identity.

None of my participants identified as afrocentric. For example, after discussing why his

Jamaican heritage was important, Bryon immediately proceeded to explain why his Jamaican

identity was not his primary identity.

> But in the same respect not as much […] It's not that important because […] as a
> Canadian, you gotta adopt the Canadian lifestyle. And yes it's important to be Jamaican
> but also to know that yeah, I'm born in Canada so you know, what's Canadian culture?
> And it's mine. I am Canadian culture.

The preceding quote is edited because in the middle of his sentence, Bryon said: "I lost my train

of thought", then re-started his sentence after I reminded him of what he said.

It is noteworthy that in Bryon's definition of what it meant to be Canadian, he took ownership of

the identity. At first, he seemed to be trying to change himself to fit into the dominant culture –

"you gotta adopt the Canadian lifestyle" – but then he claimed it for himself: "And it's mine. I

am Canadian culture." He saw being Canadian as having the right to participate in creating and

re-creating Canadian culture.

Bryon identified as Canadian.

> I call myself a Canadian! I'm Canadian. I don't…I'm obviously dark-skinned, but I mean
> I'm first off a Canadian. And in this multicultural society that we have, colour shouldn't

define who you are. But obviously I am black – the obvious question someone asks what you are, you're obviously going to say black, but in myself, I say I'm Canadian, and that really has no colour barrier.

What Bryon said in the preceding quote could be mistaken for a statement that agrees with a 'colourblind' ideology. However, Bryon's reasoning did not match a colourblind ideology. He expressed his awareness that some students continued to be treated differently because of their race. Therefore, he disagreed with those who tried to block any race of student from achieving his or her goals. His interpretation of what it meant to be Canadian included the responsibility to aid in dismantling colour barriers. This is a prime example of why using a quantitative measure of racial identity for this sample of students would not reveal the full story about what it meant for each student to assume a certain racial identity.

Noemi explained why she identified as African Canadian instead of Nigerian.

> I would say [my identity is] African Canadian. Sometimes I say Nigerian but I'm not really Nigerian because that's just where my parents are from. Like I was born in England so…and I've been to Nigeria when I was younger, like when I was a child but…I can't remember. I was too young.

Noemi contrasted what she considered to be stereotypically Nigerian Canadian characteristics with her own identity.

> I'm not like the stereotypical African – I don't really have an accent, I don't really talk about Nigeria all the time, I don't really go there, so it's like I am a lot more in touch with my Canadian side, my general Canadian side. […] There are some specific things, like the foods I eat would make me Nigerian. The family friends I go around with, and we're also like, the music I listen to – it's not all Nigerian. The issues I care about most are more related to the Canadian side.

When I asked Noemi to elaborate, she described the difference between Nigerian and Canadian manners.

> The way you act to adults is different [in Nigeria]. It's a lot more respectful. And even like your elders – someone who's just like 2 or 3 years older than you is officially your elder, so you treat them as if they were a huge adult – a lot older than you. I always laugh at my cousin, 'cause he's changed since he's come here – of course he's gotten a lot more Canadian. So he's like: "Hi!" – before he used to call me "Auntie." I'm not really his

> aunt – I'm basically his age, so…he's only a couple of years younger than me. So those are some big differences. My parents had to basically teach me: "This is what you do when you see your Nigerian aunt", and like the ones who live there call my mom "Mom" because that's what you do there, or "Auntie" and "Uncle" but there, like that's what you actually call them.

Joshua identified as "part Jamaican, part English, and part Canadian" and demonstrated a multicultural mindset similar to nigrescence theory's *multiculturalist* identity.

> I just believe in a multicultural society, because everybody was created with different cultures so we shouldn't be really put down because we're different from anyone else.

Some students explained that their black identity was not always the most prominent identity in their lives. For example, when I asked Althea: "Do you call yourself a black woman, Jamaican, Canadian, African Canadian…what do you say?", she replied:

> I would say…I'm a young lady, I don't know?

After more discussion, Althea conceded that "in a formal setting", she would say: "Hi, I'm Althea, a young black woman." However, as she continued the discussion, Althea described an identity closer to the MMRI's *humanist* ideology.

> I think us, here, are very…what's the word? Very fortunate. I think a lot of issues like peace, world hunger – those things are issues we should really worry about, and the environment of course. I think those are more important. And between race, it's just silly.

As I continued to analyze my participants' descriptions of their racial identities, I began to notice how often they used the word "should." It became apparent that many of my participants' sense of their own racial identity developed in response to what they *aspired* for Canadian society. On one hand, this can be regarded as an immature way of coping with the reality of ongoing racism in Canadian society. On the other hand, it can demonstrate the sense of hope that my participants had for effecting change in their global community.

Bryon also saw himself as having humanist qualities.

I feel like Canadians are important, but as well, us as a human race and a global society [are] definitely as important as being Canadian because we have to be responsible for the human race.

Joshua also expressed humanist values related to a sense of personal responsibility.

I care about what's happening around the world and for the kids in Africa, suffering because of health issues and food – lack of food in those countries. And I feel like I can…if I can get rich, I can give all the money that they need so they can go to foundations for food and stuff like that.

Identity as context-dependent

Clayton had the most unique conception of his racial identity among my sample of achieving black Canadian high school students. He described his identity as subject to the context in which *others* first encountered him.

I think it depends how they first meet you. Like if they see you first as an athlete, they're always going to picture you as an athlete, or if they always see you being more cultural, they're always going to think of you more as a cultural person. But once you get to know that person, you get to see a little bit of everything that they do, so you kind of know them better that way, instead of looking at them based on what they saw you do as a first impression.

He explained that his own sense of a collective identity depended on the situation in which he found himself. In fact, he proposed that a key factor in promoting positive social relationships was for group members to look for things that they had in common with each other.

For example, [people identify with] things that [they] like. Say, like depending on the certain type of music you listen to for example, when it comes to music, you may have a certain group of friends or certain people that you talk to when it comes to that. When it comes to sports there may be certain types of people you can relate to. It can be food, family, traditions....You might relate to family, and maybe even sometimes friends. For different things, you tend to be influenced and hang out with different people and sometimes even, you guys tend to come up with your own scenarios and think what each other thinks just to…in order to get along or to establish a connection.

Two themes emerged when discussing Clayton's conceptualization of identity. First, Clayton's description of the strategies that group members use to establish a connection shares some characteristics with *code-switching*, in that it involves a negotiation of the parameters of a social

relationship (Carter, 2008). However, Clayton characterized this negotiation as mutual, rather than a unidirectional adjustment of norms where Eurocentric interests are always placated while others' cultural markers are suppressed. In his model, all parties are active in deciding and re-deciding what it means to fit in. Second, while Clayton talked about the different social identities that students assume, he never gave me any indication of which identity held the most *personal* significance to him, as he thought of himself (and everyone else) as unique, not needing to be associated with a certain identity – racial or otherwise.

> Everyone's unique and I like to look at things from my perspective first and just knowing that your gut feeling and what you think first is always…sometimes the best choice to go with.

No matter how I rephrased the question of his racial identity, Clayton reinterpreted the question. To him, every individual is unique, and individuals should look to their own internal understanding of their identity rather than allowing other people's input to be the primary determinant of how individuals come to understand themselves.

Clayton's conclusions also serve as a summary of my participants' conceptualizations of their racial identity. What quantitative researchers seek to classify as static and finite may well be more dynamic and in flux than is convenient. Rezai-Rashti & Solomon (2008) say that race "is not an unchanging, biological concept but rather a complex, dynamic and changing construct." (p. 168) This sample of achieving black Canadian high school students are influenced by their school environment, driven by their personal goals, and motivated by their black families and communities, while their racial identities are negotiated and renegotiated as they learn more about themselves and the world around them. My findings surrounding racial identity echo Gosine's (2008) findings in his study of 16 university-educated black Canadian adults. He found that "[i]n contrast to both popular and scholarly discourses that essentialize Black people, the

experiences and perceptions of study participants were characterized by polyconsciousness, ambivalence, fluidity, and hybridity." (Gosine, 2008, p. 307)

It is a disservice to this sample of achieving black high school students' critical thinking skills and a misreading of their sense of self within society to mislabel these students as discounting their cultural backgrounds or disregarding the impact of racism because they do not choose to essentialize their black identity. Their pride in their black identity is matched by their sense of ownership in Canadian society. This is tempered by their experiences of prejudice in the classroom, but it is buoyed by their willingness to find multicultural allies to work together to stamp out racist practices in the classroom and beyond. This is what is meant by the "complexity" of a black racial identity. This is their re-interpretation of what it means to be black.

CHAPTER 5: SUMMARY AND IMPLICATIONS

In this final chapter, I will provide a summary of the previous chapters, discuss the implications of my findings, and offer suggestions for future research.

Summary

The purpose of my research was to document the factors that contribute to black Canadian high school students' academic success and to explore these students' conceptualization of their racial identities in their school contexts. I arrived at this topic after witnessing the media frenzy surrounding the Toronto District School Board (TDSB)'s plans to address the 40% dropout rate for black students by opening an Africentric high school. The heightened media coverage and the subsequent disagreement on how to best serve black students revived the interest of students, parents, educational stakeholders, and the media in the academic experiences of black students.

This provided the impetus for my research to explore some aspects of these experiences that had not as yet been widely investigated in Canada. While preparing the background research for my thesis, I found that most of the Canadian research used deficit models to point out the structural and institutional inequalities that black students faced. What was less studied was the experiences of black Canadian high school students who managed to achieve in the midst of a system that predicted their failure. I decided to take this approach, using a *discourse of achievement* to guide my own research (Stinson, 2006).

Rhamie & Hallam (2002) discuss the use of deficit models in previous studies targeting achievement for black students. They argue that although deficit models were used to keep the focus on the urgent need for school reforms, deficit models also had the unfortunate consequence of reinforcing the general public's negative stereotypes of black students. Instead of resulting in

raised expectations for black students, the message was corrupted such that educators continued to have low expectations of black students' abilities and motivation to achieve school success. The blame for black students' failure in the classroom lay squarely on the shoulders of the students and their families.

Similarly, American researchers Howard & Terry (2011) observe that "[t]hese explanations [for black student failure] are usually centered on students lacking or being devoid of culture, coming from a culture of poverty which is not suited for academic success, possessing an oppositional culture, having a disdain for academic achievement, or having parents who lack concern for their children's academic aspirations."(p. 346) Like the seminal Canadian studies of the 1990s that interviewed black students in Toronto, Rhamie & Hallam (2002) investigated the academic experiences of black students with parents from the Caribbean and found the same to be true in the UK.

> Some authors have argued that studies investigating and reporting academic success in African-Caribbeans may lead to a neglect of positive action to raise standards (Osler, 1997). However, research which consistently focuses only on negative educational outcomes provides an unbalanced perspective of the African-Caribbean community as a whole and reinforces negative stereotypes which, in themselves, contribute to the problem. Further, research drawing attention to underachievement and the high level of exclusions has been limited in its impact and change is slow. Recommendations have not resulted in the necessary change in attitudes and practice in schools to bring about an increase in standards. (Rhamie & Hallam, 2002, p. 152)

Rhamie & Hallam concluded that "deeper investigation into the experiences of academically successful African-Caribbean males and females to establish more precisely the factors that have enabled them to succeed in school and to address the concerns expressed by them is crucial." (p. 168) This echoes the TDSB's claims that the Ontario Ministry of Education's Literacy and Numeracy Secretariat has called for more research into "the specific strategies that work well to foster success among Black students" (Dragnea & Erling, 2008, p. 6).

Therefore, my research questions grew out of these calls for more research into the experiences of and strategies employed by *successful* black students.

Theoretical Framework

I approached my research questions from a social constructivist framework where students' perceptions of their environment were the primary focus of the research. The media coverage of the TDSB's proposal of an Africentric school revealed that students wanted to be included in the discussion surrounding their academic outcomes, but did not feel that they were consulted in a meaningful way. Therefore, I used social constructivism to give students' voices a starring role in my research. Rather than focusing on the external factors that act on black students, I wanted to know how these students interpreted their school experiences. I grounded social constructivism in anti-racism in order to "problematize the marginalization of certain voices in society and, specifically, the delegitimation of the knowledge and experience of subordinated groups in the education system."(Dei, 1996a, p. 33) Similar to the aims of the TDSB's Africentric school, I viewed black students' cultural capital as legitimate sources of knowledge, and hoped to point out ways in which schools can tap "into the cultural knowledge of parents, guardians and community workers."(Dei, 1996a, p. 33; Africentric Alternative School Support Committee, 2008)

Method and Findings

I chose to conduct individual interviews with a small sample of achieving black high school students to answer three questions:

1. What factors do achieving black Canadian high school students identify as being helpful to their academic achievement?

2. How do these students perceive their racial identities?

3. What is the significance of these students' racial identity at school?

I chose to include black students of varying ethnicities to match the TDSB's targeting of all "students of African descent" (p. 1) to include students "from the African continent, Canada, the Caribbean or other parts of the African diaspora." (Africentric Alternative School Support Committee, 2008, p. 1)

Althea, Bryon, Clayton, Joshua, and Noemi's answers to my research questions cannot be expected to represent all black students' perspectives. Instead, I used case studies to provide concrete examples of students who are not living up to the stereotype of an underachieving, unmotivated black student. I wanted to examine how these students' attitudes and beliefs contributed to their academic success, but also to demonstrate the external sources of their academic motivation and to point out areas where educators can be more proactive in seeking out ways to meet the needs of black students.

I found that teachers' contributions to my participants' academic outcomes came a distant second to the support provided by their families and communities. Although students were able to name behaviours that caused them to see their teachers as helpful or harmful, it was their parents who motivated them to achieve, and their communities that set the standard of academic excellence. Similar to Rhamie & Hallam's (2002) home-community model, parents stepped in when school support was unavailable or insufficient, and kept their children motivated to do well in school by teaching them to cope with the devaluing of their cultural capital in the classroom. Students also saw themselves as being ultimately responsible for their academic outcomes, and persisted with difficult subjects and situations in school by focusing on the career and lifestyle goals they hoped to accomplish as a result of their schooling.

However, the story of these achieving black Canadian high school students' academic experiences was not complete without examining the role of race in these students' academic contexts. I wanted to move past "colour-blind and sanitized analyses generated via universalistic discourses." (Gillborn, 2006, p. 23) Since "[s]tudent identity and representations of blackness within Canadian, British and American societies are also important in understanding how racism works within and between groups of people that make up the larger society" (Solomon & Tarc, 2003, p. 17), I reviewed Canadian, British and American studies to examine the link between racial identity and academic achievement. Numerous American studies showed that racial identity and academic outcomes were inextricably linked, and Canadian and British studies described how black students of all ethnicities continued to view their academic experiences in a racialized context.

All five participants in my study had unique conceptualizations of their racial identities. Bryon identified as "Canadian", Noemi called herself "African-Canadian", Joshua identified as "part Jamaican, part English, and part Canadian", Althea saw herself as a "young black woman", and Clayton maintained that his identity was dependent on his social context. Some participants expressed disappointment that their cultural capital was not acknowledged in the classroom and most agreed that a black teacher could add value to their educational experiences.

Implications for Future Research

The results of this study provide three implications for educators who are interested in targeting academic achievement for black Canadian high school students.

1. *The importance and prevalence of parents as primary motivators of academic achievement*

This study documented the numerous sources of support provided by parents of achieving black students. The education-positive behaviours that these students demonstrated were largely

promoted and upheld by their parents. This indicates the importance of parents instilling pro-education values in their children so that as they mature, students come to see these education-positive values as their own. Further research should investigate the prevalence of achieving black students without parental support to find out the extent to which the home and community support demonstrated by the parents in my study is representative of the wider population of black Canadian high school students.

Although it is commendable that the black parents in my study did not fit the stereotype of being uncommitted to their children's education, Rhamie & Hallam point out that "[t]he development of the home-community model of success does not lay the burden of responsibility for academic achievement solely at the door of the home and community, but makes an expressly critical indictment of some schools, and the role of some of the teachers within them….The findings underscore the need for effective schools, with high expectations, to become the norm rather than the exception." (Rhamie & Hallam, 2002, p. 167)

2. *Teachers can spark academic achievement by recognizing students' cultural capital*

The results of this study revealed that students' perceptions of their teachers were variable at best. Some students who did cite their teachers as being helpful to their academic achievement also talked about the negative stereotypes that they expected their teachers to hold about them. At the very least, teachers need to confirm their students' value in their eyes by demonstrating that they actively reject outdated stereotypes about black students' capacity to learn. Claiming to be 'colourblind' is not enough: When teachers claim this, students feel as if their identity is being ignored. The participants in this study were proud of the consistent educational support provided by their families and communities, and they wanted teachers to recognize the cultural capital that they brought to the classroom.

Howard & Terry (2011) explain how culturally responsive pedagogy can increase students' academic achievement and engagement in the classroom: "[I]f teachers are able to make connections between the cultural knowledge, beliefs, and practices that students bring from home, as well as the content and pedagogy that they use in their respective classrooms, this combination may have the potential to enhance the academic performance and overall schooling experiences of culturally diverse learners"(p. 347) In contrast, some students in my study perceived their school environment to be sorely lacking opportunities for black students to feel recognized and represented in the school community.

This initiative to recognize students' cultural capital in the classroom extends beyond the US. The Ontario Ministry of Education's Literacy and Numeracy Secretariat (LNS)'s 2011 document, *Student Identity and Engagement in Elementary Schools*, echoes Bronfenbrenner's bioecological model of development when they stress that the school community is just one of the communities that influences students' education: "Every student lives within other communities: the family, a cultural community, a social community and perhaps in an international community as well. These are the support structures that lend strength to the education of each student." (The Literacy and Numeracy Secretariat, 2011, p. 2)

The LNS recommends that teachers make a commitment to valuing diverse students' cultural capital from the time that they begin elementary school, especially when teachers are unfamiliar with their students' culture: "It is particularly at these times that stepping out of our comfort zone can help. How we interact with others, our students, matters."(p. 2). They conclude that when teachers show their students that they are able to step out of their role as the authoritative source of all authentic knowledge in order to learn from their students, "meaningful relationships develop" (p. 2) between the teacher and the student. "[E]nsuring students are listened to and

valued and respected for who they are leads to greater student engagement which, in turn, leads to greater student achievement" (The Literacy and Numeracy Secretariat, 2011, p. 1) Further research can explore the ways in which Ontario schools are following the recommendations outlined by the LNS, and can investigate whether these strategies have led to increased student engagement and/or academic achievement.

3. *Reconsidering the value in extrinsic motivation*

Many studies have focused on students' intrinsic motivation as the way to increase the 'love of learning' in all students. However, the students in my study overwhelmingly cited extrinsic goals and demonstrated performance orientations where they were primarily motivated by the need to achieve good grades in school. This could be because these students were looking at their education as a stepping stone to achieve upward social mobility. This might result in the motivation for pursuing an education to be different from students with an established legacy of wealth or a high socioeconomic status. Even upper-middle class black students with immigrant parents may be more likely than their peers with Canadian-born parents to observe that their parents' successes catapulted them from fiscal hardship after arriving in Canada to financial success, all *within one generation*. These parents' children might feel that they are expected to do the same, if not better, and see their education as the only way to achieve this kind of success.

Therefore, further research should investigate whether students who are presently disengaged from the classroom can benefit from a refocusing of their academic orientation towards *first* finding out what they can do *with* their education. Once these students believe for themselves that their education predicts their future success, then educators can begin the process of establishing the love of learning in every student. To that end, teachers can partner with black students' parents and communities, and seek out opportunities to use culturally responsive pedagogy in the classroom.

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Appendix A

Nigrescence Theory-Expanded (NT-E) Racial Identities

Table 1
NT-E Pre-Encounter *Racial Identities*

Black Racial Identity	*Miseducated*	*Assimilationist*	*Self-hating*
Salience	Low	Low	High
Valence	Negative	Neutral	Negative
Attitudes	- Negative stereotypical beliefs about black people in general, but not self - Results from Eurocentric school system that disregards African contributions to Western civilization (Awad, 2007)	- Nationality is more important than black identity - Does not believe that race is important in America (Worrell et al., 2008)	- Identifies with negative black stereotypes
CRIS example	"Blacks place more emphasis on having a good time than on hard work." "Too many Blacks 'glamorize' the drug trade and fail to see opportunities that don't involve crime."	"I am not so much a member of a racial group, as I am an American" "I primarily think of myself as an American and seldom as a member of a racial group."	"Privately, I sometimes have negative feelings about being Black."
Correlation to MMRI (Vandiver et al., 2002)	none	Negatively correlated with *Nationalist*	none

Table 2

NT-E Internalization *Racial Identities*

Black Racial Identity	*Multiculturalist*	*Biculturalist*	*Afrocentric*
Salience	High	High	High
Valence	Positive	Positive	Positive
Attitudes	- Identity is defined by black race and at least two other cultural identities (e.g., gender, sexuality, nationality, religion)	- Identity is defined by black race and one other cultural identity, usually nationality (Vandiver, 2001)	- Identity is primarily defined by Afrocentric values and principles - Involved in black activism
CRIS example	"I believe it is important to have both a Black identity and a multicultural perspective, which is inclusive of everyone (e.g., Asians, Latinos, gays and lesbians, Jews, Whites)."	**None** - the CRIS does not measure this identity because of the large number of possible bicultural identities (Worrell, 2008)	"I see and think about things from an Afrocentric perspective."
Correlation to MMRI (Vandiver et al., 2002)	Positively correlated with *Oppressed Minority* and *Humanist*	Negatively correlated with *Nationalist*	Positively correlated with *Nationalist*

Appendix B

Glossary of Terms Used

Achievement Orientation

A student's achievement orientation describes how he or she perceives a challenging task or circumstance (Santrock et al., 2010). There are three types of achievement orientations:

1)   *Mastery orientation*. Students with this orientation tend to "focus on the task rather than on their ability, have positive affect (suggesting they enjoy the challenge), and generate solution-oriented strategies that improve their performance." (Santrock et al., 2010, p. 375). They tend to engage in metacognition (reflecting on their learning) and are more concerned with the process that leads to achieving competence than with the outcome (Santrock et al., 2010). Harper (2010) categorizes a mastery orientation as a "key component of academic success." (p. 475)

2)   *Performance orientation*. With this orientation, students are more concerned with the outcome than the process, and winning (doing better than their peers) or achieving a high grade is most important (Santrock et al., 2010; Harper, 2010). Harper found that high-achieving black and white students demonstrated either a mastery orientation or a performance orientation, and did not differ significantly according to race.

3)   *Helpless orientation*. Here, students "focus on their personal inadequacies, often attribute their difficulty to a lack of ability, and display negative affect (including boredom and anxiety)."(Santrock et al., 2010, p. 375). Santrock et al. compare a helpless achievement orientation to an internal-stable-uncontrollable attribution. They argue that this student would be likely to believe that his or her personal aptitude was fixed and unable to change (Santrock et al., 2010).

Attribution Theory

Attribution theory refers to how a student explains the underlying cause of his or her behaviour or performance on a task (Santrock et al., 2010). An attribution has three dimensions:

1) *Locus*: Is the cause internal or external to the student?

2) *Stability*: Can the cause vary dependent on the situation, or is it fixed?

3) *Controllability*: Can the cause be controlled?

Students who classify their success as internal (e.g., due to their intelligence or hard work) are more likely to have higher self-esteem than students who attribute their success an external locus such as luck or an easy evaluation (Santrock et al., 2010; Anglin & Wade, 2007). Low self-esteem can develop when students consistently attribute failure to an internal cause (Santrock et al., 2010). Attributions can also affect motivation: A student who views his or her failure as stable may become unmotivated to follow through with plans to reach a goal, while a student who attributes a low score on a test to an unstable (variable) and controllable cause can become motivated to study harder for the next test, as he or she believes that the outcome of the next test can change with his or her effort (Santrock et al., 2010). Santrock and his colleagues note that students who attribute failure to external factors such as teacher bias can become angry, as they view their own effort and aptitude as inconsequential to the result.

Metacognition

Metacognition is "the ability to understand, regulate, and use one's cognitive processes in a constructive manner." (Snyder, Nietfield, & Linnerbrink-Garcia, 2011, p. 182) It has two components: the *knowledge* of cognition and the *regulation* of cognition (Snyder et al., 2011).

1) *Knowledge of cognition* consists of students' knowledge about their own strengths and weaknesses, and "knowing what strategies to use, how to use them, and when to use them." (Snyder et al., 2011, p. 182)

2) *Regulation of cognition* happens when students draw on knowledge that they have previously obtained to carry out and evaluate the strategies necessary for achieving their goals (Snyder et al., 2011). Sungur & Senler (2009) define it as the "mental processes necessary for students to plan, monitor, and evaluate their learning"(p. 46)

Self-Concept

A student's *self-concept* incorporates "the less changeable aspects of self, those that describe the individual across situations." (p. 46) Vandiver, Cross, Worrell, & Fhagen-Smith (2002), quoting Cross (1991) theorize that self-concept has two components: *Personal Identity* (PI) – general personality traits common to all people (e.g., "outgoing, sensitive, adventuresome" (p. 72)), and *Reference Group Orientation* (RGO) – a person's preference to be affiliated with a certain social group (e,g., "race, gender, sexual orientation, religion, disability, and so forth"(p. 72)). In this theory, RGO is quantified in terms of *salience* (the importance an individual places on a certain social identity) and *valence* (the range of positive to negative connotations individuals associate with a social identity) (Vandiver et al., 2002). For example, a black student who considers his nationality as a Canadian to be the primary aspect of his self-concept might be categorized as having low racial salience and neutral racial valence.

Self Efficacy

Self-efficacy is "the belief that one can master a situation and produce positive outcomes."(Santrock et al., 2010, p. 376) Students with high self-efficacy tend to make plans in advance to achieve their goals, persevere longer during difficult tasks, and recover more quickly

from setbacks (Santrock et al., 2010). Teachers with high self-efficacy tend to view their students as "reachable and teachable" (p. 376), and are more likely to try to develop strategies for struggling learners (Santrock et al., 2010). Oates (2009) would characterize a school populated by high self-efficacy teachers as one that prioritizes learning. He argues that black students have been shown to have significantly less access to these schools than white students, and that this contributes considerably to the achievement gap between black and white students (Oates, 2009).

Self-Esteem

A student's *self-esteem* "is the judgmental component of the self, the value a person places on its various aspects" (Santrock et al., p. 46)

Self-Image

A student's *self-image* involves how he or she perceives him- or herself "over short periods of time." (Lewis & Knight, 2000, p. 46) This self-image can be "situation- or role-based and, therefore, changeable." (p. 46)

Appendix C

Demographic Information

a) Age

b) Gender

c) Country of birth

d) Numbers of years of education outside Canada

e) Parent/Guardian occupation

f) Parent/Guardians' highest level of education

Interview Questions

1. Describe what you think makes you successful at school.

2. Who helps you be successful at school? *Follow-up:* Who is not helping?

3. What do you want to do after you finish high school? *Follow-up*: What are you doing or planning to make that happen?

4. How do you describe your race or ethnicity? *Follow-up:* Is it important to you? In what way?

5. How does your identity as [*insert self-identification*] affect how you see yourself as a student? *Follow-up*: How does it affect how others see you?

6. Can you tell me about a time when you felt that your teachers', peers' or community's [academic] expectations of you were different from those of your classmates?

7. Who (if anyone) do you consider to be a role model in your life? *Follow-up*: Why are role models important?

8. Tell me about the parts of school you enjoy/ don't enjoy. *Follow-up*: How important is it that the things you study in school relate to your identity as _____? What parts of the curriculum could be improved to meet that need?

Appendix D

Data Analysis Flowcharts
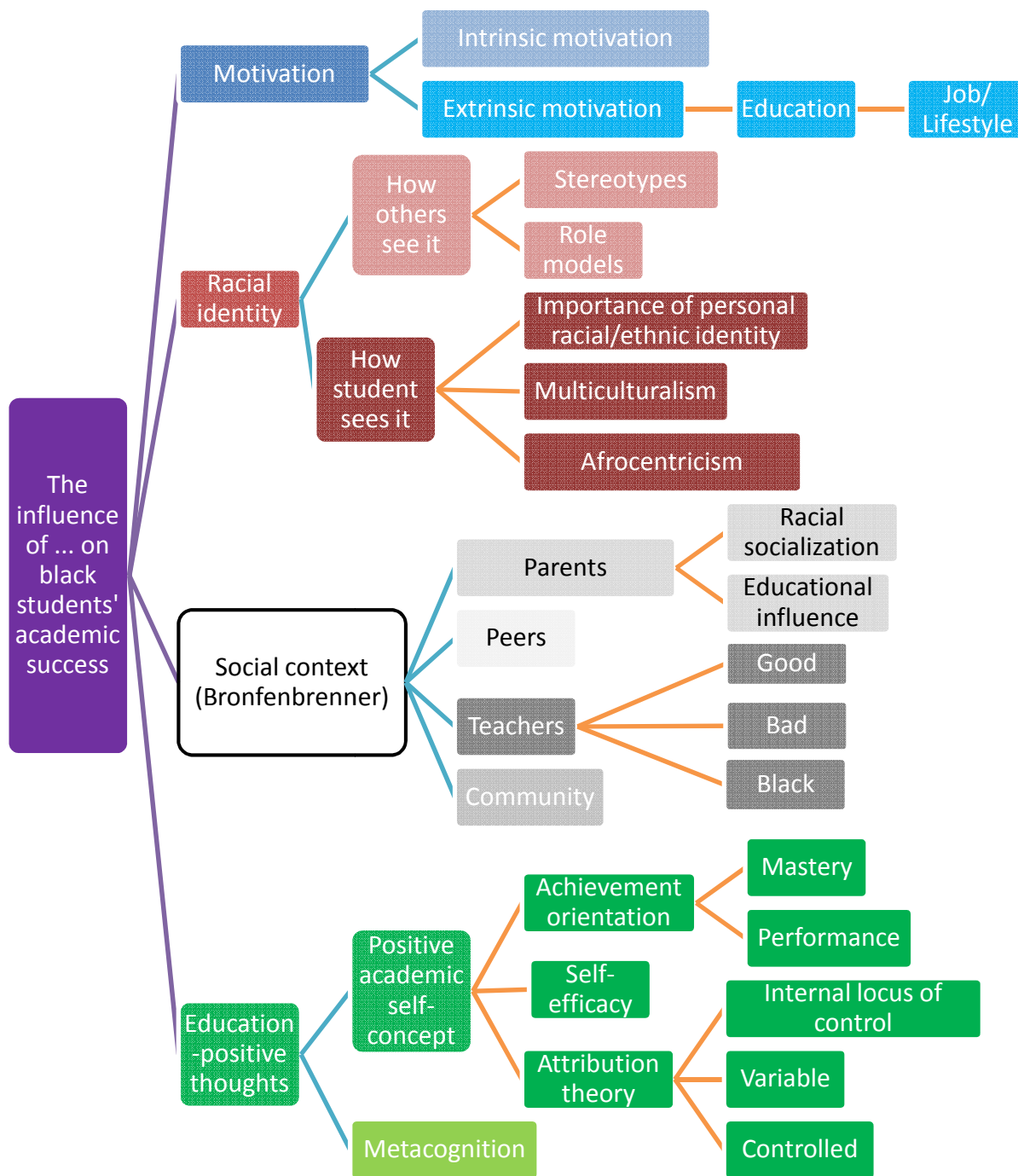
Figure 1. Initial topics emerging from content analysis.
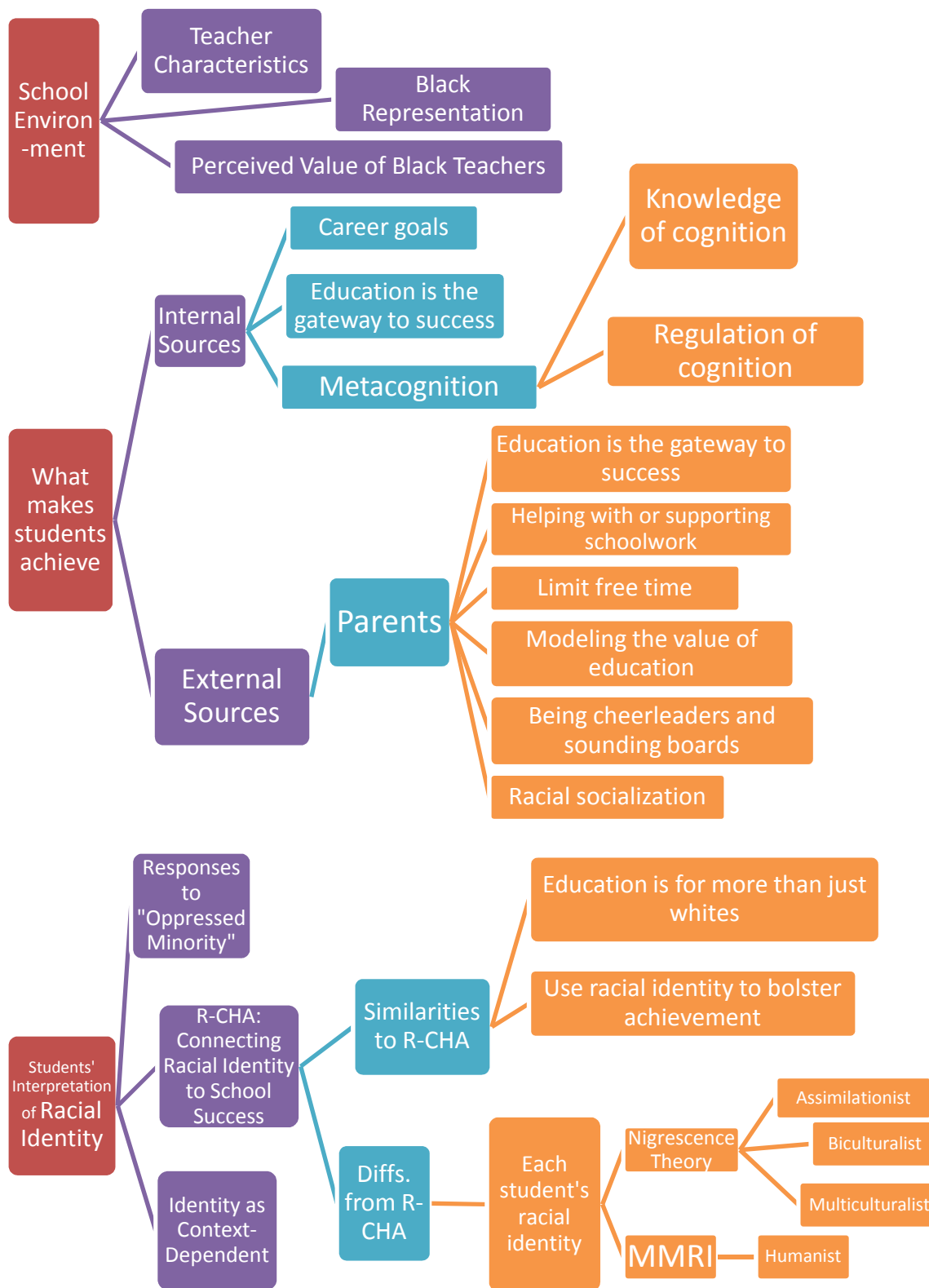
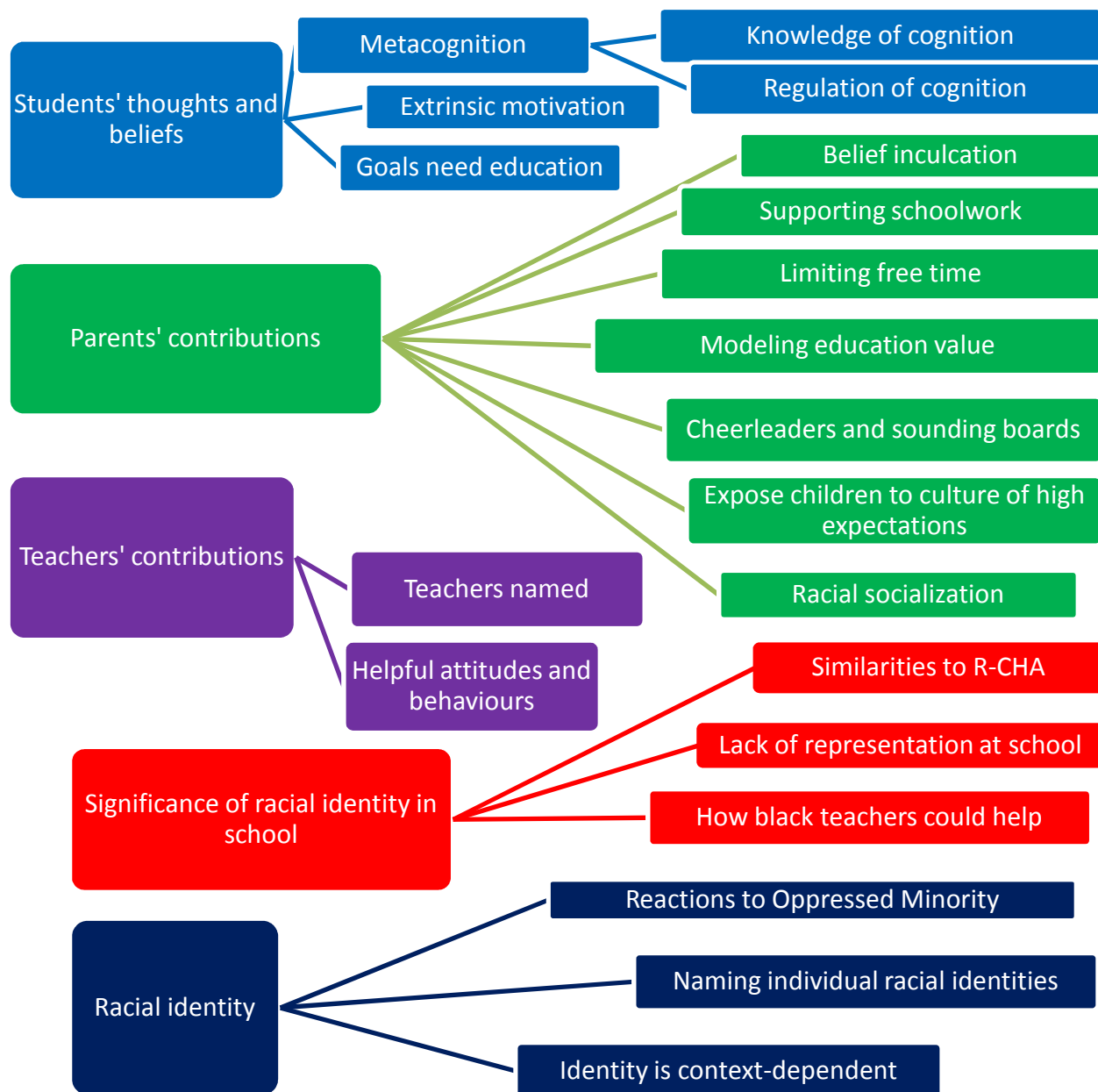Figure 2. Interview topics organized according to research questions.

Figure 3. Final themes emerging from inductive data analysis.

Appendix E

Ethics Approval Form

	FORM A

Faculty of Education
Graduate Programs & Research Office

Print Form

Reset Form

APPROVAL OF M.Ed. THESIS PROPOSAL

If the proposed research does not involve human subjects or the direct use of their written records, video-tapes, recordings, tests, etc., this signature form, along with ONE copy of the research proposal should be delivered directly to the Graduate Programs & Research Office for final approval.	If the proposed research involves human subjects, this signature form, along with ONE copy of the research proposal and Ethical Review Form signature pages (Section 1.1 to 1.7) must be submitted to the Graduate Programs & Research Office for final approval.

IT IS THE STUDENT'S RESPONSIBILITY TO PROVIDE A COPY OF THE RESEARCH PROPOSAL (INCLUDING REVISIONS) TO THE THESIS SUPERVISOR AND ALL MEMBERS OF THE ADVISORY COMMITTEE.

Student's Name: MELANIE-ANNE ATKINS   **Student #:** _____

Field of Study: Educational Psychology/Special Education

Title of Thesis: BLACK STUDENTS' PERSPECTIVES ON ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT

Name of Thesis Supervisor: GOLI REZAI-RASHTI

Name of Thesis Advisory Committee Member: *Co - supervisor* WAYNE MARTINO

DOES THIS RESEARCH INVOLVE THE USE OF HUMAN SUBJECTS: ⊙ Yes ○ No

APPROVAL SIGNATURES:

Graduate Student :   **Date:** *Sept 7th, 2011*

Co-
Thesis Supervisor: **Date:** *Sept 7, 2011*

Advisory Committee: **Date:** _____

Ethical Review Clearance: **Date:** *Oct. 28/11*

Ethical Review Number: *1109-3.*

Associate Dean
Graduate Programs & Research: **Date:** *Nov 7/11*

A STUDENT MAY PROCEED WITH RESEARCH WHEN A COPY OF THIS FORM CONTAINING ALL APPROVAL SIGNATURES HAS BEEN RECEIVED.

A copy of this proposal may be made public and kept on a two-hour reserve in the Faculty of Education Library.

Version Date: January 2010

The University of Western Ontario   *Faculty of Education*   *Graduate Programs & Research Office*

Appendix F

Ethics Revision Approval Form

Western Education
WESTERN UNIVERSITY
FACULTY OF EDUCATION
USE OF HUMAN SUBJECTS - ETHICS APPROVAL NOTICE

Review Number:	1109-3
Principal Investigator:	Goli Rezai-Rashti
Student Name:	Melanie-Anne Atkins
Title:	*Black students' perspectives on academic achievement*
Expiry Date:	March 31, 2012
Type:	M. Ed. Thesis
Ethics Approval Date:	January 31, 2012
Revision #:	1
Documents Reviewed & Approved:	Revised Study Method, Revised Recruitment, Revised Inclusion Criteria, Revised Letter of Information & Consent

This is to notify you that the Faculty of Education Sub-Research Ethics Board (REB), which operates under the authority of the Western University Research Ethics Board for Non-Medical Research Involving Human Subjects, according to the Tri-Council Policy Statement and the applicable laws and regulations of Ontario has granted approval to the above named research study on the date noted above. The approval shall remain valid until the expiry date noted above assuming timely and acceptable responses to the REB's periodic requests for surveillance and monitoring information.

During the course of the research, no deviations from, or changes to, the study or information/consent documents may be initiated without prior written approval from the REB, except for minor administrative aspects. Participants must receive a copy of the signed information/consent documentation. Investigators must promptly report to the Chair of the Faculty Sub-REB any adverse or unexpected experiences or events that are both serious and unexpected, and any new information which may adversely affect the safety of the subjects or the conduct of the study. In the event that any changes require a change in the information/consent documentation and/or recruitment advertisement, newly revised documents must be submitted to the Sub-REB for approval.

Dr. Alan Edmunds (Chair)

2011-2012 Faculty of Education Sub-Research Ethics Board

Dr. Alan Edmunds	Faculty of Education (Chair)
Dr. John Barnett	Faculty of Education
Dr. Farahnaz Faez	Faculty of Education
Dr. Wayne Martino	Faculty of Education
Dr. George Gadanidis	Faculty of Education
Dr. Elizabeth Nowicki	Faculty of Education
Dr. Immaculate Namukasa	Faculty of Education
Dr. Kari Veblen	Faculty of Music
Dr. Ruth Wright	Faculty of Music
Dr. Kevin Watson	Faculty of Music
Dr. Jason Brown	Faculty of Education, Associate Dean, Research *(ex officio)*
Dr. Goli Rezai-Rashti	Faculty of Education, Associate Dean, Graduate Programs *(ex officio)*
Dr. Susan Rodger	Faculty of Education, Western Non-Medical Research Ethics Board *(ex officio)*

The Faculty of Education   Research Officer
1137 Western Rd.   Faculty of Education Building
London, ON   N6G 1G7

Appendix G

Letter of Information

BLACK STUDENTS' PERSPECTIVES ON ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT

LETTER OF INFORMATION

Introduction

My name is Melanie-Anne Atkins and I am a master of education student at the Faculty of Education at The University of Western Ontario. I am currently conducting research into the achievement of black students, and would like to invite black high school students who have at least <u>a passing grade in all of their subjects</u> to participate in this study.

Purpose of the study

The aim of this study is to identify the factors that achieving black students believe contribute to their academic success.

If you agree to participate

If you agree to participate in this study you will be asked to take part in a one-hour interview about the factors that you believe contribute to your academic success. This interview will take place at a location convenient to you, and will be audio-recorded and transcribed into written format. You will be given an opportunity to review the transcript from this interview and will be able to delete, modify, or elaborate on any of your responses, if you so choose. This may require an additional hour of your time.

Confidentiality

The information collected will be used for research purposes only. The data will be kept confidential by storing it in a locked cabinet and will be destroyed after five years. Results of this study may be published in an academic journal and presented to others as a conference paper or in other places and may include quotations from your interview. Your age and school grade (e.g., Grade 10) will be identified, but a pseudonym will be used instead of your name, and efforts will be made not to disclose your identity.

Risks & Benefits
There are no known risks to participating in this study.

Voluntary Participation
Participation in this study is voluntary. You may refuse to participate, refuse to answer any questions, or withdraw from the study at any time with no effect on your academic status.

Questions
If you have any questions about the conduct of this study or your rights as a research participant you may contact the Office of Research Ethics, The University of Western Ontario. If you have any questions about this study, please contact Dr Goli Rezai or Dr Wayne Martino.

This letter is yours to keep for future reference.

Appendix H

Consent Form

BLACK STUDENTS' PERSPECTIVES ON ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT

Dr. Goli Rezai-Rashti, University of Western Ontario; Dr. Wayne Martino, University of Western Ontario; Melanie-Anne Atkins, University of Western Ontario

CONSENT FORM

I have read the letter of information, have had the nature of the study explained to me and I agree that my child may participate in the study. All questions have been answered to my satisfaction.

_____
Name of Student

_____   _____
Student's Signature   Date

_____
Printed Name of Parent/Guardian

_____   _____
Parent/Guardian's Signature   Date

VITA

Name: Melanie-Anne P. Atkins

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