RECLAIMING THE ANCESTORS’ QUILT:
BLACK WOMEN IN THE LAW NETWORKING FOR SOCIAL CHANGE

by

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A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements
for the degree of Master of Arts
Department of Sociology and Equity Studies in Education
Ontario Institute for Studies in Education
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ABSTRACT
This work is a narrative-based qualitative and participatory study of the networking practices of Black women studying, teaching and practicing law. Black women pursuing careers in a middle-upper class White male dominated profession occupy an “outsider-within” subject position. Such women experience dissonance stemming from compromises made to balance conflicting socio-economic conditions and expectations among the sites of family, community and dominant institutions. This work aims to uncover the strategies these women are developing to both succeed in the profession, and to remain grounded in their respective identities, families and communities. By developing an awareness of how these connections operate, in sites such as the family, legal education or profession, Black women in the law may then actively: (1) develop effective models of resistance for marginalized persons in dominant institutions; (2) equip themselves to resist external oppressions and find strength for self-renewal; and (3) form alliances around loci of oppression, including race, gender, sexuality, ability and class to lay the foundations for transformative social change.
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A note to Daisy:

I was floundering to define the subject for my thesis, having many ideas and issues to explore concerning interlocking oppression of Black women in law. I was struggling with many ethical and methodological questions that I had no idea how to begin, until you suggested the networking approach. I suddenly knew how I would fit the pieces together. I was thinking in a linear manner, subscribing to a meritocracy theory that would envision these women as separate entities that somehow managed to be successful in proximate isolation. Of the many approaches to qualitative analysis in general and narrative study in particular, I needed to create a method that was honest, ethical and without pretense of objectivity. This paper represents the attempt that I have made to fulfill those goals.
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Why The Law?: On Great-aunt Gertrude and the Instability of the ‘Paper Chase Moment’

The 1973 movie, *The Paper Chase*, typified middle-class White man’s law school in White America. It is a story of young men in their quest to pass first year exams, and understand ‘The Law’ according to Harvard and Hollywood. The movie proves that liberated young women may spite their fathers through unstable relationships, and that young men who work hard and “have the right stuff” will eventually succeed. By the time the closing credits rolled I had experienced my ‘Paper Chase moment’ when I thought I would find fulfillment studying for a noble profession in an ivy covered tower. I temporarily forgot or allowed myself to forget that the movie normalized messages that a woman’s place was to support her husband, and that a professor should humiliate a student into submission before either would gain respect. I tried to remember where ‘I’ was in the movie, “Where were the Black people?” In the classrooms, I think, they were in the back, I think, and perhaps in the street scenes, I think. Certainly there were no groups of Black people anywhere much less studying together or supporting each other. My ‘Paper Chase Moment’ did not last. In a very simple way, I realized that I could not both ‘have’ (middle-class success and ties to my community) and ‘be’ (a generic law student and actualized Black woman) at the same time. The discovery was so painful that I put my dream away.

However, the need for respect and the wish to learn remained. What was new, was my overwhelming need to control what was happening to me, to somehow force people (racist Whites) to be fair, to have a position that people had to hear, despite what they thought about the colour of
my skin. Unlike law professor Patricia Williams, when I turned to my mother to validate my goals, she could not tell me that the law was "in my blood" (1991: 12). Whether my enslaving ancestors were in the law is lost to time, their dubious legacies purposefully forgotten by my parents. The laws in my history were built on a foundation of Aboriginal genocide, enslavement and contested land. The law that brought Europeans five hundred years ago is the same law that appropriated the stolen land, mainly to distribute it to the new lawmakers. The law of the land had literal and immediate utility, up until my parents’ generation where acres of land could change ownership by the whim of an indulgent Aunt, but almost never by the stroke of a pen.

One of my mother’s favourite family stories was of the marriage of my great-great-aunt Gertrude. She was referred to as ‘brown-skinned,’ and her husband was much darker, but her first child was what was called ‘red-skinned’. My uncle, (no one seems to remember his name) assumed infidelity, and forced her out of “his” home with “her” daughter. It was the women of the family, their long lives and memories of family genetics, not to mention legendary persuasion that convinced my uncle to keep his wife and child. A second child was born brown and a boy, so all was well. Then the third child came, and she was as red-skinned as the first, so then came the women of my family, with their histories, their memories, and their persuasion. Part of the argument was, that having accepted the first red child, my uncle had no right to reject her sister. Apparently, my uncle loved his wife, and was ready to hear anything that would save him the public embarrassment of the situation. He couldn’t win either way; he was either a cuckold, or child abandoner. I wondered if he also wanted to secure paternity of his one brown son and use of his wife’s land, but I digress. So, when my aunt Gertrude became pregnant for the fourth time, everyone prayed that she would have a dark-skinned child, and a boy for good measure; the women of my family were beginning to have doubts in their powers of persuasion, and frankly thought that Gertrude should have tried harder
to have more brown children. Being a typical woman of my family, or so my mother tells me, aunt Gertrude had twins, one red-skinned boy and one dark-skinned boy, severely depressing the trade of the village gossips.

My aunt’s story was my first formal exposure to ‘the law,’ as my family experienced it. It was my first vivid understanding that people were attached to each other, through land and each other’s bodies, my first understanding that colour, gender and class were inextricably linked. I used to go over the permutations in my head, the gender and colour and class “what ifs?” that would have given my aunt’s story a very different outcome. I wondered at the perseverance and intelligence of the women in my mother’s family, and the mystical will of my aunt to solve her difficulties with finality. She produced irrefutable evidence that she was fulfilling her part of the marriage contract. My uncle was not so much the judge, as were the community elders/gossips. The women of my family were her lawyers, producing evidence of their own, in their memories, their wills, and their bodies; without them, my aunt may have never been able to finally exonerate herself.

Part of the story, of course, was aunt Gertrude’s land—property, both real and symbolic land which afforded her a little more of her husband’s good will, and a little more insurance if he left. Aunt Gertrude became a legend, her husband a faded memory, and her story a lesson to me about the collective will of the women in my family. I wanted to be part of those women, I wanted their knowledges, their competencies, and most importantly the spiritual will that engendered their power. It was in remembering this story that I grew beyond the hopeless contradictions of my ‘Paper Chase moment,’ and brought out my dream again. This time I had the tools in my memory to imagine an escape from the master’s house and work in a community of women to build our own (Lorde 1984: 112, I. M. James 1996d).
Networking: Introduction to the ‘Ancestors’ Quilt’

In this work I will explore, describe and analyze the ideologies and practices of Black women in the field of law, who together form a community, or ‘Network’. Throughout this work I will outline aspects of the network I find significant, but my primary consideration is to fairly represent the thoughts, actions and dreams of the women I interviewed. I borrow the analogy of quilting. Although ‘networking’ is a category imposed for this study, the history of Black/African women’s collectivities is thousands of years old (Busby 1992). In more recent times of European exploitation and invasion, enslaved and free Black women in the Diaspora continued to raise children, work, live and love each other (Hill Collins 1990). When I began reading sociologist Patricia Hill Collins I was struck by her brief discussion about quilting. Quilting seemed to typify the values, cultures and knowledges of West African women adapted for the North American context. In my own thinking about the book it was helpful to draw on the analogy of the ‘quilt’, which represents Black women’s history of creative practicality, as Hill Collins explains:

This dual emphasis on beauty occurring via individual uniqueness juxtaposed in a community setting and on the importance of creating functional beauty from the scraps of everyday life offers a powerful alternative to Eurocentric aesthetics (1990: 89).

Traditionally the study of networking has focused upon the shared mothering practices of women in a particular community (Hill Collins 1990: 119). The ‘threads’ of quilting, the shared tasks, respect for elders, and educating the youth, have been adapted by the women to confront the forces that threaten Black communities (129). Community activism casts ‘the quilting’ across neighbourhood and community boundaries. ‘The Network’, is a way to continue the history of activism, shared tasks and common goals. Somehow, with Canada’s small Black/African/Caribbean population, a tiny number of Black women lawyers, have found each other and have committed themselves to working for their communities. ‘Networking,’ therefore, becomes a way for women to continue the work or ‘quilt’ of their ancestors: The Ancestors’ Quilt.
**Rationale and Assumptions of this Study**

In this study I take as a given that Black women, and other minoritized women, encounter racisms, sexisms and multiple discriminations in the law; that experience has been explored elsewhere (see Ng 1991, Razack 1991, Monture 1992, Neallani 1992, Brand 1993, Duclos 1993, Silvera 1993, Sparks 1993, Thornhill 1993, Ontario 1995). I am positioning this work as a complement and continuation of other works by employing in-depth interviews with interconnected women to find the strategies that they individually and collectively employ. To understand strategies in confronting/refusing/negotiating oppression, the *whole* lives of these women must be considered. Are they *surviving* in a hostile legal environment, are they maintaining African/Canadian/Caribbean identifications and identities? Are they maintaining links with family and other supports or beginning to make the connections for community practice? As Philomena Essed writes, Black women, and by extension, other marginalized people, can provide information about dominant group members, resist oppression and provide an alternate construction of power and privilege toward societal change (1991: 5).

A marginalized person, specifically, an African woman in the Western Diaspora entering a dominant institution, is entering a contested site (Dei 1996a, Williams 1991). This woman may experience ruptures and dis-junctures stemming from sacrifices and compromises that are made to balance conflicting epistemologies, socio-economic conditions and expectations, experienced among home, community and dominant institutions. In occupying a subject position as the "outsider-within," the particular strengths and strategies these women must develop may cause conflict within their own identity, family and communities (Hill Collins 1990). It is possible, in part, to reconcile these ruptures by making macro and micro connections among sites of oppression (Essed 1997) including race, gender, sexuality, ability and class.
If the women in my study develop an awareness of how these connections are articulated in private and public institutions, such as the family and legal education, they may then actively employ the connections in specific sites in community law practice. By developing an awareness of how these connections operate, in sites such as the family, legal education or profession, Black women in the law may then actively: (1) develop effective models of resistance for marginalized persons in dominant institutions; (2) equip themselves to resist external oppressions and find strength for self-renewal; and (3), form alliances around loci of oppression, including race, gender, sexuality, ability and class to lay the foundations for transformative social change (see Hill Collins 1990, Duclos 1992, Lorde 1984). Despite the participation and support of the women I interviewed I could never produce “innocent,” bias-free research claiming to tell the truths of these women’s lives; nor would I want to (Etter-Lewis 1996). As a Black woman with a similar background to most of the women, as a potential colleague, as someone who would like to be part of a network in the future, I already feel a connection. One day, I may even look to these women as mentors in my own career and studies. Producing a balanced work is in all of our best interests, but imposing an impossible standard of what could be considered political action would have dubious merit, and worse, betray the women’s trust (Stanley and Wise 1991). Although theory and practice are inextricably linked, I will focus on women of the Network’s “exemplary practices” to achieve personal, professional and community development (Dei 1996a).

This work will not be accessible to all—to do so, and to satisfy the requirements of my institution would make it necessary to have written two texts. It is my intention, however, to come back to this text and revise sections for scholarly and popular publication. I aim for this thesis to offer several opportunities for Black women in law schools, practitioners, and potential law school candidates. I hope that the reader will use this text as a resource for other research and writings, to
help encourage and prepare women for challenging ‘law experience,’ and to offer strategies of community practices, refusal of dominant discourse, and self-fulfillment. I chose a small sample that could be attempted with the limited time and resources in a Master’s thesis, but more importantly, I wanted to engage with the richness of the narratives which would be lost in statistically representative quantitative analysis (Essed 1991: 54).

**Guiding Questions**

1. What are the subjects’ experiences, understandings and articulations of the saliency of racism and other interlocking oppressions in legal education and practice that led to the formation/continuation of the ‘Network’?

2. How does the ‘Network’ function to enable members to resist racism, and other interlocking oppressions, and maintain/adapt their Black identities/identifications?

3. What role does the ‘Network’ play in the employment of strategies of resistance which contribute to effective community practices and increasing Black communities’ access to both law services and legal education?

4. How are the women in the ‘Network’ addressing the challenges and possibilities to ‘networking’ in legal education and practices, how do these practices constitute transformative social change?

**The Context of Black Women’s Legal Education in Ontario**

It is not my intention to re-write Black people’s or Black women’s histories in Canada, which can be found in excellent books, essays and other works whose topics extend beyond the focus of this thesis (see, D’Oyley and Braithwaite, 1973, Tulloch 1980, Brand 1988, Moreau 1996, Winks 1997). However, I think that it is important to offer some background to the history of struggle that led me to write this work.

The first recorded presence of Africans in Canada referred to anonymous enslaved men.¹

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¹ The difference between “enslaved” and “slaves” is more than just a semantic difference. Without negating the very real and violent lives of my ancestors, I wish to also respect their struggle and resistance. Enslavement denotes a circumstance that is forced and escappable and cannot be linguistically, and I believe conceptually, employed without referring to subjecthood. Thus we are forced to talk about an enslaved man, woman, child or people and hopefully think about the historical context.
From the early seventeenth century, there exists a record of the guide/interpreter Mathieu de Coste (Winks 1997: 1), yet we do not have a picture of what a Black man’s life would have been in early Canada, New France as it was then, until the appearance in the history books of Olivier Le Jeune in the 1620s. We know that the English enslaved Le Jeune in his homeland of Madagascar, and sold him, at age six, to French merchants. We know of his conversion to Catholicism, and we know that a First Nations boy was enslaved with him. We also know that he died a ‘free’ man around the age of thirty (Winks 1997: 1-2), decades before the French Canadians officially ended the enslavement of Aboriginal and African peoples in 1709 (3).

Not until many decades later do we find one of the first records of an enslaved woman; the story of Marie-Joseph Angelique. In 1733 Marie-Joseph escaped her enslavers, who later captured and punished her. Defiantly, in April of 1734, she made another attempt and in the process set fire to the house to cover her escape. Forty-six buildings burned in her wake. The ‘law’, a combination of mobs and court officers, recaptured, tortured and paraded her through the streets of Montreal. They cut off her hands, hanged her and burned her at the stake near Place d’Armes, now the centre of tourism in ‘Vieux Montréal’. The ‘law’ then gathered up her ashes and threw them to the wind, an act designed to deny her a Christian burial (Brand 1988: 36-37, Dumont 1987: 97).

Angelique remains a footnote in mainstream Canadian women’s histories (see Dumont 1987, Prentice 1988). I wonder where she found the strength to escape again, I wonder what young Oliver, who is not much older than my baby cousins thought of his supposedly “humane” enslavers (Winks 1997: 2). As far as we know, neither person could read French, nor be well informed of many documents besides the Catholic Catechism. Literacy was by no means common among White Canadians at that time, and the merchant classes clearly exploited the Habitants and poor settlers. Yet, both groups had families and institutions for support. Perhaps a relative, priest, notary, or
teacher could read the law, or write to the British Monarch to demand justice. But what justice was there for Le Jeune and Angelique? By what mechanism was Le Jeune freed, especially since there was no statute to enslave him? What kind of ‘trial’ did the magistrates set up for Angelique? Both were without family, power and education. What the law enabled for rich White Canadians, and at least promised to poor ones, was completely unavailable to enslaved people who relied upon their exploiters’ noblesse oblige.

From the earliest times that European criminals stole African people from their land, we started to weave together the struggle for escape, belonging, resistance and education. Currently, Black women’s education is very different from the non-existent or segregated formal education that continued early into this century. In the late nineteenth century, and well into the twentieth, Black communities, such as North Buxton and Chatham in Ontario and North Preston and Africville in Nova Scotia, had small segregated schools that provided early education, while high school was an option for very few who could arrange the fees, facilities and transportation (Moreau 1996: 54). Most Black women were wage earners, but White employers excluded them from White women’s traditional occupations of clerical, secretarial and sales work, well into 1960s and 1970s. Even in Nova Scotia, with its large indigenous Black population, it is still rare to find Black women in these positions. Perhaps eight out of ten Black people in Eastern Canada have in their family or kin group women who have made their living “in service” as a domestic worker or care giver (Brand 1988: 57). Being ‘in service’ was one of few options available to Black women because, only ‘ladies’ could work at the ‘front of the shop,’ and by socially prescribed definition Black women, Native Women, Asian women and other Women of Colour were excluded. Middle-class White women were to remain cloistered at home, fulfilling their marriage vows of motherhood and genteel domesticity. Yet, White commentators considered Black women in the same family pattern “‘most lazy” because
they stayed “out of the fields, doing nothing” demanding that their husbands “support them in idleness” (Jones: 1985: 59).

James St. G. Walker wrote that a White Halifax woman looked for a servant simply by telephoning any number in the predominantly Black town of Beechville (Brand 1988: 58). The White woman assumed that any woman answering the phone would be Black, and therefore seeking domestic work, if not so already employed. This White woman’s act of racist arrogance is manifold: first, she assumed that all Black women would be looking for such work; second, that she had carte blanche to invade the privacy of anyone in a Black community; third, any harm or offense would be mitigated by her economic offering and social status; and fourth, this woman denies humanity and individuality to Black people, since all Black women were interchangeable. Black women paid to care for White children fare little better. For a “tutor” or “nanny” the very names which meant White if not English (Brand 1994: 190), an agency would be employed or careful search in newspaper or magazines made, but for a Black servant, the phone book was reference enough.

Until World War II, at least 80% of Black women worked in domestic service (Cooper 1994). In the words of one woman who remembered that time, “It was not until “Hitler brought the war” that White employers stopped preventing Black women from entering the public sphere, in the form of the dirtiest, most dangerous factory and munitions jobs (Brand 1994: 182). The same patriarchal economy that needed “Rosie the Riveter” (Prentice 1988) to replace White men in battle, needed Black women to replace “Rosie” in her place in domestic service. Many Black men were allowed to replace White men in the agricultural fields (Carty 1994: 211), and late in the war, as in the War of 1812, were finally allowed to fight. The government initiated the West Indian Domestic Scheme out of war time emergency rather than any progressive immigration plan (Silvera 1993).

Throughout the pre- and post- war eras, Black women sought opportunities for formal and
informal education; those who were able to access education were expected to bring that knowledge back to the community (Moreau 1996: 57). The fields of nursing and teaching were especially valued for the prestige of professional certification and direct applicability to community needs. These were the very choices available to my mother in the 1960s in the Eastern Caribbean. For working-class Black women in North America, domestic service was still the norm. Black women’s painfully achieved inroads into teaching and nursing were grand exceptions (Moreau 1996). Therefore, the few Black men and women pursuing a career in law were extraordinarily rare.

In 1886, Delos Rogest Davis, the first Black person in Ontario called to the bar, was admitted only after a specific act of legislation and a special admissions exam. He needed the exemption not because of legal barriers, but because no lawyer would hire him to complete the required training, a problem that many minoritized law students still face. In 1892, White women were permitted to study law in Ontario, and in 1897 Clara Brett Martin was the first woman to practice law in Canada and the entire British Empire (Prentice 1988: 133). In 1872 Mary Ann Shadd Cary became the first Black woman in North America to complete her law studies and although she lived in Canada most of her adult life, she officially practiced only in the United States. Yet, she gave the community the benefit of her training and supported herself and her family with her more well-known teaching, writing and publishing activities (Sadler: 1994: 21-2).

Black people would have to wait for our first Canadian trained female lawyer until 1960, when Myrtle Blackwood Smith become the first Black women to be called to the Ontario Bar (Braithwaite 1993). That these exceptions are so remarked upon, so unusual the reality of Black women’s education in Canada that they stand in stark contrast to the everyday lives of the vast majority of Black women who tried to make a life in this country from the 1700s until today. Throughout it all, Black women were networking, whether to share resources or share child care, or
to lobby for social justice issues. Shadd Cary met with groups of Black women and men across Southern Ontario, and the Northern U.S. to gather strength for the abolitionist movement (Bristow 1994: 126). Black women were teaching what they did in one-room school houses long before Whites admitted them to teacher training in Canada’s teacher education centres. Women, as farmers and concerned citizens, worked as buffers at demonstrations and when necessary, formed human shields between agents of the law and the men in their communities (Shadd 1994: 60). Black women have been meeting to discuss their issues long before the first national meeting of Black women in 1920 of the Congress of Coloured Women in 1920 (Hamilton 1994: 35). The ultimate network of Black Women and Men in the Underground Railroad laid testament to the struggles of all Black/African people, and to the most famous conductor, Harriet Tubman. (Brand 1993: 273).

Because Black women live in such a contested and contradictory space, many of our ‘firsts’ as Black women, are firsts for all women and all Black people. Mary Ann Shadd Cary, the first woman to publish a newspaper in North America; Rose Fortune, the first female police officer (Hamilton 1994: 30). These ‘firsts’ reflect the ideology that insisted Black women lacked the ‘natural’ refinement of White women and therefore could not only be used in the fields but their offspring could be sold away from them without any thought to the ‘nature’ of woman as mother. By the same strange confluence of capitalism and patriarchy, Black women could run businesses that were not ‘ladylike’. Since we were not ladies, and since women’s mobility was not considered a ‘gain[] for the race,’ the occasional independence of Black women did not threaten White men’s ownership or community standing. The ownership of Black women and their children by White men served well the purposes of labour, sexual exploitation, and enlargement of the enslaved population. Thus, the social relations of production and the social relations of reproduction did not merely conjoin but were crudely the same (Brand 1988: 51-2).
In comparing Black women’s work from pre-industrial patriarchal mercantilist/capitalist plantations to post-industrial post-modernist patriarchal capitalism, the status of the work has stayed the same; from taking care of master’s children and old people in the ‘big house’, we take care of them in the hospitals, long-term care homes, and the ‘big house’. From cooking and cleaning in the ‘big house’ we cook and clean in the ‘big house’ plus fast-food restaurants, hotels and hospitals. From sweating in the fields, we now work in the more appropriately named ‘sweat shops’ (Brand, 1988: 58-59). We do this work with Portuguese, Italian and Asian women, but even now we are separated on the factory floor, through class and gender stratification. In these illustrations my ‘we’ is conditional.

I say ‘we’, not for my close family and friends, and only temporarily for myself. I have worked in several different shades of ugly polyester uniforms. I have worked as ‘counter help’ in a ‘fresh food outlet’. I was a unionized hospital worker, and I was a cook’s assistant. All were grossly segregated workplaces where White males were the owners and senior managers, and the Women of Colour/new immigrants were scraping by. I have been behind counters and White people show me their scorn, and Black people their shame. A few Black people showed relief that I wasn’t another ‘statistic’, and other People of Colour vocalized that I was in a new immigrant terrain. These few showed some curiosity, the silent, and sometimes spoken question with a tepid smile, “what are you doing here?” Of course that is what I would like to think, that I am that important, that I committed a small act of resistance by taking a job to build my character besides provide a pay cheque. But for the most part, everyone ignored me, saw me without seeing me, heard me without hearing me, and responded to the Black space that was performing them a service, in the same way I had done countless times before. Sometimes I needed to block out what was happening to me, that I was being so obviously raced and classed and gendered, assumed heterosexual and asexual, in the
dominant's small gestures of domination, the constant barrage of images and words that announced the social structure that clearly subordinated me. There was no safety at work, yet there was no safety in schools either; there never has been (Hill Collins, 1990: 144).

The very idea of 'safety' has long eluded Black women's educational experiences in this country. The history of pursuing education for Black women is filled with epistemic and physical violence (Moreau 1996), from the struggles for government funding for Black elementary schools in the last century, to segregation in the first half of this century. It certainly looks like our struggle to access quality and inclusive education will continue well into the next millennium. Were the struggles all about socio-economic gain and the desire to fit into dominant social spheres to reproduce a mirror of dominant culture and ideals? Recent Black literature argues otherwise (see Moreau, 1996, Mirza, 1992, Cooper, 1995, Johnson 1995). Black women's education was a contestation of the controlling images of 'mammy', 'jezebel' and 'matriarch', which were supposed to dictate Black women's place in society (Hill Collins 1990). Pursuing an education was to refuse both sub-human portrayals, and the oppressors' concerted effort to break our bodies, spirits and minds. Education ruptured capitalist demands that Black women accept whatever roles dictated by White upper classes (Moreau 1996: 66). Black women have inherited the "social and psychological" oppression that continue to deny us our educational opportunity, but we have also inherited the "seed of resistance" that propels us to end the cycle of violence (Moreau 1996: 65).

Becoming a Lawyer

Admission to law school is based on many factors, however the LSAT (Law School Admissions Test) score and undergraduate CGPA (cumulative grade point average) are almost always the most heavily weighted factors. The cost of one LSAT application fee is $110. Optional LSAT preparation courses run from $100-400, preparation materials $20-100. Law school
applications in Ontario are $100 per school, $340 for all six schools, $40-70 for each out of province school. Secure mailing of these materials, transcripts of all post-secondary institutions attended, miscellaneous expenses are about $20-50. Some of the expenses can be waived by the application service or individual law schools, but others are mandatory, and require a strict need assessment (LSAC 1997). If you are sure you will be accepted at the school of your choice, and fairly certain that you will achieve a high LSAT on the first attempt, then $300 is sufficient, although some people will spend upwards of $1000 for the extra courses, tests and material, if they can afford it.

Although the actual criteria required by the law schools is changing, many schools, (Ottawa University and University of Windsor being notable exceptions) primarily consider the LSAT mark and CGPA as their primary admissions criteria for what they call “regular applicants”. Considerations of life and work experiences are primarily noted for “non-traditional” applicants, such as mature, Aboriginal or economically/educationally disadvantaged students (LSAC 1997). The reactionary claim of elitist students and professors that their schools are being overrun by sub-standard applicants, is clearly disputed by all the Black women you will later meet in this study. Most entered law school in the regular stream, and report that in most of the schools, older and/or economically disadvantaged White men and Women comprise the vast bulk of the ‘equity students’. My perusal of class pictures in three Ontario law schools affirms their comments.

For many students, one of the biggest in their law school plans is the LSAT, which was developed after 1947, (LSAC 1996: 2), and all common-law schools except the University of Moncton require it (21). As any standardized test, the LSAT is both controversial and seductive (Steinberg 1995: 131). Although it allows law schools to believe that it is simply an indicator of future performance, it actually serves as an intimidating, and for some, insurmountable barrier to a legal education. Many test takers I have spoken to believe that the LSAT is intended to weed out
minoritized or socio-economically disadvantaged applicants by employing irrelevant and/or culturally biased questions. For example, a question designed to test "logical reasoning" asks the test taker to choose the one answer out of five that best explains why a hypothetical group of physicians should use sugar and not antibiotics to disinfect a wound. One answer states that sugar should be used as it has been so employed since "ancient times," a concept that appeals to a non-Western epistemology that would value the indigenous knowledge of elders and the faith of a historical community (Dei 1996a: 96-7)—this was the ‘wrong’ answer. The ‘right’ answer is based in a knowledge of, and respect for, Eurocentric bio-medicine. The testers assume that a 'logical thinker' will not only choose the most scientifically sound argument, but will quickly and objectively exclude all other possibilities in the allotted 70-90 seconds (LSAC 1993: 23).

Historically, the admissions process in Ontario was even more arbitrary and elitist. The "grandfather" of the LSAT in Ontario was called the “Primary Examination” which was designed “to make sure that he had the proper gentlemanly background to be a member of the Bar” by testing “his knowledge of The Odes of Horace, Euclid and the Iliad” (emphasis mine, Cole, 1997: 17). That a few White women were practicing in this province, by the late 1800s, (Prentice 1988: 133) seems to have escaped the writer’s notice, as gender neutral language appears only late in the piece.

In all, there are sixteen universities that offer a common law education in Canada, 6 in Ontario. Common law tradition stems from the British system. All practicing lawyers in Ontario must pass the ‘Bar’ (a system of bar courses, examinations, and work experience called “articling”) of the Law Society of Upper Canada. The Society maintained a monopoly of teaching as well as accreditation and training until, 1957. The history of law school in Ontario, as it is reported, is very confusing, one-sided, and largely partisan. To read the “version” of this period in the University of
Toronto and Osgoode Law School calendars is to realize that the machinations of politics, rivalries, egos and ‘old boys’ resulted in a largely decentralized, if barely reformed system of legal education.

With admission to law school, tuition ranges from $2000-4500 per year, with most schools falling in the middle range; this cost excludes books, rent and other expenses (LSAC 1996). Marks are very important for the first year to secure the very few legal positions available for the summer, and to obtain/maintain scholarships, bursaries and awards. During the first and second years, law students compete for coveted summer positions that are important indicators for future employment (Law Society 1996: 9). However, equity considerations are most often eschewed by employers who look for candidates who fit the norm of meritocracy, who ‘conform’ to dominant age, class, gender and appearance norms (Law Society: 9). In second year, students spend much of the time worrying about securing their articling year employment. For some, this will be their first practical experience, and is absolutely required in order for to prepare for Bar Admissions courses upon completion of the LL.B.

Although some professionals (Law Society 1996, Sparks 1993) have recommended more equitable hiring practices, so-called “non-traditional” candidates (racialized people, Aboriginal people, people with disabilities, and others) often have difficulties securing jobs, and sometimes are unable to find suitable employment in the field and are forced to either delay or change their vocational goals (Law Society, 1996). In Ontario, Canadian citizens or permanent residents of “good character” who successfully complete the degree, articling year, bar admissions courses and exams, are said to be ‘called to the Bar’ and are therefore allowed to practice law in this province (Osgoode 1997: 69). Many so-called “traditional” (middle/upper class White able-bodied, ‘straight acting’) students return to their summering or articling positions, or professional or personal contacts to find employment. However, other students may still have to run the gauntlet of discriminatory
interviewing and hiring practices, closed doors and glass ceilings to finally secure a permanent position (Law Society 1996: 9). As you will read in the following pages, the above ordeal is only the beginning. Most new lawyers are often exploited by firms who make the most profit from their lowest paid and hardest working lawyers. However, the eight Black women in my study also outline the racial/sexual harassment, multiple discriminations and silencing that led them to find sisterhood, community and activism in the Network.

Guide to the Journey

This study proposes to uncover linkages and strategies formed by Black women in ‘the law’ in the sites of family, education, identity and community. In this Chapter I have outlined the experiences, stories contexts, that led me to research and writing of this work. I also offered a more specific background to the meaning of networking and the origin of the my use of the ‘Ancestors’ Quilt’ as a parable for community development and knowledge production. Finally, I brought forward the four main questions that are the basis for this undertaking, and the general principals that guided my research and writing.

In Chapter Two I will further outline the study’s conceptual framework. I begin by sharing the ‘Ancestors’ Quilt’ parable illustrating the issues faced by marginalized scholars writing in the academy. I link a narrative of definitions, which I hope will guide you through my use of major sociological terms, and outline the influences of the two major systems of thought that guided my research conception, critical race theory (Matsuda 1991, Bell 1992, Crenshaw 1993,), and Black feminist thought (Hill Collins 1990, Essed 1991, Mirza 1997). Both sets of theories encourage the use of stories, parables, tales and anecdotes to disrupt the bifurcated notions of ‘scholarship’ and ‘fiction’ (Hill Collins 1990: 5). I also will explore writings on mentoring, role modelling and alienation which all inform a framework which resists the concurrent articulations of oppressions.
Chapter Three begins with an exploration of feminist and anti-racist methodological directions. In the first half of this chapter I interrogate my position as investigator, the impossibility of ‘hygienic’ research (Stanley and Wise 1990), and the dangers of becoming a ‘native informant’ (Spivak 1996). I then discuss the moral obligation to explore the possibilities of participant empowerment and social transformation, and lastly the necessity that as marginalized people we pursue our own research questions and methods and questions. In the second half of the chapter, I outline my specific research methods and the design of the study. Moreover, I outline the specific issues involved working with highly identifiable research participants.

The core of this work is found in Chapter Four, which centres the views and voices of the eight women who form the basis of the study. In this chapter I briefly outline the backgrounds of the participants and the origin of this study, and discuss the strategies and practices that form the basis of Networking through six major sections (chosen to reflect both my guiding questions and the women’s concerns). Some of the goals guiding the interview process were to: first, establish the reasons why the women chose to attend law school, and explore how their senses of identity informed their decisions. Secondly, to utilize narratives and observations to outline the women’s experiences in law school and law practice, then to describe their external supports. Thirdly, to describe the internal supports, people and organizations, which are integral to the functioning of the network and facilitate the enrichment of Black communities.

In Chapter Five, I offer an analysis that draws upon an imaginary story to illustrate the importance of the representation of marginalized people in the courts and justice system. I argue that the Network works, not as an organized group, per se, but as a resource that allows and encourages, and nurtures its members to participate in effective community practice. The Network serves five important functions: First, it allows the women of the network to better integrate themselves into
their communities. Second, it works to expand access to the profession by the community and marginalized/racialized persons. Third, it allows its practitioners to surmount the isolation of the profession. Fourth, the Network facilitates increasing access to legal services by Black communities. Lastly, the Network can help to change the look of legal professionals and the functioning of the law itself. Only when the knowledges of marginalized individuals are incorporated into the ways dominant institutions function, will the saying ‘justice for all’ have real meaning.

Finally, in Chapter Six, I present two stories that question the uncritical acceptance of the legitimacy of the law, of what the law should be, how justice should be administered. To that end, I illustrate why liberal and mainstream feminist legal paradigms inadequately address the legal and justice needs for People of Colour in general, and Black women in particular. I argue that the knowledges of marginalized people must be the foundation for, not an additive to, movements for social/legal justice, and that the Network is a dynamic framework for transformative change. I then outline what I see as the significance of this work, and discuss directions for future exploration and study. I conclude this work by giving the last word to the women who have given me so much of their valuable time and priceless spirits.
chapter two:
conceptual framework

"The Ancestors’ Quilt and the Scholars’ Tapestry"

As The Scholars sit in the Ivory Tower poring over the Tapestry of Truth, Power and Justice the Scholars are worried. Some are worried over losing Power, some are worried that the solution, bringing the Others into the tower may prove to be Their undoing, and some are trying hard not to worry at all. For it is the weaving of the pure Tapestry that sustains the Tower’s existence. From time to time, a few of the others who remember how the Tapestry became Ivory seem to become ill or are made to leave the Tower; everyone else succeeds in forgetting. Once The Scholars all believed the Tapestry was woven with pure Truth, but as all the threads are the same Ivory colour, the lies, half-truths and violence are woven in—right, with wrong genius with insanity, knowledge with ignorance.

The Scholars weave, as The Scholars always have done, but somehow the Tapestry keeps unraveling. In its centre, tears and breaches appear and The Scholars must methodically or desperately make repairs. Yet every time it seems The Scholars would have to abandon their work, They allow a few of the nomads called Others into the Tower. The Others are given respite, and vow to lead their sistren and brethren into the Tower. The Scholars accept the gifts from the Others along with what they can steal, or trade, and The Scholars take those multi-coloured threads and renew the weaving. Ignorant of the qualities of each colour, The Scholars choose all, and tell the Others to weave small sections. The Others are triumphant, believing that their threads will finally be part of the weaving of Truth. The loss over of what was stolen is temporarily forgotten.
As the Others stand in the Great Hall of the Tower for the unveiling of the completed Tapestry, a coldness grips them, and the Others realize they must soon leave the Tower. Some leave, deciding that their welcome has been over-stayed, they decide to venture again into the wilderness to learn the mysteries of the Ancestors’ Quilt. The Quilt had been lost long ago, but these Others believe that Answers can only be found within their own cloth. The Others who remain, wait to see the Tapestry unveiled, and find with horror that the Other threads were woven onto the edge of the Tapestry. The threads begin to weave into bright and vibrant colours of different lengths and sizes reflecting each other and forming intricate patterns, but somehow, slowly fading into White.

Some of the remaining Others are disgusted, and leave immediately hoping to meet their friends in the forest, but the image of Tapestry is burned in their minds forever. Some are transfixed by the beauty of the weaving, proud at long last to be part of the Truth. Some Others grudgingly decide to continue to weave for The Scholars, hoping one day to either share equally in the Tapestry or learn enough to one day stitch the Ancestors’ Quilt.

THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS

In my story I have tried to illustrate that academics/activists employ different strategies and ideologies in the search for equity, whether the “Others” in my story rejected, resisted or assisted The Scholars, counter-strategies and ideologies of the dominant seem to negate every action. I would hope, that given the choice, I would take my chances in the outside world, but by choosing to write in this academy I am rejecting the wilderness. Does that mean that I am becoming a co-opted scion of the dominant few, even seeking to become one of them?— I would say “No!” For me part of this journey of writing and research is to contextualize my easy answer by exploring the writings I have studied to explain the process of producing knowledge. However, before I outline the application of the theories that have guided this entire work, I will first briefly summarize some key terms.
Definition of Terms

In this section, a thematic glossary, I cluster terms of similar meanings both to draw fine distinctions, and to note where terms may be interchangeable in differing contexts. Sociology has been criticized by both the conservative and progressive scholars of the “unnecessary use of jargon [and] its pseudo-scientific stance” (Stanley and Wise 1990: 267). I sometimes agree with such pointed criticism, especially when I try to make use of particularly nebulous terms, or to define terms still being constructed by both users and creators. Yet, in a sense, these weaknesses point to the dynamic, if not democratic nature of a relatively young discipline which allows space for feminist scholars to be widely cited in the discipline and beyond (Stanley and Wise 1990: 266-7). The attempt of scholars of Colour to be recognized for work that centres race is yet to be seen, but is a sight for constant struggle (Dei, 1996, Razack 1993a).²

Community:

The very idea of community contains notions of nationalism and ‘home’ that are becoming increasingly problematic. My own fantasies of what it would be like to ‘go home’ to Antigua are now tempered with the reality of socio-political challenges. I will discuss in later chapters that the idea of ‘home’ is still contested by the women I have interviewed. Deep considerations have brought them to a clear understanding of how and where they plan to live their lives, even if, like myself, most have been unable to completely reconcile ‘home’ and ‘here’. The Black women in my study built their identities around various conceptions of what can be called an ‘imagined community’ of the African Diaspora, in that “members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their

² A note concerning my word usage: In the body of this work, so you will read various versions of such contested or developing terminology/ideology such as Black, ‘black,’ and black, for example. I will use my own preferences in the body of my work, and the original author’s preferences in direct quotations.
fellow-members...yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion" (Anderson 1983: 15). The women first met with me, not as a the theoretical ‘generic’ stranger, but as a very definite Black woman. Whether I become a close friend, a colleague in coalition work, or someone to smile at on a busy day, would be partly determined by how I communicate my sense of identity.

The community or communities throughout this work is the African Canadian and Afro-Caribbean extended families, neighbourhoods, collective identifications, where we were born, and hopefully where we find our homes, and cultural, social and spiritual sustenance. To paraphrase Angela Davis, the community “isn’t everywhere”, meaning that the some middle-class Black people remember to work for the ‘community’ when we have empty resume spaces, contracts, or grants applications to fill (Davis 1996). Thus ‘community practice’ is should be encompass a greater praxis than ‘donating’ time or resources. Work in communities means the exchange of knowledge and experiences and learning to understand how systems of oppression are interconnected. It means learning from elders, passing on our own knowledge based on “connections, caring, and personal accountability” (Hill Collins 1990: 223). Part of that accountability for middle-class Black women is learning to adapt our position of relative privilege to improve our communities’ socio-economic resources and help our communities negotiate access to services. However, equally important is reaching beyond understanding how systems operate, and learning to develop and practice strategies in our private and professional lives in order to improve and/or resist the systems themselves.

Race and Ethnicity:

‘Race,’ and therefore ‘racism’ originated in Western European philosophical and belief systems as a justification for/result of their colonial and imperialist ‘expansion’ beginning in the sixteenth century (Dei 1996a: 40-1). Race is a socially constructed ideology grown out of arbitrary phenotypical (physical) traits which UNESCO has declared to have no scientific base and used by
dominant White groups to "legitimize[] the ruthless exploitation and subjugation of non-Western people" (Dei 1996a: 40-1, Bolaria and Li 1988: 16-17). In the centuries following the original invasions of Africa, the Americas and Asia, European colonizers needed to legitimate continual socio-economic and political exploitation through racist notions of biological determinism such as Social Darwinism, eugenics and structural functionalism in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Even today, such theories still have enduring scientific and social currency; Philip Rushton, the Moynihan Reports and The Bell Curve to name a few.

Both 'race' and 'ethnicity' are actually dynamic socially constructed terms which represent various notions of human differentiation in a specific time and place. Some writers consider 'ethnicity' to be primarily is based on "socially selected cultural traits," and 'race' to be primarily based on "socially selected physical traits" (Wilson in Li 1988: 17). Nonetheless, ethnicity is far from a neutral or equivalent term implied by such a definition. The dominant group often disguises their racism through an "ethnic minority" discourse where a corresponding "ethnic majority" remains undefined (Julien and Mercer 1996: 455). Stuart Hall who has written extensively on the uses, abuses and possibilities of the term ethnicity, insists that it is a "strategically necessary concept" because it acknowledges both "the place of history, language and culture in the construction of subjectivity and identity" and that "all discourse is placed, positioned, situated and all knowledge is contextual" (Julien and Mercer 1996: 455-6). Ethnicity then becomes a short-cut to contextualizing Whiteness, forcing some recognition that being White is not being 'normal', and therefore offers an avenue to expose the arbitrary nature of Whiteness and other forms of dominance.

'Whiteness' can be defined as the privilege of white skin containing powerful notions of controlling relations of power, precluding whole nations from exercising the right to self determination and constructing societies where the relative social distance from the White male elite
determines one's humanity (Dei 1996a: 28). Disturbingly, the normalization of the violent acquisition of economic, social and political power often renders the power of Whiteness invisible (Dei, 1996a: 28). Equally disturbing, is that the exploration of the implications of such power is often the project of White writers who have found a lucrative academic and economic niche for their scholarship.¹

In some ways the history of Whiteness in North America is a history of White ethnicity and White racism. For example, if we discuss the socio-historic context to the term Jewish, Irish, Italian, Québécois(e) we will be able to analyze both the essentialist nature of these terms and the different positions of dominance and subordination these groups have held over time (Ignatiev 1995). Furthermore, in certain spaces, ethnicity can also be explored within entirely ‘non-White’ groups, for we too need to interrogate terms such as Black, West-Indian, African Canadian within our own contexts. However I capitalize the terms ‘Black’ and ‘White’ for different strategic reasons. Capitalizing ‘Black’ when referring to race and culture grows out of my own feeling of pride in my Black identification and reclamation of a colour which has so many negative meanings in European languages and cultures. Ida B. Wells wrote “the earliest printed appeal for capitalizing the word Negro” in 1878 (Busby 1992: 150-1). Many racial and ethnic groups employ Blackness as a symbol of a shared history of suffering, but we should remember to analyze how history has been gendered and sexualized. Any nationalist or pan-nationalist appeal should be based in a commitment to reduce socio-economic disparity in the African Diaspora and larger transnational contexts (hooks 1992).

However, the nationalism inherent in adopting an uncritical Black identity has a danger of overlooking other marginalized groups, or works to participate in the process of ‘Othering’ other

¹ For example, Peggy McIntosh 1990, Anne Stoler 1995, Teun van Dijk 1993, Anne McClintock 1995, Robert Young 1995, although some racialized/minoritized scholars are also writing in this area, the rhetorical questions remain "Who is more likely to get published?" and "Who are the authentic writers on Whiteness?"
races in a claim of innocence at the bottom of the ‘hierarchy of oppressions’ (see interlocking oppressions). Here, I am drawing an important distinction between a ‘racial identity’ of ‘being Black’ and a ‘racialized identity’ of ‘becoming Black’ (Ibrahim 1997). Being Black/African is to be located in a particular “social, cultural and historical construction” (Dei and James 1998: 3); whereas ‘becoming Black’ is to recognize that a racialized identity is problematic and to “construct, appropriate, negotiate and shape” one’s own racial identity, so that to identify with an empowering, self-defined conceptualization of ‘Blackness’ is to “take on a political agency and collective resistance” (Dei and James 1998: 3).

Mainstream Feminist Theory, Black Feminist Theories, Women of Colour, North and South:

Feminist theory has as its core the pretext that women’s lives and experiences must be situated in “questioning the adequacy of any analysis of human behaviour” (Hale 1995: 516). Feminist theory often focuses on relations of dominance and subordination of female and male in relation to: economics, racism, ecology, reproduction and sexuality (Hale 1995). Many Women of Colour refuse to separate out our multiple identities into race or class or gender, and instead call on all sectors of society to consider the ‘whole person’ who is singularly located. ‘Womanism’ was originated by Alice Walker; not as an oppositional nor mutually exclusive term to feminism, but as a feeling that ‘feminism’ in North America was dominated by middle-class White women and that minoritized women needed a more universal term that reflects our reality more inclusive of female/male relationships, multiple races, sexualities, classes and abilities ((charles) 1997: 282).

Black feminist theories in the North American context centres the histories, everyday experiences, the family, intellectual, social and cultural traditions of women of African descent. Although much of the scholarship is based in a North American context, many women are now making transnational links to Women of Colour in the South. The goals are social transformation,
often humanistic in nature, which combat Eurocentrism and other erasures of marginalized peoples. Such theorists often go beyond simple notions of gender equality, beyond even the inclusion of multiple loci of oppressions towards a theory of social transformation of the entire society, “a commitment to reorganizing U.S. society so that the self-development of people can take precedence over imperialism, economic expansion, and material desires” (hooks 1981:194). In Great Britain and Ireland the term, ‘Black’ includes most non-White people including South, East and South East Asians, Afro- and Indo- Caribbean people and other so-called ‘visible minorities’. In the British context Blackness emanated as a unifying ideology to combat the subordination of invisibility in British Society. Black British feminists often write about the shifting nature of ‘who is Black’ and notions of ‘home’ and ‘Diaspora’ (Mirza 1997: 4-5).

Two terms that are meant to link home and Diaspora are the terms ‘People of Colour’ or ‘Women of Colour’. These terms have achieved currency because they are inclusive of people in the South, and are not semantically negative as ‘non-Western’ or ‘non-White’. Nor are the terms explicitly self-Othering, such as ‘Third World’ or ‘undeveloped’ (Etter-Lewis 1996: 1-2). Finally, ‘Women of Colour’ is not inherently false, such as the term ‘visible minority’ when in fact, Africans, Asians, Aboriginal people make up the world’s majority in population (Etter-Lewis 1996: 4).

Although the dominant elite sometimes appropriate the term, ‘Women of Colour’, as a bland descriptive, and because certain ambiguities must be considered transitional, it still remains a “direct means of acknowledging the unlimited variety of women in a constructive manner” (Etter-Lewis 1996: 4). The dichotomous terms, ‘North’ and ‘South’, where the former term denotes developed countries in Europe, North America, plus Australia and New Zealand, and the latter denotes everywhere else (Spivak 1996), are beginning to address the issues of White colonies in the Southern hemisphere, and the migrations of relatively privileged racialized people.
Critical Race Theory

In reading the introduction of the critical race text, *Words that Wound*, I began to understand, and eventually embrace that the struggle against oppression is to make a choice, every day, to “accept the gift and burden of [this] inheritance” (Delgado 1993: 2). I realized I was searching for something I did not know I was missing, the feeling that my religion gave me as a child, that every question had an answer, even if the answer was no, or had a meaning that I could not yet understand. Critical race theory is political, emotional, experiential, historical, contextual, imaginative, communal, active and reflective (Delgado 1993: 4-6). The seeming inability of multiple oppressions to be understood in the dominant discourse becomes glaringly obvious when exploring issues in the Anita Hill/Clarence Thomas hearings. Thomas and his conservative supporters exploited race and racism as a cover for political leverage and blatant misogyny. Without race even being mentioned, Thomas became the proverbial “best-qualified man for the job,” (Brodsky Lacour 1992: 140) by attacking all women’s credibility, and reinforcing White male elites’ belief in meritocracy.

The word ‘race’, became a powerful speech act (Brodsky Lacour 1992: 136), transforming Thomas into the victim whose assailants were also his judges and defenders. Liberal critics were paralyzed by the refusal to recognize their own prejudices and were therefore incapable of a collective and responsive race/gender analysis. Race, gender, all other modes of oppression became meaningless categories, freeing everyone from thinking about it at all, everyone that is, who can afford not to (Brodsky Lacour 1992: 133). What is compelling about Lacour’s writings is the means by which the dominant discourse renders everything that concerns marginalized people meaningless. In my formal education I have been inundated with the arguments put forth in dominant discourse, intellectually, but in my mouth I tasted the feelings of denial. I wore them on my skin, and breathed in those words. I tasted, felt and thought flavours, sensations, and conceptions that however bitter,
were empty—empty, because they did not, and could not, name anything or anyone that was important to:

Critical race theory names the injury and identifies its origins, origins that are often well disguised in the rhetoric of shared values and neutral legal principles. When ideology is deconstructed and injury is named, subordinated victims find their voices (Delgado 1993: 13).

Naming the specific ‘harms’ of racism and other oppressions in the law is an empowering first step in understanding both why race and other loci of oppressions are salient, and why such oppressions infuse both everyday experiences and systemic practices and policies (Dei 1996a: 64). I did not have the words before to describe feelings of becoming unraveled in arguments with openly and covertly racist White people. Critical race theory deconstructs the magic of ‘rights discourse’ that works to privilege the ‘might’ of the individually privileged. In deconstructing a monolithic ‘Whiteness’, proponents of critical race theory construct a range of strategies and stories of intersecting oppressions to weave different realities and perspectives into the law (Matsuda 1993: 15).

**Black Feminist Theories**

If critical race theory is the key to the inclusion of the larger Tapestry, then, the Black feminist theories offer to me the secrets of sewing my own Ancestors Quilt. From Patricia Hill Collins I have learned to transform my notions and standards of what we consider to be ‘intellectual,’ or ‘theory’ or ‘scholarship’. I was immediately lifted by the power of her vision, yet weighted by the responsibility to work towards its fulfillment. In her simple answer to the question “What is Black feminism?” she states that it is “a process of self-conscious struggle that empowers women and men to actualize a humanist vision of community” (1990: 39). Of course such a humanist conception is problematic; other Black feminist theorists accuse Collins of claiming, in *Black Feminist Thought*, an epistemic privilege of having a “naïve essentialist universal” notion of Black womanhood that echoes the privilege claimed by dominant knowledge producers (Mirza 1997: 4-5). For Mirza, Black feminism is a primarily political project marked by “strategic multiplicity and
contingency" which has a single purpose to "excavate the silences and pathological appearances of a collectivity of women assigned as the 'other' and produced in a gendered, sexualized, wholly racialized discourse" (1997: 21). Other writers conceive of Collins' strategic unification as a means to, but not the goal of, political action (Bakare-Yusuf 1997: 82). Although both points of contention are founded in concerns of repeating the mistakes of the dominant, Hill Collins herself means her work as a cohesive departure point to help other Black women to "find their voices" (1990: xv).

I imagine domination of Whiteness as a tapestry of a single thread, representing a sphere of discussion only in the early stages of contextualization and theorization (see Ignatiev 1995 and McClintock 1995). Whereas Blackness, indeed Black womanhood, has for hundreds of years and in hundreds of ways been examined. Hill Collins stitches her patches a little too tightly, and the end result has a few jagged edges, but to me that is very different from homogenizing her subjects. She first tries to form an informal consensus by citing the "work and deeds" of many Black women thinkers, living and passed on (Cooper, hooks, Lorde and others). She is very careful to temper this vision of the future with the reality that must first struggle with existing power inequities and to include class and sexuality analysis (237). I don't consider her nominal appraisals sufficient when she is claiming inclusion of many voices, but neither would I reject the aspect of Collins' work which offer very useful strategies for community action and personal healing.

Action, healing, struggle and empowerment are all effectively articulated for the "outsider-within" perspective (Hill Collins 1990: 12). This concept offers strategies and insights into networking and community practices through the bridge of developing useful connections among the researcher, her participants and the community. Hill Collins holds that Black woman academics are excluded from mainstream (White male centered), feminist (White female centred) and Afrocentric (Black male centered) intellectual traditions through our multiple positions of
subordination (12). Although our knowledges have been suppressed in all three paradigms, the particular strengths and strategies that relatively privileged Black women must develop may cause conflict within their identities, families and communities (11-12). As the author discusses the importance of self-reliance, appropriated by the self-help reactionaries, she histories independence as it is learned in the family, tracing our patterns to their West African roots (121) and survival of extended family and community networking practices through enslavement and more ‘modern’ forms of economic and sexual exploitation.

Hill Collins doesn’t ignore the widening class divide in Black people that mirrors trends in the general population in North America. The spirit of “race uplift” is still practiced largely as a middle class duty where working-class and poor women are considered to lack a strong moral foundation (1990: 152-3). The Black middle-class is socialized to obtain university degrees, but education is sought and valued by all classes whether sought to ‘uplift the race’ or for material advancement (153-54). Education may be a catalyst to secure better lives and personal fulfillment for all classes. Personal development need not be secondary to the survival and development of family and community. When ‘learning’ is valued as much as ‘schooling’, wealth and information are shared; community and outsider knowledges co-exist (Dei and James 1997). As “outsiders-within”, educated Black women have an opportunity to reconcile the ruptures caused by constantly moving between dominant and marginalized spaces by centring such concepts as sisterhood, family, community, mothering, everyday activism, and folk wisdom (Hill Collins 1997: 13).

A LITERATURE REVIEW OR A SEARCH FOR LITERATURE

When researching Black women professionals, the review of literature often becomes a literal search for literature. As I searched I quickly realized I would find few pieces addressing my many research interests. The dearth of material addressing my specific subject position can be
characterized by a series of 'not's' — i.e. 'not' in a Canadian context nor about women in the legal profession nor from student perspectives, nor specifically about Black women. Most importantly for my purposes, much of the work is 'not' explicitly written by Black women for Black women about networking for community action. In order to network and practice acts of anti-oppression, we must first be admitted to the academy, and empowered to stay. In their report to the Special Advisory Committee to the Canadian Association of Law Teachers, Trish Monture-Angus, Joanne St. Lewis and others outlined the many barriers. As of 1990, nearly three per cent of lawyers were visible minority members, when we comprise nearly six per cent of the general population. Native people are even more under-represented (Alvi 1992: 178-9).

If there are few Black women in the law, there are correspondingly few writers. I found it difficult to glean the information concerning all my areas of interest from the available writings. Therefore, I will limit my focus by first examining the writings I have organized into: (i) The debate of mentoring versus role modelling, a concept that in practice ranges from one-on-one relationships to community activism. (ii) The writing on networking, per se, is much more tentative and is largely found in implicit meaning, anecdotes and observations. Thus, networking is often conceived by these writers as the absence of alienation and isolation.

There is a dearth of material that address my specific subject position, within academia and other sites that are linked to community practice. First, most of the studies that examine Women of Colour in the law, and specifically African women of the Diaspora do so within the American context, where the Black populations differ (in varying degrees) from the Canadian context in: ethnicity, percentage of general population, demographics, immigration, migration, socio-economic factors and prominence in the national socio-political make-up (see Matsuda 1993, Crenshaw 1993, P. J. Williams 1993). However in employing critical race theory I felt that I could be part of creating
something; something to which I could one day contribute, something born out of more than an understanding of marginalization, de-centring, and the very denial of my own identity. European-masculinist theories leave me empty, because they do not, and cannot, name anything or anyone that is important to me. The entire construction of ‘dominance’ has as the root, the purpose of absolving the beneficiaries of ‘Whiteness’ from repairing the harm of multiple oppressions. Critical race theory names the “injury and identifies its origins,” allowing “subordinated victims” to find a platform for resistance (Delgado 1993: 13).

Second, many general studies of higher education do not necessarily address specific legal contexts, ideologies and educational cultures. They are, however, concerned with important issues in the formation and incorporation of identities. In problematizing the myth of the “strong Black woman,” Dionne Brand writes that we constantly struggle against the internalization of White beauty standards, sexual exploitation, the patronization of the Black family, and vulnerability to immigration scape-goating. Despite this, Black women continue to organize to fight for change as individuals and through groups. Brand concludes by calling for Black women to continue to struggle against state legislation, patriarchy, and capitalism at home and at work (Brand 1993: 297).

Third, many works are concerned with producing recommendations for institutions to attract and/or gain equity for Black women students, professors and practitioners. Corrine Sparks, the first African Canadian Women to become a judge, wrote an appendix to a report of the Canadian Bar Association on the status of women in the profession that outlines challenges and opportunities, but focuses on producing recommendations to the schools, courts, and firms that are the agents of discrimination. Other studies gather information about the experiences of Black women in academe that also make valuable recommendations for student strategies, but lack a substantial discussion of community development (see Moses 1989, Sparks, 1993).
Lastly, most of the Canadian articles and studies are written by and for established Women of Colour academics and practitioners and victims in the legal system. Living so far from the centre precludes any real or imagined claim to an unproblematic identity in the eyes of the dominant, which inevitably affects one’s life experiences, especially for people in conflict with the law, or seeking redress from the courts. Racialized women literally disappear, figuratively and literally; we can be un-named. Even when other Women of Colour are attempting research, many of us are hidden behind our colonizers’ names and are denied the option of recognizing multiple identities that form the basis for our claims for redress and recognition. (See Duclos 1993, Neallani 1992, Thornhill 1985).

My larger goal is to adapt research practices that contribute to a general understanding of combining theory and community interests in the specific site of legal education. I quickly realized that I could not employ an epistemology that recognizes the story of White dominance to be the first story, the best story, the most legitimate and believable story. The story of our own erasure is so inviolate that for a Black woman scholar, years of education, wealth and position will never remove the conspicuousness of Blackness, the incapacitation of ‘Womaness’ in the dominant discourse (Neallani 1992). Informing this discussion of the need for minoritized persons to create knowledges for our communities, is the concept of integrative anti-racism studies. The idea and practice of integrative anti-racism confronts the exclusivity and essentialism involved in disconnecting singular sites of oppression which must be understood as “multiple, intersecting and concurrent” (Dei: 1996, 69-70). To attempt to do otherwise would be to negotiate the denial of self as subject and compromise possibilities of building effective links within and across communities. To stake comfort or identity in one locus of oppression is to seek a “toe hold of respectability” in the dominant discourse, which implicitly requires the performance and further validation of Christianity,
ability and heterosexuality, and systems of dominance (see Hill Collins 1990, Razack 1996).

**Experiences of Black Women in the Law: Variations on the Theme of Networking**

**Mentoring and Role Modelling**

In this section I include writings by Black women who as professionals, professors and students, highlight the many different voices and experiences of the Canadian and American legal context. A mini-debate among Black women law professors in the U.S., and echoed by Professor Carol Aylward and the women I am interviewing for my study, concerns definitions and practices of ‘role modelling’ and ‘mentoring’. For an extremely succinct definition, a role model ‘is,’ and mentor ‘does’. Aylward, the first Black woman law professor at Dalhousie Law School, mentions only role modelling in her discussion of the high expectations law school administrators place on their racialized faculty, who are then expected to “bring intellectual diversity,” be role models, set high academic standards for themselves, while under the constant pressure of trying to succeed in a poisoned work environment (1995: 497). On the other hand, a strident proponent of mentoring is Lani Guinier, who writes:

> Presenting black women law professors primarily as role models ignores their roles as scholars, and intellectual leaders whose presence on a faculty might alter the institution's character, introducing a different prism and perspective.... She contributes to legal education not merely through her physical presence but by pulling from the richness and rootedness of her experience, by continuously reaching for the transformative possibilities of her role. (1995:76)

As a mentor Guinier aims to empower through “feedback, guidance, and sharing” (1995: 77) rather than setting examples through role modelling, and feels that although she has a responsibility to engage racialized students, she must mentor all students, as a way to transform the facade of “neutrality” that privileges the White male perspective (75-76). Anita Allen also talks about the dangers of superficial role modelling policy to Black women who are not the institutions’ “positive minority” ideal (1995: 82). Allen argues even anti-affirmative action backers may support role modelling on utilitarian grounds (84), which further “whispers the inferiority” of marginalized
persons who are valued, recognized, and compensated only for our ability to “guid[e] our kind” (84-85). Therefore, Black women role models are relegated to the “tiresome, unappealing” task, a responsibility which dominant law professors have largely failed, and would continue to neglect (85). The logical extension of such an argument would mean solving the problem of ‘supplying’ role models simply by removing the ‘demand,’ which would be marginalized students and progressive White students. Both the past and present appointments indicate which group bears the greater brunt of such exclusion (Hagan and Zimmerman 1993, Sparks 1993).

**Alienation and Networking**

Given the nature and audience (elite legal practitioners) of the works published in expensive anthologies and legal journals, the authors’ address the injustices of domination and consequences of alienation in an astute political strategy. Sparks does write a section entitled ‘Networking,’ but this is conceived only in terms of gaining access to employment (63). In other sections Sparks discusses how the lack of networking can debilitate Women of Colour. In “A Cause to Success”, Sparks maintains that succumbing to the temptation to “mimic[ ] the behaviour and attitudes of White men and ignoring sexist slights can make it easier to be accepted and assimilated by white, male classmates or colleagues,”; an ‘assimilation’ which she attributes to the success of White female lawyers. This kind of success comes at a cost to women’s mental health and self-esteem, yet Sparks leaves the discussion to outline the nature of discrimination of law school admissions policies and the hiring practices of law firms. In fact, the bulk of the piece is devoted to equity claims that prepare the reader for the extensive recommendations for the Canadian Bar Association and provincial law societies that conclude the report.

Sparks recommends the establishment of a “race and ethnic mentoring system”, changes to curriculum, and administrative policies that would support these women upon entering the legal
academy. However, the report fails to outline the values of including the experiences and competencies of Women of Colour, as well as their bodies. The recommendations are structured as ‘rights claims’ to inclusion of individuals within marginalized groups without emphasizing the responsibility, indeed, the opportunity of including diverse voices for the transformation of dominant and marginalized students alike (Razack: 1991: 16-17). Thus, making past and present inequities vulnerable to a struggle of competing claims on existing rights without dismantling dominant structures (Razack 1991: 18).

Carol Aylward recognizes the importance of being part of the dominant structures when faced with challenging her well-intentioned White colleagues to be effective allies. Aylward refers to the example of professors McKay and Devlin who wrote an influential essay describing Dalhousie Law School’s affirmative action program to benefit Nova Scotian Black and indigenous Mi’kmaq communities. She respects her colleagues for supporting affirmative action policies and criticizes them when they negate the practices of power-sharing they purport to hold by speaking for marginalized peoples. For Lani Guinier, the consequences of exclusionary hiring practices in most law schools is that there are “too few minorities to go around” for committees, student supervisions and the institution’s demand for “spokes-modelling”. A “spokes-model”, a category from the television show Star Search where attractive women and men who were rated for “poise, looks and articulation” (Guinier 1995: 80n) as a response to tokenism where marginalized professors say little of substance, as long as they are visible proof of the institution’s alleged commitment to diversity. As marginalized professors’ ability to thrive is compromised, White faculty members consolidate their power (Aylward 1995: 498):

White male law professors can (if they wish) arrange to be in the company of colleagues of their race all the time. They can be assured of finding a publisher for their article on affirmative actions. They can be assured of having their voices heard in Faculty Council, or in any group of which they are members (498).
While dominant faculty members experience this ‘network’ of scholarly and professional support, marginalized professors must be aware that their every word and action may jeopardize their own careers. Aylward calls for a shift in the balance of power, that will in turn empower marginalized faculty (1995: 499).

In the process of her criticisms and expressing her justified anger, Aylward underestimates her own privilege and power. As the director of the equity programme and one of few racialized professors, she does have options to initiate practices that would both empower herself and capitalize on the staff and student support that is already available. By actively mentoring her students and outreaching to her community, and fostering political awareness, Aylward would strengthen her position in the academy, establish a base with which to find spiritual renewal and provide her students and community members with a valuable resource. In effect, a useful mentor becomes like a Gramscian “organic intellectual” who links theoretical consciousness of the academy with practical activism in the community (Hesch 1995: 99-100).

Lani Guinier echoes Aylward’s sense of isolation but also discusses the possibilities of empowerment of voice through networking and coalition-building. Guinier writes of her negative experiences in law school, and the difficulty in voicing them to her White male and Black male colleagues who in turn, articulate their “loving recollections” (1995: 74). These images are briefly contrasted with her gaining strength with another Black woman who validated her experiences. This validation enabled her to “[find] her voice” when speaking to young Women of Colour at a Yale Law School conference (1995: 74). Guinier shares personal challenges of “multiple consciousness” a “bifurcated thinking” (Matsuda 1996: 5) that complicates her relationships with male colleagues and even her family (Guinier 1995: 75). Guinier also discusses being rooted in community affiliations and building coalitions with like-minded scholars (1995: 77). She, like Richard Delgado, considers
sharing stories as an act of anti-subordination, fighting for a voice in the midst of an environment of active and tacit silencing (Guinier 1995: 77).

Anita Allen writes that although representation of Black women in the academy is the necessary component to ensure empowerment, without the voice to resist marginalization in the academy it is impossible to guarantee that we may exercise power to build coalitions with other marginalized groups, promote socio-economic enhancement, give voice to our concerns, and transform institutional priorities from positions of power (83). Yet, Allen’s methods of practice are individualistic; Black women with the power should be leading and speaking for the community. We would still not be completely integrated into our communities, but would be welcome to share our resources. I am not ready to accept the role of being a visitor, however welcome, in my own community. Allen’s practices do not address the class rifts that may arise from gaining a privileged position relative to your base community. Conversely, Tauna Lovell Banks writes at least of having Black women colleagues as she relates a story of her “five well-dressed” friends riding in an elevator whose very presence scared White women from entering (Lovell Banks 1995: 98). Banks mentions the nervous laugh that ensues, the ‘mask’ each woman employs, but again the reader is told little else.

Esmeralda Thornhill’s often quoted article still stands as a powerful indictment of White feminist maternalism. The sisterhood that Thornhill describes is a close relative of Hill Collins’ conceptualizations of humanism, but first, Thornhill demands Black Women share in “appraisal power” – the power to be part of the formation and reformation of the female subject within a Canadian context (1985: 157). She outlines a network of sorts, one that aims to share our “other-mothering” expertise honed through experiences of enslavement and racist immigration policies. Thornhill specifically refers to the Canadian government’s West Indian Domestic Scheme of the
1955 which exposed Southern women to exploitation from their employers (see also Silvera 1993 and Carty 1994). In return, she demands White women share their power and desist in their own oppressive practices (Thornhill 1985: 160). Echoing many of Thornhill’s demands in an article written four years later, Jacinth Herbert incorporates more Western theory and statistics, and writes in a reflective style, but nonetheless carries a determination to be heard. In working with Simone de Beauvoir’s construction of ‘Otherness,’ Herbert also calls for a sisterhood, but her argument implies that power inequalities of White feminists relative to women marginalized on the basis of “race, ethnicity, age, physical ability, religion and sexuality”, is a result of our exclusion from the subjecthood of the category “woman” (Herbert 1989: 279).

**TOWARDS A WORKING THEORY OF INTERLOCKING OPPRESSIONS**

When I read their images such as the Black woman as “surrogate man,” (Thornhill 1985: 159) graphic examples of violence in slavery, and rhetorical styles, and statistics that indicted mainstream pretensions at equality, I didn’t so much read them as experience them. I balked at the bare essentialisms that peppered the articles. Then I sobered, very quickly, when I realized that emotions and professional capital that appeared on those pages were literally written in the blood of our ancestors. It was my body they were fighting for, my raced, gendered, sexualized and classed self, and they were fighting with fierceness that could reflect the anguish of a woman under siege. I too would be under siege, like the women I am studying (I. M. James 1996d).

In keeping with a multiple identity and multiple foci, I have framed this study to draw on many scholars and disciplines. The foundation of my framework builds on the understanding that the race, gender, class, sexuality, language and religion, other loci of oppressions and the structures through which they are articulated, such as systems of law, education, and government are ultimately interrelated and interdependent. To actively resist one site of oppression sometimes only serves to
reinforce the oppression on other sites. The concept of “integrative anti-racism studies” argues for confronting the exclusivities and essentialisms involved in the singular discussion of social positioning:

The integrative anti-racism acknowledges our multiple, shifting and often contradictory identities and subject positions. Borrowing from post-modernism, it rejects meta-narratives or grand theories. It, in effect, calls for multiplicative, rather than additive, analyses of social oppression (Dei 1996a: 70).

‘Intersecting’ or ‘interlocking’ oppressions mean more than re-inscribing the additive analysis of race, gender, class’ which follows White scholars’ admissions of privilege, and pledge to examine their own complicity in dominance (Agnew 1996: 3). Such pledges are not often found throughout the body of these confessional works, and even more rarely lead to political action. As integrative approaches, intersectional and interlocking analyses critically challenge the players and policies that perpetuate the cycle of oppression, while intersectionality is a discursive, analytical, restorative, and deconstructive framework that aims to “disrupt the tendencies to see race and gender as exclusive or separable categories” and link “current concepts with their political consequences, and real world politics with postmodern insights” (Crenshaw 1993: 114). As held by Kimberlé Crenshaw ‘intersectionality’ means finding the junctions where oppressions meet and deconstructing the quantitative and qualitative legal, socio-economic and psychological aspects of occupying a many-layered subject location. Intersectionality, therefore, is a framework though which ‘simple’ cases of discrimination may be analyzed, contextualized then challenged in legal, economic and political arenas.

On the other hand, an interlocking analysis is a political, constructive and most importantly, transformative framework that exposes how subject locations are secured by the dominant power and articulated through the disempowerment of the subordinated. Although the constructs of anti-racism, Black feminism, critical race theory and socialism each offer an important analysis, when considered singularly the frameworks lose some of their meaning when applied to specific subject
locations in a Canadian context. Class analysis based on White middle-class family, education and economy patterns fails to fully account for factors such as a downward mobility of immigration, underemployment relative to education, an extended family economy or a dynamic life-time cycles of family structures present in minoritized communities that Caribbean and other racialized people may experience (Mirza 1992). These factors are directly mitigated by race, ethnicity and gender stereotyping that are uniquely and differentially articulated in each community, and in the body of each person. For example, when police officers stripped-searched Audrey Smith on a Toronto street (Philip 1995: 13), it was not because she was ‘poor’ or ‘Black’ or ‘woman,’ it was because she was “poorBlackwoman” and in the eyes of the White men who degraded themselves by committing such an action she was ‘immigrantsub-humandmgdealer’.

In the media Smith was described as “bovine,” “simple,” “lump”. As the early details of the Bernardo/Homolka killings were being revealed, Karla Homolka was described as “Barbie,” “Mona Lisa,” and “fairy tale princess,” (Philip, 1995: 13). Smith was given sympathy because she appeared too slow and matronly to know better, her race and outsider status demonized, whereas the blond and petite Homolka was considered too angelic to be truly guilty, her race and ethnicity a non-issue. An intersecting analysis would rightly accuse liberal legalism and White feminism of failing to reconcile the conflicting articulations, failing to analyze how racial and ethnic insinuations turned the WASP family of Mr. And Mrs. Teal into the “rap music” (read Black) influenced individuals of Paul Bernardo and Karla Homolka. The same efficient justice system that sent police officers to question Bernardo about the ‘Scarborough Rapes’ is the same one that decided that he was too clean (read White) to be a credible suspect (I. M. James 1996b). An intersecting analysis would uncover the implicit reading of the criminal code that ‘blondes are more innocent’; this is backed up by the socio-economic realities that ‘blondes’ are under-policied, under prosecuted, highly employed and tend to
be English speaking citizens (Ontario 1995). An interlocking analysis would look further than the justice system for answers.

Besides aiming for equity behind and in front of the bench, and seeking economic reparations and political representation (St Lewis 1996), we must work for the erosion of the hegemony of the dominant discourse that makes 'innocent blond' a quasi legal statement. Activists, scholars, judicial professionals, either conscious or no, are actively enabling the flow of discourse in and out of political and social currency. Every ounce of relative power and influence could be employed to commence and/or strengthen strategies such as flexible coalition building, fighting for activist representation within the system, lobbying for specific changes from outside the system, and working to be consistently active in our communities. Every strategy needs to be employed, then reexamined, rejected or refined.

Another example of the oppressions of racism, sexism, imperialism, genocide, capitalism, patriarchy and ableism are all at work in the Indian Act's disenfranchisement of the children of Aboriginal women and 'non-status' men, where children of status men and non-status women maintained their 'official birthright' (Prentice. 1988: 396-7). The intersectionality approach would bring forward the claims, motives and competing interests of all the relevant stakeholders such as the women themselves and their children, conflicts among the elders, and hereditary and traditional chiefs, the government's exploitation of the conflict, and the justice system's complicity in providing a legal framework for inequality. Intersectional lines of inquiry might focus on the women's need to find a remedy, the oppositional forces at work, how Native women could be empowered to commit social action for themselves and communities.

The idea of interlocking oppressions goes further than intersectionality, by recognizing that these concepts are related, and are articulated together in society. However, this recognition is only
a semantic correction unless we build the coalitions and partnerships on economic, political and socio-cultural levels that demonstrate that all oppression must be fought together if any are to make any lasting gains:

...a system of interlocking race, class and gender oppression expands the focus on analysis from merely describing the similarities and differences distinguishing these systems of oppression and focuses greater attention on how they interconnect. Assuming that each system needs the others in order to function creates a distinct theoretical stance that stimulated the rethinking of basic social science concepts (Hill Collins 222).

To illustrate the notion of 'interlockedness', clasp your hands together, fingers interwoven. When you try to lift one or even two fingers the remaining digits remain entangled, and if by some incredible effort you lift a few fingers, the rest are still attached to the same hand, still part of the same body and you have only worked to lessen the possibility that the other digits will work free (Razack 1997). Of course, such a simple demonstration belies the incredible breadth of readings such an integrative approach implies. If we use the same example of Native women being denied equal rights treatment, an interlocking analysis would discover that the rights were sought not simply for economic security, but to secure resources for educational and health initiatives fought by patriarchal band councils. It would examine how the government and laws came to exercise a policy of partial genocide, internal conflicts and land grab law well into the 1980s.

Above all, an interlocking analysis would also examine ways in which Native women's traditional powers have devolved since European invasion, and challenge the justice system's implicit and explicit employment of racist notions of innocence and guilt. An interlocking analysis would dispute the validity and morality of the structures and systems that sanction the oppression, while offering a system of alliances and coalitions that could stop the cycle of division and rule. Such a theory would recognize that the cohort of ableism is sexism, the action of heterosexism is homophobia, the security of xenophobia is 'Othering' the enemy of acceptance is not rejection, but tolerance, completion of racism is genocide, and so on and so on in a seemingly endless cycle. No
one location is present without several others.

The Canadian government's relentless attempt at the genocide of Native people to steal their land secured the acceptance of the enslavement of Africans to gain capital. The very presence of People of Colour, and the refusal of Native people to disappear, provoked racist xenophobia that translated into racist immigration policies favouring Northern Europeans. In turn, the massive settlement of White immigrants, and the discouragement of 'Others' secured the government's occupation of the stolen land, and the establishment of the Canadian state. Throughout our bloody and shameful history of the internment of the Japanese citizens, head-taxes for the Chinese immigrants, refusals of Holocaust survivors, and the destruction of Black settlements such as Africville, marginalized people have been separated from our allies in dominant institutions and in our communities.

However, despite the need for a coalition of allies, strategic emphasis on specific issues may be necessary to combat the dominant acts of subordination, i.e. the denial of the continuing salience of race, or setting up and controlling structures and resources that force marginalized groups to compete against each other for government grants and political influence (Dei 1996a). With state sponsored multiculturalism, governments foster division and discourage coalition building among subordinated groups in the name of preserving Canada's so-called mosaic (Agnew 1996) while at the same time passing racist immigration and employment laws aimed to push the already disadvantaged further into the margins (Razack 1991 and Silvera 1993). When we ask for rights as Black women, the justice system and human rights commissions tell us that we may be either Black or a woman (Duclos 1993). When we aim to surmount racism and become independent and successful, our community and social scientists tells us that our gains are made on the backs of Black men. When we wish to be safe from violence in our homes we know that while the punishment for
White male abusers are fines or probation, the punishment for our men may be jail time (Ontario 1995) or an 'accidental' police shooting. In conclusion, an integrative interlocking analysis has as its core the explicit recognition that all oppressions are inextricably linked, and minoritized stakeholders need to coordinate strategies for lasting and effective change.

In Chapter Three, I formulate a discussion of how the epistemology forwarded in critical race theory, Black feminism and integrative anti-racism may be translated into an integrative methodological analysis and practice that incorporates the experiences of legal practitioners and the articulations of interlocking theory. By addressing issues of the researcher/participant subject positioning and specific questions of ethics and responsibilities in my research design, data collection and analysis I hope to lay the foundation for the second half of this work, where I outline (Chapter Four), analyze (Chapter Five) and conclude (Chapter Six) the findings of my research.
CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGICAL DIRECTIONS

The book was blue, the one I was looking for and finally found. The book cover was light blue with large black letters. In the centre I saw an orange-brown face speaking into the ear of a yellow-brown one. The profile of the man was speaking into the ear of the woman's half face through horizontal strips of a rising sun. His mouth open, hers closed, his gaze looking beyond to shapes that evoke a non-Western country, somewhere people are different shades of brown. Was it that woman's half face that was supposed to be "Listening for a Change?" Inside there is a photo of three Ethiopians practicing interview techniques. The caption tells me that they are role-playing the "insensitive interviewer" and the "monosyllabic informant" (Slim and Thompson: 1995: 84).

METHODOLOGY

Testimony and Subject Position: A Question of Ethics and Power

Methodological questions and the resulting methodology encompasses much more than practices and techniques of data collection and writing that fall under the rubric of Research Methods. Both aspects are necessarily complementary (Essed 1991: 54), and many feminist theorists would insist that the philosophy behind methodology, data collection and the specific methods stem from each other, and must be linked to the empowerment of women (Fonow and Cook 1991). As Philomena Essed argues:

Only by taking subjective experiences of racism seriously can we study how Black women in their daily lives strategically use beliefs, opinions, acquired knowledge about racism, and other heuristics of interpresentation to account for their experiences of racism as an intrinsic part of everyday life. It is important and inevitable that we rely on subjective reality constructions because the complexity, depth, and multitude of experiences cannot simply be observed by, for example, a participant investigator (1991: 59).
What I am doing, what anyone who talks to people is doing is collecting oral testimony. I wrote the requisite ethical review for thesis work with 'human subjects', and by the end of it, the women, 'we', had been transformed into the subjects, 'they'. I had adopted an impersonal language in first draft of some of my early writings for this paper, so I dutifully changed the words, which did nothing more than make the stilted and distant writing even more evident. If this is what I was writing, then what was I doing? Black British feminist Safia Mirza explains leaving my own identity unexplored would leave my research open to the pervasive domination of Whiteness:

Whiteness: that powerful place that makes invisible, or reappropriates things, people and places it does not want to see or heard, and then through misnaming, renaming or not naming at all, invents the truth - what we are told is 'normal', neutral, universal, simply becomes the way it is (1997: 3).

Following the normalization or normative properties of Whiteness, paradigms such as leftism, Marxism, and specifically feminism are constructed in Eurocentric epistemology and practice. But it is not White feminists, or all feminism espoused by White women which I seek to refuse (Mirza 1997), but the imperial feminism that "comes from a White perspective, and universalizes it" (Aziz 1997: 70, emphasis original).

In this refusal I do not seek to build a Black Feminism or Womanism ((charles) 1997) that seeks to speak for all oppressed women, and results in exclusion or homogenization. Instead I wish to form a theory and resulting methodology that recognizes and incorporates difference. To balance competing interests without subscribing to a hierarchy of oppression. To speak personally and specifically without claiming universality, nor an anti-theoretical stance which would privilege experience without critical reflection. The ‘networking approach’ seemed to be the method best able to satisfy both my interests as a Black woman interested in activism, and as researcher in a White dominated institution which demands a particular kind of scholarship. Fitting the pieces together meant forming the work to excise the linear/dichotomous from my conceptualization of my world. Theory and practice could not be separated; I could not abrogate the responsibility that
being a researcher in my own community entails, nor ignore the implications of power that such research might entail.

Kamala Visweswaran addresses some of the above issues when she discusses Judith Stacey’s concept of the “delusion of alliance,” to negate conflicts of power that often infects the feminist ethnographer (1994: 90). Visweswaran’s analysis places the informants’ agency and specific strategies at the centre of the narrative (91-92). Her solution to the problem of authority is to “offer a decidedly less authoritative account so that readers continually question it as ethnography (91). In practice this means constant citations, informal style, first person pronouns and large blocks of narratives. Indeed, that is the way I write the narrative chapter of this work, and through it remind myself that I am translating a medium of thought, of conversation, of body language and tones of voice, to flat sheets of paper. The “unseen eye” of the writer almost disappears, but does this mean that the seen observer has any less power? Reading Visweswaran made it very clear that inscribing radical methodology into ethnographic practices and writing is fraught with pitfalls, especially when laying the seeds for your own criticism are written into the text. Yet, perhaps setting the too high expectations, is not the failure of either the person or goal, but a challenge to the reader to find another approach.

To further the process of reclamation, I must make the connections among the macro- and micro- sites of oppression including race, gender, sexuality, ability, class, and others. Without the connections the only alternatives to the isolation of the academy is to become a “native informant” who is marginalized as the ‘proximate other’ or the “information retriever” who gathers knowledge in her/his community of origin for Western consumption (Razack 1996, Spivak 1996). With that knowledge in mind, it seemed as though I could find no alternative in my research other than to subscribe to the colonialist project to find ‘natives’ in order to create knowledge from their
experiences for economic/or academic gain. As marginalized scholars/professionals we need to develop a more critical awareness of our own complicity in continuing inequitable power relations in institutions (Razack 1996) in a step towards understanding (including our families and communities). We may then actively employ the connections in specific sites in communities, with the aid of such strategies as networking (Bannerji: 1993).

In order to centre my research around the women who are key to my study, I wanted to avoid positioning myself as the essential/paramount subject. For although I can only know through my body, I may try to know more than my body, and to do that I must sacrifice certain trappings of Western notions of the 'expert,' without forgetting that it is I, clip-board or binder in hand, who has the last say in the research, and the most to gain materially (Visweswaren 1994). Therefore, I must research myself, my biases, my own subjectivity, identities, in order not to 'subjectify' myself, create myself as subject, or to remove myself in the name of hygienic research (Stanley and Wise 1991: 265-6), but to instead ensure that the researched, the researcher, and the eventual readers may try to separate a few tangled threads, leave some alone, or try to understand the larger pattern.

Reflexive Sociology: Rupturing the Researcher/Participant Relationship

Fonow and Clark’s conception of reflexivity in sociology aims to explore enabling and constricting forces and practices affecting feminist scholarship and notions subjectivity and positioning in the power relationship between researchers and subjects. Deconstructing the power relationship has a dual purpose; to study feminist resistance to patriarchal systems, and to gain the special insight that such analysis and struggle gives (1991: 1). Fonow and Clark argue that their methodology is unlike the romantic remembrances of exotic field work, the scientific and self-conscious examination of the research, the practices, the conditions and methods. I was most impressed by their notion that feminist research may be used as a conscious-raising pursuit. The
NOTE TO USERS

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Years of schooling teach individuals to rename, recategorize, reclassify, and re-conceptualize their experiences. Once familiar and comfortable ways of knowing, behaving, and communicating may seem strange or unenlightened, or be discounted entirely. New values are implanted, new voices acquired... Thus, although African, Latino, Native, and Asian American researchers my possess certain sociological characteristics that bind us and make us recognizable to our home communities, we may have forgotten or been taught to disregard the belief systems of our birth communities... More important than the sociological facts may be the political alignments expected of ethnic minority researchers by community members (Foster 1996: 216).

I know that feminist/integrative anti-racist methodology would not be in and of itself enough to ‘cleanse’ my research of bias and power differentials (Stanley and Wise 1991: 266). Indeed I believe that stating my biases, my viewpoints, explaining how I understand the world is an ongoing and integral part of my research. I cannot ever step out of my body to be the neutral observer so valued in traditional masculinist conceptions of social science. Yet, I also want to avoid the ‘I am every woman’ nature of White feminist conceptions of oppression that concentrates their search for ‘personhood’ into an elitist rights discourse (Taylor and Rupp 1991: 120). As a result, scholars deem nature to be too ‘messy’ and it is neither spoken of nor theorized. Instead we often remove personal reflections and forget that it is the personal present in the political that forms and informs feminist research. Stanley and Wise argue that all research should be ‘grounded’ because it is impossible to separate personhood, what we might say as social location and experience (1991: 266-7), from opportunities for a “transformation of reality” (268). Researchers must recognize, in fact encourage their participants to be active in the data collection process. Both researcher and participants undergo changes, and all involved are changing their perceptions of themselves, each other and the research itself.

**Issues in Liberal Feminist Research: Lessons for my Study**

In opening this discussion of the Holland and Eisenhart study, Educated in Romance, I am recognizing that I found several interesting questions to ask about ways in which Black and White women may have differential experiences of higher education, but ultimately found another
valuable demonstration of why minoritized people need to do our own research. The study, about young Black and White women’s responses to schooling, peer network and gender relations in two colleges in the American South, concludes that women of each race employ different strategies for both entering and negotiating university life. Black women tended to view their work as a means to prosperity, and the White women tended to focus on grade attainment. Both groups were relatively unsuccessful in meeting the goals they had set for themselves (Holland and Eisenhart 1990: 178-9).

Conversely, the women of both races who met, and often exceeded, their goals primarily viewed university as a centre to acquiring expert knowledge and to challenge themselves (Holland and Eisenhart 1990: 174-175). These women also wanted to gain a broad education, persevere in the face of setbacks, place less emphasis on romantic involvements, succeed independently of peers or instructors who would question their abilities, and are more active outside of the classroom (176-7). Most importantly, for my purposes, the Black women who adopted this strategy were more politically active in race issues and university life, and planned to use their expert knowledge to help their communities while “seriously pursu[ing] careers” after university (180).

While I find these distinctions useful in tracking successful strategies, the authors’ methodology is structured around a normalized vision of middle-class White women, while the ‘Other’ is slotted in for contrast, left for further study, or given over to anecdotal/popular speculation. For instance, Holland and Eisenhart write:

Perhaps if we had been able systematically to research the vocabulary of gender types at Bradford [predominantly Black university], as we did at SU [predominantly White university], we would have found the sorts of difference depicted in Spike Lee’s School Daze (1990: 218-9).

If the authors lacked the resources to delve into gender relations of the Black women, what were they studying? This book concludes where a more useful interlocking analysis would begin.
For example, the study found that race, class and age markers divide women who are vulnerable to the hegemony of patriarchal desire (224), and in their concluding questions the writers asked what the [White] women would do when they grew older (which is equated with becoming less attractive) and they could no longer depend upon men for material support (230-1)—Questions which they had already found to have limited import to the Black women they studied.

I intend to ask more probing questions centred in the women’s relationship with their families, communities and identities and at the same time help create an empowering environment where the participants may feel comfortable speaking with someone with a shared background (Etter-Lewis 1996: 8). Of the many questions I ask myself during the research and writing process, the following questions represent my aim to earn and develop the trust a shared subject position “loans” me (Etter-Lewis 1996). First, what factors in home life and early formation of their identities and competencies lead to them to enter law school “ready to engage” (Holland and Eisenhart 1990: 180) with university life and academic work. Second, if as Fuller suggests, young Afro-Caribbean women succeed by displaying “pragmatic and non-conforming” behaviour, (getting good grades without being the “teacher’s pet”) (1990: 49), how do the women in the Network learn this role, and if they do not play this role, in which ways do the strategies they choose to adopt differ? Furthermore, how does membership in the Network inform each women’s role performance in their respective law school experiences, exposures to the legal profession, and engagement in community practice?

Third, although the authors studied peer relationships, the women emphasized individual strategies and goals, at the expense of examining the issues around which Black women formed both group strategies and collectivities, beyond the sharing of material resources. In what specific ways do the Black women of the Network perform their collectivity in the Canadian context, and
how is this idea of collectivity negotiated with the individualism of the liberal ideology of legal education? Furthermore, how do the women in the Network consider to develop and adapt in the face of external (interlocking oppressions, socio-economic conditions) and internal (personality conflicts, individual difficulties) pressures?

Fourth, Holland and Eisenhart depict most of the women in the study as going out into the world alone, and unprepared to encounter forms of gender oppression (1990: 230-1). Are the women in the Network using their legal education to better resist different forms of oppression, and by what means, and with what influences are the strategies developed? What needs are being fulfilled by the Network so that the women continue to be involved, and how are these needs being met in professional, personal, and social issues? Finally, what specific methods would reflect a well considered attempt to answer these questions? That is, how was I going to apply ideas about methodology and ways of thinking into my actual research practice?(I. M. James 1996d)

**Sea Water Fish in Fresh Waters: How to Live in the Weight of the Water**

Felly Nkweto Simmonds, Black British feminist sociologist, discusses another kind of ‘reflexive sociology’ which more critically explains what Fonow and Clark named as “rupture points”. My socialized subjectivity is that of most Black women, I was born into the social world, cultures, and knowledges of Black families and communities, and quickly found that my small world was pathologized in dominant society. As Nkweto goes further to expound on Bourdieu’s metaphor for society:

... I know myself inside and outside myself. My relation to this knowledge is conditioned by the social reality of my [world]... I cannot be, as Bourdieu suggests, a fish in water that ‘does not feel the weight of the water, and takes the world about itself for granted’ The world that I inhabit as an academic, is a White world. This White world has a problematic relationship with blackness (1997: 226).

Her version of reflexive sociology refuses the objectification and silence of the ‘Othered’. Nkweto Simmonds writes about how to actually do sociology, in a way that we can practice what we teach.
The writer explains how ‘knowledge’ and ‘experience’ are inextricably linked, and Echoing Hill Collins, Nkweto aims to use the knowledge that she has gained both “inside and outside” of herself, embodying, de-objectifying and giving voice to the ‘Other’ (232). To give ourselves ‘voice’ and ‘body’ is to empower ourselves yes, but is also an opportunity to inform the entire discipline. Nkewto later cites Bourdieu’s reluctance to situate himself in his own work as an exertion of White male academic privilege; only they have the option to present a disembodied intellect (228-9). Anyone else who cannot perform the ‘mind/body split’ faces consequences of being unqualified for employment or rights, for if our body is made primitive, then our efforts toward equity are mediated through systems in society, such as law and education where we have little say in how our own knowledges and culture are produced. Therefore ‘Others’, moving from our own communities to elite institutions always feel the “weight of the water”. When we do sociology or history or other disciplines as scholar, as she so succinctly writes, we are expected to “be, but not to know about being” (Nkweto Simmonds 1997: 228). Nkweto uses the familiar experience of conference organizers and participants who expect her to be a “race expert” without challenging the silence and detachment of the mostly White audience (1997: 226, see also Monture-Angus 1995) who as scholars themselves may privilege the separation of the “‘facts’ of social reality, from the ‘fictions’ of experience and biological knowledge” (Nkweto Simmonds 1997: 229, from Fanon 1986).

SPECIFIC RESEARCH METHODS

In the Preface, I explained Daisy’s idea of examining women who were already politically and socially compatible, of studying a ‘network’. First however, I needed to gain access to a group of women who would be representative, diverse, organic, and most importantly, progressive. I possessed little interest in studying women whose only focus is socio-economic gain, but neither could I ignore the class implications of pursuing an upper middle class profession. Therefore, I
would need to theorize and consider the socio-economic and political implications of Black women pursuing an education that would affect their respective class, political and cultural relationships with their families, communities and the wider society (Hill Collins 1991: 232).

**Research Design**

Choosing a ‘networking approach’ for this study carries implications far wider than the organizational structure. In choosing women who had already formed bonds, depended upon each other, had mutual respect and expected patterns of behaviour, I would know that they understood ‘community’ to reach beyond the ethnic geography of neighbourhoods (Davis 1996). Second, the networking approach offers me a deeper social and historical context to the research. My observations become more ‘real’ because they can gain some insight into dynamic mediation, the women’s differences and alliances within the group. Third, I would also have some indication how both my research questions and deportment were being taken up by the participants. As the women spoke to one another about my questions, the isolation of ‘being studied’ was mitigated, their knowledges of the process expanded, and their power to intervene in the research increased (Nelson 1996: 189).

Fourth, the number of participants is statistically small, and I interviewed only the participants, as opposed to non-network friends, colleagues or family. Therefore, it was even more important to cross-reference the women’s responses, insights and concerns (Visweswaren 1994). However a major consequence of the network approach was the relative lack of diversity of the subjects, as ‘friends-of-friends’ the participants tended to come from similar ethnic and socio-economic backgrounds if defined as objective categories. Yet, there were significant differences in
how the women subjectively defined themselves and their communities, i.e. 'I was born in Africa' in relation to 'I am African' or 'I am Black'. Therefore, this study presents me with the opportunity to examine the category 'Black' and the participants' naming of their identities and identification (Dei and James 1998).

Originally I intended my study to include a cross-section of women at various stages of their careers. I formed six categories of women: (i) first, second, third year students and articling students (ii) junior practitioners, (iii) professors, (iv) senior practitioners, (v) support staff and law school applicants, and (vi) judges and deans. These categories are fairly arbitrary but are based on the ages and experiences of the participants. However, for two main reasons, most of the women in this study are concentrated in categories (i) and (ii). First, it is only in the last decade that Black women lawyers in Canada number in the hundreds. Most of the women in the Network are in the early stages of their careers. Secondly, the experiences of the forerunners who entered law school in the 1960's and early 1970s are vastly different than the younger women who may expect to have a few if not several Black women colleagues and mentors in law (Guinier 1995: 74-5).

Making Contacts with Participants

At the onset of my research I wondered how I could contact the kind of women that I wanted to interview. Ads and posters in law school seemed be the way to attract the most attention, but I knew, in their position, I would be wary of such intrusion. I knew a few Black women who were attending law school in the Toronto area, but I was unsure of the nature of contacts they had made, and how they situated themselves in the law school setting, and I certainly wanted to avoid telling a friend that she did not meet my criteria. Cannon and Higginbotham describe similar considerations

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4. In relation to the women of the Network, I refer to the continent of Africa, rather than to specific regions or countries to maintain the women's anonymity.
in their study\textsuperscript{5} that examined the effects of race, class and gender discrimination on White and Black women employed as professionals, managers and administrators. The researchers found that anyone who purports to represent diverse samples must spend more time, money and thought in incorporating excluded/marginalized women (Cannon: 1991: 107).

Although my study solely concerned Black women, I still needed to be thorough to ensure that my middle-class, heterosexist, ableist, and other biases didn’t result in a study ‘of me’ instead of a study of women who have nuanced subject positions. Correcting this imbalance in feminist scholarship requires theoretical conceptualizations that include all dimensions of inequality, more complex research designs, and strategies that confront the obstacles to the incorporation of diverse groups of women (1991: 107, also see Zinn 1986).

The researchers found posterizing and letter writing were ineffective in targeting Black women for research participation. Instead, labour and contact intensive methods included: personal presentations to women’s organizations’ meetings; snowball techniques of calling individuals to recommend others for the study; and identifying special newsletters to receive advertisements (Cannon 1991: 112). Researchers anticipated the possible reluctance for Black subjects to participate, knowing that they would have to overcome mistrust or feelings of being set up for exploitation, especially since they came from a predominantly White institution (1991: 113). Therefore, I turned to a friend attending law school, who was involved in feminist and anti-discrimination activism and asked her to recommend a women who was both an activist and well connected to other Black women. She immediately thought of an acquaintance who became an eventual participant.

\textsuperscript{5} A Significant number of the women in the profession group were lawyers raised in both working class and middle-class homes.
Once I spoke with the first woman and conducted a preliminary interview, she put me in touch with another eventual participant who in turn, gave me 'the list' of the network. I initially contacted twelve women, two of whom did not get back to me in time to be included in the study. Of the remaining ten women, Janice, a senior lawyer in her own practice and deeply committed to community work, was unable to schedule a meeting; Patrice, a very successful sports law practitioner at the time of our abridged phone interview was in the process of moving her family to the United States. I will largely exclude Janice from the study, but will incorporate some notes from my conversation with Patrice where relevant. Therefore, over the course of three months I conducted in-depth interviews with the remaining eight women. Each of the women know each other, by close friendship, professional or social association.

Data Collection and the Interviewing Process

When I first contacted each woman, I informed her of the general nature of my research, and explained the general interview, research and writing processes. I asked each woman where she would prefer to be interviewed, and offered my residence, a university setting or other setting, or to travel to her office or home. Of the eight interviews, I conducted four in the homes of participants, three in their present work sites, and one at a former work site. At the time of the interview I gave each woman a letter of informed consent to sign, and again informed of them of their right to withdraw from the study at any time. During each audio-taped interview I took brief observatory notes of both the surroundings and circumstances of the interview’s setting.

I conducted eight in-depth interviews ranging from one to two hours each. In the course of the study I aimed to; (1) give a general description of the network members and functions, using narratives and observations, (2) outline the functioning of the network, and (3) form a discussion to

6. All names of research participants are pseudonyms.
develop my research questions. The questions include: What pressures, commonalties, goals and needs were identified by the members as being instrumental in maintaining the network?, What do these women constitute as 'membership,' and how do members maintain 'good standing'? What roles and functions are individual women performing within the network, and how do they 'perform' themselves in the field of law, and community practice?

During the interviews, I wanted to ask the women a variety of questions concerning their experiences, perceptions and insights into the formation of their identities and role(s) within their families, communities, and places of legal study and practice. However, a battery of questions, no matter how sensitive would position me as the 'knower' and the women as the 'known,' and would render my research a project of "subject retrieval" (Visweswaran 1994: 98-9). Instead, the questions were flexibly formed to slowly develop each woman's level of comfort with the interviewing process. I wanted to give them an opportunity to move from their position of being the 'informant' towards being a 'participant,' if they so choose. Moreover, I wanted to allow the participants to establish a comfortable level of trust in my research goals, and in me, that would be comfortable and productive (Nelson 1996: 190).

**On Ethics and Responsibilities**

The 'networking approach' seemed the one best able to satisfy both my interests as a Black woman interested in activism, and as student in a White dominated society. Fitting the pieces of my exploration method, meant that I could not think in a linear dichotomous manner in which I have been taught (Dei 1996a: 92). Theory and practice could not be separated, and although I could not abrogate the responsibility that being a researcher in my own community entails, I could neither ignore the implications of power that such research might entail.

Despite my best intentions, my first few interviews were both more structured and researcher
controlled than I would have liked. As the interviews progressed, however, I found that I would only ask a few questions and the women would speak at length or not at all. Having discussed the process with each other, later interviewees were both more prepared to answer my questions, and more certain of the direction they wanted the interview to follow. Therefore, I did not ‘push’ on sensitive areas, and I retreated on other issues. I did not feel that I could ethically and honestly delve into their lives in such a preliminary study. I was very aware that each woman was performing herself in a very specific way. They seemed to be conscious of how they presented themselves, took the research process very seriously, and maintained a thoughtful and positive presentation. Given that I told the women I was interested in learning their “best practices” and contextualizing their successful strategies, I received a relatively high amount of trust and openness (Dei 1996c). In return the participants answered my questions to their discretion.

I wanted to ask several question to discern what each woman understood to be the site(s) of struggle for transformative change. How does each woman conceive these sites individually and how does she conceptualize their interconnected nature? Further, I wanted to understand how she practiced, or plans to practice within these sites. Perhaps her participation in the research process may inform her operation in these sites, especially in commitment and practices within multiple communities. Finally, I wanted to gain some understanding of the supports that each woman receives: How do the women position themselves in their families and friendship system? What effect, if any, does a legal education and professional designation have on the kind of support that she seeks from her family, partners or friends? What relationship does she have with the development of her spirituality and sense of identity?

Because of these women’s demanding careers, compounded by family, volunteer and community commitments, I found it sometimes difficult to arrange and keep a rigid interview
schedule. As other researchers in minoritized communities have found, Black women research volunteers have "less free time to devote to the project, were often unable to complete the interview in one sitting, and were more likely to cancel scheduled interviews because of unforeseen circumstance" (Cannon 1991: 114). However, researchers such as Cannon and Higginbotham, did not interpret these circumstances as disinterest, as the women continued to express interest in the study; almost all of the women completed an interview. They also found that women working in established firms had access to administrative staff and answering services to honour time commitments. Also reported is a marked tendency among women in male-dominated professions to have defined spatial and temporal boundaries (Cannon 1991: 114). Therefore, although I expected and received a high level of interest in my work, an interest bordering on excitement, I also knew that I needed to respect that the women maintain very busy personal and professional schedules.

Data Analysis

Once I did meet each participant for their respective interview, I taped the interview session on audio tape and made modest to extensive notes. After every interview I labeled the tape for later transcription. During the labeling process, I gave pseudonyms to each of the women that would help ensure anonymity, but still reflect their ethnic and national backgrounds. In the Higginbotham study (discussed above), the researchers took many preliminary precautions to ensure the women’s comfort with their study. They found that Black women required extensive reassurance and information, especially around issues of privacy and anonymity. Their participants, like my own, were Black middle-class subjects highly visible in the community. In fact they were often singular examples in their specific fields or firms. The Black women also asked for more specific information concerning the future and present usage of the research data, and showed more overall concern with how they would be situated in the research process (1991:114). Although the women I studied were, for the
most part, in the earliest stages of their careers, they are already highly visible in the legal profession and/or Black/African communities.

To further respect the privacy of these women I have altered or coded significant features such as exact ethnic/national background, law school attended, years in practice, etc, (see Appendix II). Furthermore I gave the subjects the opportunity to discuss, amend or append the data, during research and writing processes. During the months I interviewed the women, I transcribed, organized and coded the data. The feedback from the women led me to increase my original fifteen topic ideas to twenty before the interviews. During the interviews the participants tended to offer the most extensive answers in the ten ‘significant’ areas that appear in the Appendix I. For the purpose of producing a more thematic document, I reduced the ten themes to the six major categories that will be introduced in the next chapter.

Possible topics were selected, expanded, reduced or deleted according to the following criteria and considerations. First, the theme matched some of my primary research interests such as the application of critical race theory. However, since fewer than half of the women wanted to discuss the theory, it was given cursory treatment in the narrative chapter. Second, in other areas such as relationships and sexuality, the women were greatly concerned with issues of privacy and trust which limited the discussion to each woman’s personal boundaries. Third, other topics were meant only to be minor, but because most or all of the women expressed particular interest, I expanded the topic. For example, the women’s time in law school classes and in practice; often I had only to ask one question for the participant to speak extensively about her experiences. The length and depth of each theme and sub-themes roughly corresponds to a combination of the interest of the participants, and relevance to networking strategies. Thus, many unexpected topics provided a rich context and background to the formation of the relationships through which the women
network.

Fourth, some topics were generated completely from the interviews, such as the notion of finding opportunities in the United States. These subjects which originated with the women themselves, and when addressed by two or more women, the item would be added to the research questionnaire. Fifth, some topics were excluded because of a miscommunication or my error. In these situations, some of the women’s responses led me to conclude that the questions were unclear or were non-applicable. At other times I believed certain questions and responses required more context and/or experience than I had brought to the interviewing process. Finally, I merged some areas, which garnered modest interest in certain interviews, but offered some insight in the narrative. Other themes such as ‘role modelling and mentoring,’ were merged or re-organized purely for organizational clarity.

While I chose the major themes for representation of the collection of narratives, I chose specific excerpts to represent the complexity of dissonance, synthesis representation, or a combination of the three. Obviously, it is necessary to include narratives from all of the research participants, but the reader should note that the reduction of the original themes meant that the balance of the eight voices was somewhat skewed in the final paper. I also wanted to represent the range of responses each women gave: from emotional, to insightful, to intellectual, to forceful. Secondly I felt that certain ‘exceptions,’ the contradictions, oppositions and differences, found both within each women’s interview and among group’s narratives are important comments in and of themselves, and also demonstrate that the strength of the Network is not in uniformity, but in collectively negotiating differences. Thirdly, I included comments that I felt synthesized an individual women’s comments, or ‘summed up’ the feelings of the group.
During the entire research, interview and writing process I kept a reflective journal which generated the writings and reflections that appear throughout this work. For a truly reflexive research it is paramount to follow the theory of self-interrogation and analysis with the practice of records, notes and questions that reflect the development and change of the research, and the resulting effects on both the researcher and participants (Slim and Thompson 1995). Through the journal and creative writing I accessed other methods of finding connections between my own experiences and my research. I found I was able to explore connections and dissonance without the constraints of a scholarly format. In the next chapter I introduce the six major themes and individual narratives that make connections between the women’s words and actions. In addition, I will combine the narratives, contexts and summaries with my own thoughts and experiences, as well as lay the theoretical and practical foundations for further analysis.
CHAPTER FOUR: 
THE NARRATIVES

Introduction: A Description of the Participants

The Network can be described to an outsider as a list of fifteen to twenty names held by various Black women working or studying in the field of law all across Canada. Yet, the list itself is simply a passport without a visa. The real possibilities of the Network lie in the sisterhood and support that these women offer each other; relationships built on greater commonalities than a shared subject location. What draws these Black women together despite differences in location are, as my informants were quick to explain, their politics, compatibility, competency and commitment. Their ages range from twenty to forty. The women were born into various classes, ethnicities, abilities, socio-economic positions and places of origin. Members are multi-generation African-Canadians, Africans, African Caribbean, or have emigrated from other countries in the Diaspora such as England and the United States. Half (four) of the final participants were born in Canada, or came here when very young, while there rest were born in various West African and Caribbean countries. Six women ‘grew up’ in Canada having received most of their primary and secondary school education in this country. All participants possessed a Bachelor of Arts from a Canadian university before attending law school, and three women possess Masters degrees. The younger women I spoke to have obvious respect for elder, more established members, and look to these women as respected mentors, friends and employers. However age and position are less important than personality,

7. My questions and comments appear in bold text, and unless otherwise stated for this chapter and subsequent chapters, citations are from the 1997 interviews with the eight participants named by pseudonyms in the study.
politics and commitment to determine what leadership roles a woman may take in the collective.

Whether corporate lawyers or legal aid practitioners, all the women in the study describe themselves as being committed to progressive politics and/or research and practice. As described in the previous chapter, I narrowed the original list into six major themes. The first section, (I), in this chapter is also the first question I asked each woman in the interviews: why and how she chose to enter law school. Section II explores issues of identity and identification. The women responded to questions relating to their concepts of ‘Blackness’, ‘identity’, and the meaning of ‘home’. In Section III we discussed the women’s experiences in the profession, drawing threads from their sense of identity to understand what challenges they faced, both in law school and in practice. Moreover, we discussed some of the specific strategies they employed to surmount those challenges. Section IV gives context to the women’s strategies by revealing the supports that informed their successful approaches. Supports include: family, non-network friends and colleagues, partners and relationships and spirituality.

The last two sections explore the mechanism, sites and possibilities of networking. In Section V the women discuss their participation in various Black focused conferences and groups. I also asked them to explicate their notions of ‘role modelling’ and ‘mentoring’. The women shared both their theoretical understanding of collectivity and mutual support, and their practical experience from reflections and stories about the importance of their mentors and Black colleagues. Finally, in Section VI, we explored the transformative possibilities of networking. I asked the participants questions about the theoretical and practical applications of intersectionality/interlockedness in the profession in general, and in networking specifically. It is in this last section that we focus on the actual functioning of the network as well as discuss the alternatives, resistences, and refusals to dominant institutions facilitated by ‘networking’ strategies.
I. WHY DID YOU GO TO LAW SCHOOL?

The very first question I asked everyone I interviewed was “Why did you go to law school?”, which is a slightly different question than “Why did you want to become a lawyer?” I thought that by asking the former question, I could ‘get at the root’ of a decision they made with little or no contact with practitioners, and separated from the so-called glamour and prestige of the legal profession. None the participants’ parents are/were lawyers themselves, although two of the women’s extended family members and parents’ friends are in the profession. Each woman’s reasons were different at first glance, and had multiple origins, however, certain themes did emerge: (1) Parent and family influence or ‘germination’, (2) a need to give social service to their community or larger society, (3) a practical aspiration for socio-economic security, (4) to be a change agent for specific injustices, and finally (5) an expressed desire of uncertain origin.

Alicia’s path to becoming a lawyer involved her mother evaluating each of her children’s best skills and ‘suggesting’ a suitable middle-class profession:

I think my first thoughts of law school was placed in my head by my parents. I remember as a little as a child I had a book of memories at school and as far back as kindergarten someone had written in for me ‘future Profession: lawyer’…. and it was one of those things where your parents say, ‘oh you speak well’, ‘she has a big mouth’, ‘she’s going to be a good lawyer’. And I think that I also had it in my mind that that was what I was going to do, and I think as I got older I thought that it would be a way that I could make some change, a good profession, very versatile. I think I got into it for all of those reasons (1).

Her parents wanted her to have a profession. Alicia thought about her ‘mother’s decision’ for many years, before developing the simple thread of “you should be a lawyer” into a complex weaving of her own. Alicia brought ideas of making a difference in her profession where change would also fulfill her own self-concept and religious responsibilities to use her skills to help others. Like Alicia, Vivia also identified her parents and family as the impetus for choosing law. Although Vivia’s family were involved in various health professions, her family supported her decision to choose another field, as long as she chose a profession. Vivia, her siblings and cousins, like all of the
women I interviewed, were expected to attain as much education as possible, no matter their parents' educational or occupational background. Moreover, in many cases the women held higher career expectations than even their parents (Mirza 1992: 170).

However parental influence is just one of the factors, a second theme appeared. Other women choose law, over many other interests, because the profession seemed to be a tangible way to benefit humanity in general, and Black communities in particular. For example, Francine did not make a “focused” decision to attend law school; “I was into poetry a lot, and so I thought that I should do something more that contributed more to humanity, rather than something so solitary” (1). Francine’s wish to “contribute to humanity” led her to a career in law. Although Francine comes from a middle-class family, her expressions of wanting to help the community is without the self-conscious classism of “race uplift” (Hill Collins 1990: 65). Francine, and another woman named Susan shared with me their achievements in the humanities and the arts. Both women continue to nurture and develop their original interests and envision a day when they will be able to devote more time to their other interests. The women expressed their ‘privilege’ to be in a position to offer legal assistance or to act as mentors much more often than a ‘duty’ to give back to the community (Hill Collins 1990: 149).

A third theme emerged which exposed a very middle class desire to extend general undergraduate education to a practical vocation that would open possibilities of material security. In short, the need for security and respectability; in Susan’s words:

I knew I wanted to continue my education, and I suppose to a certain extent, I had bought into the myth that law school was this respected way in which to do that... it wasn’t because of any life long desire to practice law, or love of the law, and it wasn’t even necessarily because of a particular desire to have a professional designation,.. I knew that I just needed to keep doing something, and that just seemed to be a respectable and viable (1).

Yet, tempered with the search for ‘respectability’ is the need to make real societal changes from a position of power recognized in dominant systems. Later in our discussion Susan related that her
respect for her legal education diminishes as she gains experience in her law practice. Susan positions herself ‘on the inside,’ of legal systems, but is constantly re-thinking her vocational choices as she told me, “part of the frustration is that changes aren’t coming fast enough for me, but at the same time,... I don’t know what to do, should I sit home and write poetry, and is that going to change the world?” (3).

The women who voiced reasons that I have placed in the fourth category came to law school with a specific purpose in mind. Their previous frustrating or disappointing contacts with the justice system spurred them to effect change from within the system. Yvonne changed her career plans after constantly being thrown up against systemic legal barriers in a former occupation. Yet for her, the change was not so much a break with her past, but a continuation of her larger goals:

*I can’t remember when I wanted to go to law school, my undergrad was in [the human services sector] and I practiced a bit and as a result of being very frustrated trying to help individuals, ... I thought that there must be a better way of going about making change, and that probably having knowledge of the law will allow you to actually attack the system as opposed to helping individuals trying to fit within it* (1).

Other women expressed of feeling ‘called’ to become a lawyer from an early age. Marjorie told me, “I guess there were so many reasons. From the time I was young, from my highscool days, I always wanted to be a lawyer, and I don’t quite know why it was just something I always wanted. I liked the idea of being in the courtroom…” (1). Marjorie’s mentor, a White woman lawyer, encouraged her to attend law school, was instrumental in application process and continues to support her. When she becomes frustrated with the day to day “roller coaster” of legal education and practice she finds strength in trusting her instincts.

Of course, most of the women, including those mentioned, would cite a combination of reasons that demonstrated the importance of delving further. At first, Gloria talked about law school as ‘just something to do’, that would fall in line with both her own, and parental expectations, “Basically I knew that I had to have a profession if I wanted to live the kind of like that I wanted to
lead, a more or less comfortable life, and also my parents just also expected that I would be some sort of professional" (1). Yet, later Gloria began talking about the deeper reasons behind her career choice:

...then I did [another profession] and that was so boring so then I figured—and also around the same time, I saw time passing by and I said okay you basically have to do what you are going to do and at the time I happened to be dealing with an issue of abuse in my family when I was younger and I had a lot of anger, and I wanted to become a prosecutor so I could provide some kind of justice for women who had been abused, and [for survivors of] child molesters, it was that fact that propelled me to finally make the move.

I think that the significance of these responses is not determining statistical or even analytic significance from the similarities or differences. Rather, it is remarkable that, despite these differences, each woman has come to the point where she identifies community activism and practice as a major, if not the only reason for continuing her career in the law. Conversely each woman who expresses significant dissatisfaction with law cites barriers against community work as the reason to leave the profession. Materially based reasons for entering the profession may affect, as we will explore later, the nature of activism, but seems to have little bearing on each woman's commitment to the path she is taking. As we shall see below, the Network has become for some of these women more than a support, but a prism through which to filter their damaging and exciting experiences in law school, in practice, with their families and friends, and how they mediate their complex identities.

II. IDENTITY ISSUES

The nature and meaning of what it means to have a 'Black identity' is under dynamic revision, questioning and acceptance. As discussed in Chapter Two, distinct notions of difference and identity are operating in these women's lives; the dominant notion of a 'being Black' which is the assigned social significance of race, and a resistant notion of 'becoming Black' political agency of self-constructions (Dei and James 1997: 3). 'Becoming Black' encompasses multiple social
locations including gender and sexuality, refusing the stereotypes and limitations and treading new paths. Part of networking is understanding and supporting the identity negotiations and actions of women on different paths; as Yvonne said, “I don’t really want to like, pass judgment on people, because people are at varying stages of identification with their race and identity and so on. And I have been at varying stages, and hopefully will change even more” (7).

The Network may work to subtly re-knit the breaches in the fabric of the women’s identities. Most of these women expressed a strong feeling of knowing ‘who’ they were, if not ‘where’ they were going. Negotiating a racialized identity means challenging not only cues and stereotypes received through the dominant discourse, but also the knowledges acquired in their own communities and families. Notions of ‘home’ are especially under scrutiny, as Makeda related, “we are the first generation who know this is where we will stay, my children will be Canadian” (preliminary interview). Although some women are looking to countries such as the United States as a place to settle down to live and work, others are looking for ‘home’ in their countries of origin in the Caribbean or Africa:

Where is home for you?
Someone told me once, well slavery was not an immigration policy. My perception of home, both my parents are immigrants, my [one parent] is [Caribbean], my other’s from [Africa]. I was born in [the Caribbean], but I have grown up here, so I guess that’s a tricky question. Is home a street address, where my bed is? Or is home the country where I feel most comfortable, or is it the country that I am most familiar with. Is it the country for which I don’t have many personal recollections of, but I have personal ties to? It’s difficult to say, but lately I’ve been thinking, I can’t spend the rest of my life in this country, I can’t take the cold, I can’t take the people. I need to be around Black people, so as of late there is an idea in the back of my mind to go somewhere, ...just to try to reclaim one of my traditional homes. I think home is all those things...where you’re welcome is probably the most useful definition ...I think that the Network has helped, I don’t think that I am the only person who feels this way, so there is this shared understanding of that concept (Susan Sabet5).

At the time of my research, at least four women were seriously thinking of relocating to the United States, and two of the fifteen women I spoke to will be practicing or setting up practice by the end of 1997. The desire to finally put down roots in this land for the women (who come from immigrant families) is very much tempered with the understanding that this land was stolen by
European groups from Native peoples, the same groups who constantly remind newer and more 'visible' immigrants that this is not our home:

I don't feel an affiliation to this particular land, to the geography of Canada, and I believe that no one should except for the Aboriginal peoples. I think that people in the network—it's a shared sentiment, that although you spend your whole life here, to a certain extent, you are always going to feel out of place, or unwelcome, or foreign... (Susan Sabela 5-6).

And ahh, also you know, I am very Canadian. I don’t mind saying that. And I think that apart from the Native people, whose land this is, we are all immigrants, and we don’t have the right—certainly White people don’t have the right to tell Black people they don’t belong. I mean they made these racist immigration laws, which blatantly kept Black people out of Canada for all these decades. For well them to say, 'well my grandparents came here', well they made the rules, that make their grandparents able to come, and not mine. So Hello!—I'm not going to let them get away with that. (Francine Shaw 6.)

When we discussed studying in ‘in the master’s house’( Lorde 1984) the importance of taking a little bit of ‘home’ into dominant institution became very important, for comfort, and for a relevant schooling experience.

Gloria’s and Vivia’s following statements explain that they applied to law school hoping that the school would encourage marginalized people’s participation in their education. Once they entered law school the women demanded that their respective student governments and faculties make some progression in their representation of Black people and other marginalized groups.

Joining an elitist profession offers special pressures to minoritized women to maintain a cohesive sense of identity; the women pursued a vocation in the law with the understanding that ‘difference’ is both a site of oppression, and a site of possibility. In the following excerpt, Vivia remembers encountering a now influential White woman lawyer who had been her professor. At the time the woman chastised Vivia for being “too sensitive” after complaining about a violently racist class presentation. Professor Smith’s power play betrays any shared notion of womanhood, for not only does Smith try to deny Vivia’s competence, but denies the competence of anyone who shows emotion:
I think that I come away from it a stronger person. The other day, there was something going on at the Canadian Bar Association, and I went and I saw professor [Smith], and I said hello to her, and I think she remembered who I was—what I really wanted to do was to say, 'well you thought I wouldn't make it to practice, because I didn't have the stomach for it, and here I am!' But I will take the opportunity to do that, just so she knows that she can't break people (5).

Whatever the professor's intention, her actions further marginalized an already vulnerable person, in effect, 'blamed the victim' of the racist action for trying to assert her right to an equitable education. For it is not the emotion Smith remarked upon, but the temerity for this young Black woman to challenge her liberal self-conception, to challenge her own perception of "real world" (Vivia Powell: 4-5). According to Smith, women like Vivia have only two options, deny our identities or leave the profession. Vivia instead created another option that allowed her to gather her strength to survive Smith's racist 'advice'. For Vivia it was not the experience itself that made her stronger, but her ability to remain focused despite such experiences that allowed her to remain unbroken. The women have shown me that to problematize being a 'Black woman living in Canada' is a prerequisite for survival in this field, for as Francine relates, the law was made to fit a very different person than herself, different than any of us who are 'Othered' in our daily lives. Francine's words evokes Patricia Hill Collins' outsider-within paradigm, as she expounds:

Critical race theory was about the integration of the self into law so in law school and in practice, they would talk about how objective law was, and I saw law as something so much outside myself. Part of my feeling was such dissonance, which really arose the more conscious I became, especially in practice, this dissonance between what law was objectively on the outside, and...here I was as a Black woman...the universe has so much to give us inside ourselves, but often we are so busy trying to make it in the 'White man's world' that we don't stop to hear the wind and the trees, and hear what God tells about ourselves. And I think that if we develop the strength in the inner person, then you know, outside systems can never triumph, no matter how they try, because...I guess when you set yourself up for things that are not going to make you happy, then whether you get them or not, you are still going to be unhappy. And once we get them, and some of us do—so?, so you fit into the White man's world, where are you?!—you're lost, and some of us don't find ourselves, once we do that (8).

Before reading Hill Collins and listening to women like Francine, I thought that one day we could make the 'law' fit us, but I know I am thinking of the terrible corruption of self to bring something so terrible, so foreign inside of me.
III. LAW SCHOOL AND WORK EXPERIENCES

General Experiences

Of all questions I asked, or topics discussed, the ‘law school experience’ elicited the most emotional responses, it was exceedingly difficult to choose passages from the transcripts and although I omitted some important stories, I hope that the narratives you will find below represent both the triumphs and the pain. Overarching these experiences of law school, teaching and practice are the feelings of isolation that must always be opposed, and the constant pressure to prove yourself in the classroom, and at the firm. In speaking about one of the most prestigious firms in Canada, Gloria identified one product of racism as a ‘double-standard’ for Black lawyers once they leave law school practiced by many places of employment, public and private. “They have one Black lawyer,... and she clerked at the Supreme Court of [...] you have to be the la crème de la crème, the best of the best, and that simply isn’t true of their White students (7). Marjorie talks about general distress of the constant exams, applications and interviews that takes a toll of every student. When I asked her what else she would like to discuss in the interview she wanted to offer some advice to other Black women who are thinking of entering law school:

... just take it lightly. I know that I spend too much time worrying about it, way too much time. I panic, I run myself ragged, into a frenzy, and it ends up working out okay anyway, and then I work myself up into the next frenzy, and it's like a wave, up and down all the time. And I think that is one of the worst things that one can do, because you are constantly on a roller-coaster ride [emotion]. I think that in first year you should try to secure as many good friendships as you can, because I think that law school can be a very lonely place, it is not as glamorous as everyone sets it out to be, and I think the competition ruins it. You always want to know that you are okay, and there are a lot of people who just want to know that they are better than you are. And I find that a lot of times it can be a very immature place (9-10).

That Marjorie found law school to be an “immature place” did not surprise me, yet I was surprised to learn of the in-your-face racist attacks some of the women experienced. What happened to Canada’s reputation for gentle racism? I should have been prepared to hear these stories, because a friend in law school saw a White male student confronting a young Native woman saying that his
friend *would* have been accepted if only she had not taken his place: incomprehensible to me, familiar experience to Alicia. Later in the interviews Marjorie and Alicia quite articulately deconstructed the notion of ‘merit’ as a Eurocentric tool of exclusion and a perpetrator of privilege. Yet in the early sections of the interview, it is the frustration of the denial of their hard work and achievements that the women remember:

... I was the only Black person in the entire group. There was another African guy, but he just never talked to me, and I just felt really alone, and it was just very obvious that I was only one of the few minorities, it was very obvious to me. Eventually I met other people, but law school was not a very pleasurable experience, it wasn’t pleasurable socially. People make it very clear at [my school] that anybody that is not White, doesn’t deserve to be there. People make that very clear to you that you’re not White so therefore you didn’t come in on your own merits, and ah, even some of the profs do that, so you are fighting an uphill battle all the way there (Alicia: 2).

For Francine, on the other hand law school was generally a positive experience, but the same overtones of ‘unbelongingness’ remain. As a high-achieving student with many outside supports, Francine enjoyed the intellectual challenge of law school and made life long friends. Looking back, Francine recalls a particular story that crystallized her feelings of isolation, feelings that have amplified over time:

I remember going to the law school to see if my acceptance letter was coming. ‘cause I had to answer. So the professor I saw was in charge of admissions. He went looking, I remember, hunting around his office. And, ahm, he checked through every pile but one. And he said ‘sorry, but I can’t find your name’ and I asked about [the last pile], and he said ‘Well, you know that pile is for straight ‘A’ students who were very successful, and who will definitely will be accepted, and we are sending their letters out first’. So he said ‘well you are not going to be in that pile,’ and I said, ‘well you better check, because I think I am’. And so he very unbelievably, well I know he was being rude and racist, he kind of went, ‘well okay if you insist’ and then my name was in that pile of 10 students. And then he said ‘Oh my, you are in this pile’. That let me know that I really wouldn’t belong (3).

‘Burdens’, Activism and Survival

Vivia and Gloria speak very eloquently of what she and other women consider the ‘burden’ of dealing with race/gender issues at the same time as the “roller-coaster ride” of legal education and practice (Marjorie Vincent 9). The women found themselves speaking up in class and defending themselves or classmates against the more obnoxious students on an everyday basis, and becoming anti-racist resources for their professors, classmates or administration, both informally and formally:
I was taking on, I felt as a Black student, more than anyone else was required to take on in dealing with law school on a day-to-day basis. You feel that added burden and you feel pressurized, and that you are being unfairly treated—and part of it is forcing you to grow and learning how to deal with these things, cause I think that when you are in school you are dealing with the tip of the iceberg, and it’s just preparing you for what you are going to face when you come out in practice (Vivia Powell 3).

I resented that while my White colleagues could leave class and go home and study, I had to be meeting with the Dean, writing reports, meeting with the Associate Dean, writing this person, going to (The Group’s meetings), spending my time doing this stuff, and I tried to get them to hire someone to take care of these issues, but of course, they didn’t. So I don’t expect every Black person who goes there, to be a radical and to argue, because I got into some heated arguments...they are admitting [to the law school] Black people who don’t make any difference, who just go with the status quo, who are ‘happy to be there’, and that’s good enough for them, but I guess it’s a change, in some small way (Gloria Warner 5).

Whether the women felt the ‘burden’, they continue to advocate for themselves and other students in more marginal situations. The responsibility of being considered as a change agent/trouble-maker presented the women with a window of opportunity to effect reforms. Professors and administrators who were giving ‘lip-service’ to equity and change found themselves challenged and held accountable for systemic and individual discrimination. Gloria confronted her professor after a class on the property implications of the ‘expansion’ of Europe, and though the professor did mention the appropriation of Native lands, he failed to expose the explicit racism inherent in colonial conquest:

... I remember going up to him after and saying, ‘I can’t believe you went through that whole bit of history, without mentioning the reason that the White people could do that [destruction] is because they viewed the Aboriginal peoples as beneath them and not good enough’, and his mouth just dropped open. I said that ‘I had heard that you were one of the better profs at this school with respect to these issues’...And he just started saying, ‘well, you know, ahm, we all know that there is racism involved, but you know I have to be careful around here because if you start saying this kind of thing too often, people start, you know thinking that I am a ranting liberal,’ blah, blah blah. And I just said, ‘whatever’... First of all [it shows] their own internal racism,... to me you must have some sort of racist thought in you that allows you to cower that way, and the other thing is to me that it was not important to them, it didn’t matter to them anymore, it wasn’t an issue anymore, it’s history, let’s move on, and not understand that the legacy is still here with us, today... (2).

Like other women in similar situations, Gloria’s response to her experiences was to ‘vote with her feet’ by avoiding courses that purported to deal with social justice issues. The classes which promised to be progressive, usually ended up eliciting her anger and disappointment (Harrington
1995). She remembers one course in particular, that dealt with human rights issues in a Marxist liberal framework which ignored race, gender and other oppressions; “I didn’t want to be taught it by them, and I also didn’t want to do what they thought I should be doing” (4). Gloria doesn’t see her actions as flight, but rather taking the struggle to an area that will prove more useful. Yvonne had another strategy to survive her course work, a seemingly involuntary ‘shutting-out’ of discriminatory teaching practices and curriculum.

...I would come into the class, with the biggest cup of coffee, had slept twelve hours the night before, and as soon as they started to say stuff, that I know just wasn’t jibbing, I would [tune-out] And it would happen consistently! And when I looked back at it I really think that that was my body’s way of helping me to close down to that because I was overburdened, or I couldn’t take it anymore ... after leaving law school, ahm, I realized, and I am still realizing how much it took away from my spirit, or I think, ahm, I had wrapped a lot around it to protect it from getting hurt by being there. So I certainly I feel I had [don’t have] the same exuberance and energy and liveliness coming out as I had when I went in (5).

Yvonne echoes Francine’s earlier words concerning the “dissonance” and lack of “integration”(3) experienced as a Black woman in the law, when she relates to the lengths she took to create an education for herself that would help to reconcile the breaches between what the law professors wanted to teach, and what Yvonne wanted to learn. Yvonne feels the impetus to fashion the tools to create her own cloth, and significantly, because the law, as it was being taught, had little relevance. She took ownership of her education by studying on her own, and researching topics “to better articulate and appreciate what it was that I was feeling in the first instance” (4).

IV. THE SUPPORTS: FAMILY, FRIENDS, COLLEAGUES, PARTNERS, AND SPIRITUALITY

Family

These short quotations do not adequately reflect the complicated relationship to family and community and all the positive and negative aspects, which these women on other issues did address, but I hope to outline some key issues. ‘Family’ can be a place of support and a place of contested identity. Parents, family and racialized or ethnicized communities may share in the struggle, to
transform oppressive institutions. Marjorie's extended family represents a complex support network, from parental protection, to grand-parental mentoring. Family means having more people to tell her "get your butt back in there!" (11) as her cousin does, when she complains about the profession. The losses of separation from her family and 'home' are self evident when she told me, "Here I am a nobody, there I am someone's daughter... There I am surrounded by my entire family ... and everybody has the same accent as me... I feel complete when I'm there" (11).

Although individual families are middle-class, Black communities are marginalized politically and economically. In the dominant discourse even materially comfortable families experience the reactionary consequences of neo-conservatism than their main-stream cohorts, as they tend to be more heavily employed in the public sector, service sector and other vulnerable areas (Henry 1994: 103-4). Parents and extended family members in the margin hope their children will further the socio-economic position of the community (Nieto 1992). My father always told us that they only way to mitigate the whims of systemic and individual racism was to become self-employed. Educational literature often discusses how family attitudes and culture influence the student's attitude towards achievement, but of even greater import is that a family's ability to become positive cultural agents in their children's education actually improves the child's educational experience and academic outcomes (Dei 1997: 190). For Susan, her extended family and friend gatherings are opportunities for her to hear the pride and love of her parents communicated by other elders in her family and community:

...and I think it was good for me, to see people that knew me my whole life, and say this is what you were like when you were smaller, and you know I am so happy that you are doing this. I think I sort of gave you more encouragement, because I think that you can expect your parents to encourage you, you know they are responsible for you so of course they are going to tell you what you are doing is great and wonderful and their proud. But, I think it's always nice to here it from people who don't have to say it (2).
Like Susan, I would think that my parents were blasé about my life, until at a gathering and one of my aunts would tell me about the long letters my parents would write, or the phone calls where they would proudly complain the time and money invested in their children's education. For Alicia, Makeda and Gloria, family brings joy and responsibility. Years of financial struggle and extended years in school are finally beginning to result in economic and social independence.

Francine’s perspective about her family reflected her concerns about “being in the world” (7). She meditates very carefully about how she learned to ‘be in the world’ in a Caribbean family which was formed by her parents’ conception of beauty and worth. Ethnicity, race and gender are societal constructs first experienced through the nuclear family, which is an institution heavily influenced by dominant values. Thus, a family, regardless of racial and class composition may also influence by dominant values, and may become a primary site to reproduce them (Ng 1981):

I guess with my life, I have to integrate so many things that people would think of as different, as other. You come to realize that there is nothing 'Other’ about it. So ahm, I think that it is part of the legacy of slavery, and in the Caribbean, that [there is] the difficulty of coming to terms with the beauty of Blackness. And, I don't think that my family is very different from most West Indian families in that sense. I should write a piece about that. As a child I felt integrated into everything, and the realization as I grew older, about how dissonant I was. ...So I functioned very much on my own. (Francine Shaw 7).

Francine, like all of us, is operating simultaneously in multiple subject-positions in multiple discourses. She is very aware of the contradictions that her very person poses to a society unaccustomed to a complicated difference. For Francine the bounds of what should be considered ‘family’ needs to be broadly defined; a place where you find support and feel at home, whether that is with relatives, friends or by yourself. For most of these women, ‘family’ has always included blood and non-blood kin, reflecting societal patterns in Caribbean and African communities (Hill Collins 1990: 120). The Network then is not a substitution for the ‘ideal nuclear family’, but a way to express feelings we usually associate with the positive aspects of family, such as understanding and spiritual support.
Religion has been a mainstay in cultural representations of Black women for hundreds of years (D.S. Williams, 1993). The trope of the Baptist matriarch singing and praising in church is as familiar as other stereotypical images that inform dominant discourse (Hill Collins, 1990: 67). For the women in the Network, religion is one part of a larger spirituality that may or may not include a God figure, and though influenced by family traditions, reaches beyond childhood expressions of faith. Just as these women value the supports of friends, family and the Network to give meaning to their law experiences, so too do they turn to church, God, nature, inner-voices, prayer and meditation. Francine was raised in a Christian household, and now believes in a spirituality that includes, but is not exclusive to, a monotheistic God:

For me, learning that outside burden of some idea of success is not important. It is important really important to establish the inner truth of you—not really be focused on what other people, whether they be your parents, ... it’s just important to get the truth for yourself, and there’s a lot of happiness in that, and liberation in that—yeah I think that this is all about the internal knowledge. I believe that we are really parts of spirits who form parts of the whole... (7)

The spiritual support may have grown from family example, and God and organized religion grew into a personal spirituality. Alicia was raised in a mixed-race Protestant church where although she felt welcome, she limited her involvement because she did not feel quite at home. When she moved out on her own, she sought out predominantly Afro-Caribbean Church, and when she found such a place, her profile in church activities greatly increased. An important part of her community participation includes tutoring, and informal and formal legal counsel for the congregation. Part of Gloria’s spirituality is protecting your own spirit, from ‘soul killing’ situations. Of her decision not to pursue a career in criminal prosecution as she had always planned, she revealed, “I thought that it would have been too easy for me to get dragged in, pulled in, and it would just hurt too much, (7). Yvonne also attends a Black church like Alicia, and like Gloria works to nurture her spirit, by integrating the many parts of her life into a “whole self”:

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I personally am trying, as much as possible, to integrate what is my voice, and I think it’s changing, again I hope it’s always changing into what I’m doing—and that way I enjoy my work. I guess it’s integrating your whole self—your work and your interests, and what you feel about things, and the more you can do that, I think, [laugh], the healthier you are, [laugh] hopefully the happier you are, and the more content with yourself you are, and the closer you are with your God, or whatever it is you may feel with your spirit. [pause] yeah (13).

Integration for Yvonne means choosing employment where she would be working in her community, choosing partners that understand her goals, and maintaining her spiritual health through prayer as well as formal worship. Marjorie also spoke to me about the toll trying to maintain a separate career, private life, family and community activities takes on your physical and emotional, and spiritual health. Aligning these areas along a personal philosophy seemed to be an important strategy for not only surviving law school and practice, but for renewing yourself to find the “faith and strength” to continue to work in and with the community.

**Partners and Non-network Friends**

The responses from women in Network, when I ask them about romantic, sexual or life-partner relationships ranged from the intense silence, to reluctant confidences, to faces bursting with pride, but few words. One woman said “Don’t you get me started on Black men!” (Susan: 3), another beamed when I asked her about a long-term relationship, said a few nice words, and gently changed the subject. What was common in all the women’s reactions was their refusal to allow such relationships, whether negative or positive to control their lives, or to even dominate this study. Instead, they reflected on how relationships were one of many factors including family, law experiences and friendships which marked the development of their identities.

Marjorie strongly articulated the changes she sees in herself. These changes, echoed by Susan, came from the need to empower themselves in aspects of their lives that they could control. For all of the women the tenets of legal theory and practice hold few lasting revelations. The harsh experiences in law school and beyond strengthened the women’s resolve to be closely involved with
people who bring happiness to their lives, or not be involved at all:

I don't think that I can at all go back to being the woman that I was in my pre-law school days. I know for a fact that I don't stand for bull ship, either in my personal life, or my professional life these days. It's right now, out the door, because I don't have time for it anymore... Either you come into my life, and add some minimum degree of happiness to it, or get the hell out. That's my concept. (Marjorie Vincent 3).

The “gulf” that Susan experiences with men in her life, who view her differently because of her profession, is similar to Gloria’s discussion about her friendships (see below). In the Network, Susan finds validation in her struggle to find and maintain relationships with partners who are willing to overcome their intimidation of the legal profession:

I guess [men] buy to a certain extent buy into this myth, that law is academically or intellectually elite profession, and that lawyers are a certain caliber of people, which I think is utter nonsense, or else I wouldn’t be here, [laugh] but I think it’s made some personal relationships difficult, because [they say], ‘I’ll defer to you because you are the law student, and you have two degrees, and I don’t’, and I think that it’s just created this really ugly gulf, which I don’t think is properly founded, and so yes, in that respect the profession has caused some problems I just think that people buy into the social tendency to defer to lawyers... I find that a lot of the women have experienced the same thing... (4).

Vivia and Alicia who have found nourishing relationships have done so with other professional men; however, the pressures of law school and early practice continually test those bonds. Three other women in the Network, whom I did not interview extensively, found partnerships with men in solid working-class jobs or self-employment, but only one of those couples are still together. When talking with those women, issues of class and insecurities, were common causes in demise of the relationships.

I had this feeling that they had made up their minds to prevent our interview from being about men. I say ‘men,’ because none of the women talked about intimate relationships with other women. Out of my own inability to maintain their anonymity in such a small sample, I did not feel able to investigate more deeply into issues of sexuality. I deliberately used gender neutral language in some instances, and at other times I referred to both genders in my questioning. As educated women, many with social-science or social service backgrounds, and with the work in which they engage,
I felt they were making up their own analysis of the benefit and costs of such disclosures, for themselves and for their colleagues. As they respected each other’s privacy, I will respect theirs.

Non-network friends include friends from non-law circles (childhood, the community, and family acquaintances), and also friends in the law (other students, co-workers). Friendships were very important to all of the women, and like other Black women, represent an important avenue for emotional “growth and well-being” (Hill Collins 1990: 98), yet being an outsider-within affects all of their relationships. Friendships formed before law school, are particularly vulnerable, as Marjorie discovered. Rather than let the relationship dissolve due to mounting class differences, she decided to put in the extra effort to give her friends some of the time and attention they had previously enjoyed:

You asked me before about who do I turn to. I think of my best friend of 15 years, I think that our relationship dwindled after I got into law school, and that’s my fault as much as it is hers. She is in a common law relationship, she had a baby, a few months before, I got accepted [to law school]. Our lives are just completely different. When I was off studying the law, which she is not at all interested in, she’s doing the family life thing, and I think as much as I am happy for her, I wanted her to be progressing ... with me. Our relationship has recouped, this summer, but that is probably because I have more time to put into it, in terms of my personal life (7).

Gloria has also experienced tension with childhood friends who through their actions and words articulate the class breaches her becoming a lawyer has caused:

— I’m closer now to the friends I made in law school, I hang out more with them, go out more with them, I talk on the phone more with them, than other friends from before. I have had one friend who kind of backed away, and as much as said that I had changed, since going to law school, but I didn’t think that that was true—and then you have some friends who think that you are important now, that they can’t phone you because they will be wasting your time, ...—I’ve had people tell me, .... And then too, you find out that, not that only people in law would understand, but that people in the same position as you would be more likely to understand what you are going through. I guess it’s kind of changed, you have to go out of your way to show them that you haven’t changed, and also you are a bit more cynical probably (10).

In Gloria’s statement she remarks that she has changed because she is ‘probably’ more cynical, but hasn’t changed because she would still enjoy going out with her old friends. Maintaining those friendships does not preclude her from seeking support from people in the law, who ‘understand’ what she is going through. These statement reflect more complementary behaviour, rather than
conflicted thoughts. Gloria needs support from her community and her profession, because she is committed to remaining grounded in both aspects of life, despite the challenges and contradictions. The women in the Network become a supplement to, and not a replacement for, other relationships. It is the support from the women with whom they can share similar experiences which facilitates the maintenance of other relationships which can then be enjoyed on other levels. The feeling of being “absorbed by the law” (Susan: 1), is a pressure all of the women are fighting. The women’s relationships with family, friends, partners and with spirituality are aspects of support and survival, but are also aspects of creating a holistic life for themselves and supporting each other in community practices.

V. MENTORING AND ROLE MODELLING AND BLACK LAW ORGANIZATIONS

Role Modelling and Mentoring

When I asked the women, “What do you think of role models and mentors?”, the responses were multi-layered, with personal, professional and theoretical implications. Some women made no great distinctions between the meaning of mentoring and role modelling. They were more concerned with sharing stories of the women and men who had made a difference in their own lives. Vivia described a role model, whose career she had been following for some time before she met the woman in person. Later she took advantage of an opportunity to develop a mentoring relationship:

She [Juanita Westmoreland-Traoré] was the first Black person to go to UQUAM. I think it was Montreal, and to walk in to law school at a time when they were desegregating schools in the South, someone encouraging her to go to Africa as part this trip, how she got to be part of this UN observation teams in Haiti and different places, and her experiences are mind blowing, and here is this woman with a very stable marriage, and very happy family life, and two sons who are doing very well, she’s done it all. And now she is the first Black law dean in Canada, and she is just a phenomenal, phenomenal woman, and people like that you can learn so much from them. ...You have to really learn from people like her. I would say that mentors are important, sitting back and thinking that you are going to learn everything in law school that you are going to need to know to practice is foolish... (13)

Gloria was very concerned with mentoring, and talked about the responsibility to mentor youth in high school and university and colleges, for law, and many other careers:
I think they [mentoring and role modelling] are extremely important. I know that in various schools, but at [our school] there weren’t enough of us to do this officially, I think that at either Queen’s or Ottawa, they would pick an upper year, who would look out for a particular first year, and I think that’s good, maybe it was at [another school], ...ahm, and that’s definitely a good thing, but pretty much if you are there, you are there because you can picture yourself as lawyer, so I think that it really needs to start earlier, when kids are in high school, and I think that BLSAC has tried to do that, in past years they have invited high school students to be part of the conference, so that they can see what it’s about... There should probably be something much more... I know that varying groups in the community do mentoring for a wide range of careers (11).

Yvonne also considered the importance of mentoring even the brightest of youths. She strongly believes that our young people need assistance to gain access to the resources, experiences and leadership and training that youths from more affluent/established communities have, “Just so, I guess, they have the idea that they can achieve anything they want, but we have to help them take those steps” (11).

As I outlined in Chapter Two, ‘role modelling’ is considered to be the more distant term, politically ambiguous or even dangerous. Yvonne is wary of elitist institutions trumping up the retention of a few conservative minoritized professors into a feigned commitment to equitable hiring practices, “sometimes [role models] can be used against us, because [the institution says], ‘so and so can do it’—knowing full well that they are only ever going to let two [black] professors ever on the faculty” (14). Nonetheless, Yvonne pointed out the value of role models in her own life, and believes getting Black people into the institution is as at least a first step. Makeda related her personal experience in working to get two Women of Colour ‘in’, to be hired as professors at her law school. The administration eventually hired a White lesbian woman, and with their history of White only hiring it seemed to Makeda that “that’s as far as they were willing to go” in terms of equity (6). Despite of, or maybe because of, Makeda’s frustrating experiences, she is already mentoring young law students and looking forward to mentoring even more youths:

I think we need to learn how to survive in the institutions, because people are leaving the practice, in record numbers, and for us to go and spend all this time in school, it’s like we are being defeated, and that’s not what I hope, so I understand the distinction, but it depends where you are at, role modelling just may be enough on some levels for some people, but for me, I hope that the new lawyers coming
out recognize the importance of mentoring, that you don’t have to lose your culture, your community when you work for a big firm. I think that you just learn different way of expressing that, especially when you are working for very conservative organizations (2).

Yet, the women’s mentoring commitment is not limited to youths, as some women are in the process of encouraging older Black women. These women stem from their communities or law firms have worked as para-legals, or legal secretaries and have expressed interest in changing careers. The women in the Network are coaching other women and men through the application process, and are drawing on the resources and people in Black law organizations to help candidates prepare for law school (Yvonne).

Black Law Associations

...The Feb of my first year at law school was my first BLSAC conference, and what an oasis, and even now I can picture the final dinner, and the steering committee had assembled all of the black judges they could bring in to sit at the head table for dinner. I was just... just that image I could still almost draw it for you right now. Ahm. Because being one of only a few Black students at [my school] and being isolated because of race issues and feeling that I was in an alien world, that [BLSA] was just amazing, and I think ..and from there I became more involved (Yvonne Archibald: 6).

I had a really good group of friends that I could turn to. and we really really supported each other. it was really good. we had an annual conference every year, BLSAC, where all the students from all across Canada get together, and that was amazing, that was just the highlight of my year, always, always. I had to miss one this year, the first one I missed. I go every year. they are so good. even if you never ever end up going to any of the seminars, it is just so empowering to walk in a room and see 200 black lawyers, it is a good week-end. Everybody else says that it was a turning point in first year, you were just feeling down like you didn’t belong (Alicia Peters: 11).

Yvonne and Alicia’s striking images were often echoed by the other women who considered their involvement in Black law associations as gateways to empowering experiences in law school and practice. In fact many of the women met for the first time at a BLSAC (Black Law Students’ Association of Canada) conference, and grew to know each other as committee members, as well as friends or classmates. BLSAs (law school chapters of the national organization) function in most law schools, depending on the numbers of politically active members in each school. Members of from each BLSA may be elected to the executive of the national organization that organizes the annual conference which rotates among law schools across Canada. Recently, a national
organization of practicing lawyers, CABL, (Canadian Association of Black Lawyers), which also holds an annual conference, has been formed. All of the women I spoke to had joined, attended meetings of, or had held executive positions in, one or more of the three organizations.

As political entities, the organizations attract people for a combination of different reasons including: seeking spiritual support and a sense of belonging; seeking potential friendships and relationships in the Black law community; to exchanging information and ideas for social change; and forming contacts for professional development. Makeda’s conception of professional development includes survival skills for White institutions. She plans to commit to political action as part effecting change from within political institutions:

I think that we have to learn how to strategize and trying to get what we want without always being so explicit about it, without always being confrontational about it, there are ways to maneuver in institutions so we can still reach our goal, without being looked at as being totally militant, or activist. Because we are not, for the most part, we are just trying to get the same rights that our colleagues are achieving, I think it’s not forgetting where we come from. I think that we continue to support BLSAC and CABL, and getting our forms and support the conferences, going to the Black Bar conferences in the U.S., these are things that the firm should be paying for. We shouldn’t feel bad for asking, because they go to professional development, this is our own kind of professional development (3).

Of course there are a few who see the organizations as nothing more than a job search directory or résumé item. Marjorie, Makeda and Vivia talked about other “foolish” or “annoying” people who “perceive that their association with Black people will have some sort of negative impact on their lives, or livelihood unless they could see the direct benefit (Vivia Powell: 12). All of the women tolerated such behaviour, what Alicia calls the “lone Negro syndrome” (8) of Black people who would turn the other direction upon seeing another Black person come down the hallway. They always seem too busy for Black centred events, although they would make time for activities where large numbers of Black people are conspicuously absent. Vivia believes one cure for this affliction is time. She remarked that a Black women who had no time for BLSA in law school, is now inviting CABL members to her social gatherings (13). Other kinds of behaviour, Vivia and others tolerated
was unwanted attention from Black men, which they openly admitted to treating differently than White men:

...okay I can understand that if you are locked up in this 'lily White world' five days out of the week, and a certain code of conduct, and you are busting your butt to make it, and you want to relax and you want to have fun, but there is a line between harassment and joking, and part of it is just culture, like (Vivia Powell: 12).

Several of women avoided the subject, and a few mentioned that there are “too few of us” to make waves. Still others thought that employers, media, police would “go harder” on their Black male colleagues than on a White male. For the most part, they chose to deal with the issues personally.

Most of the women tended to separate professional harassment from the severity of the physical and sexual abuse of which their clients complain, which they view as much more serious, and a cause for intervention (Marjorie: 13). Ironically, both classes of women feel the need to balance their personal rights and safety against the double-standard of police and judicial treatment towards Black men (Lubiano 1992: 339-40).

VI. CHALLENGES AND POSSIBILITIES OF NETWORKING

The above discussions have brought us now to the conception and practice of the Network. However this discussion is far from the end of sewing the quilt; in fact it is only the end of the section of pieces that must be arranged and stitched together to take on shape, and take meaning. Aspects of identity, supports, experiences and hopes converge at a place where some theories prove intangible, while others pass a test of truth. Networking, for these women, began long before they left law school. Their thoughtful and critical considerations of their relationships with each other and their work in different communities began long before my first inquiry. Consider this juncture a gathering of threads.

Each woman had seemingly very different conceptions about networking, which mirrors, in some important ways, their reasons for joining Black law associations; opportunities for professional
development, spiritual connections, practical exchanges of information. Yet unlike the larger associations, the Network is entirely made of women. I have refrained from using an approach which would mean describing actions and informants from an insider’s versus outsider’s point of view. I gave the women the opportunity to define what networking meant to them, over the course of their respective interviews—with whatever language they wanted to use. Any loss of complexity and contextualization is due to my cutting and pasting of words to attempt to fairly represent each women’s responses.

During our interview Francine frequently made references about connecting the political to the personal, more precisely the political to the spiritual. The Network is important to her, because it is an integrated centre in what she considers a very dissonant profession. Like Yvonne (see above), Francine considered the integration of activities in the profession and in personal life, as a way of connecting to other people, to stave off the pressures of isolation and privilege that the law encourages.

...as Black women we really need to encourage [a] sense of integration, and part of that comes from helping each other out—not you know, with fanfare or with trumpets, just kind of quietly....Ah, I think that for me... I can speak for me, taking that personal approach—it becomes a political approach, and ahm, it’s a way of being part of other Black women, and I see myself as very much a part of other Black women who have gone before or—I mean I don’t see any difference really between those who were here or who have gone before—you know we are all part of a chain, or a river (Francine Shaw: 7-8).

Makeda’s immediate need for the Network is to receive and provide day to day support with other Black women, the major consideration in her decision to move to a new city. Makeda found friendships that she hoped to form, but she also found a competition she was not expecting. The support the women offer each other is enmeshed with the very real prospect of law firms who will only hire one minoritized candidate, and being passed-over for permanent employment in favour of well-connected White candidates. The comfort of support, may also be tempered with the “tensions” of rivalry:
I've never felt the competition that you feel here. Like sometimes I feel it when I go out with other Black women lawyers, who's working at the big firms, who's working at the clinic—who's going to grad, and who can't find a job, all of that I think does cause a lot of tension, but my experience at [my school], even though we all wanted to do well, and when it came down to exams, we all did our own thing, but we all supported each other, so it is a really different mind set for me to come here and feel that wow, you took a job from someone [here], and I think that all we can do is to create networks...(6).

In Susan's comparison between networks among the privileged, and her own Network, the idea of "struggle" was at the crux of the differences:

I think the concept of networking is just associating with like minded people, on professional development, I think they are different [from White or privileged networks] is that the struggle is part of life, I think the purpose of their network is to have to struggle as little as possible. Whereas this network, I don't think that people are adverse to struggle, because I think they see the reward and the necessity of it, and I also think that there is something invigorating about struggle too. Just so long as you are doing it in unity with other people, and not just alone. But I think that the problem is the relationship, and the way that the struggle that informs the struggle (Susan Sbeta 5-6).

Challenging the System and Creating Alternatives

The strategies for negotiating the profession, are as varied as the women themselves. What appears to be similar actions, such as two women both choosing to work on a Bay Street firm, may stem from very different reasoning, and result in distinct actions. Other strategies include working for legal clinics in the community, working in a government office, teaching law, applying to small firms, or a combination of the above. The key to sanity, to finding a centre, means relying on each other for everything from legal referrals, to pep talks, to encouragement to make the hard choices as Yvonne did when women in the network encouraged her to take her present job:

...working [there] is considered by the legal community a 'suicide choice' ... It was the worst thing that I probably could have done professionally in that sense. But it was so right, inside. And so, inside, to some degree that was real turning point...continue to make those kinds of choices, and you know, just to follow what that is. That is something I wanted to do. Even when it is tough to do... I guess that would be for me what self-actualizing is (9).

Part of self-actualization for Yvonne is planning for future alternatives to law that would enable her to continue to advocate for her community.

One choice is to leave the practice of law altogether, if trying to effect change proves too frustrating, "so I don't necessarily think that I am going to be practicing for ever, or even
for the next many years, because the technical aspect of the law is really not of much interest to me, it's only what it can do for us” (Yvonne: 9). Nevertheless, Yvonne recognizes that working in dominant structures is one path that women may take, to “play the game,” if at least the community will eventually benefit from role modelling or material resources, “[Black women] should set their own goals for themselves and if that goal is to be a partner in a Bay Street firm, then I wholeheartedly support you in that!” (12). Francine is also uninterested in ‘playing the game,’ and expresses the value of working in dominant institutions, although the isolation and oppression can be painful. Francine insists that we must struggle to overcome the barriers consolidate the power of the already privileged:

So I don’t think that we should disregard structures, because White men will perceive themselves as [the only power of] these structures, but I think that one can get strength and a sense of purpose within that structure. But I think a big part of it is to help our sisters out. Yeah—that’s part of our political struggle...part of it is to see where the barriers are and to see how we can jump over them or go through them, or what we are going to do with them.—’cause the barriers are there. There’s no sense in pretending that they’re not—finding ways to break them down. (6).

Gloria related to me an articling experience some years ago, that demonstrates a creative refusal to suppress her identity. Part of her own attempt to break down the barriers included outlining her commitment to her community during her job interviews:

....so in my interview I said, well basically I am happy where I am, I just wanted to see if this place was any better, and I want to go to a place where they will respect my need to do work in my community along with the work that I’m doing with the firm. [And they said] well that’s nothing special, ‘there are women here and they have to go home and tend to their families’, and I said ‘yeah, I’m a woman and someday I will have a family and I will have to do that, and on top of that I would like to go and do some stuff in my community, and I want a firm which won’t question what I’m doing, that is part of my, that’s the package I bring.’ And they just didn’t get it, and I was like okay—next! And I went to [the other firm] and said the same thing, and they said, ‘great, that’s great!’ And I didn’t really believe them, but at least they were saying it [laughter] (7).

Attempting to ‘break down barriers’ is an onerous and often lonely enterprise; and especially difficult if financial or care-giving responsibilities limit short-term goals and employment choices. Nonetheless, the women still try to balance competing and often conflicting liens on their time and resources. Experiences and support, found in the Network, as well as the
strength of other supports give the women both the reason to make brave choices, and the resolve to see through their choices to fruition.

**Making Law Accessible and Building Coalitions**

Negotiating alternative strategies for including community practice in institutions is sometimes just as challenging for the women as including legal practice in the community. The women’s abilities to effectively advocate for the community depend on many factors; being an outsider-within means much more than a socio-economic division, it has serious implications for the women’s senses of identity and belonging:

...I’d love to be in a practice where I am so successful that if someone came in need, I could say that I am okay in paying my bills this month, I can help this person, without having to charge them much...to have people to come to you as a Black person and say I know that you can help me, as opposed to coming [to a White owned firm] because they think that only [they] can do it, and a Black person on the street maybe can’t... That would be the ultimate goal.....if we [Black professionals] support each other and we know what we are doing and we have some sort of vision in mind, the possibilities are endless (Vivia Powell: 9).

Vivia’s response outlines the challenges of trying to gain the trust of her community. She argues that if Black professionals (9) reinvest in the community by investing in each other they will foster job creation, and prosperity. Prosperity is more than just socio-economic security to Vivia, because effective services will foster cooperation, confidence, community pride and identification to combat the community’s “negative public perception,” and it may, in turn, lead to stronger and more effective advocating for community issues.

Opening the possibilities of identity through making elitist professions accessible to everyone is a theme that all the women raised, including Makeda, who is joining a national committee to address equity issues in the profession:

...law [is] an opportunity and a potential route for Black people, and not just for a few Black people. I think that it is something that every person can attain or accomplish if they want to. And I think that just presenting that possibility is very significant for high school students (2).
Alicia remarked that many of her friends achieved outstanding grades in undergrad but were "turned-off" law school, and continued their educations in other professional schools or graduate schools.

Well there definitely needs to be more representation among the teachers, because there was one Black teacher, and not just among African Canadians, but for everybody, and among the students too. They have a program ...[that's for] mature students, People of colour, People with disabilities, people with economic disadvantage, most of the people end up being, older, White men. so what are you doing, you are not accomplishing anything. They haven't done anything. So there needs to be real change. I think that if they really want to change that school, they need to start attracting—and I don't but the well, people don't have the marks—people just don't apply, people aren't encouraged to apply. People become discouraged, they need to—the university needs to get out there.

The reasons all of the women gave for the disparities were manifold, including the economic and cultural hegemony of White elitism, and they expressed fears of isolation and undue competition that unfortunately came true for Black undergraduates who did enter law school. Others, who had the confidence, and financial security, simply thought that it "wasn't worth it" to pursue such a time-consuming and expensive education. Such reluctance, and her later experiences of legal institutions, prompted Francine to strongly insist on the incorporation of the law school and university in the community, and a change of the entire concept of what it means to be a lawyer.

[A university] must be part of the community, otherwise it doesn't really function. It's not true to itself...White men certainly buy into the group that they are elitist, that they are not public servants, and the Black students do to. And you look at them and think "Hello?!"—what do you think you are here to do, if not to serve the community. And it's all about service, not about thinking that we can make a buck.

Thinking about being inclusive, knowing the theory, believing in the good ideas like 'strength in numbers' and combating the dominant's 'divide and rule' ideology, are much easier to execute in the mind and mouth than in action. To Makeda, the burden of effort to practice coalition building and making links between oppression seem to fall squarely on racialized peoples' shoulders. The White feminist women from her law school classes failed to understand a race/gender analysis, even after a year having Women of Colour in the group.
sharing their experiences and analysis (3). Meanwhile, some of the White men so strongly identified Makeda with her Blackness that they aimed to render her ‘invisible’ by calling her by the name of any Black woman at the school:

...there is a lot of visibility/invisibility that I experience in law school. That was a huge thing, always being mistaken for the other Black women. I realized that they didn’t see any of us, they just saw our skin colour, and the White women, would see our gender and forget everything else. I’m not sure about what I think about that in terms of strategy. I think it creates more conflict, internally and externally (3).

These experiences inform Makeda’s strategic decision to align herself with the “race camp” (4).

Susan also had similar experiences and feelings. Upon further discussion, Susan explained that her two major reasons are more for strategy than ideology: First, Susan has few Black male colleagues, they are practically absent in the power structures that exclude her. Secondly, although Susan disagrees with the principal of using issues of gender as a “stepping-stone” in court, it is sometimes the only way for the mostly racist judges to address discrimination.

Judges are very reluctant consider more than one ‘ism’ at a time (5). She was however, more optimistic about the possibilities of coalition building with other marginalized groups:

I guess meeting with people who belong with another intersecting community, or another racialized community if those groups have similar views on the same issues, there is strength in numbers in voicing your concerns. I think that that is the basis of coalition building, recognizing how another group is affected by a similar policy or law, and we will get together to see how we will address it, and both of our concerns will be met... (5).

Susan’s difficulties in forcing the courts to recognize the interlocking behaviour of oppressions, without side-lining racial issues, is paralleled in Yvonne’s experiences in coalition building:

...I don’t think that our initial purposes are always to build a broad-scale coalition on this issue. Again, because of resources, because, I’m sure if you know anything about coalition work, you spend as much time faxing and calling, and anything, as you may spend on whatever the issue [laugh] is. And the other thing is, and I think it needs to be stated very frankly, is that we have a history of having our issues absorbed by other groups.... So where there are sort of, ahm, ...similar are complementary to other groups. I think we do pretty good job of linking up. But, neither are we afraid to say that we have to go this one on our own (11-12).

Yvonne also experiences both the obstacles and the possibilities of committing to the resistance of interlocking oppressions in her work, yet Yvonne’s insists that her work address issues of
importance to the Black community. Her earlier comments illustrate that she clearly recognizes the danger of the salience of race being subsumed in discussion of other oppressions (Dei 1996a). For Yvonne, identifying an issue where the Black communities have to be “on our own” is not an issue of nationalism, but a politically strategic decision of how best to employ the community’s limited resources.

SUMMARY

Clearly, the women support each other in a profession hostile to marginalized persons. The Network is a strategy for survival, a social club, and a site of social, professional and economic advancement. What remains to be further explored, is how an informal grouping of relatively privileged professionals constitutes resistance, given that the greatest obstacle they are facing is the law itself. The liberal individualistic framework and elitist discourse of the law greatly challenges us to incorporate the ideas and methods of resistance that have been passed down through enslavement and/or colonialism to present conservative realities in North America (Williams 1990: 729). Nonetheless, in Chapter Five I will argue that the Network provides a powerful and still developing site of anti-oppression practices which is being realized in the commitment of individuals who support each other in everyday anti-oppression practices, community outreach, and the empowerment of other marginalized persons. It is the Network that enables the women to survive in an institutional environment made hostile by the exclusionary dominant groups (Alvi 1992: 178-9) and challenges them to work hard for social change for all.
CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION

Introduction: Surpassing Survival

'Survivor' is a particularly fitting title for women in the Network, as everyone shared with me at least one 'law school story' of being made to feel 'Other'. Everyone remembered being accosted, whether directly or indirectly, with the accusation that they didn’t deserve to be there. Some of the women who are practicing or articling shared with me 'a law firm story,' a site where they expect racist/sexist treatment, but their salaries and positions are no salve for discrimination. Many of the poignant and emotional narratives were made bare in Chapter Four, it is there where sadness is mixed with anger, joy with defeat, it is there where battle scars are bloodied and the bruises laid for view.

Yet, survival is only one aspect of the women's stories. They thrived as well; whether within the confines of school or work, or finding sustenance with family or community. It is through these narratives that I learned to understand that great strength and courage not are qualities we possess but powers we invoke, and any power exacts a price. When I discovered that by 1995 only about five Black women had graduated from the faculty of law of the University of Toronto (Yvonne Archibald: 1), I suddenly could feel, without need of theory nor sympathy, the exact violence being committed on my middle-class Black body. To go through even more hoops of graduate education, only again be one out of a handful, and perhaps to again feel vulnerable at offering a tentative smile to another Black woman, only to be ignored. I finally felt what I had always known; although I may one day accrue the social and material benefits of becoming a lawyer, there would be untold
psychological dues to pay if I chose to undergo the process alone. I was finally beginning to learn that ‘myriad-of-sites-of-oppression, not-only-existing, but-interlocking-in-such-a-way-as-to-sustain-the-whole-system’ applied to me (Hill Collins 1990, Razack, 1991, Crenshaw 1993, Dei 1996a).

Like the women in this study, I have been forced to reconsider what I would define as ‘success’ in my goal in becoming a lawyer. Through their insights and confessions, I realized that I would have to feel as well as think about how I could be consistent with my own sense of identity, family and community. By choosing to interview women, aware of social justice issues, I did not expect a resounding endorsement of their legal education, or the law firms. Most of the women are just now finding a field where they wish to practice law, and others are employed in what they see as ‘getting over’ positions—“until I move to the States”, “until I can open my own practice,” “until I pass the bar,” and “until I pay off my loans” (Holland and Eisenhart 1990: 169).

At the same time, many of these women were outstanding scholastic achievers. The Network includes many award winners and holders of sought-after positions clerking, articling or working in Canada’s highest courts and most prestigious law firms. In fact, most of the women either hated law school or felt an indifference borne out of resignation, or the healing powers of time. The women who are now practicing find that the same racist/sexist exclusions exist in the ‘real world. Of the all the Black women I interviewed or spoke to about law school, only Francine Shaw employed positive terms, and she had reflected that only her naïveté and ability to distance herself from her surroundings allowed her to manage as well as she did. As most of the women that I interviewed are either in law school or in the early stages of practice, negotiating hostile environments were not only vivid memories, but in many cases everyday experiences.
'Working At' Versus 'Working For': A Framework for Understanding Resistance

There are many reasons why the Network should not work, but many, more compelling reasons that it must not only function, but function for transformative social change. Every day the women face the external pressures of racism, and other oppressions at law school and in the work force, and the internal pressures of responsibilities to family and community, and the struggle with identity. Although the women experience moments of frustration, they still remain optimistic that they will be able to make social change, with each other's support. When I asked Makeda to imagine what kind of change in the community the group could enact she replied:

Hrmn [pause] I think it allows us to take risks in the work place that we wouldn't normally do, because we are able to bounce ideas off each other. One, I think it allows us to be a part of our community, a lot of it happened when I went to law school, they community said, 'oh my God, you're going to law school'. I think the community puts you on some pedestal that I don't think is warranted at all, and it's a very uncomfortable feeling to have your own people, say 'oh my God!', or 'You think you're all that!', and you are placed in this strange position of wanting to be the same person. You are the same person connecting with the same people, and also it's their recognition that you are doing something that even to this day is different from the normal stereotype of what they think a Black person is able to do. I think that what I want to be in my own community is to be a resource, so that they can come to me, which is already beginning to happen... that's invaluable that you can call someone in your community, even if it's [just] commenting on 'do you think that this person is going to be able to help me, yes or no', and to be honest and give them that feedback (Makeda Joseph: 8).

Being part of the community, 'working for' the community is the underlying basis for women's efforts, and an important criteria to form evaluations of their work. The women make a separation between what I describe as 'working at' behaviour, at a place of employment, and "working for" real community goals. 'Working at'— at law school, and at large impersonal law firms, means completing and exceeding the level of work and/or socialization expected. In exchange for such work, the women are extended professional development opportunities, and financial compensation. 'Working at' can be described as more than just "getting over" (becoming socio-economically successful). 'Working for,' involves undertaking employment or projects at community clinics, outreach programs, Black law organizations, and mentoring. As the women
repeatedly reminded me, working for the community is work, and may demand the same professional tasks such as researching ‘black-letter’ law, arguing in court and advising clients. Within places of employment and sites of community activism, the women are ‘working for’ their own futures, for the issues that matter to themselves, their families, and Black communities. The ‘law’ is only the conduit through which power may be accessed and transformed into community empowerment. The great difference is that the women are ‘working for’ their own community members and institutions. And by doing so, they are leaving the Scholars’ Tapestry and gathering patches for the Ancestors’ Quilt.

**FIVE DOMAINS FOR RESISTANCE: SEWING PATCHES FOR THE ANCESTORS’ QUILT**

I have organized this further discussion and analysis of “working for” into five major challenges that the women of Network face—five domains for resistance. First, Achieving Integration; using the Network for support to attempt a reconcile conflicts of practicing law, ‘working for’ communities and self-development. Second, Broadening Representation; facilitating community members access a legal career, including changing admission policies, and breaking down barriers in the profession. Third, Surmounting Isolation; learning to recognize and diminish the unfortunate effects of three different modes of isolation. Fourth, Increasing Access; realizing the promise of community involvement by ensuring that community members and groups have greater opportunities to utilize legal services. Finally, Transforming the Law; the venerable challenge of transforming the law itself, so that foundation that they are working so hard today will be strong enough to ‘lessen the struggle’ of marginalized women and men who enter law school, and make the profession a “safer” place to practice (Susan Sabeta: 3).
Achieving Integration

Bridging the physical, social and psychological distance between oneself as an individual and member of a Black community is only the first step in destroying feelings of disjuncture; rapprochement is a poor substitute for integration. Belonging to a community means eschewing both “hit-and-run” activism of the elitist outsiders and the “warrior” mentality of the litigator. Rather, a lawyer should be “solving problems in a process that merges legal rules with social priorities... to produce not victories but choices” (Harrington 1995: 193). The widened opportunities of elite education combined with a deserved distrust of the justice system and legal profession means that although many members of the community are proud, many others wonder how professionals could engage in such “soul-killing” work (Razack 1996). Furthermore, the scarcity of Black women and other marginalized people in traditionally White male professions is sometimes greeted with suspicion by the very communities we purport to serve. Furthermore, the precepts of the discipline, such as individualist rights framework, continue to fail to incorporate the tenants of cooperation and responsibility, which are valued in Black/African/Caribbean communities (Dei 1996a: 50).

Academically achieving women in my mother’s generation had few career options. Many became nurses and teachers, professions which affirmed nurturing contacts in their communities (Calliste: 1996: 365-6). Now we have the ‘right’ to live outside of our communities (if we can afford to) and enter new professions (if we have ‘merit’). Yet, such ‘freedom’ tends to bind us to alienation from our original communities (Sparks 1993: 74). Practicing professions in the health, education, and social service fields in the Black/African neighbourhoods, assumes a physical awareness of, if not political affinity to, the aspirations of Black/African. These professions also result in direct practical, material and spiritual benefits to most members of the community.
The "law," in marked contrast, is a much more intellectualized, elitist and worst of all, nebulous pursuit. To the average person law is nothing, and everything, at the same time. To members of marginalized communities, 'law' is hardly ever on our side. Lawyers do not make the laws they swear to uphold—the same laws Black women and other minoritized lawyers themselves find dissonant. The women I interviewed, expressed in various ways, that their feelings of "dissonance" can only be eroded with efforts of "integration" of self (Francine: 7-8, and Yvonne: 13). An integrated life is one where you commit time to 'work for' in the community, and help the community members access resources for them to come to you (Vivia Powell: 9). It means shaping relationships with family, friends and partners that are open, nurturing and empowering (Alicia Peters: 4). However, living holistically and critically is a continual process of re-evaluation the women undertake. It is a process which they readily admit is difficult, and which also necessitates committing the time and energy to encouraging each other, and occasionally questioning each other's decisions (Gloria Warner: 5 and Alicia Peters: 2).

**Broadening Representation**

The women in the Network still number very few; a handful in a sea of White students and practitioners and professors. Without exception, all Black women lawyers in Canada will experience being the 'first', 'only' or 'one of a few' Black women in their firms or faculties. However, their enrollment numbers are slightly better than in the past (See Alvi: 1990: 178-9 and Essed 1996: 128). The women are very aware of this fact and have worked, as Susan commented, to "lessen the struggle," for the women who come after, by entering elite dominated sites and maintaining visibility, just as their mentors prepared the way for them. Such sites include; clerking at higher courts, teaching at law schools or practicing in large firms in corporate or property law, places where "they don't want you to be" (Gloria: 2).
For Yvonne and others "not playing the game" of emulating White privilege means making difficult spiritual, political and socio-economic choices, for themselves and their communities. This may entail working in areas that most directly touch the community, such as legal clinics and independent firms in immigration, criminal litigation and human rights law. Other strategies include attending law schools with particularly low Black attendance, and once getting there becoming committed to "changing the dynamic and make-up of the profession so it is more friendly and accommodating" (9). Alicia, Yvonne, Gloria, Vivia and others lobbied their respective school administrations to begin or greatly expand their outreach programs, in addition to their own outreach and mentoring to high school, college and undergraduate students. Both acts of 'working for' dominant institutions, and 'working in' community sites such as legal clinics, and centres are important strategies to increase and retain Black women lawyers in the profession (Aylward, 1995, Sparks 1993).

The women are committing themselves to changing policies and teaching practices through aiming for prominent positions in large corporate firms, universities and the court system; for Makeda, part of increasing representation means pioneering in the fields of criminal, corporate or immigration law where members of Black communities "can see, oh there's a Black lawyer, and even if she's not working on my case"(4), challenging both external and internal racisms. Therefore, the representation of law within Black communities is even more important than representation of Black communities to the law. Then the issue of representation becomes a patchwork of related issues, such as the allocation of human and material resources, reforming law school admissions, retention in the profession and effective action in communities. In recognizing that each person has different strengths and roles to play in different legal and community arenas, the women are rejecting a Western dichotomy that dictates they remain within, or exiled from 'the system' (Dei 1996a).
**Surmounting Isolation**

The women of the Network continue to be active in and/or contribute to Black Lawyers’ associations in Canada and internationally to learn the strategies and build the practices and resources that will allow them to better ‘work for’ the community (Vivia: 9). Although most of the women in the Network presently live in Toronto, many plan to move to other cities in Canada, the United States, or to the Caribbean or Africa. Feelings of isolation of subject location, of being a Black woman in the White institution of the law school, led to a search for social community with other racialized students in general, and Black women students in particular. Many women first experience isolation when they are treated as ‘chosen’ by their families and/or communities and/or friends. Gloria remarked her friends were afraid of wasting her study time with invitations to commercial movies (9). As much as the women are same ‘underneath,’ their exhibited patterns of relationships, speech, confidence, their perception of the world and their place in it, are all influenced by their respective law experiences. It is this first isolation which is most painful, and yet the one area with which all the women continue to struggle. Hence, the women’s need to join or increase their commitment to Black churches or community tutorial programs; the preference for law schools and cities with a large Black population; the expressed search for women and men with strong identifications with Blackness all take additional import. Moreover, the women continually examine goals, situations and/or relationships that may exacerbate their sense of isolation, such as employment opportunities in dominant firms.

The second isolation is from mainstream law school life. This isolation may manifest as intimidation in the classroom, being actively discouraged from pursuing a career in law (Russell 1995: 31), having to defend your own abilities and the competency of the rare racialized professor, to patronizing White students (Harris 1995: 102). Furthermore, Black women must navigate the
politics of tokenism and survive outright verbal assaults (Greene 1995: 89). White women lawyers often report White men and White women colleagues overtly or covertly chastise them for being 'too masculine' (aggressive, ambitious, or ironically enough, feminist) or 'too feminine' (family-oriented, sensitive, modest career goals) (Harrington 1995: 39-40). These concerns are only the beginning for Black women in my study, and in the literature, who are constantly apprehensive about how their respective ways of dress, manners and even hair styling will be taken up by their dominant associates.

In the dominant gaze, Black women become the objects of "hypotheticals" in debates over the political meaning of braided hair or other physical or cultural traits that have no bearing on performance (Caldwell 1995: 299). Makeda remarked that one of her dilemmas in starting her new job, was deciding on a hairstyle that would be acceptable to herself as well as her colleagues (7). In some offices, natural hair, when combined with other 'subversive acts' such as wearing a Kente cloth scarf or cowrie shell earrings are career limiting decisions, leaving women open to criticism that they are not 'team players,' and/or potentially offensive to clients. Many of the women refuse to leave 'all of [them]selves at the door' and continue to display specific artifacts from their communities and identities. For example, when I first interviewed Vivia I was struck by the variety of Black/Caribbean community newspapers, trade magazines, Diasporic prints and degrees displayed in her office. Her office was not just a place of work for herself, but a place where colleagues and community members alike could feel comfortable. In fact every woman in the Network shared some experience where they felt caught in a "perverse visibility and convenient invisibility" trap (Caldwell 1995: 299). The 'trap' consists of employers or professors encouraging Black women to be 'ethnic' enough to recruit clients from their communities or carry out marginalized legal research, but 'normal' enough to meld into a conservative, liberal, or imperial feminist environment.
Although most of the women have all but given up trying to change their colleagues' bigoted ideologies, they still challenge any expression of that ideology over which they have influence, such as the cases where Gloria and Vivia rebuked their respective professors' racist and imperialist pedagogy. Assaults, both physical and psychological, are fundamentally painful and decentering, yet a third disturbing isolation comes at the rejection of your political location by other Women and Men of Colour. The women in the Network witnessed early on in law school the silence of so-called friends, allies and professors. This third isolation leads women to each other, and membership in the Network. What most concerns the women are the Men and Women of Colour who exhibit “lone-Negro syndrome” and consequently want little or nothing to do with other racialized/minoritized persons (Alicia Peters, see Chapter Four). By her very presence a Black woman, “a gorilla in the midst” (Russell 1995) produces discomfort in dominant and racialized/marginalized professors and/or colleagues unwilling to come to terms with externalized or internalized racism. This isolation both challenges the women to politicize potential allies, and serves as a reminder of the dangers of neglecting anti-oppression practices where we work and study.

What is important in understanding the above discussion is that compromises are made not necessarily in reaction to pressures from systems and institutions, but in anticipation of these pressures. Makeda’s minor compromise on an office hairstyle in the present may secure both partnerships and relationships in the future, where she intends to initiate lasting community action. Notwithstanding the women’s compromises, isolation in the dominant legal community is the one for which women are most prepared, the one about which the women cared the least and the one in which concessions to dominant systems is most tolerated, for themselves and for their colleagues in the Network. Although each woman makes minor sacrifices and negotiations, no one is willing to compromise their relationships with family and friends, their credibility with their communities, nor
the core of their respective identities. By insisting on both representation and accountability for themselves and their Network colleagues and friends, the women are creating an alternative to the isolation of remaining outsiders in both their communities and the legal profession.

**Increasing Access**

A fundamental goal of all the women of the Network is to increase access to legal services for their communities. The challenge of creating strategies that will guarantee that they can actually serve the community on a personal basis is daunting, especially for women in the prestigious corporate firms and those that work as prosecutors or as law professors. The following strategies represent five approaches variously employed and developed by women in the Network.

The first strategy entails negotiating conditions of employment, allowing the extension of the time and resources necessary to serve more marginalized clients in her community. For Vivia, that negotiation includes the understanding that her employers expect to benefit from the connections she makes with more affluent families and institutions in her community. If she brings in more lucrative clients to her firm, perhaps at least she will be able to provide vitally needed services for the most disadvantaged in the community, and may give more extensive attention to their needs (12). As the successful outcomes of such negotiations grow both in significance and reputation, her firm and other dominant legal institutions will be encouraged to expand community partnerships. Once the resources become available to the community, what may begin as superficial actions may focus attention on vital issues such as legal aid and the over-policing of Black communities (I. M. James 1996b).

The second related strategy is to negotiate, with an employer or law school, the time to initiate or expand community and school outreach programs. Most of the women I spoke to in the Network were in some stage of outreach development, whether as a representative of the institution,
an individual, or as a member of group already familiar to the community, such as a church or youth group. For this strategy the idea of leading an "integrated life" has an immediate application. Alicia, as part of her spiritual self renewal, empowers members of her church congregation by offering needed legal advice. In addition, she combines more formal career networking with social events through her BLSAC activities. The women aim to ensure that their law schools (present or former) commit to outreach programs that target Black high school and undergraduate populations. However, as members of dominant institutions are reluctant to adopt equitable admissions and hiring policies, the women encourage people of different backgrounds, genders and ages to apply to law school, and more importantly commit themselves to prepare and mentor prospective candidates.

The third strategy is a long term goal for some of women in the Network. They hope to set up private practice and consequently achieve greater flexibility and power in providing services for their respective communities. Private law firms are usually based on the partnership principle, where partners are the owners of the firm and draw hefty salaries from the total profits of the firm. Before the 1980s’s many young lawyers could expect to be ‘made partner’ after several years and stay with the firm for life. Now however, even established firms court “rainmaker” lawyers (usually elite White males, insiders in the world corporate accounts, high finance and patronage) at the expense of retaining up-and-coming minoritized/racialized lawyers (Harrington 1995: 29, Hagan & Zimmerman 1993: 19). Without binds of racist and hyper capitalist structures, women of the Network intend to set their own rules. Being in control means setting profit sharing, billing methods, non-hierarchical administration, and company policies based in community empowerment and service. Ideally, women like Alicia and Susan envision a full service feminist legal practice that will address a wide range of needs from real estate and business law to immigration and human rights. However, the women’s ability to pool their resources in the future depends on their respective
abilities in the present. To earn the resources and respect necessary to begin a new firm, they need to establish themselves as competent lawyers in the dominant legal community, and establish credibility as effective activists in their home communities.

The fourth method of ensuring that marginalized individuals and groups benefit from legal services is to work in legal clinics, existing small firms or independent offices which are already mandated to service diverse communities. The women who ‘work for’ in these sites often attend formal and informal community functions and are featured in community programs and papers. Working in the clinic system provides different challenges of taking on front line cases and facing the responsibility to provide all of the communities’ social-justice needs notwithstanding the extreme limitations of scarce human, political and material resources (Yvonne: 11). The combination of opportunities to argue cases which may reach the Supreme Court of Canada and improve the lives of marginalized people across the country, and to help an individual member of the community to find justice, is both attractive and satisfying. Moreover, women working in community clinics often feel most integrated in their communities, and are among the most visibly activist of their respective community’s professionals. The frustration experienced by women in mainstream firms and law schools to effect the slightest social change often diminishes for those who work for clinics or small community minded firms. Yet, just as often the frustration is replaced by the pressure to take every case, join every coalition, support every community event; in short, to fill the enormous need for service largely neglected by dominant institutions. The women in the Network who already work or volunteer for their clinic often feel their greatest worry is to find the time and personnel necessary to make their goals and dreams come to fruition. The women need more time to mentor and recruit potential colleagues, more people to recruit, train and supervise volunteers, and the resources to
initiate and supervise other programming. Yet, the women continue to hope that their resources will match their plans.

The fifth, most drastic, but sometimes the most necessary strategy, is to leave the practice of law and maintain ties to the profession. One woman in the Network feels that after a few more years of practice she will embark on a political career. As a provincial or federal representative this woman aims to form the laws and policies that directly affect the lives of Black/African/Caribbean people and other minoritized groups. Another woman sees herself concentrating on developing popular and scholarly writings and lectures in the future. She hopes to help raise political awareness among some members of her community, while applying her legal training and experiences as an effective lobbyist for her community’s social-justice demands. A third woman aims to one day join the judiciary. As a judge, she intends to write decisions that both reflect anti-racist/equitable principles and the government’s failure to translate Charter Rights into socio-economic improvements. Notwithstanding the women’s diverse career plans, all have in common the belief that five to ten years of law will offer the necessary skills and contacts to launch their new careers.

Everyone of the above strategies requires that women in the Network become expert advocates and dedicated community members. What is not so obvious is the mutual encouragement, and critical advice implicit in their decision to follow such difficult career and life choices. Without the support of family and friends, spiritual conviction, and a healthy self knowledge, all of their ambitious plans would lose much of their meaning. The women are planning collective futures of writing collaboratively, practicing law together, and honestly reviewing each other’s actions for their transformative possibilities. All of these actions reject a legal individualism which “treats people as abstract individuals, rather than as situated citizens” (Hutchinson 1995: 89). The women are
reaching beyond an intellectualization of ‘community’ as an imagined ideal (Anderson 1983), and the marginalization of community work as a set of unrelated practices (Davis 1996).

**Transforming the Law**

Ironically, but not surprisingly, the greatest challenge the women face is the law itself:

If the experience of multiple discrimination produces unique problems for those involved, it should be reflected in especially intense feelings of anger and stress among minority women. This is exactly the pattern we find....Minority women consistently have the highest average scores on the anger/stress scale, while non-minority men have the lowest....These results support the assertion that multiple discrimination is a unique problem for minority women in law school settings (Hagan and Zimmerman 1993: 13-14).

The above quote taken from a publication of the Canadian Bar Association demonstrates what the women in the Network have always known: the law is a rigid field, ruled by precedents and liberal rights discourse (Williams 1991). The increasing number and prominence of Black women in the profession demonstrates that the women are beginning to achieve the socio-economic markers recognized by dominant members of the profession and society. Yet, for the women in the Network, and the communities they are ‘working for,’ such achievement is empty without changing systemic interlocking oppressions. ‘Change’ means recognizing and challenging domination in its myriad forms, and working to see that these challenges develop into lasting systemic and social changes, for example: Gloria, and other women in the Network fought the “elite racism” that insisted that a White defined meritocracy is fair for all students (van Dijk 1993: 139) by working for a change in admissions policy at their respective law schools (Gloria: 9). Susan works to unravel the racism/sexism of her colleagues who insist that Black communities are too disorganized to affect racist legal traditions. She offers her services by organizing court appeals of laws and procedures which detrimentally affect members of Black communities. Yvonne practices an ‘interlocking’ analysis of the law by building coalitions with Native, Chinese and poverty activists on common legal issues (Yvonne: 12).
Other Black women like Francine, Susan and Marjorie, continue to write policies, papers and articles which are beginning to build a legal 'text' that addresses the challenges faced by Black women, and other minoritized groups in Canada. This work is sometimes less visible but influences if and how dominant society members may articulate the discourse around Black Womanhood. The debate in legal circles is changing from 'there is nothing written' to depreciating the value of what is available (Amoah 1997: 7). Nevertheless, this change does represent the infancy of increased visibility of Black women, and issues of interlocking oppressions in the mainstream legal discourse. Soul searching and perceptive writings (see Thornhill 1985, Duclos 1993, Razack 1993, Sparks 1993) by Black women and other Women of Colour challenge our construction of our own identities. Sociologist William Cross theorizes the process of internalizing a positive Black identity as “Nigrescence” – the psychology of becoming Black. Albeit, I am reluctant to accept a stage theory to describe what I, and some of the Black women I am interviewing have experienced as a fluid process, Cross does offer excellent descriptions of some of the behaviours and ideologies of someone coming to terms with her racialized identity (Cross, 1995: 54). Whereas all the women are vocal about identifying with their Blackness, it was the performance of their identities that were at issue. All of the women continue to come to terms with the reality of the epistemic violence of higher education and the legal profession (Moreau 1996: 209).

The women find themselves constantly, and sometimes futilely trying to “extract kernels of justice” and relevance from ‘Black letter Law’ (Vivia: 3, see also Hutchinson 1995). Some of the women are exploring how the existing justice system may be transformed by equitable principles found in anti-oppression legal theories and practice. The growing movements of ‘outsider jurisprudence’, ‘critical race theory’, ‘feminist legal theory’, and even the moderate theories of ‘critical legal studies,’ ‘rights discourse’ and ‘legal pluralism’ hold the promise of rethinking and
reforming legal theory and practice. This list is intended only to illustrate the diversity of thought in legal reform, and offer areas of further inquiry for the lay reader. 8

No theory can change law enacted by legislators. However, when judges incorporate critical theories in rendering judgments and interpreting discriminatory laws and policies, laws may eventually be struck down by the Supreme Court of Canada. Such landmark cases affect the lives of millions of Canadians, such as the decriminalization of abortion after the Morgantaler case and the recognition of pornography’s harm to women and children in the Butler case (Johnson 1995). However, even successful Charter of Rights challenges alone cannot replace discriminatory legal practitioners, or produce the political will to diminish the influence of the corporate lobbies. Only by identifying the “interconnections” which bind the articulation of oppressions, and building broad based alliances among ordinary stakeholders “can [we] begin to alter these practices and eradicate the relations which reproduce domination” (Johnson 1995: 89). The voices of marginalized women were largely silenced in both the pornography and abortion debates, and our bodies absent in the court rooms. In both cases elite feminists forced the courts to recognize the inequality of women in this society. However such victories are do little to change to lives of most women, as local access to abortion has barely increased, and pornography reigns on the internet (Hutchinson 1995). In marked contrast is the case of Judge Corrine Sparks.

Three years ago, a judge in Halifax was called upon to decide a case of a young Black man accused of assaulting a White male police officer. According to the boy, “R. D. S.,” he had been trying to help his cousin, who was being held by the police officer. R. D. S. soon found himself in

a choke-hold and under arrest. At the trial the judge believed the boy’s testimony and acquitted him of all charges. When giving the context for her decision the judge said:

...I am not saying that constable has misled the court, although police officers have been known to do that in the past. And I’m not saying that the officer overreacted, but certainly police officers do overreact, particularly when they’re dealing with non-white groups. That, to me, indicates a state of mind right there that is questionable (Sparks 1995: 68-9).

The case of *R. v. R.D.S.* should be a story about how a young boy encounters trouble with the law. However, the judge’s words of summation transformed the story into one challenging policing in a racist society. Sparks believed that even the legal definition of a ‘reasonable person’ is someone who acknowledges the racism/discriminations inherent in Canadian society. For stating what most marginalized people know to be a fact, her decision was overturned, and challenged all the way to the Supreme Court. It is a the story of how Corrine E. Sparks, a Black woman judge, dared to speak the unspeakable, dared to tell a story that named race in a powerful and profound way, which indicted the justice system built in the interests of a White dominance which would control the telling of all stories. However, in defiance of dominance, this story is also about the power of women’s networking practices, including women from the Network in this study.

In this case, unlike Butler and Morgantaler, provincial and national groups of women, as well as individuals and local groups devoted resources and support for a case which strikes a chord within so many of us. The groups who were officially given status by the court, are called “interveners”. An apt title for a group of: The National Organization of Immigrant and Visible Minority Women of Canada (NOIVMC), the African Canadian Legal Clinic (ACLC), the Afro-Canadian Caucus of Nova Scotia, the Congress of Black Women of Canada and the Women’s Legal Action and Education Fund (LEAF). In addition, local women’s groups in Nova Scotia, and law students and practitioners across Canada help to research and fund the case.

Sparks is the exception that establishes the ‘rule’ of White dominance. Therefore, the
accusation of bias towards the Black woman trial judge, could both absolve the justice system and dominant society, and condemn Judge Sparks, who could be de-centred, and literally unbelievable. In order for the Crown to prove that Judge Sparks was biased, they must implicitly recognize race to be a factor, because bias requires a reason from which partiality could be based. The argument needed Sparks to be Black as her defendant, for the prosecution to show the connection between Sparks and R.D.S. The connection of race, became knowable, and therefore problematic only because of its visibility. The objectification of Sparks, is not a new project, and is inextricably linked to issues of gender, and sexuality (L. M. James 1996c). An effective method of subordination in this case proved to be the questioning of the impartiality of the judge, who because she was both Black and a woman was already vulnerable to attack (Razack: 1993b). To question the credibility of the judge cast doubt of credibility of any and all oppressed persons who are required to be impartial authorities. When the case reached the Supreme Court, and five of nine judges restored the acquittal of R.D.S, only two justices found that Sparks was entirely appropriate in her actions:

...we disagree with [the justice's] position that the comments of Judge Sparks were unfortunate, unnecessary, or close to the line. Rather, we find them to reflect an entirely appropriate recognition of the facts in the evidence in this case and the context within which this case arose – a context known to Judge Sparks and to any well-informed member of the community (1997: 2).

Later in their opinion of the case, L’Heureux-Dubé and McLachlin wrote that Sparks “was simply engaging in the process of contextualized judging which, in our view, was entirely proper and conducive to a fair and just resolution of the case before her” (15). At stake in this case is principally and immediately the fate of a young man. In a wider context, the outcome may have a far-reaching consequence of the ability of minoritized judges and other practitioners to employ their own experiences to determine the credibility of witnesses and the admissibility of evidence. This is an ability taken for granted by their White counterparts. To silence our experiences of multiple oppressions would allow the dominant experiences of being the oppressor to have free reign as the
legitimate 'voice of truth'. In Judge Sparks’ own report of Women of Colour in the legal profession, the voice of one Black woman succinctly addresses the real life frustrations of liberal and feminist response to what I have been discussing:

The larger question is whether not to participate, and thus refuse to legitimize this so-called gender equality task force and at the same time falling prey to this "passive" form of silencing. Or to participate and thus legitimizing this farce. Whatever I choose to do it will still be, in my view a form of silencing. It is sad that the legal profession has no room for radical voices. Thus, women of colour who want to speak with a radical oppositional voice feel censored and silenced. So why do we participate in these processes. Perhaps this is a sub-issue that must be explored (Sparks: 1993: 94-95).

Sparks, and R. D. S. finally did win the case. R. D. S. was finally free to plan his future without the threat of imprisonment, and Sparks is free, for now at least, to plan her career without the threat of judicial sanction. Hopefully, as major cases are decided which consider the social contexts in the judgments, more judges and lawyers will begin to accept the applicability of anti-racist/anti-discriminatory arguments that call for a reinterpretation of existing statutes and common law traditions. In the meantime, the women of the Network are establishing links with people across the country and within communities to mobilize human and financial resources necessary in cases that someday may increase the likelihood of obtaining justice for all Canadians.

Maintaining community kinship and nurturing meaningful relationships means taking the time for self-renewal and support of others, which conflicts with commitments to mainstream legal practice. The stress of dealing with overtly and covertly racist/sexist/ableist/ colleagues and employers is further compounded by making hard decisions of whether to consolidate gains for the future by working for a firm through overtime or to work for the community in the present acute needs for legal resources. For even the most liberal of employers maintaining a healthy 'bottom-line’, protecting the reputations of the partners, securing the firm’s future outweighs both our concerns for our community and our voices (Harrington 1995). If in fact "equity will only be achieved in the legal profession when lawyers from all backgrounds genuinely accept that there is
more than one way of being a good practitioner or professor..." (Hagan and Zimmerman 1993: 3), then the role of a professional needs to include political action for marginalized/racialized communities. Therefore, a ‘successful’ transformation of the law must mean that both dominant and marginalized stakeholders recognize that the arenas of ‘working for’ dominant institutions and ‘working at’ community development overlap, interact and ‘interlock’ just as the physical and social geography, cultures, histories and the identities of the Black women who act in these spaces (see Hill Collins, 1990 and Dei, 1996a).

I conclude this work in the next chapter, by sharing two final stories regarding the danger of accepting the origin of the law, and the elusive possibilities of justice. I then expand two examples of paradigms that fail to adequately address issues of women in the Network, and offer a paradigm that calls for resistance through coalition and community practice. Before concluding with a final passage in the words of the women in the Network, I offer my view of the significance of this work, and outline areas of future study.
CHAPTER SIX:
CONCLUSION

Beyond Critical Race Theory & Black Feminist Thought: Reconciling the Tapestry and the Ancestors' Quilt

Critical race theory teaches that combating the racist actions of those already in power is only one step in a myriad of strategies to transform the justice system. Bringing constitutional “test” cases to the highest courts, fighting for equity in law school admissions and hiring practices programs in law schools, firms and judicial appointments are important for changing the justice system to make it relevant for legal professionals, and persons from marginalized communities. Black feminist theories teach us that racialized legal professionals must “up-lift” themselves and their communities (Hill Collins 1990: 147-8) by engaging in mentoring in the high school and undergraduate levels to encourage more young Black people to enter the professions. Integrative anti-racism teaches the above strategies as well as offering a Canadian sociological perspective of practices and political strategies to combat racist assumptions, and problematize the dominant discourse (Ng 1991).

The complexity of the disenfranchisement of Black/African/Caribbean people, demands that any attempt to reform dominant systems, law school admissions, judicial appointments and tenure, must be combined with front-line activism and galvanizing material and spiritual resources in diverse communities. These are the combination of strategies that will lead to transformative change in the future, while addressing the pressing needs of marginalized persons in the present. Furthermore, these actions must exist within a framework of resistance that interrogates a capitalist paternalism that neutralizes all oppressions. A liberalism that neutralizes gender or a feminism that neutralizes race cannot represent the voices of the majority in Canadian society who experience multiple
oppressions. Our judicial system is one where “race-neutrality in law has become the presumed antidote for race bias in real life (Hill Collins 1990: 48). As a Black woman of a dominant class, sexuality and ability, I need to monitor my silencing of other presumed “neutral” voices as I reach to have my own heard. I need to challenge the barriers of academia and the law which informs the questions I ask, the way I ask them and the kind of relationships I may form with members of my own community. Resistance is the transformation of the external world, to disrupt weaving of the grand Tapestry of power and domination. Resistance is to stitch the Ancestors’ Quilt, to transform our inner-self and personal worlds, to become aware of our actions within multiple locations, interdependent with multiple communities.

Hagar’s Story: Learning to Re-position the Law

Drawing on the work of Maria Mies and Rhoda Reddock, Dionne Brand illustrates the connections of multiple locations, and the interlocking articulation of oppression in eighteenth century Canadian history. The institutions of the enslavement of Black women, and forced domestication of White women controlled their productive and reproductive services. The benefit White women accrued from Black women’s forced labour, *interlocks* with their own dependence on elite White males, and the capitalist economy. (Brand 1988: 44). I grew up attending a middle-class White Baptist church, surviving the White children’s racist attacks, and their parents’ phony smiles. Although their acts of domination were painfully obvious, the exploitation of the Bible to reinforce their world view was dangerous for all its subtlety. They taught me to accept the Bible, to ‘explore’ but never question the contradictions. They taught me that the laws against murder, abortion, had come down to us as words of God, unedited, *the law*. They taught me that Hagar was just a concubine of Abraham, and used *his* son Ishmael to taunt barren *his* wife, Sarah. When Sarah and Abraham’s test was over, and the concubine tossed out, God, in His infinite mercy, saved her
(Genesis 16, 21).

When I re-read the ‘story of Abraham’ as the story of ‘Hagar, Sarah and Abraham’ I was brought to the painful realization that what I was really being taught in my Sunday school was ‘how an uppity slave got her due,’ and that I had identified with the enslavers, I had accepted the law. Abraham controlled Sarah, but Sarah owned Hagar. Historically, Abraham and Sarah would have had other choices, such as adoption. Under the Nuzi law of the time, if Sarah ‘lent’ her servant to her husband, she would be considered the legal mother of any resulting heir, and therefore accrue automatic material benefits and social protection. However, under the adoption laws, she would be like a ‘step-mother’ and have little legal claim to her husband’s estate. (D.S. Williams, 1993: 27).

Until Hagar is finally cast out into the wilderness with her son Ishmael, Sarah and Abraham traded her back and forth between them (Genesis 21). However in the wilderness she cares for her son, creates a new name for the Hebrew God based in her African heritage, names a physical monument, and becomes a mother of a people who bear her name (30-33). This African woman!

In one sense this story seems so distant and mythical, but we see the same conditions and biased knowledge production in our present society, such as: single-motherhood, homelessness, religious devotion, the ‘Black matriarchy’, and the ‘Black super-woman’. Yet, when I was taught to read Hagar’s story, the lesson to be learned was the mercy of God, not the terror of patriarchy. I was taught, selectively, about the historical Abraham, to understand him, his family and time. I was taught to feel his suffering of childlessness. At the very same moment I was taught to forget about Hagar, to ignore her sacrifices and pain, and her joy of motherhood. I could not see myself in Hagar, nor could I let Hagar into me for fear that I would let all enslavement in with her, a place and time we are supposed to have left behind a long time ago. Leaving pain behind, also means we leave the contexts, strength and purpose that belied true cost of suffering and joys of struggle. We
would leave behind the lessons, small victories, the unforgivable betrayals and forgettable indulgences. I would leave behind the real histories and sacrifices of Black women like Marie-Joseph Angelique, Harriet Tubman, Mary Ann Shadd Cary, Esmerelda Thornhill, Corrine Sparks. In their place I would take with me only the icon of ‘Black Superwoman’, strong, powerful, but alone and unknowable.

**Liberalism: Dis-connections and the Conservation of Power**

In law as well as history, Black women are ‘unknowable’, our lives remain largely unexplored. In the principals of liberalism, and the rule of the law, over the rule of ‘man’, our realities are not worth knowing, unless our pre-established rights are in jeopardy (Hutchinson 1995). Through ‘black-letter’ law, philosophy of law and traditional jurisprudence even the most cursory rhetoric of articulation of race, class, and gender I have learned to expect in sociology are almost absent (Maloney 1997: 1). I did not fit either category, and the law fails to recognize that my experiences are both raced and gendered, not to mention infused with the discourse and practice of other discriminations.

In Ontario’s recent report on the racism in the Justice system, the writers assume “we” know that our justice practitioners are basically “just”. Thus, the many problems and issues they identify are placed under the banner of systemic racism, except for the unusual acts of a few ‘bad apples’ (Ontario 1995: 2-3). Instead we should be speaking of ‘racisms’ and ‘discriminations’ because oppressions are practiced in many forms, and are articulated with other practices and ideologies in society. Racism has a popular ideological form which is normalized as ‘common sense’ for its practitioners (Rizvi 1993). Mike Harris aptly named his ‘Common Sense Revolution’. The ideology gained such currency with White, middle-class and even working-class Ontarians because it feeds and normalizes the racist/sexist/homophobic/ableist bundle of common sense ideas they already
held. These ideas are found just as much behind the bench in court, behind the podium at school, and behind the desk at a law firm.

Many marginalized persons in law school or practice may become aware of feelings of isolation, incompetence, non-belonging. A heterosexual, able-bodied White women may name it ‘sexism’ and may have a more difficult time reconciling inequities and gaining justice, as demonstrated by the large number who leave the profession (Hagan and Zimmerman 1993). Yet, they are also the women who are most likely to be mentored and to be ‘hooked-up’ (Makeda Joseph: 7). What does not change between these situations and other exceptions to the archaic rules of discrimination, is the centrality of ‘Whiteness’ at the heart of the machinations and permutations of situational privileges. Therefore it is not the rules, but the sources of the rules which must be theorized and fought. If broadly inclusive questions remain unformed, there is little possibility of the defeat of racism and other oppressions. The specific experiences and intersections of oppressions that infuses one person’s fight could inform another’s. A liberal paradigm does not speak to unraveling a hierarchy of competing interests and fails to give reasons to form the connections between oppressions. The refusal of dominant legal professionals and their government to seriously attempt this process results in the silencing of voices and the exclusion of bodies willing to make change (St. Lewis 1992).

Liberal Feminist Theories: A Premature Celebration

An exception to the above claim is the representation of elite White women in the legal system. They were the first to gain access to higher education, political appointments and the vote, in the late nineteenth to early twentieth centuries, rights which Women of Colour and Native women would only obtain many decades later (Prentice 1988). The latter half of this century was a time of political and social upheaval, and economic expansion, not coincidentally corresponded with greatly
increased job opportunities for middle-class White women, whose husbands’ salaries were no longer earning the ‘family wage’ promised in post-war reforms. However Black, Asian, and Southern European women had always worked outside their home (domestic work or factories) or brought paid work into the home (piece work, laundry). These women were supplementing the income of their spouses who, when they could find work, were employed seasonally (construction, agriculture) or in lower status jobs (cleaners, physical labour). For these men and women, as well as working-class and farming White families, the promise of the ‘family wage’ meant a reality of ‘family work’ as their children left school early to seek employment (Andersen 1993).

Thus, just at the time capitalism needed more consumers, White middle-class feminists fought for women (read White women) to leave the home, and other issues that touched their lives, such as company sponsored child-care and the non-taxation of child support payments (Razack 1991). Of course, to fully benefit from such measures both parents needed steady employment. Meanwhile, groups such as the Women’s Legal Aid and Action Fund (LEAF) neglected the issues that affected more working-class and racialized women: the criminalization of refugees, crackdowns on supposed immigration and welfare fraud, and the over-policing of communities not considered women’s issues, but rather as ‘poverty’ or ‘immigration’ issues (Razack 1991). Only in the past few years have NAC, (National Action Committee on the Status of Women) and LEAF been credibly addressing a wide range of issues affecting racialized and poor women and their families (Razack 1991: 24-5). NAC, as a national lobby group, has recently been headed by two Women of Colour and has made a strong commitment to the incorporation of minoritized voices. In contrast, LEAF defends legal cases as well as lobbying and is subject to material and political constraints. First, it depends on the donation of time, resource and influence of wealthy patrons, and second, it cannot afford to attack the actions of individuals in power on the government and the bench, for real fear
of reprisals (Go 1997). Therefore, emphasis is placed on arguing Charter of Rights cases and “paper gains” which include fighting for equal representation in political and judicial appointments (CACSW 1993: 17-18).

However, if we look to the court system, and the growing number of female appointees to make equitable judgments, there is no conclusive evidence that White women judges are significantly more sensitive to issues of marginalized people than their male-counterparts (Feinman 1994: 145). Great exceptions to this assertion can be found in the Supreme Court where the madam justices are the most courageous interpreters of the Charter of Rights. Nonetheless, the pool of candidates in Ontario for ordinary judicial appointments (prominent lawyers, professors, deans) are mostly elite males, and other candidates are simply passed over. Calls for judicial reform to educate the judges and lawyers already in the system appear infrequently, and often lead to optional protocols. In a recent attempt, former Supreme Court Justice, Bertha Wilson, introduced a guide to one thousand federally appointed judges. She was greeted with skepticism (Vienneu 1997: 1) Such arguments rest on the assumption that the abolition of institutional racism rests in the White middle-class male to allow himself to be re-educated, share power, and rewrite the history and rules of a society that defines and excludes marginalized peoples (St. Lewis 1992: 6). We are playing a futile game of encouraging White elites to abandon the privileges of the Whiteness (I. M. James 1996b).

**The Transformative Possibilities of Networking**

To achieve change when working within dominant systems such as law, fighting for representation will begin to end the discriminatory logic of “what you have not yet been”(flown a plane, been to law school, become mayor), “you can’t ever become” (an astronaut, a judge, prime minister). The echo of internalized racism echoes in the minds and souls of racialized groups (Hill Collins 1990: 72). Struggling for representatives of different groups to pursue key positions is an
important disruption of the dominant discourse, and an equally important producer of role models for the marginalized. Fighting for representation must accompany an interrogation of the paradigms that precluded inclusion, or those who enter positions to become effective mentors will rarely advance in their professions or achieve personal empowerment (Aylward 1995).

The women in the Network have incorporated an alternative paradigm that is closer to an African epistemology which recognizes the empowerment in respecting the inextricability of spirituality, politics, ethics, community and nature (Dei, 1996b). They value such ‘empowerment’, over a Western definition of ‘power’ which privileges cultural, material and political exploitation. The strength of the women is in their refusal to adopt the values of the institutions. (Monture 1995: 50-1). Yet, the refusal to adopt a paradigm, is only effective when an alternative view can fill the void (Eichler 1986: 40-1). Networking fills ‘the void’.

Networking, as practiced by the women in this study, reshapes the dynamic relations of ‘power’ and ‘empowerment’ to ensure that the women who reach positions of influence, whether within or outside dominant institutions, both support and critique each other. Networking entails the denunciation of liberal paradigms which privilege individualism and depend on the “essential autonomy of human beings” as the underlying basis for society (Razack 1991: 76). Black women who would follow their mentors into positions of power will find even greater hurdles. Women such as Judge Corrine Sparks, Dean of Law Juanita Westmoreland-Traoré, and Programme Director Esmeralda Thomhill faced a myriad of challenges to reach and retain such positions, and the challenges are ceaseless. (Williams 1991, Hagan and Zimmerman 1993, Sparks 1993, James 1996c).

The social world and the systems it contains such as education, law, social services, and health, are problematic (Ng 1981). Ethnicity has been used by social scientists and governments as a method of “managing diversity,” transforming patriarchy and exploitation of some races by one,
into ‘race relations’ (Dei 1996a: 80). Black women and other racialized women are made “ethnic” by the dominant society’s interpretation of difference, and the dominant project to manage people in relation to the modes of production and social location within society (Ng 1981: 99). In the dominant discourse, the issues that matter to Black women are reconstituted into artificial and devalued categories that cannot incorporate the experiences of diverse people. Because to do so would be to recognize the “harm” of oppressions, and the false value of Whiteness (Matsuda 1993).

**Directions for Future Study**

*It’s important that you publish this [research] in law journals. There is so little work done about us [Black women in the law] anywhere, and it’s even worse in Canada. We need to record who we are and what we do...because we aren’t in it just for ourselves — Marjorie Vincent.*

The most important test of the efficacy of my work will be answered in the responses of the women in Network: Will they themselves feel fairly and critically portrayed? Is the incorporation of stories, analogies and parables a significant and effective complement to the traditional thesis format and content? Will the women find this work a useful record for themselves, their own community practices, and in mentoring young Black women and other marginalized people? Will this work bring about a discussion of reconciling the ruptures of living in dominant and community sites? Finally, is the “pattern” of this work sufficiently complex that it could generate future inquiry and study? I expect to know the answer to my first two questions soon after I make this thesis available to the Network women, and other readers. When I enter law school and begin to practice I will more fully understand the implications of my third and fourth questions. However, I may not know for several years to come, whether my answer to my fifth question will be answered by someone other than myself.

There are many areas of the Network that I would love to explore in future research. As I mentioned throughout this work, concerns of trust and disclosure drew boundaries around my
interrogation, their responses and what I could ethically report. Because of my promise to the women to maintain their anonymity to the best of my ability, I have lost some of the richness of the narrative patterns, some of their individuality, and some of the context. Moreover, issues such as childhood and adulthood trauma, sexuality, partnership with men need to be more fully explored. In the future, I would also like to form a study around progressive/committed/critical Black women at the pinnacle of their careers, such as Juanita Westmoreland-Traoré, Corrine Sparks, Joanne St. Lewis, Esmeralda Thornhill and Tony Williams. The wealth of knowledges held by the women, the challenges they face, and their experiences would be necessary to complete the Network’s story, to add the elder patterns to the Ancestors’ Quilt.

Reconceptualizing the Past to Reshape the Future: Gathering the Threads

Beyond the rhetoric and good intentions, working to ameliorate socio-economic conditions and freedom of spirit of our own groups must accompany political actions with other marginalized communities. We must remember the links made between Native and Black people in the anti-bellum period was in blood and body, as well as circumstance and territory. We owned each other at various junctures in history and geography, fought together and against each other, and competed for recognition and funding, that are all part of a legacy waiting to be bound up with the waves of latter immigrants (Hull 1982). It is sufficient, for my present purposes at least, to say that we, marginalized people in Canada, are not always the best of allies. The enemy is not ‘White people’, some of whom are our allies, but the oppression itself, and the actions of those who perpetuate it.

Although oppressions have a most irrational basis, whether on perceived physical or cultural differences, the maintenance of the material gains oppressions have afforded, is a pastime in which we are all complcit. The historical connections between the rise of capitalism and industrialization with enslavement and genocide of African and Native populations, with the strengthening of
capitalist patriarch and the control of European women and children are no mere coincidences. Just as the present day economic downturns, Ontario’s election of the “Common Sense Revolution,” the rise of racist incidents, and immigration’s head taxes were interdependent (Ng 1993). Unlike White women, in 1929, Native women and most Women of Colour did not gain the rights accorded with becoming “persons under the law”. It is an exclusion that has continued to a plague human rights discourse and constitutional accords to the present (Monture 1995). In times when we broke down systemic barriers and revolutionized social policy, such as the civil rights movement and women’s movement in the 1960s and 1970s, leaders of the movements were largely unable to reconcile their respective oppressions and include other groups. Thus, in renewed conservatism of the 1980s and 1990s previously excluded groups, Native people, refugees, racialized lesbians and gay men, persons with disabilities, poverty and prisoner’s rights activists who are struggling hard to maintain resources in their own communities have little faith that they won’t find themselves again betrayed by the ‘new-Left’ or mainstream feminism (Davis 1996, Go 1997).

In the end, the biggest winner from divisiveness within minoritized communities is patriarchy/capitalism. Whereas society’s elites consolidate power in the hands of a few, marginalized people are trying to obtain a small piece of a shrinking pie. Strategies of securing rights, group by group, may secure oppression of others with temporary privileges, and excludes any possibility for real equality for all. As critical race theorist Derrick Bell so eloquently expounds, it is the very naming the harms caused by racist/sexist constructions that will lead to the recognition of our “real lives,” as valuable because “we can only delegitimate [racism] if we can accurately pinpoint [that] it ... lies at the center, not the periphery; in the permanent...” (1992: 198). Therefore, the only way to achieve the goal of liberation is to recognize that racism is a fixture of North American life, in a sense ‘bred in our bones’, and to commit ourselves to finding ‘new terrains for
For the women in the Network, that terrain means working to “shape” the law to meet the realities of people in marginalized communities:

But at the same time you can’t completely abandon the law, because it does provide a framework, from which to bring about effective change. It’s not the concept of law that is wrong or racist, but the content the informs that context, so what you do, people who network within law is to try to inform that content so that shapes the reality of people's every day lives, because a lot of law just doesn’t speak to what your reality is, or my reality is, or Tom’s reality on the street. So I think try to make it more reflective of and responsive to, the people whose needs it’s supposed to work for, so the challenge that network faces is how to do that (Susan Sabeta: 2).

My responsibility to represent the realities of the women in the Network, despite, or perhaps because of their relatively high socio-economic positions, made clear to me that they would not allow me to be detached, and have their trust at the same time. As Marjorie said, “we were the ones who spoke up in class, and looked other Black women in the eye, and returned their smiles.” What may seem trivial to an observer, or a way of marking ‘in’ and ‘out’ groups, is in fact a fundamental method of marginalized Black women to identify our allies. Marjorie marked other students by their willingness to address how race and law interact in the classroom, and their choice of companions. I should also mark the importance of personality development—a compatibility with other members of the Network. Yvonne addressed this point by implying that some women were sometimes left “out of the loop” due to personality conflicts. Other women, including herself, became very selective in which activities and gatherings, informal and formal, they would attend. Conversely, geographic location did not seem to be a great factor for any of the women included in the Network. Women in several different cities as often as local women, expected to maintain close contacts, and to see other Network members at gatherings of various Black law associations. A shared subject location alone will garner interest in a potential member, “we are always happy to see another face” (Yvonne). However, compatible politics and personalities, professional competency, and the commitment to contribute to the profession and community are the threads that bind the women of Network together to reclaim the Ancestors’ Quilt.
Each woman reinforces the 'threads' by engaging in some form of community practice to supplement, or as part of regular employment or school work. Women who are presently employed in community based clinics, or maintain a close association, find that they their jobs, social lives and community work are inextricably linked, which brings both challenges and benefits. Other women, who are still in law school, or completing their articling year and/or writing their bar admission exams or 'working at' corporate firms, find that the demands on their time and energy limits their volunteer work, as well as family interactions and time for partners and friendships. The women's abilities to balance competing interests, and the community's ability to take advantage of those resources and build trust is mitigated by the very systemic barriers that lead the women to become lawyers: poor access to legal, residency status and economic disparity (Ontario 1995). Moreover, the women's relationships with the community are further complicated by internalized racism, emanating from the system's disrespect for lawyers in the court, and the normalization of negative images in dominant culture (Dei 1996a: 52).

The women of the Network are facing impossible pressure to split their families, politics, communities, and even their identities into separate exclusive compartments, to achieve success in professional and personal contexts. To paraphrase a saying, the women of the Network, like other marginalized people working in dominant institutions, are 'sea fish swimming in fresh waters' (Nkweto Simmonds 1997: 226). We have educated ourselves to adapt to, and even thrive in, a White patriarchal environment, but we will always feel the difference of Blackness, of womaness, and of other loci of oppression. We will always feel the weight of the water and the confines of the shores. This impossibly burdensome task is one that we, as marginalized bodies in a White dominated society, face in struggles with family, community institutions, and ourselves. 'Integration of self' and 'Black woman lawyer' seem to be mutually exclusive conditions, yet the women of the Network
continue to find support in each other and the commitment, resources and strength in themselves to work for community development, and anti-discriminatory practices

A LAST WORD: CHOOSING TO STITCH THE ANCESTORS’ QUILT

Try to imagine that the following story is true:

A member of my community is apprehended by an officer of the peace. She is then assigned a good lawyer free of charge, who is me. With the respect and understanding of a judge and crown attorney who are also Black women who understand the interlocking nature of race/sexuality/class/ability/gender that have bearing on my client’s case, she receives a fair bail hearing and quickly secures a trial date, until which she is free to be cared for by her family and our community. The accused, who is “innocent unless proven guilty”, enters the court room. She is confident that she will be able to tell her story and that story will be heard. Together, with the help of other court officers, who are also socially aware professionals, we do not rest until we put forth all of the ‘facts’, stories and experiences, so that justice not only is done ‘but appears to be done’.

Even the staunchest defenders of our system must admit that some Canadians would no more believe this story than a child’s fairy tale. In an adversarial criminal justice system, such as our own, story-telling becomes the hidden, yet integral component to any trial, as important as the liberal rhetoric of ‘justice appearing to be done’. In actual practice, the courtroom is made of personalities and egos, which are raced, gendered, classed, marked for ability, and judged for sexuality (Ontario 1995). Each person’s dress is searched for signs of religion, and any connection (real or imagined) to a particular ethnic or regional identity. For example, as a dark-skinned Black woman, named Irma Marcia James, I may be constructed as Black, Black and female, BlackWoman, or the neat trick of

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9 A phrase used by Gary Caraccilo, Duty Counsel with the Metropolitan Toronto Provincial Courts, as he spoke at a seminar of the Scarborough Solution for Safety: What can the community do to improve the criminal justice system?, November 11, 1996.
the colour myth, that would say that she-has-no-race-or-gender-but-if-you-must-ask-I-will-tell-you.

Yet, if I really were in a court of my peers, they would recognize my manner, pronunciation of certain words, body shape and name to be Caribbean, and probably from a small former British colony.

If however, the courtroom was full of my closest peers they would recognize that my mother is “Nurse Harris,” from Urlings Village, who was nearly Matron at Halberton Hospital, and that my father is “Dispenser Samuel,” who used to work at Bengie’s. They would know that my body is from my father’s mother, and my skin is from my mother’s father. They would know my family’s long history in the labour movement in Antigua, and that my father’s and uncle’s names are far greater testament to the struggles and sacrifices of our recent ancestors than to the depravity of enslavers who died long ago (Smith 1994: 91). Finally, they would also be able to trace a connection, no matter how tenuous, through blood or social relation—to at least one member of my family, which would mean that they would know me—or, at least, the factors of racism, sexism, colonialism and immigration that informed my experiences and shaped my identity.

I draw upon this story to illustrate just how far apart my imagined story is situated from the reality of the Black women in the Network, and other racialized/marginalized practitioners of the law. Some practitioners would find my examples undemocratic, unintelligible, and perhaps accuse me of ‘reverse racism’ for doubting their ability to judge racialized people fairly (Ontario 1995). Some liberal practitioners would be equally insistent that a properly informed group of White court officials could be just. Because, according to liberal individualist ideas, there is meaning in the phrase “when the system functions properly it works for all,” and no real meaning in the phrase “Black community” (Austin 1995). My race comprises less than one percent of the Canadian population. If I wanted to include subject locations of race, gender, ability and religion, much less
than half of one percent of all women in Canada resemble me in subject location (see Herbert, 1988). If we were to include all factors including general age, island of origin, and immigration history, education and class, we would be down to a few dozen women, half of whom I know personally.

Where I can claim a handful of ‘me’s, White defendants, lawyers, judges can claim the support many millions of those who identify with being racialized and gendered “normal”, (male and White), and the many millions of others who have internalized being “abnormal,” and identify with the interests of the majority (Neallani 1992: 156). Most importantly, they can claim a system that recognizes ‘his’ story, the dominant story, is the first, the best, and the most believable. Blackness is so identified with deviance that a White serial-killer such as Paul Bernardo is remarked upon for the contrast between his “blonde good looks” and his apparent savagery (I. M. James 1996c). In fact, Bernardo’s appropriation of Rap music helped explain his depravity to the mainstream press and public (Philip 1995). The links of bonding must be strong enough to combat White dominance of the profession, and the subtler, yet just as pervasive influence of liberal and/or American legal theories which view Blackness as criminal, Womanhood as inferior, homosexuality as deviant, and criminals as Other (Williams 1991: 124).

Indeed, there are many reasons why the Network could ‘work’ and still fail to be transformative, and be ‘just’ a social club. In the middle of some of the interviews I was waiting for the women to “say something revolutionary,” and I know now that I just wasn’t listening carefully enough. I would turn to a passage in Black Feminist Thought, one I had already read several times, and become renewed. It is not the genius of Hill Collins, the complexity of hooks, the soul of Lorde that drew me, though all of these women at different moments inspire. It was the words of a domestic worker whose name I wish to know, and whose wisdom I wish to earn:

She [the employer] told me what she wanted done and then she said, “My girl always scrubs the floor”. Well, I noticed down in the basement that she had a mop, and she had taken the mop and hid
it. So I cleaned the whole house and everything, but I didn’t mop the floors. And when I got ready to go, I took the bucket, the brush, and the knee-pad and set them in the corner. When she came in she was very pleased... She went into the kitchen and she looked and she said, “But you didn’t scrub the floor.” She had a daughter who was ten years old, and I know I’m not her girl. I’m just the lady who came to do the days’ work. So I said, “Well, you said your girl cleans the floor, and I’m not your girl...and I don’t scrub floors on my hands and knees.” "Well,” she said, “tomorrow I’ll go out and buy a mop. So, I got my coat on and I said, “Why don’t you just let me go down in the basement and bring the mop up?” (Hill Collins, 1990:143)

With a few simple actions, and a gifted understanding of the relations of power, this woman outsmarted her employer, resisted menial work, claimed her right to womanhood, and completed her work to her own satisfaction. Like my aunt Gertrude, this anonymous domestic worker used to perfection her available resources, to find empowering possibilities in what seemed to be an inevitably disempowering situation. Nothing in my experience, or in my imagination would have prepared me to find promise in the face of such harsh contexts of domination.

I once asked “How can we keep ourselves from being collected?”—How do we prevent ourselves from becoming a native informant, an information retriever, or some supposed “Third World” authentic subject (Grewal: 1994, Razack, 1993: 111). After some thought I answered my self, “we can’t control who collects us, we can only control what we collect, and remember from whom our wisdoms come”. Of course, even if that control is limited by the cultural hegemonies around us, we have the choice to negotiate a Western cultural imperialism or to reclaim fragmented cultures and subordinated knowledges (Grewal, 1994: 14). I choose to concentrate on the second option, with the understanding that I am inevitably participating in the first. I choose to uncover my personal history. I choose to collect the spirit of the women who will teach me. Ultimately, I, like the women in the Network, choose to gather the threads of our communities and contribute to the quilting:
I come from a really religious family. And ah, I think that their belief in God, and my belief really helped us through. My parents sort stepped back, they are not in my life as much, which is good, but they are always there when I need them. They are very supportive, and ah, my mom was always pushy when I was a child, very pushy, to the point of being too pushy, and she taught us a certain 'stick-to-it-iveness', and I just don't know when to quit anything, so there was no way I would have quit. and I give that to her. She really taught us to be, just to really stick to things, and not give up easily.

— Alicia Peters

So as long as [the law] remains narrow, the powerful insiders stay comfortable with it being [like that]—they close themselves off too, from broader things, and different people, Women of colour. And... so we have to open that out. So we don't have to function in a world that lies separate from us, and objective and neutral outside of us—and it's all about perspective and experience.

— Francine Shaw

I guess, at law school, it's funny, it's so important, because at law school, the people who were my friends were the gay people and the Aboriginal people, they were the people I hung out with. In [the club] there was a mix of people, and I know that a number of times we worked on things with their input and we cross-attended each other's meetings. [pause] I know that the [Aboriginal students] still felt—that while they understood that we were somewhat in the same position... we still had to do some things [separately].

— Gloria Warner

Then I have clients who come in, and say 'I don't have any money, I don't have welfare, I got cut off everything, I don't have any food'. Law school does not prepare you how to handle these things... you learn about legislation, legislation does not apply to real life fact situations. And the hypothetical cases that you get in law school exams are—well, 'Mary and Fred are divorcing, the house cost $150,000, they're going to split it, how much should each get, blah, blah, blah'. They don't say well Mary and so and so are divorcing, he beat her black and blue, the kids are in psychiatric counselling, she's living in a shelter...

— Marjorie Vincent

They kept me from dropping out, read my papers, and 'showed me the ropes'... She was such a strong student, we couldn't go in there and be mediocre.... We give ourselves what the law can't, a validation.... They can't understand how something can be more than the sum of its parts

— Susan Sabeta

...watching some of the Women of Colour at my school negotiating through the professional stress around getting the same benefits as their White and male colleagues and being respected by the White male and female students, was [important] as a Person of Colour; those are really difficult dilemmas. And going in there and discussing and teaching each other about those strategies is the only way that we are going to start finding a space for ourselves.

— Makeda Joseph

I can't say that there is a huge separation between my work and community work and my personal life... I can do it as long as I maintain a healthy balance.... This office quite generous in terms of it's pro bono work, and I take the time and the resources I use here to do my community work. It's not that hard a thing to negotiate—of course their understanding is tempered by what's it's going to do for [them] in the end.

— Vivia Powell

Maybe we have to be more structured about our mentoring, because of that, because we don't have the same opportunities to produce the way, for example, other White Canadians do. Ahm, so I think that I have benefited from people who have taken an interest in me, from when I was little. I've always had people outside of my family who cared and were willing to take time, and ahm I feel very privileged for that. I think that [mentoring] happens in a lot of ways that you don't even appreciate that it's happening.

— Yvonne Archibald.
APPENDICES:

APPENDIX I
QUESTION ‘CLUSTERS’ WITH SAMPLE QUESTIONS

As explained in the Specific Methods section in Chapter II, these ‘question clusters’, or main themes were used instead of a traditional interview guide.

I. Why Law?
1. Tell me about your decision to become a lawyer.
2. Who was involved in helping you to reach your decision?

II. The Law Experience
1. Could you relate some experiences around law school.
2. Who and what were your supports at that time?
3. How does the practice of law compare with your studies?

III. The Network, Your Role in the Network
1. How would you define the ‘Network’?
2. How did you become a part of the ‘Network’?
3. Where do you see yourself in the next 5 to 10 years?
4. Will the women in the ‘Network’ be part of those plans?

IV. Community Practice
1. What do you consider to be your community[ies]?
2. Do you see yourself practicing law in or for specific communities?
3. What do you see as your role within your community[ies]?

V. Family Support
1. What was the role of your immediate family in your experience in law?
2. What role, if any, did your extended family play?

VI. Relationships with Friends and Partners
1. Did your relationship with friends and/or partners change in your law experience?
2. What were your relationships with Black men in law?
3. What were your relationships with other Black women in law?

VII. Role of Theory in the Practice of Law
1. Could you tell me what you know about Critical Race Theory?
2. Do you find legal theory useful in your practice?

VIII. Role in Organizations
1. Were/are you part of Black student organizations?
2. Will you be/are you part of Black lawyers organizations?

IX. Role Modeling and Mentoring
1. How would you define the concepts ‘role modelling’ and ‘mentoring’?
2. Do you see any significant difference between the two terms?

X. Identity and Identification
1. Could you tell me about your family background?
2. Where do you call home?

XII. Other Issues
1. Are there any other issues that you would like to discuss?
2. Are there any questions that you wish you had been asked?
APPENDIX II
THE PARTICIPANTS

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant's Number</th>
<th>Place of Birth/ Schooling</th>
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<th>Years in Network/ Years in Law Practice</th>
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<td>African-Canadian &amp; African/ Black</td>
<td>5/0-1</td>
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<td>6/2-4</td>
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<td>6/1-2</td>
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<td>6/2-4</td>
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<td>8</td>
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APPENDIX III
CONSENT FORM

LETTER OF INFORMED CONSENT
for thesis research of I. Marcia James in:
BLACK WOMEN IN THE LAW: NETWORKING FOR SOCIAL CHANGE

I ______________________________________ have read the enclosed letter concerning the study on family and community and identity of African Canadian women in the study of law.

I understand that any information that I give to I. Marcia James, M.A. candidate, will be confidentially, anonymously and sensitively managed.

Signed,

________________________________________________________________________Date: __________________________/1997.
APPENDIX IV
LETTER OF INFORMATION

ADDRESS

DATE

Dear Madam:

I am a M.A. student in the Department of Sociology and Equity Studies at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, University of Toronto. I am conducting a study of Black women studying law and the role that your families, communities and identities play in resisting racism and other forms of oppression in legal education and practice. You could be one of the 6 to 8 women that I would like to include in this study.

In this study I endeavor to map strategies of survival, to explore, not how Black women can better integrate themselves into the mainstream, but how you are sustaining and creating links with your communities. Towards that end I will begin by asking you questions pertaining to your racial, social, and political identifications. I would like to know about your experiences in school and how you made your decision to enter the field of law. Moreover, I will ask about what factors, influences, strategies enable or challenge your continued studies, or involvement in the legal profession, your family and your community (as you define them).

With your permission, the interviews will be taped and transcribed, and will last for between 30 minutes to 1 1/2 hours. At any time I will turn off the tape recorder to respect your wishes. The identity of participants will remain confidential. Participants may withdraw from the study at any time. Confidential tapes and transcripts will be kept at my home. Information may be used for future academic writings, but identifying features of participants will be removed or altered.

Thank you for considering this request for your participation in this project. If you agree to be part of the study, please read and sign the attached letter. If you would like to receive more information about the study, please contact me at home at 416-***-****.

Sincerely,

I. Marcia James,
Graduate Student
REFERENCES


1994. “We Weren’t Allowed to go into Factory Work until Hitler Started the War”: The 1920s to the 1940s.” In P. Bristow (ed.), We’re Rooted Here and They Can’t Pull Us Up: Essays in African Canadian Women’s History. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 171-192.


Bristow, P. Coordinator, et al. 1994. We’re Rooted Here and They Can’t Pull Us Up: Essays in African Canadian Women’s History. Toronto: University of Toronto Press


Hull, G. T., P. Bell Scott and B. Smith, (eds.). 1982. All the Women are White, all the Black are Men, But Some of Us are Brave: Black Women's Studies. Old Westbury, NY.


