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BLACK-EYED SUSAN: "BLUE-EYED" SCHOOLS
Academically-oriented Black girls in Toronto schools.

by

Sandra P. Anthony

A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
Graduate Department of Education
University of Toronto

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DEDICATION

To God be the Glory!

As a practising Roman Catholic I pray a lot and invoke the help/guidance of the Holy Spirit in almost everything I do. My faith plays a major role in my life and, of course, in the completion and successful defence of this dissertation. The seed of faith was first planted and nurtured by my parents and so.....

With love and gratitude I dedicate all the work that went into this thesis to my devoted parents:

Lucille (Romano) Anthony and Cyril Anthony

- a belated 50th wedding anniversary present. Thanks for letting me do it my way; for your support, understanding and patience. Mommy, thanks for teaching me how to stand up for myself and for your lessons in courage. Little did we know how much I'd need both in order to survive as "Black-eyed Susan" in this "blue-eyed" institution.

And to my most supportive sibling:

Dr. Jacinta Anthony Branday

- I know your wish was for me to do medicine too but I just never felt the passion for it. Hey! At least you can call me Doctor now.
BLACK-EYED SUSAN: "BLUE-EYED" SCHOOLS.
Academically-oriented Black girls in Toronto High Schools.

Sandra P. Anthony
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ABSTRACT

This study explores the ways in which academically oriented Black girls in Toronto secondary schools perceive, interpret and cope with issues related to their race and gender. It also examines their achievement motivation and strategies for coping with their status as academic Black girls. The literature abounds with research describing Black students who disengage from school or academics. Much less is known about the strengths and coping mechanisms of those who overcome barriers, such as racism and sexism, to achieving academic success. This is the first study that focuses on academic Black girls in Ontario schools.

Through semi-structured personal interviews with twenty Black girls, this study provides some insight into their experiences of racism and sexism, their academic problems and their relationships with school staff, family, friends and acquaintances. They also describe the strategies they use for coping with these issues and the sources of their motivation to achieve.

The findings show that racism and sexism are still major elements of school culture and that perpetrators include teachers, administrators and students. Despite this, the girls were able to cope with discrimination in ways that did not jeopardise their academic achievement. Contrary to popular belief about Black students, they consider academic credentials as crucial to the attainment of their career goals. This study dispels the myth which equates Black culture with nonconformist behaviour and academic failure. The participants displayed positive aspects of Black culture and identity, and a sense of pride in their African heritage.
This research also confirms that school staff, families and peers have key roles to play in Black students' academic achievement. The girls had several supportive non-Black teachers who encouraged their academic pursuits. The study identifies additional ways through which educators and policy makers can promote achievement and support, not only Black students, but those from other marginalised groups. Most notable among these is the call for more Black and other "minority" teachers and administrators in our schools. The participants also expressed a desire for a more inclusive curriculum because the Eurocentric one currently used is not realistic and does not adequately meet their needs. They proffered additional recommendations for improving the school system, pedagogy and instruction and these are also included here.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

For being there when I needed them, and for their constructive criticism, I am deeply grateful to my wonderful thesis supervisor Dr. James (Jim) Ryan; my Committee members, Drs. George J. Sefa Dei, Susan Padro, Tara Goldstein and Sherene Razack; and to the external examiner Dr. Cecilia Reynolds. In the former OISE, the Educational Administration department, having only one female professor, was referred to as, "those old White men in suits" by staff and students from other departments. Jim Ryan, a young White man who I have yet to see in a suit, showed courage by agreeing to supervise a thesis which deals with race X gender issues - a topic pretty much taboo in our department. There were two distinct phases of my doctoral journey. These are separated by, what I refer to as, "the Mark Ryall incident" - an incident which was to forever change my life in the Educational Administration department. Following my response to this incident, everyone, including my supervisor, had a different attitude towards me. I expected Jim to "bail out" at any time, and gave him ample opportunity to do so, but he stayed to "the bitter end." I am glad that he did because, as a White male, albeit of Celtic heritage, he can spread the word and hopefully reach the White males in his classes. Hey Jim, we're counting on you. Don't let us down!

I was directed towards OISE by two delightful professors emeriti: Dr. Magda Krondl, Faculty of Medicine, University of Toronto and Dr. Alan Brown, OISE/UT. Great choice folks! I thank both of you for this. I had the time of my life and "did you proud."

Motivation to achieve is a major theme in this thesis. My source of motivation was primarily intrinsic - I'd say, about 80%. The remaining 20%, or so, came from Dr. G. Harvey Anderson, Faculty of Medicine, University of Toronto, who supervised my second masters thesis. Harv, it'll blow you away to learn that I wrote my dissertation in about three months. I applied a lot of what you had taught me. Thank you very much for all that you did then, and for your continued interest in my professional activities. I am also grateful to our former colleague Dr. Robert J. Bialik, who instilled in me a desire to search and find things out for myself - something I've found to be lacking in many graduate students I've since met. Of course the search was assisted by our library staff. Thanks to Mrs. Kamlesh Sharma, Ms. Megan Sandiford, Joanne, Zain and the rest of the R.W.B. Jackson library staff.

To "Paula" and the other nineteen academically-oriented Black girls who participated in
this study; to Elise and to my friends in CUPE, thank you very much. I completed the data collection in record time because of you. Girls, this thesis is your story.

After "the incident" I never felt safe working in OISE/UT after hours or on weekends. My fear was alleviated by our caring security guards. I thank the Messrs. Balakrishnan (Bala) Nadakanasabai, Leonard Dascine, Keith Golding, Perampalam (Pera) Nagamuththu and Ray Chandra. Life outside of Ed. Admin. was pleasant because of the charming and helpful individuals in the Registrar’s Office, the Print Shop, the cafeteria, the Dean’s Office, Education Commons, Operations & Services. As the curtain comes down, I say thank you to the friendly staff in the PhD Oral Examination Office (Mr. Richard Yap gets the prize for patience)!

For reasons known to them, I wish to express profound gratitude to: my brother-in-law, Dr. J. Michael Branday and his brother Mr. Paul (Tony) Branday, Dr. Karl A. Smith, my dear "Island" friend and "accomplice," Mr. Kevin Stonefield, Mr. Erkki Pukonen and Mr. Gilbert (Ian) McIntyre.

I also got a "push" from my parish priest Fr. Robert Foliot. Until now I had always carried heavy "service" and academic loads, simultaneously. Earlier this year he said something that I wish I’d been told years ago, "All God wants you to do right now is to be the best student you can possibly be." This enabled me to write the dissertation free from guilt about focusing primarily on academics. During this period I was nourished, in the biological sense, by my neighbour Mrs. Doris Burnett Macdonald - truly an angel sent from heaven. I feasted on her hot, tasty home-cooked dinners. What a blessing! Thanks to all who prayed for me - your prayers have been answered.

I am grateful for the many forms of financial support that I received from OISE/UT. It was a pleasure serving the Institute in my positions as: Vice-president/Acting president of the Graduate Students' Association and simultaneously as President of CUPE Local 3907 which represents its Graduate Assistants; as the sole student member of the OISE/UT Advisory Board and on many standing and ad hoc committees. Until the "Ryall incident" the Ed. Admin. department had felt like a home away from home - I was comfortable and happy there. From April 5, 1994 to this day, I feel stressed and tense whenever I am in the department. My OISE/UT political career did two things: it provided some distraction from the emotional turmoil caused by "the incident" and I gained invaluable experience and knowledge, superior to anything that was taught in the classroom.
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CHAPTER 1
CONCEPTION OF THE RESEARCH QUESTION

The purpose of this study is to investigate how academically oriented Black girls in Toronto secondary schools perceive, interpret and cope with issues related to their race and gender. It also explores their attitude towards school and education, their motivation to achieve and strategies for coping with their status as academic Black girls in White schools. I chose to explore these issues partly because of my interest in them and also because I hope this study will help school staff to help Black pupils to realise their academic potential.

This study, like all other research studies, is informed by a theoretical understanding of human and social behaviour. Researchers have beliefs and ideas about issues such as, for example, race and gender, which influence what they choose to investigate and how they choose to do it (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). These beliefs and ideas form part of what Kirby and McKenna (1989:49) refer to as the researcher's "conceptual baggage." In this chapter I present my conceptual baggage and the events which led to the conception of the research question.

The foundation of this research lies in both theory and empirical studies in which I participated (Ryan, 1994; Dei, 1995). When I began this doctoral journey I had no idea that either racism or sexism influenced educational outcome. As an assertive, outspoken Black female, with a background steeped in Science (Anthony, 1987; 1991), I never felt that my race or sex had prevented me, personally, from doing anything in school. Furthermore, I knew no one who could make such a claim. Part of the reason for this is that I was "blind" - ignorant about both racism and sexism. Therefore, as suggested by Kirby and McKenna (1989), in order to inform the reader about this important relationship, I describe myself and my original beliefs, and how these were transformed during the conception and conduct of this study. I then present the rationale for undertaking this research, followed by its objectives. The chapter ends with an outline of the rest of the thesis.

1.1. INTRODUCTION TO BLACK-WHITE RACISM.

I was introduced to Black-White racism shortly after my arrival in Canada (from Jamaica). One of the first issues with which I was greeted was the debate over Phillipe
Rushton's theories of race (Ziegler, et al, 1991; Rushton, 1990 cited in Dei, 1993b). Through the mass media, which was responsible for coverage, I discovered that I belong to an intellectually inferior race. About the same time, I also observed two things which aroused my curiosity. The first was that, in my graduate department, Faculty of Medicine, University of Toronto (U of T), I was the only Black student. The presence of Whites and Orientals seemed to lend support to Rushton's theory that Orientals and Whites (in that order) are superior, in intelligence, to Blacks. I internalised this and did not enjoy my first year at U of T. My self-esteem sank to an all-time low; I wanted to withdraw and go home. However, my reluctance to disappoint my family, together with my natural tenacity and spirituality, motivated me to stay.

The second observation relates to Black adolescents. I was surprised at the large numbers on the streets and in shopping malls during normal school hours. In my homeland (Trinidad) I had never seen this. As far as I knew, all children were in school. In Jamaica, where I spent several wonderful years, this was a common sight because many families are economically challenged - they lack the resources to send their children to school (Coelho, 1988). Unlike oil-rich Trinidad, with a population about half the size of Jamaica's, schooling in Jamaica is, unfortunately, not "free." I looked at the "loafers" on Canadian streets and thought, "They have such wonderful opportunities here and look at how they are wasting their time." Of course in time I discovered that I was "blaming the victims" (Ryan, 1976, in Solomon, 1992).

My knowledge of racism grew exponentially at OISE/UT. It is here that I was also introduced to sexism and other forms of discrimination, first through the literature then later, experientially. I learnt, via the required readings for the course, The School, the School System and Society in an Administrative Context, (taught by Jim Ryan) that race, gender and class discrimination pervade the entire educational system. Among other things, I discovered that Rushton was not alone in his beliefs about Black people; that females exist in an oppressive patriarchal system and that children from low-income homes were not expected to do well in school.

The finding about students from low-income homes was surprising because I had observed the opposite in Trinidad. Coming from the "Beverly Hills" of my home town, the daughter of a revered "big boy" in an oil company and the sister of a popular young Member of Parliament, I went to school with status. However, we were not socialised differently, as
suggested by some reproduction theorists (Bowles & Gintis, 1976). In fact, my memory of school is that teachers encouraged children from low-income homes more. In the Caribbean, the achievement ideology is the same as in North America (Miller, in Solomon, 1992; Ryan, 1991). Academic credentials promise upward mobility through a good job/career. In my old high school I recall that low-income children were pushed more than the rest of us. The advice given to me, by one of my teachers, illustrates this. He said, "Anthony, you don’t have to study; your family will get you a job."

As part of the course requirement, I wrote a paper which focused on the role of schools in the process of premature withdrawal. A review of the literature revealed the following profile of "dropouts:"

- average age, 16 years;
- usually Black, Hispanic or Native from low-income, single-parent homes;
- poor achievers, usually found in the lowest stream;
- do not participate in school activities;
- have few or no friends in school and feel alienated;
- experience frequent discipline problems;

I also discovered that there are also students who fit this profile yet remain in school. They "drop out" of academics but are engaged in the social aspects. Sports, cultural activities and their friends keep them in school (Ekstrom, et al., 1987; Natriello, 1987; Fine & Zane, 1989; Newmann, 1989; Wehlage et al., 1989). A number of school-related factors also contribute to a student’s decision to withdraw - factors which tend to "push" them out. These were identified by the "dropouts" themselves and include:

- persistent negative feedback from teachers;
- boredom;
- absence of school spirit;
- streaming and ability grouping;
- poor teacher-student relationships;
- grade retention;
- lack of encouragement from school staff;
- the belief that teachers do not care about students;
- being "picked on" and unfairly disciplined.

Clearly, schools share part of the blame when students disengage. In fact, some researchers believe that school factors outweigh all other factors associated with dropping out (Radwanski, 1987; Wehlage & Rutter, 1987). Again I thought about those who stayed in school. Was this their experience too?

A deeper understanding of racism in the schools came through the first of two empirical studies with which I was involved (Ryan, 1994). As a research assistant at OISE/UT, I was asked to interview students from diverse ethnocultural backgrounds at a high school in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA high school). I facilitated two focus group meetings which were attended by mostly Black students and, in the first instance, four teachers. The meetings were audiotaped. The students spoke openly and passionately, about their experiences of racism in the school. Their revelations both stunned and enraged me. Feelings of bitterness and resentment towards racist White teachers and administrators entered my thoughts. Now, finally, I understood why some Black students prefered the streets and the malls. My disdain was replaced by sympathy and an overwhelming desire to help them, if only I knew how. I wondered, too, if the situation at the GTA high school was an isolated case or if it was the norm.

The following year I was involved with a different research project, transcribing audiotaped interviews and analysing the data (Dei, 1995). This project involved hundreds of current and former (dropouts) Black students from four different Toronto high schools. Like those at the GTA, these informants also described degrading, de-humanising experiences of blatant racism, involving staff in all four schools (Dei, 1994; 1997). Now I was sure that the GTA was not an isolated case. My anger and resentment intensified. How I longed to expose those racist White teachers and change society's perception of disengaged Black students!

Filled with a desire to learn more, I started talking to Black people in Canada and the United States to hear about their personal experiences and those of their children. From these discussions it was clear to me that race overrides socioeconomic status in the society as well as in the schools. The most startling example came from my Black friend, a millionaire whose children attend the most expensive private schools in a Canadian city. She described their experiences of blatant racial discrimination and harassment, not only from other students, but from teachers too. A second example involves a Black Canadian woman, a senior executive of
a statutory corporation. She told me that she was working late one evening when she was asked by a junior White male employee if she is one of the cleaning staff. She was well-dressed "in a designer suit," and was quite taken aback that: "He didn't even know who I was." These two examples refute Cox's (1959) theory, in Ramcharan (1988), that, if the class system is altered, the problem of racial conflict will disappear. I now turn to Canadian Blacks' experiences of racism in education and employment because the achievement ideology promises a job commensurate with our skills and education.

1.1.1. The Black experience in Canada.

African slaves were first brought to Canada during the sixteenth century (Ramcharan, 1988). In the 1800s they were joined by escaped slaves from the southern United States and Blacks from the Caribbean. Included among the latter were slaves, explorers, loyalists, pioneers, refugees and immigrants (McClain, 1979; Walker, 1980; Hill, 1981; Coelho, 1988; Ramcharan, 1988; Henry, 1992). The next wave of West Indians arrived after 1960, under the "Domestic Scheme." As White women abandoned their roles as full-time housewives and mothers to enter the labour force, Black women were "imported" to take care of their homes and children. Among White Canadians, this reinforced the belief that "minorities" were fit only for menial labour (Ramcharan, 1988). Following a change in Canada's immigration laws, a different class of West Indian immigrants arrived. Highly educated, skilled and qualified individuals entered this country - some were fleeing political strife, some were in search of better opportunities for their children and others wanted change and adventure (Coelho, 1988; Henry, 1992).

Regardless of our attributes, Blacks in Canada experience racism like those in other predominantly White countries. The Canadian society is racially and ethnically stratified. Discrimination and inequality between the dominant and oppressed groups are based primarily on race (Ramcharan, 1988). We experience racial discrimination in employment, education, legal and political rights, public services and housing (McClain, 1979; Walker, 1980; Hill, 1981; Talbot, 1984; Ramcharan, 1988). I will focus only on employment and education here.

The most recent employment statistics show that Black people are over-represented in menial jobs (Statistics Canada, 1995). The most disturbing aspect of this is that, many have skills and education that merit placement in higher positions but are unable to penetrate the
"glass ceiling." In the workplace, Whites that they had trained often got promotions denied them (Crichlow, 1993), and when finally "promoted," they are paid less than others in a similar classification (Carasco, 1992; Crichlow, 1993).

The "gatekeepers" are usually Anglo-Saxon males. When they open the gates, they first let in those who look like they because it is easier to trust and relate to them. Priority is next given to White women who represent their wives, sisters and other female relatives (Karabel & Halsey, 1977). This is not a new development. Blacks and other immigrants "of colour" have always been given the low status jobs which Canadian-born Anglo-Saxons find unattractive or discomforting (Walker, 1980; Hill, 1981; Ramcharan, 1988).

Blacks are discriminated against because we are considered undesirable by employers (Coelho, 1988). White people are given three times more job opportunities than Blacks (Reed, 1995). In a recent study of racism in the job market, both White and Black testers were sent to apply for jobs. It was repeatedly observed that the Black tester was told the job had been filled, then later in the day, the White tester was accepted (Finlayson, 1990, in Canadian Labour Congress, 1997). In a 1991 survey, fifteen employment agencies were asked if they would refer only White applicants for a job. Twelve were willing to accept discriminatory job orders (Rees, 1991 in Canadian Labour Congress, 1997). Many Blacks experience feelings of powerlessness knowing that opportunities for advancement depend on factors other than their ability or industriousness (Coelho, 1988).

Racism does not restrict itself to the job market. It also shows up in a host of other Canadian institutions, including schools. Through the hidden and stated curricula, schools reinforce the stereotypes of the wider society and help to maintain the status quo. One common manifestation of racism is the over-representation of Black students in vocational level programmes, sports and music, and their under-representation in university preparation programmes (Toronto Board of Education, 1993; Dei, 1995). Black children also get more negative attention and are subject to differential treatment from school staff (Haughton, 1987; Anthony, 1994; Codjoe, 1997; Dei, 1997; Ibrahim, 1997). Their response varies - some acquiesce, some retaliate in ways that are considered unacceptable by the school and others withdraw (Solomon, 1992; Dei, 1995, 1997).

It has been suggested that Black children’s behaviour may be related to their social class.
With respect to recent Caribbean Black immigrants, teachers have reported that those from the middle-class adjust more easily and are better able to cope with academic work (Coelho, 1988). While there might be some truth in this, it is also just another attempt to "blame the victims" rather than the school and teachers' expectations of them.

The issue of social class is not elaborated upon here because it is a well-known fact that, in predominantly White countries, being Black situates one near to the bottom of the social hierarchy. The devalued position of Blacks in these societies should not be ignored when examining issues related to their school achievement (Ford, 1993). In the words of Sleeter and Grant (1988: 146):

"Historically, racism contributed to the development of a stratified economy, and it continues to contribute today ... there exists a strong, direct correspondence between race and social class."

The "correspondence" is so strong that social class becomes secondary in importance to race. Race creates a "caste" system - as Blacks, we know we are regarded as the scum of the earth. Regardless of our actual socioeconomic position, White people treat us all as "lower class" unless we are recognised in a particular context as "Dr. Somebody" or "Minister So-and-so." Blacks, in White societies, cannot escape a lower-caste status. Therefore, because Black students' status is rooted in their race, and because it is the principal determinant on how they will be judged, I consider race and racism the more important variables on which to focus. In chapter two I show that racism in Toronto schools does contribute to the stress faced by Black students. This said, I hasten to add that, within the Black community, class matters. Those of the upper and middle classes are clearly distinguishable from those of the working class. [I presume that, within all racial groups, class matters].

Another reason for not focussing on class, per se, is the finding that, unlike their White counterparts, Black students' academic performance is generally not contingent on their parents' status in the society (Maughan & Dunn, 1988). A similar finding was reported in the Toronto Board of Education's 1991 survey of secondary school students (TBE, 1993). Maughan and Dunn (1988:118) offer an interesting explanation of this phenomenon: "It is well known that many Black adults are in low paid and relatively unskilled jobs, often incommensurate with their previous work experience or qualifications." This is confirmed in a 1995 Statistics Canada
survey which showed an abundance of Blacks, with professional skills and qualifications, employed in menial jobs (Statistics Canada, 1997). This, of course, is an example of systemic racism in our society.

Within the educational system, racism does not end at the secondary level. In universities and colleges Blacks and other students "of colour" experience both blatant and subtle forms of racism. As an example of subtle racism, I will quote my (OISE/UT) colleague, Amina Jamal (1994:37) because her experience is typical of what many of us have faced:

"Sitting in classrooms as a graduate student I have also become aware of how differently are the spaces assigned to us to speak.... [O]ne aspect that has marked my speaking has been its different reception within the courses/discourses on feminism and anti-racism. As a woman of colour I have perceived how in anti-racism courses my experiential or analytical interjections carry a kind of credibility and even "normalcy" which is denied in feminist courses.... my colour and race seem to confer on me an almost uncomfortable degree of authority, in feminist courses [they] strip me of the legitimacy of speaking as a woman.

I will offer another example of tertiary level racism, taken from my academic department (Educational Administration). It is a form of discrimination known as linguism (Lippi-Green, 1997). A student of European descent recently stated that, "the standards of the department will go down because of the large number of students whose first language is not English." This comment was made in the presence of a diverse group of students and an Anglo professor, in the home of one of the very students whose first language is not English. The professor said absolutely nothing - he made no attempt to contradict this bigotted remark. This prompted a "minority" student (in the same department) to say, in reference to the professors, "They talk about transformational leadership but they cannot transform themselves."

This statement is true in more ways than one. I was in an OISE/UT alumni association meeting which was attended by a (different) White male professor from my department, and other alumnae. The conversation turned to anti-racism and anti-sexism initiatives. The professor said that he is not supportive of "any of those things." I asked, "So you want to maintain the status quo then?" He replied with an emphatic, "Yes. Because it is our culture." (I took one of his courses and critiqued this statement in an assignment. He did not comment).
1.2. INTRODUCTION TO SEXISM.

As stated above, I was also introduced to sexism through the reading material in the same course, *The School, the School System and Society in an Administrative Context*. The following year, wanting to get back to my health "roots," I read course 1149, *Women's Learning, Women's Health Movements and the Health Professions* (taught by Helen Lenskyj). As part of the requirements for this course, I wrote a paper which explored self-esteem in girls and women, and the contribition of schools to the "second-class" status that females have in our patriarchal societies. The sexist elements in both the hidden and stated curricula are discussed in chapter two. One might wonder how, in this blatantly patriarchal western world I was not aware of sexism until that time. This was due to a combination of nurturing and ignorance. I will discuss my ignorance first.

My ignorance about patriarchy was rooted in the fact that the gendered order in society seemed normal and was acceptable. Why was the masculine pronoun used to refer to both sexes? I never thought about that. Among my friends, there were only two whose mothers worked outside the home. That seemed strange. At the time I felt that they should have been at home. Why were there no female bus drivers, letter carriers or engineers? I thought women simply did not wish to do these jobs. Many girls and women today are still ignorant about sexism and unable to recognise its subtle forms. Now I turn to the nurturing aspect which limited my knowledge and experience of sexism.

My wise mother, a feminist before the "movement" was established, raised a gender-neutral household. There were no male and female roles or chores. Furthermore, we were equally encouraged to pursue careers. She assured me that I could achieve anything I wanted to, if I was not afraid to try. To some extent, this teaching was reinforced at school - nothing and no one contradicted it. In addition to this, there was nothing in our society that suggested otherwise. I knew many female professionals, had just as many male as female teachers and there was, at the time, a female prime minister in the Caribbean. Furthermore, I experienced no sexual harassment. In the English speaking Caribbean, children start secondary school at age 11 or 12. I attended a co-educational school and throughout those adolescent years, never saw, heard or experienced anything that can be labelled sexual harassment. Those were, perhaps, more innocent times, when boys were more respectful. There may also have been a religious
influence. It was a Presbyterian school with an ordained minister as principal.

As with my discovery of racism in "White" schools, I was stunned and outraged to learn of the ways that male and female teachers discriminate against girls. I felt both sadness and anger about the sexist behaviour and harassment meted out by their male peers (Larkin, 1994; Dei, 1995; Stein, 1995). However the greatest pain and curiosity were felt when I considered young Black girls and the multiple oppression with which they must cope.

1.2.1. Sexism in Canada.

Like racism, sexism is a major part of Canadian culture - it exists in society and in our institutions of learning (Carasco, 1992; Dei, 1995; Koba, 1995; Kaufman, 1997; Larkin, 1997). In 1995 the United Nations Development Program ranked Canada as the best place in the world to live, in general (Thompson, 1995). However, when gender issues were considered, Canada was placed ninth mainly because of the disparity in earnings between men and women. With the battle for pay equity won, a review of recent newspaper headlines show that sexism is made manifest through education and employment discrimination, sexual harassment and violence against women.8

A 1993 Statistics Canada survey found that 51% of women have been physically or sexually assaulted by men (Canadian Advisory Council on the Status of Women, 1997). The majority of Canadians killed in domestic violence are women. On average a woman is killed by a weapon every six days, often by a man she knew. Violence against women often starts in the schools - boys are "allowed" to harass girls. In Ontario 83% of female high school girls said that they had been sexually harassed in their school (Larkin, 1997). This included verbal slurs such as bitch, broad, dog, slut and chick. They are pinched, grabbed, groped and teased about their bodies (Kaufman, 1997; Larkin, 1997). Victims generally respond in passive ways. To avoid perpetrators they drop courses, skip class and stay away from certain sections of their school. They become silent in the classroom and have difficulty concentrating (Larkin, 1997). Similar avoidance tactics have been reported by women who are sexually harassed in the workplace (Hall, 1989; Schneider et al, 1997).

Other aspects of gender discrimination in schools are addressed in chapter two. Among other things, girls are ignored by teachers, silenced in the classroom and made to feel that their
ideas are not as valuable as boys’. In short, they are socialised into the second-class position that is ascribed to females in patriarchal societies. I dealt with sexual harassment here because, having experienced it for the first time in my OISE/UT department, it became a part of my "conceptual baggage" (Kirby & McKenna, 1989).

With all that I have written, I must admit that, in Canada, girls and women have made some progress in education. A 1996 Statistics Canada report showed that, among the 20-29 age group, women (51%) were more likely than men (44%) to have a post-secondary degree or diploma (Carey, 1998). Clearly they have found ways to cope with sexism in educational settings and overcome the obstacles that it presents.

1.3. DOUBLE JEOPARDY: Black women in Canada.

The double oppression, and marginalisation, of Black women in Canada deserves special attention. The study of women's history and experiences in Canada has received much attention over the last 25 years. However, most of the research and publications have focused on White women's issues (Bristow, 1994). In addition to the economic, political and social concerns that are usually addressed in (White) women's history, Black Canadian women's history must include issues such as slavery, rape, colonialism, racial segregation and other forms of racism (Brand, 1994; Sadlier, 1994; Carty, 1994; Newton & Smith, 1997). The stories of enslaved and freed women will reveal, not only the horror of that time in history, but their "active resistance and determination to put an end to such an abhorrent existence" (Alfred & Staton, 1997:67).

Although we are no longer chattel slaves or indentured labourers, Black women still bear heavy burdens in Canadian society. The social relations of women’s labour have always determined an unequal and inferior place for Black women and, to this day, most are found in the service sector of the labour force (Carty, 1994). While this is the case for women in general, race further segregates the labour force. For example, one rarely sees a Black woman as the Executive Assistant of a White male Chief Executive Officer, Dean or company President. Race devalues Black women's labour, or renders it undesirable, vis-a-vis Whites. Despite having the required qualifications and experience, race denies us access to positions that are given to less qualified/experienced White women (Crichlow, 1993; Grace, 1993; Maya, 1993; Watson, 1993; Carty, 1994). This leads to feelings of anger, frustration, resentment and loss of faith in oneself
and society (Crichlow, 1993; Gabriel, 1993; Grace, 1993; Maya, 1993; Watson, 1993). However, as it did for some of our ancestors, racism has made some of us stronger, more resourceful women, determined to fight present day oppression so that life might be better for those behind.

1.4. BLACK STUDENTS: The importance of the study.

In Canada, as in other predominantly White countries, there are many Black females who, despite the odds, do well in high school and go on to pursue tertiary education. However, not much is known about them, or for that matter, about successful Black students per se. The literature is replete with descriptions of Black students who fail to achieve academically, who "dropout" of school or are anti-school and disruptive. These behaviours are now perceived as characteristic of Black student culture and, unfortunately, have been adopted as such by many capable Black students (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986). Academic achievement, punctuality, obedience and other pro-school behaviours, are considered the prerogative of Whites. What exacerbates the situation for Black students who want to adhere to their "culture," is the inclusion of behaviour in academic assessment. Those who strive for top marks know that they must behave in a manner that is acceptable to their White middle-class teachers. This choice can lead to their being ostracised, alienated and sometimes assaulted by their Black peers who reject them because they are "acting White" (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986; Solomon, 1992).

I can empathise with Black students in Canadian secondary schools to some extent. Until my arrival in Canada, I had attended only "black-eyed" institutions of learning. I had never experienced discrimination and did not have to simultaneously exist in two cultures. Black adolescents must cope with many stressors and rather than try to be more understanding, I felt that White staff seemed eager to get rid of those who do not fully conform. I had read so many articles about dropouts and disengaged students that my anger and frustration grew to the extent that I might burst. So I changed my focus. To some, this will seem like "taking the easy way out," but as a health professional, I draw the line as dictated by the law of diminishing returns.

I reflected upon my experiences of discrimination as a student in this doctoral programme and wondered about adolescent girls for whom it might be more emotionally devastating. Certainly that I would have dropped out, had I experienced such oppression during high school, my
thoughts turned to those who persevere and are doing well, academically. It was a refreshing change to focus on those who succeed.

The need to fill this gap in our knowledge was articulated by several researchers. Solomon (1992), whose study involved working class Black students in a low level academic programme, suggested that future research on Black cultural forms in Canadian schools should explore first and second generation Blacks in higher academic streams. The need to include the cultural forms of successful Black students was also noted by Ogbu (1988), in Mickelson and Smith (1989:111). He believed that, in order to understand their success and failure in schools, we must understand their:

\[\text{P}erceptions, \text{interpretations and understandings of how the world works and the }\]
"actual" role of schooling in their world.... [because] these beliefs constitute part of minority children's culture.

Prillerman et al (1989) argue that we need more research on how Blacks survive and succeed in, presumably, oppressive environments to identify determinants of success. This involves an exploration of the person-environment transactions between Black students and White schools. We need to explore how Black students' perceptions and expectations of their White schools affect how they perceive, interpret and cope with their experiences. How a student perceives a stressor, for eg. the absence of Black teachers, and copes with it, can buffer or exacerbate its effects (Prillerman et al, 1889:206). These psychologists believe that future research should focus on advancing our understanding of how Black students cope with status-related sources of stress, and the effect of their coping strategies on academic achievement. They also suggest that attention be paid to how stressors within the Black community [of students] affect their success or failure. This led to the development of the research question on which this thesis is based.

It may seem an odd choice of topic for a student of educational administration to investigate. However, as it is now, the practice of educational administration is steeped in theories that were developed by White males and are often based on White males (Shakeshaft, 1989a,b). Schools were created to teach White males what they needed to know to become public people. Thus the very nature of schooling is shaped in their image (Shakeshaft, 1987). Is it any wonder then, that White males have evolved as the primary beneficiaries of schooling? Considering that students represent two sexes and many different ethnocultural groups, it is only
fair that new theories of educational administration be developed based on this reality. In order to develop theories that would benefit an increasingly diverse student body, we need to know as much as possible about them, especially those groups that historically have been ignored.

The recent surge of Blacks entering Canada has generated interest in Black issues and in our experiences in Canadian schools. It is not enough to extrapolate from American or British studies or to apply their findings to our situation. As Solomon (1992:14) notes, "Canada's policy on multiculturalism has led racial "minority" immigrants to expect an open opportunity structure with equal access to education." Only by examining schooling from the point of view of the students will we know if this promise is being fulfilled or if "minority" students here are experiencing the same marginalisation and degradation as those in "melting pot" societies.

1.5. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY.

Overall Objective.

The overall objective of the study is to investigate how academically oriented Black girls in Toronto secondary schools perceive, interpret and cope with issues related to their race and gender. The study also explores their motivation to achieve and strategies for coping with their status as successful Black girls in White schools.

Specific Objectives.

(1) To explore their attitudes towards school and education, and their feelings about significant others. This includes information about their role models and mentors, their feelings about teachers, friends and relatives as well as their personal goals. Some researchers believe that Black students are not school oriented because they feel that education will get them nowhere in White societies (Ford, 1992; Solomon, 1992; Ogbu, 1987). Do successful Black girls share this fatalistic view? There is also a link between Black students' academic performance and their relationship with significant others, especially teachers and peers (Irvine, 1990).

(2) To explore their experiences of racism. This includes having them recall and describe incidents involving, witnessed by, or told to them by other students at the school. In cases where school staff were aware of the incident, their feelings about the school's response will also be
considered. It is important to know how they felt, what they did, and how, if at all, the event(s) affected their attitudes towards school. People respond to things differently - what may be a highly contentious issue for one person may be considered unimportant or insignificant by another. Thus their interpretation of both personal and vicarious experiences are included.

(3) To explore their experiences of sexism. As with racism, this includes a description of their feelings about their school’s response, in cases where staff were aware. Here too, it is important to know how they felt, what they did, and how, if at all, the event(s) affected their attitudes towards school and education.

(4) To explore the strategies they use to cope with discrimination and other aspects of school. The focus is on how they cope with the implicit and explicit curricula: racist and sexist elements in the curriculum; the degree to which they feel intellectually challenged; their perception of the teachers’ ability; classroom behaviour and interaction; study habits; and the channels through which the hidden curriculum is delivered, e.g. regulations and sanctions. The underlying rationale here is that, to do well in school, one must cope with both social and academic issues. Academic problems may be rooted in the social aspects of schooling, including the curriculum and the manner in which it is presented. Students, feeling powerless to effect change, must find ways to deal with stressful situations. Haughton (1987) cites several studies which show that children become frustrated when the school work is not sufficiently challenging; they become difficult and refuse to work. This was previously documented by Rist (1970) who observed that teachers in a predominantly Black school simplified the work to such an extent that the students became bored, restless and disruptive. Their strengths and the manner in which the girls deal with everyday racism and sexism, will provide insight into their coping strategies. Do they opt to suffer in silence? Are they so "thick skinned" that they are unaffected by prejudice? Do they retaliate? If so, is the retaliation considered appropriate by school staff? This will also reveal whether or not they are experiencing cultural conflicts. For example, do they see themselves as "acting White" because they are doing well in school? Have they totally rejected their Black culture or are they practising a form of the Jewish teaching, "think Yiddish and dress British" (Lazarus, 1980:109)? If so, is this conscious or subconscious behaviour? Their values and
beliefs will inform their behaviour which will, in turn, determine how they respond to discrimination. Do they share the belief that the only way to get through is by conforming to middle-class Anglo norms and values, or at least, by not being openly resistant?

5) To explore their achievement motivation. This includes a description of key aspects of their personalities - e.g., their sense of self, values, beliefs and practices. The rationale here is to show whether their motivation is more intrinsic or extrinsic in origin. Locus of control is a popular personality construct which has been central in the study of motivation in Blacks. The prevalent view in the literature is that Blacks are more "external" than Whites (Graham, 1989). However, it has also been shown that people who feel in control of their destinies tend to do better in school than those who do not (Abatso, 1985). Several studies have shown that a person's image of her/himself strongly influences her/his academic performance (Verma & Bagley, 1982; Lawrence, 1987).

6) To uncover ways through which teachers and administrators might better help Black students to fully realise their academic potential and strategies that the students themselves can use to achieve success.

1.6. ORGANISATION OF THE THESIS.

My research grew out of a desire to draw attention to successful Black students, girls in particular, and to gain some insight into their world. In this chapter I traced the conception and development of the research questions. I also explained why I chose to focus primarily on race and gender although these are only two of the forms of discrimination that Black girls face in our schools. In so doing I emptied the contents of my conceptual baggage to enable the reader to appreciate the passion that motivated and sustained this research, and the writing of this thesis. I then discussed the importance of this study and its contribution to the field of Educational Administration.

In chapter two I present a review of the literature that focused on the schooling of Black children, females and the special case of those who are both Black and female. This review also describes the achievement motivation of successful students and the strategies used by
academically oriented Blacks for coping with the burden of being different from the stereotype.

In chapter three I present the rationale and describe the method used to collect the data on which this thesis is based. I discuss the merits and demerits of using semi-structured personal interviews; the development of the themes and sub-themes and the presentation of the data. The analysed data are presented in chapters four through eight. In chapter nine I discuss the major findings from this research. Finally, in chapter ten I reviewed the findings of the study and some questions that it raised.

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NOTES.

1. My definition of race is adapted from Bennett and Le Compte (1990). Race is a socially constructed term used to refer to people with a common ancestry and similar physical characteristics such as skin colour, hair texture and facial features. Of course, there are no such things as biologically determined races.

2. Bennett and Le Compte's (1990) definition of gender is adapted. Gender, which includes physical sexual characteristics, consists of learned cultural behaviours and understandings. Gender identity is formed after birth and can be independent of sex (The Toronto Star, 7/7/98, p. A2). This article describes a child who was born male but raised as a female because his penis was accidentally severed during circumcision.

3. My definition of racism is that articulated by the Ontario Ministry of Citizenship, cited in Wright (1994:5) as: a system in which one group of people exercises abusive power over others on the basis of skin colour and racial heritage; a set of implicit or explicit beliefs, erroneous assumptions and actions based upon an ideology of inherent superiority of one racial or ethnocultural group over another.

4. The Republic of Trinidad and Tobago (Trinidad, in this thesis) produces 1% (yes, one percent) of the world's petroleum.

5. Some quotes from this study are included in chapter two.

6. On a world basis, 85% of the population is made up of "people of colour;" White's constitute only 15%. Being a "minority" means belonging to a group that does not have control of what is mainstream; that does not have the power to broadly define and express culture, education and lifestyle issues (Sadlier, 1994:34).

7. In Ontario schools are now de-streamed.
8. Here is a selection of headlines from The Toronto Star:

- Finding work in a man's world: Women face subtle pressures in job search (2/2/98)
- Putting women into the story (describes a girls' high school's feminist curriculum, 1/6/98)
- Grrrl talk (describes a collegiate's discussion group for girls, 11/26/96)
- Engineering attracting more female students (12/11/96)
- Woman soldier tells of rape: raped and beaten by 2 soldiers (6/11/98)
- Women probation officers complain about harassment (6/17/98)
- Ad blitz to focus on sexual harassers (5/15/98)
- Engineer in sex bias case wins $51,000 (11/27/97)
- Domestic assault court to open (11/1/96)
- 'Kissing' [male] judge gets to keep job for now (11/6/96)
- Power to the women (profiles White women in senior positions in the Canadian labour movement, 11/29/97)
- We did it: Women who shattered the glass ceiling. (12/27/97)

9. Of course, coming from schools which had few, if any, White students, this too, was a surprising revelation.

10. I was stunned to discover that the grading of behaviour exists in graduate school. I took an extra course (not required for the degree) with Shahrzad Mojab, a light-skinned Iranian instructor in the Adult Education department. She said that she had decided to give me a grade lower than what my academic work merited because I had been absent from class to often and she felt that I hadn’t done the required readings. First of all, I had warned her beforehand that I will miss many classes because of my political commitments in OISE/UT. Secondly, she never discussed the readings in class so how could she assess whether or not I had read them? Thirdly, when I did attend, I dominated class discussions. Based on the evidence, I conclude that she forgot this was "adult education" and not high school and decided to grade, not only my behaviour, but my race. Interestingly, the course title was Power and Difference in the Workplace, and she markets herself as one in the fight for equity.
CHAPTER 2
REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The purpose of this chapter is to review the literature that deals with the school experiences of Black students, girls and academically successful Black girls. There are few studies which have focused on successful Black students in general, and on girls in particular. Most of the research into Black students' school experiences was done in Britain and the United States; only a few have been carried out in Canada. These studies focused primarily on dropouts, or comparisons of Black and White students designed to explain innate "deficiencies" in Blacks, our culture and/or our families. To complete the picture about the education of Black children, more investigations into success are needed.

Racism and sexism are two forms of discrimination that Black girls encounter on a daily basis. Their school experiences will have elements common to all Black students and to all girls, but one cannot simply combine the two to arrive at conclusions about Black girls. How they respond and cope with their oppression will differ from Black boys, because they are not boys. Similarly, because of their race, they cannot be expected to adopt the behaviours of White girls. Among Black girls themselves, other differences arise from their academic status in the school. High achieving Black girls behave differently from those who are barely getting through, and there are consequences for this.

Discrimination has positive and negative effects on academic outcome. On the negative side, it can lower their self-esteem which, in turn, can have a debilitating effect on their academic performance. It can also create resentment and hostility which make concentrating on academic work difficult. On the positive side, it can foster a drive to succeed. In addition to coping with the stresses of academic work, relationships, and adolescence, Black girls in secondary schools must find successful ways to cope with discrimination.

2.1. ORGANISATION OF THE REVIEW.

The first section deals with the experiences of Black students in predominantly White schools. Included are stereotypes of Black students, an exploration of racist elements in the school and the curriculum, and some accounts of positive experiences with White teachers. In
the next section I provide a general description of girls' experiences in school. Here the
difference between Black and White girls is outlined. The last two sections are devoted to Black
females. The intersection of race and gender is explored, and finally, Black females' motivation
to succeed and strategies for coping with their success are discussed.

I included several unpublished conference papers that I have written. These are based on
data from the race-related projects on which I worked with OISE/UT professors Jim Ryan and
George Dei. The GTA high school to which I frequently refer, is a large (>1700), multicultural
 (> 65 nationalities) school located in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA) where I did some
ethnographic work (participant observation and interviewing) in 1994. I have used a number of
quotes from two focus group meetings that I conducted with about fifty self-selected students.
Most of them were Black but there were a few Whites and members of other "minority" groups.
Four teachers were present during the first meeting but this did not hinder the students' free
speech. I have also included Black student voices from George Dei's (1997) study, and from

The inclusion of many Black student "voices" in a literature review is perhaps not a
common practice. I have chosen to do so because these voices represent the experiences of Black
Canadian students and their experiences have contributed to our new and growing knowledge
about the schooling of Black children. Giroux (1992), in explaining why it is important to use
voices notes that:

There are experiences out there that illuminate larger questions of educational
philosophy.... Those stories are important. This is one of the reasons I have a lot of
trouble with liberal and procedural morality. It eliminates the stories in favour of abstract
rules.

In our educational institutions members of the dominant culture determine what counts as
knowledge and what is important enough to be included in the (re)production of knowledge. As
the author of this thesis, I have decided that the students' voices count as knowledge that is
important enough to be included. Furthermore, Black students' voices transformed me from one
who "blamed the victim" to one who advocates on their behalf. Their voices also serve to
illustrate and support findings from other published studies.

Finally, I deliberately used some very old references to show that much of what is
experienced by Black Canadian students today had been documented by researchers in Britain,
the United States and Canada over thirty years ago. It appears that there is still a lot of work to be done to "level the playing field" so that Black students have a fair chance.

2.2. BLACK STUDENTS IN WHITE SCHOOLS.

There is a dearth of information about Black people in mainstream academic research. When "normal" phenomena are studied, Blacks are often omitted but frequently find themselves "the subject" when deviant behaviour and cultural or intellectual "deficiencies" are studied (Hare, 1985; Phoenix, 1987; Ziegler et al., 1991; Christensen, 1992; Ford, 1993). Furthermore, what is considered inherent deficiencies in Blacks is excusable and normal among Whites. Katz (1970:126) notes that:

The literature on such [IQ] tests shows that when two groups of Whites differ in their IQ's, the explanation of the difference is immediately sought in schooling, environment, economic position of parents. However, when [Blacks] and Whites differ in precisely the same way, the difference is said to be genetic.

So-called "biological theories" of Black people's deficiency and inferiority abound in the literature and, unfortunately, have formed the basis of many educational policies, beliefs and practices (Coleman, 1966; Karabel & Halsey, 1977; Bennett & LeCompte, 1990; Ziegler et al., 1991; Ford, 1993).

The literature also shows that, despite decades of association, White school personnel and Black students still do not understand each other (Joseph, 1976; Coard, 1981; Carrington, 1983; Haughton, 1987; Crichlow, 1994; James, 1994). Furthermore, many White teachers do not know what to do when confronted with racist material in the curriculum or with overtly racist students (D'Oyley, 1976; Kehoe, 1985; Haughton, 1987; Britzman, 1992; Christiansen, 1992; James, 1994). This is articulated well by Bryan, a Black GTA student who said: "White teachers approach Black students in a certain way; White teachers make you feel small" (Anthony, 1994:8).

Black children are constantly bombarded with terms which describe everything bad, ugly, uncivilized or under-developed as black or dark. Many are treated as if they are mentally retarded or emotionally disturbed (Gannon, 1976; Alleyne, 1962, in Haughton, 1987; Washington & Newman, 1991; daCosta, cited by Solomon, 1992) and often they are made to feel that they do not belong (D'Oyley, 1976; Jamdaigni, 1982, in Haughton, 1987; D'Augelli
& Hershberger, 1993). Black students know that they are viewed by some teachers as lazy, simple-minded, happy-go-lucky folk lacking in sophistication or sensitivity (Jamdaigni, 1982, in Haughton, 1987; Hare & Castanell, 1985). They are considered good at certain artistic endeavours and at physical, non-thinking activities where their 'aggression' can be channelled into more productive areas (Carrington, 1983; Hare & Castanell, 1985; Bryan et al, 1987; Mac an Ghaill, 1988; Haughton, 1987; Solomon, 1992). Black students are encouraged by school staff to pursue sports, sometimes substituting it for academics (Carrington, 1983; Solomon, 1992; Anthony, 1995b). This is illustrated through a statement made by Peter, a Black student at the GTA high school (Anthony, 1995b:15):

When I first came [to this school] I didn’t want to join up for any sports but for three months I was harassed by the teachers who kept saying, "You know, you’re Black, you can play sports. What’s wrong with you?"... They will do special favours for me, you know, like an extra mark here and there. They do what they have to do to get you on the team if you’re a good sportsman..... They kept harassing me, then finally they got the hint.

Despite the encouragement to play sports, it is only certain sports that appear to be open to them. Roger, another GTA student (Anthony, 1996b:15) explained that:

If you’re a Black person you play basketball. Then if you go for hockey, no one will sign you for the hockey team. They say a Black person should go for basketball and that’s all.

2.2.1. Racist elements in the school and the curriculum.

Solomon (1992), Bryan, et al (1987), Codjoe (1997) and others have reported that Black students' educational aspirations are often viewed as being overly ambitious. Teachers and guidance counsellors find it difficult to hide their skepticism when confronted with talk of university. This can lead to poor academic performance in Black students. Kleinfeld (1972), Baker (1973) and Larter (1982) all note that, among North-Americans, White children's academic self-concept (which is strongly correlated with academic achievement) was more readily influenced by their parents' perception than by their teachers'; the reverse was observed among Black students - their academic self-concept was more strongly affected by their teachers' evaluation. It is a very well documented fact that many White teachers have more negative expectations for Black students than they do for middle-class Whites and Asians (Carrington, 1984; Wright, 1987; Irvine, 1990; Troyna & Carrington, 1993; Spina & Tai, 1998). Perceptive
Black students sense this and, for some, it can have deleterious effects on their education. Victoria, a dropout who had returned to high school as an adult, said that (Dei, 1997:69):

I can tell you the reason why I dropped out! ... The school that I went to, they made me feel like I wasn't smart enough to do the stuff. They told my parents to send me to a technical school. They treated Blacks like we had no brains ... and that the Chinese were smarter, the Whites were better, so I just said, "Forget it!"

In addition to being negatively stereotyped, Black students face disparagement in the curricular materials used in many schools. Curricular material often describes history, literature, and other subjects, from the White [male] perspective; women and "minorities" are either omitted, referred to in negatively stereotypical ways (Weiner, 1985; Foster, 1985; Weiler, 1988; NY State Ed Dept, 1989; Mirza, 1993; Chrichlow, 1994; James, 1994; Codjoe, 1997), or appropriated. An example of appropriation lies in the fact that Egypt is often presented as a European civilisation and Egyptian people as White (Evans, 1988). A Black teacher who was interviewed in Dei's study experienced this. She recalled that her schooling (in Toronto) led her to believe that Egypt was in Europe; it was sometime later that she discovered it is in Africa (Anthony, 1995b). Secondly, a Black community worker, who was also educated in Toronto, notes in Dei (1995:80) that:

I did Greek philosophy and Greek history.... If I had not done my own research, read on my own time, I would not have known that a lot of people who they were saying attributed the great works of civilisation to Greece and Rome ... were African scholars.... Africans ... being portrayed as being born as Greeks and Romans. So you see when an African person goes to school ... he does not see his people contributing anything to the advancement of civilisation and he doesn't feel as if he has a place there.

This sentiment was echoed by a Black Alberta student in Codjoe's (1997:175) study who said that, "When you have a sense of what your people have done, it helps you get through the school system ... because you feel that your people have made a contribution to where you are."

Discussion about the race and colour of the early Egyptians continues to dominate the scholarship of those who are desirous of proving that Black people could not have developed such a civilisation, and those intent on proving that we did (Young, 1994).

Black students also feel demeaned by the way that material about their heritage is presented in the classroom (Black, 1973, cited in Haughton, 1987; D'Oyley, 1976; Ijaz, 1980; James, 1994; Spencer, 1995 in Codjoe, 1997). This sometimes exposes them to ridicule by their
classmates (D’Oyley, 1976). Michelle, a Black girl at the GTA high school said (Anthony, 1995a:12):

In my history class I'm the only Black person. So we were watching this movie about World War I and you see all these Black people in the movie pushing the horses for the White people who were going to fight in the war. I asked my teacher how come there were no Black people in the war? He explained how the white people were racist and he defended them for being racist because he said that 'In the Bible it said to 'beware of the colour black' so it was okay for them to do that.'

Lucille (Black student) recalled how demeaned she felt when a certain novel was discussed in her English class:

When I was in grade nine I was the only Black student there and we had to read "To Kill a Mockingbird" and the reaction from kids, they look straight at you, anything about stereotypes they look at you and you feel terrible. I was like shrinking, I didn't want to be in that class.

Another Black girl added: "I cried".

It is interesting to note that Blacks are not the only ones who are sensitive to such issues. Stahl (1979, cited in Haughton, 1987) noted that, in Israel, when the newly arrived Oriental Jews were educated with textbooks written from the European Jews' perspective, they suffered from the same symptoms of underachievement observed among Black students.

Textbooks aside, there are other ways through which the curriculum enhances racial differences and fosters feelings of inferiority among Black students. At the GTA school there is a cosmetology programme which teaches students skin care and hairdressing. Both Black and White girls commented on the absence of mannequins with Black hair and they wondered why Black hair could not be used to teach hairdressing to students in multi-ethnic Toronto? They also noted that, "the walls in the classroom were covered with photographs of White women sporting White hairstyles" (p.13). They felt, and rightly so, that the school was wrong to promote only one type of hair as being 'normal.' This can be cited as an example of how the 'hidden' curriculum is delivered.

Admission criteria to certain courses also give cause for concern. There is a beginner course in Italian at the school, but apparently, it is not open to all races. Michelle (Black female) told me (Anthony, 1995b:13):
You see Mr. Minelli, he and I don’t get along. When I first came here, I wanted to take Italian and he said I couldn’t take it because I don’t know anything about Italian language and I’m not Italian.

This line of reasoning was questionable because, after all, it is a beginners’ course. Such behaviour has the potential to adversely affect the self-image of Black students and alienate them from non-Blacks. It implies that they and their culture are not acceptable to other (more elite) cultures. This situation can exacerbate the feelings of resentment some Black students feel towards White teachers, and increase the amount of distress they experience in school.

2.2.2. Differential treatment.

The differential treatment of Black students is made manifest primarily through sanctions, evaluations, negative stereotyping, surveillance and the form of harassment commonly referred to as being "picked on" (Solomon, 1992; Anthony, 1994, 1995b; Codjoe, 1997; Dei, 1997; Ibrahim, 1997). For example, at the GTA high school (Anthony, 1995b), members of the Black student club, Colours, were asked to pick up the garbage around a shopping mall which is located near to the school. The students claimed that no other group had been asked to do this. Furthermore, prior to the formation of Colours, students had never been asked to perform this task.

With respect to sanctions, Black students are denied some privileges afforded Whites, and are more severely punished for the same rule infraction (Anthony, 1995a,b; Dei, 1997; Ibrahim, 1997). Furthermore, when they complain to the principal about being unfairly treated by their teachers, their complaints are generally ignored. This prompts some of them to take matters into their own hands. Aziza, a Black muslim girl in Ibrahim’s (1997:144) study recalled that, when no action was taken following her complaint about a teacher’s unfair treatment towards her, she was really angry and addressed the offending teacher thus:

I told him, "Monsieur, you are a racist." [He said], "But ... I was never a racist, I treat all students equally." I looked at him and told him, "Oh really? Good! Of course you are a racist and I have no desire to speak to you. I will be late for my class" and I left.... I was so relieved that I told him that, because it came out of me. It is a rage....

Concerning academic performance, some teachers express disbelief when Black students’ test scores exceed their (teachers’) expectations. Codjoe (1997:163) described a situation
involving a Black grade 12 student in an Ontario school who "topped" her class in a Science test. Her teacher, who had previously suggested she drop Science after grade ten, asked her, "Did you write your name on someone else's paper?" At the GTA high school one of the girls talked about a Black student who "got really high on his test and ... the teacher goes to the two people that sit beside him, 'I'm taking two marks off because you let him copy from you.' I heard how he's really smart and stuff" (Anthony, 1995b:11).

2.2.3. School-based degradation of Black students' culture: Language and music.

Language is an important component of culture. It is developed to help people survive in their world but it can also be used as a tool of oppression because it reflects the society and power relations within it (Smith, 1987; Lippi-Green, 1997). Language can also be used as a fence, allowing people of a common background in while keeping others out. In his study of Black boys in a Toronto school, Solomon (1992:41) notes that:

Language ... pulls together the Black segment of the school population while at the same time alienating those students and teachers who are not of West Indian origin. With school administrators, teachers and White students effectively locked out of dialect interactions, the Jocks are able to secure for themselves a certain kind of power.

Thus language is essential in creating unity and for the maintenance and transmission of culture yet many teachers in Toronto's multicultural schools deny Black students the freedom to use their language for informal discourse. Students at the GTA school described their school's attempts to make them feel ashamed of their dialect (Anthony, 1994:14):

About the language part, you see how we speak Patois in the cafeteria, well there's Orientals and there's Indians who speak their language and when you walk down the hallway that's all you hear. They don't tell them anything but they tell us to 'Please speak proper English,' or 'You should not speak bad English.' They think everytime we speak Patois that it's cuss we're cussin' but they don't know what the Orientals and Indians are saying.

In all fairness I must point out that there are some people of African heritage who themselves are ashamed of their dialect but this is fast changing. In the more contemporary literature (Fuller, 1980, 1983; Riley, 1985; Bryan, 1987; Mac an Ghaill, 1988; Reid, 1988; Coultas, 1989; Solomon, 1992), and at the GTA school, I observed that many Black students [of West Indian
parentage] are genuinely proud of their dialect/language and resent the attempts by White school personnel to outlaw or degrade it. Coultas (1989), Bryan (1987) and Solomon (1992) believe they derive a sense of power from a dialect/language that is unintelligible to their White, middle-class teachers. Unfortunately use of non-standard English can militate against their academic success by creating self-fulfilling prophecies.

Like language, Caribbean music is also regarded with some measure of disdain. Gabrielle offered an example of this (Anthony, 1994:11):

After gym we're allowed to play music and just hang around. So me and my friend Kevin were listening to this Reggae tape that he'd brought. The gym teacher goes, "How can you all listen to that baboon music?" So I go, "But wait! I'm not a monkey okay? My parents came from Jamaica, this is what we listen to!" I told my Mom, she called the school and told off the teacher. The next day I got called down to the office, the principal was laughing, he was laughing in front of my face you know, and he said, "Oh Marion don't worry he really didn't mean it." And I'm thinking like, "It's not a joke you know."

This is not an isolated case of one teacher displaying his ignorance. Black students from four different Toronto schools heard similar comments in reference to rap and Reggae music (Dei, 1995; Anthony, 1995b, 1996b). In addition, they are often asked to "turn down" the volume when playing their music while Whites are allowed to blast their heavy metal music (Solomon, 1992; Anthony, 1995b).

2.2.4. Positive experiences with White teachers.

The previous sub-section portrayed White teachers of Black students in a negative light because negative experiences are what Black students often encounter. However there have been fewer reports of positive experiences with White teachers (Codjoe, 1997; Dei, 1997). In Codjoe's study, five of the twelve participants recalled positive experiences with "really helpful" and "sympathetic" White teachers who believed in them, helped them and encouraged their academic pursuits. Ama, one of the young women who he interviewed (Codjoe, 1997:266), recalled that:

I had one teacher in grade 12 that was really good. That was the first time when I took Science ... We were doing Physiology ... She used to push me.... She encouraged that push in me to do well. That's why I think, maybe a bit more sympathetic teachers like her. Now I know that there's probably not so many sympathetic teachers. There are some

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teachers, like, if you want to learn, you learn; if you don’t want to learn, hey, that’s up to you....

When describing their favourite teachers, the students in Dei’s (1997) cited similar characteristics. In addition they favoured those who answered their questions without making them "feel uncomfortable or stupid" and who interacted with them outside of the classroom. Steven, one of the participants, described his favourite teacher, "She’s encouraging. She always tells me ... that I could make it somehow, that I could be somebody.... I’m thankful for that. There’s somebody that believes in me" (Dei, 1997:126).

2.3. THE SCHOOLING OF GIRLS: Sexist elements in schools and the curriculum.

A number of studies have shown that the experience of school is different for boys and girls (LaFrance, 1991; Bennett & LeCompte, 1990; Middleton, 1987; Randall, 1987; Stanworth, 1983,1987; Shakeshaft, 1986; Sadker & Sadker, 1986). Bennett and LeCompte (1990:225) suggest that:

The socialisation and treatment of girls puts them in positions very similar to educationally and economically disadvantaged minority groups despite the fact that numerically, they are not a minority.

In schools, gender discrimination occurs via several routes: through the administrative structure, the curriculum, method of instruction and various forms of teacher-student interactions (Bennett & Le Compte, 1990; Irvine, 1990; Renshaw, 1990; Weiner, 1990; Stanworth, 1983, 1987; Randall, 1987; Shakeshaft, 1986; Sadker & Sadker, 1986). The next sub-section focuses on teacher-student interaction because this is considered "the most valuable resource in a classroom" (Sadker & Sadker, 1986:514). Teachers’ influence can override that of parents’ (moreso in situations where children rarely see their parents) and lingers long after the children have left their classrooms (Irvine, 1990).

2.3.1. Teacher-student Interaction: Putative effects on girls.

Between childhood and the end of high school children spend over fifteen thousand hours in school (Lawrence, 1987). Teachers socialise and condition them through the 'hidden' and stated curricula (Bennett & Le Compte, 1990). They consciously and subconsciously inculcate
students for their appropriate roles within the school and the larger society. Teacher-student interaction is a two-way process during which teachers and students influence each others' behaviours, but it is by no means an equal process - teachers can control and influence students to a greater extent than students can teachers (Irvine, 1990).

Teachers' interaction with students is influenced by the students' gender and race. That boys interact more with teachers, than do girls, is very well documented (Shakeshaft, 1986; Sadker & Sadker, 1986; Stanworth, 1983, 1987; Renshaw, 1990; Weiner, 1990; LaFrance, 1991; Leicester, 1991). Male students establish their prominence in the classroom by initiating more positive and negative exchanges with teachers. Whichever form the exchange takes, boys succeed in capturing a disproportionate amount of the teachers' attention and this holds true regardless of the teacher's sex (Sadker & Sadker, 1986; Stanworth, 1983). This affects students' attitudes towards themselves and school because they believe that if a teacher asks them questions or for their opinions, then the teacher cares about them and their opinions count for something (Stone, 1981; Verma & Bagley, 1982; Stanworth, 1983).

LaFrance (1991) reviewed several studies of the gender dynamics in schools and concluded that "female students are nudged into passivity, dependency and silence rather than activity, autonomy and talk, not so much through deliberate words and actions, but via subtle, non-verbal cues" (p.5). This phenomenon is observed, not only at the primary level, but also during the secondary and tertiary years (Sadker & Sadker, 1986). Irvine (1990) studied the teacher-student exchange in sixty-three classrooms in ten elementary schools and noted that the approach to 'silencing' females was different for Black and White girls. Silencing of Black girls began in the upper elementary grades while that of Whites began in the lower elementary grades. This difference was attributed to the comparatively egalitarian environment in which many children of African descent are raised. Several researchers are of the opinion that, among African-Americans and African-Britons, there is less oppression of females than among Whites (Simmons & Rosenberg, 1975; Hare, 1985; Riley, 1985; Lewis, cited by Irvine, 1990; Reid, 1991; Carby, cited by Knowles & Mercer, 1992; Mirza, 1993; Fordham, 1993). This may explain why Black girls in the lower elementary grades were perceived as being assertive and bossy, rather than submissive and helpless as were the White girls (Irvine, 1990). By the time they get to the upper elementary grades, however, they become as "invisible" as their White counterparts.
As I perused the literature, and listened to the Black girls at the GTA school (Anthony, 1995a,b), I noted with pleasure, that many of them escaped the silencing process. As they progress through the school system, much to the consternation of their White, middle-class teachers, they continue to be "those loud Black girls" (Evans, 1988). In some cases they are acting on directives from their parents. Linda, a Black GTA student said: "Our parents teach us 'you have to speak up for yourself" (Anthony, 1995a:20). There are students whose loudness is a deliberate attempt to attract the teacher's attention, albeit in a manner incongruous with Anglo middle-class norms. Leslie, at the GTA school, said that (Anthony, 1994:9):

You have your hand up to answer a question but the teacher doesn’t see you, they look right through you to a White student. You have to say [sarcastic tone] "Excuse me Miss," and scream and raise your voice to attract the teacher's attention. They answer questions, the same questions from White students while ignoring Blacks.

This is hardly a case of paranoia for way back in 1973, Rubovits and Maehr reported that very bright Black children are the ones least likely to be noticed or praised by their White teachers. Shakeshaft (1986:501) notes that, "the high-achieving female receives the least attention of all students," and the attention decreases further when the female is of African heritage (Riley, 1985). Eventually Black girls become the "phantoms in the opera" (Fordham, 1993). Considering these findings, one can expect very bright Black girls to be among the most invisible race-gender group in Canadian schools.

Finally, there are girls like Linda (GTA school) who use their voice to defend their race (Anthony, 1994:12):

I was in a Business class with a certain teacher and he said "All people from Africa have AIDS," so I said [loud, impassioned tone] "You listen, all of us Blacks have African descent. I don't care what you say or who you're talking to, as long as I'm in this class you keep whatever racist comments you have, keep it inside because I'm a different student to deal with, all these other Black kids will sit down and take it, I'm different. It's like you see Martin, Mandela, Malcolm and now it's me, it's my turn."

Based on the literature and my own observations, I now share Shakeshaft's (1986:500) view that:

Females and members of minority groups, on the other hand, must obtain their education in systems that are at best indifferent and at worst hostile to them.
Women and members of minority groups learn that their concerns, their lives, and their cultures are not the stuff of schooling. They discover that school is not a psychologically or physically safe environment for them and that they are valued neither by the system nor by society.

The differential treatment meted out to females in our schools has the potential to diminish their self-esteem and subsequent academic performance. Children's self-esteem is of interest because their attitude towards school, behaviour in school, participation in extracurricular activities and academic performance have all been found to be positively related to their self-esteem (Stone, 1981; Jordan, 1981; Verma & Bagley, 1982; Lawrence, 1987; NY State Ed Dept, 1989), the correlation being even stronger when self-esteem is low (Bullivant, 1987).

Teachers' attitude towards students has been identified as a powerful force in raising or lowering their self-esteem. (Renshaw, 1990; Stanworth, 1983; Irvine, 1990; NY State Ed Dept, 1989, Jordan, 1981). A student's perception of her- or himself can be greatly influenced by their perception of how teachers, among others, feel about them (Rosenberg & Simmons, 1973; Holliday, 1985). Children who believe that their teachers dislike them are more inclined to dislike themselves and school. They feel isolated, discouraged and fail to perform well academically. This phenomenon appears to be more pronounced among girls, low-income and minority students who tend to be more teacher-dependent and are more likely to hold teachers in high esteem than are boys and middle-class, White students (Stanworth, 1983; Coleman 1966). Unfortunately, the feeling is not mutual - teachers generally tend to favour Anglo middle-class students (Irvine, 1990). Here again, girls may be at a disadvantage because they have a greater need for external approval and are more concerned about what others think about them, than are boys (Irvine, 1990; LaFrance, 1991).

The different ways in which boys and girls are treated in schools also lead to different academic and occupational outcomes (Shakeshaft, 1986; Sadker & Sadker, 1986; Bennett & LeCompte, 1990; Aburdene & Naisbitt, 1992; Steinem, 1993; Pierson & Cohen, 1995). In the secondary years girls are often encouraged to pursue "low-status" subjects and boys the more elite ones such as Mathematics, the Physical Sciences and Technology. In Mac an Ghaill's study (1988) a minority female student recalled that she wanted to take Physics but was advised by her
teacher to take Biology instead because it was the one that girls took if they wanted to do a Science subject. At the GTA High School there was an attempt to discourage Fran (Black female) from taking Biology, even though it is "the one that girls took" (Anthony, 1996a:16):

I went to one of the Guidance Counsellors and told her I want to do grade 11 Biology. She said, "How about music instead?" I said, "Miss, I took music last year." She said, "How about keyboarding?" "I did that in summer school Miss." She tried her best to turn me off Biology.

This is a major point of concern because young women who are not encouraged in the Mathematics/Science/Technology arena, are unlikely, as adults, to be employed in occupations related to these fields which continue to be dominated by men (Carey, 1998). Aburdene and Naisbitt (1992) found that, in the United States, the smallest discrepancy in earnings between men and women occurred in jobs related to Mathematics, Science and Technology. This is not to imply that money is everything, but having enough of it will render women less financially dependent on men, and independence has been identified as a tremendous boost to one's self-esteem (Steinem, 1993).

2.4. RACISM AND SEXISM: Interlocking oppression.

Black females (in White societies) are perceived as being loud, readily available sexual objects,³ resilient matriarchal "mammies" who are expected to perform heavy physical labour and produce many children (Beale, 1970; hooks, 1981; Phoenix, 1987; Evans, 1988; Reid, 1988; Coultas, 1989; Fordham, 1993; Mirza, 1993). We are often denied the respect and consideration granted White females (Beale, 1970; hooks, 1981), and are located beneath them on the social ladder. The word "woman," bell hooks (1981:138-140) points out:

is synonymous with white woman, for women of other races are always perceived as Others, as de-humanised beings who do not fall under the heading woman... White feminists ... impressed upon the American public ... by drawing endless analogies between "women" and "blacks" ... to exclude [alienate] black women.

In Ain't I A Woman? hooks (1981) chronicled the strained relationship between Black and White women. From the days of slavery to the present time, she posits, White women have had a vested interest in maintaining their supremacy over Black women. After all, it is only over the "minority" woman that the White woman can exert her power (hooks, 1981:153). With
legislation such as employment equity that opens doors for women, White women are more likely to be selected. The White male "gate-keeper" sees in her, his mother, daughter, sister or aunt, and this gives her an advantage over women "of colour." This is the reality faced by Black female students who often see White women working outside the home while their Black housekeeper cares for their children and homes. This is one of the reasons that Black women tend to focus more on racism than on sexism.

From the school experiences reviewed (Fuller, 1980; Tomlinson, 1981; Riley, 1985; Bryan, 1987; Phoenix, 1987; Evans, 1988; Mac an Ghaill, 1988; Mirza, 1993), it is clear that for girls of African heritage, racism is a far more salient form of oppression and discrimination than sexism. This is partly explained by the fact that many Black females do not perceive themselves as inferior to males. Despite the 'genderised' division of labour commonly found within their homes, the Black girls in these studies felt that they were far more capable than boys, both academically and with respect "to practical things." Their feeling of competence is supported by a number of empirical studies which reveal that among Black students, girls' academic performance is consistently better than boys' (Tomlinson, 1983; Hare & Castanell, 1985; Mac an Ghaill, 1988; Washington & Newman, 1991). With respect to race, contrary to what White people think, Black students at the GTA high school and those in other studies, do not consider themselves inferior to Whites and have no desire to be White (Dei, 1995, 1997; Anthony, 1996a). In fact several of them noted, with disdain, that White students "smoke, drink and use bad words;" "they get pregnant just like us but they have abortions" (Anthony, 1996a:17).

Black girls are very much aware of the limits that gender places on their career choices but feel that their experiences of school and society are more adversely affected by racism (Riley, 1985; Bryan et al, 1987; Phoenix, 1987). In a distressed and impassioned voice, Linda, a Black girl at the GTA school cried out: "Our parents send us to school to get an education. Instead of studying our books we come to school to learn about racism" (Anthony, 1996a:16). In Mac an Ghaill's (1988) study, the girls were more inclined to notice and comment on racial, rather than sexist practices. For example, they overlooked their school's practice of using female students to make sandwiches at school functions, but commented on numerous incidents of racism. However, this is not to imply that females of African heritage ignore sexist issues. Wanda (Anthony, 1995b:20) showed the extent of her annoyance with an overtly sexist teacher
by complaining to her mother:

This teacher I had last year was very sexist, he always told the girls things like 'we should go to the kitchen and cook,' until one day my mother came and told him off. She told him that's why he has no wife because he has no respect for women.

It is true that, in addition to school, children are also socialised through the family, the media and their peer groups but according to Pratt (1975, quoted in Haughton, 1987:15):

School wields the greatest influence because through it society makes its most deliberate attempt to structure socialization..... changing textbooks is not enough, it is teachers that have to be changed, not programmes and books."

Thus any progress hoped for by the publication of "guidelines" will be negated by teachers and administrators who are not "bias-free." Pamela, a White girl at the GTA school (Anthony, 1994:20) expressed the view that:

It's not the students in the school and it's not the teenagers. All the ignorance comes from authority, like the teachers and principals make us prejudice against each other. In my old school the principal said stuff like (I don't like to say this word) but he said stuff like 'nigger' and he loved to suspend the Black kids.

To support her contention, Pamela went on to describe an encounter that she had with one of the school's administrators:

I was in Mr. Jones' office one day because I'd swore in front of a teacher. He called me into the office and he goes, "I don't know where you get your ignorant attitude, maybe you get it from the Black people you hang around with?"

Incidents such as these can foster the belief in students that teachers and administrators want to perpetuate the caste-like status of Black students in 'white' schools. They should seriously ponder this comment made by an Black female student (Bryan, 1987:96):

That's meant to prove they are not racist. But it doesn't. They are the ones who need Black Studies, not us. It's for them to change their attitudes towards Black people, because I think people are racist in this country but they don't even know it because it's built into their culture and they don't realise it.

This review, thus far, highlights the fact that the experience of schooling is different for boys and girls and that, among girls, those of African heritage are treated differently from those of those of the dominant culture (Foster, 198; Riley, 1985; Fordham, 1993). Clearly, it is not a level playing field. I end this sub-section with a quote from Pine and Hilliard (1990, in Ford,
B]lant, crude, egregious, and overt racism has come out of the closet again into our schools. Documented accounts of public slurs, threats... and racial conflict now ring disturbingly from schools in every region. Schools, which ought to be a civilizing influence in our society, seem instead to be incubators of racial intolerance. Racism, prejudice, and discrimination are shamefully sabotaging our nation's efforts to provide high-quality education for all children (my emphasis).

2.4.1. Intra-racial sexism: Oppression from Black boys.

Black girls in two Toronto-based studies spoke of the ways in which they are disparaged by Black boys. Solomon (1992) observed that Black West Indian boys engaged in boisterous and physical encounters with their female counterparts. The girls are "grabbed, shoved against the wall, and sometimes fondled" (p. 58). Their response varied. Some girls, it seems, were not seriously offended. They objected vocally, but made "no genuine effort to disentangle themselves from the boys' grasps" (p. 58). Others found this behavior distasteful and offensive but felt powerless about preventing it. The more assertive girls responded "aggressively to the boys' advances. They swear at, hit, and throw objects to ward off offenders" (p. 59). Some of them practised the "safety in numbers" adage - they moved in groups to protect themselves against physical abuse from the boys.

In Dei's study (1997) Black females reported that they are "harassed in the hallways of the schools, and that this is often by Black males" (p. 100). Being physically and verbally abused, they feel disrespected by their male counterparts. The quote below illustrates what some of them experience (p. 100):

Girl 1: I think, Black guys, it's not only, everything they do is violent, because if they're talking to you, they're like...

Girl 2: "Bitch!"

Girl 1: ... and like, "What's up baby? I want to talk to you." It's aggressive and it's violent. Everything they do is violent.

Girl 2: Yeah.

To avoid this type of harassment one girl chose to limit her interaction with Black males (p. 101):
I don't talk too much to [the males] because some of them, you do talk to, and it's like, you pass and you say, "Hi," "Bye," and the next time they see you it's like they want to touch you all over your body. And if you tell them no, it's like, "Oh, you think you're this ... you think you're better than people." So I really don't talk too much to them.

In their defence the boys claim that girls who are treated in this way bring it on themselves through their manner of behaviour, dress and speech. They felt it was acceptable to disrespect such girls who did not respect themselves. However, as noted by Dei (1997:100), they failed to:

recognise that by blaming Black females for creating their own problems ... they were subjecting [them] to the same sort of stereotypes as those constructed around Black males which centre on the same sort of superficialities. This behaviour demonstrates their lack of regard for the subordination of Black women and their inability to recognise their own complicity.

2.5. HIGH-ACHIEVING BLACK FEMALES IN WHITE INSTITUTIONS.

Although Black females suffer triple subordination (race, class and gender) in the wider society, in schools they usually occupy a position somewhat above Black males (Tomlinson, 1983; Hare & Castanell, 1985; Riley, 1985; Mac an Ghaill, 1988). This does not render them immune to our patriarchal society - they are certainly reminded of it in the hierarchy of the school system, the business and professional world and in politics. Despite their struggles against race, gender and class issues, many girls of African heritage make it to the upper echelons of school. At the GTA High School I noticed that, although few in number, there were Black females in most of the advanced classes that I observed. This section takes a closer look at successful Black female students, their motivation to succeed and the strategies for coping with their success.

2.5.1. Motivation to Succeed.

Ford (1992:231) defines motivation as "those factors that collectively incite and direct behaviour." Brophy (1986:8) defines motivation to learn as "the students' desire or willingness to engage and persist in academic activities in school." Graham (1989) examined two distinct approaches to the study of motivation in Blacks - the personality approach and the cognitive
approach. With respect to minority motivation, the personality traits most frequently examined are need for achievement and locus of control.

The achievement motive reflects a desire to do things well and to compete against a standard of excellence (Graham, 1989:41). Students with a high achievement motive tend to have realistic aspirations: they select moderate over easy or difficult tasks and work hard to excel although they might not select the most advanced courses. Jordan (1981) identified achievement motivation, and academic self-concept, as key factors influencing academic performance.

Locus of control refers to stable and generalised beliefs about personal responsibility for outcomes (Rotter, 1966, cited by Graham, 1989:47). Individuals with an internal locus consider themselves totally responsible while externals consider powerful others, luck or circumstances beyond their control as responsible for outcomes. Internals tend to blame themselves for failure and accept praise for deserved triumphs. They are more likely to exert effort to control their environment, to be less susceptible to social influence, more achievement oriented and better psychologically adjusted than externals (Graham, 1989:47). Externals neither blame themselves for failure nor do they see success as the result of their own efforts and abilities. Graham (1989) notes that, although a positive relationship between internality and academic achievement has been established, there still remains a need to explore the cognitive aspects of motivation.

The cognitive approach deals with an individual's perceptions, evaluations and causal inferences as determinants of achievement-related behaviour. Here the focus is on thought, not personality, as individuals seek to understand why outcomes such as success or failure occur (Graham, 1989). The causes that individuals use to explain these outcomes include ability, effort, task factors, luck and help or hindrance from others. Particular causal attributions have distinct psychological and behavioural consequences (p. 57). For example, subsequent academic performance of students who attribute failure to lack of effort differs from those who cite low ability. Students can control the effort expended but lack of ability is considered a more permanent state over which they have no control. In the latter case, self-esteem is undermined, expectations are lowered and these students tend to give up.

With perceived ability being such an important causal attribute, Graham (1989:61) poses the question: "What factors are known to influence ability attributions for performance?" The answer lies, to some extent, in the direct and indirect messages from teachers. We gain
information about ourselves based on the affective communications of others. When the teacher communicates sympathy, rather than anger at the student’s poor performance, the student is more likely to think that s/he is lacking in ability (Graham, 1989:61). Graham could offer no explanation for the negative effects of this presumably positive emotion.

Although Graham (1989) tries to make clear distinctions between the personality and cognitive aspects of motivation, there is some amount of overlap. For example, causal attributions (cognitive) and locus of control (personality) seem to address similar issues. Secondly, the affective cues from others which influence self-perception (cognitive), is linked to achievement motivation. Ryan et al (1985) consider motivation to achieve as contingent on both intrinsic and extrinsic factors. Students are more willing to learn when placed in an environment that is conducive to learning because such an environment enhances their intrinsic motivation to learn and thus academic achievement is likely to follow. It is quite natural for children’s interest to fluctuate from subject to subject, and from topic to topic within each subject. This, according to Ryan and colleagues, is where extrinsic control - classroom practices in particular - become important. They believe that, in addition to motivation and learning, the classroom environment can also affect students’ self-esteem, emotional adjustment and social well-being. Perhaps the overlap between personality and cognitive approaches occurs because one’s personality influences her/his perception of events and subsequent evaluations which, in turn, can affect one’s personality. Many Black students perform poorly in school because they have low expectations, feel hopeless, lack interest and give up in the face of potential failure (Graham, 1989). These are motivational issues and play an important part in understanding academic achievement among Blacks.

2.5.2. Characteristics of Successful Black Females and Coping Strategies.

Most of the research into Black female education was conducted during the last twenty years and the majority of these studies were done in the United States and Britain. Based on the literature I have concluded that the characteristics of successful Black girls, coping mechanisms and success strategies vary both between and within countries. Contributing to the observed differences are the different educational systems and the influence of different socialising processes. A common thread is that, in both countries, successful Black girls view academic
qualifications as an assertion of their own sense of competence and a way through which they hope to gain some control over their lives. This is consistent with the literature on successful African-American students (both sexes) which show that the more successful are those who have adopted the American achievement ideology. Mac an Ghaill (1988) notes that the academically oriented, young Black women in his study, saw themselves as role models, not just for others at the school, but also for those in the wider community. Thus for these girls, motivation can be both intrinsic and extrinsic.

An outstanding feature of successful African-American girls is their invisibility (Evans, 1988; Irvine, 1990; Fordham, 1993). In addition to working hard, these 'phantoms in the opera' (Fordham, 1993) are silent types, perhaps seen, but never heard. With respect to culture and behaviour, they were more Euro-American than African-American and presented a serious, academic air about themselves. Before the last two decades or so, successful Black-British girls were described in a similar manner (Bryan, 1987; Phoenix, 1987), but recent studies have shown that they have diverged from this norm to an extent that confuses their Anglo school personnel (Fuller, 1980, 1983; Riley, 1985; Evans, 1988; Mac an Ghaill, 1988; Reid, 1988; Coultas, 1989). These authors have reported a genre of girls who, in addition to working hard, are outspoken and so proud of their African heritage that they actively resist attempts to "Whiten" them. They described the girls in their studies as being assertive, strong, independent, confident, vocal and highly visible. Many of them are recent immigrants, or the children of recent immigrants, from the West Indies and Africa. In the British studies cited, Black girls of West Indian background attributed their coping skills and academic success to the nurturing received during their early life in the [predominantly Black] Caribbean (Fuller, 1980; Riley, 1985; Bryan, 1987; Phoenix, 1987).

Being a successful Black student comes with a price (Ford, 1992, 1993; Fordham, 1993). Black students who are pro-school are often teased and rejected by their ethnic peers for "selling out" or "acting White" (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986; Bennett & LeCompte, 1990; Fordham, 1993; Hemmings, 1996). This must surely create some amount of emotional stress for them, girls especially, who want very much to be accepted (Bennett & LeCompte, 1990). Many Black students in Canada believe that academic success is contingent on "acting White" (Solomon, 1992; Dei, 1994, 1997; Anthony, 1996a). There may be good reason for this perception. Hare
and Castenell (1985) observe that among African-American students, personality variables are more highly correlated with academic grades than are traditional aptitude measures. More precisely, the closer the students' attitudes and values approximated those of their [White, middle-class] teachers, the higher was the students' academic performance; lower class, non-White children posed a greater possibility for conflict and failure (Hare & Castanell, 1985; Ford, 1991). This situation may exist with other lower-caste ethnocultural groups. For example, Tahuri, a Maori woman in Middleton's (1987) study reported that she had to deny her Maoriness in order to be any good in the eyes of the school. This is a most unfortunate situation for, as noted by Coultas (1989:285), "conformity and academic ability are not automatically linked," although many White teachers seem to think that they are.

For some Black students the burden of being 'ostracised' by society, the school and their peers is too much. Many gifted students join forces with oppositional students, become very disruptive and perform below their ability, while others choose to drop out altogether (Ford, 1992, 1992a, 1993). Oppositional Black students usually have a strong public support system, an identifiable subculture (Fordham, 1993; Solomon, 1992; Mac an Ghaill, 1988; Fuller, 1983) that successful Black girls lack. In fact, academic achievement aside, Black girls appear to be the most socially isolated group in high school (Damico & Scott, 1988; Irvine, 1990; Fordham, 1993). The more successful ones are often criticised by the less successful for their conformist approach to schooling (Mac an Ghaill, 1988; Solomon, 1992). Those in Fuller's (1980) study were so afraid of being called snobs or being perceived as those "boring good students" that they worked hard at being recalcitrant. They did their homework and avoided serious conflict while engaging in a number of mildly militant practices. They read magazines during class, pretending not to listen to the teacher; they were technically late for class (arriving just ahead of the teacher), and handed in assignments late.

Another difference influencing coping strategies used by African-American and African-British girls is rooted in the different educational systems. In the British system students begin secondary school at age eleven or twelve. At the end of a compulsory five-year period, they write standardised, public (exit) examinations (Ordinary or 'O' Level) which are graded by educators not personally acquainted with the students. Thus, because they are identified only by number, students are assessed on the quality of their work, not on their behaviour. This practice
may have resulted in students being less affected by their teachers, and so achieving academic success beyond their (teachers') expectations. Maughan and Dunn (1988) compared the 'O' Level results of Black and White students who had had similar school and curriculum opportunities. They found that the Blacks examination scores were not only higher than the Whites, but were better "than would have been predicted on the basis of their earlier attainments" (p.123), that is, when their tests were graded by classroom teachers.

In contrast to their American counterparts (Irvine, 1990), successful African-British girls do not see teachers as significant others (Fuller, 1980; Mac an Ghaill, 1988; Riley, 1985). Although they did not openly reject their teachers, they appeared indifferent to their [teachers'] opinions about them. By rejecting their teachers, the girls in these studies were able to reject the negative stereotypes ascribed to their race and gender, as they strove for academic success.

Other success strategies related to emotional support of various kinds. Some students were sustained by their religious beliefs and practices (Tomlinson, 1983; Bryan, 1987), others by their parents/family (Tomlinson, 1983; Riley, 1985; McKellar, 1989; Ford, 1992,1993), a kind teacher, or the desire to prove wrong, a 'prophet of doom' (McKellar, 1989). Academically oriented friends proved a tremendous source of support (Tomlinson, 1983). Students tend to form close friendships with those in their academic league (Bennett & LeCompte, 1990; Hemmings, 1996). With a scarcity of their own kind in the advanced stream, high-achieving Black girls sometimes turn to White girls who would not otherwise associate with them (Grant, 1986; Irvine, 1990). This could be a strategy to maintain their academic status for as noted by Bennett & LeCompte (1990:209) "even bright and highly motivated students with helpful, pushy parents, find it difficult to study when none of their friends do." I must point out here, that active parental support was not always attributed to success. Some African-American girls, unlike their British counterparts, did not receive encouragement from their parents (Fordham, 1993). Fordham (1993:24) interpreted this as the parents' way of preparing their daughters, "to live a life saturated with conflict, confusion, estrangement, isolation, and a plethora of unmarked beginnings and endings, jump starts, and failures."

In addition to the problems already cited there is an added element of fear. Some girls worry about the resentment and hostility that their success generates in Black and White students
of both sexes (Fordham, 1993; Essed, 1991; Mac an Ghaill, 1988; Fuller, 1983). Resentment and hostility are experienced even in post-secondary institutions of learning (Abatso, 1985; Haughton, 1987; Essed, 1991). By becoming educated, Black women may be seen as a threat to Black men and Whites who prefer to keep us in our triply subordinated positions.

2.6. SUMMARY.

In this chapter I reviewed the literature which describes the school experiences of Black students, girls in general and successful Black girls in particular. It showed that, in "White" schools, the experiences of Black students are inferior to those of (middle-class) Whites. Blacks are demoralised, degraded, despised and disparaged by White staff and students. These experiences can destroy their self-esteem and alienate them. They respond in different ways - some negative and academically-destructive, and some positive. I also described the stereotypes which are attached to Black students in general, and to Black females. Girls, regardless of race, experience gender discrimination by school staff. They are ignored, the bright ones more so, and remain largely unnoticed. Their self-esteem decreases as the number of years in school increases. There are attempts, through teacher-student interactions, to socialise them into the subordinate position that females have in patriarchal societies. However, some Black girls resist this socialisation and become neither silent nor invisible.

On the other hand, there are Black students, and girls, whose experiences have been quite the opposite of what I have described. Their White teachers were supportive and fair, and they encouraged them to achieve. These teachers made an effort to understand them and to make their school experience pleasant.

The relationship between teacher-student interaction and self-esteem, and between self-esteem and academic outcome was addressed in this review. I also discussed the achievement motivation with reference to its personality and cognitive elements. In the final section I described the characteristics and experiences of successful Black American and British girls, as well as their strategies for coping with their unique status. There was no general description of them. Some were visible, some invisible; some silent, some loud; some conformed completely, others did not. They shared some things in common: a fear of ostracism and/or hostility from non-academic Blacks, a strong achievement motivation and a seemingly healthy self-esteem.
What is missing from the review, are studies describing academic and non-academic Black Canadian girls. Are their experiences the same? Their responses? Their coping strategies? Or are they different?

This study was designed to explore how academically inclined Black girls, in Toronto high schools, deal with racism, sexism, and their status as academic Blacks. It was also designed to explore their achievement motivation and coping strategies. In chapter three I discuss the methodology I chose and the process of collecting, analysing and presenting the data that are used to answer the research question. I give particular attention to the development of the major themes and sub-themes which are presented in subsequent chapters.

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NOTES

1. During the second semester of my first year at OISE/UT, a "minority" female PhD student came up to me, a highly vocal and visible student, and said, "I wanted to tell you, you have given me the courage to speak out in class." At the time, she had been in our (Educational Administration) department for almost three years. Another "minority" female told me that she comes into the department only at night because, "I don't feel as if I belong here." She, too, had been in the department for about three years.

2. As shown by Evans (1988) and Fordham (1993), many people do not consider loudness a positive trait. I do.

3. In the Caribbean this is reversed. We consider White women to be sexually promiscuous because this is what we see on television and in movies. We also believe that White female tourists, unaccompanied by male partners, come in search of sun, sand and sex. This theme forms the basis of many of our calypsoes.
CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

In chapter one I discussed the events that led to the development of the research question and its attendant objectives. Then, through a review of the literature (chapter two), I described problems that girls and Black students encounter in schools. Citing research from the North American continent, Britain and Australia, I outlined the various strategies that successful Black girls have used to cope with their status. In this chapter I provide the rationale for the methodology used, and describe the process for collecting and analysing the data which are presented in chapters five to eight.

This is an empirical investigation which focuses on academically inclined Black girls in Toronto high schools and their experiences with respect to race, gender and academic problems. It also seeks to explore their strategies for coping with these issues and the sources of their academic motivation. The study was not designed to prove that racism or sexism exist in our schools - there are enough studies which show that they do (Solomon, 1992; Anthony, 1994; Larkin, 1994; Dei, 1995; Smith et al, 1997). I want to understand how racism and sexism affect successful girls' experiences of school and their academic performance. I am interested in the girls' perceptions, their interpretations and their responses.

A major component of this study is experience - both personal and vicarious experiences of racism and sexism. Accounts of these forms of discrimination are more than just personal stories. These are social problems which therefore represent social experiences (Essed, 1991). Essed (1991:3) also suggests that:

Accounts of racism [and sexism] locate the narrators, as well as their experiences, in the social context of their everyday lives [in school, and] give specificity and detail to events. Although the research focuses on girls, their descriptions of vicarious experiences will provide additional information about their perception of, and responses to racism and sexism. Essed (1991:56) argues further that the "notion of experience includes a general knowledge of" both forms of oppression and this knowledge influences their definition of reality. The meaning they attach to specific events is significant only within a framework of their general knowledge of racism and sexism.
A qualitative research design was used in this investigation. Borg and Gall (1989) recommend qualitative methods as the most appropriate when studying human behaviour, especially those cases which are different, or atypical, as these are often overlooked in quantitative studies. It is also ideal when studying situations that are best explained from the perspective of those who are personally involved because the meaning people give to their experiences is essential and constitutive to what the experience is (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). I chose the semi-structured, personal interview method because I would not be able to get the information needed from just conducting a survey or observing in a classroom. Furthermore, as noted by Essed (1991:59), we must take subjective experiences of racism [and sexism] seriously:

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 ... a participant investigator.

Qualitative interviewing, with open-ended questions, is a flexible and dynamic process which allows informants to talk about their lives, experiences, perceptions and feelings in their own words (Taylor & Bogdan, 1984). Close-ended questions generally require that respondents choose from a predetermined list of items. However, a semi-structured conversation allows the interviewer to probe respondents for explanations or clarifications of statements made.

There are different types of interviewing techniques. One type consists of a face to face verbal interchange in which the interviewer tries to obtain information from another person(s) (Kirby & McKenna, 1989). Another type is a guided conversation designed to elicit rich, detailed information from the respondent (Kirby & McKenna, 1989). In the first case the researcher is not normally considered a source of information; in the latter both the interviewer and interviewee share information.

There are several disadvantages of the interview method. For one thing, when interviewing in the absence of other activities, such as participant observation, the interviewer must rely on second-hand accounts because s/he was not present to witness the events. Furthermore, as with any conversation, interviews are subject to fabrications, deceptions, exaggerations and distortions (Taylor & Bogdan, 1984). What people say may be diametrical to what they actually do or have done. Taylor & Bogdan (1984:82) cite Benney and Hughes (1970) who put it this way:
Every conversation has its own balance of revelation and concealment of thoughts and intentions: Only under very unusual circumstances is talk so completely expository that every word can be taken at face value.

However, as a qualitative researcher, I am not after absolute truths but perspectives. All the same, I cross-checked their answers by soliciting the same information through asking seemingly different questions.

I must say a few words about memory. It is true that our memory of some events fade over time, but we are more likely to remember incidents that hurt, surprised or shocked us. Furthermore, I did not think that their ability to recall would be an obstacle because more than twenty years after leaving school, respondents in Dei's (1995) study were able to recall, in vivid detail, racist and sexist incidents that they had experienced or witnessed in their schools. The girls in my study will not have to recall that far back.

Another drawback is that, in a qualitative study, it is difficult to determine how many individuals to interview. What is important is the potential of each "case" to aid in developing theoretical insights into the area of social life being studied (Taylor & Bogdan, 1984). One also stops when a saturation point is reached. Despite these limitations, interviewing remains an important tool for sociological investigation. Accounts of real-life experiences are a rich source of information and provide insights which cannot be obtained in other ways (Essed, 1991).

Finally, as one who has used both quantitative (Anthony, 1987, 1991) and qualitative methods (Anthony, 1994) I felt that the research question will best be answered via the latter. Among other things, it will allow the voices of the respondents to be "heard."

3.1. THE SAMPLE.

The sample consisted of twenty girls of predominantly African heritage, as determined by their phenotype - what society refers to as Black girls. Nineteen of them are of Caribbean ancestry; the twentieth is of Nigerian ancestry. Three were born in the Caribbean and one in England; the others are Canadian born (Appendix V). Being Black was one criterion for selection. The other criterion related to academic stream. The 1991 Toronto Board of Education survey of every secondary school student (TBE, 1993) showed that Blacks comprise 9% of this population. Most of the students (74%) were in the advanced stream. Of the total "advanced"
population, only 7% were Black. Clearly, Black "advanced" students do not represent the norm. I used placement in this stream, not grades, as the symbol of success thus only girls in the advanced stream were included. Perusal of appendix V will show that two of them (Paula and Simone) have poor grades. However, they are academically oriented and have managed to remain in the advanced stream. There are other definitions of success. For example, Black children who do not drop out can be described as successful because they found ways to cope. As grades 9 and 10 had been de-streamed, selection was confined to those in grades 11-OAC (Ontario Academic Credit).

All the girls live in a Toronto suburb. The city and suburbs are among the most ethnoculturally diverse, and densely populated, in Canada (Statistics Canada, 1997). Most of them live in detached, single-dwelling homes or townhouses. The participants represent 7 different high schools, but half, as shown in their profiles (Appendix V) came from one school. This is not a comparative study hence there was no limitation on the number of students who would be drawn from any particular school or Board. Furthermore, because the girls were not expected to have identical experiences, subjectivities and coping strategies, it would not have mattered if all twenty had originated from the same school. On the other hand, because they come from different high schools, the study transcends the local particularities (Essed, 1991) of any one school. Like Essed's study of Black female professionals, this one is exploratory and does not need to meet the requirements of statistical rigour.

Most of the participants belong to a Christian religion (18) and of this group, the majority (16) are practising. Nine of them have part-time jobs; six of the eleven who do not work would like to. All but four live in two-parent homes (two fathers had passed away).

3.1.1. Recruitment.

The first ten participants were selected from a list of fifteen names and telephone numbers provided by Paula, herself a participant. I met Paula's mother, for the first time, at the October 1995 biennial convention of the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE). We became better acquainted over time and around March 1996 I asked if she would allow Paula to participate in my study. She said it was fine with her if Paula agreed, and enthusiastically added: "Why don't you ask Paula to get some girls from her school for you?" About two weeks
later Paula called with the list of names and numbers.

I telephoned the parents of all fifteen girls, introduced myself and explained the purpose of the study. We developed instant rapport - the fictive kinship described by Fordham and Ogbu (1986). Every parent agreed to allow their daughter to participate on the condition that the child herself was willing to do so. If their daughter was at home they put her on the telephone so I could describe the study and get her response. In cases where the child was away, this introductory conversation was delayed for a mutually convenient time. The first question each girl asked was, "How'd you get my name and number?" It was interesting that not all of them knew Paula. Although no girl declined, they were not readily available because of school, job and social commitments. I decided to wait until school closed for the summer vacation to begin interviewing.

The second ten girls were identified through an organisation which honours outstanding Black students in the Greater Toronto Area. Another Black woman who I had met through CUPE invited me to the organisation's awards ceremony. I discussed my study with "Bill", the organisation's president and a Black Caribbean educator. Bill introduced me to "Elise," the student president. Elise, a past recipient of awards, is a young Black university undergraduate of Caribbean parentage. Again I explained the purpose of this study and she agreed to give me some names from their files. Within a few weeks Elise called with a dozen names and telephone numbers. I went through a similar process as described above with their parents and the girls themselves. As with the first set of girls, these also asked, "How did you get my name and number?" When I mentioned the organisation the response became a predictable version of, "Oh yes, I remember! I got an award from them.... But I'm not really involved with them. I don't know how they got my name in the first place, probably from my school." Reena was not recruited from either source. She was visiting at Susan's home when I went to interview her. I checked that she was in the advanced stream, told her about the study and she agreed to participate.

So altogether I had 30 names and telephone numbers (including Paula's). The final twenty can be described as largely self-selected. There was one wrong number and one "not in service." Two girls were away for most of the summer and, because I had already met my quota, I did not bother to call them back in late August when they were expected to return. With the
remaining four, arranging mutually convenient times to conduct the interviews proved problematic, so I decided not to pursue them.

3.2. THE INTERVIEWS.

Towards the end of the school year I telephoned the final twenty girls to make appointments for the interviews. The date, time and venue for the interviews were arranged primarily at their convenience and choice. All but three girls were interviewed in their homes. I obtained signed permission (Appendix I) from their parents before interviewing each. Roxy, Karen and Brenda A were interviewed in my home. They signed the consent forms themselves (Appendix II).

After some casual conversation with the participants and, in some cases, their parents, about the weather, my finding their home (or their finding mine), "this thing" called a thesis, and our countries of origin, I pulled out the form on which demographic data were recorded (Appendix III). I asked the questions and filled in the answers myself. During this process we exchanged more "small talk" as we went through the items on this form. I reiterated the confidentiality clause - that their name and the names of everything and everyone associated with them, would be altered. This said, the first order of business was to establish their pseudonyms. To give her some feeling of ownership I asked each girl to choose her own pseudonym. The demographic items were not used as selection criteria, but I included them because I knew they would contribute to an understanding of the participant, and the analysis and interpretation of the tape recorded data.

The interviews were audiotaped, with their consent. Before turning on the tape recorder I reminded the participant that it can be switched off at any time. None requested that this be done. Then I labelled the tape with her pseudonym and the date. Being audiotaped should not have influenced their comments to any significant degree. As noted by Taylor and Bogdan (1984:102), "since they already know that their words are being weighed, they are less likely to be alarmed by the presence of a taperecorder." I invited each girl to ask me questions at any time during the conversation. I reminded her that participation is voluntary, that she did not have to answer any questions that made her feel uncomfortable and that, if she changed her mind half way through, we could end the interview. Each session lasted between one and a half to two
hours.

A semi-structured interview schedule was used (Appendix IV). It was hardly ever followed, as shown, because they often talked at length and covered issues I had intended raising later in the conversation. Thus several of the questions were not asked directly. This meant that I had to listen carefully to avoid asking a question that was already answered except at those times when this was deliberate cross-checking. The questions were developed from numerous articles in the literature, the actual interviews, my musings and "conceptual baggage" (Kirby & McKenna, 1989).

To create a relaxed, conversational type of situation, I offered anecdotes of my own experiences or words of encouragement where appropriate. I also asked them to use my first name instead of "Miss Anthony" as they were wont to do.² In studies like this, that rely solely on interviewing a stranger, a key element involves putting the participant at ease and developing rapport (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). The semi-structured approach allows for some digression from the interview schedule and this helps to foster the development of rapport and create a more egalitarian setting. In addition to this, I assured them there were no right or wrong answers, only their thoughts, opinions and feelings mattered. Despite my efforts to eliminate a hierarchy, I sensed that they still considered me an authority figure. It was only after we had been talking for about thirty to forty minutes that I felt they were relaxing and becoming more talkative.

During this process I changed the phraseology of some questions and added new words. For example, the phrase "acting White," which I acquired from the American literature, was not immediately recognised by them. After explaining its meaning I was corrected, "Oh! You mean White-washed?" I incorporated this into the question as "... acting White or White-washed." I subconsciously adopted some of their words and phrases, for example, the ubiquitous "like" and "you know."

At the end of the interview I invited them to "telephone me at anytime with questions or comments" that they may have thought of only after the interview. I then asked their permission to telephone if further questions arose or if I needed to clarify anything after reading the transcripts or during data analysis. Thus I "left the door open" for future communication.

The recordings were fully transcribed by Dawn, a professional Anglo-Canadian secretary. The girls spoke English with Canadian accents so she understood them and, by her own
admission, enjoyed listening to the conversations. While Dawn was transcribing the original tapes I listened to the duplicates to familiarise myself with the information and to recall the expressions and intonation they had used. I made a random comparison of the information on the transcripts and on the tapes.

In April 1997 I invited them to my home for a "thank you" dinner party. Not wanting it to appear like a focus group meeting for more data collection, I let them direct the topics of conversation. They were curious about the results of my study but, unfortunately, I had not yet begun analysing the data and did not wish to speculate. They were also curious about "this thing called a thesis" so I showed them my masters theses. It was only at this time that I felt they were completely relaxed with me, that the hierarchy had been eliminated.

3.3. THE DATA: SORTING AND ANALYSIS.

One of the main advantages of qualitative research is that it generates a vast amount of data in a short time. Most of the analysis was done after all the interviews had been transcribed. I explored a number of different software programmes for qualitative data analysis and decided on The Ethnograph (Richards & Richards, 1994) because it was best suited to my home computer’s hardware. With the version of The Ethnograph that I acquired, I could code a chunk of data, ranging in size from a single word to the entire transcript, into a maximum of seven different categories - far more than I needed. I used The Ethnograph to number each line of the transcripts, then began the process of reading, re-reading and developing a preliminary list of codes. I also jotted down, in a notebook, any ideas that came to mind as I read the transcript. I later assigned codes that corresponded to the theme of the question asked, as well as to all themes addressed in the participant’s response. There were times when a particular code did not seem "right" so I either changed it or developed a new code. In the end I had about fifty different codes (Appendix VI) all of which I entered into the software programme. I printed the coded data and filed the segments (I had just as many files as codes). I then grouped the coded segments into categories identified first, by the themes, and secondly, the sub-themes of each specific objective (see chapters 4 - 8).

The major themes were selected with reference to the specific objectives of the study. These were slightly altered, from what I had originally set out in my research proposal, after
data collection. In the original design, experiences of race and gender discrimination were placed together, as one specific objective. Similarly with coping strategies and motivation to achieve. After reading through the transcripts, I decided to separate them not only because of the volume of information (which was, admittedly, quite enormous), but because of the variety. There were many different sub-themes within each of these categories which addressed the study's overall objective.

Some of the sub-themes were developed from the data and perusal of publications not previously seen. For example, grade retention (chapter 5) and ignoring racism and sexism (chapter 7) were developed from perusing the transcripts. With respect to "ignoring," after I discovered it I was unsure about how to report it. I searched the literature for publications and discovered it is considered a coping mechanism. Had I noticed it during the data collection phase, I would have explored it with the participants.

As was expected, some coded segments were appropriate for more than one category and I agonised over where they should ultimately be placed. For example, where race and gender intersected, I posed the question, "if she was a boy, how likely is it that this would have happened?" There was also overlap with some "coping" and "motivate" subthemes, as well as with "motivate" and "attitude towards school." I used a similar "questioning approach" to make the final selection. I also kept a file of "difficult to place" segments and, finally, after writing an outline of the discussion, inserted them in the most appropriate sections.

The decision about which segments to include in the data chapters was easier. I read all the segments, within each sub-theme, about three or four times to get a clear idea of the main point(s) they were making, then I selected those that best illustrated or supported these point(s). When reading the dialogues, S: refers to me, Sandra, and R: refers to the respondent.

With a sample of twenty girls, not randomly selected, there may be questions about the generalisability of this study. Bassey (in Bell, 1987) notes that an important criterion for judging the merits of a study is the extent to which the data enable someone, working in a similar situation, to relate their decision-making to what is described in the study. Thus the relatability of the study is more important than its generalisability. Bullough's (1989:xi) comments about case studies can apply to any qualitative study. These are studies which "invite the readers to question and explore personal values and understandings.... They are also a means by which to
identify potential problems and a vehicle by which to begin thinking them through." Readers will have to make the final decision as to whether or not the data relate to them, their children's experiences or to the students they teach.

I base my interpretation of the findings on my knowledge and experience of discrimination, society and schooling both in Canada and in the Caribbean.

3.4. SUMMARY.

In this chapter I presented my rationale for using the semi-structured interview method to collect the data. I also discussed the merits and demerits of this methods. In order to obtain rich information about their feelings and perceptions of discrimination, and about other problems they encountered in school, I felt it best to allow them to talk freely with some guidance in the form of questions that I asked. Using a taperecorder (with their consent) freed me to conduct a conversational type of interview.

The sample consisted of twenty girls of African heritage, all in the advanced stream of seven Toronto area schools. I described the method for recruiting them, and provided details of the procedures and protocol used to interview them. I briefly described the computer software that I used (The Ethnograph) to code and search the data, the process of sorting and the development of themes and sub-themes. The data are presented in chapters four through eight under the heading of the major themes.

NOTES

1. If parents were involved they eventually excused themselves or ushered us into some quiet and private part of their home or patio. In most homes I was offered a snack or meal after the interview had ended. Knowing the West Indian hospitality culture, I always accepted.

2. In Caribbean culture, children do not use adults' first names unless it is prefixed by Auntie or Uncle.

3. Over time I found that working at home was best for me.

4. The Ethnograph locates every data segment, in each transcript, to which a particular code was assigned.
CHAPTER 4
ATTITUDE TOWARDS SCHOOL AND TEACHERS

This chapter provides a general introduction to the participants. The themes within which the data are presented were developed from their responses to the questions that I asked during the first part of the interview. The themes include: whether they like or dislike school, their sense of belonging in the school, their attitude towards academic work, various aspects of their relationship with staff and their suggestions for improving the educational system.

4.1. Like/dislike of school.

To begin exploring their feelings about school, I asked two separate questions, "Do you like school? What do you like most about school?" All but two of the girls (Joanne and Karen) said that they enjoy going to school. What they like most about school is being with their friends and learning. Teachers, as a main attraction, were cited by only two girls - Roxy and Keisha. Roxy, a member of the Student Council, is "in with the teachers" and likes the fact that, although it is a large school (n > 1800), "a lot of teachers know me." Jennifer and Betty love the multicultural nature of their school (Pinecrest). No other aspect of school was identified.

In the rest of this section I present their answers to the question, "What do you dislike or like least about school?" Joanne, who works eighteen hours per week said that, "I enjoy school but I don’t really like going.... Waking up and being there for so long, the hours, you get tired quickly." Karen does "not like physically going there" because the students are too immature. "I was around little kids, but they were my age," she said. Karen also dislikes group assignments because:

A lot of the other kids, they just don’t, I guess it’s the attitude they have, it’s really lazy and laid back and I’m a very studious person, I work hard. I find that a lot of the time, if they know you work hard, they try to piggy back on you. And when you’re doing group work you end up carrying five other people, you know? That’s one thing that bugged me about school.... I can work well with others ... I got to the point where I couldn’t take it anymore. I’m working 125% and you’re working, like 50%, and I have to carry you. Then there’s the other person who’s not working at all! A lot of my group marks actually went down.... In one class, at the end of the year when I got my mark, I said, "Something’s got to be wrong," because I thought my mark should be higher. So
she [teacher] looked at it and said, "Well, it's because of your group work; the marks that came in brought your marks down." So she fiddled around a bit and she brought my mark up for me.

In contrast to the responses about attractive elements of school, eight students cited teachers or principals, and the pressure they put on students, as their most hated aspect of school. In addition to the early start, Paula dislikes some of "the teachers who gossip and ... get into everybody's business." May, who attends a different school, expressed similar sentiments about her teachers. She also wished for more Black teachers, "I wish my race was more represented in my school, 'cause there are no Black teachers. There was one man, supposedly African, but he left anyways." Brenda B dislikes "the vice-principals and principal. They kind of hassle you too much, in my opinion." Erica, who is coping with the "stress of trying so hard," dislikes teachers who "just piss you off. You don't want to be in the class no more."

Simone expressed her feelings about some teachers in a bit more detail:

Well, the teachers. Some of them can be very hard to cope with. Like, they don't really understand you, in a sense. They're just teaching and they're not really getting to know you, as a person. They don't try to get to know you. Sometimes they're just grouchy or, you know? Not all of them, only some.

Susan objects to the added stress that negative teachers place on students:

I don't like teachers, like, certain pressure that teachers put on you. I don't like the negativity from certain teachers. As you get into the older grades they stress a lot that, you know, unemployment is high right now and that the acceptance rate in universities is kind of low or it's harder to get in. A lot of them are putting more stress on you and, I don't know, there's a lot of negativity out there. I don't really like it in the schools. There's certain problems with certain teachers, like, they're not as understanding.

As a student mediator at her school, Reena has to help resolve conflicts between teachers and students. Among other things, she hates that the teacher is always deemed right:

What I like least is when they rush us at the end of the semester. They rush us to get work done, and stuff like that. Also when you're in a situation where you know you're right and the teacher won't wait because the teacher is the teacher, higher authority.... I help the students if they have a conflict. Sometimes the teacher is wrong. I help a lot of students and I see the situation and I know that this student is right, the teacher is wrong. But the teacher will always win, the higher authority will always win.

What Elizabeth hates most about her school is its size:

Our school's pretty big, I guess about, 2200 students. It's the biggest in San Fernando. And the only problem I had with it is, some of the classes tend to be big. And the
teacher, like if you have problems, the teacher can't give you any attention in class because they have maybe 29 or 30 other students to take care of. And so, it's up to you. It depends on what the subject is. If it's like History or something, it's not that bad, but if it's like, Math, then it's difficult because these teachers are working with the ones who know their stuff, and the ones who are having problems, they don't really get that much attention. And so, like, people who don't do well, they tend to get ignored.

Interestingly, only three students (Stephanie, Denise and Betty) cited homework as the aspect of school that they most disliked. Overall they tend to do their homework and assignments on time because these marks count towards their final grade. In all schools, marks are deducted, on a daily basis, for overdue work and herein lies their motivation to get it done on time "all the time" or "ninety-five percent of the time."

4.1.1 Dropping out of school.

I asked the participants if they had ever contemplated dropping out of school. Although it was never considered a serious option, some of them had entertained this thought. Erica who works one or two days during the week, said:

Sometimes when I'm tired of getting up in the morning. You know, it's not being there, 'cause as soon as I get there, it's over. But to get up in the morning sometimes when I'm real tired after working all day.

Although she does not like going to school, Joanne has stayed for the reason cited by most of the girls - their friends. In response to my question she replied:

All the time, all the time! I say, "Okay, forget this." You know, I know that's bad.

S: So, how come you didn't do it? What kept you in?

R: Because, what is there to do if I drop out? You know, my friends are in school, I don't want to be the failure, you know?

S: You could go to work full time.

R: But, do I want to work full time? That's the question. You know, money's not that important to me.

When Brenda A feels overwhelmed, those are the times that she thinks about dropping out:

I think all students, at some point in their school career, feel that it's not worth it, "Why bother with the pressure?" Because when everything comes at you at once, sometimes it's really hard to handle all the pressure because you have this assignment due, you have

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to get this presentation done, but somehow you get it all done, even if you have to do it late, and that's the way you survive. In terms of dropping out of school, I think that thought goes as an escape route for many people but they never go through with it because, if they actually leave, not to come back is a big decision. They don't drop out because they know that school's the place to be. Deep down, they know they need to be here.

Frustration led Beverley to contemplate dropping out of school but instead she dropped out of the course that created the frustration:

Sometimes it gets frustrating, like my OAC Chemistry class. I dropped that - twice. I thought a different teacher was teaching it the second time, and I would have a better chance of understanding it, but it was the same teacher. He would walk into the class and write everything on the board. He'd give you something to do and he'd leave for a couple of minutes and come back and leave and come back. So you wouldn't really learn anything. I was getting discouraged because I was studying so hard and I wasn't making the mark that I thought I should be making. So I was like, "Okay, forget this class," and I stopped going for a while ... because when I sit there, I feel like such a klutz!... I asked him like tonnes of times [to explain things] but just the way he explained things, I guess I just didn't get the hang of it. And I'm good at Science you know. So I just stopped going, second semester.

In addition to staying in school, they generally obey school rules and regulations and make an effort to stay out of trouble.

4.2. SENSE OF BELONGING.

Several studies have shown that disengaged Black students feel isolated in school. They lack a feeling of belonging (Wehlage & Rutter, 1987; Irvine, 1990; Dei, 1995). The corollary of this is that academic achievers will feel "connected" to their schools. I asked the girls if they feel comfortable and like they belong in their schools. All but two of them (Keisha and Beverley) replied in the affirmative. Keisha said that, "at Pinecrest, it just felt like they didn't care." Beverley, who had been in Canada only a few years, feels that she is "liked by everybody, but not really accepted. I was always an outsider." She did not bond with her school, per se, but with her five close friends. Roxy's feeling of belonging is tied to her involvement on her school's Student Council:

Definitely! There's been times, during the school year, when I've been there 'til 9 o'clock at night, or at the earliest, 7 o'clock. Yes, that's how much stuff I do. So, I mean, I have to feel that it's [school] mine, you know? There's times when I've come to school late, not a lot, but the secretary just goes, "Go ahead" 'cause they know what
I do there and I feel good about that, you know?
Although she is not doing well academically, Paula also feels connected to her school:

Yeah. Even though I don’t say anything, yeah. I don’t really feel left out or anything like that. I feel like I fit, I know that I fit in the class. I don’t really have a problem with that…. Sometimes I don’t feel like being there, that’s about it.

S: What makes you feel like not being there sometimes?

R: I don’t know. I get bored.

She was "timid and shy in grade nine," but after three years, Simone now enjoys a comfort level which allows her to "do anything - be stupid. Who cares what people think? It’s not a big deal."

Friends play a role in their feeling of belonging. Brenda B notes that, "At first when I started J.P. Smith, I wasn’t, I started in grade eleven, so I had the adjustment period. But eventually I’m like, "Wow! I really have friends. These people remember me!" Susan said, "Yeah. When I’m with my friends or even when I’m not with my friends, if I’m just in the school. I’ve established myself there, it’s been four years." Denise’s loyalty to her school was revealed in her statement that, "if I had the choice, I wouldn’t leave."

4.3. ACADEMIC WORK: Challenging or boring?

Haughton (1987) cites several studies which showed that students become frustrated when the school work is not sufficiently challenging. Rist (1970) found that, in a predominantly Black school, teachers simplified the work to such an extent that the students became bored, restless and disruptive. Based on these observations, I asked the students whether they found the work boring or challenging. Sixteen of them said that it is challenging, to some extent. Some classes involved more thinking and preparation, while others required simple memorisation. Their weakest subjects were generally considered the most challenging. Simone, for example, notes that:

Some of the work, I wouldn’t say all of it [is challenging]. Like, some things you already learned in an earlier grade, but quite a few things that you learn are new. A lot of it is memory work. The only real challenge I really find is Math, ’cause I’m not really good in it.

In Trinidad, and other English-speaking Caribbean countries, students enter secondary school around age eleven. Beverley, who had spent some years in the Trinidadian system, found the
responsibilities more challenging than the actual material. She said:

It was challenging because they gave you work and it was your responsibility to do it. And if you didn’t do it, they didn’t care. So you have to, the responsibility is on you. It [the material] wasn’t challenging, like, you didn’t learn too much. I could finish a year and not tell you what I learned.

In Susan’s opinion, whether a course is challenging or not depends, at times, on the teacher:

It really depends on the teacher. Certain teachers they make it a lot easier for you, maybe because they’re lazy and they don’t want to mark the work. Sometimes it depends on the teacher, sometimes on the course. I find a lot of the courses that I take, Business, some Sciences and some Maths, they’re pretty difficult…. Certain classes, when it’s the same thing, I’m bored. I don’t really apply myself, it’s too easy for me and I don’t want to go…. An example of an easy class? Music. I didn’t really enjoy going there, playing the scales everyday. Art. I don’t like to sit there and work on something for a long period of time…. sitting there drawing for a month, I don’t find that challenging and I don’t like Art. I like Business where it’s something new everyday, or solving problems. Something that challenges me.

Roxy also believes that teachers have some responsibility in this respect. She said: "I think it depends on the teacher because they have the curriculum. It’s how they use it, because some teachers make it challenging and others don’t. And it depends on how much they know and how much they apply it." Karen described how, with the help of an understanding teacher, she overcame a situation of boredom:

It really depends. Math was challenging for me, but for my friend who’s really good in Math, it wasn’t as challenging for her. When she was in English, she was like, "Oh my gosh!" To me it was like, "Okay, bring it on. I can take care of it, no problem." That’s my strongest subject. Actually this year I talked to a teacher about that because she realised how bored I was in class - this was OAC English. She said, "Okay, I’ll let you go in independent study." So for the rest of the year I didn’t go to class but I did my own work, at my own pace and yeah, I got to do a lot more work and go in more depth with things. I find they don’t really do that.

The challenge for May is not the school work but striking the right balance between curricular and extracurricular interests. She is fifteen and in grade twelve. She explained why her grades plummeted over the years:

Before, when I was in grade four and I was tested that time, I just exceeded everybody. But down through the years, I got kind of lazy and I was just, there. I got 70s, maybe 80s, you know? But I don’t find it difficult. The thing I find difficult is balancing out between sports, school things and school work.

Jennifer is among the four who do not find the academic work challenging. She said that,
"I find it’s enough work for me. I don’t find it challenging at all. It’s just that you have to be very disciplined…. But it’s fine for me." Reena is not challenged because she has already "gotten over the hard stuff. Now everything else is easy."

4.4. ATTITUDE TOWARDS STAFF.

The teacher-student relationship contributes in important ways to academic outcome (Irvine, 1990). Throughout the data chapters there are accounts of their interactions with teachers and administrators. In this section I present some of these interactions, the students’ perceptions about the teachers’ ability and their need for teachers’ approval.

4.4.1. Teacher-student relationships.

This sub-section deals with both positive and negative accounts of interactions with teachers. It also provides additional information about their behaviour in school and their feelings about staff. I did not ask a specific question about "teacher-student relationships." This information came from their answers to different questions and from comments that they made during the course of our conversations. Several students talked about teachers being helpful and understanding. Brenda B feels she has been lucky in this way:

I’ve been lucky, I can honestly say that I’ve been lucky. I know that a lot of teachers in my school, I would not go into their class because of things that I’ve heard or from things they’ve said or things they’ve done. Personally, I feel that the teachers understand me - not my culture or my race, and some teachers try to understand that; some teachers are very open-minded with that. But they understand me as a student and as a person, and that’s good enough.

S: What do they do or say that conveys that impression to you?

R: Okay. We had a Black History assembly in February and I was co-organiser, and I had a little speech to say, and some teachers were getting involved…. I went into the library and there was this lady who heads the Multicultural Organisation. She was there, "We can do this, we can do that." She was getting more enthusiastic than I was! But she wanted to learn. Another teacher went to this museum in Windsor or Western or someplace, and he brought me books and magazines after hearing my speech. I’m like, "Wow!"

Keisha talked about a White male teacher who "really loved Black people." I asked how she knew that he "really loved Black people" and she replied:
'Cause he said to us, "What I found in the school is that, most of the White teachers like to put Black people in the back of the classroom. Well in my classroom all of you are going to come forward because I want all of you to pass because we're doing Black Studies. And it was his first time doing it, a White teacher. He was going "to make sure that all of you do well." And there was this one Black guy in the class, he was stubborn, he [teacher] told him, "You're not going to fail. Do you know that if you sit at the back you're not going to learn anything?"

Susan has had mostly good experiences with her teachers, some of whom continued to show an interest in her years after she had left their class. She said that:

I have a lot of teachers who believe in me. I have teachers who I still talk with, from grade nine, and who believed in me and who still do, and they supported me. And you know, they'll just come and talk to me sometimes and you know, good relationships with them, and even with [Caribbean] dance teachers. I'm "in" with the staff.

Teachers' lack of respect for, and their fear of, Black students contribute towards the students' negative feelings about them. The girls do not care for teachers who disrespect Black students or flaunt their authority. Karen described such a person who she considers her worst teacher:

All my teachers have been really good teachers. There was only one teacher that had an attitude, she wasn't very nice and I didn't really want to go to class, 'cause I didn't like her. She was basically, "my way or the highway" type of thing. This was grade ten English. She wasn't very personable, because I like to get to know a person. People say it's "kissing up." I found that I got along better with the teachers than I did with my own peers, you know. I'd go off to class and talk about these books and these classics. I was really into talking with my teachers and being friendly with them, they helped me out a lot.... I liked my approachable teachers.... I used to go and have coffee with some of my teachers. But it was really, you learn. I love learning from just people in general.

Teachers do not actually have to say anything to convey this message. Paula talked about "a couple of teachers" with whom she found it difficult to interact because they flaunted their authority through the things they did:

Some of them act like they are, they hold it over you, I don't know...

S: Sort of like, "I'm the boss and you'd better do what I say?"

R: Hm, hm, yeah. But maybe they're not so forward in saying it, but certain things that they do.

Erica described a situation which illustrates the "my way or the highway" attitude referred to by Karen. She defied her (White) teacher's order to throw away a lollipop because she believed
there was a more practical alternative:

Like this one teacher - the class that I told you I failed - she was like that [piss you off]. I don't really think she liked me, personally. One day I came in the class sucking a lollipop, so she's like, "Throw it out!" And I was like, "Throw it out for what?" So I took it out, and wrapped it up and put it in my bag. She's like, "Throw it out! In the garbage!" So I'm like, "I'm not going to!" And then she's like, "Well, if you're not going to, then leave!" So I just say, "Okay then, I'll leave, but I'm not throwing away the lollipop that I just bought for fifty cents." And then she's like, "Go to the office!" So I went and discussed it with the vice principal, and I told him that "She's a real b----, you know." And then he's like, "Well, a lot of students complain about her ways and how she carries on, her attitude and stuff but [he] understands," and I didn't get suspended. He just let me stay in the office 'til the class finished and I went to my second period class.

S: Did you say "b" or the actual word?
R: I said "b."

Erica described an altercation with a different (White) teacher. This is another example of how teachers abuse their power:

My Accounting teacher, one time she saw me at the door, I was walking in the class and she closed the door right in my face. And then I'm like, "Didn't you see me at the door?" I wasn't yelling or anything. She yelled, "Well, you're late! It's after the anthem! So stand outside 'til I feel like opening the door." So I'm like, getting real mad and I started yelling. So she sent me to the office and I explained it to the vice principal [the same one], how she closed the door right in my face. So he's like, "That was rude" but he said I'm not supposed to yell at people in high positions, stuff like that.... He said I shouldn't go back to the class 'til tomorrow and I should apologise to her.

S: So, she doesn't have to apologise to you for closing the door in your face?

R: No, but I have to apologise for yelling, right? So, I apologised to the other one too, for the lollipop.... You know, 'cause you want to be in school and you don't want to miss days. So I'm like, "What the hell, just apologise." Like, I don't feel any way just to go and say, "I'm sorry" 'cause I don't normally react the way I did with those people but they made me mad! Stuff like that just pisses me off! So I went to both of them and said, "Well, I'm sorry it happened that way and I was really mad about you doing this to me." And she's like, "Well, I might have reacted in the wrong way." Like, she wanted to say sorry, but you know, they're not going to come out with it because they're in a high position, right? So, that's how it went.

One problem with large schools is that it is difficult for teachers to get to know their students and some students, such as Beverley, do not respond favourably to this. She talked
about this and about a teacher who she did not like:

Actually, they don’t know you, eh? They pass you in the halls…. She doesn’t know me, she just walks past me and she just smiles. I’m thinking, "Like, why are you smiling at me?"... There’s this one teacher, I had absolutely no relationship with him because he talked mostly to White students who talked to him, and the ones who didn’t talk to him, he didn’t talk to.

A few of the girls mentioned teachers who are afraid of Black students or who, it seems, wished to keep some distance from them. Joanne observed that:

When they walk in the hallways, when they have to get to their class, they walk by the walls, they don’t really walk in the crowd, you know. If there’s a crowd they’ll stop and let the crowd go by and they look straight ahead, they don’t turn their heads. That’s what they do. Like, I watch them. It’s really funny to see them.

Reena talked about other behaviours that teachers use to avoid, rather than try to diffuse, potentially violent situations:

A lot of teachers do that. There will be a lot of fights and some teachers who are really, really scared will just walk the other way. They’ll be coming down the hall, and they’ll see the fight and they’ll turn and walk the other way and won’t say anything to the office or anybody - 'cause they’re scared.

She went on to mention a few who pause to acknowledge the students, "There’s a few who stop in the hall, 'Hi Sir, how ya doing?' you know, give a few jokes, or whatever, and move on."

4.4.2. Teachers’ ability to teach.

During the focus group meetings at the GTA high school, a number of students expressed their frustration about teachers who cannot teach (Anthony, 1994). I asked the girls in my study two questions: "What do you think about the teachers’ ability to teach? Do they explain the work well enough so you can understand?" Their responses show that, as with any profession, there are some who are really good, and some who, according to May, "have no ability to teach at all." May elaborated on this point:

Some teachers have no skills, and I don’t know why they’re teaching. I mean, I just can’t believe some teachers! They have no ability to teach at all. And there have been some complaints about some of the teachers in our school, made to the principal and to the other teachers, and nothing’s been done about it, and I just don’t understand why.... I’ve had some of them and it’s like, what are you doing? They just look so dead and they don’t know what they’re talking about or what they’re doing. They have no
communication skills. I don’t know how they got there. I don’t understand.

In response to the question about her teachers’ ability to explain the material, Melissa replied:

Yeah, they do, but some teachers are really mean. Like this one lady - it hasn’t happened to me, but to other people when they ask her to go over something - she’d be like, "Well maybe you don’t belong in this class; you should still be in grade nine."

S: Does she say that sort of thing to Black or to White students?

R: One time it was a Black guy and another time an Indian [Asian] guy.

S: So, how did the students respond? Did they answer back or anything?

R: One of the guys, he sort of answered sarcastically. He told her, "You’re the teacher and it’s your job to teach."

S: What was her response?

R: She screamed (laughs).

Melissa also talked about the transformation of her grade ten Science teacher following a complaint made against him:

In grade ten we had this teacher, we used to do Science with him everyday and he’d say, "Okay, these are the chapters you have to know, so do it." Like, he never even taught anything. And then we went and complained that he wasn’t even teaching. So he comes back. Now he teaches different; he won’t shut up and he doesn’t give us any time in class to read.

S: So, while he talks and talks and talks, do you listen and listen and listen? (laughs).

R: We sleep in his class. Everyday people are sleeping. He doesn’t care.

Joanne, who goes to a different school, also mentioned a Science teacher who did not teach:

I’d say, in some cases, they know how to teach. In Hilltop [from where she transferred], I find that, with Science, because they knew [the material], they expected the students to know. It was just hard. Like, when they gave you the independent study, they expected you to be on the same level with them, as a teacher. I think they should teach you. At Pinecrest, everybody knows what they’re doing, it wasn’t really interesting, but they knew how to teach.... Yeah, they [teachers] do their homework too.

On the topic of Science teachers, Reena’s experience has been better than the two previously described. She admired her Biology teacher for his persistence:
Like, I had this one teacher, and I really admired him for that. He had us doing something in Biology for almost a month and he said, "We’re going to keep doing it and doing it until everybody understands it."

S: Then at the end of the year he rushes to complete the syllabus.

R: That too. But at least he knew, in the exam, that that part, you were going to get perfect, you know? And that feels good, knowing that there’s a certain part of the exam that you would get perfect, you could do it without any worries.

Brenda A has been "lucky enough to get many teachers" like Reena’s Biology teacher. She believes that, by explaining things to students, teachers show they care:

I believe that if teachers didn’t care about us, why explain everything that’s there to be read? They have the textbooks there to teach us, that’s all they really need to give us, you know? "It’s all right there in the textbook, read it tonight and answer the questions tomorrow and do the test the next day." But that’s not how any of my teachers were. They all explained it, I don’t understand it, explain it, I don’t understand it, and they explained it again. And most of them wouldn’t leave you without having you fully understand what they were talking about. I think I was lucky enough to get many teachers who really cared about how their students did.

4.4.3. The need for teachers’ approval.

The literature shows that females, and "minority" students, have a greater need for teachers’ approval than do males and White students (Stanworth, 1983; Irvine, 1990; La France, 1991; Ford, 1993). Based on this, I asked the participants whether or not they care about what teachers think about them. Eight of them said that they do care. They cared for two reasons in particular - their marks depended on it, and they wished to be seen as different from the stereotype of Black students. Joanne’s comment illustrates this:

Sometimes I do. I care if they think I’m just someone who likes to fool around. I care about that because they may look at you and say, "Okay, this person’s not here to learn so why should I take my time to mark her paper?" Or, "Why should I take my time to explain anything to her?" That sort of thing. [I want to be seen] as somebody who tries, someone who comes to class, I guess, not on time, but someone who comes to class and who tries to learn.

Paula cares about what they think of her because "I don’t want them to think that I’m a bad student, that I’m like, a trouble-maker or anything." Melissa said that what teachers think about her matters "because they control the marks and if you need recommendations, it’s them you
have to go to - they can tell people bad things or good things." Susan cares to the extent that she chose her friends to protect her image:

I think it’s very important, because they [teachers] can help me a lot. I care what they think about me, like, I guess it’s true who you hang around with and I wouldn’t like to be seen a certain way. And that’s why I hang out with people who are more like me, because that’s the way I’d like to be seen - as an individual. It’s sad to say, but teachers do see you for who you hang around with.... I’d like to portray a certain image and I’d like people to see me that way. So, I guess it does matter.

Six girls said that they do not care what teachers think about them. Although Denise answered in the negative she, too, expressed some concern about not being stereotyped:

No. Because they may have their own opinions or views about me, but it’s not about what they think, it’s about what I think about myself. Their opinion might have a little thing on me, but nothing big enough to affect me in my actions. I don’t really care.

S: But, a little while ago you said you like to behave this way so they would know you’re not like the stereotype of Black students. Is that of any importance to you then?

R: That’s important, in a way, because I’m trying for myself, I’m trying for all of us as Black women or Black youth. Because it’s just better that people know that we’re not, this way, you know? This stereotypical way, you know? But in other cases, I don’t really care. It’s just, more important to let other people know that we’re not, that way.

Karen, the girl who socialised with some of her teachers, said that their opinions do not matter to her because:

Right now, I’m very secure in who I am. Everybody tells you their opinion, basically, but in the end, it’s who I want to be. A lot of them [teachers] have been very supportive and, when I was leaving, "Oh, I’m going to miss you so much," you know, that kind of thing.

The remaining six girls could not answer yes or no, they said it depended on the particular teacher. Reena explained it:

It depends on the teacher. There’s a lot of teachers who have a lot of respect for me and I don’t want them to see me in certain situations like, arguing with a person ... in a bad situation, let’s say. But there’s some teachers who, it doesn’t bother me what they think.

The word respect also featured in Erica’s comments. She, too, cares only about certain teachers’ opinions:

For some, I don’t care what they want to think, but for others, like my Personal Life Management teacher, she’s a real nice teacher and, for me, whatever she says, goes. If she says, "Stop talking" in the class, I’m quiet, ’cause I really respect her and she shows
respect for us, you know? But for some teachers, I really don’t care. If you want to think the worse, go ahead.

Brenda B had talked about an English teacher who always gave her a C+, no matter how hard she tried. Over time she stopped caring about what he thought of her. With the rest of her teachers, however, it was different because:

Usually my teachers love me. It’s not that I’m, “Hi Sir, how are you doing? Here’s your apple this morning.” It’s more along the lines of, they see my marks, I want them to know that I’m trying. I’m not putting on a front or speaking different in front of them.

4.5. CHANGES TO THE SCHOOL SYSTEM.

I put this question to the girls, "If you had the power to change something in the school system, or in your own school, what would you change?" This question was designed to further explore what they perceive as problems in school. They offered a wide range of suggestions relating to the curriculum, discipline, ethnic representation on the staff and streaming. The most common, however, was the need for more Black History/Studies and Black teachers. Brenda B said:

The inclusion of more Black teachers, Black vice-principals and Black principals. In the beginning I think it would be hard because a lot of Black students would say, "Black teacher? I’m in that class! Black VP? That’s the only one I’m going to talk to." Black students may go to them more because they feel they may understand them better. Like personally, the best thing I had for high school, almost, is to have a Black teacher teach me because it’s different. Like, I think you need to see these people in successful positions and they might motivate you to do what you want to do. After having my Black night school [Math] teacher, I’m like, "Maybe I can teach Math." Like, it was never really an option for me.... But seeing him do it, I’m like, "Hey, okay, I can do that." I think if more Black people saw Black people in good positions, they might go for it, they might motivate themselves. A Black teacher might be able to tell him stories, you know, about when he was in high school, "I was getting C’s, now look at me, I’m a high school teacher or a university professor."

Until more Black staff could be hired the suggestion from Elizabeth might be considered. In her school leadership workshops and discussion groups were organised for Black girls. The group leader was a Black female law student from one of the city’s universities. In this group they dealt with issues such as stress management and conflict resolution in addition to leadership skills. There were girls from grade nine through to OAC. Elizabeth found it personally helpful
and motivating. "It started out with good intentions, she said, but "it didn’t pan out the way we thought." She thinks schools should organise more of those workshops and support them in such a way that they will be sustained. "It was really cool, and yeah, I did learn a lot from that."

With respect to the curriculum, the girls mentioned the need for more Black History or Black Studies. Keisha said that:

I would leave the compulsory things like Math and English, but when it comes to other courses, I would focus on certain History courses. I think we really need Black studies in our schools because when those White girls (two of her classmates) [took] our course, they got the highest grade in our class. And I feel that if we have more of that in school when people start to look at T.V., and when they hear what they say about Black people, they could say, "No you’re wrong because I did a course and I learned about their background and I learned about their heritage and all the hardships they went through. You’re wrong. I would give them a chance." That’s what I would stress.

Karen had a lot to say on this topic. She thinks incorporating other people’s history into the curriculum should not be a difficult task:

In terms of history, I think they should expand it, they should make it a much bigger department. I think they should have more seminars and workshops. It’s just that they don’t make a major effort to teach students things other than Canadian History, you know? I never really heard them mention a Black person in Canada. Like, I have to go read other books to find out. So I think that’s kind of wrong. I think they should have a more all round view of Canadian History and all the different people who contributed to Canada.... They should be able to incorporate every cultural group. They say, "Oh, that’s too hard." But you have kids going down the hall, they have a lot of tension ’cause it’s there and they can’t fit it into the curriculum. Come on!

When the interviews were conducted the high schools were still streamed but the Government’s decision to start de-streaming had been made. Beverley is a product of the high school system in Trinidad which is not streamed. Her suggestion for improving the school system is to do away with streaming because:

They have this notion that you’re getting an easier shot when you take general courses but I think they should disregard that whole system of general and give everybody advanced. Because everybody can do advanced, they just make it seem like these average kids can’t do it. Like in my History class they divided the class into general and advanced and all of them are learning the same work, so why doesn’t everybody have an advanced grade? You know, because you can’t go to university with a general grade. And if he’s teaching general and advanced students in the same class, then what does that tell you? That doesn’t make any sense. Everybody could do it.

Susan does not hold this view. On the issue of de-streaming she said:
I would change this "no OAC." I don’t think it’s going to benefit the students by condensing everything into four years. I would change the de-streaming because I don’t think it’s fair. I think that advanced students are being held back and I think that students who are in general, it might be holding them back also.

The question of discipline was addressed by Beverley. Coming from a more authoritarian regime and a system which includes daily prayer in schools, she quickly noticed what she assessed as the lack of discipline in her school. She strongly believes that:

The discipline is something that they need to put back in and most of these kids, like, they took prayer out of school but I think they should put it back in. Because half of the kids in those schools don’t know there’s something higher than them. Like, they have no respect whatsoever. If you have no respect for yourself, then I don’t think you will have respect for other people. That’s why there’s so much violence going on. I just think they need the prayer. I don’t think it has to be one particular religion, just a prayer so that people would have a sense that there’s something ahead of them.

Beverley talked about her first day of school in Toronto. When the teacher asked her a question, she stood up to answer and "the whole class burst out laughing." Her teacher said, "We don’t stand in Canada to answer questions." Most of her teachers are aware of the different kind of discipline practised in the Caribbean. She said:

They [teachers] know that the school systems are more strict over there. Most of them said that, because I was from the Caribbean and I was disciplined over there that’s why I had that way of thinking.... Even if a teacher is like, rude to me, I don’t go swearing at the teacher. I can’t do that because if my Mom knew she would be knocking me on the side of the head.

Joanne who felt that she had been misled by guidance counsellors at her previous high school, expressed a desire for better guidance in the schools. She thinks that:

When you’re entering into high school, you should be guided about what you want to do with the future, from grade nine. Guidance counsellors should help you to take only the courses that will help you to get there, that would benefit you. Because sometimes you take courses that you really don’t need and you waste time. You get on the wrong track and then have to pick up, you know, or drop off at the end.

Elizabeth thinks there should be changes in the kind of teachers who are hired. She wonders why some people go into teaching:

I’d probably change the way they hire teachers. Because they need more teachers who are more, I guess, encouraging to the students and who care about the students. ’Cause there are some teachers who are just in it, I don’t know why, they are teaching the subject with no enthusiasm whatsoever. And then there are teachers who are really,
really, doing a good job and they are the ones who are leaving because all the jobs are going down south. So I think they should improve the curriculum and the quality of teachers and find people who actually love to teach children and who want to encourage them. Because these students now, in future years, they're really going to get discouraged and there are very few of them who are really into school because of the teacher, the subject, the teacher has turned them on to.

Brenda A's answer to the question was different from the others. She said, "People always ask me, what would you change about your school? That's the hardest question for me to answer because my high school experience was a very, very good one."

4.6. DISCUSSION.

It is clear from their statements that the social aspect of school is a major attraction. This has been found in other studies which describe Black students' high school and college experiences (Tomlinson, 1983; Solomon, 1992; Hemmings, 1996; Ibrahim, 1997). At Solomon's (1992) Lumberville high school, the principal said that suspensions were the most hated form of punishment because the students have no social life outside of school.

School staff, who are predominantly White, comprise the least liked and most disliked elements of school. Race and poor inter-racial relations play a major role in the problems they have with teachers. They said that teachers hassle them and do not take the time to get to know or understand them. However, this is not the case for those who are involved in "high status" activities such as the Student Council - they are "in" with the teachers.

The stressors of school life are evident. They must deal with teachers' abuse of their power/authority (subsection 4.4.1), academic deadlines and teaching practices that are not always to their liking. Stress has led to thoughts of dropping out but they did not act on this feeling because they know the connexion between high school and their career goals and because they want to be with their friends. Some of this stress might be relieved if there were more Black academic staff in the schools as they could better relate to them. Some White teachers try, but they cannot understand our culture or our race because, of course, they have not experienced it and are not Black. Black students are also more likely to trust Black guidance counsellors. For one thing, Black counsellors will probably not have low expectations of them.

The girls identified more aspects about school that they disliked than what they liked.
Their friends, extracurricular involvement and career goals are strong "magnets" which hold them in school and add to their sense of belonging. Students who feel connected to their schools are more likely to remain. Those who drop out cite, among other things, hurt feelings, poor interpersonal relations, boredom and not feeling accepted or that anybody cared (Radwanski, 1987; Wehlage & Rutter, 1987; Dei, 1997). Dropouts are also less likely to have been involved in extracurricular activities which are known to keep non-academically inclined students in school (Solomon, 1992).

The students in this study expressed mixed feelings about the curriculum, the manner in which it is delivered and the extent to which they are challenged by it. Some of them find it boring and irrelevant. In the former case, teachers are blamed for not making the work interesting. When students are bored they become apathetic and are less likely to invest the time and effort required for academic success (Rist, 1970; Haughton, 1987). Eventually their grades fall and they may opt to withdraw from school altogether.

Teachers who, in their view, flaunt their authority, or fail to explain the material well, are not liked. Furthermore, the girls do not like being taught by them and these are the subjects with which they have the greatest difficulty. Authoritarian teachers provoke Black students to anger and it is difficult for an angry child to sit in a class and learn. When students are always deemed wrong and expected to concede, regardless of the extent of the teachers' culpability, the seeds of resentment and hostility are sown. Teachers who behave in this way acquire a bad reputation because students talk about them. As a consequence, Blacks avoid taking subjects taught by such teachers whenever possible. On the other hand, teachers who make an effort to understand them, and who show that they care about their students' learning, acquire good reputations. Black students enjoy their classes and tend to do well in those subjects.

Their concern for what teachers think about them is connected more to their status as Black students than as girls. They wished to be seen as different from the stereotype of Black students because their marks, and recommendations for further education, depends on how teachers feel about them. As girls, however, their self-image appears to be unaffected by their teachers' perceptions of them. This is shown by their willingness to reject those who they felt had rejected them. Their response is different from what is suggested in the literature. Girls, and "minorities" in particular, are described as having a greater need to be liked and accepted by

The participants identified a number of ways through which the educational system can be improved. The need for more Black teachers and administrators was again mentioned, in addition to the inclusion of Black History/Black Studies in the mainstream curriculum. All races need to know about our contributions to the development of Canada. There are often arguments about adding more courses to a loaded curriculum but Black History can replace other non-academic courses which are offered. For example, Travel and Tourism, Drama, Fashion Arts, Gym and Notemaking are, what I consider non-academic courses, taken by the participants (see Appendix V), and perhaps, most Black students. Alternatively, as suggested by Karen, Black History could be incorporated into Canadian History and given more than a cursory mention, as has been the case in some of their classes. [I elaborate on this in subsection 5.6].

Opposing views about de-streaming were offered. Having been educated in the same de-streamed school system as Beverley (prior to her arrival in Canada), I am a proponent of de-streaming for several reasons. First of all, the correspondence between streaming in school and in society is well documented. Blacks and working class children are overrepresented in the lowest streams in school and in the lowest paid, menial jobs in our society. Streaming is part of the hidden curriculum which helps to prepare students for their future roles in society (Bowles & Gintis, 1976; Bennett & Le Compte, 1990; Irvine, 1990; Dei, 1997). Streaming not only contributes to academic failure but also to the development of low self-esteem and premature withdrawal from school. A dropout in Dei’s study illustrates the connexion between streaming and withdrawal thus, "[Y]ou're saying, 'Oh my goodness, I'm so advanced, but yet I'm sitting here in basic. How is everyone viewing me?' And you want to get out. And it's just like trapping a fly in a jar, he will eventually die" (Dei, 1997:119).

The lack of discipline and absence of prayer in schools are topics which need to be revisited by education policy-makers especially considering the increased incidence of violence in Toronto schools. There is good reason for not promoting any one religious group but the multicultural agenda could be expanded to include, as suggested by Beverley, prayers from all denominations. Students from different religious backgrounds can take turns leading the school in prayer. Provisions should, however, be made for atheists.
4.7. SUMMARY.

This chapter gave an overview of the participants' attitudes towards school, academic work and the staff. What they liked most about school is the opportunity to be with their friends, and learning. Their dislikes include getting up early, pressure due to deadlines, group work, nagging and authoritarian teachers. These are the things that, at times, have made them consider dropping out of school. They would like to see more Black teachers and administrators in the schools. The girls expressed a desire for more caring [White] teachers who will take the time to get to know them and not be afraid of them. There were some teachers who had taken a personal interest in them, who respected and tried to understand them. Negative feelings were associated with teachers' abuse of power/authority and their lack of respect for students. Overall they seem to have had enough good experiences with White teachers to compensate for the bad experiences.

There were opposing views about the teachers' ability to teach. Some teachers were described as having no teaching or communication skills; others were praised for preparing and explaining the material well. They found some of the academic work challenging and some of it boring. They believe it is the responsibility of the teachers to make the work challenging and interesting.

Their need for teachers' approval varied. What teachers thought about them mattered primarily because of course grades. They know that their behaviour is "graded." Some were concerned that teachers not see them as recalcitrant Black students. A few of the girls are secure to the extent that they do not care what teachers think about them. Mutual respect was identified as a key factor - they respected teachers who respect them and it is their opinions which mattered most.

They offered several suggestions for improving the school system, the most common being the need for racial diversity among the academic staff and the inclusion of Black History/Black Studies in the mainstream curriculum. Their desire for more Black teachers is interesting, considering their "blindness" to racism (chapter 5) and their feelings of belonging in the schools. This sense of belonging may be related to their close friendships and extracurricular involvement.
CHAPTER 5
RACISM

Whether White Canadians wish to admit it or not, this is a racist country (Lazarus, 1980; Ramcharan, 1988; McKague, 1991; Crichlow, 1993). Since schools reflect the norms of the society, one can expect to find racial discrimination inside them. To identify some of the race-related problems that they encounter, I asked the students to recall racist incidents in which they were directly involved, that they observed or were told about. Several of them commented that, in their school, blatant racism is passe, and they offered reasons for this. However, during the course of our conversations, they revealed many incidents which I consider to be clearly racist. I have grouped these under the following headings: blatant racism involving school staff, racism among students, the situation with Black students and racism in the curriculum. I close the chapter by looking at how they believe their school experiences might differ had they been White.

5.1. BLATANT RACISM INVOLVING SCHOOL STAFF.

Citing examples of, what I considered, blatant racism at the GTA High School (see chapter two), I asked the girls if they had experienced or witnessed similar incidents at their school. They said that they had not witnessed such overt racism and offered reasons which suggest that school staff are beginning to fear the consequences of overtly racist behaviour. May believes that:

Subconsciously they [school staff] would do it. Consciously, they don’t want to. They know that being Black has some kind of power; they know that we can report them. And saying that somebody is racist, like, a guidance counsellor, that would get them a lot of, you know, attention. So, they’re really careful about the way they speak with you, because they know that we have knowledge and we know, "that’s racism" and we can report them.

It appears that the growing tendency of Blacks to speak out about racial discrimination may be silencing those of the privileged group. Reena thinks that:

A lot of people at my school are scared of all Black people. I wouldn’t say scared of all Black people, but scared of the Black people in my school. They would rather not say much to them, you know what I mean? A lot of them don’t feel comfortable unless you
talk to them first. A lot of them are scared of that [overt racism] because they know that that’s the first thing you’re going to say and so they kind of watch what they say and what they do and when they’re going to say it and not, because they are really scared of what you’re going to do.

Roxy said that she, too, had never heard racist statements from teachers: "I can never really say that I’ve heard a teacher say a racist comment or a racist joke. I mean, I’m the type of person that I would go down immediately to the office and say something."

This said, they went on to describe a number of incidents that can be classified as blatant racism. These are presented under the following headings: grade retention, academic discouragement, unfair treatment and other offensive actions not included in previous categories. In almost all accounts of racism the students mentioned a teacher or administrator. Their stories show the covert ways through which racist messages are conveyed. Sometimes racism is so subtle that it is a feeling which cannot be fully described. Denise notes that: "My Math teacher, I don’t think she has anything against us. It’s just her whole attitude that makes people think that they’re, you know, less than, say, Whites or Orientals or anybody else. You know?"

5.1.1. Grade retention.

First generation girls all experienced their schools’ racist practice of retaining English-speaking Caribbean students in lower grades based on the fact that they did not speak Canadian English. In fact, what they spoke was "English with an accent" (Lippi-Green, 1997) that is not valued in "White" schools. In addition to boredom and irritability, grade retention can be counterproductive as shown through Beverley’s experience:

They put me back in a lower grade. Like, I started to get bored with my school work. I would do my school work but it didn’t really interest me because I did it already. So, it was just, like, I go to school and I hang out, do my work, my classes. It was mostly like, friends that kind of made it pleasant.

S: Since you had this work that you had done already, does that mean you got all 90’s?

R: Well, the first year, yes, because everything was so fresh in my head. But, the second year when I had to take over Science classes, because I was back in Sciences classes, I was sort of like, doing bad. But I know we did the work before and, because you know you did the work before, you don’t pay that much attention, you know what I mean? First, I got 90’s, but the second year, I started getting 70’s and 80’s from then, that’s when I started getting 70’s and 80’s.
June described how she managed to climb out of the retention pit. Even after she had proved herself, the principal still wanted to put her back a grade because of, what he perceived as, her lack of social skills:

They put me back a year.

S: They put you back? Isn’t it strange that they can just do that, when children come up from the Caribbean?

R: I came in April and I was finishing grade five, and when I came up here they put me into finishing grade four, and they have me in that until the end of the year, from April until June. And then I was really miserable because in grade four, they were doing stuff that I did in grade two. So, I just had to complain and my mom came in and they said, "Okay in the new year, we will put her in a grade five and grade six, split class," and I was in grade six then. They pushed me into grade six, and I didn’t do grade five. That’s how I ended up getting back on track from when I left Jamaica. But when I came here, they put me back.

S: Ah, but you showed them that you could handle the grade six work?

R: Yeah. Even then, the principal, he was really "down" on putting me in grade four, back a grade, "Because she won't be able to cope socially." And come graduation, I got the Student of the Year Award. He came up and talked to my mother, "Oh, I see she made you proud." And I was just, "Let’s get out of here, don’t talk to him."

For Beverley, getting out of the lower grade, completely, was not as easy as in June’s case although she too, had shown that she could handle the work:

Even like, when I was there the first year, they put me in general classes, all general classes. I had no idea that in Canada they had two levels of grouping kids in classes and when I went there for a week, everyone else was, "Why are you in general? Why are you in general?" They even put me in ESL English and I was, like, "Why should I have to go to ESL English? Like, I can speak English, I don’t need to go ESL." And when I read the books in a month, they came and took me out of the class. And she’s like, "Oh, I don’t think you can handle the work," and da, da, da, and I went back and I asked her to change all my classes to advanced classes, and she changed half of my courses - I have eight courses - she changed half of the classes and left four the same. And I was, why don’t you change all?

S: Was this after the first semester, or during the first semester?

R: The first month I was there, and I was like, "Could you change all?" And she was, like, "No, because I don’t think you can handle all the work." And I’m like, "It’s not
for you to assume that I can't handle the work. If I can't handle the work, then I'll just fail the classes. Like, I don't care but I think I can handle the classes."

S: You told her that?

R: Yeah, and she's like, "Oh, I don't think you can do it, so I'll just change half." That year, I just did half of the classes in advance and half in general, and then after that year, I just chose everything in advanced. So, sometimes, the teachers discourage you and sometimes, some of them encourage you, so it all depends on, not all of them are the same.

Simone also talked about her experience of retention and her struggle to get out of the lower grade:

I guess they [Black teachers] understood you better. I remember when I just came up from Jamaica, they [White teachers] treated me like, I'm dumb, like I don't know anything or something like that. They put me in this special class with Miss Stacey, she's a White woman and ... like I didn't know English.

S: You started in which grade?

R: This was in grade seven and eight. When I just came here, I went to another school. That's a different story in itself, that would be long story. Like I was looking back in my report card awhile ago and, I'm looking back and seeing all these special classes and I didn't need them. I mean, in a sense, those special classes were keeping me back. And now, it's like I'm free and like, okay you know? I can do what I want. 'Cause every time, you'd have to check in with them and they'd bother you and, you're like "Uh, leave me alone," sort of thing.

S: So, who knows, maybe your Math problem started with those special classes?

R: Yeah, maybe that was it, you know. Maybe that's why I despise Math - 'cause of them. That's another thing with this school system. Like when you come from a different island or something like that, I don't think they should automatically say, "Okay, go in a special class." They should see what your capabilities are first. And I think that's what happened to me. They just dump you in a special class and I don't think that they think, "Maybe she knows something 'cause in Jamaica, maybe they even learn more than we do up here. Who knows?" You know?

S: And I think some of the parents, when they hear of special class, they think it's because you're special that they put you there. They don't realize it's because they think you're slow.

R: Right.
S: So did you find it wasteful, really?

R: It was! It was a waste of time. I mean, I didn't want to be there. There were other kids who couldn't read well. I used to go through reading like...[snaps her finger] reading, reading, reading. And they'd be like, "Good Simone." I'd be like, "Okay, can I leave now? I don't belong here." But they don't listen to you, you know?

She related this incident in response to my question about the need for more Black teachers in our schools, not as a response to incidents of discrimination. Interestingly, earlier in the interview when I asked if she had experienced any racism from school staff she replied: "Actually, no, they're not [racist]. Maybe if you've talked to some other students who've had experiences with them, they would probably say, but I haven't had any incidents with them that involved anything with race or anything like that."

5.1.2. Academic Discouragement

The literature abounds with studies which describe the low academic expectations that White teachers have of Black students and how they are encouraged into non-academic pursuits (Rubovits & Maehr, 1973; Coard, 1981; Carrington, 1983; Mac an Ghaill, 1988; Irvine, 1990). There is evidence of this in recent Canadian studies too (Solomon, 1992; Anthony, 1994; Codjoe, 1997; Dei, 1997; Ibrahim, 1997). In some of the situations presented below, one might argue that there is no evidence of racism. However, as suggested above, teachers and administrators are careful not to display overt forms of racial discrimination, and although the students are offended, it is often difficult to prove "racism." This said, I present situations in which Black students were not given the type of encouragement that they needed. At a meeting with their principal, Black students at Keisha's school drew attention to this:

Well, with some of the guidance counsellors, they felt like Black youth, they would want to go to college, they would never aspire to go to university. We had a debate about that, and it was this young brother and sister in the Association at our school, we had a debate about it and the principal told us, "Oh, that can't be, because at my school that's one thing that's going to be encouraged." I go, "You might be encouraged, but I don't think you've encouraged the guidance counsellors to, like, sit down with us and say, where your weaknesses are, your strengths."

S: So, did some guidance counsellors actually say those things or was it something you sensed?
R: They really told me. I think every year that I went in there to update my credits, they would say, "You're college material. You're not university material." And I know when I was in grade ten Science, I told my teacher I wanted to be a Social Worker and he told me that they only get ten cents a minute, or something like that. He was trying to put down the average rate of money they're going to get and that just made me unhappy. Because, I mean, if anything, a teacher, I know the main duty is for you to listen to what your student has to say, and to have that relationship where your students could respect you and then, later on in the year, I could say, "Well, you know, my teacher told me this and gave me certain advice in order for me to achieve my goals," instead of putting me down.

Keisha feels that guidance counsellors and teachers should support and help students to achieve their goals. Karen talked about her Black male friend whose teacher tried to encourage him to take gym instead of an academic subject:

Actually, a friend of mine, he just graduated, I think last year. I'm not sure where he's from, he's a Black guy, and he's really good in English and he wanted to take...um, I can't remember which course he wanted to take, but it was a more advanced course and some guidance counsellor told him, "Oh, why don't you take gym? You seem like a really, you know, fit guy. You should take gym." And he was like, "Excuse me, I don't think so you know." So, that's the only one I heard about.

S: Did he end up taking gym anyway?

R: No, no, he took the course.

Elizabeth described her feeling of discouragement when she was not given "a fair chance" by her (White) grade eleven Mathematics teacher. I had asked, "Did you ever feel that a teacher didn't like you because you're Black?" She replied:

I have to kind of wonder with a couple of my teachers - like my Math teachers. My grade eleven teacher, the one that I hated the most. I thought that he thought that I couldn't do the stuff and I'm just sitting in the class for, I don't know, what reason, that I was just stupid or something. I don't think he was racist, but I just don't think that he gave me a fair chance. Like, I would go to him for help and everything but in his mind, he was already, like, negative, like, "I don't think she will ever get an A, I'll be happy if she gets a C minus."

S: What sort of things did he say or do to make you feel that way?

R: He never said anything to me, but I remember when my mom went in for an interview, or she talked to him over the phone I think, and that's what he said to her. She told me and I just got mad. I'm not going to take this! I wasn't going to take this sitting down!
S: So, did you go and say anything to him?

R: No, I didn’t. I wish I did, but...

S: So, you took it "sitting down?"

R: Basically, but in my mind.... Like, I’m not going to go in and attack the teacher, I’m just not going to him for help anymore. If I have to, I’ll go to somebody else. I’ll try and work at it, but I’m not going to listen to him bother me.

Simone spoke in detail about her experience of being discouraged by a grade ten teacher's grumpiness and his attitude towards her:

In grade ten I had a fight with a teacher. I worked very hard in his class. It was history and he made certain things complicated. And you try to talk to him, like, "Sir, could you please explain this?" And he'd yell at you! And you're like, "Okay." Once we had this memorisation work to do, and I memorised my work and I knew it. And you know, I had difficulty remembering 'cause I was nervous in front of all these people [classmates]. But I was just nervous and stuttering. And he got mad at me. He really did discourage me 'cause we ended up in a big fight and I left the classroom and I was, like, I didn’t want to come back here. But afterwards he ended up apologising.... He was Irish.... He was grumpy, I can't explain it. He was just different, wierd.

S: Was he grumpy with both Black and White students? When a White student asked him to explain something, did he react as he did with you?

R: He had his preferences, you could say. I wouldn’t say it was a racial thing. I don’t know if it was because of my race, personally, I don’t know.

S: The ones he "preferred," how were they different from the ones he didn’t prefer?

R: I don’t know. I guess you could say they weren’t really different. Because I mean, he used to always say, "Oh, the girls." He never really cared for the boys, but he was just joking. I don’t think he really was racist. He just had his people, I guess, who he favoured. I don’t know why.

In responding to my question about being discouraged by teachers, May’s response shows that it is sometimes done covertly:

I think they have, but not directly, indirectly. They’ll say something like, "Well you know you have to really work hard for this. I’m not saying that you can’t do it, but you know, it’s really hard to do, so you’ll have to really work at it, but I’m not saying you can’t do it." There's always a "but," you know. They make the negative, they tell you the negative more so you're not thinking about, "Okay, I know I can do it," you’re just thinking about the negative things they said, and I know that, so I just don’t let it get to
me. I just don’t think about it.

5.1.3. Unfair treatment

The girls recounted many incidents of unfair or differential treatment rooted in race. As their quotes will show, these traversed various aspects of school life including sports, grades and sanctions. Brenda B talked about an English teacher who gave her a C+ on every assignment. Despite repeated explanations of what he wished her to do, and her compliance, her grade never changed. She thinks his behaviour might be rooted in racism because until that time, she had received only A’s in English:

Okay, my C+ English teacher, I heard stories about him before I got into the class. "He didn’t really like Black people," or, you know, small stuff like that. Other teachers they say, they give Black people a hard time, and I’ve known or seen teachers who’ve done stuff like that, and they just, like, get on your case.

Throughout the course of the interviews the students cited many instances of what appear to be arbitrary grading practices which could be influenced by race and sex. The arbitrary method of grading used by one teacher is illustrated in Beverley’s story of how she negotiated a higher final mark in a certain subject:

At the end of the term, I think I missed, like, seven classes or something and he’s like, "Oh, I’m giving you a 65." And I’m like, "A 65! I’ve got all my work in!" There’s this guy, he never used to come to class and he gave him, like a 75 and I’m like...

S: What colour is that guy?

R: He’s White, a White guy. And I’m like, "You better give me a 75 because I’m not taking a 65." And he just, like, bumped the mark up.

Research has shown that a common complaint among Black students is that White school staff "pick on" them and hassle them (Anthony, 1994, 1996a; Dei, 1997). Jennifer feels that, at her school, teachers "nag" Black students more than they do White ones:

Yeah, sometimes it does bother me how ... they’re always, I don’t know if it’s picking on the Black students, but sometimes the Black students bring it upon themselves. But we’re just, we’re not even doing anything, and they’re always nagging at us to be doing this and doing that. And we, you know, are doing exactly what the White students are doing, but they’re just focusing more on us. So, that bothers me sometimes.

S: Can you think of any concrete examples to illustrate?
R: Okay, we were in the hallway one day, there was a whole bunch of us in the corner and then, there was some Italians in the other corner. And the guys were free-styling, right? They’re rapping, from the top of their head, right? And the White kids they’re playing their "techno" kind of music, and they play it loud, 'cause they have their boom boxes in the school, and we aren’t even supposed to be playing that, right? And so we were just sitting there, you know, watching them, and I guess we were kind of getting loud, you know, "Wow, he’s really good!" you know. And so then, the principal came by and he said, "Can you guys move along?" And then, we were like, "Okay, well, we’ll move along." But he didn’t say anything to the Italians. They’re playing their big boom box right there and you aren’t going to say anything to them?" He walked right past them and then he came back and we were still there. He goes, "I said you guys should move along." And so we moved along. We just moved because we didn’t want to cause problems, but the Italians were still able to play their music. It was loud, especially techno is loud. It was loud!

Track and field events are areas often considered the domain of Black students. Joanne described a situation where a Black "track star" was cheated out of her award in favour of a White athlete:

Especially related to sports, you know. Someone who’s a really good track star and everyone else is just there, they’re like average and this person is up above average. And I remember when they had the athletic banquet, this person did get recognized but she didn’t get the medal she deserved, or the plaque she deserved. They gave it to the White girl. Everyone felt that she was cheated out of it. I think she was, like, everyone knew, everyone thought that she would be the one, you know?

S: And this was for sports?

R: Hm, hm. Especially in sports. You always see it happen, they always get cheated out in something.

Keisha offered an example of how "White" offence is mitigated while Blacks receive harsher punishment. She described an altercation between a Black and a White girl and the school’s response:

No, the White girl called the Black girl, a nigger and she slapped the White girl for that. The principal came up and the Black girl told her everything and she didn’t care. She just expelled her. I felt that was unfair. Even though that girl was probably in other trouble, still I think she should be able to, you know? I would have taken that to the Board, because I know, for one, I would have told my parents. I’m not afraid to go the Board. I will talk to them and, you know, tell them, "This is what I believe," you know.
5.1.4. Other offensive words and deeds

In this section, I have included incidents that are considered offensive but which do not fit into the categories above. The narratives show that the girls are sensitive, not only to racist behaviour directed towards Blacks, but also towards other "minorities." For example, the incident described below clearly shows that Jennifer and her friends were offended by a teacher's racist remark and equally disappointed by the principal's failure to respond:

I've experienced once when a teacher has come up to a couple of students in the hallway, some East Indians and he asked them to move from the hallway, and they wouldn't move from the hallway, and then he said something along the lines like, "Don't you understand me? Maybe you all should go back to where you came from." That's when I heard that, and we were not impressed with that. We told the principal but I don't think he did a follow-up on that.

Susan mentioned situations where teachers appeared hostile towards students whose first language is not English. Like Jennifer, she was also upset by such discriminatory behaviour:

I've been told about certain instances. Like a lot of the Asian race hangs out in the front foyer and this girl said how a teacher came and said, "Don't you guys have class? You guys should be moving on. Move on to class." And then like, you know, they were still there and she goes, "Do I need to get an E.S.L. teacher up here to translate for me?" When I heard that, I was like, "Wow!" because it's never been like, you know, directed right at me. I haven't really been affected by it [racism], but I know that it is in the school also ... I've seen, a teacher once, she couldn't really understand a student who had a heavy accent. And I guess she was trying to understand, and she kind of lost patience and she was speaking loud and she was kind of brushing the student off, and I guess that can be taken as racist.

Some students are very perceptive; they can sense what is not actually spoken. In situations such as that described by Karen (below) one may think that she was being overly sensitive. However, her perception and interpretation of this event is the important thing to consider. Karen, herself, wonders if she had over-reacted:

Well, actually, there was [racist event]. It could be just me, like, my perception of the situation, but in Science, grade nine, first term, I got 100% and one of my teachers, Chinese, she told another teacher, this White teacher, "Oh, this is my 100% student," and he was like, "Oh! This is your student!" He seemed really surprised. I don't know why, but I was a little, like, my brain kind of went off and a little thing was, "Hmm, I wonder if that was what he was implying? Oh, because I'm Black or I'm female or something. 'Are you sure this is the student?" type of thing.
It is clear from their statements that some teachers humiliate students in the name of humour. Students will respond differently. Some might hide their embarrassment by laughing along with the teacher and their classmates, others will retaliate. Beverley recalled such an incident which occurred in her presence:

Most of them [teachers] are pretty careful with their words and, I guess if they make jokes, they know who to make it around. Maybe they make jokes inside in the teachers' lounge or whatever, but, with the students, they don't really make..., except that one teacher. Josh is my friend and we would make jokes while we were doing computer, we would make jokes, like, to ourselves right? And he [teacher] would come around and he would tell him, "So what happen, Josh, do you have a brain small like a pea?" Or something like that. He'd make all these insulting jokes and Josh would be, like, "Who are you talking to? Don't make those kind of jokes with people." So there's certain people he likes to pick on.

5.2. RACISM AMONG STUDENTS.

The most telling sign of racism among the students is volitional segregation (Anthony, 1996b). Although segregation has some positive attributes, it is based primarily in racism. All the girls mentioned areas in their schools where the Blacks hang out, areas for Whites, Asians or other ethnic groups. While some of them socialise with non-Black students, in all but two cases, their closet friends are Black and usually of Caribbean origin. Rena described the segregation process:

No, it's [race] not a problem for me, personally, because a lot of my friends that I have, I've been with since I was small. We went to school together, so we grew up together. We didn't even know anything about race, we just grew up together all alone, so there's no problem with me. This [racial segregation] is what I noticed. When everybody got to high school, everybody found their own group. So, it's like, Black people over here, Indian people over there, and we're all still friends, but we just don't, like, at lunch, we all wouldn't get together and hang out, we just go to the different sections, it's an automatic thing. It's not to say that I can't talk to her because she's with her Indian friends, I'm with my Black. Sometimes the Indians and the Blacks mix. That's the only groups, the Indians and the Blacks, but otherwise, there's not much of a mix.

Although students generally gravitate towards their own kind, racial segregation might be promoted by teachers. Paula's comment implies that this teacher was encouraging divisions among the students, by race and/or ability. It is also an example of how teachers help to reinforce the negative stereotypes associated with Black students:

I can think of a situation now. That same teacher, that same Physical Education teacher
that I told you about, the one who loves to gossip. Oh my goodness! In grade nine, I remember it was me and my friends, she’s Guyanese-Indian, and this Greek girl. We used to talk a lot, right? We were in Health class one time, I don’t know what she [teacher] told the Greek girl, but she goes to her, "If you weren’t hanging out with the people that you hang out with you would be getting better marks." She was getting good marks, like 80’s.

S: Did she tell her that in front of you?

R: No, she didn’t say it in front of me.

S: Oh, the Greek girl came back and told you?

R: Hm, hm.

While this suggests the teacher has a negative perception of Black students' ability, it may apply specifically to Paula, considering her poor grades (see Appendix V).

Despite voluntary segregation, ethnocultural clashes do occur, as described by Simone, who makes an effort to avoid them:

Actually there is a lot of racism, to think of it. I mean it's been fights among Greek and Pakistanis and stuff like that, fights against Black ... Actual fist fights. There's actually been knives, guns, stuff like that. Yeah, there has, in my school. Blacks and Whites. But I stay far from those things, I'm like, "Okay, forget it. Stay away from them."

Susan spoke about Black students who make fun of other students' culture and their clothes:

They [administrators] got rid of some benches in the hallway where the majority [Blacks] hanged out and they [Blacks] said that was racist because they [staff] didn’t want the Blacks hanging there. But I could understand why 'cause it was a lot of the Blacks who sit there and make fun of people when they passed. I’ve passed there and I’ve heard them yelling things out in front of all these other students from different countries wearing different, you know, their country’s clothes. And they get called, you know, they get racial slurs, and they get these other comments. These students pretty much intimidate the school and I don’t really think comments are made toward them. The Blacks pretty much intimidate the school. Maybe I’m biased, but I’ve been in that hallway where the Black students hang out. And I’ve seen them, I’ve seen it personally, so I can say that. I know that there have been complaints by students to teachers because I’ve had teachers say things to me that they heard about and they have a student who is really upset.

Denise, who attends the same school, is not appalled by the Black students' behaviour; she seems to think it is acceptable to have "little prejudices." She said, "Well, among the Blacks, everybody’s friends. So, we respect each other. There’s little complaints about the South Asians, the Pakistanis. When they are in the hall, every time somebody passes there, they say,
'Oh, it smells.' Everybody has their little prejudices.

Name-calling and segregation also exist within racial groups. At Elizabeth's school the Canadian-born Chinese (CBCs) refer to recent Chinese immigrants as "FOBs" (Fresh off the Boat). The CBCs laugh at their accents and their clothes and they usually do not associate with each other. Racism also exists in May's school but she observed that it has declined somewhat over the years. Her quote also shows why some Black students choose to suffer in silence:

In my school there's still racism. Before it was really bad, because I would walk down the hallway, right? And some White girl would just come up to me and go, "Bomboclaat!" just for no reason, right? And I would be, "Why are you saying that to me? You're assuming that I'm Jamaican and you don't even know me." You know, they just come by and say all these rude things. Second year was little bit bad, but then the third year, grade eleven it seems as if all that stuff had died down. But the first year and second year was just bad. They would say, "All these Black people" and the teachers didn't hear it, but they would say it to us, and we can't really say, "Well that person said this," because the teacher has to believe both stories. We didn't even bother to report them because we knew nothing was going to be done anyway.

S: So, you all had to take all that abuse?

R: Yeah. I figured that the whole process of doing something about it would take too long and I would be the one who would be [considered] bad in the end, you know. And as soon as you have a certain reputation, all the teachers know and therefore prejudge you and I didn't want that. So I said, I'll deal with my own problems.

S: Oh, my! Did they ever hit you or do anything physical?

R: What? No! They're not brave enough to do that. No, no. It was more a thing where only the students would be aware of what's going on.

5.3. THE SITUATION WITH BLACK STUDENTS.

There are numerous publications which document the low academic achievement of Black students in Canada (Solomon, 1992; Toronto Board of Education, 1993; Dei, 1995), the United States (Coleman, 1966; Fordham & Ogbu, 1986; Bennett & Le Compte, 1990; Irvine, 1990), Britain (Coard, 1981; Carrington, 1983; Stone, 1985). Several explanations have been put forward. These include, White staffs' differential treatment of Black students, Black parents' lack of involvement in their children's education, and lack of motivation in the students themselves. I asked the participants: "Why do you think that Black students, in general, don't
do well in school?” Some of the girls cast blame on the teachers while others believe it is the fault of the students themselves and their parents. Those who blame the teachers feel that if they cared more about Black students, these students would be motivated to achieve. June, among others, thinks that disengaged Black students need more attention from the teachers - they need to feel that teachers care:

   Actually, I think they just need somebody to pay them a little bit of attention, to make them do their work. Because, like, in grade twelve, they don’t push you to do your work. So, they are, "I don’t care because the teacher don’t care about me anyhow. So why should I bother."

While Susan blames the teachers too, she seems to think that part of the reason Black students do not do well is rooted in racism outside the school system:

   I’ve never run into a race conflict with any of my teachers, but I know there are some teachers who will see a Black student, usually male, and think that they’re not going to make it, they’re not up to par. And they push them (toward general), you know. Then there might be another student, who might be White, who is doing worse off, or the same as [the Black one] and they’re not pushing them towards general, and they might push the Black student, you know, towards general. But, I’ve never had it myself. I know that a lot of teachers have this stereotype ... these Black students, usually male, that they have no goals, no aspirations.... I know a lot of these students, they’re like ... they say, "Why try anyway, because there’s so much negativity out there." There’s so much against them, so a lot of them don’t try. But even for the ones who do try, sometimes they feel that they’re being held back anyway.

Karen is aware that a lot of Black students disengage themselves from academics because they fear being seen as acting "White" or as nerds:

   I think that some Black students feel that they can’t excel because then they’ll be considered, "Oh, I’m trying to be White, I’m trying to be this, I’m trying to be that." And it’s really, really sad. Because a lot of them have a lot of potential and it’s just wasted on skipping class, hanging out with their friends, causing trouble, this and that, when they could be in class doing their work. If they go to class, "Oh, you’re a nerd."

But, it’s all an image. It’s all an image.

Denise acknowledges that stereotypes exist, however she feels that Black students must make an effort "to let loose of the stereotype ... try really hard to show that they can be as smart as other races or ethnic diversities." Beverley empathises with the teachers. She holds the students themselves, and their parents accountable for their poor academic performance:

   I don’t happen to have a lot of problems with the White teachers in my school, but my other friends have. [S]ome of the Black students develop a negative response to the
teachers anyway. And you see, before you can even enter a class first day of school, it's just: "Oh, I don't like this teacher because I heard this teacher is so and so." Before they get into the class, they develop this attitude towards the teacher. So when you go into the class and you give the teacher an attitude like that, you can't expect the teacher to now say: "Okay, I'm going to help the student," when they're giving her such an attitude. Half of their parents don't know what they're doing. That's one thing that I noticed. Their family is not close behind them ... their parents are working so much, or out, doing their own thing.

Despite the negative ascription, some Black students are taking leadership roles in their schools. This is revealed, for example, in Denise's description of the student council (SAC) at her school:

Yeah, actually I have run for SAC, but I was outvoted by two other people. Our SAC was more diverse, we had more Black people on it this year than last year. Last year I think it was all White. [This year] we had like, I would say, 80% of it is Black and the rest are White, which is pretty good because you don't really see a lot of [S: Black students running for it]. Right, right. Our president was Black, a Black male ... We had a lot of Blacks on the Student Council this year.

5.4. RACISM IN THE CURRICULUM.

Several studies have shown that Black students feel demeaned by the negative portrayal of their race in curricular material or the manner in which it is presented (Haughton, 1987; Crichlow, 1994; James, 1994; Anthony, 1995a; Rezai-Rashti, 1997). I asked the question about racism in the curriculum in two parts: (i) Can you recall seeing anything racist or offensive in the books and other material used? and (ii) ... in the way that the material was discussed or presented by the teacher? Based on their replies, it appears that some schools are progressing towards a more inclusive, and less derogatory, curriculum. Stephanie expressed surprise at seeing ethnic names, instead of Anglo names, in her textbooks:

[Laughs]. I just remember reading in the grade six Math book - actually it's pretty multicultural - but sometimes I just have to laugh like when they're talking about "Rajiv went to the store to make a mix of peanuts and whatever ..." It's just kind of funny. Like, it's really good that they are introducing everything, but I laugh because sometimes I'd be reading the names and I'm like, "Oh! Where did they get these from?"

June's surprise resulted from seeing a photograph of a Black woman, that she had met, in her (Canadian) textbook:

No, I can't really think of anything [racist]. Actually I was surprised because, flipping through my Accounting book, I saw a picture of this [Black] lady and I met her through this leadership programme that I did. She was an entrepreneur. She established her own,
nursing home for seniors. I was surprised to see her - flat out - in my textbook. They had Black people in the textbooks! It's okay if they show, like, these are some of the job opportunities. Sure! I noticed stuff like that in a couple of my textbooks, so I don't really see anything negative. I'm surprised to see some of the positive stuff actually.

S: What about in English? Some Black students said they didn't like "To Kill a Mockingbird."

R: We did that in our class but the [White] teacher that taught it, she's really sensitive to issues like that. She's really behind multiculturalism too. Like we have a heritage day at our school every year and she will dress-up in a sari and everything. Like, she will really help out. She's not racist at all. She helps out sometimes more than some of the Black teachers at our school. So she handled it really well.

Like June, Keisha and Beverley also described how sensitive teachers dealt with the issue of race in the curriculum. Beverley's teacher has personal reasons for his sensitivity to discrimination:

Like one time in my History class, we were talking about how AIDS originated. This [White] student said, "Some Black person slept with a monkey," or some crap like that. I'm like, "What nonsense are you talking about? Oh, that is not even true!"

S: Did the teacher hear that?

R: Yeah, and the teacher corrected the guy. And, what did he tell us? That it was spread from an animal drinking polluted water from deep inside the jungle, and it bit somebody and it got spread that way, or something like that. Actually, I have to read up on how it originated. But that teacher, I liked that teacher. Actually, he had a lot of problems too because he was a gay teacher and a lot of students didn't like him either. But I thought he was alright. I loved him.

Beverley went on to describe other aspects of the curriculum where change is needed:

They need to put a little more Black History education in the school curriculum. In Literature you get Black authors, like they started to bring it in. But in History, I never - I learned all my Black History from home [Trinidad]. When you come up here, it's mostly European History and a lot of time you spend on the holocaust. But when it comes to like Blacks and slavery and the Caribbean, you spend like, zippo time on it. Like one day maybe, and then that's that. You don't really discuss anything. So they need to, like, try to work that in. Actually they have to work it into the curriculum because a lot of the Black students up here, they don't have a clue what their history is about - like the Caribbean and stuff, unless their parents teach them or they take outside classes. So they need to put some of that in.

The need to incorporate Black History into the mainstream curriculum, instead of an add-on, is illustrated in Paula's comment:
One year they had African-Canadian History, but it was like, extra-curricular, after school. You'd have to go on your own time, and all that stuff. At one point, a lot of people showed up, but then, the numbers started to decrease after a while because, you know, it's on people's free time and they don't want to go.

Keisha spoke at length about a White teacher who really loved Black people and actually teaches Black Studies:

S: A White teacher teaching Black Studies! How did people react to that?

R: Actually, he'd previously taught "Society", so this was no problem for him because in "Society" you discuss discrimination and all about Blacks. So he just said, "I'm going to read these books over the summer" so he knew what he was talking about. He blew us away.... He was careful in how he spoke. He talked about his experiences where he spoke out of turn and it offended somebody. So he said, "I'm going to be careful about what I say" and he told the class, "If you ever think I'm talking out of turn, then tell me and I'll stop."

S: So were there only Black students in this Black Studies class?

R: Well, all of the class was Black, except for two girls who were White. They wanted to broaden their horizons, which I found very interesting because I know in Mississippi and Alabama you don't have that - White children trying to learn about our history. Our teacher told us he's tired of White history. That's the reason he taught the course, because he wants to learn more about other cultures and about their heritage, where they came from.

It appears that, unlike Black History, Black literature attracts students from diverse ethnic backgrounds. Brenda A recalled that:

It was called Modern Literature but it focused on Black literature and poetry and stuff.... There was a mix [of students]. Actually everybody thought that only Black students would take the course, but really, there was a nice mix of different students in the class. There were Chinese people and everybody else who came to our school. I can't name all the cultures.

Roxy complained about the absence of Black people from both History and Literature that are taught at her school:

It bothers me a lot and because of that, I've done a lot of research by myself. And other people must think about it too, because this girl, Michelle, she's White, and she got a whole book of all the inventors. Like, she collected all the papers on Black inventors and I photocopied that from her. So it's not just Black people thinking about it, it's White people too. But yeah, that has bothered me, it really has.... The only thing I don't like is the fact that we have to take Shakespeare - five years in a row! I had an argument with my teacher about it. I said to him, "How does Shakespeare, how is a White man writing
his views in the 20th century going to help me in the 21st century, when I have to get a job and survive?" He goes, "Oh, bla, bla, bla, Shakespeare's used in everyday life and everything." Maybe he has a point, however, I don't think I need to know every part of Shakespeare, you know? Five years in a row! And that's not just at my school, that's every school that you have to have English, and Shakespeare is part of the curriculum, you know.

Jennifer, who attends a different school, also said "no" to the question of racist material in the textbooks because, "the problem is, they don't have any textbooks that portray Black people, so they can't be doing that. No." May cites this absence as an example of racism, "Basically you really find only White people in the books. That's racist right there!" It is, as noted by Paula, "mostly what a lot of people are complaining about."

Reena is the only student who cited an example of, what she considers, negative stereotyping:

I wouldn't say anything in the textbooks. I know in my Law class we did this exercise where there were nine applicants, and there was one heart and we had to choose who they would give the heart to. And one thing that disturbed me, they had a Black HIV positive lesbian.... No, this wasn't in the textbook, it was on the worksheet. I had the same worksheet two years ago. But I mean, why does the lesbian have to be Black?

S: Did you ask that question? Did you ask the teacher?

R: Sometimes I choose not to because it would, like, get off topic and then also, being a minority, they might say: "What's her problem?" you know? "That's not the issue, right? What we're looking at is the heart and which applicant to give it to."

5.5. IF I WERE WHITE.

To further explore the issue of racism, I asked them if they think that their experiences in school would have been different had they been White. Brenda's response was quite revealing:

I got along with them [teachers] because they respect me and I respect them. Whereas if I was White, I would be used to teachers respecting me. Like, I've never been disrespected, but I know how much an education is, and when you get it fairly, I know how great that is. But I think if I was a White student, I would take it for granted they [teachers] loved me, or they liked me, or I'm not getting any hassles or any problems. But I learned to recognise racism and sexism.

Her comments imply that teachers do not automatically like or respect Black students. Furthermore, it suggests that White students enjoy an unfair advantage in the school system. As White students, Denise, Brenda A, Susan and Karen all believe that the main difference would
be in the ethnic makeup of their friends - they "would be more comfortable with White students and not so interactive with Blacks." This level of comfort might extend to school staff as noted by Paula: "Well relating to the teachers and having things in common with them. Because if, you know, you can't relate to them, you know." Simone, Jennifer and Keisha feel certain they would have been treated better by the predominantly White staff at their schools. Keisha said: "Well, some principals and some teachers, they wouldn't have picked on me as much. A part of them seemed to pick more on other cultures than on Whites." She went on to say that she is sure she "would not have been a racist White person."

The remaining seven girls are not sure that being White would have made any difference to their experience of school. Earlier in the interview Beverley had described a personal incident which she had perceived as racist yet she felt that staff would not have treated her any differently as a White person because:

It all depends on sucking up. It's just human nature. If you meet somebody and you know they don't like you and you're nice to them, and smile everyday and tell them a couple of good things. They'll take a liking to you, it's just human nature - it happens to you if you're Black or you're White. I mean, there's some teachers, definitely they're White, and they don't really care for me to be around, but they would do whatever I asked because I was polite, you know what I mean? ... I'll just keep sucking up to them until I get to where I want to go, because it works. It really does.

Roxy, a member of the Student Council, has enjoyed many privileges. As a result she does not think that being White would have brought any advantages:

I don't know if it would have been necessarily different because I don't see any other White people getting more privileges than I.... I don't see it as a problem for me because I've accomplished things in the school that most people haven't, so....

Reena has a somewhat different reason for believing that colour does not matter much. She seems to think that being a good student renders one colourless - teachers see a good student not a Black student:

I think it would be like "[Beverly Hills] 90210" or something. You know, like one of those T.V. shows.

S: Do you think teachers would treat you any differently?

R: I don't know. I think I've built up a standard for teachers who look at me now. I think they're just looking at me as a good student now, and not really like a Black student - which is good, which is really good. And I think that's how I would want it.
So, I always wonder if I was a different person if I would be the same way, and I sometimes think that just my name would be different, my hair colour would be different, this and that, but I think me, inside, would still be the same.

5.6. DISCUSSION.

The racist scenarios that I described to the participants are those which I presented in chapter two. The girls expressed shock at what the GTA high school students had experienced, and said that those things would never happen in their schools. The part of the city in which their schools are located has a highly visible and vocal Black community and this may have contributed to their teachers’ “fear” of practising overt racism. An alternative suggestion is that the girls were fortunate to get teachers who are respectful and accepting of ethnocultural diversity. However, this is disproved by some teachers’ discriminatory attitude towards students whose first language is not English.

The practice of retaining newly arrived English-speaking Caribbean students is another example of systemic racism. Language/accent remains the only socially accepted medium for practising overt racism because it provides a “legitimate” excuse for marginalising undesirable “minorities” (Lippi-Green, 1997). School staff cannot say, “we’re putting you back a grade/in Special Education because you’re Black” but they can say, ”... because you lack English-language skills” and this is sanctioned by the schools. The racist basis of this practice was illustrated by an eastern-European student at the GTA high school. This student told me that when he first arrived in Canada, although he spoke no English, they put him in an advanced grade (Anthony, 1994).

The “language skills” argument lacks substance on several counts. First of all, despite the fact that we all have native dialects or languages, the official language in current and former British Caribbean colonies is [standard] English. Many ignorant Canadians, graduate students included, do not know this and we are often asked, “What is your first language?” Our textbooks are written in English and standard English is the form of communication used in our schools, and by all the staff (Coelho, 1988). Secondly, the movies and television shows that we watch are mostly North American and British in origin - there are no “Caribbean” subtitles - and our students understand them. It will help education policy makers and practitioners to visit these
countries, not the resorts but the schools, and observe in the classrooms. This will broaden their limited perspectives about West Indian students. They will also see that the British West Indian education system is far more advanced than that in Canada. Based on my experiences as a high school Science teacher in Jamaica, and a grade 12 Math/Science tutor in Toronto, I contend that the curriculum taught to 15-year-olds in the West Indies, in preparation for their school leaving examination, is equivalent to that delivered to grade twelve or OAC students in Canada. The same is probably true of Nigeria which is a former British colony.

Being retained, or placed in ESL and Special Education classes, frustrates Black children and retards their intellectual development (Coard, 1971, 1981; Dei, 1997). New immigrants often do not understand the Canadian educational system and may be ignorant, as I was, of the stereotypes associated with Black students. These are things which should be openly discussed with new arrivals. Of course, to do so requires that school personnel be honest about their racist beliefs and practices. This will be difficult because of White Canadians’ general reluctance to admit that this is a racist country.

The girls were discouraged by guidance counsellors and teachers who had low expectations of them but were hesitant about describing such staff as racist. In Simone’s case, because the teacher was known to "prefer girls," one can only conclude that his attitude towards her was racist. Although he had his "favourites," she could/did not explain how they differed from those who were not favoured. White Toronto teachers have admitted to being surprised when Black students do well; they also admitted that Blacks are not encouraged in Math and Science because they are not expected to succeed in these subjects (Dei, 1997). When discussing negative school experiences, Black students expressed the greatest emotion and anger when they talked about the low expectations that some teachers have of their abilities (Dei, 1997). Belittling Black students breeds bitterness and resentment towards the teacher and results in some students not wanting to go to class (Anthony, 1995b; Dei, 1997).

The differential treatment experienced by the girls is similar to that experienced by other Black students in White schools (Irvine, 1990; Codjoe, 1997; Dei, 1997; Ibrahim, 1997). There is ample evidence that Blacks experience more severe disciplinary measures than Whites, or other race. They are more likely to be punished for subjective rather than objective offenses (Irvine, 1990). Subjective offenses, which reflect the teachers’ personal judgement, include
disobedience, insubordination, disrespectful behaviour and violations of the dress code (Irvine, 1990). When Black students are reprimanded for behaviours that are deemed acceptable for Whites, or are denied privileges afforded White students, this suggests that theirs is a subordinate race and enhances their feelings of inferiority (Dei, 1997).

Arbitrary grading practices also serve to maintain the status quo. When higher marks are given to White male students who are less deserving than Black females, this provides the former with an unfair advantage when competing for scholarships and university admission. Unfortunately, this form of White male privilege does not end at the secondary level (Jensen, 1998). The situation described by Beverley (5.1.3) is an example of the intersection of race and gender. It is uncertain whether the teacher had originally assigned her a lower mark because she is Black, because she is female or because she is a Black female. However, it illustrates that the meritocracy, of which we hear so much, is premised on a false notion of educational equity.

Ethnocultural segregation among students is viewed as both a negative and a positive practice. Some school personnel view it as negative and try to force integration by assigning racially diverse students to work groups (Anthony, 1996b). Knowing that racism pervades our schools, this motive might be viewed with suspicion. It could be seen as an example of White peoples’ attempts to separate Blacks in a bid to prevent "revolt." This tactic was used on the slave ships and on the plantations. Africans from similar regions, who spoke the same language, were kept apart to prevent collusion and revolt. On the other hand, there are teachers who promote segregation. They "ghettoise" Black students by denying them entry into traditionally White, or elite, activities (Anthony, 1996b; Dei, 1997; Ibrahim, 1997).

There is a positive, nurturing aspect to ethnocultural segregation, especially among recent immigrants whose first language is not English. Black students say that it contributes to their sense of belonging in school (Dei, 1997). A language minority, Latina student at the GTA high school said that she trusts those from her own culture but not White Canadians (Anthony, 1996b). Furthermore, when she is tired she finds it easier to communicate in Spanish than in English. It is unlikely that White Canadian teachers, who have never lived abroad, will ever understand how comforting it is for "minorities" to congregate with those of their own ethnocultural group.

Despite its positive attribute, segregation remains a telling sign of racism because because
it is rooted in racial discrimination and xenophobia. White Canadians generally do not accept non-White Canadians or immigrants. The most despised are Black people, and we know it. Walker (1980:105) notes that:

Black Canadians have not had the option of assimilation into mainstream White society.... It must be recognised that whatever tendencies the Blacks have had to preserve [their culture] have been reinforced and enhanced by the fact that ... total assimilation has been denied them.

Non-Black immigrants from largely monoracial countries also develop a fear of Black people based, in part, on media representation and reinforced through their lived experience in countries like Canada and the United States. While some people of different races and cultures have successfully formed links, they are in the minority. Racial discrimination, especially negative stereotyping, makes it difficult for many Blacks to find support and trust among ethnocultural groups outside of our own. The cultural component is important because within racial groups one also finds segregation based on cultural background or country of origin (Dei, 1997).

The girls identified multiple causes of Black students' general lack of achievement in their schools. These include the students themselves, lack of parental and teacher/school support, and negative peer pressure. The common denominator is racism - in society and in school. It is important that racism be discussed openly in schools to help all children to understand how it operates to keep certain groups marginalised and at the bottom of the socioeconomic ladder. However, as noted by Christensen (1992) we can hardly expect those who benefit most from a racialised society to actively work towards eradicating racism.

The curriculum is a key component of the educational system. There has been some improvement. For example, the inclusion of Blacks, portrayed in positive ways, Black authors and the use of non-Anglo names in textbooks. However, there is room for more. I mentioned the need for more Black History/Studies in the curriculum before (4.6) but would like to say something more in this chapter. Some teachers oppose this move because they see it as special interest groups receiving special treatment (Dei, 1997). This is not the case for, as noted by Walker (1980:3):

The historical significance of Black history is that its study reveals several important aspects of Canada's development as a society that are otherwise missed, and to overlook Black history is, therefore, to distort our image of ourselves as Canadians and the historical forces that have made us what we are.
This means that when Blacks are excluded, all students are not taught a complete and accurate history of Canada. The culture in power (Delpit, 1988) determines what is included in the curriculum and what is omitted. Powerful Whites, and their representatives, determine what counts as knowledge worthy of sharing. By omitting the contributions of Blacks (see Appendix VI) the dominant culture keeps us in our scorned position in society, and reinforces the myth that we are worthless freeloaders.²

Some of the girls admitted that being White would alter their experience of school. Their comments revealed the profound effect that racism has on their relationships with White school personnel, and on the relationships they would like to have had. The girls felt that they would be automatically respected, "picked on" less and have things in common with their teachers, had they been White. Reena’s comment is especially telling - it reveals another aspect of racism. Reena is convinced that she has become colourless! However, I hesitate to describe her as "raceless," as defined by Fordham (1988) because she has Black friends and is involved in Black activities both in and outside of school. Fordham (1988) described successful Black adults who felt that they had to appear "colourless" in order to achieve career success. This is a delusion because one cannot look at another person and not see their colour, unless one is visually impaired. Reena’s comment, among others, poses the strongest argument for, (i) the inclusion of more Black teachers and administrators and (ii) compulsory anti-racist training for school staff. In addition to serving as role models for Black students (see subsection 8.7), Black academic staff will be more sensitive to their needs and help them to feel more connected to the school system (Codjoe, 1997; Dei, 1997; Solomon, 1997). Furthermore, because of the fictive kinship (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986) which Blacks tend to develop, they can be expected to support and encourage the academic pursuits of Black students. Black students need this to counter the negative experiences they often have with White staff.

Racial discrimination limits Black students’ educational experiences, academic outcome and life chances. Unfair treatment contributes to the development of strained interracial relationships. When the student perceives race as a factor this may result in feelings of alienation, hostility, conflict, aggression and more student misbehaviour (Irvine, 1990).
5.7. SUMMARY.

In this chapter I presented the participants' responses to both overt and covert forms of racism. Although they felt that, in their schools, blatant racism was passe, the data show that this is not really so. Some denied personal experiences of racism then went on to describe racist incidents in which they were personally involved. First generation girls described their feelings of boredom, frustration and anger when placed in grades below their academic level. They talked about being discouraged, by staff, from pursuing certain academic subjects but appeared unsure if the discouragement was rooted in racism. They, or their friends, had experienced differential treatment with respect to grades, rule infraction and athletic achievement. They also described their responses, or lack thereof, to these and other offensive incidents involving staff. This said, there are some (few) teachers who are making an effort to understand Black students and treat them fairly.

Among the students, there is ethnocultural segregation, name-calling, verbal abuse and inter-ethnic fights. The girls appeared more willing to admit to personal experiences of racism involving students than they were where staff are concerned. They do not complain to staff because they believe the teachers will side with the White students and nothing will be done. The fear that non-Blacks have of Black people seems to protect them from physical abuse.

With respect to the low academic achievement of Black students in general, they held teachers, parents, society and the students themselves culpable. Negative intragroup peer pressure was also cited. They believe that many bright Black students adopt anti-school behaviours to avoid being labelled "nerds" or being perceived as "acting White."

The lack of Black people in the curriculum was mentioned by most girls. Blacks received a cursory mention in some history classes. In a few cases authors "of colour" had been included in the English curriculum and there has been some Black studies courses. However, this is not enough. There is evidence that some teachers are trying to be sensitive when discussing Black issues. Using a similar format, I present their experiences of, and responses to, sexism in chapter six.

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NOTES

1. In my OISE/UT department, a "high status" White male student boasted how he
threatened a White female professor who had given him an A as the course grade. As she had not yet submitted the grades to the Graduate School, he forced her to change it to an A+.

2. A male Jewish doctoral candidate in my OISE/UT department said this to me. He shouted this question at me, "What have Black people ever invented or contributed to our society?" He went on to describe us as freeloaders. At the time, being still ignorant about Black history, I could only talk about the two Nobel laureates who originated from the Caribbean, an area with a total population of about five million.
CHAPTER 6
SEXISM

We live in a sexist society and so, it can be expected that there will be gender discrimination in our schools (Kaufman, 1997; Larkin, 1997; Novogrodsky & Alimi, 1997; Rezai-Rashti, 1997). Sexism is made manifest in many ways. To explore their experiences of sexism or gender discrimination, I asked the girls to tell me about sexist incidents involving teachers, guidance counsellors, principals and peers - to relate anything they experienced personally, witnessed or heard about. Their responses are presented under the following sub-headings: incidents involving school staff, incidents involving students, sexism in the curriculum, with special reference to Mathematics and Science and reverse sexism (female advantage).

6.1. INCIDENTS INVOLVING SCHOOL STAFF.

The girls appear to be more tolerant of sexism than they are of racism. As the quotes will show, they tend to dismiss sexist incidents as jokes. In the situation described below, Denise and her classmates felt uncomfortable yet no one asked the teacher to stop making sexist jokes:

He was kind of funny. My Accounting teacher. He's a joke 'cause he's kind of, like, a lot of girls in the school kind of see him like a pervert. He would, I don't know... My friend, Natasha, and I, we would talk in class about him and say how he's always looking at you in this certain way and he always makes this kind of comments, but in a joking way, that would be kind of, not sexist, but kind of, inappropriate for a teacher making a comment to a student, you know?

S: When you said that he would look at you in a certain way, in what kind of way?

R: Well, not, I don't know. I can't really describe. It's not like a sexual way or something like that, but just joking, just some comments that he would make that are inappropriate.

S: But did it make you feel uncomfortable laughing at the jokes?

R: I would laugh at some of them, but, I found it kind of weird and uncomfortable, it's not right for a teacher to be, you know, making a kind of joke like that. I would understand it if he was making a joke with your mom. Like, if he was making a momma joke...

S: Like your momma this or your momma that?
Yeah. I could understand that he was trying to make the class laugh and stuff like that. But certain, like you know, dirty jokes he would make that are sexual jokes, you know, dirty jokes that he would hear from the street or something like that.

Rather than speak out about it, Beverley and her friends also chose to laugh at a teacher’s sexist behaviour:

There were certain male teachers that when girls wore certain, like, low tops or whatever, especially if you have big breasts or whatever, they would come over you and say, try to help you and try to look down your blouse and stuff. And I’d be, like, "My goodness!"

You could actually see them doing that?

Yes. And we would, like, watch them and me and my friends would make jokes and, "Oh, this guy is such a pervert."

Paula described her experiences with her grade ten Science teacher who, she believed, was sexist. However, as much as I probed, she would not, or perhaps could not, give evidence to substantiate the rumours about this teacher:

No matter how hard you worked on your assignments, this man would always fail you. He’s one of those teachers that you have to repeat everything he says right back to him, or else it’s wrong. If you put it in your own words, it’s wrong. So I got a 50 in his class - I deserved higher than that. A lot of people said he was, what is that word? Prejudice against girls - sexist! That’s it! That he’s sexist.

Did you ever hear him say anything though, that you can use, as an example?

No, no.

I wonder why you thought that he was prejudiced against the girls?

I don’t know, actually. Maybe I did hear - I think I did - but I don’t remember.

Racism is probably considered a more serious infraction among some students. For example, Roxy said: "You know, I’ve never heard any racist jokes, but, sexist?! I mean, we have male teachers in our school that say certain things, [but] it goes both ways, too, you know? Some students say things to teachers too." Male teachers are again cited, by June: "I’ve had a couple of male teachers that do it as a joke, but, you know, you don’t really take them too seriously."

Keisha, on the other and, was not amused by a teacher’s justification of rape, although
she missed a similar point made by a male classmate:

Well, when it came to, when it came to the topic of harassment and rape, I remember, we related everything to an article, and one of the teachers did something really demeaning to the females. He said if they want to dress the way they want to, and go into areas that are, like, isolated and stuff, then they deserve to get raped.

S: Oh! So, what did you all say about that?

R: Most of the students, most of the girls left the class.

S: Nobody challenged him? You know, had a debate to show him what was wrong about that statement?

R: Oh, the guys did. The guys said, "How can you say that?" They go, "I have a girlfriend and even if she dresses, I mean, if she dresses up provocative, she's looking for it, okay, but you can't necessarily say because a girl is dressing in a mini skirt, that she is looking for it, that she wants it."

S: What about self control? The men are allowed to have no self control?

R: That's the thing! And he said, "I don't think you could talk on the basis of girls only, because guys have their way. I think guys who walk in certain areas too, you might as well say, they deserve to get killed." And the teacher, he disagreed. He didn't, I don't think he was listening, or he wasn't paying attention to what the student was saying and that's one of the weaknesses of teachers. They just, they sometimes only want to hear themselves talk. They don't want to hear what students say because the student might be right.

June talked about male students' attitude towards females. In her opinion, they have no respect for females "whether inside or outside of school." So I asked her about teacher intervention:

S: You say they have no respect for the female students...

R: That's everywhere. Whether in school or outside of school.

S: Oh! But, do teachers do anything though, if they happen to pass by and see the males being disrespectful towards the females?

R: The Black teachers do. Yeah. And all the Blacks do. They'll just say, "You can't talk to her like that." Other teachers, they just walk by and that's not a big thing but, they just walk by.

S: But, how do you as a female feel, to see that sort of behaviour?
R: It's disrespectful! Like, if I know the guy, to talk to, I might say something, but other than that, more times, I mind my own business.

Then, as a follow-up question, I asked if she had ever been disrespected. Her response provides a good example of the everyday ways that racism and sexism intersect. The situation she described is one that I could have labelled racism just as easily as I have labelled it sexism. She described an altercation with a White male student which is also a good example of the way the system mitigates "White on Black" offenses:

S: So, when you say reacted, do you mean with words or with actions?

R: It almost got to action. He called me a Black bitch and other names, and I called him a honky. So, because of that, I got suspended for, like, half a day.

S: And what happened to him?

R: He got suspended too, for half a day, which I don't think was fair.

S: No. He started it and he got the same punishment for calling you a worst name? Honky is a name commonly used on T.V. sitcoms, it's like WASP!

R. Hm, hm.

S: He used these kinds of bad words towards you and was there, like"F" and all of that too?

R: Yeah

S: Oh, my gosh! So, you said those words back to him, too? (Laughs)

R: Yeah, I just lost my cool with that.

S: So, was that the only time you were suspended?

R: Yeah.

The principal failed to consider that the Black female resorted to the tools on hand to defend herself. He devalued the Black female by considering "Black bitch" equal in offense to "honky".

6.1.1. Favouritism

All the girls acknowledged that Black girls are treated better that Black boys. However,
they recalled a number of situations that could be interpreted as sex discrimination unless one defines sexism as Brenda B does:

S: Yes, so we were talking about sexism in your school.

R: Well, there have been little things. Like, I used to play basketball in grade twelve, on the junior team. We would get the old gym, like, the guys got the good gym, and it would get to you. But it wasn’t blatant, like, "You’re not getting the good gym!" Sure, it was probably sexism, but we never really made a big deal out of it, 'cause it wasn’t a big thing to us, it wasn’t life or death, and it wouldn’t hinder us. We still got our gym, you know, be thankful for that. With the uniforms, we wanted these cool little reversible tank tops to wear, and they’re like, "No, we think girls should wear the longer sleeved ones." We didn’t like it. Sure, it probably was sexism.

S: So, the boys got to wear the tank tops?

R: But, then, sometimes you have to think, there’s a reason why we don’t walk around naked and they can go shirtless. But, I never really made like, said, "Well, gee, they’re being sexist." 'Cause to me, sexism really counts when it hinders you from doing something, or when you don’t get the equal opportunity and equal chance.

Betty talked about the favouritism displayed by teachers who also serve as coaches:

I guess some teachers, for instance...male teachers...probably give favouritism with guys, you know, especially if they’re a coach or somebody, you know? It’d be like they’re probably coaching one of these kids and they’re like, miss classes. "Well, I want them to play for my game, you know?" Then, if a girl missed the class, it’s like.... It depends. Some coaches could be like they side with the person they’re coaching.

S: Have they ever asked you to do something or said something that stereotyped females?

R: Only, that guys said that girls can’t play football.

S: The teachers said that?

R: Uh, huh. Like, the coaches.

S: How did the girls respond to that?

R: Girls are, like, "We can play football you know."

Stephanie shares Betty’s perception of coaches and Brenda B’s view about sexism:

No [sexism]. There’s the odd teacher that, I don’t know, it’s not all that blatant. Oh yeah, there’s only one teacher I’ve had that was like that.
S: Do you want to tell me about that?

R: I think there was maybe three boys in the entire class; it was a French Geography class, but it was just, like, he was like he had his favourites and he was like that with everything. He was also the track coach too, so, he was always, he had his favourites.

S: So, were his favourites the boys?

R: Yeah, then if there were no boys, then the pretty girl in the class or whatever. That's just about it. It's not that he hindered my career or anything like that. I just had one teacher, my Information Processing teacher. When it was time to carry the recycling stuff downstairs, she goes, "Where's some nice strong men to...." I'd say, really what are you talking about, or, whatever?

S: That's sexism, because, you know, she makes it look like women are so weak or something. It's only men who are strong, you know?

R: Yeah, that's just the way she is, though, I guess. I wasn't offended. I didn't want to carry the recycling down. (laughs) That's just the way she was.

6.2. INCIDENTS INVOLVING STUDENTS.

The incidents involving students ranged from blatant to subtle forms of sexism. An example of blatant sexism is that experienced by Elizabeth. She was harassed by a male student but did nothing about it despite the fact that she "was shocked":

No, he [student] did not really say anything. It wasn't what he said, sometimes, it was what he did. I mean, once, I was doing a lab, and he walked by (I wasn't paying attention), he walked by and he, like, slapped me on my butt, and I didn't know for what reason he did that. I was in such shock! I could not believe that. I didn't do anything about it, but it was just, you know, but that's about the only thing.

S: Was he Black? White? What?

R: He was White. It was just, funny. Like, I didn't really think about that at the time, because that has never happened to me. Like, occasionally, every once in a while, when I was younger, maybe, but, you know, in high school, I think that was the only experience in high school that I've had.

The situation described by Karen is typical of the ambiguity which sometimes makes it difficult to label a person or an incident as sexist. Karen clearly finds certain male-female interactions disgusting but is not certain herself, if it is sexism as revealed in her last sentence:
S: Do you have any other experiences of sexism that you can recall?

R: Mostly the other students are like that. Like, the male students.

S: Really?

R: Oh, goodness, the stories! I mean they’re all a bunch of chauvinistic males.

S: Chinese males? White males?

R: I find that, all of them basically. They’re all the same! But I find Black males, actually - the way they treat girls - I see them down the hallway and stuff and they’re like, hanging off these girls. And the girls like, let them though. I can’t really say anything about it but, I kind of found that disrespectful and they kind of let them treat them however, you know? I find that it’s very, very sexist.

S: So when you say "hanging on them," do you mean physically?

R: Yeah, physically, like hanging their arm around them and basically walking and talking with lyrics and this and that, you know. I don’t know, it could be that they’re all good friends and stuff. But, I don’t know the way they do it.

Some high school boys, it seems, still hold stereotypical views about women. Whether serious or in jest, these comments are not appreciated by the girls. I asked Jennifer:

Do you have problems with the boys?

R: Yes.

S: Let me hear about that.

R: Well, me, I’ve always voiced my opinion about some boys. I don’t like sexist guys and they’re always saying, "Yeah, you shouldn’t be here, you should be home in the kitchen, you guys can’t get these kinds of jobs." Really, I can’t take that. So I am always voicing my opinion and telling them, you know, "Times are changing, you know, women play an important role in the society now, too, so you guys have to come to terms with that." But, I guess, sometimes it’s on a joking level but sometimes, it just gets on my nerves when guys take it to the extreme.

Like Jennifer, Paula is also dismayed about the things that boys say:

Like students, guys, yeah, okay. Now, there’s a lot of sexism.

S: Yeah? Tell me about it.

R: Oh, my goodness, these guys, oh my goodness! "Some of those girls should be in the
house, barefoot and pregnant," and all those kinds of stupid comments.

S: You mean, they are still saying those kinds of things?

R: I don't hear it as much as before, but, whenever I hear it, I have to hound people over it. Because it's ridiculous. I mean, if somebody chooses to do it, then they choose to do it, but....

Not only is sexism sometimes difficult to determine but to the untrained eye, it is not easily recognisable. Keisha's story below, demonstrates a more subtle form of sexism that she had overlooked:

Not at all, no. Actually, I found them [guys] very encouraging. One time I was talking about cars and this guy, you know, "Keisha, that's interesting, you know a little about cars. You know, if you got a job in that, you could, maybe if you were a receptionist for a car dealership, that would be good because you know a little about history of...."

S: But, I thought that was a sexist statement. That he would put you as the receptionist. Why couldn't you be the owner of the car dealership?

R: I don't know. I guess it's because, I don't know. I didn't take it like that, cause I kind of just said..., I know, for one, I'm not good with money.

Reena displayed some spunk and conviction as she talked about how she handles the boys at school:

Yeah, a lot of guys are like, heh "psst" and, first of all, I know you are not talking to me because you know my name and you don't need to call me that way. Some guys, when you're passing, they like to grab you and I do the same thing [grab them back]. Like, what are you doing? You know, put them in their place. But besides that, not much. I'm the type of person, like, I let everything be known at first. Like, "Guys, you can't hit me and get away with it. Guys, you have to respect me if you want to talk to me." Things like that. Like, I let them know up front, so they can't play they're doing something stupid and I don't know.

S: They must be scared of you? (Laughs)

R: I wouldn't say they are scared of me. I just say they're friendly, because I have a lot more guy friends than girlfriends, really. Like once we get along, then everything's okay.

It appears that Reena has managed to capture both the respect and friendship of the boys.
6.3. SEXISM IN THE CURRICULUM.

There were no elaborate accounts of sexism in the curricular material. However, May notes that some stereotypes still pervade:

Sexist, like, when you see photographs, you see more of the women caring for the babies and all of that, and you see more of the dads doing athletics or being in the business world, or you see women in the Parenting books. [But] that's not what's in Society.

Her observation is countered by that of several girls who said that they're sometimes surprised to see the noun astronaut followed by the pronoun "she."

6.3.1. Mathematics and Science

Several studies have shown that Black students tend to be under-represented in subjects such as Mathematics and Science (Foster, 1985; Thomas, 1986; Mac an Ghaill, 1988). The literature also shows that girls are less likely than boys to pursue Mathematics and Science beyond the compulsory level (Thomas, 1986; Berrill & De'Bell, 1997; Rogers, 1997). Historically, these subjects have been considered by educators, parents and students as being more appropriate for males. The humanities are perceived as more relevant for females and Blacks (Reid, 1988; Bennett and Le Compte, 1990). Clearly, this is an area where race and gender intersect. I have included data about their relationship with these subjects in this section although the racist aspect of it cannot be ignored.

All the girls took Math to some point or another because it is compulsory. Only six of the girls (Melissa, Stephanie, May, Brenda A, Beverley and Brenda B) took Math together with two or more Science subjects (Biology and Chemistry or Biology, Chemistry and Physics). In all cases they did well, securing an average of over 70% on each of these subjects. The eight who are doing poorly in Math, placed blame either on themselves or more often on their teachers. Their problems with Math often started during Junior High and they never improved. Simone, who blames herself, elected to do Math at the general level but even then, it was a struggle:

The only challenge I really find is Math, 'cause I'm not really good in it. Well, I find... I really, really can't. I don't understand Math. It's just something I shut myself down to. I find I have to open up myself and I don't. Like, I'm always like, "Aaah, I can't stand this"! sort of thing, so... I can say it's my fault. I won't blame the teachers for that,
’cause they try..., well, my teacher that I had, she tried her best. Most of my subjects are advanced. I mean really, the only subject that I would take as general is Math.

S: So you chose to do general Math?

R: Yeah, ’cause that’s what I feel I can handle.

Erica chose general Math too, but unlike Simone, she was excelling. With pride, she said: "I am real good at Math, I’m real good." She does not want to switch to advanced Math because she feels she would not do as well. Elizabeth, on the other hand, believes it is the teacher’s fault that she is not doing better in Math:

Well, the teachers are pretty good. In my opinion, it was just Math that was the big problem. The teachers are pretty considerate and they teach everybody, but in the Math classes, especially, I find they usually gear towards the people who are getting a grasp of it and you know, are going at the same pace as the teacher. So, basically, the Math classes. The first one [teacher] I’ve had and the third, they always geared towards the students who were doing well, and they would disregard anyone who was having problems.... The Sciences? I guess there’s not much emphasis on Sciences because, I don’t know, maybe it’s because, you know they don’t believe that Black girls can do things like Science and Math. Maybe the emphasis isn’t there because they just don’t think they’re capable of doing it.

The experiences of Susan, Beverley and Keisha support Elizabeth’s perception. These three girls were actively discouraged from doing, Math in Keisha’s case, and Calculus in Susan and Beverley’s case. I asked Beverley why she felt more Black students were not taking Math and Science. She replied:

Maybe they’re not encouraged. I don’t know. A lot of my friends say, oh, that it is too hard.

S: Where did they get that idea? It’s too hard?

R: I don’t know. I guess from, I don’t know, from, like a friend. I wanted to take Calculus and my teachers were telling me I shouldn’t take Calculus because I can’t handle the work and, all this kind of stuff. And I was like, "Okay, why are you telling me that I can’t take it? You should be telling me that I can take it and trying to help me if I need help."

S: So, did you tell the teacher that? That they should encourage you and help you?

R: Hm, hm.
S: And what did the teacher say?

R: He said, "Yeah, but some Calculus is just not for some people and maybe you should take something that you think you can handle."

Susan, who attends the same school as Beverley, was discouraged by more than one teacher but she persisted:

I didn’t really have a very good teacher in grade ten Math, and, for every course that you’re going to take, you’re supposed to get a signature saying that you could go into this course. To make sure that you have the requirements so that people, grade nine students aren’t taking an O.A.C. course and they don’t have the prerequisites. So, I was going around to get the signatures and a Math teacher said: "Oh, you only got 84 with that teacher in grade ten" and she goes: "You want to take grade eleven? I don’t think so." She was telling me, she goes, "You’re not going to make it, you’re going to have a lot of difficulty," and I don’t think it was her place, one, to tell me that, and two, teachers aren’t supposed to discourage you from trying and from taking a course and from, you know, trying to do better. And I thought, this is not a teacher I want, I hope I don’t get you. And I said I am going to take it anyways. I did the course, I might not have done as well as I could have, but I, maybe I could have taken a grade ten course again and brushed up on it, but I didn’t want to waste time going over it.

S: Did you say you got 84?

R: I got 84 in grade ten.

S: 84, and she made....

R: She said, well because the teacher was known to not be a very good teacher and that he, you could trick him into marks. If he forgets a test, he looses your test, you say, "Well sir, I got a 90 on it." He like, he was very absent-minded. And they knew this and they knew a lot of students took advantage of him. So, and that he wasn’t as hard as he should have been. He has easier tests. So, she was pretty much saying that you should have walked out of his class with a 90, and if you don’t, well then, you were an idiot. I took it again and now I am going on to Calculus and Finite.

She also had conflicts with her grade twelve Math teacher, a Black man with a doctorate in engineering who was frustrated at having to teach grade twelve Math. In Keisha’s case the teacher might have made a difference had she used a positive approach. Keisha showed determination to get the grade twelve Math credit and compared her English teacher’s attitude to the Math teacher’s:

One of my weaknesses was Math and English, and this one English teacher gave me, she
would sit down with me and tell me what my mistakes were and she'd say, "You know, you have a lot of potential." She felt really positive about me. My Math teacher, on the other hand, because I was getting a low mark, just told me to drop the course. So every time I told her, "Don't you think I'm dropping it too early?" She would say, "Listen, you don't need Math for what you are going into." I told her, "That's true but still, like don't you think I can try and get this credit, even if I don't need it, just try and get it?" She wouldn't do anything really.

S: Was she a White teacher?

R: Yeah. But the thing is, I guess it's me. My mind just totally went against Math and, no matter who helped me, it will be the same when I get to the classroom. So, I just, I did my best and I didn't get the credit for grade twelve, but I got through all the other credits for Math, grade nine to eleven.

With respect to Science, she also assigns some blame to the teachers:

I know when I do Science I cannot stay up and listen to that teacher just babble, babble. Because basically, I think it's the teacher why some girls drop out, especially Black girls. Because some teachers don't know what they're doing, they just ramble off. And you know, they say, "Okay, that's it. Next day we'll do so and so." Maybe if we had good teachers, maybe if it was more interesting, if there was something they could add to it, that would get our attention.... I feel that some Black girls don't think it's for them. And they [teachers] basically don't think it's for Black people. I guess, really, I think the Korean and Whites and Indians [South Asians] are like, getting 90s in that course. Blacks get like a 70 or an 80 right?

While some of the girls felt that teachers don’t encourage Black girls in Math and Science, others like Joanne felt they it was primarily the fault of the students themselves:

S: Who do you see more of in the Math and Science classes, male or females?

R: Males.

S: Oh, so that's still happening?

R: Yeah.

S: So more Whites or Blacks or Chinese or what?

R: Chinese and Whites

S: Ooh. So that seems to be a common trend still.

R: Yeah.
S: Somehow, in the Science subjects you don’t see...

R: Everyone just shies away from it.

S: So, I wonder why is that? Do you think it’s a problem with the students or with the teachers? Why we don’t have more girls and more Black people in Science and in Math?

R: I think they just hear it’s too hard and they just don’t even attempt to get inside, like, you know.

6.4. Reverse Sexism: Female advantage

Although we live in a patriarchal society, there are some advantages associated with being female. I asked them: "Do you think your experiences in school would be different if you were a boy?" Erica, Betty and Melissa do not think that anything would be different but Melissa acknowledged that there are some teachers who favour girls over boys. Simone, Roxy and Susan are not sure if anything would change because they might "remain the same person." Roxy surmises that she would be more into Math, Sciences and athletics. Reena identified with one specific boy as the type of person she could be:

I never really thought about that. I could see myself being like one other guy that..., he’s like really smart or whatever, and he doesn’t joke around and stuff like that. But I don’t know if I would be the same person as a boy, or if I would be a totally different attitude and stuff like that. You know what I mean? That’s something to think about. I never thought about that. I think, if anything, girls are treated better. As students, I think the girls are treated better than the guys. Like, teachers are more willing to help the girls than the guys, unless the guy was say, in TOPS [gifted programme], or he was really good with that particular teacher or something. But I think the girls are treated better than the guys.

The girls who believe that they would be happier as boys based this on their perception that boys have more freedom from parental restrictions, as well as in the schools. Keisha, Paula and Joanne also believe that boys have more fun and as Paula said, "They don’t seem to let things bother them as much." The remaining ten girls think they would be worse off as boys because, as Beverley notes, boys have a harder time than girls:

[B]oys have a harder time than the girls. I think girls, you know, are accepted. Teachers are threatened by the [Black] guys.

S: So aren’t they threatened by the White guys or the Chinese guys and...?
R: I don't know, you know. 'Cause they seem to pick on them [Blacks] more, and I don't know why.... Yeah, they pick on them more. They would be, like, "Oh, why don't you take off your hat?" or "What do you have in your pockets?" or "What are you doing in the halls?" Sometimes they would be doing nothing and they would keep picking on them. And with girls they don't, they would converse more with the teacher and be more accepted. Get more close to the teacher and the guy wouldn't do that. They keep themselves restrained and teachers would be, like, they wouldn't be close to them and look over them and see what they're doing, like encourage them in their school work. They [boys] have a harder time.

Joanne also blames the teachers, not for "picking on the boys," but for ignoring them. When I asked if, as a Black student she felt ignored in the classroom she replied:

I find that with the males. I do find that, with the males, they just leave them to do what they want to do. If you want to come to class, your choice; if you want to sit there and do nothing, your choice - just don't disturb anyone else. But with the girls, it's not really so much like that.

While Beverley and Joanne blame the school staff, Elizabeth shares culpability between both the staff and the students themselves:

It may be, I don't know, because I'm a girl, it's just, I guess, it's just different. I don't know what would really happen if I was a boy. I may not have even graduated high school. Who knows? I guess personally speaking, and from what I've seen and heard it's like, if I were a Black boy going to school you know, I may have turned out the way I am now, but again, I may not have gotten as much enthusiasm, as much learning out of school because I was a Black boy as opposed to being a Black girl. I mean, they seem to see that potential. But, with a boy, they seem to suck you into this trap, "Oh, he's not going to amount to anything, so..."

S: When you say they, do you mean the teachers or...?

R: The teachers and the administration. They don't really help them. They try, some of them really try and some of them don't. I guess it's also in part, it's your own personal choice. I mean, if you want to go to school and learn and graduate, carry on with the dream that you have, it's up to you. So, maybe some of these boys, they just choose what they want to do. Maybe they choose not to do this type of stuff.

S: So, your perception is that the Black girls would get more encouragement than the Black boys?

R: Well, yeah. From what I've experienced, I mean, I've had a Black teacher and, it helps. It's like, she's a woman and everything, and the workshop I was in, as well. That helped me a lot too. We had grade nines right through to me, I was the oldest. I think that helped, if you have a curriculum, like a little workshop.
Jennifer based her answer primarily in student behaviour:

I'm not even sure what I'm trying to say here, but, I do feel that it would be different if I was a boy going to school because boys have to go through some difficult things compared to women, and boys are always the ones who are getting, the Black boys in my school are always the ones who are getting themselves into fights and problems or little things. They have problems controlling their tempers, they have problems in voicing their opinions to teachers, and I don't know if that would be me if I was a boy, but I do feel that they go through harder stuff than the girls do in my school.

Brenda A, June, Stephanie and Karen also spoke about the negative peer pressure that, in their opinion, is harder for Black boys to resist. Karen notes that, "[Guys are a lot worse on other guys who are smart.]" June is of the opinion that peer pressure, combined with teacher expectations, make the school experiences more difficult for boys:

I think the teachers have more respect for [girls], than they do for the guys. Because they know the stereotype of the males, especially the Black males. There's stereotypes of Black students, in general, but if it's a Black male, there's just this stigma about being a Black male and it's much worse for them than for a girl. I think it would be a lot harder first of all, proving to everybody, like, doing the work. Like, as a girl, I could say "Forget it, I'm going to do my work." But guys are a lot harder because they all like, "You're such a nerd," and then they'll be like, how they say that with me? "Oh, you're a brainiac," but as a joke. But if I was a guy, they'd do it seriously, and it's a lot harder to not go with the crowd when you're a boy than it is when you're a girl.

May looks at a different kind of pressure, that which is put on girls to succeed:

I think I can say, it would be different in the sense that I wouldn't be expected to achieve as much as a girl, right? Because a lot more pressure's put on girls to achieve in their academics.

S: The pressure is put on them by whom?

R: By society in general, but by teachers also. And I think boys are expected to be more athletic, as opposed to academic.

Denise who had earlier commented on the problems Black boys encounter considered another advantage of being female - a strategy that cannot be used by boys:

I'm trying to think of situations - going to the washroom. You know, girls have an advantage because if it's a male teacher, you know, "I need to go because you know, my period," or something like that.

S: Girls tell the teacher all of that?!!
R: If you really want to go and he won’t let you, you can sicken him out by saying that. I know a couple of girls that did that. I gotta go! I really gotta go, I just gotta go. It’s an advantage. (Laughs) But even with lady teachers, since they understand, they just let you go, you know, but they [girls] probably would go and just sit in the cafeteria for ten minutes and come back (Laughs).

6.5. DISCUSSION.

It appears that the girls are not quite knowledgeable about sexism, especially in its covert forms. The incident described by Elizabeth was included here because I felt that, had she been a boy, she would not have been slapped on her bottom. Her non-response could be interpreted in two ways - (i) not wanting to cause "trouble," or (ii) a natural response to emotional shock which temporarily paralyses victims. In the former case, racism may be the underlying reason for not speaking out. Some Black students prefer not to speak out when victimised from fear of being seen as confrontational or disruptive - traits often associated with recalcitrant Blacks. Furthermore, having witnessed their Black peers being unfairly punished, or having experienced it themselves (eg. June), they may opt to ignore personal victimisation especially when the perpetrator is White. This is another reason for having more Black academic staff in our schools - Black victims will sooner approach them believing that they will have a fairer chance. This is not to suggest that, perhaps like White staff and White assailants, they will automatically side with the Black students. Blacks do not have the power to behave in this way. We know that we will have to justify and fully explain our actions and for this reason Black students might expect to get a fairer "trial." We are always scrutinised.

June’s comments, and her experience with an abusive White male student, illustrate the lower caste position that Black females occupy in our society and schools. It appears that the White teachers at her school do not consider Black girls worthy of protection, and the girls are aware of this. Of course, this is another example of the intersection of race and gender. Then, when they take measures to defend themselves, they are punished as severely as their attackers are. Black students generally receive harsher punishment than Whites for the same, or less severe, violations (Irvine, 1990).

Their narratives suggest that male teachers are the perpetrators of sexist behaviour. Although they heard and witnessed inappropriate "jokes" and behaviour, the girls chose not to
speak out. Interestingly, while they were hesitant about labelling teachers, or incidents involving them, as racist, they readily labelled teachers as sexist, but hastened to add that "it was just a joke." As with racism, they were more likely to confront sexism during classroom debates and sometimes when dealing with male students, but not the sexist behaviour of their teachers.

The use of gender stereotypes and sexist language in the curricular material appears to be on the decline. With respect to language, the feminist movement has succeeded where the anti-racism "movement" has failed. Gender-neutral language is almost exclusively used in the media, business and in scholarly material. For example, chair/chairperson has replaced chairman, and letter carrier has replaced postman. This change coincided with the surge of White women entering the labour force. Their male counterparts, who control the media, business and other aspects of our society, yielded to accommodate them.

Black people have had a more difficult time getting "colour neutral" language institutionalised. Words like "black" and "dark" are still used to describe bad or negative situations. As recently as August 16, 1998, The Toronto Star carried a front page story with the caption, "Black Monday 2: The day they put Drabinsky on ice." The Star's White male ombudsperson dealt with this issue in his April 15, 1995 column. He said that the objection to the use of the word black in such ways shows a "lack of understanding in the world.... To suppress an offensive word is one thing. But a perfectly good colour (or more accurately, the absence of colour)? Sorry, this ombud does not buy that." If this is the case, white is "a perfectly good colour" too, why is it not used to describe negative situations and everything that is bad? Is it because those who assign the labels are themselves "white"? The media wield powerful influence on children and schools should do their best to counter, not reinforce, these effects.

As with education in general, Black students, and girls in particular, need special encouragement in Math and Science. These are the subjects which generally lead to the highest paid and most prestigious careers - fields which tend to be dominated by White males (Aburdene & Naisbitt, 1992), except in predominantly non-White societies. Tutoring programmes and remedial classes may be necessary for those who had early negative experiences with these subjects.

With respect to Black students, most of the participants felt that staff favoured girls over
boys. This finding contradicts most of what is written in the literature. Studies based mainly on White students show that teachers tend to interact more with males (Shakeshaft, 1986; Sadker & Sadker, 1986; Stanworth, 1987; Leicester, 1991) although they consider females as having a higher potential for learning (Cornbleth & Korth, 1980 in Hale-Benson, 1989). My finding is, however, consistent with the literature that deals with Black students (Hare & Castanell, 1985; Mac an Ghaill, 1988; Hale-Benson, 1989; Solomon, 1992; Dei, 1997). In addition to feeling more accepted by their teachers, the girls generally believed that, as Black boys, they would have been less academically oriented. As reasons for this they cited negative peer pressure, low teacher expectations and lack of encouragement from teachers. Unfortunately I did not ask how their experiences would have differed had they been White boys. Their answers might have revealed aspects of White male privilege in our educational institutions (Jensen, 1998).

There is a need for more anti-sexism training for students and staff of both sexes. Sexism, racism and other forms of discrimination should be openly discussed and analysed in all schools. The students of today will control the media and the rest of society tomorrow therefore change must begin in our schools. Assertiveness training workshops should also be offered to girls. Unless they are empowered to speak out, sexist behaviour and gender stereotyping will continue to be "normal" elements of schooling. Finally, the suggestion by Foster (1985) should be seriously considered - martial arts training for all girls.

6.6. SUMMARY.

In this chapter I presented the participants' responses, or lack thereof, to gender discrimination in their schools. Most of them appear unsure of what constitutes sexist behaviour, more so in its subtle forms. When faced with clearly sexist incidents, they are generally unwilling to confront it and respond with laughter, silence or denial. As long as sexism does not prevent them from achieving something, they prefer to ignore it.

Male students, of all races, tend to disrespect girls. This may be related, in part, to the examples set by sexist male teachers. Except for Black teachers, sexist behaviour towards Black females is ignored. This is another area where race and sex intersect. Black females are not considered delicate ladies, worthy of protection, as are Whites (hooks, 1981; Mirza, 1993). Some girls responded to sexist statements from boys and during classroom debates.
Few of them are taking, and doing well in, Mathematics and the Physical Sciences. Most who are not doing well traced their problem to a teacher who had directly or indirectly discouraged them in an earlier grade. There is the perception that teachers think these subjects are not for Black girls.

With respect to their status in school, vis-à-vis Black boys, they know that they are more accepted by their teachers. They receive more positive attention than the boys. They believe that teachers are more likely to "pick on," or completely ignore, Black boys who, they feel, need attention and to be encouraged. The only advantage in being a boy, is that they will have fewer restrictions at home and more freedom to absent themselves from classes (to participate in sporting events).

In chapter seven I describe their strategies for coping with racism, sexism and other facets of school life.

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NOTES

1. With this I could identify. I was quite an assertive, perhaps aggressive, teen who was respected by the boys. In those more innocent times we were not into dating and romance - just friendship and athletic competition. Then, and now, my closest friends and confidants are males.

2. I am confused about some of the changes which, to me, are regressive. The use of the masculine "actor" to refer to both sexes is akin to the old custom of using "he" in a similar manner. The feminists should have sought to feminise all masculine nouns for which there is no feminine equivalent rather than subsume females under distinctly masculine forms.
CHAPTER 7
COPING STRATEGIES

High achieving Black students face many stressors at school. In addition to racism, and sexism in the case of females, they may face intragroup ostracism, alienation and assaults (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986; Bennett & Le Compte, 1990; Ford, 1993; Hemmings, 1996). Coping successfully with these burdens depends on a combination of inner strength and strategy. A variety of coping strategies have been identified in the literature. These include "racelessness" (Fordham, 1988), silence and invisibility (Fordham, 1993), acting White (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986), insubordination (Fuller, 1980, Ford, 1992), becoming class clowns (Kunjufu, 1988, in Kennedy, 1996, Ogbu, 1992), religious belief and practice (Tomlinson, 1983; Bryan, 1987), the use of multiple images (Hemmings, 1996) and family and peer support (Tomlinson, 1983; Ford, 1993, Hall Mark, 1996). Other than peer/family and religious support, I could find no evidence that the girls in my study had adopted any of these strategies. They had developed totally different strategies. They made sure that they were seen and heard; they were not shy about their ethnicity, culture or academic achievements. They displayed pro-school behaviours and did not "clown around" in class. These girls are clearly different from the "stereotype" of academically oriented Black students. Their strategies suggest a certain amount of self-confidence and high self-esteem, and these are evident in their descriptions of their strengths.

7.1. STRENGTHS/POSITIVE ATTRIBUTES.

Inner strength, together with successful coping strategies, enable oppressed people to cope with and resist their oppression. Despite the disadvantages that they face, many Black females are found to be self-confident and to have high self-esteem (Fuller, 1980; Tomlinson, 1983; Coultas, 1989; Evans, 1988). Those in this study appear to have similar traits. I asked them questions about their strengths, or most positive attributes, and their weaknesses. Based on their responses, they seem to have a healthy self-esteem.

Fourteen girls spoke about their leadership skills, high self-esteem and outspoken, independent nature. Beverley said, "I'm independent. I know anything that I start, I can finish, once I encourage myself. I'm very ambitious and that will take me a long way. I don't really
befriend a lot of people and I do my work." Brenda A identified her self-esteem and the source of it was attributed to "hearing positive things from my mother and from my teachers and even from my peers." Denise talked, not only about her own self-esteem but her practice of boosting other people’s:

I know I am intelligent and it feels good because, knowing their stereotype of the Black students - that they’re not as intelligent as the Whites or the Orientals - it does boost me up a little bit. It boosts my courage and my self-esteem.... I like me, personally. I like to raise other people’s self-esteem. I like to make other people know that they’re, you know, good, important. That’s a strong point in me.

June identified her determination and assertiveness. She cited parental influence in the development of these "strong" traits:

My determination and not letting people walk all over me.

S: From where did you get that?

R: I don’t know. I guess my mother, I don’t know.

S: You know, some parents tell their children, "You have to speak up for yourself," do you get that sort of advice from yours?

R: Yeah. Like, the way my mother is, if she doesn’t like something, she’s going to tell you. So I guess I sort of just picked up on that.

Other girls, like Betty, could not explain how they became the way they are:

I’m very outspoken. It’s like, I speak my mind. If it’s going to offend somebody, I’m sorry, but this is the way I feel. I’m entitled to my own opinion, type of thing.

S: From where did you get that?

R: I don’t know. Ever since, I’ve been bold. I find myself very outspoken.

The responses of six girls support the stereotype of the Black woman as both strong and caring (hooks, 1981; Mirza, 1993). Their most positive attributes are that they are caring and understanding. Two others mentioned these in addition to their "strong" traits. Erica said that, "I think I’m a real caring person, and I’m real honest and stuff. I really help people a lot." Brenda B also values this trait. She said:

I’m a role model. I didn’t choose that role, I have it, I’ve accepted it, and I’m okay with it. Like, I think I do it well. I help people and people know if they call Brenda, they will
get help. If they need something, Brenda, and if she can do it, she'll do it. So I'm like, a sort of supporter. I help people in that instance or circumstance.

I followed this question with one about their weaknesses. Here too, there was nothing in their responses that implied low self-esteem. Eight of them cited procrastination, or as Paula put it, "lack of self-discipline" as their weakness. Traits such as "helpful" and "trusting," considered "strengths" by some of the girls, were cited as weaknesses by others, and in two cases, by the same girls who considered them strengths. For example, Brenda B said, "Maybe I'm too helpful, sometimes I've thought that.... And sometimes I feel that it's not really a weakness. Like, it's never hurt me or my education. But maybe I'm too, out there for everybody." Beverley, on the other hand, thinks that being too nice can be dangerous. She said that:

I'm too nice (laughs). Like, back home [Trinidad], niceness is good, but up here, it's really bad. It's dangerous because a lot of people take advantage of you. That's one thing that I've noticed. A lot of people are like, "Oh Beverley, can you do this? Beverley can you do that? Do you have money?" And I'm like, "Okay" and I lend them money all the time. I don't carry money around with me now because I can't lie, I feel guilty. If I have the money and this person asked me and they need it, I give it to them.

Jennifer is the only one whose weakness is boys. She had earlier said that being "hot-headed and opinionated" were her strengths. However this was not the case with boys:

I say I'm hot-headed, but when it comes to boys, I always have a weak spot and I don't like that. I can't stand up to guys, boyfriends, as easily as I could my girlfriends or my parents. I want to get rid of that weak spot because, eventually, they're going to walk all over me and I don't want that to happen.

Stephanie, whose greatest strength is "self-motivation," could not identify any weaknesses.

7.2. RACELESSNESS AND ACTING WHITE.

With the "raceless" personna, bright Black students distance themselves from other Blacks and Black cultural events. Those who "act White" adopt what is perceived as, White cultural norms and practices (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986). In another study, it was observed that achieving Blacks switched images to suit the particular milieu in which they found themselves (Hemmings, 1996). Believing these to be in conflict, they presented themselves as model students, Black persons and other selves (Hemmings, 1996).

None of these forms of coping was evident in my sample. For one thing, the girls'
closest friends are predominantly Black or "minority", most being of Caribbean origin. In addition, they are all involved in some type of Caribbean or African cultural or educational activity in their schools and/or the community. For example, Brenda B co-organised the Black History assembly at her school and also made a speech; Simone is active in the African Heritage Club at her school and Elizabeth is in the Caribbean dance and the Anti-racism groups at her school.

The girls resent the fact that being well-behaved is considered "acting White." Karen passionately expressed her feelings about this and being a "nerd":

Oh yes, oh yes! This is a whole new thing now! A White girl once asked me, "Are you White wash?" She actually asked me! No, the ignorance cannot be so bad! My gosh! I asked her, "How can you say that to me? You're saying Black people can't be smart!" Most of my friends are Chinese but the Black people that I do talk to at school, my acquaintances and friends, we've been talking about that kind of thing too. And I think they probably said that about me too, but I figure that, "I've got a mind, I know where I'm going in life, so you think what you will."

S: Tell me more about your conversation with that White girl.

R: It wasn't a long conversation because it was insulting my intelligence to talk to her, you know what I mean? You know, what does that mean? What's Whitewashed? Are you Blackwashed because you wear baggy pants? And you listen to Black music? I mean, it doesn't make any sense! So I said, "I don't see myself as Whitewashed anything. I'm Black and I'm intelligent. It doesn't mean that I'm trying to be White because I'm trying to be smart. Black people can be smart." And the conversation was done there because I said I'm not going any farther with you.... I think that some Black students feel that they can't excel because then they'll be considered, "Oh, I'm trying to be White." It's really sad because a lot of them have a lot of potential and it's just wasted on skipping class and causing trouble. If they go to class, "Oh, you're a nerd." Like, I was kind of a nerd, if you want to call it that, but at the same time, I can party pretty bad too, you know. It's all an image.

S: Did they ever call you a nerd to your face?

R: Jokingly, yes. A lot of people did but it's, "Hey, nerd is boss in the future, so I'll see you there man! You'll be working for me. So, you know?" (Laughs. This reference was to Microsoft's Bill Gates who, reportedly, was a nerd in high school).

Like Karen, Susan, Jennifer and their high-achieving friends use humour to cope with the "Whitewashed" label, they tease one another and make jokes about it. Socialising with Black friends and participating in Black cultural activities connect them to their less successful
counterparts. Jennifer explains why she is not ostracised by other Black students:

Oh they tell me that all the time [laughs], "Jennifer, you're acting White; you're Whitewashed." but they know I'm not because all my friends, all my good friends, are Black and I listen to all the Black music and, well, there's no such thing as Black music, I can't believe I said that! But, it's all the Black stuff, I guess. They just say that because of my marks. They feel I'm White because I get good marks and I'm trying to explain to them, "What! Do all White people get good marks? No. So you cannot tell me this." Yeah, they're just joking. I tell them, "Well, you're White too when you get good marks." I don't care. We make fun of each other all the time.

Brenda B said that she has never been described as "acting White." Her comment also reveals the attitude of other Black students towards her:

Never heard it! Never heard somebody describe me like that and personally, I don't think it's "acting White" because I don't think White people are the only people who can be well-mannered and behaved. I think a lot of Black people can do that and have done it. Like, students don't see it as "acting White," they see it as acting smart. There is a difference.... I'm just different! I think a lot of people who are different feel they have to be like everybody else.... I know a lot of people they don't quite fit, how people perceive the Black person, and that's me.... They don't call me Whitewashed, they've never thought about it because Brenda's different. They've learned to live with it. At first it's like, okay, maybe not, but eventually, you know, they talk to me. I make jokes, I'm just like them. I'm just different from them and they're okay with it.

Stephanie said that she is not labelled as such because "my friends are all like me - high achieving people." This is also the case with Simone who described what she thinks a Whitewashed person is like:

I wouldn't say they say it about me 'cause all my friends are like me, you know, they want to do their work. I choose my friends wisely.... I guess whoever they say are Whitewash are stuck-up too, like, they don't talk to nobody else, or whatever. I'm not like that. I see you in the hall, I wave, I talk to anybody.

Denise, in talking about a former friend of hers, hinted that the use of, or failure to use certain slangs also identifies those who are "Whitewashed":

I know this one girl, we used to talk and get along but our friendship is, like, terminated now. She's like, I would give her the name "Whitewashed." She hangs out with a lot of White girls, I don't see her hanging out with any Black girls. She's into the Greek, kind of Macedonian person. I don't talk to her anymore because of an incident we had a couple of years ago.

S: I thought "Whitewash" was the term for people who are behaving well in class and doing well?
R: No, that’s more of a nerd, kind of, suck up. The term "Whitewash" is used more like, well, she hangs around with White people, she talks like, how White people talk, you know, stuff like that.

S: But you talk like how White people talk, don’t you?

R: I don’t know. Probably, yeah, I would sound like it, but it depends on what you’re talking about and who you’re talking to. Like, certain times when you’re with your friends, you know you talk slang, but if you’re talking on a certain level, with a teacher, you’re not going to talk slang, you know?

Brenda A notes that such individuals are "usually described as snobbish or not part of the Black [school] community." June said that she has called some Black students "Whitewashed" because "they don’t care about Black people at all." This comment is interesting because it implies that White people do not care about Blacks. Whether "Whitewashed" students, as defined by Simone, are ostracised by other Black students, or choose not to associate with them, it is hard to tell.

7.3. SILENCE AND INVISIBILITY.

Fordham (1993:17) contends that silence and invisibility are highly valued prerequisites and obligatory components for academic success. She referred to bright African-American girls as "phantoms in the opera" - barely noticed and never heard. She believes that these girls had to present themselves as different from "those loud Black girls" in order to achieve academic success. The girls I interviewed are quite the opposite - they are loud and highly visible, but in constructive ways. Based on what they said, at school they are generally assertive, spirited and involved in classroom discussion. Reena’s description of a classroom situation helps to illustrate this point:

In my Law class there’s a lot of debating but my problem is people think that I look mad [angry] and they think that I’m upset. They say, "Calm down." I’m fine. But it’s just that I get so heated and I’m into the moment, and I’m like, standing up, pointing and shouting, ‘cause I want my point to be heard and if I think that you’re not hearing it or understanding, I speak louder and louder. So people think that I’m mad. My teacher got scared. She told my mom about it at the parent-teacher interviews, "I’ve never seen anyone, I’ve never seen Reena like this before, and I’ve had her for three years." She got scared! I’m the type of person, especially in my school, if I know something’s right and you’re saying it’s wrong, I’ll have to prove you wrong.

S: Even if it’s the teacher saying it?
R: Yeah. I will debate with anybody, with anybody. I love to debate, it's just that I have to calm down, I guess.

Unlike Reena, Jennifer has been taught how to communicate, thus reducing the likelihood of scaring her White teachers:

I always voice my opinion. If I don't agree with something that they are saying, I will tell them. I mean, I obey them, but I tell them, you know, my opinion on something. They take it into account. They might not act upon it, but at least they know how I feel. But I do obey them.

S: Do they consider that "being rude" - when you tell them your opinion?

R: No, because one of my [White] teachers, my Law teacher, told me to say it in a diplomatic way. So, if I say it in a diplomatic way, then they can't say that it's rude. So, if I'm going to say something, I have to say it in the right way so that they don't take offence.

S: So he sort of trained you how to say.

R: Well, we had a discussion in class about some teacher always taking things the students say the wrong way. Then he asked us, "Well, what was the manner in which you voiced your opinion?" And then students said, "I just told her flat out that 'what you're saying is wrong.'" Then he said, "Well, maybe that's how you feel, but if you had said it in a more diplomatic way they could not actually say that you're rude and you're disrespecting the teacher." So, from then on I learned that if I want to say something, I say it in a diplomatic way so I cannot be condemned for that.

S: Are they all open to these opinions, or do you have some of them who try to shut you up?

R: Yeah, with some teachers, you have no say, "What I say goes." If they say that, I have to back down because I just get into trouble. I just leave it.

S: Yeah, but some of the other Black students probably won't just back down so easily.

R: No, they don't.

Like Black students at the GTA High School (Anthony, 1994, 1995a), their voices are not used only for academic debates but also to defend their race. Karen recalled a time when she was in "one of those moods" and confronted a teacher about the common practice of describing negative things as "black":

I've had pretty good teachers and I'm very outspoken anyways. There was one time
when a teacher was talking about somebody being blacklisted, right? So, I was in one of those moods I guess, and I was like, "Blacklisted?! Why do they say that, blacklisted, blackmail? These negative things!" 'Cause my dad and I talk about these things, you know? And she was like, "Well, I didn’t mean anything by that." "But Miss, you’ve got to think, you know, when you say stuff like that. That’s the kind of impression that you’re giving." She was like, "Okay, I’m sorry." You know, she kind of thought about it. So, I put myself into a position where I can talk to my teachers very well, I can say something like that and they’re not like, "Oh, you’re being disrespectful." Because I think, especially at the OAC level, you should be a peer, pretty close to a peer, with your teacher. You know, you shouldn’t still be in that kind of, like when you’re in Kindergarten and the teacher tells you what to do all the time and holds your hand. You should be able to have adult conversations.

Karen’s reference to being in "a mood" suggests that she is not always confrontational. This is further illustrated by Simone, a usually soft-spoken student from a single parent home:

Yeah, in the classroom I become very opinionated when I hear something that I don’t like. In English we had this discussion - it kind of had to do with single parents. I live with a single parent. So I was like, "Okay, this is how it works. Everybody seems to think that coming from a single parent means that the family is broken and the kids are delinquent. I mean, it’s not like that." ... Yeah, I challenged them!

Being vocal and opinionated may help reduce the likelihood of being harassed by staff and students. Brenda B explained why she does "not get a lot of personal attacks from teachers":

Like, I don’t get a lot of personal attacks from teachers or whatever, because they know better - a lot of teachers know better. "Don’t bother her, because she has an opinion. She’s going to say something to you and you may not want to hear it."

Earlier in the interview Brenda recounted a time when she shocked the principal, teachers and students who were present - it was the proverbial "last straw" and she "exploded." The incident began when she and some of her Black friends were harassed in the school library by the librarian who "always comes and picks on us." On this day things got to the point where they (eight or ten of them) were sent to the vice-principal’s office. The librarian did not accompany them. Brenda said:

I listened to everything the man [vice-principal] had to say. I don’t know, something just went off in my head. I raised my hand and I said, "I have something to say." My friends were shocked because I talked for ten minutes. I said, "First of all, she [librarian] has a problem with us, where is she? Why is she always hiding behind the VPs? We’re not going to bite her. We’re not going to say anything to her, but why is she not here in this conversation? Why are we having this conversation with you? She comes and tells you her opinion and we have to sit here and listen to you tell us her opinion but she’s not here to hear our opinion. You know, maybe there’s not a problem with us, because there
are a lot of people, not only in our group, that are complaining about this librarian, a lot of people are complaining about her!... So, it doesn't matter what she does, we have to sit here and take it? I don't think this is right!" My friends were shocked because I don't usually talk, I just sit there and say, "Okay, fine." But, it was wrong. I said, "My friend got kicked out of the library, he can't go back in. They don't want to hear his apology. What is this? This is school, we're supposed to be learning here! Why is it we're having all these problems with her? Don't you realise there's a problem with her?" I just grabbed this whole conversation. He didn't want to hear me again, but I got my point across. And like, after that, they were more open-minded and they gave us a seminar room until a VCR was stolen. And now, all of a sudden, they think we might have stolen it. We didn't touch the VCR, but no more seminar room. We put up with a lot of crap from them. And personally, I think they could have handled it a lot better; as an OAC student I saw many possibilities that they weren't taking.

S: So that's clearly discrimination. As a Black person, how did that make you feel?

R: I didn't like it. It got to me, but you get used to it, sort of. It was hard to cope with it, but the fact that other people were going through it, made it easier. We just figured they're not going to get rid of her at all, we can't do anything about it. We just try to make as little quarrel as possible, do our work, try not to get into trouble and try to get out of high school. A lot of my friends did that - they watched what they said and they watched what they did. I never really chose that method. I figure, I'm going to say what I'm going to say. I'm not rude to my teachers, I have a lot of respect and a lot of love for my teachers. But if some people decide that they want to get on my case for no good reason, that's their problem, but excuse me if I have something to say about it. I know a lot of people who just, you know, "Keep quiet, don't say anything, keep quiet," but I couldn't handle that. Like, I did it at first, but then, I'm like, "Why? I have a right to say what I want, if you don't like it, that's your business."

For some of them the source of empowerment is in their extracurricular activities. Susan found the confidence to speak up from her [Caribbean] dance class:

Well, now they notice me because now I answer, now I'll debate, now I'll put my hand up more, and you know, volunteer information more. Sometimes I'm still quiet but, you know, I'm a lot louder now. I guess that comes from dance class, I guess also from my parents teaching me to speak up, speak up for myself. Like, you know, be stronger!

In addition to being vocal, they are not hesitant about high visibility. Reena, who is involved in a number of extra-curricular activities, planned on increasing her visibility in the new school year:

I said to myself, and I said to my friends and my family, "Listen, I'm making my name in my school this year, I'm making my name. People are going to be sick of me when I leave that school and that's the way I want it. That's how I want it."
May's comment suggests that Black students are actively involved in increasing their visibility, at least in her school:

It's [her school] mostly White, Chinese and Indian [Asian], and then we would come in, maybe, fourth. That sounds bad, but it's good. It was worse before, but we're increasing.

S: But, would you say that the Black student population is visible?

R: Visible? Yes, we are very visible. We make ourselves known, we try to get our side known. We do things for Black history month. Yeah, we are visible.

There may be times, however, when some of them prefer to be less visible. To reduce the likelihood of being "hassled" by school staff, Brenda B and other Black students eat their lunch in the gym instead of the school cafeteria:

We have a gym where we eat lunch, a lot of Black students. It's not because we don't want to be around White people you know, so many people think. It's just because it's quiet, not like the cafeteria. We can say our own little things, we can tell our own little stories and you don't get hassled as much. You're in a quiet, confined space.

Several researchers have found that bright Black children, girls more so, tend to be ignored in the classroom. This, it seems, is not the case with most of the participants. They ask questions, offer opinions and generally do not feel that teachers ignore or overlook them. Betty feels that participation depends on the teachers, "It depends on, really, the teacher. Like, if they're open-minded about things. All my teachers they have no problem with, you know, you have your little say, whatever. So I never felt it was a problem." Erica recalled a comment from a teacher which suggests that she frequently answers questions:

Yeah, I feel comfortable like saying that I don't understand, can you just go over it, and stuff.

S: Do you put your hand up to answer questions?

R: Yeah, I love doing that. My Math teacher, after class one day, she's like, "Don't you give anyone else a chance to answer the question?" 'cause I'm real good at Math. But I wouldn't do real good in advanced Math, I'm real good at the general level.

S: In any of your classes, do you ever feel like you should shut up and keep quiet?

R: No, never.
Of the twenty girls I interviewed, Joanne is the only one who said she does not feel comfortable asking questions in class:

No, I don't [feel comfortable]. I'm always quiet in class, I'm always just sitting. If I have a burning question, I'll probably ask my friend to ask.

S: Why is that? Are you shy?

R: I don't know. I don't like to think I'm shy, but I guess I am.

S: Is it that you're intimidated by the teacher or is it because you don't want your friends to know that you don't understand something? Why would you ask your friend to ask?

R: Probably intimidated by the teacher.

S: And in your old school, were you quiet over there too?

R: Yeah, I was. I've always been quiet. I do talk [with friends], but I don't really ask questions.

I mentioned that bright Black students at the GTA High School said that they felt ignored in class and asked if this was their experience too. Most of them said that the teachers tend to call on, or interact more with, bright students. This implies that those who are not getting good grades are usually ignored. Paula, who has the lowest average of all the girls, said that when she makes comments in class her teachers "don't usually give a response." She believes that:

Some teachers will ask mostly girls or their favourite student in the class or the person they know always has the answer.

S: Who are their favourites? White ones? Chinese? Or is there a mix?

R: I think it's mostly who they notice, who is a little more bright, I guess.

Simone's position that, "When you're quiet they don't really pay attention to you" is not supported by Keisha. Keisha said that teachers call on her because, when they ask questions, she looks down at her desk or sometimes daydreams. Denise and Brenda B expressed their frustration about not being chosen in class when they have their hand up but neither thinks this is racist. Denise said, "You know, if you have all the answers they might pick us once in a while. Even though hands are up they might see someone who's just sitting there quietly and pick them, just so they can have an opportunity to speak." Brenda B. has had "a few teachers"
look past her and call on other students, but:

I don’t take it personally. To me, that’s not racism. If they do it continuously, in every class, in every subject, then okay, maybe…. Sometimes you feel ignored because you’re smart. Like this isn’t a bad thing. I realise if I was teaching and somebody knew all the answers, I wouldn’t always ask them. I never really felt ignored though. They always knew that you were there. Like with my Biology teacher, he’d always say, "Well, I know you know Miss Brown, so we’re going to ask so and so." Heh, he knows I know. That’s all I wanted.

Joanne referred to her Math teacher as a "hypocrite" who tried to put her down when she was in her class. I asked, "What sort of things did she do or say to make you feel that way?" She replied:

Okay, here’s a class that I like to participate in, and if I put my hand up, she won’t choose me. Like, she’d go to someone else.

S: And then, would you say anything at all?

R: I wouldn’t say anything; I’d just put my hand back down.

Elizabeth likes to speak up, when she knows the answer, and finds it annoying when teachers ignore her:

It’s not like they constantly ignore you, or whatever. Sometimes they call on me, sometimes they don’t, even when I have my hand up.

S: So then, what would you do? Just take it down or say something to them?

R: No, I take it down. I’m like, annoyed, and then I try again. And if they get me, that’s fine, and if they don’t get me, then I really get annoyed and then I just, you know, shake it off, "Well, okay. Maybe this wasn’t my day. Maybe they wanted to ask other people for class participation." So I don’t really take it to heart too much.

Melissa has had similar experiences. In her Biology class, she just sits and listens "because he’s the type of man that, okay, you put your hand up and he is talking and talking. Finally I just say, forget it." In Karen’s opinion it is up to the students to "sell" themselves:

You have to make yourself known in classes because a lot of times, I find that, it could be a Black student or it could be a White student, it’s like, you have to sell yourself, basically. You have to let them know, "Hello, I’m here." Even though classes have only thirty in them, in university it’s even more. So you have to be vocal and you have to at least let them know that I’m here and I’m thinking and I want to learn. And you have to be enthusiastic about it. And I guess it’s because I naturally am, that it’s so easy for me. But I find that a lot of students don’t and they don’t get the higher marks.
Jennifer is noticed because of her looks, "I've not gone through that [feeling ignored], no. They notice me because everyone says I have a nice smile, so all the teachers take to me in the beginning. Yeah, I'm always acknowledged in class."

7.4. BEING THE CLASS CLOWN.

Assuming the role of the class clown was identified as yet another strategy achieving Blacks use to detract from their academic accomplishments and remain connected to their less academic counterparts (Fuller, 1980; Fordham & Ogbu, 1986; Kunjufu, 1988, in Kennedy, 1996; Ogbu, 1992). However, there is no evidence that the girls disguise their academic status by clowning around in the classroom. In chapter eight, where their motivation to achieve is presented, I describe their (mostly positive) feelings about public recognition of their achievements. Melissa thinks that being smart is an asset, "Some, [teachers and students] you know, they just talk to you differently because, if you weren't this smart then they wouldn't respect you as much." During junior high Elizabeth used to "play dumb" because she did not want her classmates to know how bright she was, but "when I got to high school, it didn't matter to me. I'm thinking, 'So what? I know this, I'm going to say I know this. That's what I know.'"

For Black students, personality correlates higher with academic grades than do common aptitude measures (Hare & Castenell, 1985; Riley, 1985; Wright, 1987). The participants in this study are aware of this. They know that clowning around carries academic sanctions. When I asked if the students' marks had anything to do with their behaviour, Denise replied:

Yeah, 'cause you know most of the lazy ones or the class clowns and stuff, they don't have as high marks as, you know, the quiet ones do. Partly because they are lazy and they don't do all their work because they talk in class or they are jokers and stuff like that. I think they [teachers] take that into consideration. I think they have to.

However, as Reena points out, the "quiet ones" do not always do well, "There's a lot of quiet people who don't do well and you'd always expect [them] to be the ones who do well. A lot of quiet people don't do well at all."

Some proportion of the marks is given for class participation and this poses another disincentive for clowning around. Jennifer talked about this when I asked if she cares what teachers think about her:
Yeah, because there are some teachers who base their marks and their strategies on the student. If they see that the student skips a lot and the student has a bad attitude, then it usually shows on the final mark that the student gets. The student could be a bright, intelligent person, doing well on tests, but when it comes to participation marks, it does help and play a big role. Teachers sometimes give you a mark because they don’t like your attitude.

S: So, you’re saying that the final mark could depend on your behaviour rather than on your actual ability in the subject?

R: Yeah, I’ve seen it before.

S: But, in a way, that’s not fair because they’re grading behaviour not...

R: I know. It’s true, but they do! They say, "If you skip my class, then don’t expect to do well. If you have a bad attitude and don’t respect the teacher, then don’t expect to do well in my class." They tell you sometimes at the beginning when you take the course. They deduct marks and you can’t say anything about it because the teacher can say, "Well, participation takes into account skips and attitude and that" and they have a valid basis for doing that.

Joanne had a personal experience of this. She feels that teachers get upset when students skip and still do well in the subject:

I remember I had a problem with a Math teacher because she gets upset when you do well and you don’t come to class - they don’t like that. Like, I have a problem with being late but I’m not always late, probably 2 to 5 minutes late, that’s it. In Math I had an 89 average and to be exempted [from final exams] you need a 70 or over. And she told me that I don’t have enough hours in the course to be exempted. And I go, "How is that possible? Being late two or five minutes, how is that hours?" And she goes, "Well, that’s the policy." And she made me take the final exam and it brought my mark down lower because, obviously, when you have an exam with stuff from first term, it’s going to be harder than being exempt. It lowered my mark to an 81.

In Melissa’s school, the grading of behaviour has been institutionalised:

You have to behave well because they have Studentship, which is like attitude, behaviour, da, da, da. So there’s some teachers, if they don’t like your attitude, you’ll get zero.

S: Studentship eh? So that’s what it’s called?

R: Hm, hm. In OAC it’s worth 10% of your mark and in other grades it’s like 15 or 20% of your mark, so it’s a lot.

This strategy indicates the high value they place on doing well.
7.5. OSTRACISM AND ISOLATION.

Unlike the academic Black girls encountered in the literature (Damico & Scott, 1988; Irvine, 1990; Fordham, 1993; Hemmings, 1996), those in my study do not appear to be a socially isolated group. When I asked what they liked best about school, nine of them clearly identified their friends first. About her friends Jennifer said, "We make each other feel important all the time. If any of us have problems, we are always there for each other." Five other girls made indirect reference to their friends by stating that what they liked most was "interacting with other people." These were mentioned in addition to learning. Joanne and Karen are the only two who do not really like going to school (although they enjoy learning) but this has nothing to do with feelings of isolation. Joanne works and hates getting up early to go to school the next day. She transferred from Hilltop Collegiate to Pinecrest a year ago and does not have many close friends yet. Karen considers herself too mature for the "little kids ... my age" who attend high school.2

The girls do not feel isolated from disengaged student. When we talked about students who "hang out" and waste their time, May said, "You know it’s funny, because I still interact with them, I still talk to them, we’re still cool." She also said that they do not call her names like brainiac, nerd or Whitewashed. Unlike May, most of the others have chosen not to associate with recalcitrant students. Beverley’s statement typifies their explanation for avoiding them - the desire to avoid trouble:

I'm liked by everybody, but not really accepted 'cause I guess, I take myself away from a lot of people. Like, if I see trouble, I don't go near it. Like, certain people I don't hang around with because I don't want to be there. They might think that I'm too uppity or whatever, that's the way they put it, "You're too good for everybody." But if I see that a person has certain habits, and I don't like it, then I don't see any sense of hanging around with them. I tend to keep to myself and the people that I choose to be my friends. I tend to give everybody an equal chance but I usually have a good sense of what a person is like and the way they carry themselves.

The literature shows that high achieving students tend to associate with those like themselves (Tomlinson, 1983; Damico & Scott, 1988; Bennett & Le Compte, 1990). However the girls that I interviewed do not associate with advanced students only, but with those who are academically oriented. Everyone of them has Black friends in the general stream.3 I asked if their "general" friends try to pull them down or encourage them to waste time. As illustrated
by Reena’s response, this was not the case, "No. We normally sit and do work together. I would help her with her work and she would help me with mine. Disregarding the fact that it was general, we just helped each other." In answer to this question Keisha said:

Oh no, not at all! Actually they more seek my help than if I were to fool around with them. They say, "Keisha, I’m having trouble with this course, can you help me?" And I know one thing, I try to limit my time with my friends and concentrate more on my studies ... That's one thing, I picked who I want to hang out with. Like, I knew who my friends were.

7.6. FAMILY AND RELIGIOUS SUPPORT.

In the struggle for survival, most West Indians turn to religion for both spiritual and physical support (Coelho, 1988). In addition to this, family support is crucial in helping Black children to resist the negative effects of racism (Coultas, 1989). Black parents know that their children will encounter discrimination in the schools and so they give them advice on how to cope with it and how to get along with others. Beverley who had said that "sucking up" is the way to get along with school staff (section 4.4), had been given this advice by her mother:

Most of the times I just stay out of their [school staff] way. If I have to get something I’m usually nice. My mom always tells me, "Kiss up, that's the easiest way to get anything you want, you know, make them feel like you like them. Sorry to be telling you that, hon, but that's the way to go." Some of them are really nice, I don’t have to kiss up to them. Some of them I really do like, they help me a lot. And there's others, you just have to pretend to get whatever you want.... My mom always told me I shouldn’t bother with what people think. There's good White people and there's bad White people and they are always the ones who'll try to put you down, so you must try to feel good about yourself.

May’s father told her what many Black parents tell their children (Ford, 1993):

My father tells me that, if I’m in a class with another White person, I have to be better to get the same grade that the White person is getting, my work has to be better than that person for both of us to get the same mark because I’m Black. And I understand. He tells me that if I feel anything racist, to go talk to the teacher right away or go to him and he’ll deal with it. But I never let it get to that point though, I just kind of deal with it myself.

Elizabeth’s parents talk about their own experiences of racism to prepare her for "what's out there":

They’d tell me stories to kind of like, show me what's out there and what type of people I might have to deal with.

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S: Do they tell you stories about their own experiences of racism?

R: Hm, hm. And they say, no matter what happens, don't ever say, "Well it's because I'm Black," 'cause the minute you say that, they're going to react with something else.

Simone spoke about the teachings from her mother and her religion:

Well, she tries her best to tell me that I shouldn't be racist against people. I think my religion helps with that a lot too because the main belief is, "a person is a person, it doesn't matter about race or anything like that." And my mom has instilled that in me, like ever since I can remember. And if somebody's racist towards you, I mean there's nothing I can really do about it. I'm a very mild person. I'm not a person who goes back and quarrels and causes fights, you know. I keep a low profile.

Beverley, Joanne and Keisha also rely on their religious beliefs for some measure of support. Beverley's church teaches her that, "There's no problem that you can't overcome. God won't give you any problem that you can't take care of. He makes it hard, but you will overcome it."

7.7. IGNORING RACISM AND SEXISM.

All the girls admitted that racism and sexism exist in their schools, but on a personal level, they claim to "not think about it nor see it." At one point during the interview, Paula said that she does not "think about those things" but subsequent statements revealed that, in fact, she does:

I don't know, I have never really thought about it. I don't really think about those things. Like sometimes, sometimes maybe.... Some of the things, I just can't think of them right now. I think I might have just brushed it off and never really thought about it.

Talking about personal experiences of discrimination can sometimes be difficult. Later in the interview when I asked if her experience of school would differ had she been White, she said, "Yes it would, because of what I've seen in all those other White people." Roxy related an episode that she witnessed in the classroom when a teacher made a stereotypical comment to a Black male student. Although it "shocked" her, she said, "I don't really focus on these things, so it's not something I file away and think about. It's not something that I sit down and think about." Joanne spoke a lot about the unfair treatment meted out to Black males at her school: she talked about a Black student who was cheated out of an athletic award; she attributes her silence in the classroom to being intimidated by her teachers; she is annoyed that her Math teacher always ignores her when she puts her hand up to answer a question, yet when I asked
about her experiences of racism she replied:

I don’t see it. I don’t know, maybe I’m just blind to it, but I don’t see it. In school I don’t like to think that because I’m Black I can’t achieve as well as a White. I don’t want to look upon it that way. I used to think like that, but I grew out of it.

Stephanie knows that there is discrimination in her school but she has decided to ignore racism and sexism until she is personally affected:

Maybe I’m an idealist, but I don’t see that. Like, yeah, I know that there are bad things going on at the school, and I know that there are bad people, but I don’t really come in contact with them. So, I can ignore it for a little while, until it comes and lands on my lap.

The girls cope with racism and sexism by ignoring them or, at least, trying to. Denial or minimisation of discrimination, by women and members of stigmatised groups, is a coping strategy reported by several researchers (Crocker, et al, 1993; Ruggiero & Taylor, 1997). According to these authors, this behaviour enables individuals to perceive some sense of control over life’s events and facilitates social acceptance by the "in" groups. This may be the case with my study participants. On the other hand, it may be that they recognise and respond only to blatant forms of such discrimination. Brenda B notes that:

It’s hard for me because I don’t consider everything racism or everything sexism. It might be, the person might have all intentions but unless it’s blatant, unless I see it. In certain circumstances it’s like, it could be racism. Who cares? Why am I going to sit here and worry, "It could be, it could be." Maybe if I could say, "It is racism, or sexism," then maybe there should be something done about it.

7.8. IN SCHOOL BEHAVIOUR: Mildly militant.

The negative stereotype of Black students is known to all the girls. Among other things, Black students are seen as indisciplined, disobedient and resistant to authority (Carrington, 1983; Mac an Ghaill, 1988; Solomon, 1992). Some academically successful ones adopt these behaviours to prevent being ostracised by their disengaged counterparts (Fuller, 1980; Fordham, 1993; Hemmings, 1996). Among the girls in my study are some who engage in mildly militant practices but avoid serious conflict. Paula, for example, states that she breaks only the rules "that they don’t really enforce, like being in the hallways at lunch time" because she is "afraid of getting in trouble." She went on to say, "I don’t make any contention between me and my teachers. I just want to have them teach me and get my credits, and that’s it." Beverley admitted
that she does not always obey school rules:

Not all the time (laughs), but most of the time I do.... The most things I do at school is, I like skipping classes. I skip classes and they won't do anything. Actually, they called me down [to the office] one time for skipping classes. "Why are you skipping classes?" I'm like, "I didn't feel like going." And they'll go, "Well, you go to the next class, okay?" And I'm like, "All right." And that's all that was said.

June skips classes too because, she said, "Sometimes I just need a break. I'll just sit in the cafeteria or do something." As with Beverley, her teachers do not say anything about it because, "I have such a good reputation with the teachers; they don't really care." Joanne tries to be "nice, especially to teachers" but there are some days when she may be pushed over the edge. She said, "Everyone has their days, you know, when you just go too far.... and I might tell them something or whatever."

The majority of them, however, are conformists who obey school rules and regulations. Like Keisha, they do not wish to be categorised as delinquent Black students:

I was like, more to myself, sometimes. And if a teacher tried to argue with me, I'd just leave. I wouldn't stay and argue. I'd try to get my point across but if he wouldn't listen, there's no sense in me being there. I just left.... In school I'm more of a sedate person. I know that at home I would act different. But when it came to the public, I was more sedate and just knew what I was about. I'm myself. So if they want to categorise me as being like the others [trouble-makers], then they are wrong.

Being "sedate" probably takes some effort because later in the interview Keisha told me, "I'm a person, I don't know, I have to keep moving around. I can't sit still for a certain period of time. And, I guess, doing all that studying, it gets boring after a while. You know there's a purpose, but it gets very boring. "Speaking for "smart Black youths" at her school, Denise made a similar observation:

There's a lot of smart Black youths in our school. We try to pull away from the stereotypes, even though there are some people that are pulling away from the academic courses and stuff like that. That's mostly because of laziness, you know. If they try really hard they can show that they are as smart as, you know, other races. They would pull it off.

Karen believes that how one behaves in school is related to one's class, not one's colour. Her statement reveals a very acute perception of some of the more subtle norms in her school:

It has nothing to do with your colour, it's your class system! It doesn't matter if you're Black, White or whatever, if you have no class, you have no class, okay? That's the big difference. You have to have a certain decorum, you have to carry yourself a certain
way, 'cause no one will respect you. They don't realise that. As much as I don't really like it, I know in this world, it's all, it's your image; it's what you speak, it's how you say it, and that's what they see most. If they see you act like you don't care, you don't want to be there, then why are they going to give you the time of day?

Cheating was one of the practices that Hemmings (1996) observed among successful Black students in her study. In my study, only Beverley mentioned this activity and it seems that she and her friends indulged in it because the opportunity was "given" to them:

That [Accounting] teacher was kind of like a joker. In my opinion, he's not supposed to be a teacher because he doesn't teach properly. He doesn't know how to teach.... He's White and he's slack. He would come to class with all these peverted jokes. He's a joker; he doesn't do his job. I got an 80 in that class and I did absolutely nothing. I just came to class and talked, and did the work and the test. And then, you know, you could be cheating in that class and he would not care. I don't even think he saw us cheating.

This is the same "peverted" teacher described by Denise (section 6.1).

7.9. DISCUSSION.

The relationship between high self-esteem and academic achievement is well documented (Stone, 1981; Verma & Bagley, 1982; Lawrence, 1987). The girls appear to have a healthy sense of self which is nurtured by their parents, teachers and peers. Unlike White girls described in the literature (NY State Education Department, 1989; American Association of University Women, 1990), their self-esteem seems to have increased during their tenure in high school. For example, Elizabeth who used to "play dumb" in junior high now proudly displays her brilliance. (The changes in Black girls' self-esteem, as they go through the school system, is a topic which should be investigated in future studies). Overall, the girls in my study appear to have a positive self-image which, no doubt, helps them to cope with discrimination and the demands of school and adolescence.

With respect to "acting White" they wonder, as I do, why being well-behaved in school, and doing well academically, are associated with White students? This, I argue, is a stereotype that was constructed, and is sustained, primarily by White people. White people have the power to make generalisations and to make these generalisations stick (Spina & Tai, 1998). This stereotype grew out of our experiences during and after slavery, including the period of colonisation. White people denied us access to education then and later provided us with
substandard educational resources and differential treatment (Walker, 1980; Hill, 1981). Thus we have had limited opportunities to develop an academic tradition, or to be rewarded when we do well, as have the Whites (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986). Is it any wonder that our academic achievement fell behind theirs? Rather than locate blame in racist policies and practices, the "deficiencies" of Black people are cited when our children fail to achieve academically. Over time, "academic failure" became synonymous with Black and being Black meant that one was not expected to achieve academically. Unfortunately many Black students internalise this and reject academics as a way of rejecting Whites and, what they perceive as, White culture. After all, they are taught by White teachers and from textbooks that were written by Whites. As difficult as it will be under White "oppression," Black people need to develop, or re-develop, a culture of achievement (Johnson, 1997). When this happens more Black students will realise that academic success is not exclusive to Whites.

The other aspect of "acting White" relates to behaviour. Here too, the positive attribute - being well-behaved - is associated with Whiteness. There usually is a reason why some students are disruptive and school staff should make an effort to understand why they behave that way (Rempel, 1991; Eitzen, 1992). Sometimes it is a plea for attention; sometimes they are trying to resist the schools' attempts to force them to conform to norms which are oppressive, repressive or discriminatory. An example of this is the "no hats" rule at Pinecrest (data not presented). The ten Pinecrest girls mentioned this and all felt that it was a silly rule designed to oppress Black students whose dress style often includes the wearing of hats - indoors. Staff can help Black students by being less autocratic and authoritarian when relating to them; by not applying negative stereotypes and by giving them the respect and courtesy due any human being. Most disruptive children respond favourably when presented with the right combination of positive reinforcement, fair discipline and genuine concern (Rempel, 1991; Eitzen, 1992). Part of the reason that Black students resist White authority may be that it calls to mind scenes of the White slave master, or plantation owner, "talking down" to, or subduing the Black slave, or labourer. Considering the link between "attitude" and marks, resistant students will be doomed to failure even when they are intellectually astute.

Delpit (1988) suggests that, to be successful, Black students must be taught the rules of the "culture of power." Included among these rules are the linguistic style and ways of
interacting, of the dominant culture. Translated into gender-specific behaviour, this means that Black girls should be reserved, orderly and quiet like the White ones described by Cornbleth and Korth (1980, in Hale-Benson, 1989). Recall that Reena's teacher asked her to "calm down" and Jennifer was taught how to communicate by her Law teacher (section 7.3). The girls know which behaviours are acceptable and so restrict their "loudness" to classroom debates. Outside of the classroom they are careful of their behaviour lest they be seen as nonconformist Black students (see also subsection 4.4.3). Their assertiveness, however, is demonstrated in their readiness to challenge the discriminatory or disparaging remarks that their teachers make when imparting "knowledge." This attitude has some protective qualities in that, teachers (and perhaps, students) refrain from saying certain things to them. Course marks provide another reason for ensuring that they are seen and heard in class. They know that a percentage of their marks is reserved for participation, and that quiet students often do not get high marks.

This finding is not supported in Dei's (1997) research. He found that Black female students felt intimidated in the classroom and unable to freely express themselves. A teacher commented that they are "very, very quiet in the classroom" but once outside, for example, in the school cafeteria, they become loud, their conversations "peppered" with offensive expletives (Dei, 1997:166). This teacher concluded that, "it is a reaction to an insecurity that they feel in almost every other situation." Only one of the girls that I interviewed (Joanne) felt uncomfortable participating in classroom discussion. However, there was nothing in her interview to suggest that she behaved boisterously outside of the classroom. Her biggest problem seemed to be getting to school on time, especially after working the previous night.

In their view, and mine, these girls have shown that it is possible to learn and apply the rules of the "culture of power," be reasonably well-behaved and have an academic orientation without sacrificing their Black identity. Their closest friends are Black, they listen to "Black" music, use Black slangs and are active in Black organisations at school and in the community. Where no clubs exist they are busy trying to get them organised and, during Black History month they make sure that it is commemorated in their schools. They have a strong racial identity and sense of pride in their cultural heritage. Sanders (1997:85) quotes Edwards and Polite (1992) who note that:

[S]uccessful Blacks are first and foremost affirmed and empowered by a positive sense
of racial identity. They fully understand that as Blacks they will encounter obstacles, prejudices, and inequities, but they never view their race as the cause of the problem.... It is this essential recognition that grounds the thinking of achieving Blacks, enabling them to ... gain a powerful measure of spiritual strength from the physical and psychological struggles that racism inevitably demands. (p.6)

Their parents have played a key role in nurturing and sustaining their positive sense of identity while preparing them for a world which is designed to destroy it. Parents of Black children help them to cope by reminding them that they "have to be twice as good to get half as far" (Sanders, 1997:85), or some version of this precept (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986; Ford, 1993). They tell them about their own experiences of racism and discrimination to prepare them "for what's out there." However, despite their awareness of racism (and sexism), the girls have chosen to "not see" it, as a way of coping with the distress it will otherwise cause. Racial prejudice increases emotional stress of Blacks more than in any other "minority" group in America (and, undoubtedly, in other White countries including Canada). This stress reduces students' willingness to persist at academic tasks and interferes with the cognitive processes involved in their learning (Gougis, 1986, in Codjoe, 1997). Overtine they also experience a reduction in their motivation to learn.

Religion plays a central role in the lives of many Canadian and West Indian Blacks (Walker, 1980; Hill, 1981; Talbot, 1984; Coelho, 1988; Bristow et al, 1994). Christians are taught that God created us in His image and likeness and that He loves us all (Holy Bible). We are encouraged, through Scripture and religious teachings, to believe that God cares especially about the poor, oppressed and marginalised people in the world. These, and other religious beliefs, have enabled many Blacks to cope with the stress of racial discrimination. All but two of the participants in this study are Christians, and of the 18 Christians, 16 are practising. Religious belief and practice have not been addressed in much of the literature on Black schooling (that I have read). However, where it is mentioned (Coultas, 1989; Ogbu, 1992), participation in religious activities was positively associated with academic success. Non-Christian Blacks may have different experiences. They face discrimination not only from non-Blacks but also from Black Christian students (Dei, 1997).

The girls in my study cannot be described as socially isolated. They all have a core group of friends who provide academic and emotional support - buffers against discrimination and
other stressors that they encounter. Beverley’s comment, about not having many friends, may suggest that she is experiencing the isolation that is associated with being a successful Black girl. This is not the case however, because, as noted in chapter four, she has five close (Black) friends. Most of the girls chose to avoid disruptive Blacks who are not academically oriented; few have maintained occasional ties with them. Whether in university (Tomlinson, 1983) or high school (Mac an Ghaill, 1988; Bennett & Le Compte, 1990; Codjoe, 1997), socialising with academic peers is an excellent strategy for maintaining one’s focus on achieving this type of success. The girls in my study were fortunate to have found Black girls of that ilk. In other studies, successful Black girls had formed friendships with successful girls of other races in order to maintain their academic focus (Grant, 1986; Irvine, 1990; Codjoe, 1997). It is interesting that "my" girls also formed close friendships with those in the lower stream. What they had in common was their desire to achieve academically.

7.10. **SUMMARY.**

I began this chapter by presenting the positive attributes (strengths) identified by the girls. Their strengths are a key component of their ability to cope with racism, sexism and other school-related problems. Having identified strengths such as "leadership skills" and "high self-esteem," the girls can be described as self-confident and having a healthy self-image. Unlike some Black girls described in the literature, they cannot be described as "raceless" or "acting White" because they participate in, and organise, various Black-related activities. They also have many friends, the closest of whom are Black and, in most cases, of West Indian heritage. Thus they are neither isolated nor lonely in school. They displayed traits that are quite the opposite from those attributed to successful Black students. For one thing, they are neither silent nor invisible. They make sure that they are seen and use their loudness in constructive ways - during class debates and sometimes to defend themselves against unfair treatment by school staff.

Although some admitted to breaking minor school rules, they are, for the most part, well-behaved and diligent in their academic work. While some Black students consider this "acting White" these girls do not think that being well-behaved and studying hard are the prerogative of White students. They are not shy about their academic achievements and do not engage in behaviours, such as clowning around, to mask their brilliance.
Their parents, friends and religious beliefs also help them to cope with the many stressors they face. With respect to racism and sexism, their main form of coping lies in ignoring, denying or minimising their personal experiences of discrimination. In some cases they appeared to be unsure that a particular incident was racist or sexist. Thus ignorance is also a factor in their response - if they cannot recognise racism and sexism, or do not wish to recognise them, then they do not have to deal with and cope with them. This form of "coping," which has been observed among various oppressed groups, allows some individuals to feel in control of their destiny.

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NOTES.

1. Self-esteem is defined as "how a person estimates their own intrinsic value; their own self-worth" (NY State Education Dept). Self-esteem is often used synonymously with self-concept, self-image, self-regard and self-confidence by non-psychologists (Verma & Bagley, 1982; Lawrence, 1987). Self-confidence is regarded as the behavioural component of self-esteem, i.e., how a person's self-esteem translates into behaviour when interacting with others. I use the terms interchangeably because the strict psychological distinctions are not necessary in the context of this thesis.

2. At the time of writing she has just completed her first year of university. She complained about the juvenile mentality of her classmates, "It's the same thing, they're just like the kids in high school."

3. There is no basic stream in any of the schools.
CHAPTER 8

ACADEMIC MOTIVATION

Motivation, a key variable in understanding academic achievement among Black students, has been extensively studied (Graham, 1994). I asked the girls what was the source of their motivation to achieve? Several sources were identified. These include their parents (14 girls), themselves (6 girls), a combination of self and family (7 girls) and racism. Three girls made reference to a teacher (Brenda A, Betty and Susan), and one, to a special programme for Black students at her school. A few of the girls, like Betty, cited multiple sources of motivation.

8.1. MOTIVATION FROM FAMILY AND CLOSE FRIENDS.

Family achievement orientation has a greater influence on Black students' achievement orientation than do sociodemographic variables (Clark, 1983; Ford, 1993; Hall Mark, 1996). I asked the girls to describe the kind of encouragement and support that they receive from their parents and other family members, with respect to their education. Based on their responses it is clear that there is tremendous parental involvement, more so from their mothers.

Brenda A's motivation comes from her mother who encourages her to believe that she can overcome obstacles with hard work:

I think it's from my mother. My mother is a very stubborn woman. She doesn't listen to me when I say I can't do something or it's very hard. She just says to "study harder." That's the type of attitude she has. She keeps telling me that she taught me how to read at the age of four, and I was reading everything. I don't know, I can't remember. But mom just keeps saying, "If it's a hard course, you have to study hard." That type of attitude. "Why are you on the phone when you should be studying?" And if I were to come home with a poor mark, she'd know the reason why. To her, there is no way that I could be studying straight through, concentrating on my books, and still come out with a poor mark.

Although Keisha credits her parents with encouraging her to succeed, she also mentions the church's influence. Her focus on her father's input may have something to do with the fact that he passed away three weeks before this interview:

I think it's my parents and the debates I have in church about the way we behave today, especially as a Black youth. And I know my parents taught me, they trained me, that's
one thing they did, they trained me very well, how to act, both at home and in public. I think that my dad's strict, because he's always been a person who's very persistent, very determined, especially when it comes to academics. And for all his children, he wants to see us succeed and achieve. Like, when I was in Music, he would always be by the piano and he wouldn't go away until I mastered that piece. So, he was more of, I guess, a role model. My mom was a role model as well. Like, she was always there to see that we did our home work, to see that we achieved in other curricular activities, but dad was more of the academic person.

Like Keisha's, Denise's father is also the more supportive parent:

My father, my father! My father is more of, he would say how he feels, you know? "I'm very proud of you, keep up the good work," you know. I had a conversation where I told him that school's kind of hard right now and bla, bla. I was talking about the pressures and, you know, the stuff that was going on in my life and he said, "Well, compare it to the mechanism of the water pipe. The water comes up by pressure, pressure makes the water rise." Well, I took that and I'll always remember that. So, he always seems to boost me up, you know, try to work harder and stuff like that.

Beverley's motivation comes primarily from a desire to please her mother - she mentioned herself only after I asked a leading question:

From my mom. She usually tells me that I can get anything that I want, I have to try. Even if something bad happens to you, it will just take a longer time to get what you want, but you can still get it, you know? She always tells me - not to discourage too much - that things will work out. Really.

S: Is there something that you want to be just for you?

R: Yeah. Most of the motivation is from mom, but I want to succeed and become the most successful person for myself. Most of it is not really success in the sense of having a big career or anything like that. I want to have a career, I want to be able to live comfortable so I'll do anything to do that, but it doesn't have to be to get a career. I just want to be happy and achieve that sense and happiness and, some sort of success, but I don't know what it is. A lot of people say, oh, they want to become rich but that's not my goal. That's not important, I don't see it as important. I never learned that to be important.

S: Did your dad ever tell you anything about education, about success or any kind of encouragement from him?

R: Yeah, he always encourages me to do well. But, my dad, I guess, he's a "don't care" kind of person and I guess, I get my independent side from him you know? Like, I do my own thing. I don't bother with people. But, he's more laid back than my mom. But he's like, if I say, "Oh dad, I'm going to do this", he says, "Go ahead," and he'll be
behind me to do it. That's the farthest that he encourages me 'cause I like to make my mother proud, and she's like, she always checks on me, and it makes me feel good.

The family is behind May's drive to succeed, but for reasons not cited by any of the other girls.

May desires is provide for her family:

I think my drive right now is to succeed to provide the most I can for my family. That's my drive, right now. If I can do that for my parents, as long as they're happy, well off and they have all the cars they want, the house they want, they can go shopping (my mom loves shopping every day, she can go shopping every day if she wants to). Then I'm fine.

In some cases, parental support goes well beyond words. Susan described a situation which illustrates the extent of her parents' assistance, and the advice they give:

I procrastinate a lot and have to rush the night before or the weekend before, you know. And my dad's running me back and forth downtown to the Reference Library, 'cause it's the only one open Sunday and it's due Monday, and bringing books home from work that I can use and staying up with me, all night, while I'm typing it up. And my mother will type up the title page in the morning, while I'm showering, you know. My dad will go over my seminar notes with me while I'm brushing my teeth or in the car. They support me, they help me a lot. I'm trying to work on that, organising my time, time management and stuff... They tell me to work hard, be true to myself, not to put a lot of stress on myself, that I'm too young for the stress. It's a hard world out there, there's going to be a lot of obstacles, that I'm going to have to try and work them; they believe in me and I must believe in myself. They tell me as long as I work hard I will succeed; not to take advantage of anyone and not to let anyone take advantage of me; to know my sources and my resources and to use them effectively to my advantage. Never to be ignorant, try to be understanding and to compromise.... I thought of graduating, working for a year to raise money for university, less stress on my parents. But my parents said no, because they've seen that happen so many times, and then they don't go back, they lose incentive. I don't really want that to happen to me, I want to go straight in.

Keisha's parents also play an active role in her education - they sit with her and help her study:

I usually study in a group or with my Mom and Dad, that way I'm able to retain more. The more you talk about it, the more you remember.... That's one thing with my parents, they always ask me to bring my stuff, sit down, and you know. I guess they're older and they're more experienced, they would know like, how to go about reading, like, a certain section, and then trying. One thing with my Dad, he always tells me. "Never cram something, try to visualise it and understand it."

Jennifer gets encouragement and career advice from her uncle who works for the government, "he went to York university and has been through a lot." In addition to communicating their academic expectations, the parents appear to discipline their daughters and
exercise control over their activities. Simone and her sister live with their mother. She described
the level of discipline and advice about education:

S: Does she allow you to date?

R: No.

S: Would you like to?

R: Heh, what girl doesn’t? She doesn’t mind, but she has to know the person and she’s
very strict when it comes to the opposite sex, you could say. I mean, there’s certain
times that I have to get off the phone, there’s certain times that she sets a curfew. I don’t
mind. I mean, I give her a year. I go, "Mom, you have six more months, because I’ll
be 18 next year." So, I give her a little. I mean, I’m her last child, she wants to hold on
to me, that’s fine.

S: Does she allow your sister to date?

R: Yeah. Well, my sister’s older.

S: Does she give you advice about education, school, things like that?

R: Well, she tells me that I should do the best I can; try and keep out of trouble. Like,
she’s my mentor. She’s there for me when I need to talk to her about things.

Brenda A talked about the importance of being motivated both at home and in school
when she described her school’s special programme for Black students. Her statement, below,
was in response to my question about how her experiences of school would differ had she been
White:

In my school, I don’t think it would have been different. Well, obviously it would have
been different because I would be from a different culture. But, maybe I wouldn’t have
been given such a motivation to do well, because there has been, like, such a hype of
getting Black kids to study more and do all those things. They [the school] are trying to
get kids to be encouraged and stuff, that helps me. All the different programmes all the
things that focused on Black youth; trying to get you to be encouraged and to know that
you can do well. That’s not available for any other culture. Not to say that they don’t
get encouraged from home, but having that outside motivation is just as important as
having that motivation in your homes. I’ve been given different opportunities and
different types of motivation and encouragement and things like that.

Brenda went on to talk about the importance of being motivated by one’s peers:

[Peers of mine, like friends of mine who say, "You know that’s a pretty good mark,
Brenda, you did really well on that course." This is good too. Not just to hear it from
your teachers all the time but to hear it from your friends who probably have just as
much, or even more influence than, you know, who could persuade you more than most
of the people could.

Betty has such an influential friend. Her academically successful Black boyfriend encourages her
to study hard:

Well, I have one [boyfriend]. But, like, he’s supportive too, you know. Because he’s the
type of person, he motivates me too 'cause he’s like, you know, if I have a test to study
for, and he knows about it, he’ll be like, "Study for your test and then you can talk to
me, but if you haven’t studied, then don’t talk to me until tomorrow, after you’ve taken
your test." Like, he is always behind me for that.

8.2. ENCOURAGEMENT FROM TEACHERS.

For the best results, the encouragement that Black students receive in their homes must
be reinforced in the school. The role of teachers in the educational outcome of girls and Black
students is well documented (Sadker & Sadker, 1986; Shakeshaft, 1986; Irvine, 1990; LaFrance,
1991). Most of the girls in this study, in answer to leading questions, described situations where
they received both academic encouragement and discouragement from their teachers. As their
comments show, not all teachers motivated them and, furthermore, the type and extent of the
motivation varied. A Black teacher that Betty had in grade seven helped to instill a drive to
succeed within her:

She was my grade seven teacher, and she like, I found she always pushed the Black kids
a lot more. She’d like to see us succeed, you know? 'Cause she knows what it’s like, and
she’s like, "You know, the people will step on you, you have to be on top," type of
thing. She motivated most Black kids.

Brenda A also described how she was encouraged to pursue Science:

They told me to do things that I thought I wouldn’t be able to do.

S: Like what?

R: Well, OACs. I wasn’t even going to go for OACs, really. Biology. I was going to
stop at grade eleven. I didn’t think that was what I wanted to do with myself, but they
were, "Well, just try it. Try Biology." And I tried it and I really liked it and decided to
focus more on my career because it’s more on Sciences. And that’s how they pursued me
to get into Sciences.

She described the effect that getting both good grades and encouragement from her teachers have
on her desire to continue achieving:

After the first 90%, I would be mad if I got anything under 90% and I think in those classes, it really helped me to have the teacher say, "Oh, that was really good." Right from the start, that just motivates me to always do good. And even if it's like, one percent under the average of what I was getting the day before, I wouldn't let myself do that. I would always have to keep up and study and never let myself fall behind, even in those classes that I was already doing well in. I think it's easier to keep doing well than it is to work your way up to doing well, from doing poor.

Brenda A went on to describe her response to what she perceives as motivation in the form of reverse psychology:

Some of them encourage you. Some of them were more, "Well, I don't care if you study or not. I don't care if you fail, I'm still getting paid" type of attitude. They didn't mean it. There's one teacher that I remember that did that all the time, "You can just go home and watch T.V." This was a male teacher, but he was just joking. The thing is, whenever he did that, it made you want to study and show him, "Yeah, I studied. Yeah, I know the answers!" Like, he wanted you to study but he wouldn't say that. He'd say don't study and that would make you study.

Although she had problems with her grade eight Science teacher, Stephanie talked about how she subsequently became oriented towards Science:

In grade eight I didn't have a very good Science teacher and I didn't like him that much. I didn't like his teaching style. Like, he just had overheads and you'd just write it and if I didn't finish it, it would go off, it doesn't matter. My grade 8 Science, that was the mark that kept me from getting honours when I graduated. So I was really upset with that. My grade 9 Science teacher, he was really good, he was really funny too, and I got really good marks in that class, like I went up almost 30% in Science! That's when I said, I like Science. I can do this. He was very encouraging too.

Reena notes that, "A lot of teachers tell me that I can go far, no matter what I do. Like, I have a lot of teachers who are very, very supportive and very encouraging." However, this has not been June's experience:

By the time you reach your OAC, no [encouragement]. In the lower grades the teachers are more down on you, but by the time you reach your OAC you just come to class whenever you want. If you hand it in, you get marked and if you don't, you get no marks.

S: When you say they are "down on you" do you mean in a negative way?

R: No. They try to help you out more, they try to push you to do your work because they feel that the grade nines are easier to straighten out, so they try to push them to do better. But by the time you reach grade twelve or OAC they don't really care. Like, if
you come to class, that’s your business; if they see you in the hallway, that’s your problem. They’ll say, "Get to class" but they’re not going to push you.

Joanne also feels that there has not been much motivation from teachers, "Encouragement? Probably the little comment they may put on your paper, your essay, 'Very well done,' whatever. That’s probably the only encouragement I would get." Earlier in the interview when I asked if she had ever been praised in the classroom, for work well done, she replied, "Never!"

Beverley, who had had some secondary schooling in Trinidad, compared the type of motivation she received in the Caribbean with that in Canada:

If you didn’t do it [school work] they [Canadian teachers] didn’t care. Teachers back home, even though they were getting paid and everything, they were more, like, caring. They would push you even if you didn’t want to come to class and work, they would make you come and do the work. They would stay after school and give you penance - make you stay back and do your work. Like, it was more caring, they were dedicated. Whereas, these teachers, even though they get paid, they don’t sweat it if you come to class or you don’t come to class. They are just there and if you want to learn then you will learn, that’s your business.

Betty thinks that some teachers are supportive of students who show an interest in learning:

Some of them are [encouraging]. Basically you have to let them know that you want to learn, you know? If you’re having problems, you have to let them know that you are willing to do whatever it takes to get that credit and they’ll like, they’ll help you. But if you’re the type of person who just comes to class, doesn’t really care whether you pass or not, then, they don’t take the time.

S: But don’t you think, at some level, the teachers should try to motivate students like that? The ones who don’t seem to want to learn? Do you see teachers doing anything to help students like that?

R: Some of them do try. I see some of them and then, some students are just like, "well it doesn’t matter anyways," so the teachers just say, "Forget it then."

Teachers who pushed and encouraged them at some point during their schooling, are also the ones they described as their favourite teachers. In the majority of cases these were White teachers.

8.2.1. Praise.

Classroom praise represents another avenue through which teachers can motivate their students. Bright Black students, girls moreso, tend to receive the least attention and praise from
their White teachers (Rubovitz & Maehr, 1973; Riley, 1985; Shakeshaft, 1986; Haughton, 1987; Fordham, 1993). Some however, are not bothered by this. In other studies Black girls did not wish to be praised (Fuller, 1980; Fordham & Ogbu, 1986). Fearful of being ostracised by other Blacks, they downplayed their academic success rather than draw attention to it. The girls I interviewed are quite the opposite, as illustrated in this dialogue with Erica:

Yeah, they usually do that, like tell you, "Oh, this is really good!" And they'll read it out in front of the whole class.

S: Wow! And do they say, "This is Erica's," so everybody knows it's yours?

R: [Nods]. And everybody, you know, looks up and, you know, "yeah, that's Erica's." ... That makes me feel good to see that, you know, I put all my energy and strength into, all my ability to write the essay and it's good, you know?

Not all teachers publicly identify authors of outstanding work. On one occasion when Betty was not identified, she did it herself - she proudly let the class know of her excellent work:

It depends on the teacher though. One project I did in Management Studies, I didn't think I was going to get a good mark on it and I got perfect, and I was surprised. He [teacher] was sitting on top of the desk explaining everything, every flaw that everybody did, you know. And he's like, "One person did such a good job. There's someone among you guys that got perfect." And I'm like, "Well, I know that's not me." So I went up there and got my stuff and opened my notebook, looking for the mark and I saw the 100. I was like, "What is this out of?" And they [classmates] are like, "One hundred." And I was like, "No, this cannot be! I did not sit here and get perfect!"

S: So, when you noticed that it was you, did you, like, say anything to let the class know it was you?

R: Yeah. I was like, "Eh, I got 100!"

S: What did they say? Did anybody say anything?

R: They were like, "It's good work. Congratulations," type of thing.

In June's case it is not just her classmates who know that she is brilliant, the entire school does, and she is not bothered by it. Every year, at her school's (academic) assembly, she receives plaques and awards for outstanding work.

Although they do not strongly object to public recognition, for various reasons, the girls do not all revel in it. Roxy thinks that it creates pressure to maintain the performance: "Like one
time in Math, when I started getting not so good marks, this guy walks up to me, ‘I thought you were a brainer?’ I was like, ‘Well, I never thought that I was, you know.’" While Brenda B does not object to teachers reading her essays aloud in class, she expressed her fear of being used: "I don’t like people knowing ’cause then, you get people just leeching on to you all of a sudden. ‘Hey Brenda, what’s up? What are you doing this weekend? You want to help me do my essay?’” Elizabeth expressed concern for students who were not performing as well, "It’s just that you’re kind of rubbing it in." This was echoed by Brenda A who voiced an additional concern:

I’d rather no [public praise]. Like, maybe the first time, okay. But, I hate making people think as though I’m being favoured over them, like that’s the reason why I’m getting my marks. I like people to know that I’m studying hard and I’m up at night, not on the phone, not watching T.V., but studying to almost two or three o’clock in the morning for that test that I did well on. Instead of them thinking, "Oh, teacher likes her, no wonder," that type of attitude. I really don’t like that. So, in a sense, I’d rather that she or he tells me instead of me and everybody else.

Despite having these feelings, none of them said that they had asked the teachers to refrain from this practice. Interestingly, they were not afraid of being labeled "nerds."

8.3. SELF MOTIVATION.

Key "personality and cognitive" elements of motivation (Graham, 1989) were revealed in the girls’ responses to the question: "When you do badly on a test or assignment, who do you blame?" This question was designed to examine their locus of control. Locus of control refers to generalised beliefs about the causes of outcomes and reinforcements (Graham, 1994:69). At one end of the locus continuum are "internals" who take personal responsibility for outcomes and reinforcements. At the other end are "externals," those who believe that powerful others, luck or circumstances beyond their control are responsible for outcomes and reinforcements.

Based on their replies, it was clear that they assign a major portion of the blame to themselves when they fall below their expectations. Melissa’s comment is typical of those who blame themselves completely, "Sometimes I know it’s my fault, ’cause I do procrastinate. And sometimes I don’t study, not enough. I look over it and say, ‘Oh, I know that.’ And then, I don’t.” When asked if the teachers were to blame for her unsatisfactory performance in certain subjects, Paula focused on effort rather than perceived ability:
No, no. 'Cause even for Math and for English, they were like, "Well the mark you got, you know it might be kind of difficult for you again." Well, it’s not! It’s only because I was like, lazy, in the course that I got such a low mark. It’s the only reason. I don’t take my time, sit down, take my time to do things. That’s what my mother always tells me too.

In several cases the self-blame is tempered by a more indepth assessment of the particular situation. For example, although Brenda A blames herself "all the time" this does not mean complete vindication of teachers:

Oh, all the time! I don’t boo-hoo-hoo. If I got a poor mark, I don’t go to the teacher. The first person I go to is myself. ’Cause I know, for myself, what I was doing to study for that test and if I wasn’t doing as much as I could have been doing, I know that. And if I studied from the time I got home to the time I went to bed, then I could say, "Well, I don’t know, I really studied hard. What did I do wrong? Maybe it’s the teacher and maybe it’s not." So, I’m the first person who receives the reprimand.... My Mom taught me how to question teachers about something like that. She said not to ask them why you got that mark but ask them how you could have gotten a better mark. And if they can answer that for you, then you know what you can do in the future.

Unlike Brenda A, Karen does not hesitate to approach the teacher when her marks are lower than expected:

If I know that I didn’t put any effort in it and the mark reflects that, then I defer. I know that I didn’t put the effort in.... I blame myself because who else is there to blame? But if I know that I put a lot of effort in and the mark is not what I expect, I’m going to ‘up’ and say, "Excuse me, but what’s going on? I’m wondering why..." I have a really good rapport with my teachers, so they can honestly tell me, they can point out, this, this, this, and, "I’m sorry, but you know you could have done better than that." And then I can respect that. But other times I look it over and it’s usually some kind of mistake here or there that they made, so I get a higher mark. As long as it’s just mechanical error.

In Elizabeth’s case, she assigns some blame to the teacher and questions her ability only as a last resort:

Some of the times I look at it and think, "I could have studied more, I know I could have studied more." ... Some days I look at the mark and I’m thinking, "Why am I getting this mark?" I mean, I had an English teacher and he was horrible. I’d get assignments back and I couldn’t understand what I was doing wrong. And one day he pulled me aside and said, "What’s the problem?" And I said, "Whoa! I don’t like my marks." And he looked at me and said, "Don’t get uptight about it because we’re not even half way through the semester." I’m used to getting 80s in English and I was getting like a 74, and I was upset about it. And he was like, "Don’t get uptight about it, it’s still a good mark." I guess he couldn’t understand I’m used to being an over-achiever. So, like, in this case, I kind of blamed the teacher because I thought I was doing well and I thought I knew
what I was doing and I don't think the teacher could see what I was doing because his teaching style was completely different from the teachers that I had the years before. The next day he actually found out why I was so upset. He could see that, you know, I'm used to getting high marks. I do blame the teacher 'cause I don't feel that they're giving me a fair chance and sometimes I blame myself because I know that I could do better and I totally slacked off when I should have been studying.... At one point if I wasn't doing well I would question myself and say, "Well, what am I doing wrong? Why am I not getting the marks that I'm used to getting?" So after something like that I would feel kind of low and I'd be, like, questioning, like, my ability and capability as a student.

Expectations of doing better in the future is a cognitive attribute that keeps some Black students motivated (Graham, 1989). This sentiment, expressed in some way by all the girls, is exemplified in Brenda B's comment:

First of all, to me a low mark starts with a 7. And sometimes I feel it's me personally. Like, I don't say, "Oooh Brenda, you should have done better," and get down on myself. I don't do that. I just say, "Marks are marks. Sometimes you get your 80s, sometimes you don't." And it depends on the subject. If it's a surprise quiz, hey, I don't blame myself, because I didn't memorise it last night. I didn't know we were going to have a quiz. But, if it's a test and I look at the answers I got and I see the mark I got, obviously something's wrong in my answers. Maybe it's the material, maybe it's the way I'm perceiving the material, maybe it's the way the material was taught. I never blame my teachers unless it's clearly their fault. But usually it's not their fault.... So I usually put the blame on myself, I just say, "Next time I'll do better."

While almost all of the girls blame themselves when their marks are below expectations, some credit themselves for sustaining their motivation. Betty explained it this way:

I don't know. Just 'cause you want to accomplish something, you know, you don't want to be just sitting around doing nothing when you know, you can be doing something. It's like, I'd rather work than sit at home and do nothing. 'Cause like, you build a lot of character at the same time. It's like, a drive, type of thing, to succeed.

S: So it's coming from inside?

R: Yeah, it's like motivation in yourself, your self-esteem type of thing. You know, you're like, "Okay, I want to succeed, I have to get this right," type of thing. "I want to be somebody, I want to go somewhere." So, it's like, you do that so that you can succeed in life, basically.

Stephanie, while acknowledging some parental involvement, assumes primary responsibility for her success:

I'm a motivated person, so it's not like my parents say, "Do your homework" and they have an old whip or something. No, it's just, I want to do it because it's my mark, I'm
the one who's getting the mark. And if I see that I'm getting 50s, it's my fault, not someone else's fault. I can't say, "Oh, I got this on the project because of my partner." No, it's my responsibility and I know that. My parents are with me, they are really good. But I'd have to say that, overall, it's me.

8.4. ROLE MODELS.

A role model is defined as an admired person who positively influences an individual's values, goals or outlook on life (Solomon, 1997). The teacher candidates who were interviewed by Solomon (1997) felt that positive role models, of a similar ethnocultural background, "are inspirations for young people, boosting their self-confidence and promoting higher educational aspirations" (p. 400). For example, "as symbols of accomplishment challenging the ... racism and ethnocentricism within schools," Black teachers could show that "achievement within the mainstream system was not incompatible with maintaining a strong cultural identity" (p. 401).

For adolescents of any race, role models may be either sports, media, entertainment, religious or political personalities, not personally known to them. Interestingly, their role models were most often a parent/family member (13 girls) or someone with whom they are personally acquainted. Roxy was the only one who cited a famous person as one of her role models, "My mother, definitely! I really, really like Maya Angelou, the [African-American] poet, actress and writer. But, basically, my mother, that's who I look up to you know."

8.4.1. Parents/family members.

Six girls identified more than one family member as their role models. Seven cited their mother only, four cited both parents, three mentioned a sister and two talked about their uncles. Simone's feeling about her mother is evident in her statement, "She's my role model. I love her very much, she's my hero." Denise offered a reason why her mother is her role model, "My mother, yeah. She's very independent and strong. My father too, but as a woman, I would say my mom." For Susan, both parents were identified. She explained why they are her role models:

My parents definitely! I really admire my parents. They worked really hard. I think they're really intelligent, really smart, in a lot of the decisions they make. And they made me the person that I am and I'm proud to be who I am. They made that possible. They support me in a lot of ways.

Reena's only role model is her older sister who, she said, "played a big role in my life. She's
taught me a lot of stuff and put me in the right direction. So I would say, she’s been a role model for me.” Although Paula gets some support and encouragement from her mother, her role models are her two college-educated sisters in whom she also confides.

8.4.2. Friends/personal acquaintances.

In addition to her parents, Susan’s Caribbean Dance teacher is also someone whom she admires:

My dance teacher, my choreographer. She’s not much older than us. She’s really intelligent, she’s at York. She went to university at 17, plus she teaches us. She became our choreographer at 19 or 20. She works you know, with kids. She knows what she wants to do, she’s really level-headed, and I think, strong, as a young Black woman. She talks with us and she can be like a sister, yet like a mother at the same time. And she never looks down on us, you know? She understands a lot about what we’re going through. She’s really cool. Sometimes she can be tough on us, like a grown-up, but you know, we need the discipline from her sometimes. We’ve built a lot of respect for her and she has a lot of respect for us and it’s a lot easier.

Erica, who also identified her mother, spoke about a Black woman friend:

I have a friend, her mom is Jamaican and she’s Canadian, she was born here, but she acts like she’s a Jamaican. She’s like, 23. She’s like my best friend in the whole of Canada. I really imitate her in certain ways and I try to do what she does. I respect her and she respects me. She goes to university and she always tells me to try my best.

Brenda A’s role model is a Black student who managed to overcome the barriers which he encountered:

My role models are, I guess, teachers, older students like myself who decided to overcome the barriers. Like, I have one [Black] friend, he was in all the basic course at his school. They told him that he should just go to college. He came to my school after and he ended up being persuaded to take Science as one of his pre-requisites to finishing school and he ended up really liking it. Then he took the OAC course for Biology and he really liked that too. And now he’s in Guelph University studying Neurology.... Yes he is! Yes he is! And he always tells me, "Don’t listen to anybody but yourself."

Except for their parents, all role models were individuals who had achieved some measure of academic success while remaining connected to Caribbean culture.

8.4.3. Television shows.

Although entertainment personalities were not cited as role models, two of the girls cited television shows which inspire them. Elizabeth, who is planning a career in Environmental
Science, loves "The Nature of Things." She said that, "I like learning, period. I get upset when I miss "The Nature of Things." It used to be on Thursday nights and then the hockey was coming on and I was going nuts." Brenda B, whose ambition is to become a physician, had initially responded, "hard to say. I don't know," when I asked about her role model. She went on to talk about being motivated by the show "Emergency Room" and described her passion for it:

Like in order for me to keep going with school, like during school, there's this show, it's going to seem stupid, but there's this show, "ER, Emergency Room," I love that show to death. If I've got [home] work on a Thursday night to do, I take my one hour break, because I usually don't watch T.V. during the week, but that's the one show I watch. And I sit there and I watch them doing what I want to do. And they just, it's like, "Wow! I want to do that!" I want to go back and study when the show's done, but like.

S: What about "Chicago Hope?" That's another one.

R: Yeah. I never find it as interesting, so I just stuck with my "ER." But I don't know, seeing people doing what I want to do kind of pushes me to keep going.

S: So, would you say that group on "ER," they are more or less your role models then?

R: Yeah, you could say that. Yeah.

To varying degrees, they all considered themselves role models for other Black students - their peers as well as their juniors. Brenda B said that:

I have a lot of friends that are younger than me and they look up to me. And the fact that I want to go into Science, they're like, "Wow! Brenda can do it, I can do it!" A lot of Black students are like, "You want to be a doctor? Are you serious? Do you know how many years of school?" They're like, "Wow, wow!" It's not so much that I want to be mesmerised, or loved or hailed, I feel that a lot of people look up to me - in the younger grades and in my grade.

S: So you see yourself as a role model for them, other Black students?

R: Yes. Actually, I do.

As with the other girls, being a role model makes Denise feel good. She explained why she is not a role model for girls her age, and vice versa:

Not as much for other Black girls my age, but like, a little younger. A lot of little kids look up to me, yeah they look up to me a lot, the little youth, 12 or 13. It makes me feel good because I know I can be a good model. I am. Girls my age, we are the same; we
act the same, we talk on the same level, and stuff like that. There's really no girl that I look up to, like she's smarter or prettier and stuff like that.

On the topic of being a role model herself, Susan said, "I'd like to think that some people can look up to me or approach me or ask me for help, and that ... I'm doing my people proud."

8.5. ATTITUDE TOWARDS EDUCATION: Future rewards.

This section is not to be confused with their attitude towards school (chapter 4). As shown by Mac an Ghaill (1988), some students can be pro-education but anti-school, thus the potential rewards of education can be a potent motive. Many Black students do not succeed in school because they see no point in getting an education (Ogbu, 1987; Ford, 1992; Solomon, 1992). In White societies, Blacks who succeed in school face a job ceiling. Fordham and Ogbu (1986:179) suggest that, among older children, the job ceiling creates feelings of "disillusionment about the real value of schooling ... which discourages them from working hard in school." When I asked the participants of this study, "What does getting an education mean to you?" interestingly, they all connected education to future job opportunities and financial independence. Each girl talked about her intention to go pursue tertiary education either at university or college. Reena believes education is especially important for Blacks:

Right now, in today's society, it's important, especially being Black, it's important getting an education. I mean, I watch a lot of my friends, you know, who have had babies and just stopped going to school. They all went in the wrong direction. And for me, I know that I don't want to go in that direction. Right now, my education is very important to me because I have big plans for the future, you know, big house, big car, this many kids, and this is the kind of wedding I want, this and that. You know what I mean? So, I just want my education to be done so that I can get a really good job. You know what I mean? Just let my kids have everything, my family have everything - my mom, my sister, you know, whoever needs help in terms of finance, whatever. I'll be able to do that.

June, a self-motivated girl who is driven by sheer competition, considers a university education a key factor in obtaining future employment:

You know how hard it is to get a job. No one would hire me without an education, so I want to do well, I guess, because I need to get into university and there's so much competition. So it's like, I don't want an eighty, I want a ninety, there's so much competition. That's what drives me.

About half of the girls consider "gaining knowledge" an important goal of education. Roxy
thinks that it helps to "know things" and to be aware:

Being successful in getting a job. Being well known, you know? Basically, being educated is the key to, I mean I don't want to be having a conversation with you and you're using these words that I don't know. I mean, I'll have conversations with some of my friends and they'll look at me, 'cause they don't know things, they're not aware. And I think that's so stupid sometimes because if I didn't know certain things, where would I be, you know?

S: So you see that as a way of achieving economic success down the road.

R: Not only that. Being aware and knowing what's going on is very important. I mean, we could have an earthquake coming and people wouldn't know because they don't read the newspapers or don't look at the T.V., you know?

S: Because there are Black students who say, oh, well, it doesn't make sense getting all this education because you won't get a job down the road anyway?

R: I don't think that's necessarily true. Of course, you might have to work harder than a White student that sits beside you, however, in these times, you can't sit there and complain, you have to do what's necessary, you know?

While making the link between formal education and future economic success, June and Beverley share the opinion that one does not have to be in school to gain knowledge. As Beverley put it:

This education has not given me anything so far. Like, I haven't learned anything, you know, I learn some things by myself, but that's about it. Mostly in Canada, it [education] means getting a job, a fairly good job where I can be comfortable and that is what it means for me.

In a similar manner June equates education with knowledge and links this to survival:

To be able to live afterwards independently. Knowledge is something, gaining knowledge is something, but when it comes to knowledge, I don't think you need to be in school, you can get it on your own. So basically learning how to survive, like, learning the skills or whatever is necessary for you to get a job and to live. When it comes to gaining knowledge, you have to do it on your own time, not at school.

Keisha interprets education as schooling. She described a teacher's view of schooling and contrasts this with her own perception:

Basically I always had in my mind that I'm here to do my work and to get the grade and to get out of high school. Not that I'm here, some of them tell me, "Oh, your student-teacher relationship." A teacher told me, she said, "Oh, even though you're here, it's also to see if you have a good student and teacher relationship, so that you'll be able to
get by." I told her, "All I know is that I'm here to learn, to get the grade and to accomplish what I need to accomplish."

8.5.1. Overcoming double jeopardy: Being female and Black

In a society which places the White male at the top of the race/gender hierarchy, one might expect Black females to be concerned about achieving their career goals. To further determine the extent to which they expect to be hindered by racism and sexism, I asked them, "Do you think that either your race or your sex would be a barrier to achieving your goals?"

Brenda B, Roxy, Erica, Beverley, Karen and Joanne share that the belief that neither their race nor gender will pose a barrier to achieving their goals. Karen thinks that, "It's all in your mind set. Then again, that could be an idealistic, kind of, you know, view. But that's how I am. I don't see it as a major barrier that the thing is, I can always get over that." Roxy acknowledges that, "there's racism everywhere":

Oh, I'm sure that I might run into some incidences but it's not something that I think about or worry about, you now, 'cause there's racism everywhere.

S: But you just believe that somehow you would be able to get over that and move on?

R: Yeah, I don't think it's something that would keep me back. I mean, if it comes down to it, I'll do it by myself, I'm that type of person, you know?

Brenda B does not think that it will hinder her because society is getting used to seeing Black people in the work force:

Like, I don't think it's going to hinder me much. I hope not. I just think you're going to have to deal with it. I think you're going to have to deal with it. I think a lot of people now, they're getting used to it. You know, that's a Black person. No more shock! She's not in shackles, you know? It's just a Black person! Or it's just a successful girl! Like, a lot of people are just getting used to it. Black girl, White boy, there's no big difference.

Betty, May and June had initially answered the question in the negative, but on further thought said that their race, rather than their sex, could be an obstacle to obtaining employment. Betty went on to explain why she chose race over sex. Her choice is probably based on her reality - Betty's mother is a nurse (RN) while her father's unemployed:

No, not really.
S: So, you feel you could be anything you want to be?

R: As long as you want to do it and you want to, like, if you put your best into it, then you could be whatever you want to be.

S: So, you don't think either being Black or female would hold you back?

R: It could. Like, it depends, really on the people who you are dealing with. 'Cause some people can be racist and some couldn’t, but you can’t judge them all to be, you know, as one. It depends on your situation, generally, what you’re in. But, in today’s society, it could hinder you... probably being Black.

S: Why is that? Do you feel that women are getting ahead?

R: I find a lot more women are succeeding, more than men. It’s like, usually, it was men doing the work and women stay home. But you see a lot of women today stepping up in life, you know. They have like, better jobs than the men do. Most of the men are more unemployed than the women are.

Elizabeth, an aspiring journalist, also cites race as the bigger obstacle:

Probably just the job market, it’s just horrible! I mean, I figure if I do well in school and I have the credentials and I get a job, then there won’t be a problem. If it has to do with people, I’m sure that I can overcome that. Like, I just have to stick it out, I guess. If there are barriers because I’m a minority, then, you know, I have to keep looking. I think those are the only two real barriers that I have to worry about.

S: What about your gender?

R: Gender, no. Because, I guess with the profession I’m going into, a lot of the people in my program, I hear, are women, so it’s not that big of a deal. I guess it just depends on the mind-set of the person doing the hiring, but I don’t think it would be because of my gender.

Elizabeth’s view is shared by Paula and Reena. Susan, Denise, Jennifer and Brenda A all believe that race and gender are two strikes against them which they will overcome. Susan intends to overcome race and gender barriers with hard work:

I know what I want, and I have to go after it in order to succeed and get ahead in this world because there’s a lot working against me, maybe as a female and maybe as a Black female. Also because I’m young and a lot of people don’t take us seriously, when we’re from the younger generation. But realistically, yes. But I’d like to think not. I don’t think of myself as inferior. Well, I guess I have when I was younger, but not now. And I’m
not going to use it as an excuse for why I don’t succeed. I will just try harder. But I know that there is, you know, sexism out there and racism out there, and I know that sometimes it would be an obstacle, but I’d like to think that I can overcome it. I will.

Denise and Brenda A will get through with positive thinking and determination while Jennifer expects that being bilingual will be an asset:

Well, I know it’s going to play an important role, but, since I have my French behind me because I’m getting my bilingual certificate and I want to study Law, I know that will help me a lot. But I know it will probably, it will be really tough for me to get a job in the law field, but I am going to try my best. But I do know that I’m going to be facing some stuff, and I have to go for my career, yeah. No, I can’t [say which will be the bigger problem]

S: A combination of the two?

R: Exactly.

Simone and Keisha are the only ones who considered gender a bigger obstacle than race.

Simone’s perception may be rooted in reference to her mixed heritage (Black and South Asian):

I think my gender probably will, ’cause there’s a lot of that these days. I don’t think my race, as much, would. There’s been a few people out there who’s going to say, like, "What are you?" because I’m mixed and stuff like that. Like, it’s not going to hold me back, no.

S: You don’t think it will create any barriers to achieving whatever you want to achieve?

R: No.

Keisha cited problems with sexual harassment:

I think just being female, because nowadays, in the work force, you have a lot of sexist remarks, a lot of harassment, a lot of disrespect, especially when you’re female. Yeah, I feel it’s being a female. I don’t think colour has anything to do with it, any more. Unless, if you’re in other parts like in Mississippi. But, here, I don’t know, I feel that it’s just basically, yeah, it’s basically your gender.

All the girls are aware that racism and sexism exist in our society and they appear poised (ready) to meet the challenges of these forms of oppression. Their main concern, however, is with first getting into, and through, the university or college of their choice. Seventeen of them identified this as their biggest worry at the present time.
8.6. RACISM AS A MOTIVE.

As shown in chapters four and five, being Black works against many students but, for others, it is an important source of motivation. Elizabeth, for example, finds that, for her, being Black presents a greater challenge than being White:

If you're White, I don't think it would really matter because you're a majority, so there wouldn't be a lot of, I guess, racism. There may be the occasional thing. But if I was White, I don't think I would have as much of a challenge, I mean there wouldn't be anything to it. You'd just, they'd [school staff] just see you and they'd think, "Oh you're going to do well."

S: And if you were Chinese or Oriental?

R: Of course, they would probably look at me and think, "Oh, she's going to medical school. So, it would be very different.

May, while acknowledging that she would not have had to worry about being negatively stereotyped, cites another positive attribute of being Black:

Okay, being White might give you an advantage, right? But I think eventually it comes down to, who's smart, you or me, who's smarter? I think, I wouldn't have as much pressure on me as opposed to being Black. Meaning that, even if I was dumb, grades in the 30s or 40s, I wouldn't be looked down upon, as opposed to a Black person getting 40 or 50, "Oh, they're dumb because they're Black." But if it's a White person, psst.... Like, it's scary thinking of myself as White (laughs). I don't know. I don't think I would have as much of a purpose in life if I was White.

Brenda B, who also feels that being Black motivates her, thinks that, "maybe I would have done certain things differently. Maybe I wouldn't want to be a doctor."

The parents know that their children must cope with racism in the society as well as in school. Betty's parents, like the others, link their educational advice to the reality of racism:

It's like my parents are good role models. My mom especially, she's always there, she always lectures.

S: What does she say when she lectures?

R: "Like, you're a Black kid, you have to do ten times better because you know in today's society it's hard to get the things you want." It's like, I understand that, you know, so I take it into consideration. She makes you think, you know? ... She's like, "Whatever you do, do it to your best; try not to get discouraged, if you're ever discouraged come and talk to me." You know, she's always there to talk to. So like, if
I have a problem at school, a teacher and me, whatever, we’d come and tell her and she
would look at it, like, in a positive way.... She doesn’t tell you to break out in a nasty
way, type of thing, she says it in a calm, rational way, you know, so it doesn’t offend
anybody.

Betty also talked about her own response to racism. This form of discrimination, which destroys
so many, pushes her to achieve:

But a lot of Black people can amount to a lot better than what the White people can do.
And they don’t give us credit for it.

S: So, does that hold you back in a way?

R: No, it makes you want to do more. It makes you want to show them, look, I can do
the same thing as you can, and even better.... Yeah I find it as more positive than
negative.

8.7. DISCUSSION.

Both work and education are highly valued in Black families (Ford, 1993). Contrary to
popular belief, Black parents generally place a strong emphasis on academic achievement,
encourage their children to do well, and make tremendous sacrifices to provide the best
educational opportunities for them (Clark, 1983; Ford, 1993; Hall Mark, 1995). Often this is
not enough because a number of social, psychological and cultural forces, many within the
schools, militate against their success (Ford, 1993). As important as school-related factors are,
the family, as the child’s first socialising agent, also plays a key role in student achievement.
The parent-child relationship is considered far more important to student success than
sociodemographic variables (Clark, 1993). The participants in my study are fortunate to have
parents who possess many of the characteristics found in parents of successful Black children
(Clark, 1983). They provide positive reinforcement, communicate high academic expectations,
show interest in their children’s academic work and have close relationships with them. Family
support is cited as one of the reasons that Black girls tend to have high self-esteem and are
highly motivated to learn (Coultas, 1989).

Regardless of the family’s socioeconomic or marital situation, a strong achievement
orientation seems to be the best predictor of the student’s desire to achieve in school (Ford,
1993). Children from such families tend to be more optimistic and supportive of the achievement
ideology (Clark, 1983; Ford, 1993). All the girls in my study discussed their plans to pursue tertiary education, with the financial and moral support of their parents. They also expect to have successful careers and feel confident about overcoming any obstacles they are likely to meet.

Their parents' attitude towards tertiary education is not a universal response. Fordham (1993) found that the parents in her study were ambivalent about their daughters' academic success. One mother, in response to a direct question, admitted that she would be happier if her daughter did not go to college because she had seen Black people with college degrees who could not get a job. The girls, in turn, could not understand why their parents - mothers in particular - were not more supportive of their academic goals. Fordham (1993:24) asserts that this was their mothers’ way of "preparing them for a life away from the Black community ... a life saturated with conflict, confusion, estrangement, isolation and a plethora of unmarked beginnings and endings, jump starts and failures." In stating this, Fordham is implying that there are turbulent times ahead for successful Black women. [I hope she is wrong].

In addition to their family, the girls in my study were also motivated by their like-minded peers. Considering that peers sometimes wield greater influence over adolescents than do parents or teachers, it is to their credit that they chose close friends who are also academically oriented. The contribution of positive peer relationships, to achievement, was explored by Codjoe (1997). Most of the students who he interviewed had chosen friends who were high achievers because, as one girl put it, "it helps when you gravitate toward people who are successful and going towards success" (p. 272). She "lost contact" with disengaged students and established friendships with students who were "all high achievers." Not finding achievers among the Blacks, another girl sought out White, Chinese and Indian (continental) friends. She did not mind being called "an Oreo cookie" by the Black students (Codjoe, 1997). In my study, Karen said that that is the reason most of her close friends are Chinese, although she has "a couple of Black ones too." She, too, does not care what the other Black students think of her.

Considering the ostracism and alienation that achieving girls often experience, and the discouragement from disengaged Black peers, I was pleased that those in my study had found Black achieving friends. What they all share in common with other high achievers (Fordham, 1988; Codjoe, 1997) is the belief that academic achievement will lead to economic success and
independence. Unlike their counterparts in Fordham’s (1993) study, this belief is encouraged by their parents. Underachievers, convinced that the American dream was not dreamt for them (Ford, 1993), tend to view academic achievement as the primary route to annihilating the Black self (Spina & Tai, 1998) and so they reject it. There is much research into the differential responses of Black children to education and one of the theories relates to racial socialisation.

Among African Americans, children whose families practice positive racial socialisation have been found do better than those whose families do not (Sanders, 1997). Racial socialisation was shown to positively influence personal efficacy which, in turn, enhances academic achievement (Ford, 1993). Thus, teaching children about racism, and constructive ways to deal with it, can help them to succeed. Students with a high awareness of racism viewed racism as a challenge and were motivated to succeed, primarily to disprove the negative stereotypes associated with Blacks (Sanders, 1997). Children whose parents talk to them about racism seem better able to cope with school and achieve better grades. The parents of Black "underachievers" in Fordham’s study (1996, in Spina & Tai, 1998) claimed that they do not see race as an issue and have never considered talking about racism with their children. Considering the propensity of Blacks to focus more on racism than on sexism, one can conclude that there is little or no discussion about sexism in the homes.

Children with a low awareness of racism (and sexism, in the case of girls), tend to be low achievers. The corollary of this, that those with a high awareness are more likely to attain academic success, does not support a popular theory of Black students’ lack of success in "White" schools (Ogbu, 1978, 1987, 1992). Ogbu associates the poor academic performance of African Americans with their pariah status. He suggests that a combination of an inferior schooling, differential treatment and the imposition of a job ceiling, has made them unwilling to expend the time and effort needed for academic success. They are also not motivated to show that they can overcome these barriers. On the other hand, Sanders (1997) cites a number of studies which, like her own, have shown that racism and discrimination promote academic success in some Black children. For the girls in my study, racism was cited as a potent motive. It appears that academic success results from a combination of an awareness of racism (and sexism) and a positive orientation towards schooling and academic achievement (Sanders, 1997).

The girls in my study were also motivated by their role models. Black people who had
achieved some measure of success, and with whom they were personally acquainted, were identified as their role models. Parents topped the list of individuals who inspire them to achieve academic success. Their relationship with their role models reveal mutual respect and trust. These feelings are not automatically experienced with their White teachers (see also chapter four). Interestingly, only one girl mentioned a celebrity not personally known to her, and even then, this person (Maya Angelou) came in second to her mother. This finding contrasts with Solomon’s (1997) teacher candidates who named several sports, media, religious and political celebrities in addition to family, friends and personal acquaintances. Like my participants, they shared racial and cultural ties with their role models. However, unlike Solomon’s sample, those in my study did not mention any [White] classroom teachers as role models. The only teachers identified were a Black dance choreographer and a Black night school Math teacher.

Dei (1997), Codjoe (1997) and Solomon (1997) are among Black educators who have been advocating for more Black teachers in our schools. Their call is echoed by Black students, parents, community workers (Dei, 1997) and teacher candidates (Solomon, 1997). Although their "model" teachers were not always of the same cultural background, Solomon’s participants felt that it is important for young people to have role models from their own backgrounds in the school, "adults with whom they could identify and feel comfortable" (p.400) and who would understand their experiences and struggles. They also said that the presence of non-White teachers in their schools had instilled in them a belief that they could achieve success in a White educational system.

Black students themselves talked about the importance of having positive role models (Dei, 1997). They felt that Black teachers could best give them "advice, hope, encouragement and a sense of the wide range of opportunities that exist for them" (p.173). In addition, they would see themselves reflected in the school system and so feel more connected. The other advantage of having more Black teachers in the school relates to student behaviour. One of the girls described her response when Black teachers are sent in as substitutes (Dei, 1997:175):

I feel like I’ve got to act a certain way. There’s a standard act I’ve got to live up to.... [We’ve had] Jamaican supply teachers and I feel like I’ve got to be 'proper' because it’s like my mom’s there, so I’ve got to be proper and behave myself. I wouldn’t think of acting any other way.

Thus there are many benefits for including more Black, and other "minority" teachers in our
schools.

8.8. SUMMARY.

This chapter described the various factors which motivate the participants to achieve academic success. Family achievement orientation was articulated. Unlike Black students in the literature (Kleinfeld, 1972; Baker, 1973; Irvine, 1990; Solomon, 1997), it appears that they are influenced more by their parents and successful Blacks with whom they are personally acquainted, than by their teachers or famous personalities. Members of the latter two groups were not identified as often as those from the former two. Maternal involvement was cited most frequently but fathers also played a significant role in motivating them.

The need for encouragement from both teachers and peers was also highlighted. Caribbean teachers were described as being more supportive and nurturing than Canadian teachers. Getting a good mark on an assignment or test, and being publicly recognised for it, were both identified as motivating factors. When their marks fall below their expectations, they blame themselves first rather than the difficulty of the work or the teachers. Their positive attitude towards education is associated with future rewards. All these girls expect to pursue tertiary education and to have careers. They do not think that either racism or sexism will prevent them from achieving their career goals although some identified it (racism) as a potent motive. Their main concern, at the time, was with getting into the university or college of their choice and successfully completing the course of study.
CHAPTER 9

GENERAL DISCUSSION

The overall objective of this study was to investigate how academically oriented Black girls in Toronto high schools perceive, interpret and cope with issues related to their race and gender. The study also explored their motivation to achieve and their strategies for coping with their status as academic Black girls. This chapter presents my interpretation of the data presented in chapters 4-8. The research questions were answered in those chapters by the students themselves. In their own voices, various aspects of their school life, their attitudes, coping strategies and sources of motivation are described. Their words raise important issues and reveal situations which can be interpreted in different ways. In this chapter I offer probable explanations of why they behave as they do and explore possible avenues for improving the school experiences of Black students. At the end of each data chapter I addressed individual sub-themes that emerged. In this chapter I will discuss, in greater detail, the more outstanding findings of the study. It is divided into four main sections: (i) Attitude towards school and education, (ii) Racism and sexism, (iii) Motivation to achieve and (iv) Black History/Black teachers. Coping strategies are manifest throughout and will be discussed where appropriate.

9.1. ATTITUDE TOWARDS SCHOOL AND EDUCATION.

Overall, the girls displayed a positive attitude towards school and their teachers. They had had both good and bad experiences with teachers. Each girl described teachers who were encouraging and with whom they enjoyed relationships outside of the classroom. It appears that there were enough good experiences to create an enjoyment of school and a sense of belonging. The characteristics of teachers who positively influence the academic performance of students were present in teachers that they held in high regard. These characteristics include: approachable, pleasant, helpful, tolerant, concerned, caring, and being perceptive of, and sensitive to, the needs of students (Irvine, 1990). Often, during our conversations, they mentioned teachers they liked and respected because "they respect me." The need to be respected was also mentioned by Black students at the GTA High School (Anthony, 1994) and in several
other Toronto schools (Dei, 1995). While there are some teachers that they genuinely liked, their main reason for fostering pleasant relationships with their teachers, seemed to be the desire to boost their marks.

The participants tended, or tried, to disregard teachers who displayed opposite characteristics - for example, those who had low expectations of them or discouraged them in any way. Despite this, teacher expectations did affect their performance in certain subjects - Mathematics and Science in particular - but not their feelings about themselves. Unlike some Black children described in the literature (Coleman, 1966; Kleinfeld, 1972; Irvine, 1990; Holliday, 1985), they did not internalise any negative attitudes that teachers displayed towards them. Instead they expressed more concern about their parents and family’s perceptions of them.

The girls know that their relationships with school staff is not the typical Black student-White staff relationship. They admitted that the negative stereotype of Black students exist in all of their schools and that they knew Blacks who conform to the stereotype. While some of them held stereotypic Black students personally responsible for the difficulties they experience in school, they also felt some sympathy towards them, males in particular who they believe are unfairly treated and "picked on" by staff (sections 5.3 & 6.4). They believe that, as Black females they are more accepted than their male counterparts. They sensed that many White teachers were afraid of Black students, Black boys in particular. Their suspicion is well founded (Ryan, in press).

There is abundant evidence in the literature which shows that, where Black students are concerned, White staff prefer the girls (Mac an Ghaill, 1988; Hale-Benson, 1989; Solomon, 1992). Based on their comments, it is clear that the girls in this study are also aware of this. They note that there are capable Blacks who disengage because they do not get enough positive attention from their teachers. Lack of attention to Black students, as a common practice of White teachers, has been documented (Rubovitz & Maehr, 1973; Riley, 1985; Irvine, 1990). Black students in Toronto high schools also complained about being ignored (Anthony, 1995b; Dei, 1995). However, the girls in my study did not experience this. They made themselves visible and vocal and felt that they were acknowledged by teachers in the classroom. It is interesting that they directed their loudness towards classroom debates, and on fewer occasions, to defend themselves against injustice. In this way they would be viewed as participating in classroom
discussion rather than as rowdy and disruptive - traits commonly associated with nonconformist Black students who are not expected to do well academically.

Based on their descriptions of themselves and classroom interactions, they can be classified as outspoken and outgoing. These traits are quite the opposite of those that some teachers ascribe to students who have high potential as learners. Cornbleth and Korth (1980, in Hale-Benson, 1989) found that the teachers in their study considered White females as having a higher potential as learners than White males and Black students, because they were reserved, efficient, orderly and quiet. Black males had the lowest potential because they were outspoken, aggressive and outgoing.

Being outspoken is a valued trait that some of them developed as they matured; others claimed they were "always that way." This is plausible. My friend Alana, a Black physician who studied at Caribbean and Toronto universities, described her 3-year-old daughter, Katy, as "feisty and assertive." Alana, who by her own admission was, and still is, a "phantom in the opera" (Fordham, 1993) expressed her pleasure in Katy and said that she will not discourage her because, "she'll need to be like that, the way things are these days."

Language (including accent) is an important component of culture. In my recent work with OISE/UT professor Tara Goldstein, I discovered that language/accent is used to mask ethnocultural discrimination. Individuals are denied certain educational and employment opportunities because of their inability to speak English with an "acceptable" accent (Lippi-Green, 1997). Teachers use language/accents to evaluate Black students' abilities (Lippi-Green, 1997) and the girls know this. Some were retained in grade when they first arrived in Canada because they did not speak English like Canadians do; others described friends who had been subjected to this form of discrimination. It was interesting that, during the interviews, they all spoke fluent Canadian English and with Canadian accents. Although the recent arrivals can speak their dialect, they never paused to find the correct word; neither did they slip into dialect even at the most animated points of our conversations. I do not consider their code-switching as evidence of "acting White" or being "raceless." For children of their age, it is probably normal to switch language codes, or accents, in different situations.

Hale-Benson (1989:89) cites Labov (1964) who delineated stages in the acquisition of standard English. Labov states that, at the high school age, "The child begins to learn how to
modify his speech in the direction of the prestige standard in formal situations or even, to some extent, in casual speech." Beverley, who admitted to using dialect with her friends, could have spoken to me in the Trinidadian dialect, but she chose not to, perhaps because I did not speak to her in dialect. In April 1997, some of the girls visited with me. We ate dinner and chatted for a few hours. It was interesting that, later in the evening, when only those of Jamaican parentage were present, June made a complete switch, and Simone a partial switch, from Canadian English to Jamaican Patois. For individuals who accept the achievement ideology, code switching could be part of their repertoire, but for others, it may be regarded as facilitating communication.

Considering their parents' employment status (appendix V), it is possible that some, like Simone and Erica, come from low-income homes. Perhaps one wonders, as I did, about Black students from low-income households who achieve academic success. Clark (1983) conducted an in-depth study of five high achievers and five low achievers from such families. He discovered that success was rooted in a combination of family, school and individual factors. Among the high achievers were factors that I also found in the girls I interviewed. These included, (i) nurturing and supportive parents (ii) discipline/parental control in the home, (iii) positive parental involvement in school work, (iv) warm parent-child relationships, (v) parental expectation that the child will pursue tertiary education and (vi) the involvement of some stimulating and supportive teachers.

Four of the girls came from single-parent homes. Based on my observations (when I visited their homes) and from our conversations, I sense that the parental factors listed above were all in place. There is an extensive literature about the relationship between single-parent households and poor academic outcome (Jenkins, 1989), but far fewer studies have examined the strengths of stable single-parent homes. Jenkins (1989) cites three studies which show that the absence of a father has less influence on academic achievement than that of the mother. Mirza (1993:43) blames the media for perpetuating the image of Black men as being "feckless and irresponsible." She admits that there is a high incidence of single-motherhood among Blacks, relative to Whites. However, within the Black community, the proportion is relatively low compared to stable, conjugal unions. Furthermore, she sees single-motherhood among Blacks as a positive thing because it encourages women to strive for compatible relationships rather than
being trapped in unsatisfactory unions based on economic need.

The girls in this study like to be noticed or acknowledged by their teachers, whether verbally or nonverbally. Hale-Benson (1989:86) points out that "Black children are very adept at nonverbal communication and sensitive to affective cues." She cites Erikson (1968) who notes that, during the formative adolescent period, children need to be responded to, to be given status as persons and to be acknowledged by those who they themselves acknowledge. Students want to be acknowledged by their teachers, but they also want to have a less authoritarian relationship with them. Simone, for example, said that she does not care what teachers think about her, yet she claimed that the teachers she is likely to remember, years after leaving school, are the ones who noticed her or talked to her outside the classroom.

Each girl expressed pride in not being like nonconformist students. This should not be considered as evidence of "racelessness" or "acting White." They believe that those who live the stereotype (of Black students) are responding to oppression in a way that makes things worse for themselves. Furthermore, the fact that these girls participate in Caribbean and African activities show that they are proud of their heritage and wish to emphasise its difference, or uniqueness, vis-a-vis White Canadian culture.

The participants' parents all originate from former British colonies (Appendix V), which, at the time that they were growing up, would have still been under British rule. (Jamaica and the Republic of Trinidad & Tobago, the oldest of the former colonies in the Caribbean, have been independent for thirty-five years; Nigeria, for thirty-eight years). Our cultures are diluted with many British values and customs. There is racism, though not the kind that exists in White countries (Coelho, 1988; LaGuerre, 1988). However, discrimination is based more on class than on race. The class structure varies among the Islands. For example, in Trinidad, as in Canada, the middle class predominates (Ryan, 1991); in Jamaica the working class predominates (Coelho, 1988). Some individuals aspire towards the upper classes and so appropriate their behaviour. They consider this being well-bred and they also want their children to be well-bred. This is the culture in which they socialise their children. Thus, in the Caribbean being well-behaved in school is not associated with race but more, perhaps, with class.

Coelho (1988) discussed the different responses of Caribbean children to Canadian school culture. She notes that teachers find middle-class West Indians more likely to conform to school
norms. Powell (1989:72) suggests that "minority group children of lower socioeconomic status tend to be more accepting of their own ethnicity than those of middle and upper social class groups." She believes that this happens because lower class groups develop their own culture and values and may reject the definitions of success articulated by the dominant culture. However, it is probably their class, rather than their ethnicity, that they accept. The evidence in my study shows that the girls and their families are proud of their ethnicity but encourage the behaviours of the (upper) middle class. However, their parents' middle class backgrounds and/or aspirations, seem to play a major role.

One may argue that, in predominantly Black Caribbean countries, with many Black teachers, there are Black children who disengage from school. This does not mean that their failure in White countries cannot be blamed on racism. What it means is that other factors may be operating in Black societies. Social class, for example, and teacher expectations of students from the working class, may militate against their success.

9.2. RACISM AND SEXISM.

Racism and sexism are two of many forms of discrimination which exist in Canadian society and schools. Black girls, being doubly disadvantaged, experience both through their interactions with teachers and administrators, other students and also in the curriculum.

It is an established fact that girls tend to be under-represented in Mathematics and the Physical Sciences (Foster, 1985; Mac an Ghaill, 1988; Novodrodsky & Alimi, 1997). Of the twenty girls in my sample, less than half (6) were doing well (marks above 70) in both Mathematics and at least two Sciences. They are also the ones who are planning careers in these fields. Among those who expressed difficulty with these subjects, their problems began in the earlier grades - usually between the eighth and tenth. They either lost interest, or confidence in their abilities, after being discouraged by a teacher. None of them talked about being discouraged by family members though, in a few instances, their friends had tried, unsuccessfully, to dissuade them.

Some of the participants described how, with the help of patient and supportive teachers, they acquired an interest and skill in Mathematics and the Physical Sciences. Thomas (1986) cites a number of studies which show that interest and ability in Mathematics and Science are
highest among students who receive encouragement from significant others, teachers in particular. Several studies have shown that Black students and White females receive the least encouragement because teachers, and parents in some cases, believe they are either not interested or not capable (Hare, 1985; Mac an Ghaill, 1988; Bennett & Le Compte, 1990; Rogers, 1997; Berrill & De’Bell, 1997). Thus boys more often than girls, are encouraged to pursue courses and careers related to Mathematics, Science and Technology. In Canada, the most recent statistics show that females are significantly underrepresented in Mathematics, Science and Technology, and overrepresented in the less lucrative arts and humanities fields. Of women university graduates, 12% majored in science and technology compared to about 33% of the men; among college graduates the numbers were 7% and 25% respectively (Carey, 1998).

The sorting of males and females into "gendered" and "racialised" professions is due, in large part, to the ways in which they are socialised. Thomas (1986:34) cites several studies which show that White females and Black students "are socialised very early in their educational developement to be more affective and service oriented, and less analytical and quantitative in their career interests and aspirations. Other researchers have reported that Black girls, in particular, are directed towards the "helping" and clerical professions (Riley, 1985; Mac an Ghaill, 1988; Reid, 1988). A review of appendix V will show that most of the girls intend to pursue professions in the "helping" arena - in this case, psychology and social work.

9.2.1. Denial of personal discrimination.

The girls denied or minimised their personal experiences of race and gender discrimination. Their frequent refrain consisted of, "I don't see it" or "not me personally." However, during the course of our conversations, they described racist and sexist incidents in which they were personally involved. Denise, for example, who is not good at Math, described a Math teacher whose attitude made her feel like she is "less than Whites or Orientals." Although she could not, or did not wish to, describe the attitude, she concluded that the teacher was not racist.

The denial, or minimisation, of personal experiences of racism and sexism is reported in several studies. Essed (1991) examined everyday racism in the lives of Black academic and professional women. Like the girls in my study, several of the women in hers denied personal
experiences of racism while describing situations they experienced that, to Essed and to me, were clearly racist. Denial of personal discrimination, in situations where it is manifest or highly probable, is a phenomenon that has been explored among stigmatised or oppressed groups (Crosby, 1984; Crocker & Major, 1993; Ruggiero & Taylor, 1997).

Members of stigmatised and oppressed groups perceive and cope with discrimination in different ways. First, some attribute negative feedback or outcomes to discrimination against their group. Doing so, it has been suggested, protects the self-esteem of such individuals (Crocker & Major, 1989). A second, and more popular, theory has emerged in the area of perceived discrimination - the personal/group discrimination discrepancy (Taylor et al, 1990, cited in Ruggiero & Taylor, 1997). This theory is based on observations from members of a wide range of oppressed groups who consistently rated discrimination aimed at their group significantly higher than that aimed at themselves. To test this hypothesis, Ruggiero and Taylor (1997) conducted experiments with Canadian undergraduates of Asian and Caribbean origin. They examined various elements of self-esteem and perceived control. Just as women did in earlier reports (Crosby, 1984), those in this study minimised personal discrimination even when there was a 75% chance of sex discrimination. In a similar manner, when faced with a 75% chance of racial discrimination, again they refused to acknowledge the possibility that their failure (on a test) could be rooted in racism.

Several explanations have been proffered. Crosby (1984:374) suggests that "the denial of disadvantage could be understood as a symptom of people's need to believe in a just world." Another suggestion offered by her is that there is an emotional reason for denial - the need to avoid identifying the perpetrators. Ruggiero and Taylor (1997) propose two different explanations, based on measures of self-esteem and personal control. Firstly, the Asians and Blacks in their study found it difficult to face the fact that they had been socially rejected because of their race. Hence they attributed failure to poor performance rather than racism, in exchange for feeling socially accepted. Secondly, by minimising discrimination and internalising failure, they could feel a greater sense of personal control over life's events. Thus, by not believing they were discriminated against, they "maintain higher levels of perceived control in both the performance and social domains" (Ruggiero & Taylor, 1997:385). If they convince themselves there is no discrimination, then there is none to report. As Crosby puts it (1984:377):
The accounts that respondents feel constrained to offer an interviewer bear a strong relation to the accounts that they feel constrained to offer themselves. Talking about personal experiences of discrimination is not easy. Considering how difficult this was for adult women (Crosby, 1984) and university undergraduates (Ruggiero & Taylor, 1997), one cannot blame high school girls for responding similarly.

An alternative explanation of their denial/minimisation of discrimination may be that they are unable to recognise its covert forms. Because of our colonial education and predominantly non-White environment, many Caribbean Blacks acquire knowledge and experience of Black-White racism, for the first time, only after our arrival in Canada. Being unprepared, many of us either do not recognise racism or understand the full meaning of racist words and deeds. For example, in the Caribbean, where Blacks are the majority and the people in power, the word "nigger" does not carry with it the same meaning as it does on this continent. The comments made by a Black American woman (Essed, 1991:93), who "almost exploded with anger when she was called a nigger by a White guy" illustrates this point:

I know the attitude behind that word. [It is] racist, it's a degrading term calling me worse than dirt. When I heard it, I just—-I remembered everything I've ever read in my history books, everything everybody ever told me about slavery or what I've seen on TV, and I said, they can't do this to me. Not in 1985!...I said no, no! This is for everybody who has been called this and been hurt by it, I'm going to hurt you because of it.

After I read this, I understood how June felt when she had a similar experience (section 5.1). She "exploded with anger" and was suspended because, in the eyes of the principal, she responded inappropriately.

Our inability to effectively deal with these new experiences of racism may be rooted in our limited knowledge of it. Writing about Blacks in the Netherlands, Essed (1991:91) describes the role that colonisation played in limiting their knowledge of racism thus:

First, colonisation is characterised by ideological domination. The colonisers present themselves as a positive identification model and ignore the relation between colonialism and racism. Second, the majority of the colonised population has little or no experience with Whites on a level of day-to-day interaction. Third, it appears that the experiences in [Canada], after migration, contradict previous expectations Blacks had about life in [Canada].

I admit to being one of those who lacked knowledge of the form of racism that exists in countries like Canada and the United States. I acquired a more thorough understanding of it only
after reviewing the literature for a reading course I developed at OISE/UT. Had I arrived with some of this knowledge, I would have handled subtle racism encountered in my early years differently.⁴

As with racism, they either ignored or minimised sexist behaviour from teachers and some students. Denise and Beverley, although uncomfortable, dismissed their teachers’ sexist language and behaviour as jokes. Perhaps they are not quite sure if this is sexism. Except for overt forms of sexual harassment, there is often ignorance and confusion about what exactly constitutes sexist behaviour (Stein, 1995).

For these girls, making a joke of racism and sexism, or completely ignoring them, are considered better options to confrontation or lodging complaints. For one thing, as noted by May and Jennifer (chapter 5) complaining might not result in anything being done and then they would get the kind of reputation they do not want. I presented these data at two conferences, one in Philadelphia, USA and the other in Barbados. The American conference was attended by many Black female academics who felt that we must teach our children to recognise racism and sexism, especially in their subtle forms as they are more likely to be manifest. We must empower them to confront discrimination in ways that will not detract from their academic performance. The Black Caribbean women scholars, on the other hand, felt that it is best to encourage them to ignore it and focus on their academic work.

It is generally believed that overt forms of racial discrimination are being replaced by more subtle forms which are also harder to recognise and/or prove (Marable, 1997). The girls said that their teachers are careful with overt racism because they know that being Black has "some kind of power" - they will complain to the school Board. (chapter 5). There is now a need to show that being female has some kind of power. Gender discrimination will not end if females do not confront it. As a Black woman, if I were to raise children in any White patriarchal country, I would teach them to recognise covert forms of discrimination and encourage them to confront it, assured that they will have my full support. From personal experience I know that making a formal complaint is an emotionally, mentally and physically exhausting process, moreso when one has no relatives nearby for support. Why, then, would I deal with discrimination in this way? Because I believe it is the fastest way to effect change.

If "speaking out" contributed to the elimination of overt racism, then it might do the
same for overt sexism. The girls said that it is common to hear sexist jokes but not racist ones (from teachers). Although they laugh, these jokes make them feel uncomfortable. If they speak out about it, staff will exercise the same caution with sexism that they do around racism. After I lodged a complaint, true there was ostracism, but individuals exercised caution, perhaps fear, in their dealings with me. I believe that, having to pause before interacting with me, allows them time to consider potentially racist or sexist elements in their speech or behaviour.

The girls are afraid to speak out from fear of being perceived as oppositional and getting lower marks. Elizabeth (chapter 6) was slapped by a White boy and did nothing about it. Ignorant about the power relations between Black females and White males, she did not think of it as a racist incident. By her own admission, she had had similar experiences in earlier grades and had done nothing then. Will girls like Elizabeth ever be able to stand up for themselves? Will they become battered wives in the future? When finally confronted with bigots at the university or in the workplace, how will they respond? Will it be an emotionally traumatic experience, due to their lack of "preparation"? When other women "of colour" are assaulted, will they distance themselves and side with the powerful Whites?

Several Black girls at Solomon’s (1992) Lumberville high school were dominated and sexually harassed by the boys but did or said nothing. One girl offered a reason why boys were empowered to behave this way, "The boys know some girls are too embarrassed to report to the teachers what the boys do, so boys just continue the harassment and get away with murder" (p. 58). If, on the other hand, my advice on handling discrimination, was solicited by a parent, my response will encompass different views. The possible consequences of both ignoring and confronting discrimination will be explained to them, and their child. The child’s feelings must be considered because there will always be Black students who cannot ignore discrimination, and girls who cannot ignore harassment, while focusing on academics. For this reason, action must ultimately be the child’s personal choice. What is needed, however, is for parents themselves to be empowered so that they can be supportive of their children who choose to confront discrimination, and guide them to do so in ways that are not deleterious to their academic performance and outcome. Children should be taught that confrontation does not necessarily involve anger and, because they will encounter repeated episodes of racism and sexism, they must know how to choose their "battles."
9.3. MOTIVATION TO ACHIEVE.

Based on the girls' frequent reference to their mothers, it is clear that there is strong maternal influence on their lives and career aspirations. As one who also identifies with her assertive Black mother, I was quite pleased to hear of their warm relationships. There are many Black women writers and media personalities who share congenial relations with their mothers and speak in glowing terms about them (Mirza, 1993). Although this practice presents Black women in a positive light, it is deemed problematic by Mirza (1993). She believes it reinforces the myth of the Black superwoman and the presumption that Black men are marginal in the lives of Black women and families. Mirza (1993:32) denounces this "reification of motherhood" for yet another reason - because "it encourages us to focus on the internal cultural dynamics of the family as an explanation of Black achievement." If Black women are considered as capable of motivating themselves by drawing on their inner strength and cultural resources, she contends, there will be problems in the development of educational and social policies concerning them. Mirza proposed an alternative explanation for the relative success of Black females - that is, the degree of autonomy which exists between the sexes.

Mirza (1993) explored the factors which influence the career aspirations and expectations of young Black and White women (aged 15-19) from working class London homes. She discovered that, unlike their White peers, all the Black girls planned on having a full time career, just as their female relatives did, so that they can be economically independent. This, she found, is not because they felt (as the media suggest) that Black men are unreliable providers, but because they expected them to be equal partners in providing for the home and the children. Black females' positive attitude towards Black males has been reported in other studies (Riley, 1985; Reid, 1988). The young Black men interviewed by Mirza all expressed support for the career aspirations of Black women.

Among the girls in my sample, it is clear that a driving force behind their motivation to do well is their desire to pursue tertiary education and to have a career. Seventeen of the twenty cited getting into and through university or college, and getting a job, as their primary concern (section 8.5). Their certainty about achieving their career goals show that they believe in the achievement ideology - that obtaining good academic credentials will lead to good jobs. As a result their need for academic achievement is high and, because they believe they are capable
of succeeding, their self-concept of ability is also high. These two important factors, which contribute to their motivation and success in school, have been proposed as more appropriate predictors of educational attainment in Black students than either SAT scores or academic rank (Powell, 1989).

There is much interest in identifying what motivates successful minority children to achieve. In her extensive review of the literature on motivation in African Americans, Graham (1994) perused over 130 journal articles and empirical studies to elucidate the relationship between selected motivation constructs and ethnic minority status. The constructs selected included need for achievement, locus of control, attribution, expectancy and ability self-concept. The majority of these studies (77%) focused on comparing Blacks and Whites. However, I will not spend time on the race-comparative aspects of her findings for two reasons. First, this is not the objective of my study and secondly, as she has shown, most of the studies compared Blacks of low socioeconomic status with middle-class Whites thus making it difficult to determine if differences were due to race, class or an interaction between the two.

Graham found that African-Americans are "internals" who believe in personal control of outcomes and have positive self-views of their competence. She also found that they have high expectancies of future success and a high need for achievement which was positively related to high educational and occupational aspirations. Feeling a personal sense of control is an important factor in academic achievement. Parham and Parham (1989:134) examined achievement from the student-environment interaction perspective and concluded that:

Children who interact in their environment without feeling a personal sense of control are usually quick to develop feelings of helplessness and apathy about their lives and life conditions. Such feelings, if internalised, ultimately prove destructive to African-American children's achievement aspirations because they confront even the smallest of obstacles to their achievement believing that they are powerless to influence the outcome. The need for personal control was also identified as a factor in oppressed groups' denial or minimisation of discrimination (section 9.2).

To further explore their achievement motivation I considered Ogbu's (1978) explanation of the differential achievement of students from various ethnocultural groups. In an attempt to explain the poor academic performance of African and Native Americans, Ogbu suggests that the answer lies in their immigrant or conquered status. These two groups of "involuntary
"Voluntary minorities," such as the girls in my sample, have a more positive attitude towards the culture in power. In most cases they have come in search of a better life and are committed to achieving their goals.

If Ogbu's theory holds true, then their attitude towards education may be partially explained by the fact that they are the children of voluntary immigrants who have not been here long enough to internalise feelings of hopelessness about penetrating the career "glass ceiling." However, this cannot be the sole explanation for their conformist ways because there are many first generation Black students who adopt the anti-school behaviours of "involuntary minorities" (Solomon, 1992).

The girls are aware of their stigmatised position in Canadian society. They provided examples of discrimination in their schools and mentioned being given some advice about racism by their parents. The fact that their parents talk to them about racism might have contributed to their academic performance. Powell (1989) cited a number of studies which examined the relationship between socialisation and academic motivation and concluded that, children whose parents transmitted a consciousness of racial barriers attained better grades than those who were taught nothing about their ethnic status. Apparently, those with enhanced awareness exhibit a higher sense of personal efficacy, and personal efficacy is among the constructs that are strongly related to academic achievement (Graham, 1994).

Despite some of their feelings about being in school, they are oriented towards both school and education to the extent that they all expect to attend university or college. Furthermore they do not believe that either race or gender discrimination will prevent them from achieving their career goals. Ullah (1985, in Mirza, 1993) found that, of all the groups in his study, young Black women, at the point of entry into the job market, were the least aware of the racism they would face in the workplace. I suspect they are also least aware of the sexism they are likely to encounter. Will this lack of awareness and hence, preparation, affect them later on? I do not know. Once reality strikes they may end up like Tomlinson's (1983) Black university women who considered themselves lucky to be in university because of their race and gender.

More than two thirds of Black Canadian women are in the labour force (Henry, 1992).
Black women have a history of caring for other people. It is no surprise that we are over-represented in (the lower levels of) the "caring" professions such as nursing, social work and teaching. With respect to the girls in my study, all but five of them (Brenda B, Stephanie, Melissa, Beverley and May) are aspiring towards occupations in which Black people and White women have gained entrance and visibility. This will undoubtedly play a role in their career success.

9.4. BLACK HISTORY/BLACK STUDIES/BLACK TEACHERS.

At some point during the course of the interview each girl mentioned the need for Black History or Black Studies in the mainstream curriculum, and for more Black academic staff in their schools. This call for inclusion was also made by Black parents and students in several Toronto area schools (Anthony, 1996b; Dei, 1993b, 1995, 1997; Newton & Smith, 1997). There is evidence that some schools are making an effort to include Black history, and authors "of colour" in the English curriculum. However, those, like Roxy, who studied "Shakespeare" for five years, expressed frustration because it is perceived as irrelevant to their lives today. With respect to history, Blacks are either omitted or given a cursory mention in the context of slavery. The girls believe that, since Blacks and people of other ethnocultural groups contributed to worldwide development, they should be afforded a central place in the curriculum. They also believe that such a move will engage non-conformist Black students.

With respect to Black History/Black Studies, the question remains, why is there such resistance to incorporation into the mainstream curriculum? Why is there such resistance to making Black History a mandatory part of the curriculum? Is it because most White teachers will be uncomfortable with it? Having to read and talk about what Whites did to Blacks, and other people "of colour" might generate feelings of guilt and shame. Or perhaps it is difficult for some to "remove their head from the sand" and admit that there is racism in our schools. On the other hand, I suspect it is because they are aware of its potential for empowering and transforming Black students. As noted by Marable (1997a:11):

Scholarship must inform and educate, but, for oppressed people, it must do more than this. Social analysis should empower people to acquire a better understanding of their world and how it actually works ... A critique of social reality is always strengthened by the perspective of history, because patterns from the past can powerfully influence what
happens in the future. But the primary purpose of social analysis should not be merely to interpret reality, but to transform it.

Thus Black History/Studies must be more than accounts of dates, names and events. These courses should transform students (future adults) into critical thinkers who are able to analyse their environments and perhaps, bring about improvements. Transformation should happen both inside and outside schools, as opportunities arise. I will illustrate this point with two examples. My Black Caribbean friend Frances and I were waiting for a train in a Toronto subway station. Frances is 30-something years old, was educated in the Caribbean, and has been living in Toronto for the past 8 years. We looked at adjacent huge billboard advertisements from a major department store - one featured a White woman wearing a skirt and sitting demurely, legs together. The other featured a Black woman, also wearing a skirt, leaping in the air, both legs off the ground and as wide apart as the east is from the west. I voiced my disgust "at how they’re trying to reinforce the stereotype of the loose, wild, Black female slut." Frances was taken aback and said that, when she looked at it, she was happy "that a Black woman got a chance to be in an ad."

In the second example I describe an opportunity for empowerment which most "blind" individuals will not see. I was at Sunday Mass, as usual. The Old Testament reading was taken from the prophet Daniel (7:9-10). In this reading Daniel described a vision of God as follows:

> I kept on beholding until there were thrones placed and [God] sat down. His clothing was white, just like snow and the hair of His head was like pure wool. His throne was flames of fire; its wheels were a burning fire.

By way of introducing his homily, the Anglo priest recalled Daniel’s description of what he had seen, conveniently omitting the "hair of pure wool." After Mass, as the priest greeted parishioners on their way out, I went up to him and said, "Father, in his description of God, I noticed that Daniel said that God had 'hair of pure wool.' Should we take that as proof that God is African? After all, it is only people of African heritage who have woolly hair." He laughed out and responded, "That’s a very interesting observation." One can only imagine, in the mainstream curriculum, how empowering revelations of this nature will be for Black students.

Black intellectuals have a role to play in transforming society, including "colonised" Blacks. As suggested by Marable (1997a:12):
The task of the radical intellectual is to illuminate constantly the contours of social reality…. we make assumptions of which many in polite bourgeois academic circles might disapprove…. Intellectual work makes real sense to Black and other oppressed people when it empowers them to make new history.

Many of the girls admitted that they are blind to racism and sexism. The need for education that opens their minds and eyes is advanced by the Organisation of Women of Asian and African Descent (OWAAD 1979, in Foster, 1985:42):

Education is not about allowing us to realise our full potential; it is not about encouraging us to exercise our minds to the full or creating self-aware individuals. Rather the education system seeks to grade and discipline the majority of school leavers for the world of work outside. With our understanding of the jobs Black people do, it is obvious what kind of education we are going to get; we do the worse jobs in society and are well prepared for this by receiving the worse kind of education…. all too frequently they [teachers] refuse to accept responsibility for the miseducation of Black children. They prefer instead to blame parents, environment, upbringing or the effects of immigration.

While I agree whole-heartedly with this statement, I believe "creating self-aware individuals" applies to children of all races, and school staff. That many Whites deny the existence of racism, and males deny there is sexual oppression, prove that they need to become more aware. This education should start in the primary grades because by the time they get to university, it may be too late for some. They may not be able to purge themselves of their biases. Another question comes to mind. Considering that many White teachers have women "of colour" cleaning their homes and caring for their children, what will be their motivation to empower and "emancipate" Black girls - presuming that they even knew how?

I must add a note of caution here. Recall that Linda, a student at the GTA high school had vociferously defended Blacks when her teacher said that "all Africans have AIDS" (see chapter two). She ended her reproof thus, "you see Martin, Mandela, Malcolm and now it's me, it's my turn." How interesting that she did not automatically think about Angela Davis, or any other Black woman activist. All children need to learn about women "of colour" who have contributed to humanity. However, with reference to Black girls, Foster (1985:46) notes that, "if history continues to ignore the continuation of Black women's struggles down the ages, their daughters will have to begin each time to struggle anew." The way in which females are socialised guarantees our oppression and schooling is an important part of that socialisation.
(Foster, 1985). It will take more than books, pictures and gender-neutral language to eradicate sexism. We need to open their eyes with knowledge of what patriarchy has done to hold us back and keep us in our/their place (hooks, 1981).

9.5. SUMMARY.

In this chapter I focused on, what I considered, the more important findings of this study. I grouped these under four headings: attitude towards school and education, racism and sexism, motivation to achieve and Black History/Black Studies/Black teachers.

Overall, the girls had a positive attitude towards school, most of their teachers and education. Their favourite teachers included those who were caring, who respected them and who encouraged their academic pursuits. Conscious of the relationship between teacher perception and marks, they were careful not to be viewed as recalcitrant Black students: they were generally well-behaved and showed that they were serious about their education. This does not mean that they were "acting White" - far from it. They organise and participate in Black-focused activities within their schools, have predominantly Black (West Indian) friends, and do not consider being academically oriented exclusive to White students. Their behaviour appears to be rooted in their parents' middle-class backgrounds or middle-class aspirations. Whether in single or two-parent homes, their parents support and motivate them in both word and deed. With respect to the problems encountered by non-conformist Black students, their opinions varied. They shared the blame, for those students' situation, among teachers, parents and the students themselves.

A noteworthy finding was that few of them were doing both Mathematics and at least two of the Physical Sciences. In most cases, their subjects, and career aspirations, were oriented towards the "caring" professions which are typically pursued by females.

The participants' responses to personal incidents of discrimination varied between denial and minimisation although in some cases they may have simply been ignorant about it. In "one breath" they denied these experiences while describing personal incidents which were clearly racist or sexist in the "other breath." The psychology literature shows that members of stigmatised groups use denial and minimisation of discrimination to maintain some sense of personal control over life's events and to be socially accepted by those of the dominant group.
When they did recognise racism or sexism, they tended to brush it off or treat it as a joke. It appears that they are afraid to speak out, when teachers are the perpetrators, for fear of reprisals.

The participants all expect to complete high school and pursue tertiary education. They are motivated to achieve primarily by their parents (especially their mothers), their inner drive for success, and desire for a career. Again, citing the psychology literature, I showed that they possess the putative personality and cognitive components of achievement motivation. Their locus of control is "internal," they have positive self-concepts and high expectancies of future success. Using Ogbu's theory, I suggested that some aspect of their drive to achieve may be related to their "voluntary" migrant status. This, however, is not the full explanation.

All the girls expressed the wish for more Black History/Black Studies and Black teachers in their schools. They want Black studies as part of the mainstream curriculum not only to engage Black students, but so that non-Black students could learn positive things about Black people (Appendix VI). I pointed out the need to make the Black Studies course inclusive of the contributions made by Black women. I argued that all students, as tomorrow's adults, need the type of education that will open their minds and eyes to racism, sexism and other forms of discrimination so that they may be empowered to confront them and, hopefully, effect (positive) change before the next millennium.

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NOTES

1. This way of thinking still exists in the minds of some professors at OISE/UT who conveniently fail to factor teacher expectations into the achievement equation. In one of my second-year PhD classes, the Anglo professor showed a film of an inner-city New York high school. One of the students in the film, a Black male, expressed his desire to study medicine at Cornell University Medical School. The professor promptly predicted: "He'll never get into medical school, certainly not at Cornell." I asked the reason for such a clairvoyant comment and he replied: "It's his language, he can't even speak proper English." The professor explained his reason for concluding thus, by describing the single case of an African-American male, with poor English skills, who he had tried so hard to help complete a degree at an American university.

2. I learnt Jamaican Patois during my sojourn in that country so I understood them very well.
3. I witnessed this need for social acceptance by Whites at OISE/UT. I was in the company of two staff members who are friends: "Geraldine," a White woman and "Margaret," a Black. Geraldine boasted that she often hurls "racial insults" at Margaret who does not mind because she (Margaret) knows that "it's only a joke." Margaret, who knows that I had filed a complaint, looked at me and beamed with pride. To me, the unspoken words were that, "I don't know how to take a joke." Secondly, after I filed the complaint, some "minority" females in the Educational Admininstration department offered their support in secret. Publicly, they shunned me while displaying elaborate gestures of support for the White male perpetrator. More than social acceptance by the "in" group was at stake, however. These women were aware that the White males who run the department, and the country, are better able to "butter their bread" and advance their careers than I could.

4. I am now contemplating publishing a little booklet to warn prospective Black immigrants, especially students, about the reality of race relations in Canada and what they are likely to encounter.

5. One of Mirza's (1993) participants said, "You need emotional support and strength from a man. You like to feel he rules, even if he doesn't" (p. 48). Sexist nurturing/socialisation is at the root of this form of thinking.

6. At a 1997 OISE/UT Equity conference, I told a gathering of faculty and graduate students that, "Based on my experience, many White OISE/UT students take all the anti-racism courses offered but it didn't help. They cannot rid themselves of racism because it is in their genes." This was meant to illustrate how deeply engrained it is. Some OISE/UT students "of colour" are concerned that these White students, with their anti-racist "credentials," will get jobs, in the field, ahead of us. Having the advantage of colour, their "credentials" will render them "qualified" - despite their behaviour.

7. Taken from Foster (1985:45) and Alfred & Staton (1997:67), some outstanding women "of colour":

Sarojini Naidu, Nanny of the Maroons, Mary Seacole, Sojourner Truth, Harriet Tubman, Mary Ann Shadd, Ada Kelly Whitney.

More information about Black women in Canada can be found in Bristow et al, 1994.
CHAPTER 10
SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

At the beginning of this thesis I described how the research question was conceived. Then I presented some of the findings from the literature that examined the school experiences of Black students, girls in general, and academically oriented Black girls in particular. In this study I explored the experiences of academically oriented Black girls in Toronto area schools. I focused on their experiences of racism and sexism. I also explored their motivation to achieve and their strategies for coping with the burdens of race and gender discrimination, as well as their unique status. In the first chapter I discussed the need to balance the research on "deviant" and disengaged Black students with studies that focused on the successful ones. This is not just for a fairer representation, but also because there are lessons to be learnt from successful Black students. This study is but one more piece of the "Black students" puzzle. It is based on twenty Black girls who were not randomly selected, therefore the findings cannot be generalised. However, there is some interesting information and ideas for school staff and parents of marginalised students who desire to see them succeed academically. One thing is clear - successful Black students, and girls in particular, do not behave alike, nor are they motivated to achieve in identical ways. On the other hand, what they share in common is the view that success in high school is a prerequisite for entry into tertiary institutions - a place where they all intend to go.

Wolcott (1990) advises against "concluding" when writing up a qualitative study. He also suggests that authors refrain from offering personal opinions and judgements. However, during the course of carrying out the research, analysing the data and writing this dissertation, several questions, issues and ideas came to mind and these are included here.

10.1. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS.

In this section I present a summary of the major research findings. I have grouped them under the five major themes that I used to present the data.
10.1.1. **Attitude towards school and teachers.**

What the girls like most about school is the opportunity to be with their friends, and learning. Their friends and their involvement in extra-curricular activities contributed to their sense of belonging in the schools. They dislike getting up early, pressure due to deadlines, group work, nagging and authoritarian teachers. These made them feel like dropping out of school. They would like to see more Black teachers and administrators in the schools. The girls expressed a desire for more caring [White] teachers who will take the time to get to know them and not be afraid of them. There were some teachers who had taken a personal interest in them, who respected and tried to understand them. Negative feelings were associated with teachers’ abuse of power/authority and their lack of respect for students. Overall they seem to have had enough good experiences with White teachers to compensate for the bad experiences.

There were opposing views about the teachers’ ability to teach. Some teachers were described as having no teaching or communication skills; others were praised for preparing and explaining the material well. They found some of the academic work challenging and some of it boring. The girls believe it is the responsibility of the teachers to make the work challenging and interesting.

Their need for teachers’ approval varied. What teachers thought about them mattered primarily because of course grades. They know that their behaviour is "graded," hence they did not wish to be seen as recalcitrant Black students. Some claimed that they do not care what teachers thought about them. They respected teachers who respected them and it was their opinion that mattered most.

They offered several suggestions for improving the school system, the most common being the need for racial diversity among the academic staff and the inclusion of Black History/Black Studies in the mainstream curriculum.

10.1.2. **Racism.**

The girls felt that blatant racism was *passe* but the data showed that this is not really so. Some denied personal experiences of racism then went on to describe racist incidents in which they were personally involved. First generation girls described their feelings of boredom, frustration and anger when placed in grades below their academic level. They talked about being...
discouraged, by staff, from pursuing certain academic subjects but appeared unsure that the discouragement was rooted in racism. They or their friends had experienced unfair treatment with respect to grades, rule infraction and athletic achievement. They also described their responses, or lack thereof, to these and other offensive incidents involving staff. However, there had been teachers who made an effort to treat them fairly.

Among the students, there is ethnocultural segregation, name-calling, verbal abuse and inter-ethnic fights. The girls appeared more willing to admit to personal experiences of racism involving students than they were when staff was involved. They do not complain to staff because they believe the teachers will side with the White students and nothing will be done. The fear that non-Blacks have of Black people seems to protect them from physical abuse although one girl was slapped on her bottom by a White boy.

With respect to the low academic achievement of Black students in general, they held teachers, parents, society and the students themselves responsible. Negative intragroup peer pressure was also cited. They believe that many bright Black students adopt anti-school behaviours to avoid being labelled "nerds" or being perceived as "acting White."

The lack of Black people in the curriculum was mentioned by most girls. Blacks received a cursory mention in some History classes. In a few cases authors "of colour" had been included in the English curriculum. When Black Studies was offered it was taught after regular school hours hence difficult to sustain. There is evidence that some teachers are trying to be sensitive when discussing Black issues.

10.1.3. Sexism.

The girls appeared unsure of what constitutes sexist behaviour, more so in its subtle forms. When faced with clearly sexist incidents involving teachers, they were generally unwilling to confront them and responded with laughter, silence or denial. Some girls responded to sexist statements from boys as well as during classroom debates. As long as sexism does not prevent them from achieving a goal, they prefer to ignore it. Male students of all races disrespect girls. This may be related, in part, to the examples set by sexist male teachers. Except for Black teachers, sexist behaviour towards Black females is ignored.

Few of them are taking, and doing well in, Mathematics and the Physical Sciences. Most,
who are not doing well, traced their problem to a teacher, in an earlier grade, who had directly or indirectly discouraged them. There is the perception that teachers think these subjects are not for Black girls.

With respect to their status in school, vis-a-vis Black boys, they know that they are more accepted by their teachers. They receive more positive attention than the boys. They believe that teachers are more likely to "pick on," or completely ignore, Black boys who, they feel, need attention and to be encouraged. The only advantage in being a boy, is that they will have fewer restrictions at home and more freedom to absent themselves from classes (to participate in sporting events).

10.1.4. Coping.

Strengths such as "leadership skills" and "high self-esteem" were identified. These girls can be described as self-confident and having a healthy self-image. They cannot be described as "raceless" or as "acting White" because they participate in, and organise, Black-related activities both in and outside of school. They also have many Black friends. Thus they are neither isolated nor lonely in school. They are also neither silent nor invisible. They make themselves highly visible and use their loudness in constructive ways - during class debates and, at times, to defend themselves against unfair treatment.

Although some admitted to breaking minor school rules, they are, for the most part, well-behaved and diligent in their academic work. They do not think that being well-behaved and studying hard are the prerogative of White students. They are not shy about their academic achievements and do not engage in behaviours, such as clowning around, to mask their brilliance.

Their parents, friends and religious beliefs also help them to cope with the many stressors that they face. With respect to racism and sexism, their main form of coping lies in ignoring, denying or minimising personal experiences. In some cases they appeared to be unsure that a particular incident was racist or sexist. Thus ignorance is also a factor in their response - if they cannot recognise racism and sexism, or do not wish to recognise them, then they do not have to deal with and cope with them.
10.1.5. Motivation to achieve.

They are influenced more by their parents and successful Blacks with whom they are personally acquainted, than by their teachers or famous personalities. Maternal involvement was cited most frequently but fathers also played a significant role in their education and in motivating them.

The need for encouragement from both teachers and peers was also highlighted. Caribbean teachers were described as being more supportive and nurturing than Canadian teachers. Getting a good mark on an assignment or test, and being publicly recognised for it, were both identified as motivating factors. When their marks fall below their expectations, they blame themselves first rather than the difficulty of the work or the teachers. Their positive attitude towards education is associated with future rewards. All these girls expect to pursue tertiary education and to have careers. They do not think that either racism or sexism will prevent them from achieving their career goals, but some do find racism a potent motivating force. Their main concern, at the time, was with getting into a university or college and successfully completing the course of study.

10.2. Implications for schools/school staff.

Primarily through the voices of the participants, this study provides a number of suggestions for improving the educational system to better serve the needs of Black and other "minority" students. In certain areas, the findings support those of other investigators. For example, it was revealed that race and gender discrimination, from both staff and students, are still a part of "minority" students' and girls' experiences in schools. In spite of the feminist movement and various anti-racist initiatives in Ontario, race and gender stereotypes prevail. The stereotype of girls' avoidance of, or discouragement from, Mathematics and the Physical Sciences was made manifest. The low proportion of girls who were planning on pursuing Math and Science-related careers was disappointing, considering that they had all selected their courses themselves. What Foster (1985:47) suggests for Black girls with Mathematics and Science phobias applies equally for all girls:

[C]ounselling and support ... by showing them what the difference would be in the scope of options between science subjects and those subjects hitherto popular among them at
the secondary level. Unless they can be professionally advised about ... the possibilities of other choices, it is difficult to see any change in a pattern which has become predictable and stereotypical.

They need to be nurtured and encouraged to pursue these areas of study. Programmes such as those described by Rogers (1997) and Berrill and De'Bell (1997) should be incorporated into all schools. These should begin in the primary years because it is during that time that many of them develop phobias.

This study also showed that Black students' behaviour is still included in their academic assessment. This is an unfair practice which can affect them in various ways. For example, when they apply for scholarships and to universities/colleges, the admission personnel view the grades on their transcript as a measure of their academic ability, not as an assessment of their behaviour. When these marks fall below the requirements of the institution, they may be denied entry. This contributes to the disproportionately low number of Black students in tertiary educational institutions. It also provides support for educational equity programmes which are designed to make tertiary education more accessible to Black students. Our Ministry of Education might consider mandating the use of numbers only to identify students' tests and assignments. If teachers cannot identify the author of a piece of work, the student might be more fairly assessed.

Getting good marks was also identified as an achievement motive. When a nonconformist student’s behaviour is graded, s/he may believe that her/his cognitive skills are deficient and become disengaged from academic work. Compliance can, and should, be encouraged but not through fear, threats or "bribery." Caring teachers who do not flaunt their authority, who respect "minority" students and encourage them, are the ones most likely to orient them towards academics. School should not be seen as a battleground. Teaching should be considered more as a vocation than as merely a job. This cannot be legislated but it can be encouraged and rewarded. The academic outcome of Black students might improve significantly if teachers espoused Coelho’s (1988:70) view that:

Regardless of the difficulties that children may face at home and in society at large, teachers and schools have a responsibility to encourage and foster the children's educational and emotional growth. For the children who must cope with home difficulties, it is especially important that the school operate as a positive force in their lives, rather than as an additional stress factor.
All the girls described some caring and supportive teachers who had helped them along the way. The question that comes to mind is, does the caring and supportive teacher enhance Black students’ desire to conform or do conformist Black students evoke a caring and supportive attitude in their teachers? I argue in favour of the former. Teachers, as adults, operate with stereotypes of various ethnocultural groups cemented in their minds. Black children, on the other hand, start school with a healthy sense of self and trust in their teachers (Coelho, 1988). Furthermore, it is at school that many Black children encounter their first experience of racism either from staff or students (Talbot, 1984; Coelho, 1988; Essed, 1991; Asein, 1993; Samuels, 1993; Codjoe, 1997), and this can permanently alter their view of themselves and/or White people.

There seems to be a continuum of responses to both overt and covert racism. At one end are those who resolve to show Whites that they are intelligent and can achieve more than they (Whites) can; at the other end are those who internalise the racism they encounter and withdraw emotionally or physically. Considering that, for some of the girls in this study, racism is an important motive, the question becomes, how can we instill in more Black children a desire to show their White teachers that they can and will succeed? How can we erase their belief that focusing on academics is a "White thing?"

There is evidence, in this study, that some White teachers and administrators made an effort to understand and befriend Black students, and the students appreciated this. However, students also know when it is merely an affectation. They do not embrace teachers who "smile" with them while discriminating against other Black, or "minority" students. Differential forms of punishment are also noted. Word travels! Just as school staff closely scrutinise Black students, students closely scrutinise staff. Students observe, listen and talk about the staff - their words and their actions. Thus it is important that staff be fair, and be seen as acting fairly, especially when meting out punishment, judging situations, applying sanctions and grading academic work.

There were some school-related practices which call for a greater degree of flexibility. For example, team work, which is touted in the workplace, is not welcomed by all students and should not be mandatory. While there are situations where conformation is necessary, and advisable, it should not be forced when there is the possibility of crippling a student’s learning style or academic performance. This is an area for future research into learning styles. In
addition to this, deadlines for course assignments might be better coordinated with tests so that students are not unduly pressured. The goal of evaluation should not be to determine how well students perform under pressure. Some of them find it difficult handling academic stressors together with those arising from discrimination. White school staff will never know or understand the daily stress of being a "minority" within their institutions.

As revealed in Dei's study (1997), and confirmed in mine, students consider teaching style a key factor in the teacher's ability to engage the interest of their students. Teachers are expected to know their material well and to present it in an enthusiastic way to inspire their students and reduce boredom. In addition to this, some students believe that explaining the material well shows that the teacher cares about them. The corollary of this is, teachers who only read from the textbook or write information on the board, with no explanations, are perceived as not caring about students or the profession. The young adults in our high schools are perceptive, intelligent, discerning individuals. When they complain, teachers should consider this a form of constructive criticism instead of an invitation to engage in warfare. Alternatively, instead of exposing the students to reprisals, resulting from their complaints, all schools should have a compulsory teacher evaluation process similar to that found in most universities.

Teachers should also admit when they do not know something and allow students, Black or otherwise, with superior/experiential knowledge to lead classroom discussion when the occasion arises. This practice is supported by Giroux (1992:23) who notes that student experience is not what it was in the 1960s. It is:

[S]omething very different ... the notion of experience has to be situated ... within a pedadogy. You can't deny that students have experiences [which] are relevant to the learning process.... Students have memories, families, religions, feelings, languages and cultures that give them a distinctive voice.... [W]e can't deny [their experience].

So, for example, when students criticise curricular material or classroom activities, these must be carefully examined and discussed at the administrative level to determine areas where change can be implemented. They may also benefit from learning about how "school" is done in other countries. A major advantage that some immigrant students have over many White Canadian teachers is that they have lived in another country/countries and have experienced different ways of doing things. Rather than going "back to the basics" for a clientele that is vastly different
from that of yesteryear, those in control of the educational system should seek improvements which will benefit the clientele they now serve and will serve in the future.

Another challenge posed by high school students relates to their maturity. Adolescence is a period when they want to exert their independence - to be respected and treated as adults. In this regard the twenty participants in my study are not unique. The Black students in other studies also spoke about their desire to be respected by school staff (Riley, 1985; Codjoe, 1997; Dei, 1997). Karen, one of the girls in my study, suggested that, at the secondary level students ought to be treated as colleagues. This is not to imply that they resort to using their teachers' first-names or have coffee with them. It implies fairness, respect and honest negotiations when dealing with students of all backgrounds. In the business world there is a move away from autocratic/authoritarian rule to a more participatory type of leadership. This is needed in the "management" of high school students.

Black students' participation in extracurricular activities should be encouraged but not to the detriment of their academic work. These activities should involve more than the stereotypical sports and music. Furthermore, they should not be allowed to skip classes in order to participate. This, of course, applies to all students, not just Blacks. Their involvement in school-based Black heritage clubs and other Black activities is essential for establishing and strengthening group identity and solidarity (Dei, 1997:240). However, they should also be encouraged to participate in mainstream groups such as the Student Council. In addition to the knowledge and experience gained, this can enhance their self-confidence and provide greater "voice" and visibility for Blacks in their schools. As role models they will encourage Black students to see that is is possible to penetrate some barriers. As a former vice-president/acting president of the Graduate Students' Association at OISE/UT, President of the CUPE Local at this institute and sole student member of its Advisory Board, I know well the value of participating in the decision-making processes at my "school." I am also aware of how the presence of Blacks in these positions can draw Black and other "minority" students from the margins to the centre.

There is also a need for improvements in the curriculum. The inclusion of Black History or Black Studies is strongly recommended in all schools. This should not be problematic because there are materials which can be used, at all grade levels, in our schools (see Appendix VI). Considering that Blacks have been contributing to the development of Canada for about 400
years, it is right and proper that our history be taught to all children. For Black children this will help to foster feelings of pride in their heritage and strengthen their sense of belonging (Samuels, 1993; Codjoe, 1997; Dei, 1997). In addition, non-Black students will "gain respect for their Black peers and see the fallacy of the myths that exist about Black people" (Alfred & Staton, 1997:68). It will also show that Black-White racism in Canada, being about 400 years old, is not a new phenomenon. Something is clearly lacking when university professors of history publicly deny that slavery ever existed in Canada.¹

Perhaps, as an alternative to Black History/Black Studies, the Sociology of Education can be taught and tailored to suit the different levels of schooling. This will enable students to better understand how their social world is constructed by powerful "others," how they are affected in the present and the potential future effects. In addition, the principles of anti-racist (anti-discrimination) education (Dei, 1994) should become the norm in all schools. Foster (1985) believes that anti-discrimination education should start at the primary level. With this I concur because children learn to discriminate and to oppress from adults. Therefore schools should make every effort to counter this teaching.

Another useful addition to the curriculum is English Grammar, as a separate subject. I am stunned by the widespread use and acceptance of poor grammar among Canadians, including all levels of educators. What irks me is that West Indian students are discriminated against, and put back in grade because of their poor English language skills by teachers who do not speak "correct" English. For example, how often have we heard: "these ones," "me and her": words such as coupon and poinsettia are often mispronounced as kew-pon and poin-setta; and a complete inability to distinguish between the following pairs of words and phrases: between/among, done/finish, bring/carry, less/fewer, they/them, each other/one another? It appears that, if the dominant culture sanctions it, then it is accepted as correct.

Race/racism is a central part of Black (and "minority") students' lives. School staff (and parents) must be willing and able to help the students to deal with it, to talk about it and to understand how it intersects with other forms of oppression within the school. Considering that "we are rooted here" (Bristow et al, 1994) and growing at a rate faster than White Canadians, those who will teach "minority" children must be amply prepared to deal with discrimination. To this end I recommend a compulsory addendum to the requirements (OTC) for teaching in
Ontario - the CADE - Certificate in Anti-Discriminatory Education for all staff and trainee teachers because there are Blacks, and other "minorities" who are "blind" to racism and need to be educated. Similarly there are many men and women who are "blind" to sexism. If we expect the schools to help transform society, we must equip those who run them with the required knowledge. While I have some reservations about the power of courses to alter ingrained beliefs and behaviour in *everyone*, they may prove useful for many. This certificate course will also benefit those who teach in more ethnoculturally homogenous school districts for two reasons. It will include forms of discrimination other than race/culture and, secondly, it will prepare them for the inevitable arrival of "minorities."

Despite a vast literature on the subject of Black students' academic performance - reflecting research from just about every angle - the perspectives that "blame the victim" (Ryan, 1976, in Solomon, 1992) continue to dominate discourse and practice. It is hardly by chance that these perspectives originate from White researchers. Why is it that the twenty participants of this study are the exception rather than the norm? Some will argue that there has been progress because more Blacks are going to university today than, say, fifty years ago. However, for the large numbers who are still failing, this is not good enough. Something must be done to challenge discrimination inside our schools. Here I suggest exposure - a public inquiry into discrimination in our educational institutions along the lines of the Dubin inquiry (into steroid use in sports) and, more recently, the Krever inquiry into tainted blood. Among other things, this will allow Black students to tell the public about their experiences in school and it may help the public to understand why we need educational and employment equity throughout the system.

10.3. Implications for parents/caregivers.

Like most of the lessons for school staff, those for parents are not entirely new. As shown in my study and in the literature, Black parents have a deep respect for education and encourage their children to do well (hooks, 1981; Clark, 1983; Solomon, 1992; Bristow et al, 1994; Codjoe, 1997). However, they need to foster a belief in their children that behaving well in school is not exclusive to Whites; being disruptive and failing is not exclusive to Blacks. Children need to learn that there are constructive and more productive ways to display their Black culture. Parents must nurture a healthy self-esteem in their children by telling them
positive, but realistic, things about themselves. This might help them, males especially, to better resist negative peer pressure and to show more respect for girls.

This calls to mind the need for discipline. As their first teachers, parents should discipline their children and teach them to respect others. They need to be taught that, being the victims of discrimination does not give them the right to harass and discriminate against others. Being all "in the same boat," "minority" children should learn to support one another. They should be encouraged to recognise and admit to personal experiences of discrimination as part of dealing with it in a healthy way.

Parents should also become involved in their children's education, or at least, show some interest in their schooling. This is not always easy. Sometimes the parents are unfamiliar with the academic material or they may be too tired, or unavailable, having to work at two or three jobs. However, they should try to be supportive when their children feel frustrated or stressed by school-related problems.

10.4. Implications for parents/caregivers and school staff.

Fordham and Ogbu (1986:203) state that we need educational policies and remediation efforts to address the academic and performance problems created by the burden of "acting White." Schools and members of the Black community have a role to play here. Adopting a pro-school, pro-education attitude results from cooperation among significant others in various aspects of the students' lives. As noted by Parham and Parham (1989:128):

Academic achievement in Black youngsters occurs when achievement is encouraged and supported by ... families, schools, churches, community organisations and peer groups. In the absence of a unanimous consent for this idea, there must be enough support from particular significant others in the child's life, in order for that value to be internalised and practised by the youngster.

The data from this study show that the "particular significant others" included parents and teachers. All Black children, including those within the same socio-economic group and with similar cultural origins, are not alike. In fact, within the same family children adopt different values, display different behaviours and have different aspirations. However, what they all seem to share in common is a need for a closer relationship with, and encouragement from, caring teachers and parents. In the case of non-Black teachers, developing a closer relationship may be
difficult because of a media-induced and/or nurtured fear of Black people. Many of them do not have Black friends or acquaintances and find it difficult to interact with us. How does one free oneself of prejudiced beliefs? Taking courses might help; developing friendships with those who are different might also help. What will certainly help, and may be easier in the short-term, is getting to know the parents/caregivers of the Black child. This will provide teachers with a better understanding of the student and may even help to resolve problems with the disengaged or more "troublesome" ones. There is a note of caution, however. In this study, as well as in others (Codjoe, 1997; Dei, 1997) students resent teachers who give negative evaluations to their parents. Teachers should be careful not to put down the student when attempting to involve the parents in their child’s education. Based on the data in this study, Black girls want to please their parents and will therefore resent teachers who make negative comments. There must be something positive that the teachers can report and, when delivering bad news, this should not be done in words which imply hopelessness.

In other areas the findings in this study contradict those reported in the literature. For example, academically oriented Black students in the British and American studies had adopted different strategies, from those revealed in this study, for coping with their status. Secondly, these Black students were not influenced more by their teachers’ perceptions of them than by their parents. They appear to have nurturing relationships with their parents and this seems to buffer any negative feelings arising from within the school setting. There was no evidence of conflict between them and their parents, or of cultural discontinuities between their home and school.

Another way that school staff and parents can engage children is by actively listening to them. Black students in this and other studies complained about teachers and administrators who do not listen to them especially when they try to explain their side of a story or when they try to express their frustrations/ dissatisfaction with elements within the schools. With respect to parents, those who listen to and communicate with their children tend to have fewer family conflicts and more academically successful children (Clark, 1983).

Foster (1985) offered a number of suggestions for improving the curriculum to benefit all children (p. 47). With respect to violence against girls, she suggests martial arts training be a compulsory part of the curriculum. While this is not altogether a bad idea, it will exclude the
physically challenged.

The prescription for success varies not only among countries but among the students themselves. There is a need for more studies of this kind including investigations of academically successful Black male students. The greater need however is to put what has been learnt, about motivating and engaging marginalised students, into practice. This is another topic for future research - What do White teachers know about the relationship between discrimination and the education of Blacks, "minorities" and girls? How has this knowledge influenced their praxis?

10.5. Limitations of the study.

As previously stated, because the study population is small and not randomly selected, the findings cannot be generalised. The study is also limited by the fact that almost all of the girls are of West Indian parentage and they are all first or second generation Canadians. The situation may be different for Black students whose families have been in Canada for longer periods, or it may not. A further limitation is that this study was conducted in Toronto in an area with a large non-White immigrant population. The schools also are multicultural, some more than others. What applies to Black students who are surrounded by many other "minorities" may not apply to those who live in parts of Canada that are less ethnoculturally diverse.

Another limitation of this study is that I did not interview academic Black girls from the general stream. As noted by some of the participants, they have academically oriented friends who are in the lower streams. Future studies should include their voices and experiences. As in Dei's study (1997), it would also be helpful to include the voices of parents, school staff and others with whom the participants interact - their friends and mentors in particular. This would have provided a more comprehensive "picture" of successful Black girls.

The study was limited by my financial resources to conduct and transcribe multiple interviews, and by the difficulty in setting up the interviews. I would have preferred to interview the girls on two or three occasions as by then we would have become more accustomed to each other. While there were some advantages being of a similar race and gender, and sharing a cultural heritage with most of them, my status as a graduate student, and older woman, may have prevented them from being as open as they might have been had we had time to develop closer ties (as has since happened).
This research involved girls who attend suburban schools; they also live in the suburbs. The situation may be different for inner-city Black girls who live in low-income government housing.

10.6. Personal reflections.

This was an interesting and enlightening project for me. I was impressed by the articulateness and self-confident manner displayed by the girls that I interviewed. Listening to them filled me with excitement about Black people's future in Canada. I expected to find depressed girls, lacking in self-esteem and confidence. I also expected to hear shocking accounts of blatant racism and sexism, and descriptions of their battles with racist, sexist school staff. At first I was disappointed but, over time, this was replaced with more positive feelings towards non-Black school personnel - after all, some of them did help and encourage the girls.

I think of the need for more Black/'minority' academic staff in the schools (and universities) and wonder if this need will ever be met. The excuse is always that qualified individuals cannot be found yet I have met Black teachers who have been "supplying" for over ten years. I cannot understand why they have been unable to find full-time, permanent employment in the school system. In the university there are many mediocre White faculty, I have been "taught" by some and have heard of others, yet they say that highly qualified Blacks and other "minorities" are difficult to find.

As I perused the many studies and reports about the schooling of Black children I wonder why their findings have not been incorporated into mainstream praxis. Is it, as noted by Christensen (1992) those who benefit most from racism are least likely to do anything about it? Or is it because there are still too many White male "dinosaurs" in our universities and educational departments whose goal is to maintain the status quo? The attitudes and behaviours of dominant group members must change to allow equality of opportunity to become the norm. People "of colour" must be given real opportunities to share in the power structure or the problems rooted in racial conflict will never go away (Ramcharan, 1988).

Many researchers make reference to what Black students must "give up" for academic success (eg. Giroux, 1992:23). This phrase bothers me because it implies that success is not a characteristic of Black people. Coming from a predominantly Black region of the world where
I was surrounded by many successful Black business and professional persons, and non-achieving Whites, I know that academic success is not rooted in one’s race, per se.

One may argue that, in predominantly Black Caribbean countries, with many Black teachers, there are Black children who disengage from school. This does not mean that their failure in White countries cannot be blamed on racism. What it means is that other factors may be operating in Black societies. Social class, for example, and teacher expectations of students from the working class, may militate against their success. Although class was not among the objectives of this study, it was used to explain some of the findings. Future studies of this kind should include social class among the variables to be investigated.

I also want to encourage teachers, and parents, to pay attention to mediocre students and not give up on them. I was not a "bright spark" Island Scholar and look, now I have a doctorate. I have several friends who were their island’s scholarship winners and only one of them is a doctor, most possess only a bachelor’s degree. Secondly, these individuals, who were A+ students in high school, seem to have "one track minds." I have found that, while they know their area of specialisation well, they do not know many things that I presume every adult knows. For one thing they do not read the newspapers, do not know how to behave in certain social situations - in short, no savoir faire. Given a choice, I would prefer to have a well-rounded mediocre child than an A+ with "tunnel vision."

I have been asked by many persons, both White and Black, both Canadians and Caribbeans, if I will return to Trinidad after completing my doctorate. I tell them, "We are full and overflowing with PhDs, MDs and all other kinds of doctors in Trinidad and Tobago. I’m staying here because the Black children here need to see, and become acquainted with, successful Blacks. I have a more important role (model) to play here. They need our help!"

As a final note, I must add that I thoroughly enjoyed doing this research and learning about racism, sexism and other forms of discrimination. My words may offend some, but they are words which I felt compelled to write. If it is any indication that I harbour no ill will towards Whites, I will tell you that, in Canada, my best friend and confidant, is a White Anglo-Saxon Protestant male who has stubbornly refused to learn about racism and sexism. This is because he claims that he is neither racist nor sexist. I am slowly chipping away at his resistance.  

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NOTES

1. Gerald Caplan, a former OISE professor, made this claim in his Toronto Star article, "Our racial record tolerable - compared to the U.S." May 10, 1992 (cited in Bristow et al, 1994). White Canadians love to compare themselves to White Americans but from my personal experience and those described in the Canadian literature, when it comes to racism it is a case of one country being "six" and the other "half dozen."

2. As I go "to press" he has informed me that he would like a copy of my thesis and that he is looking forward to reading it. Wonders never cease!
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APPENDIX I

Letter of informed parental consent.

I, ______________ (parent’s name), agree to let my daughter ___________ participate in the research study to be conducted by Sandra Anthony. I understand that this study will seek to describe successful female students of African heritage, their experiences in school and success strategies.

I understand that the research will include audiotaped interviews, at mutually agreed upon dates, times and locations. I understand that the taperecorder will be turned off whenever my daughter indicates that she does not wish to be recorded.

I understand that transcripts of the tapes, and any notes taken, will be read only by Sandra and her research supervisor, if necessary. I understand that my daughter will have the opportunity to review and comment upon the transcript of her interview if she so chooses.

I understand that my name, my daughter’s name, her address, the school, the school district, or organisations to which she belongs, will not be released or mentioned in any reports, publications or conferences and that pseudonyms will be used in all cases.

I understand that any transcripts, tapes or notes concerning the interviews will be kept in a secure filing cabinet and will be destroyed when no longer needed.

I understand that my daughter can withdraw from this study at any time.

I understand that a copy of any report or publication that may result from this research will be made available to me at my request.

________________________________________
Signature

Questions and comments may be directed to Sandra Anthony at (416) 691-5872.
APPENDIX II

Letter of informed adult student (18+) consent.

I, __________________ (student’s name), agree to participate in the research study to be conducted by Sandra Anthony. I understand that this study will seek to describe successful female students of African heritage, their experiences in school and success strategies.

I understand that the research will include audiotaped interviews, at mutually agreed upon times and locations. I understand that the tape recorder will be turned off whenever I do not wish to be recorded.

I understand that transcripts of the tapes, and any notes taken will be seen or heard only by Sandra and her research supervisor, if necessary. I understand that I will have the opportunity to review and comment upon the transcript of my interview if I so choose.

I understand that neither my name, my address, the school, any organisations or groups to which I belong, nor school district will be released or mentioned in any reports, publications or conferences and that pseudonyms will be used in all cases.

I understand that any transcripts, tapes or notes concerning the interviews will be kept in a secure filing cabinet and will be destroyed when no longer needed.

I understand that I can withdraw from this study at any time.

I understand that a copy of any report or publication that may result from this research will be made available to me at my request.

________________________________________
Signature

Questions and comments may be directed to Sandra Anthony at (416) 691-5872.
APPENDIX III

DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

1. Name .................................. Pseudonym ..................

2. Telephone number(s) .......................... ..........................

3. Parent/guardian’s name .......................... ..........................

4. Father/male guardian’s present occupation ..............
   previous occupation ..............

5. Mother/female guardian’s occupation ..........................
   previous occupation ..............

6. Religious affiliation ..........................
   Practising/non-practising

7. Country of birth ..........................
   No. of yrs in Canada ..............
   Parents’ country of origin ..........................

8. Age .............. Grade (1995/96) ..............

   ..............................................................

10. Extra-curricular activities ..........................
    ..............................................................
APPENDIX IV

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

The questions were designed to guide my conversations with the participants, therefore the precise wording, as set out below, was not used. Where appropriate, participants were asked to "elaborate on" or "explain" responses given. Depending on what was said, it was sometimes necessary to ask additional questions. In addition to these questions I related racist incidents reported by Black students at the GTA high school (see chapter 2) and asked if they had ever experienced similar incidents.

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Do you like school? What aspects of it do you enjoy the most? The least?

Is the work challenging? Are you encouraged to think? Is it mostly memory work?

Are the school rules/regulations clear to you?

Do you obey your teachers and comply with school rules/regulations?

Do teachers explain homework clearly enough so you know exactly what you're supposed to do?

Do you always complete your homework and assignments on time?

Are you comfortable in school? Do you feel like you belong?

How did you decide which courses you should take?

Were you ever discouraged from taking a course(s) you really felt you could do? Which course, by whom, how was this resolved? etc.

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How do you feel about being in the advanced stream? Do you feel like you're better than those in general and basic?

Were you always in the advanced stream? If no, how did you get there?

Do you have close friends in lower streams? If no, why not? If yes, do they try to discourage you in any way?

Do you hold back and play dumb, fearful of what others will say/think about you, that you might be called names like 'brainiac' and 'nerd'?

Do you consider yourself a role model for other Black girls?
Who are your role models [most influential person in your life]? From whom do you get career advice?

To whom/what do you attribute your success?

Are you ever praised by teachers for doing good work? Have you ever felt that you did an excellent job yet it was not acknowledged? Please explain (how you felt, how this influenced subsequent work).

Have you ever disagreed with a teacher over your grades? Please explain.

Do you think that teachers really care about students? Care about you? Why do you feel this way?

Do you care about what they think about you?

Do you think that your teachers/counsellors understand you?

Do they encourage you? Please elaborate.

Do you talk with your teachers outside of class time? What kinds of things do you discuss?

Long after you’ve left school, which teachers are you most likely to remember? Why?

Have you ever been fairly/unfairly reprimanded by a teacher/administrator (or witnessed an unfair reprimand of a Black student)? Please explain [how did you feel etc.]

Have you ever done something for which you expected to be reprimanded but were not? Please explain.

Do you deliberately provoke teachers/administrators [push them to see how much they will take]?

How do you feel about your teachers’ ability to teach?

Do teachers notice you in class? Do you feel ignored?

Do you ever ask questions-offer suggestions/your opinions, in class? How do the teachers respond? Your classmates? Are you perceived as dominating class discussion?

How do you feel about being taught by non-Black teachers? Have you ever been taught by a Black teacher? Was it any different? Please explain.

What does school/getting an education, mean to you?

Ask questions about proportion of Blacks and girls then, depending on answers, ask:
Why do you think there are so few/aren’t more, Blacks/ girls in the advanced stream?

Why do you think there are so few Blacks/girls in your Physics/Chemistry/ Math class?

If you could change things at your school/Canadian schools in general, what would you change and why?

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Would you describe yourself as "acting White/White washed" because you’re doing so well in school?

When you get a low/high mark on a test/assignment, how do you feel? I.e., where do you place the blame/reason [work too hard/easy, I did not study/studied hard, teacher does not like/likes me, etc].

Have you ever felt like dropping out of school/out of a particular course? Why? What happened?

Are you employed? If yes, how do you balance the demands of school and work?

Are you influenced by your peers? Describe.

Have you ever done anything, against your better judgement, simply because everyone in your group was doing it?

Have you any non-Black male/female friends? Elaborate.

What are you hoping to do after you leave school? How do you intend to achieve this? Do you think that either your race or sex will be an obstacle to achieving this goal? To getting a job?

At this point in time, what are your primary concerns/worries?

Do you consider yourself a (country of origin) or a Canadian?

What do you consider to be your greatest strengths/weaknesses?

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Can you recognise racism and sexism? Can you tell when someone is being racist or sexist?

Do you think that [in school] girls are treated any differently from boys? Blacks vs Whites and other races? How do you feel about this?

What sorts of things are you asked [by staff] to do/help with, at school? How do you feel about this?

Have you come across any racist or sexist material in your
textbooks or other curricular material used in your school? What was the reaction in class? How did you feel about it? What did you say/do? What did your teacher say/do?

Have you ever experienced race/gender discrimination in school? Please describe/explain how you felt, what you said/did?

Have you ever witnessed, or heard accounts of, other Black or "minority" students being discriminated against? Please explain (i.e., how did you feel, what did you say/do?)

Are you ever made to feel different in any way? Please explain.

Do teachers/administrators make comments about your academic ability or say things that suggest you’re an exception to the rule; atypical of your race?

Do teachers/administrators make fun of you/your race/your culture?

Have you ever been involved in any race/gender related conflicts at school? Were staff members present or informed about this? Please describe what happened, how you felt; what you said/did.

Do you think either your race or sex will make achieving your goals difficult? If yes, which do you consider the bigger problem?

What about social class? If you were the daughter of prominent or wealthy parents, do you think your experience of school would be any different? How? At your school, do they treat rich children differently from poor ones?

If you were a boy, do you think your experience of school would be any different?

If you were White, do you think it would make any difference in school?
APPENDIX V

PROFILES OF THE PARTICIPANTS

Name: Betty          Age: 16          Grade (1995-1996): 11
School: Pinecrest High
Country of birth: Canada
No. of years in Canada: N/A
Parents' country of origin: Jamaica
Religious affiliation: Pentecostal (practising)
Mother's occupation: Nurse
Father's occupation: Unemployed
Grade average: 70s (wishes marks were better)
Ambition: Paediatric nursing.
Extra-curricular activities: Manages baseball team at school, Student Council, Track (in previous years), Step dancing.
Employment status: Works part-time.
Note: Joanne's sister.

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Name: Beverley       Age: 18          Grade (1995-1996): OAC
School: Pinecrest High
Country of birth: Trinidad
No. of years in Canada: 4
Parents' country of origin: Trinidad
Religious affiliation: Anglican/Roman Catholic (practising)
Mother's occupation: Nurse
Father's occupation: Mechanic
Grade average: 70s (used to be in the 90s)
Ambition: Biotechnology
Extra-curricular activities: Volunteer tutoring (at a primary school), gift wrapping (at Christmas).
Employment status: Unemployed/ Would like to work.
Name: Brenda A.  Age: 19  Grade (1995-1996): OAC
Country of birth: Canada
No. of years in Canada: N/A
Parents’ country of origin: Jamaica/ Mother born in Canada
Religious affiliation: Christian (practising)
Mother’s occupation: Nurse
Father’s occupation: Publication firm employee
Grade average: 80s
Ambition: Physiotherapy
Extra-curricular activities: Volunteers at a hospital, Drama Club, Softball, Achieving Blacks Society, Toastmaster’s (public speaking).
Employment status: Part-time.

Name: Brenda B.  Age: 18  Grade (1995-1996): OAC
School: J.P. Smith Collegiate.
Country of birth: Canada
No. of years in Canada: N/A
Parents’ country of origin: Grenada/ St. Lucia
Religious affiliation: Christian (practising)
Mother’s occupation: Nurse
Father’s occupation: Not in the home/appears to be some communication.
Courses completed in 1995-1996 year: Calculus, Algebra, Geometry, Physics, Finite Mathematics, English, Biology, Physical Education.
Grade average: 80s and 90s
Ambition: Medicine (physician)
Extra-curricular activities: SmithStars (uniformed, elite school group responsible for organising all activities), Smith Multicultural Society (organise Black heritage month activities), Formal Committee, coaches junior girls baseball team, Dance committee (organises school dances), volunteer tutor.
Employment status: Unemployed/ does not wish to work.
Note: To graduate from J.P. Smith Academy, students must do 25 hours of community service.
Name: Denise  Age: 17  Grade (1995-1996): 11
School: Pinecrest High
Country of birth: Canada
No. of years in Canada: N/A
Parents’ country of origin: Jamaica/ Barbados
Religious affiliation: Christian (practising)
Mother’s occupation: Nurse
Father’s occupation: Unemployed
Grade average: High 70s and 80s
Ambition: Psychology or Social Work (Modelling on the side)
Extra-curricular activities: Football, Step dancing.
Employment status: Unemployed/ would like to work.

Name: Elizabeth  Age: 19  Grade (1995-1996): OAC
School: William Henry Collegiate.
Country of birth: Canada
No. of years in Canada: N/A
Parents’ country of origin: Jamaica
Religious affiliation: None
Mother’s occupation: Nurse
Father’s occupation: Mechanic
Grade average: 80s
Ambition: Journalism
Extra-curricular activities: Choir, Band (flute), Leadership Club, Dance Club, Anti-racism Club.
Employment status: Part-time job.
Name: Erica          Age: 19          Grade (1995-1996): 12
School: Pinecrest High
Country of birth: Jamaica
No. of years in Canada: 4
Parents’ country of origin: Jamaica
Religious affiliation: Baptist (sometimes practising)
Mother’s occupation: Factory Worker
Father’s occupation: Passed away
Grade average: 60s – 80s
Ambition: Travel Agency or Social Work (loves travelling)
Extra-curricular activities: Soccer, Volleyball, Basketball, Swimming.
Employment status: Part-time.

Name: Jennifer        Age: 17          Grade (1995-1996): 12
School: Pinecrest High
Country of birth: England
No. of years in Canada: 15
Parents’ country of origin: Grenada/ Trinidad
Religious affiliation: Anglican (non-practising)
Mother’s occupation: Insurance Company employee
Father’s occupation: Caretaker
Grade average: 80s and above
Ambition: Law
Extra-curricular activities: Youth Council, Tennis, Student Council.
Employment status: Part-time.
Name: Joanne  Age: 17  Grade (1995-1996): 12
School: Pinecrest High
Country of birth: Canada
No. of years in Canada: N/A
Parents’ country of origin: Jamaica
Religious affiliation: Pentecostal (practising)
Mother’s occupation: Nurse
Father’s occupation: Unemployed
Grade average: 70s and 80s
Ambition: Teaching (English, History or Law)
Extra-curricular activities: Soccer, Choir (church).
Employment status: Part-time.
Notes: Betty’s sister. Was previously at Hilltop Collegiate and had just completed her first year at Pinecrest when I interviewed her.

Name: June  Age: 16  Grade (1995-1996): 11
School: Dominion High.
Country of birth: Jamaica
No. of years in Canada: 6
Parents’ country of origin: Jamaica
Religious affiliation: Christianity
Mother’s occupation: Nurse
Father’s occupation: Mail room clerk (Teacher in Jamaica)
Courses completed in 1995-1996 year: Accounting, Law, Biology, three English courses, Mathematics, French.
Grade average: 90s
Ambition: Law
Extra-curricular activities: Sports, Student Council, Athletic Council, San Fernando Black Education Programme.
Employment status: Unemployed/ would like to work.
Name: Karen  Age: 17  Grade (1995-1996): OAC
School: William Henry Collegiate.
Country of birth: Canada
No. of years in Canada: N/A
Parents' country of origin: Guyana/ St. Kitts
Religious affiliation: None
Mother's occupation: Human Resources Officer (major bank)
Father's occupation: Civil Engineer
Grade average: 80s and 90s
Ambition: Social Psychology
Extra-curricular activities: Writers' Club, Lions, San Fernando Leadership Club, football, Excellent Youth Society.
Employment status: Unemployed/does not wish to work.
Notes: Graduated at age 17. She "fast-tracked" because she was eager to get out of high school.

Name: Keisha  Age: 19  Grade (1995-1996): OAC
School: Pinecrest High
Country of birth: Canada
No. of years in Canada: N/A
Parents' country of origin: Guyana
Religious affiliation: Seventh Day Adventist (practising)
Mother’s occupation: Construction Safety Associate.
Father’s occupation: Passed away (three weeks before interview)
Grade average: 70s
Ambition: Social Work or Psychology
Extra-curricular activities: Track and Field, Soccer, Volleyball, Basketball, Youth Choir (church).
Employment status: Unemployed/ parents do not want her to work.
Notes: She spent three years at Warbuck's Collegiate then switched because she is more comfortable at Pinecrest.
Name: May Age: 15 Grade (1995-1996): 11
School: J.P. Smith Collegiate
Country of birth: Canada (lived in Nigeria from age 1.5 - 9.5)
No. of years in Canada: 6
Parents’ country of origin: Nigeria
Religious affiliation: Christianity (practising)
Mother’s occupation: Student (Early Childhood Education)
Father’s occupation: Minister of Religion.
Grade average: 80s
Ambition: Psychology or Economics first, Law later on.
Extra-curricular activities: Basketball, Track and Field, Yearbook, Debate Team, Leadership Club.
Employment status: Unemployed/ Would like to work.

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Name: Melissa Age: 17 Grade (1995-1996): 12
School: Princess Royal High.
Country of birth: Canada
No. of years in Canada: N/A
Parents’ country of origin: Jamaica
Religious affiliation: Pentecostal (non-practising)
Mother’s occupation: Hairstylist/ Interior decorating student
Father’s occupation: Accountant
Grade average: 80s
Ambition: Sports Medicine
Extra-curricular activities: Student Council, Volleyball, Basketball, Track and Field, Yearbook, Peer tutoring, Multicultural Club, Drama Club, French Club.
Employment status: Unemployed/ does not want to work.
Name: Paula  Age: 19  Grade (1995-1996): OAC
School: Pinecrest High
Country of birth: Canada
No. of years in Canada: N/A
Parents’ country of origin: Jamaica
Religious affiliation: Pentecostal (practising)
Mother’s occupation: Cook (health care facility)
Father’s occupation: Clerk.
Grade average: 40s - 50s (used to be in the 70s)
Ambition: Social Work
Extra-curricular activities: Baseball, Step dancing, tutors grade 2 (public school as part of her Human Relations course).
Employment status: Part-time.

Name: Reena  Age: 17  Grade (1995-1996): 12
School: Pierre Champlian Collegiate.
Country of birth: Canada
No. of years in Canada: N/A
Parents’ country of origin: Trinidad
Religious affiliation: Anglican (practising)
Mother’s occupation: Accounting clerk
Father’s occupation: Factory worker
Grade average: 80s
Ambition: Business Administration (specialising in Marketing)
Extra-curricular activities: Score keeper for sports/games, Caribbean dance (San Fernando Dance Group).
Employment status: Part-time (at her school).
Note: Close friend of Susan’s (they belong to the same Caribbean Dance group).
Name: Roxy    Age: 18    Grade (1995-1996): 12
School: Maple Leaf High.
Country of birth: Canada
No. of years in Canada: N/A
Parents’ country of origin: Trinidad
Religious affiliation: Christian (practising)
Mother’s occupation: Executive Assistant
Father’s occupation: Financial Advisor (Teacher in Trinidad)
Grade average: High 70s and 80s
Ambition: Law
Employment status: Part-time

Name: Simone    Age: 17    Grade (1995-1996): 11
School: Dick and Jane Collegiate.
Country of birth: Canada (lived in Jamaica from age 3 - 10)
No. of years in Canada: 7 (since returning from Jamaica)
Parents’ country of origin: Jamaica
Religious affiliation: Jehova’s Witness (practising)
Mother’s occupation: Home care aide (Ministry of Health)
Father’s occupation: Not in the home/no communication with him.
Grade average: 50s - 70s
Ambition: Teaching (English, perhaps)
Extra-curricular activities: Dance Committee (organises school dances), Black Heritage Club, Choir (school). Has cut back on activities to focus more on academics.
Employment status: Unemployed/ would like to work.
Name: Stephanie Age: 17 Grade (1995-1996): 12
School: Pinecrest High
Country of birth: Canada
No. of years in Canada: N/A
Parents’ country of origin: Guyana
Religious affiliation: Anglican (practising)
Mother’s occupation: Library technician (Office clerk in Guyana)
Father’s occupation: Computer network consultant
Grade average: 80s and 90s
Ambition: Environmental Science or Ecology.
Extra-curricular activities: Track, Science Club, Translation Club, Aim High (academic club).
Employment status: Unemployed/ does not want to work.

Name: Susan Age: 18 Grade (1995-1996): 12
School: Pinecrest High
Country of birth: Canada
No. of years in Canada: N/A
Parents’ country of origin: Trinidad
Religious affiliation: Presbyterian (non-practising)
Mother’s occupation: Housewife/ Owns hairdressing salon
Father’s occupation: Health & Safety Economist, international corporation.
Courses completed in 1995-1996 year: English, Mathematics, Marketing, Accounting, OAC Law, OAC French, OAC Chemistry.
Grade average: 80s
Ambition: Business major; Languages minor.
Extra-curricular activities: Caribbean Dance (San Fernando Dance Group) Student Council.
Employment status: Unemployed/ Would like to work.
Notes: Close friend of Reena’s.
Here is a list of African-American achievements excerpted from Bete (1992):

(i) Henry Blair invented the first corn planter.

(ii) Augustus Jackson invented ice cream.

(iii) Elijah McCoy held numerous patents for inventions that helped lubricate machinery. His inventions gave rise to the saying "the real McCoy."

(iv) Frederick Jones developed food refrigeration systems for trucks and trains.

(v) George Carruthers designed the camera that took the first photographs of the moon's surface.

(vi) George Washington Carver changed the Southern economy by developing hundreds of products from the peanut and sweet potato.

(vii) Daniel Hale Williams performed the first open heart surgery in 1893. Samuel Lountz was a pioneer in kidney transplant surgery. Charles Drew set up the first blood bank in England and worked on storing blood plasma.

(viii) Granville Woods had more than fifty inventions ranging from a chicken egg incubator to a communication system for preventing railway accidents. (The traffic light system that we use today was also invented by an African-American).

(ix) Dr. Irene Long's work in aerospace medicine is aimed at helping space travellers adjust to weightlessness and other physical changes in outer space.

(x) Robert Lawrence Jr. was the first African American astronaut. Although there are several others, Ronald McNair (a Challenger hero), is the one most people know.

Additional resources (from Codjoe, 1997):


Special note:

In the Caribbean (total population less than five million), as far as I know, there are two Nobel laureates of African heritage: Sir Arthur Lewis (economics) and Derrick Walcott (literature). Interestingly enough, we did not win Nobel prizes for song and dance. One can only imagine what greater things Africans in "developed" societies would have accomplished if they were not "genetically or intellectually inferior."