CONCEPTUALIZING SUCCESS: ASPIRATIONS OF FOUR YOUNG BLACK GUYANESE IMMIGRANT WOMEN FOR HIGHER EDUCATION

by

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ABSTRACT

During the past four decades researchers note that educational institutions fail to “connect” with minority students (e.g. Clark, 1983; Coelho, 1998; Dei, 1994; Duffy, 2003; Ogbu, 1978, 1991). Carr and Klassen (1996) define this lack of “connection” primarily as teachers’ disregard for each student’s culture as it relates to race, and thus, his or her achievement potential. Hence, this disregard encourages minority students to question their ability to be successful. Dei (1994), furthermore, shows a tremendous disconnectedness from schools and education systems being felt by Black students. Few studies give voice to specific groups of Black female high school graduates who opt out of pursuing higher education.

I interviewed four Black Guyanese immigrant women to: (a) investigate their reasons and expectations when immigrating to Canada, (b) identify what influenced their decision not to pursue postsecondary education, (c) explore their definitions of success, and (d) investigate how/if their notions of success relate to obtaining postsecondary education in Canada.

Critical Race Theory (CRT) was employed in this study to: (a) provide a better understanding of the participants’ classroom dynamics governed by relationships with their teachers, guidance counsellors and school administrators, (b) examine educational outcomes governed by personal and educational relationships and experiences, and (c) provide conceptual tools in the investigation of colour-blindness (Parker & Roberts, 2005) that is disguised in Canadian education, immigration, and other government
policies. To support my investigation, I used CRT to guide the research design, modes of
documentation, and the process of analysis.

It is hoped that my findings and analysis enriches the academy and society by
communicating why there is a scarcity of Black Guyanese immigrant women in Canadian
postsecondary institutions, making recommendations, to increase their participation in
higher education. This study communicates the experiences of four Black Guyanese
immigrant women in Canada. It does not intend to make generalizations about the
experiences of all Black Guyanese immigrant women in Canada.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This has been an extremely rewarding experience for me. Not only have I grown as a researcher, but this process has also encouraged my personal growth. I consider it to be a stepping stone toward accomplishing my own notion of success. My journey toward successfully completing this process would have been impossible without the love and support of others and my faith in God.

To begin with, I wholeheartedly thank my thesis Supervisor Dr. Magda Lewis for her patience, mentorship, feedback, and professionalism throughout this process. You taught me how to stand on my own on some awfully glum days, and I am so grateful.

My sincere appreciation goes to Dr. Shehla Burney, who served as my Committee Member. You always provided valuable insight and I always walked away from our meetings with new ideas to consider. Thank you.

Very warm thanks to my thesis Examining Committee, Drs. John Freeman, Joy Mighty, and Annette Burfoot. It was a great pleasure to share my work with you and receive such valuable feedback. Dr. Freeman, your kindness is overwhelming.


I also express great appreciation to the four participants in this study, who took time out of their frenetic schedules to share their stories. Thank you for trusting me.

There are few friends who stick around as we explore who we are really meant to become, accepting us with all our flaws and passions. I thank all my close friends for
their love and support. I also thank my goddaughter, Danae, for inspiring me to become a better person for her to look up to one day.

The love of family will carry you through every one of life’s challenges. As I try to find words to express my gratitude to my family, I cry.

Ian you have stood in my corner since the day I met you. I want to always be able to do the same for you. Marrying you was one of the best decisions I ever made; I believe we have made each other stronger and wiser. Thanks for your love and the life we share.

My parents will remain my role models forever, and I thank them for all that they have done for me. My father is deceased, but the memories I share of him helps sustain me. My mother’s encouragement, love, support, and incredible kindness oftentimes leave me speechless. I will remain indebted to you, Mommy.

Dane you are so much more than my brother; you are my best friend. I would be lost without you. Nazaleen, you have been renewing my often broken faith in love and life, ever since you were born. Thank you both for loving me and keeping me sane.

Darrell you have brought so much more love and understanding into our family, and I deeply appreciate your help over the years with everything. You’re a gem.

I extend special thanks to my Granny and the other members of my wonderfully supportive extended family, including my stepson and loving in-laws, Basil, Agatha, and the entire family.

My parents instilled in me a love of learning, and I look forward to the rest of my journey in education. I hope to inspire the same love of learning in others around me, especially in my beautiful nephew, Devan. He will always hold a special place in my heart.
DEDICATION

This Thesis is dedicated to my mother Rosann Hussain and father Fazal Hussain, for teaching me invaluable lessons about commitment, perseverance, hard work, respect and love. We do not get to choose our parents, but if that were the case and I had a choice, I would choose you.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ABSTRACT</td>
<td>i</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS</td>
<td>iii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DEDICATION</td>
<td>v</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TABLE OF CONTENTS</td>
<td>vi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LIST OF TABLES AND FIGURES</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Problem</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purpose of Study</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Questions</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Who is the researcher?</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Significance of Study</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Definitions of Terms</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thesis Plan</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER TWO: HISTORICAL BACKDROP OF BLACK GUYANESE WOMEN AND EDUCATION</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Context</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Historicizing Black Women in Guyana</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education in Guyana</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black Guyanese Immigrant Experiences in Canada</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government Policies and Secondary schools in Ontario</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Policy vs. Practice</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Government of Mike Harris</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Section</td>
<td>Page</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Notion of Success</td>
<td>105</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER SIX: FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS</td>
<td>106</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>106</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family Influence</td>
<td>107</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interactions with Teachers and Guidance Counsellors</td>
<td>113</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Integration</td>
<td>121</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expectations about Life in Canada</td>
<td>128</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concepts of ‘Success’</td>
<td>137</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary of Findings</td>
<td>145</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER SEVEN: IMPLICATIONS AND POSSIBILITIES</td>
<td>149</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implications and Possibilities for Policy</td>
<td>149</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implications and Possibilities for Practice</td>
<td>152</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implications for Young Black Guyanese Immigrant Women in Canada</td>
<td>155</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Possibilities for Future Research</td>
<td>156</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In Lieu of a Conclusion</td>
<td>157</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>REFERENCES</td>
<td>159</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APPENDIX A: LETTER OF INFORMATION</td>
<td>171</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APPENDIX B: LETTER OF CONSENT</td>
<td>173</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APPENDIX C: INTERVIEW GUIDE</td>
<td>175</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APPENDIX D: SAMPLE FOLLOW-UP INTERVIEW GUIDE</td>
<td>178</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APPENDIX E: RESEARCH STUDY POSTER</td>
<td>179</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APPENDIX F: PARTICIPANTS’ RESPONSES AND RESEARCHER FIELD NOTES</td>
<td>180</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
LIST OF TABLES AND FIGURES

TABLE 1 Distribution of Guyana’s Population by Nationality/Ethnicity, 1980 – 2002...10
FIGURE 1 Guyana’s Population by Rural and Urban Status, 2002..............................12
FIGURE 2 Guyana’s Population by Nationality/Ethnicity by Region, 2002............... 12
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

“The notion of success is a technology that holds people in place” (Lewis, 2009)

The Problem

When I attended public secondary school in Guyana, I shared a similar understanding of success with my classmates who belonged to racially diverse groups primarily consisting of Black Guyanese and Indian Guyanese. If and when I have to be placed in one of these racial groups, I am placed in the Indian Guyanese group. Although racial tensions between these two primary groups existed outside of our school, we shared a common understanding: Only large amounts of education (preferably British or North American) would take you up the road to success. This common understanding usually drove both groups toward the pursuit of university education in Guyana; however, it must be made clear that only financially advantaged families could afford the luxury of having a member attend university. A university education in Guyana is expensive, especially more so considering the high cost of living and low gross domestic incomes. Additionally, student loans are difficult to obtain and largely based on, in many cases, a family’s limited assets and collateral.

In contrast, Canada offers students more than one postsecondary education institution to choose from, more programs, and more financial funding opportunities. Therefore, it is expected that all Guyanese immigrants would take advantage of these opportunities in Canada; but, according to Duffy (2003), this is not the case for many:

Unreported research by the Toronto District School Board shows that English-speaking Caribbean immigrants are those most at risk of failing to complete secondary school. The research offers more evidence that Blacks continue to be
poorly served by the school system a decade after Ontario’s Royal Commission on Learning decried the collective underachievement of Black students. (p. 20)

Such findings contradict Guyanese immigrants’ general notion that immigration to North America is the key to success based on the accessibility of equitable education for all (Basch, 2001; Rogers, 2001). According to a study conducted by the Toronto District School Board (Robinson, 2007), immigrants seldom realize that their educational experiences will be substantially based on their race, gender, sexual orientation, and religion or spiritual beliefs, much like it is in Guyana. Additionally, Ontario’s curricula oftentimes examine non-European cultures, languages, and histories from a European gaze, and this ensures that European civilization maintains a hegemonic power over non-European entities (Ahluwalia & Ashcroft, 1999).

Researchers highlight that Black secondary school students in Ontario feel a tremendous disconnectedness from schools and education systems (Dei, 1994). Carr and Klassen (1996) define this lack of “connection” primarily as teachers’ disregard for each student’s culture as it relates to race, and thus, his or her achievement potential. Consequently, several recommendations have been made to improve Ontario’s curricula to allow the growing population of immigrant students to see themselves in the curricula content and delivery. Many of these recommendations, however, are ignored or are implemented by means of tokenism in classrooms (Duffy, 2003). Also, recommendations are often contested like that made by Ontario’s Royal Commission on Learning in May, 1993, to establish Black-focus schools in Toronto to respond to the increasing number of Black secondary school dropouts (Duffy, 2003).

Recommendations, like Black-focus schools, that move away from mainstream curricula and teaching methods may be frowned upon and criticized for being a reversion
to the old days of segregation. However, Dei (2007) explains that there is a difference between forced segregation and voluntary self-segregation. He also emphasizes how slowly and sometimes ineffectively anti-racist education is being implemented in mainstream schools, and explains the need for alternative environments and ways of learning and teaching.

So long as recommendations are taken lightly by educators, administrators, and Faculties of Education across Ontario, Black immigrant students from the Caribbean are condemned to a system that is almost certain to fail them. Moreover, women in this demographic are burdened most since their educational experiences and aspirations are seldom studied, or when studied they are lumped together with their Black male counterparts or non-Black female counterparts. Not only are their educational and familial experiences different from their Black male counterparts, but “the cultural construction of femininity among African Caribbean women fundamentally differs from the forms of femininity found among their white peers, and indeed their white migrant peers” (Mirza, 1993, p. 177). Being aware of this fundamentally different viewpoint encouraged me to think deeply about the role that feminist organizations might have played in the lives of the participants. Participants in this study were invited to discuss their experiences and their relatives’ experiences in feminist organizations. I used bell hooks’ (1993) definition of what feminist organisations and feminism entails: “the struggle to end sexual oppression [by eliminating] heterosexism, it [a feminist organization] should not endorse any one sexual choice, celibacy, bi-sexuality, homosexuality, or heterosexuality” (p. 245).
When studying Guyanese women, it is important to recognize that differences among these women are stark (Reddock, 2004). In order to gain understanding of their journeys, it is necessary to differentiate between them racially and culturally while at the same time recognize they are also divided by economics, generations, and degrees of skin complexion (Rogers, 2001).

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study is to understand the concept of success as related to educational aspirations of young Black Guyanese immigrant women in a large Canadian urban centre which I will refer to as Multicity throughout this study. Specific purposes of this study are to: (a) investigate and understand young Black Guyanese immigrant women’s reasons and expectations when immigrating to Canada, (b) identify what influenced their decision not to pursue postsecondary education immediately after secondary school, (c) understand how they define success, and (d) investigate how/if their notions of success relate to obtaining a postsecondary education in Canada.

In order to encourage the research participants’ greater involvement in higher education along with others who share similar circumstances, it is important to understand their concepts of success as related to their educational aspirations. In doing so, it is likely that a list of recommendations can be then made to improve their participation in Canadian postsecondary institutions.

Research Questions

While studies have examined the secondary school educational experiences and postsecondary education aspirations of immigrant students in Ontario and even Black students in particular, the question remains: what does research tell us about the notions
of success as it relates to the educational aspirations of Black Guyanese immigrants in particular? Furthermore, since women and men experience the world differently, what does research tell us about the experiences of women belonging to this demographic? How do the social, personal, and secondary school educational experiences of Black Guyanese immigrant women inform their decision-making process about whether or not to pursue postsecondary education?

Secondary research questions are as follows:

(a) What secondary school education policies and procedures encourage and/or discourage this group from pursuing postsecondary education?

(b) To what extent do postsecondary education policies and procedures in Ontario deter this group from pursuing postsecondary education? What might be done so that the policies and procedures encourage this group to pursue postsecondary education?

Who is the researcher?

While I do not assume the role as a participant observer in this study, I believe that it is of great importance to situate myself in the research process to provide a better understanding of my experiences as researcher. I have remained true to Fentress and Wickham’s (1992) advice throughout my journey as the research instrument:

When we remember, we represent ourselves to ourselves and to those around us. To the extent that our ‘nature’—that which we truly are—can be revealed in articulation, we are what we remember…and the way we transmit these memories to others—is a study of the way we are. (p. 7)

Furthermore, as the author of this thesis, I adhere to Stuart Hall’s (1988) belief that each of us speaks and writes from a particular place, time, culture, and historical experience.
I self-identify with being a Guyanese-Canadian immigrant woman of mixed races. I am Guyanese because I was born and raised in Guyana until I was an adolescent. I also maintain many of my cultural traditions surrounding food, values, and social activities in Canada. I am Canadian because I have been sworn in as a Canadian citizen, and have lived in Canada for the past 14 years. I am Guyanese-Canadian and not Canadian-Guyanese because I was Guyanese long before I was Canadian. I identify with being an immigrant because I lived elsewhere before my family settled in Canada. Plus, my educational experiences in Canada have often highlighted my immigrant status. I am a woman of mixed races because I am biologically female, and my mother is of Portuguese and East-Indian descent while my father, now deceased, was of Scottish, East-Indian, and Chinese descent. I am usually identified by Guyanese people in Guyana and Canada as an Indian Guyanese immigrant woman. Non-Guyanese people in Canada often identify me as Latina, East-Indian, West-Indian, or Filipina.

Since the participants involved in this study are women from Guyana, I identified myself to them as an Indian Guyanese woman. This happened, more or less, automatically since my participants identified with being Black Guyanese and succumbing to the racial binary of Blacks and Indians in Guyana, I am not Black, so I am Indian. People of mixed heritage in Guyana are a growing population; however, when I lived in Guyana ‘mixed’ usually referred to people who were Black and Indian. Therefore, I did not identify a great deal with being ‘mixed’ while living there. I did not identify with being Indian or Black while living there either. However, ‘mixed’ is now beginning to refer to people of a variety of races and is now officially recognized in Guyana’s census as People of Mixed Heritage (Guyana Census, 2002).
While I took the opportunity to discuss my mixed heritage at times, with the participants in this study, and realized that some of them viewed me as an Indian Guyanese woman regardless of my mixed heritage, I was careful not to negatively refer to or discuss any race in Guyana. To the greatest extent possible, I communicated with the participants to ensure that they did not view me as their opposition (Blacks versus Indians), or so that they would not view me as so Canadian that I was now an outsider. Additionally, I was empathetic to them as a female immigrant who was faced with integrating into Canadian society. Of course, juggling so many identities all at once became exhausting and challenging, but tremendously worthwhile.

To speak to issues of power imbalances, I spoke to the participants openly about why I was doing this research and explained my own experiences that have encouraged me to pursue such research. I frequently reminded them of their roles as storytellers and participant-analysts in this study. I allowed my Guyanese accent to come through in conversations with participants, thereby creating a sense of familiarity and trustworthiness.

People may argue that to understand the experience of a certain group of people one has to have lived that experience, firsthand. However, oppressed people are usually unable to access opportunities to hear their voices (Freire, 2004). It is only through their stories that oppression can be exposed and, by exposing, be overcome. According to Freire, “the oppressed must not...become oppressors of the oppressors, but...be restorers [of humanity] of both” (p. 44). This is not to say that all Black Guyanese immigrant women are oppressed; however, their mostly absent voices in research (Bobb-Smith, 2004) invite us to inquire about their journeys.
Significance of Study

This study benefits the academy by increasing consciousness of a particular group of women who have rarely been studied, and when they were studied, it was in relation to their male counterparts (Bariteau, 2001). These studies as such played a role in maintaining the social, political, and economic barriers that prevent women from furthering their education and pursuing careers. It is for this particular reason that this study focused on the experiences of Black Guyanese immigrant women and not Black Guyanese immigrant men.

Furthermore, this study possibly benefits new Black Guyanese immigrant women in Canada who might better understand the challenges ahead of them, and provide them with useful information that can inform their strategies for dealing with and overcoming the barriers that prevent them from participating in postsecondary education.

Many immigrant women are intimidated by the North American education system (Barata, Hunjan, & Leggatt, 2005). By doing this study, I have had the opportunity to provide future immigrant women from Guyana with a record of personal journeys that will not only prepare them to succeed, but will also present a history of immigration policies that were in place to hinder and, later on, help others like themselves.

Above all, by understanding young Black Guyanese immigrant women’s decision making process regarding whether or not to pursue postsecondary education in Canada, secondary school teachers may develop a better understanding of how to successfully connect with this group and other racial minority groups of students, provide a forum for discussion among academics, and influence changes in education policies to provide more opportunities for such students to pursue postsecondary education.
Definitions of Terms

Throughout this study, pursuing postsecondary education refers to applying to colleges and universities for postsecondary programs. Success is a term that is defined in chapter three by other researchers, but briefly, for the purpose of this study success is defined as being unique to each participant and therefore is given meaning in accordance with their understanding of it. Multicity refers to the large Canadian urban centre that is home to the majority of Guyanese immigrants in Canada. Black Guyanese women refer to Guyanese-born women whose parents or grandparents are of African descent. Public schools refer to mainstream secular schools that are open to all students. The education system that is often referred to in this study is that of Ontario’s secondary schools. For the purpose of this study, expectations will refer to ideas that are both positive and negative. Roots of expectations will refer to the types of social, political, and personal foundations which were laid that encourage expectations as such.

Thesis Plan

Chapter two will provide a brief historical overview of Black Guyanese immigrant women in Canada, and it will highlight their interactions or lack thereof with Ontario’s education policies and Canada’s immigration policies. Chapter three will review relevant literature on the experiences of Black immigrant students and Caribbean immigrant students living in Ontario, and also describe the conceptual framework that was used to develop the research method and enlighten analysis. This chapter will be followed by a thorough explication of the research method in chapter four along with introductions to the research participants, namely Jean, Sarah, Maxine, and Sisi, respectively. Findings
gathered from documents will be discussed and compared to interview data findings in chapter six. Finally, implications and possibilities will be presented in chapter seven.
CHAPTER TWO: HISTORICAL BACKDROP OF BLACK GUYANESE WOMEN AND EDUCATION

The Context

Since Guyana is the only English-speaking nation in South America, researchers in particular consider it to be a part of the English-speaking Caribbean. Guyana is located on the North Eastern seaboard of the South American continent. It is a multiracial society consisting of descendants from East Indian, African, Chinese, and Portuguese people. Amerindians (indigenous people) and persons of mixed races also populate Guyana. According to James (2002), 47 percent of the population in Guyana consists of descendants of East Indian indentured workers, while 37 percent consists of descendants of African slaves. However, recent Census figures from the Bureau of Statistics: A Government of Guyana Agency (2002) reveal a slightly different pattern (see Table 1).

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>African/Black</td>
<td>227,062</td>
<td>233,465</td>
<td>234,094</td>
<td>30.20</td>
<td>32.26</td>
<td>30.82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amerindian</td>
<td>68,675</td>
<td>46,722</td>
<td>40,343</td>
<td>9.16</td>
<td>6.46</td>
<td>5.31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chinese</td>
<td>1,396</td>
<td>1,290</td>
<td>1,864</td>
<td>0.19</td>
<td>0.18</td>
<td>0.25</td>
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<tr>
<td>East Indian</td>
<td>326,277</td>
<td>351,939</td>
<td>394,417</td>
<td>43.45</td>
<td>48.63</td>
<td>51.93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mixed</td>
<td>125,727</td>
<td>87,881</td>
<td>84,764</td>
<td>16.73</td>
<td>12.14</td>
<td>11.16</td>
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<tr>
<td>Portuguese</td>
<td>1,497</td>
<td>1,959</td>
<td>3,011</td>
<td>0.20</td>
<td>0.27</td>
<td>0.4</td>
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<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>477</td>
<td>308</td>
<td>779</td>
<td>0.06</td>
<td>0.04</td>
<td>0.1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>112</td>
<td>107</td>
<td>294</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>0.04</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>751,223</td>
<td>723,671</td>
<td>759,566</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

While the population identifying as African/Black in the Guyanese Census has remained relatively steady from 1980-2002 at just over 30%, the population identifying as East Indian has decreased from 51.93% in 1980 to 43.45% in 2002. This decrease may
have occurred for a number of reasons. There are two possible explanations for this decrease. On the one hand, perhaps more Indian Guyanese people had opportunities to leave Guyana between 1980 and 2002 than had previously been the case. On the other hand, it may be that racial identification has shifted such that individuals or groups who previously identified with a specific race are now identifying with a mixed race.

Table 2. Guyana’s Total Population by Sex, 1980, 1991, 2002

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Census Ref. Date</th>
<th>Both Sexes</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Number</td>
<td>Percent</td>
<td>Number</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sept. 15, 2002</td>
<td>751,223</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>376,034</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 12, 1991</td>
<td>723,673</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>356,540</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 12, 1980</td>
<td>759,567</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>376,381</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Change (1991 - 2002)</td>
<td>27,550</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>19,494</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2 shows the population trend in Guyana by gender. The population of Guyana decreased between 1980 and 1991 for both males and females, decreasing more for males than it did for females. From 1991 to 2002, the population increased with a greater percentage increase for males than for females. The net result is that the male population remained virtually unchanged between 1980 and 2002, whereas the female population decreased. One possible explanation for this is increased emigration from Guyana of women as compared to males.

Guyana is divided into 10 regions. Information that I gathered from the Bureau of Statistics: A Government of Guyana Agency (2002) document is reflected in Figures 1 and 2 below which show how the urban centres (Regions 2, 4, 6, and 10) in Guyana consist mostly of Black Guyanese people, while Indian Guyanese occupy the rural areas (Regions 1, 3, 5, 7, 8, and 9).
Historicizing Black Women in Guyana

Like Black men in Guyana, Black women are also descendants of African slaves who were imported by British plantation owners prior to 1838. Guyana was first colonized by the Dutch, then the French, and finally the British. It gained its independence from the British in 1966, and became the Caribbean’s sole Cooperative Socialist Republic (Jennings, 2000). During African slavery (1600s-1800s), African women were subjected to the same pitiable living conditions and unfair treatment as their male counterparts. African women, however, also endured sexism at the hands of African men and British men and women (Brand, 1999; Carty, 1999). Oftentimes, sexual abuse
accompanied acts of sexism that African women endured (Brand, 1999). According to Carty, British women were instrumental in maintaining White supremacy in European-colonized nations, and so this made women’s fight against patriarchal oppression near to impossible in the Caribbean. As Carty says: “Third World women in capitalist states and former colonies are cast to the periphery of Western feminist theory” (p. 41).

When African slavery was abolished in 1838 in Guyana (Samaroo, 1991), Africans needed to look for alternative ways to earn a living and in doing so they gradually withdrew from their jobs on the plantations (Crawford, 2003). In response to this labour shortage on plantations, the British developed the indentured labour system (1838-1917) that allowed them to bring in East-Indian and Chinese labourers from their respective homelands. Since these other people of colour were now being minimally compensated to perform the same tasks as Africans once performed as slaves, a hostile relationship developed between Africans and the other people of colour (Rogers, 2001). This hostile relationship is among Guyana’s most unfortunate inheritances, which has regrettably withstood the test of time.

Education in Guyana

During the time of African slavery in Guyana, Amerindians were also enslaved by the British (Samaroo, 1991). I highlight this fact because the enslavement of Amerindians is hardly mentioned in literature. These two groups of slaves experienced a limited amount of education since it was important to keep their knowledge and critical thinking skills to a minimum in order to maintain and reproduce a plantation economy based on White supremacy (Jennings, 2000; Samaroo, 1991). Additionally, limiting the education
of slaves kept them isolated and lessened opportunities for conversations among
themselves and eventual revolt (Carty, 1999).

After slavery was abolished in 1838 in Guyana, improved education accessibility to
ex-slaves was surely on its way. However, these ‘improvements’ were mainly based on
the political and economic changes/needs that were taking place in Guyana at that time
(Samaroo, 1991). More specifically, Samaroo notes that the need for more productive
sectors, growth in commerce, and expansion of state apparatus triggered the message that
there was an urgent need for education for ex-slaves in order to guarantee their full
emancipation from slavery.

Following the notion of there being a dire need for education for ex-slaves was the
Compulsory Education Act (1876); this Act ensured new elementary schools were built
and made available to the lower-class population in particular (Bacchus, 1980). This
elementary education prepared students for the waged-labour force that was already
spreading rapidly across Guyana (Samaroo, 1991). Some researchers agree that this
compulsory education, aimed at securing the best interest of upper class Guyanese
through increasing the waged-labour force, was yet another form of enslavement for
many Black Guyanese people (Bacchus, 1980). As time went by the waged-labour force
initially consisted of male ex-slaves because many ex-slave women were still
experiencing sexism at the hands of their male counterparts and the British (Carty, 1999).
Ex-slave women were restricted to household and laborious agricultural tasks that
ensured that their families were clothed and fed, while their male counterparts were
encouraged to pursue education (Brand, 1999).
The education that was being offered in Guyana and coined the primary path to success was inherited from European colonial history (Hickling-Hudson, 2004).

Hickling-Hudson further notes:

The model of education inherited from European colonial history is more than dysfunctional for Caribbean goals of improvement. It continues to cause anguish and contributes to the devastating class tensions across the region. If we cannot reshape the model, there is little possibility of improvement in quality, the range of skills, competencies, values and other attributes (p. 296)

The Negro Education Act (1934) provided education through Catholic organizations to ensure that descendants of slaves developed a love for employment, which promised a disciplined waged-labour force (Samaroo, 1991). Since colonization and slavery once joined forces to break down nuclear familial relationships among slaves by frequently separating family members, coveting and abusing the bodies of female slaves, and violently reprimanding male slaves especially in front of their female partners, a great emotional distance resulted between male and female slaves (Mirza, 1993). Furthermore, many children of these slaves suffered from the terrible effects of this disconnection, and they often passed on this inheritance of disconnection to their own children. Mirza notes that, as a result of this disconnection, Afro-Caribbean men and women had a different concept of masculinity and femininity than their White peers in the labour force.

Post World War II marked more changes in Guyanese education. These changes, again, were influenced by U.S. industrialization that increased the U.S. presence in Guyana and the Caribbean at large, and the growing number of anti-colonial movements throughout Guyana (Samaroo, 1991). Eventually, this resulted in a rapid growth of education expenditure. These expenditures grew out of control after Guyana gained its
independence because the education system was, at the same time, undergoing many changes in response to an increasing need for trained labour to meet the demands of industrialization in the North. Furthermore, when Guyana declared independence in 1966, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) enforced structural adjustment policies that significantly upset the Guyanese economy (Crawford, 2003). The 1980s saw the deterioration of physical conditions in school buildings and a shortage of study materials and teachers who were finding better paying employment in other parts of the Caribbean (Jennings, 2000). Following this, Jennings notes, there was a decline in student performance even at the secondary school level. She explains that while many parents of Guyanese students were migrating for financial betterment and leaving their children behind during this difficult economic crisis in Guyana, increasingly more secondary school students were leaving school without graduating.

According to Jennings (2000), most of these school leavers were Black males who were mostly placed in less prestigious secondary schools because of their poor performance at the Secondary School Entrance Examination (SSEE); this examination is written by students at the age of 9 or 10. Students’ performance in this examination determined which secondary school they attended, and therefore, which social class they would occupy as a student and an adult. After immigrating to Canada, the question of “Which school did you attend back home?” is used to place people in social classes (Henry, 1994).

Black Guyanese Immigrant Experiences in Canada

Fortunately and unfortunately in the 1970s and 1980s, Black domestics, nannies, and nursemaids were in high demand in Canada where industrialization was creating
more skilled positions for Canadian (mostly Caucasian at that time) women (Agnew, 1993). Since 40 percent of households in Guyana were headed by women (Ellis & Jones, 1995), Guyanese women were forced to become and continue to be breadwinners for their families, even if it meant leaving their families for a substantial amount of time (Charles & Kerr, 1993; Rogers, 2001). Canada was mostly interested in Black women from the Caribbean since, it was common knowledge in Canada, these women were some of the best by-products of the legacy of slavery being that they were very economically vulnerable and politically powerless; of course, this was rarely if ever blatantly verbalized (Agnew, 1993).

There were many Canadian government policies that controlled the immigration experience of Black Guyanese domestics. There were three positions in demand in Canada—domestics, nannies, and nursemaids. Black women from the Caribbean were only employed as domestics (Crawford, 2003). The federal government’s points-system allocated a certain number of points to immigrants according to their job/position. If an immigrant accumulated a certain number of points during their contracted time in Canada, they would be eligible to remain in Canada, but, without those points, they were forced out of Canada upon completion of their contracts (Crawford, 2003). Domestics were given the lowest number of points among all these positions. Canada’s points-system was precise about the social class of women that Canada needed to maintain capitalism (Arat-Koc, 1999; Gupta, 1999). According to Arat-Koc, this system defined “women’s work” and segregated them from men while it also isolated them from women outside of their social class.
Prior to being offered a contract as a domestic, Black women from the Caribbean were required to do pregnancy tests to ensure that they were not pregnant when entering Canada (Agnew, 1993). In addition, contracts for Black women from the Caribbean were often short enough to avoid any Canadian procreation—although this limit was not explicitly written as law (Crawford, 2003). The rules that were imposed on domestics, coupled with their families’ economic dependency on their labour, forced them to rebel by staying illegally in Canada and doing whatever possible to continue to provide for themselves and their families “back home” (Crawford, 2003). As Crawford points out, the legacy of colonialism and slavery were by no means over for this group of women.

During the 1990s the domestic market declined and, coincidentally, Canadian immigration laws tightened with visa and extensive screening requirements (Crawford, 2003). Family sponsorships were booming in Canada, but the wait periods were long (Crawford, 2003). However, education—especially postsecondary education—was more accessible for this group of women in Canada, who settled mostly in a large urban centre in Ontario which in this thesis I refer to as Multicity. A British influenced education system continues to be well in place in Canada at large. This system means that colonialist literature and frameworks still flourish in the provincial education systems (Barata, Hunjan, & Leggatt, 2005), and so systemic discrimination continues to affect the daily lives of many Black Caribbean immigrant women in Canadian educational institutions (Spence, 1999). These effects must impact the educational outcomes of these women.

To fulfill the needs of Canada’s political economy, the Canadian federal government, through its policies, further employed negative stereotypes of Black
Guyanese women who were employed as domestics in Canada. These policies included the universal points system, the return of domestics to the country of their origin upon the completion of a contract (similar to indentured labour), and visa requirements were enforced later on (Crawford, 2003). The government’s systemic discrimination against women of colour was followed and at times accompanied by its small amounts of funding of services for new immigrant women (Phillion, 2003; Truelove, 2000). Some of these services include job preparation workshops that are held at inconvenient times for mothers without access to affordable childcare facilities (Truelove, 2000). Statistics Canada (2005) reports that immigrant women of colour are more dependent on government transfer payments (e.g. social assistance) than their non-immigrant counterparts (see p. 227) because they face higher rates of unemployment (see p. 225). Truelove argues that some government services were sometimes out of reach for these women since most immigrants initially settled in crowded metropolitan areas. Furthermore, these agencies were non-profit, and their survival depended on government funding (Truelove, 2000).

Limited access to agencies for immigrant women affected the formation of identity for Black Guyanese immigrant women in Multicity, but it did not entirely prevent them from responding to the domination of the majority (Bobb-Smith, 2004). According to Bobb-Smith, this particular group of women remembered “home” (Guyana) as being a place where they survived oppression and this memory encouraged them to respond to systemic discrimination in Multicity. They struggled to redefine their social, political, and economic roles in a society where White Canadian feminism still marginalized them (Agnew, 1993; Bobb-Smith, 2004).
Policy vs. Practice

Dei and colleagues (1997) and Henry (1994) address the urgency for Ontario’s existing education policy documents to be put into practice. Yet, as Dei et al. (1997) point out, what is “more disturbing is that the fate of some of these policies, in light of the political shift to the right, is not clear” (p. 18).

In the early 1980s, Black parents and educators began openly acknowledging and discussing the crisis of Black students’ disengagement from Ontario’s secondary schools, and many of these discussions eventually influenced policymaking across Ontario (Dei et al., 1997). The Toronto Board of Education issued a report in 1988 and declared that many secondary schools in and around Toronto were plagued by Black students’ unsuccessful educational outcomes, and declared it to be indeed a ‘crisis’. Since this crisis persisted into the 1990s, in 1994 the Ontario Royal Commission on Learning (Ministry of Education) also outlined concerns about the increase of Black youth secondary school dropout rates in Ontario.

The 1990s also witnessed an increase of government-funded and community-initiated research to further understand the crisis of Black youth in Ontario (Dei et al, 1997). All these studies disclosed the severe disconnect that Black youth experienced from their teachers (Carr & Klassen, 1996), their school’s social environment (Coelho, 1998), the curriculum (Henry, 1994), and the larger society (Blair, 2007). Community pressures continue to influence government policymakers to create documents to be used by school boards, administrators, and educators such as the Changing Perspectives: A Resource Guide for Race and Ethnocultural Equity (Ministry of Education, Ontario,

**The Government of Mike Harris**

Since the 1990s, the Ministry of Citizenship and the Ontario Antiracism Secretariat have joined together to provide programs targeted to assist minoritized youth in secondary schools. Government funding for some of these programs was reduced by the Conservative government led by Mike Harris (1995-2002). The Harris government stood firmly behind his ‘Common Sense Revolution’ (Doherty-Delorme & Shaker, 2000) strategy that he put in place to ostensibly reduce Ontario’s deficit.

According to Doherty-Delorme and Shaker (2000), although Harris managed to reduce Ontario’s deficit, he did so at the cost of the poor, minoritized groups, and children. Between 1995 and 2000, elementary and secondary schools lost $1.7 billion in core funding (Doherty-Delorme & Shaker, 2000). Added to this decrease, reducing secondary education from five to four years in order to cut costs, the Harris government was also responsible for phasing out the final OAC year in secondary school. His government implemented standardized testing and streaming for students with the hopes of encouraging more students to either pursue a postsecondary education directly after secondary school or go directly into the workforce, as opposed to having them apply for social welfare and rely on the government’s money (Doherty-Delorme & Shaker, 2000). Despite a subsequent change in government, these reforms were implemented right after Harris left office.
While *Women in Canada: A Gender-Based Statistical Report* (Statistics Canada, 2005) highlights that more women are pursuing postsecondary studies in Ontario than men, it also mentions that more women are being forced to commit themselves to student loans to pay tuition, which has more than doubled over the last decade. Furthermore, the report states that more immigrant women are underemployed and unemployed than their Canadian-born counterparts. Most importantly, this report does not give the much required attention to the position of Black women who are increasingly dropping out of secondary schools in Ontario (Dei et al, 1997).

*Multiculturalism Policy*

Canada has frequently received credit for being the first Western democracy to implement an official policy that recognizes immigrant and ethnic groups. Such a policy was implemented in 1971 by Canada’s then Prime Minister, Pierre Trudeau (Garcea, 2006). Trudeau’s Multiculturalism policy was influenced by the 1969 *White Paper* (Canada, 1969) that involved negotiations with English-speaking Canadians, Aboriginal people, and French-speaking Canadians in Quebec (Nugent, 2006). According to Garcea (2006), the 1971 Multiculturalism policy formed the basis for the 1977 *Multiculturalism Act* that was enacted in Ontario; this Act in turn influenced the 1982 *Charter of Rights and Freedoms* and the 1988 *Multiculturalism Act* (Canada, 1971, 1988). Garcea notes that Ontario and Quebec are the only provinces in Canada that have both policies and statutes devoted exclusively to multiculturalism, or in Quebec’s case, interculturalism.

There are those who claim that this concept of Canadian multiculturalism is convoluted in the sense that Trudeau only implemented the policy in 1971 to deflect attention away from Quebec’s cry for nationalism (Gupta, 1999). For example, Gupta
explains that Canada’s Multiculturalism policy is problematic in that it controls ethnic
groups and produces a peculiar brand of “Canadian Racism,” which she defines as
“democratic, systemic, subtle, and polite” (p. 187). In saying this, she highlights how
racism is not acknowledged in Canada’s Multiculturalism policy; it is in fact, silenced to
a large extent by such policies.

The topic of racism is also silenced in classrooms when teachers neglect or are
reluctant to discuss controversial race-related issues and identity struggles (Henry, 1994).
According to Henry, many teachers in Ontario agree that there is a need to include Black
History in the curriculum, but when doing so they continue to maintain a status quo that
“perpetuates a worldview that places Caucasian achievements at the centre” (p. 141). In
much the same way that group rights under Ontario’s Multiculturalism Act and Canada’s
Multiculturalism policy are limited and even devalued by the Charter of Rights
and Freedoms and the Canadian Human Rights Act documents, Ontario teachers’
behaviours are also limited by these documents and by their limited knowledge about the
implications of multiculturalism legislation provincially and nationally (Garcea, 2006).

For instance, while it is true that both the federal and provincial governments hold
the provision of housing for all in priority and try hard to accommodate housing requests
from low-income families by the implementation of housing projects, simultaneously
systemic racism and sexism are also at play. According to Henry (1994), the majority of
low-income families in Ontario are Black immigrants, and in this group women usually
get the shorter end of the stick. Additionally, these housing projects are usually
concentrated in certain areas that have already been branded as dangerous, impoverished,
and hopeless; according to Henry, this creates distinct social classes that continue to
divide Black people in Canada. Several of these housing projects are scattered across Multicity.

Class-based systems among Black people were not born in Canada, but in fact date far back. There is a class-based system among Black people in Guyana that is based on a person’s degree of Blackness (complexion), whether or not they belong to a nuclear family, their education level/secondary school attended, and whether or not they have family living in North America or Europe (Mirza, 1993). In Canada, the Black class-based system is based on similar factors that now include whether or not one attends church regularly (Henry, 1994).

Summary

Many negative stereotypes that produce negative educational outcomes for Black Guyanese people are born out of the treatment that they and their ancestors received during the periods of slavery, Guyana’s pre-independence, and even its post-independence. Thus it is pertinent to examine the histories of people in order to adequately understand their circumstances. People’s circumstances are a result of a past that cannot be changed and a present that is largely influenced by ever changing governmental bodies and societies. The next chapter will provide examples of past research that has examined the challenges that particular groups of immigrants to Canada have encountered, and highlight how these encounters have impacted their educational outcomes. Additionally, it will discuss this topic using the Critical Race Theory lens.
CHAPTER THREE: LITERATURE REVIEW/CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Literature Review

Overview

This section encourages a better understanding of Black Guyanese immigrant women’s decision-making processes about whether or not to pursue postsecondary education after graduating from Ontario’s secondary schools. I will discuss other studies that have examined (a) personal, academic, and social challenges which immigrant students of colour experience in Ontario, (b) immigrant students’ motivation in Ontario, and (c) immigrant students’ notions of success in the North American context.

Since literature about Black Guyanese immigrant women’s educational experiences is sparse, this chapter only provides a general understanding of this group’s experiences. Most of the literature shines light on how Ontario’s secondary school system has informed the educational experiences of immigrants, immigrants of colour, and Caribbean youth in general, but no literature has thus far given voice to the secondary school educational experiences of Black Guyanese immigrant women.

Challenges of Immigrant Students of Colour in Ontario

Immigrant students still experience personal, academic, and social challenges while living in a large metropolitan centre in Ontario where anti-discriminatory education policies are in place along with government policies that promote equal opportunity and safety for everyone.

Historically, Black Guyanese women were initially allowed entrance to Canada to work as domestics in houses belonging to the upper class (Crawford, 2003). This history
invites an understanding of how Black Guyanese women’s presence in Canada has been interpreted over the years. They have often been seen by others and themselves as being in Canada temporarily (Ogbu, 1978) in search of financial gain, and it is this point along with the point that their ancestors were enslaved in Guyana that literature fails to address when examining their educational and economic aspirations and achievements. Immigrants in Canada have various histories that often determine their personal values (Ogbu, 1991).

In her 1994 study of the effects on Black people of Caribbean origin living in Toronto, Henry finds that dealing with a history of slavery in one’s homeland and mistreatment in a country from which one expects betterment, often leads to isolation and adaptation problems. Added to these challenges, an unfamiliar education system alienates immigrant parents from their children who require help adjusting to the system (Henry, 1994). This alienation leads to feelings of helplessness, low self-esteem, underachievement in schools, and ultimately high dropout rates within this group (Henry, 1994).

Moreover, Kim and Chun (1994) suggest that an immigrant student’s behaviour and decision-making process are particularly influenced by their present environment and cultural history consisting of social norms, expectations, rules, values, and habits. Some researchers argue that immigrant students’ perceptions, educational aspirations, and general behaviour are influenced most by their family’s socioeconomic status (e.g. Coelho, 1998; Henry, 1994). Therefore, immigrant students living in society’s ‘underclass’ as described by Henry (1994), are more likely to do poorly in school while students in the middle and upper classes tend to do better (Dornbusch, Ritter, Mont-
Reynaud, & Chen, 1990). Since a significantly large population of immigrants occupy the underclass society in Ontario, Dornbusch and colleagues imply that this large population is doing poorly in schools.

On the other hand, studies also show that immigrants are in fact performing better than their Canadian born peers in schools (Kao & Tienda, 1995). All things considered, Statistics Canada (2001) reports that, although it is true that many immigrant students are performing better than their Canadian born peers, this performance only comes after immigrant students have been in Canada for a longer period of time. Thus, this performance is based on the amount of time that these students spend in the education system, and this time is usually determined by their short-term achievements (e.g. grades) and how they are treated while in the system (Gibson & Ogbu, 1991; Henry, 1994). Dei, Mazzuca, McIsaac and Zine (1997) conducted a study in Ontario that reported that Black students had the highest secondary school dropout rate in Ontario because of the treatment they received, especially from their teachers. Students reported incidents of overt and covert racism at the hands of teachers. One student whom Dei and colleagues (1997) interviewed shared the following experience:

There’s three Black students in my class, yeah, we sit together...if the White kids talk and are making jokes...[the teacher] is going to laugh with them. And if we talk, she’s going to look and cross her eyes. (p. 128)

This type of discriminating treatment leads to Black students’ severe disengagement and alienation that eventually forces them out of the education system prematurely or poisons any kind of aspirations that they have for postsecondary education (Carr & Klassen, 1996; Dei et al., 1997; Henry, 1994). Furthermore, in search of support, Black students from the Caribbean oftentimes form subcultures within their secondary school, and this
formation is discouraged by teachers and school administrators (Henry, 1994). Generally, Black subcultures in schools are discouraged because it is interpreted as a form of Black militancy that has potential for gang activities (Solomon, 1992).

While the majority of secondary school teachers’ treatment of Black students in Ontario’s private schools may not be different than in public schools, at this point, it is important to differentiate between secondary school systems in Ontario. Although all Ontario teachers receive the same teacher-training and the curriculum followed at both private and public schools in Ontario are identical in the requirement to meet provincial expectations, the academic outcomes of these two types of schools have usually been quite different (Gossage, 1977).

In a Canadian study conducted by Gossage (1977), Catholic schools funded by the Ministry of Education and private schools not funded by the Ministry of Education reported that 90% of their students pursue postsecondary education immediately after graduating from secondary school, more or less because their grades are just more up to par to gain entrance into postsecondary programs than students graduating from public secular schools funded by the Ministry of Education. However, one must consider that attending private schools and Catholic schools in Ontario is more costly and only parents who can afford this option will enrol their children (Conliffe, 1989; Dei et al., 1997). We need to consider the low socio-economic status of the Black population in Ontario, and recognize that although there will be a handful who persevere through the often challenging secondary school system, this handful oftentimes find themselves at the bottom of the ‘social economic hierarchy’ unable to afford postsecondary education (Dei et al., 1997). While Dei’s study is highly informative about the challenges of Black
secondary school students in Ontario and even addresses the racialization of poverty, this study seldom draws attention to cultural diversity among Black students.

For instance, Black Caribbean students are accustomed to having their academic life closely linked to their social life (Henry, 1994). In other words, the school that one attended while living in the Caribbean determined their social class. According to Henry, Caribbean students oftentimes have difficulty transitioning from an authoritarian education system in the Caribbean to a liberal one in Canada. Consequently, Caribbean students are faced with learning how to adjust to very individualistic learning styles as opposed to the one that emphasized didactic instruction in the Caribbean. Added to this dynamic is the language variation that accompanies Caribbean culture; although this variation is found mostly in dialectical differences, the variations can really hinder communication among Caribbean students’ peers and teachers, and at the same time exclude them from Black subcultures in their schools (Henry, 1994). This makes them more susceptible to disengagement in the classroom.

**Immigrant Students’ Motivation in Canada**

Many studies report that immigrant students’ motivation to pursue postsecondary education is governed by their experiences and engagement in discussions about furthering their education that take place with their families, teachers, and peers/friends (e.g. Henry, 1994; Kao & Tienda, 1995; Ogbu, 2003; Waterhouse, 1990).

Coelho’s (1998) report and Henderson and Berla’s (1994) report that cover over 66 studies determined that students enrolled more in postsecondary programs if they belonged to families that were positively and actively involved in their lives, regardless of the family’s socio-economic status. However, oftentimes families with low socio-
economic status have less spare time to spend with their children and are sometimes less able to help with their children’s homework (Clark, 1983; Henry, 1994). Jacob and Jordan (1993) also support the notion that, since poor families live in a ‘culture of poverty’, they are incapable of providing necessary experiences and values for their children to succeed in school and aspire to pursue postsecondary studies.

More importantly, Clark (1983) suggests that the existence and style of family interactions with children are the main determinants of how academically successful children are, and also determine what direction they choose after secondary school. This implies that healthy relationships between immigrant parents and their children would encourage children to be more productive at school, and therefore be better able to meet the academic requirements for postsecondary education.

Healthy relationships between parents and their children seldom begin in their child’s adolescence; in fact, these relationships should have begun prior to adolescence if they are to be continued or developed further in the adolescence stage (Coelho, 1998). These relationships, however, often become very complicated for immigrants. Upon immigration, there are almost always shifts of power in the immigrant family. One important shift of power often happens between parents and their children, where children become their parents’ equals—for some parents indicated by the fact that parents are no longer allowed to physically chastise their children (Coelho, 1998). This is not to say that all nations in the Caribbean or elsewhere promote or support chastising children using methods that are illegal in Canada; however, it is mentioned here only to shed light on a culturally specific child-rearing practice in Guyana and some other nations in the Caribbean that are distinctly different from those in Canada. Added to this struggle with
power in dealing with different child-rearing practices, Coelho notes that immigrant children are exposed to values at schools in Canada that often conflict with those at home. Such conflicts are often ongoing in immigrant families, and leave little opportunity for developing a healthy relationship that allows parents to be positively involved with their children’s major decisions about who should be their friends, who they should date, and whether or not they should pursue postsecondary education (Coelho, 1998; Henry, 1994). Often enough, immigrant children become trapped in the role as cultural translators for their parents who, as a result, either experience more alienation from their children and grieve the loss of their culture of origin, or develop closer relationships with their children and successfully integrate into Canadian society (Henry, 1994; Ogbu, 1991).

On the other hand, immigrant parents of colour constantly emphasize the importance of education to accomplish social mobility (Henry, 1994), and this strong value for education is usually passed on to their children (Coelho, 1998; Ogbu, 1991). Henry reports that many immigrant students of colour in Ontario decide to pursue postsecondary studies based on the great importance their parents place on education for social mobilization.

Immigrant students’ decisions about whether or not to pursue postsecondary studies are sometimes largely influenced by interactions with their secondary school teachers (Carr & Klassen, 1996; Dei et al., 1997; Coelho, 1998; Henry, 1994). According to Dei and colleagues, teachers need to be encouraging with their words and actions. For example, Dei and his colleagues (1997) did a narrative study about dropouts in Ontario and interviewed a Black dropout who shared the following story:
One of the teachers told me that I could drop math...[so] me and my friend, as a matter of fact another Black guy...dropped math and then...the next [week]...we seen that same teacher that told us to drop math talking to a White student saying, ‘Don’t drop math because if you do you might as well say good-bye to 87 jobs’. (p. 132)

Racist teachers are discouraging and aiding students’ unfortunate outcomes.

Additionally, Ontario’s Eurocentric curriculum promotes the message that non-White histories and cultures are unimportant in the Canadian classroom (Dei, James, Karumanchery, James-Wilson, & Zine, 2000).

Added to a problematic Eurocentric curriculum is the lack of immigrant teachers as role models in classrooms (Chindalo, 1999; Coelho, 1998; Henry, 1994). Many immigrant students—especially immigrant students of colour—require to see themselves in the curriculum and the delivery of curriculum. This aids their transition to an unfamiliar North American education system (Coelho, 1998). According to Ogbu (1993), immigrant students also believe that if their performance in school is high, then they will have successfully assimilated into the dominant culture. This belief creates a sense of belonging, which in turn, influences the students’ decisions about pursuing postsecondary studies (Coelho, 1998; Henry, 1994). In other words, if students feel like they belong to the educational environment in which they find themselves, then they are more motivated to participate further in it.

Moving forward, not enough teachers and school administrators realize and address how important the ‘hidden curriculum’ is in the classroom (Dei, James, Karumanchery, James-Wilson, & Zine, 2000). Dei and colleagues’ (2000) study about marginalized groups in Ontario’s classrooms, interviewed a teacher who emphasized the importance of teachers having a holistic approach to education. Henry (1994) adds that teachers do not
pay sufficient attention to the cultural differences among students and how they affect
students’ interactions with teachers, peers, and their overall achievement. For instance,
Henry discusses how an immigrant student’s silence in the classroom is often interpreted
as ignorance or defiance in the Canadian classroom, but this silence was once a
requirement in the classrooms in his or her homeland. Hence, Dei and colleagues (2000)
conclude that:

Addressing only the academic components of education fails to support many
students whose everyday realities prevent them from focusing on the task on (sic)
hand. The abstract alpha-numeric exercises lose importance when a student can’t
access the “hidden curriculum,” mastery of which allows White middle-class
students to obtain a comfort level on the road to academic, and later, socio-
economic achievement. (p. 143)

Therefore, teachers who do not address education in a holistic manner combined with the
Eurocentric curriculum that they teach greatly affect the self-concept and educational
aspirations of immigrant students.

Since students belonging to the mainstream culture and immigrant students are
exposed to the same Eurocentric curriculum and teachers and administrators’ negative
treatment of immigrants and immigrants of colour, they begin to believe that this is
normal and acceptable. Students often adopt superiority and inferiority complexes that
carry over into their adulthood (Coelho, 1998).

In search of attention, acceptance, and support, many immigrant students join
subcultures inside and outside school, and often suffer the consequences of being forced
to conform to a different way of dressing and speaking (Henry, 1994). If they fail to
conform, then they are excluded from that group. Added to this matter of exclusion, since
subcultures in schools are discouraged by teachers and administrators and the message in
schools is that immigrants will not amount to anything positive, immigrant students sometimes join illegal subcultures outside school. According to Henry (1994), this simply adds to the problem of the racialization of crime in Ontario—hence, “the most frequent encounters with the police take place among youth from the lower-class Black population” (p. 208). These experiences of being social outcasts or fear of becoming social outcasts play a significant role in determining the educational outcomes of immigrant students.

Furthermore, both immigrant and non-immigrant students are somewhat influenced by their close peers’ decisions about pursuing postsecondary studies (Coelho, 1998). Close peers are often those in the same stream in an immigrant student’s school. Therefore, some limitations and/or expectations have automatically been placed on them. According to Dei, Mazzuca, McIsaac, & Zine (1997):

> Colour-coded streaming was also regarded as a process which was based on low expectations of Black students, and was recognized as limiting their ability to transcend their socio-economic and class backgrounds. Being streamed in school was understood by dropouts as a process of being streamed in society. (p. 232)

Many researchers claim that immigrant students are motivated to pursue postsecondary studies by either their family interactions, school environment, or social interactions—some say that it is a combination of all, while others claim one to be more influential than others. These arguments bear merit, but the groups that have been studied were often lumped into the ‘immigrant students’, ‘immigrant students of colour’, and ‘Black students’; this homogenization creates a loss of self-identity among White immigrants and immigrants of colour and this often creates various degrees of inaccuracies and false information.
Immigrants’ Notions of ‘Success’ in the North American Context

Ogbu (1978) establishes two separate meanings of success among minoritized immigrants related to whether or not they were voluntary immigrants or involuntary immigrants. The former refers to immigrants who lived elsewhere before migration, while the latter refers to those who were born into immigrant families (Ogbu, 1978). Ogbu calls on his ‘folk theory of making it’ in a new country to explain the two meanings of success. He elucidates that voluntary immigrants are largely motivated to “make it” in their new country—by “making it” he is referring to using education to attain higher socio-economic status. Involuntary immigrants, on the other hand, are hyper sensitive to the glass ceiling created by White society that affects the career outcomes of their families and friends. In other words, Ogbu views involuntary immigrants as adopting an oppositional identity and attitude to the mainstream culture. They eventually accept that postsecondary education will not ensure the achievement of a successful career, and so view success as something that is not necessarily related to education.

Ogbu and Simons (1998) explain that voluntary and involuntary immigrants do not share the same understanding of role models since their notions of success differ in terms of whether or not it consists of postsecondary education. According to Ogbu and Simons, it seems that while voluntary immigrants choose people who have achieved postsecondary education to be their role models, involuntary immigrants choose those who do not have a postsecondary education but are still earning substantial salaries.

It is clear that while immigrants of colour, whether voluntary or involuntary, struggle to be ‘successful’ in a White society and often choose different paths to achieve
their success. However, their ‘success’ almost always relates to obtaining high economic status (Chindalo, 1999; Henry, 1994; Ogbu & Simons, 1998). Furthermore, an immigrant student’s ‘success’ depends on how he or she interprets personal experiences (Chindalo, 1999).

Additionally, Irigaray (1993) notes that researchers should not deny the differences between men and women and continue to hide behind the explanation of equality. According to Irigaray, the gender discrimination that women continue to experience can only end through highlighting their differences. Therefore, researchers are being called to differentiate between genders when doing research in order to avoid inaccuracies and give women their own voices to share their concepts of success and so forth.

The literature suggests that various sources influence the decision making process of White immigrants and immigrants of colour. Literature has addressed personal, academic, and social challenges which immigrant students of colour experience in Ontario, immigrant students’ motivation to pursue postsecondary education in Ontario, and immigrant students’ notions of success in the North American context. However, there is a gap in literature concerning immigrant students’ experiences in Canada pertaining to differences in race, culture, gender, and sexual orientation among immigrants.

Furthermore, many studies about immigrant students have addressed those who have prematurely left the education system. Some studies examine how immigrant students have persevered through challenges. But there is an insufficient body of research which addresses immigrant students who graduate from secondary school but do not enrol in postsecondary studies.
Having identified this gap in the literature along with recognizing the untold stories of female immigrant students of colour, I conducted a qualitative study to voice four young Black Guyanese immigrant women’s experiences as it pertains to their decision-making process when considering the option of postsecondary education.

The next section of this chapter will discuss the conceptual framework that has shaped my research method, interview questions, analysis, and the implications section.

Conceptual Framework

*Overview of Critical Race Theory*

Concerned with the slow pace of racial reform in the U.S. legal system and the impact this pace had on the educational institutions at which they taught, two legal scholars Derrick Bell and Alan Freeman departed from mainstream legal scholarship and introduced a legal movement called Critical Legal Studies (Ladson-Billings, 2000; Parker & Roberts, 2005). In turn, Critical Race Theory (CRT) was born out of this movement and aimed at upsetting the notion that racism is normal in American society (Duncan, 2002; Ladson-Billings, 2000). Therefore, while significant research exposes the crippling effects of racism as it pertains to Black students’ low academic achievement (e.g. Blair, 2007; Brown & Davis, 2000; Dei, Mazzuca, McIsaac, & Zine, 1997; Duncan, 2002; Howard-Hamilton, 2003), these poor academic outcomes have become a societal norm (Ladson-Billings, 2000). The two main interests of CRT are to (a) help us better understand how a regime of White domination and its subordination of people of colour have been maintained through social interactions and global political economic structures, and (b) improve the relationship between law and racial power (Crenshaw, Gotanda, Peller, Thomas, & West, 1995).
Critical Race Theory critiques liberalism and calls for the sweeping changes that are required to fight racism; however, liberalism conveniently lacks the mechanism for such changes and instead supports long and painful processes to gain rights for people of colour (Ladson-Billings, 2000). According to Ladson-Billings, while liberalism supports concepts of laissez-faire and tolerance, CRT is more concerned with proactively achieving equity and acceptance for people of colour. Applying CRT, which was born in the field of politics (Parker & Roberts, 2005), to educational research seems entirely appropriate considering that education is a political act and is in fact heavily influenced by the political atmosphere in which it is located (Freire, 2004).

Parker and Roberts (2005) define CRT as a mechanism used to expose the “flaws in the colour-blind view of everyday social relations” (p. 75); these flaws are oftentimes disguised in legal systems. An example of a disguised flaw is the Canadian Multiculturalism policy that was established by the Liberal government in the 1970s under the leadership of Pierre Trudeau (Gupta, 1999). Critical Race Theory problematizes the Multiculturalism policy by highlighting that racism is not acknowledged in the policy document, and so immigrants to Canada were placed in a homogenous group (Gupta, 1999). A prime example of this homogeneity, Gupta (1999) notes, was that the term “‘immigrant women’ is not the same as ‘women of colour’ because this assumes that ‘Canadian women’ are White” (p. 190). In other words, it is quite possible to be a White Canadian immigrant woman or a Canadian-born woman of color because not all Canadian women are White.

CRT was employed in this study to analyze some immigration and education policies in Canada to identify racism and problems caused by colour-blindness. Previous
researchers have used CRT to examine how blatant and systemic racism in Canadian legislation has successfully operated over the years; some examples of such documents are the Points System (Arat-Koc, 1999), the Immigration Act of 1976 (Gupta, 1999), and the Multiculturalism Act (Canada, 2004). Using a CRT lens, I discuss how specific Canadian immigration and education policies relate to the participants’ experiences.

CRT does not hold the White European and White American experience as the standard or superior group; it centers its conceptual framework in the distinctive contextual experiences of people of colour and racial oppression (Parker & Roberts, 2005). This theoretical approach helps raise important questions about knowledge production and control, especially as it relates to the paucity of research in academia about Black Guyanese immigrant women (Barritteau, 2001; Peake & Trotz, 1999; Spence, 1999). It also helps raise questions about the knowledge this group has been exposed to through their educational experiences in Guyana and Canada (two countries previously colonized by Great Britain).

Like Solorzano, Ceja, and Yosso (2000), I use CRT to “challenge the traditional paradigms, methods, texts, and separate discourse on race, gender, and class by showing how these social constructs intersect to impact on communities of colour” (p. 63). I often remind myself that, unlike traditional theories that largely produce Eurocentric knowledge that reinforces marginalization, CRT invites the use of multiple methodologies, and in so doing, refrains from becoming a cookie-cutter theory that produces only one knowledge; Spivak (1990) emphasizes the importance of recognizing a variety of knowledges. CRT invites marginalized groups of people like the Black Guyanese immigrant women in this study to create their own knowledges by sharing their
stories. This storytelling exposes viewpoints that are different from that of previous Eurocentric scholars who might have previously written about the experiences of Black Guyanese immigrant women in the Canadian education system by placing them in a homogenous group consisting of Guyanese and non-Guyanese Black women. Members of homogenous groups often have their voices and histories silenced and ignored (Henry, 1994).

Students of colour oftentimes find themselves drawn to participating in types of activities, events, and organizations that allow them to establish relationships with people who physically resemble them (Solorzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000). CRT invites me to examine the academic and social ‘counterspaces’ (Howard-Hamilton, 2003). According to Howard-Hamilton, counterspaces are spaces that are created by people of colour to make themselves feel safe and comfortable. In this study I examine counterspaces in the participants’ secondary schools and shine light on how their relations with other Black Guyanese immigrant women and non-Guyanese Black women in counterspaces influence their decision-making process about pursuing postsecondary education.

Finally, by deliberately mentioning my own researcher standpoint and voice as a non-Black Guyanese immigrant woman throughout this thesis, I use CRT to help “break open the mythical hold that traditional work [research] has on knowledge” (Ladson-Billings, 2000, p. 272). Hearing my voice in this research highlights the multiplicity of viewpoints, understandings, and knowledges. It removes the notion that there is only one mainstream Book of Knowledge that is written by a White European or North American male. As a critical qualitative researcher employing CRT, I continue to operate in a self-revelatory mode acknowledging the multiple consciousnesses that are embodied
throughout this research process (Ladson-Billings, 2000). Having said this I realize that others may read this text from a different position of consciousness.

**Conceptualizing the Research through Critical Race Theory**

Having lived in Guyana in the earlier stages of my life, I experienced what it was like to live in a place where racism, both overt and covert, thrived. In my opinion, moving to Canada—a country well-known for its welcoming and multicultural perspective—meant moving from a racist society to a non-racist society. But I do not naively believe that everyone in Canada is non-racist because I understand that we are individuals with unique and intersecting physical attributes, beliefs, values, experiences, and aspirations. However, I have been astonished by various instances of Canadian governments’ systemic discrimination against persons of colour during my time in Ontario. I decided to conceptualize this research using Critical Race Theory (CRT) because I recognize instances of racial systemic discrimination, and the participants in this study identify as being Black and disconnected from a secondary school education system that is supposed to help all students succeed academically.

Since Critical Race Theory is concerned with achieving racial equality by examining racial components of daily interactions (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001), I believe it provides a deeper understanding of my participants’ educational experiences, for it allows an examination of relationships and events that may not have been critically thought about before. While the CRT field continues to evolve, theorists and activists of CRT gain better understandings of the important role that race plays in society. Delgado and Stefancic (2001) introduce four themes of CRT, which helped me to better understand how my participants’ race heavily influenced their educational aspirations and
outcomes in Ontario. These themes are: (a) “normal science,” (b) “interest convergence,”
(c) “social construction,” and (d) “legal storytelling” (see p. 9).

refers to normalizing the racist way that society does business and normalizing everyday
interactions with racism that people of colour experience (see p. 7). Normal science
results in colour-blindness (Parker & Roberts, 2005), and I will later discuss this concept.
Normal science is not aberrational, and it is therefore, difficult to eliminate or even
address (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001).

Normal science helped me to ask the participants questions that encouraged them
to think beyond overt racial experiences. I received an electronic mail from Maxine (one
of the participants) thanking me for her experience in this study because her participation
invited her to re-examine her views about racism, and she realized that racism is not
ordinary. She wrote, “Racism is not normal and so we can’t just sit back and accept it”
(Electronic Mail, December, 2008).

Interest convergence. Delgado and Stefancic (2001) refer to “interest convergence”
as the larger more influential segments of society having little incentive and interest in
eliminating racism (see p. 7). Delgado and Stefancic describe how a system of “white-
over-colour ascendancy [that] serves important purposes, both psychic and material”
perpetuates racism and classism (p. 7). They add that white elites’ material interests are
advanced through racism, and similarly the working class people’s psychic/spiritual
interests are advanced (see p. 7).

Racism continues to exist in Ontario’s public secondary schools, and White
students continue to academically perform better than Black students (Dei, Mazzuca,
McIsaac, & Zine, 1997). White people continue to attain better paying jobs than Black people in the Canadian labour market (Statistics Canada, 2005). White males continue to own more properties than women and non-white males in Ontario (Statistics Canada, 2005). Through the theme of interest convergence, critical race theorists call for a thorough examination of white dominance that is covertly and overtly exercised through policies and practices in society. In this research, the concept of interest convergence demanded that I particularly address discrimination in Ontario’s public education policy and Canada’s immigration policy to which the participants were exposed.

In this study, I inquired about the participants’ spirituality and recognized the social class differences between them along the way in which they all referred to a superior being, God. Interest convergence also demanded me to actively listen to the participants’ conversations about success in order to recognize whether or not they viewed success as something that was innate as opposed to something that was extrinsically found.

Social construction. While people with common origins share certain physical traits (e.g. skin colour, hair texture, physique), these “constitute only an extremely small portion of their genetic endowment, and dwarfed by that which we have in common, and have little or nothing to do with distinctly human, higher order traits, such as personality, intelligence, and moral behavior” (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001, pp. 7-8). According to Delgado and Stefancic, “social construction” refers to society’s inventions, manipulations, and convenient retirements of racial categories. Furthermore, they note that races are products of social thought and relations, and emphasize that races are not objective, inherent, or fixed (see p. 7).
For the purposes of my work, recognizing the outcomes of social construction greatly benefitted me when I formulated questions to ask the participants. I was careful not to impose my personal views about their experiences and invited them to *tell* me their story instead of placing my words in their mouths. For example, the poster that I created to invite participants in this study stated that I was looking for Guyanese immigrant females who identified as being Black (see Appendix E). I invited participants to identify their races without identifying it for them because race is a social construction.

Related to social construction is what Delgado and Stefancic (2001) term “differential racialization”. This refers to members of society racializing different minority groups at different times, in response to shifting needs such as the labour market (see p. 8). Related to differential racialization, are the notions of “intersectionality” and “anti-essentialism” (each race has its own origins and evolving history) which Delgado and Stefancic advise is crucial for understanding that “no person has a single, easily stated, unitary identity; everyone has potentially conflicting, overlapping identities, loyalties, and allegiances” (p. 9). Keeping these conceptual framings in mind throughout my research, particularly allowed me to write more thoughtful researcher/elaboration journals; I made special efforts to document differences among the participants that demonstrated their unique experiences. Throughout the research process I was vigilant about not referring to the four participants’ experiences as the experiences of *all* Black Guyanese immigrant women in Ontario. My vigilance is important in order to prevent generalizations and further stereotyping of women of colour. Black Guyanese immigrant women have complex identities that arise from various intersectionalities and circumstances that need to be addressed in order for improvements to take place that
address their needs. My intention is to contribute to existing research on women of colour in Canada; particularly as it concerns the experiences of Black immigrant women from Guyana and their educational aspirations.

*Legal storytelling.* Critical Race Theory demands an examination of knowledge and persons who produce knowledge about racialized groups of people particularly in the areas of law and politics. Furthermore, “the legal storytelling movement urges black and brown writers to recount their experiences with racism and the legal system and to apply their own unique perspectives to assess law’s master narratives” (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001, p. 9). Delgado and Stefancic advise that it is important to understand that not because a person is of colour, it means that they are competent to speak about race and racism. Likewise, it is important to not presume that because a person is White they are incapable of competently speaking about race and racism.

The concept of “legal storytelling” proved very useful in this study. I conscientiously reviewed various legal documents and mass narratives that were produced from population census activities by governments. It gave me a better understanding of the immigration experiences of the participants and their parents and/or guardians. Additionally, I gained deeper insight into the practice of teachers, guidance counsellors, and school administrators who interacted with the participants.

As early as 1995 Ontario Ministry of Education and Training policy documents such as *For the Love of Learning: Report of the Royal Commission on Learning*, concluded that “...a series of external forces—economic, technological, social and demographic—require that [Ontario’s education system] be transformed now in dramatic ways...we possess the knowledge and technique to achieve this transformation” (p. 54).
According to Spence (1999), however, the effects of inequality, poverty, sexism, and racism continue to be seen as forces external to classrooms and education systems. Although some scholars like Henry (1994) and Dei and colleagues (1997) recognize these inequalities in the education system and have even discussed how educational and social outcomes are affected by such disparities, the transformations in education they call for seem to be a long way down the road.

**Synopsis**

This study employed Critical Race Theory to provide an understanding of participants’ experiences pertaining to whether or not they pursue postsecondary education. It was important to recognize and appreciate identity intersectionalities of the participants in this study in order to grasp their worldviews and unique experiences. Not only are the participants female immigrants, but I also give attention to their conceptual understanding of their race, what it means to have various degrees of skin complexions, their socio-economic situations, and their family units. The section that follows describes the research method.
CHAPTER FOUR: METHOD

Introduction

This is a qualitative study. Its methodology includes individual interviews with four participants and analysis of Canadian immigration and higher education policy documents related to their experiences as previously discussed in chapter two and that will be further discussed in chapter seven.

Goetz and Lecompte (1984) discuss conceptualizing assumptive modes by framing them in four dimensions, which are (a) deductive/inductive, (b) subjective/objective, (c) generative/verificative, and (d) constructive/enumerative. Goetz and Lecompte (1984) state that “deductive researchers hope to find data to match a theory; inductive researchers hope to find a theory that explains their data” (p. 4). This study takes an inductive approach in that I use a qualitative research approach to gather data and then I plant myself in the data (during and after the collection process) to identify themes and patterns. Additionally, this study takes on a deductive approach by using Critical Race Theory to design the research method, frame interview questions, and analyze the data collected. This study is also subjective (recognizes that there are many knowledges, ways of knowing, and ways of seeing), generative (using various kinds of data and analytical tools), and constructive (serves as a building block in a larger body of work that still needs to be done in order to bring about positive social transformation). The dimensions of inductivity and subjectivity especially come out of the way participants have “contextualized their own experiences and world view” (Goetz & Lecompte, p. 6). The generative dimension of this study pertains to the accumulation of evidence from three
sources: (a) research participants, (b) education and immigration policy documents, and (c) my reflexive journal documents, which then were subjected to analysis. According to Patton (2002), data triangulation “provides cross-data validity checks” (p. 248). Furthermore, generative research is expected to discover “constructs and propositions using one or more data bases as the source of evidence” (Goetz & Lecompte, p. 5). These come in the form of patterns, themes, and categories that were used to construct typologies. Although literature treats typology construction as a deductive exercise, Patton advises that typologies can be inductive if “done with considerable care to avoid creating things that are not really in the data” (p. 459).

This study was conducted from a holistic perspective since phenomena described by the research participants are often times complex with “interdependencies and system dynamics that cannot meaningfully be reduced to a few discrete variables and linear, cause-effect relationships” (Patton, p. 41). It was important for me as the researcher to employ a high degree of reflexivity as I am also a female Guyanese immigrant who, on the other hand, obtained a university degree from a large metropolitan university. I am not Black.

Research Design

This study has three distinct methodological phases: (a) recruiting and conducting two individual face-to-face interviews with four participants, transcribing interview data, member-checking (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2003), and creating my researcher (reflexive) journal; (b) a document analysis of Canadian education and immigration policies as they pertain to participants’ experiences; and (c) each participant’s informal analysis of her
personal transcript, and my cross-analysis of transcripts, document analysis results, and researcher journal.

**Phase One: Interviews**

*Participants:* Research participants include four Black Guyanese immigrant women. Participants were selected based on the following criteria: (a) 18 to 55 years of age, (b) immigrated to Canada as a toddler, young child, or adolescent, (c) attended a public secondary school in a large Canadian urban centre in Ontario, and (d) did not attend a postsecondary (university or college) institution following graduation from secondary school. Subjects were invited to participate in this study by a posted advertisement on bulletin boards of four Guyanese community organizations in Multicity that introduced and briefly explained the research, and provided a list of participant criteria. Subsequently, I used the snowball method as effectively employed by Spence (1999) and also by Mouzitchka (2006). This process involved asking participants to initiate contact with other women who fit the research criteria and would be willing to participate in the study.

Of the four participants three individuals met the participant criteria, while one of them had attended a postsecondary institution after graduating from secondary school. However, she was eager to share her story and I decided to include her in the study because she would bring useful perspectives to better explain challenges with which Black Guyanese immigrant women are faced and how they conquer such challenges. Each participant was given or in some cases chose a pseudonym, Jean, Sarah, Maxine, and Sisi. They will be introduced in a subsequent chapter.
Data collection: Two personal interviews, each approximately 45 minutes to one hour in length, were conducted with each participant. Approximately one week before the first interview, I provided each participant with a Letter of Information (Appendix A) and a Consent Form (Appendix B) which outlined the purpose of the study, discussed how and by whom the information would be used, addressed types of questions that I asked them, explained confidentiality, provided details about the follow-up interview, requested input into the interview data analysis, and disclosed any risks and benefits involved for participants. The forms clearly stated that the interviews would be audio recorded for the purpose of verbal accuracy, and that participants would be able to withdraw from the study and/or refuse to answer questions without consequence at any time (Patton, 2002). These documents were mailed, faxed, or emailed to the participants, and I requested that they return them when we met at the interview or prior to that. I also had additional consent forms available at the interview. At the first interviews, I asked the participants whether or not they had any questions regarding the study and if they carefully read their signed Consent Forms.

The first round of interviews were semi-structured and asked questions about the participants’ immigration experience, family life, secondary school experience, and notions of success (see attached interview guide—Appendix C). I asked each of them to describe and discuss an artifact that represents her personal notion of success to help me better understand it. Following a preliminary analysis of the first interview, participants were invited to a follow-up interview. The follow-up interview was based on questions that arose specifically from the information gathered in the initial interview, and questions about participants’ knowledge about feminist organizations were also raised.
(see Appendix D). All interviews were transcribed verbatim. In addition to the transcribed interviews, I wrote interview elaboration journals immediately after each interview session to reflect and establish quality control for data (Patton, 2002). Finally, as Mouzitchka (2006) did in her study, I remained in contact with participants by phone and email during my transcription and analysis processes in case I required any further clarification about the content of their member-checked transcripts, and this also gave participants opportunities to participate in preliminary analysis. Participants were given copies of their final transcripts and asked to add or remove any information they wished to contribute to the data. My Supervisory Committee and I were the only individuals with access to interview data. I did all the transcribing, and I use pseudonyms to refer to participants and the people and places in our conversations throughout this thesis.

Phase Two: Documents

Official documents: Like the study conducted by Barata, Hunjan, and Leggatt in 2005, I used critical theory (Crossley, 2005; McMillan & Schumacher, 2006) to provide an understanding of how Canadian immigration and education policy documents have contributed to my participants’ experiences. I also analyzed statistical data pertaining to rates of immigration of young Black Guyanese immigrant women to Canada. This analysis suggested trends, proposed new questions, and corroborated qualitative data (see McMillan & Schumacher, 2006).

I used the Women in Canada: A Gender-based Statistical Report (Statistics Canada, 2006) that discuss women’s rights in Ontario, Immigration and Refugee Protection Act, and the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development’s Continuous Reporting System on Migration. I also contacted the Guyanese Consulate in
Toronto to inquire about the resources available for new Black-Guyanese female immigrants such as financial aid for educational purposes. These types of resources were helpful in determining if and how historical legal developments over the years influenced the experiences of the participants in this study.


*Interview elaboration documents:* This is a journal that I wrote after each interview session. It contains a self-reflection of my role as the researcher, notes about participants’ actions, and extensions of interview meanings. This journal was used in my final analysis of the interview data especially; it invited a clearer interpretation of data and allowed cross-analysis that enhanced this study.

In my journal, I included field notes that I wrote immediately after the recorded interviews noting unexpected events among other developments that I found noteworthy.
This document provided an additional source of data in this study. I found journaling especially useful since I was in contact with my participants after interviews as they played an important role in early stages of analysis.

Finally, Kirby and McKenna (1989) advise that “it is important that who is doing the research and how the interpretations are made receive equal billing in the final analysis of materials” (p. 83). Therefore, in chapter one, I situated myself in this study by including information about my personal relationship to the study topic. Situating myself in this study by having long discussions with my Supervisor allowed me to explore my biases and premature judgements prior to my fieldwork.

Phase Three: Analysis

It is of great importance for qualitative researchers especially to recognize that “every way of seeing is also a way of not seeing” (Silverman in Patton, 2002, p. 542). Therefore, I employed analyst triangulation in this study, as I wanted to invite participants to engage in the analysis process as much as possible.

Participant analysis: According to Patton (2002), participant analysis invites participants’ personal analysis of their own data in order to provide for a triangulation of analysts that, in turn, increases research credibility. While I intended to have participants meet with me weeks following their follow-up interviews to analyze their own interview data and respond to my preliminary findings, I realized the time demand that I was placing on them. Additionally, I recognized a kind of unwillingness amongst my participants to fully participate in this portion of the study. In fact, one of my participants felt that she was not academically qualified to participate in such a process, and explained that there was a reason why she never made it to postsecondary studies. She went on to
say, “You [researcher] will do a better job at this [analysis] because I wasn’t educated to do those types of things” (Sisi, June 1, 2008, #2). To remedy this sentiment and still invite participant analysis, I had participants agree to stay in communication with me throughout the process of analysis so that I could receive feedback from them informally—without the pressures that a formal meeting for analysis may have entailed.

*Researcher analysis:* This involved a cross-analysis of participants’ analysis and researcher analysis that was guided by Critical Race Theory (Ladson-Billings, 2000; Gupta, 1999; James, 1990; Parker & Roberts, 2005). Both inductive (discovering patterns and themes in interview data especially surrounding notions of success) and deductive analysis (interview data analyzed according to existing theories) was successfully employed in the analysis process.

Inductive analysis for this study started with placing all interview data combined with my Researcher Field Notes and elaboration journals into categories and themes. Line-by-line coding was done manually without employing computer analytical software programs. This method allowed me to establish a closer relationship with the data and participants. Patton (2002) supports the manual method of coding when the amount of data is manageable, since he agrees that researchers need to submerge themselves fully in the data even more so when they are looking for emerging patterns and themes.

When line-by-line coding was complete, I constructed a comparison table (Appendix F) as employed by Mouzitchka (2006) to organize data. While Mouzitchka only used the table to thematically record her participants’ data, I input my participants’ data coupled with my own field notes. I used the Interview Guide (see Appendix C) to guide my preliminary findings and identify themes that I input in the comparison table.
Overall, six major themes were established and they comprised of 16 sub-themes were established:

(1) Family - (F1): Single-parent Family, (F2): Absent Father, (F3): Extended Family;
(3) Secondary School Experience in Multicity - (HS7): Social Atmosphere, (HS8): In the Classroom, (HS9): Academic Outcomes;
(4) Discrimination - (D10): Racial Discrimination, (D11): Gender Discrimination, (D12) Socio-economic Class Discrimination;
(5) Success - (S13): Personal Notions of Success, (S14): Evaluators of Success;

All themes listed above are presented in the comparison table. Themes are identified in the table as they are alpha-numerically listed above. This table was very useful in helping to compare and contrast participants’ responses and examine their experiences alongside my own reflections in the journal. The comparison table helped me greatly in organizing my thoughts around the challenging process of inductive analysis.

Additionally, the comparison table allowed me to hold each participant’s immigration timelines side-by-side to determine which immigration and education policies were in place during their times of immigration and schooling. Moreover, the comparison table was useful for getting me started with the deductive analytical approach, which entailed comparing my interview data with the already existing theoretical frameworks as previously listed in this chapter. Overall, the manual analytical approach I employed in this study was not without its flaws as is indicated in my failed
attempt to employ formal participant analysis. However, this approach proved to be sound in promoting participant empowerment and trustworthiness without the pressures of formal participant analysis meetings.

Trustworthiness

Conducting interviews with each participant and employing member-checking and participant analysis, presented me with opportunities to confirm content accuracy, and it also allowed participants to see me as a trustworthy conveyor of their stories. Moreover, member-checking also allowed participants to feel more in-control over their stories and this security increased when I invited them to informally participate in analyzing their own transcripts.

Detailed descriptions of people and situations to the extent that as confidentiality allowed, ensured validity. Reliability was increased by having only one interviewer for all participants. I also took note of any unusual circumstances that the participants may have been experiencing on the day of the interview; I also understand that one of my participant’s need to cut short one of our meetings due to a family emergency may have influenced data reliability, as it did for example in Lynette Spence’s (1999) study. To ensure reflexivity, I maintained a journal containing my personal reactions and decisions throughout the research process (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006).

Introducing the Participants

I used interview guides to interview four participants twice. Each initial interview was approximately 45 minutes in length while the follow-up interviews were about half an hour. In keeping with confidentiality agreements, some background information about participants may be modified to make it more challenging for readers to identify them.
Moreover, participants were invited to choose pseudonyms that will be used throughout this report to refer to them. Giving them this choice turned out to be an empowering experience for them. The majority of them chose the first or middle, or surnames of their mothers, grandmothers, or great grandmothers.

Additionally, since the large urban city, called Multicity in this thesis, in which this research takes place will be kept confidential to the highest extent possible. I will use pseudonyms to refer to the smaller areas within Multicity. The participants once lived and some of them continue to live in two areas in Multicity that have been stereotyped as being plagued with Black violence and poverty. These areas will be referred to as Multicity-Central and Multicity-East. The former is geographically closer to downtown Multicity and the latter is a suburb. Coincidentally, these areas happen to be home to the majority of immigrants of colour living in Multicity. Participants tended to settle in Multicity-West as soon as it became affordable for them to move from Multicity-Central. Multicity-West is stereotyped as being a safer area where immigrants of a variety of cultures settle. Multicity-West is in its development stages as new roads, shopping centres, apartment buildings, and houses are being built.

A great deal of effort has been made to keep the participants and the geographic areas that they lived in and are living in confidential. Additionally, to ensure confidentiality to the greatest extent possible, details about participants have been altered upon their approval. Making participants’ geographic locations unidentifiable through the use of geographical pseudonyms helps the reader avoid generalizations about the participants’ experiences, for generalizations only encourage further stereotypical attitudes and prejudice. Chapter five will introduce Jean, Sarah, Maxine, and Sisi.
Jean’s Story—“just shrug off, shrug off...anything is possible”

Background

Fifty-three year old Jean is the fourth of five children. The only girl, she has three older brothers and one younger brother. She was the first participant to be interviewed. She contacted me by telephone after reading the recruitment poster and we went through the list of participant criteria; then we arranged a convenient time and place for her to be interviewed.

Jean invited me to her workplace very soon after initiating contact with me, and the interview took place in her large quiet office behind a closed door. Jean met me in the waiting area of her workplace and escorted me to her office, not neglecting to briefly acknowledge all of her colleagues on our way. She pointed out the exercising area and other amenities that her place of employment offers. Although I met with Jean in the mid-winter months, I could not help but feel the warmth from the moment she introduced herself to me in the waiting area. This participant said that, although she did not meet all the participant criteria for this study, she really wanted to share her “success story” so that it might inspire young Black Guyanese immigrant women.

My follow-up interview session and a third conversation with Jean were both conducted by means of electronic mail as it became nearly impossible to gain contact with Jean again at a mutually convenient time since her schedule became very crowded, and she was also away on vacation. All interviews with Jean took place in the span of four months.
At present, Jean fills a senior position in the Training and Development department at a large company in Multicity-West, where she also currently resides. She has been employed in various positions at that company for the last 32 years. She is a proud homeowner who travels a great deal, and she considers herself to be financially stable. Jean has a 30 year old son and a teenage daughter; both of them still live with her and her common-law partner. She is previously divorced.

I have chosen to introduce Jean first because she was the first participant to immigrate to Canada. I use her experience to provide a historical background of immigration circumstances and educational institutions in Canada during the time of her immigration experience. Additionally, learning about Jean’s experiences prior to learning about the other three participants’ experiences will set the context for the struggles these women face.

Immigration Experience

Prior to emigration from Guyana to Canada in 1971, Jean lived in the capital city of Guyana and she belonged to the upper-middleclass society. Jean attended secondary school in Guyana and described it as an enjoyable experience, but one filled with many differences in comparison to her secondary school experience in Canada. While Jean lived in Guyana she looked forward to coming to Canada and expected that Canadian society would provide a welcoming and safe environment for her:

Jean: I never once considered that there would be um racism in Canada when I came. I mean never really experienced that in Canada or even back home, but I see people who experience it in different ways in Guyana and even here.

Researcher: So, what was your reaction to ah witnessing racism in Canada then?
Jean: I was shocked because you don’t hear people talking about that part of life in Guyana; you just hear of the lights and good education and jobs.

Researcher: So, did you speak to anyone about the racism you witnessed in Canada?

Jean: Not really [pause]. Nobody talked about it at school really. According to how everybody was treated, we, I guess, shouldn’t see or [pause] you know highlight that there were different races in our class.

Researcher: Why do you think they did that?

Jean: Um, well I think it was just cause they didn’t want us to focus on the differences between us to make sure we were treated equally. Instead they wanted us to bond together and work together using our similarities. So, after a while even though we were different in skin colour, we started to think we were not especially if you are mixed like me and don’t experience racism really.

Researcher: How did you feel about them not really talking about the differences?

Jean: Well, I thrive in just about any situation, so I used it to my advantage, I guess. I figured that since we were somewhat the same, then I had the same opportunities as everyone else here, so I pursued the opportunities. I think I thrived. (Jean, February 27, 2008, #1)

Jean shares the story of the complicated immigration process that her family experienced since it was not possible for all her family members to migrate at the same time. Jean explains:

My father came first but he had remarried, then he applied for my eldest brother first. This brother applied for my mum, then she in turn applied for my youngest brother and I, we came for vacation initially and with her application, we were granted residency...while we were waiting for this, we were told it was fine for us to go to school since it was Sept 12, 1971. In the meantime, my dad applied for my two other brothers. (Jean, April 12, 2008, #2)

Jean summarizes her immigration experience in 1971 as being a very positive one. She was separated from both her parents for about two years prior to immigrating to Canada. Both of her parents were living in Canada while Jean’s grandfather, aunt, and three brothers lived together in Guyana. When I asked Jean how she felt about this
arrangement of living without her parents in Guyana, Jean responded by saying, “my grandfather, my aunt, and my older brothers were substitute parents and, because of our strict and disciplined upbringing, you tend not to veer far from what you know was right” (Jean, April 12, 2008, #2).

Secondary School Experience

Jean immigrated to Canada in 1971 at the age of 16. She attended secondary school in Multicity-East and lived there for about six years prior to moving to Multicity-West. On the occasion of my first meeting with Jean, I turned off the audio recorder after completing my questioning process; however, Jean continued speaking about her experiences in secondary school in Guyana as I also shared my Guyanese secondary school experience with her in a very comfortable conversation where we both spoke with our Guyanese accents more freely. She recalls minor and major differences between her secondary school experiences in Guyana and Canada:

I remember getting licks [spankings] one and two times [occasionally]. I remember the teachers whipping the girls in their hands and the boys on their butts with a wild-cane um whip or bamboo. Here they can’t touch you [pause]. Those were the days man; they had you straight. The kids had a lot of respect for teachers and for the peers too. It’s not like Canada where the kids don’t stand up when teachers walk in the classrooms. (Jean, After the recorder was turned off, February 27, 2008, #1)

Since Jean’s mother and father were residing separately in Multicity-East, she lived with her mother and attended secondary school in Multicity-East. Jean did not undergo any placement tests when she started secondary school; she was automatically placed in Grade 11 Advanced courses because of her age and report card from Guyana. She said that there were few people of colour attending her school, and she bonded with a girl in her class who had also migrated from Guyana that same year. While Jean remembers her
secondary school experience in a positive light, she couldn’t help but reminisce about how she felt forced to abandon learning French in Grade 12 since her peers’ French-speaking skills were way more advanced than her own considering that they had taken French since Grade 9, while this was Jean’s first encounter with the French language. She notes:

Especially, um I wanted to learn French because I learned Latin and Spanish in Guyana, so I wanted to learn French when I was in Grade 12 but they put me in a Grade 9 class and this was a bit weirdness if you want to call it because the Grade 9 students had already learned French in Grade 1. So, I just abandoned it. (Jean, February 27, 2008, #1)

In order to be able to afford her postsecondary tuition fees, Jean accelerated secondary school by enrolling in night school to obtain her secondary school diploma six months before attending university. She used those six months to work full-time and saved money for tuition fees. Her night school was located outside of Multicity-East, and so this entailed substantial commuting at nights. Attending night school also took away a bit from the social aspect of secondary school because of time restraints. Additionally, Jean also mentions that she was far less involved in extra-curricular activities in her Canadian secondary school compared to her Guyanese secondary school. She explains this change in terms of there being very different extra-curricular activities at schools in Canada and Guyana. She says, “the types of things I would be interested in demanded lots of flexibility...like hanging and flipping over...I’m not that agile...I might be slim but not agile (laughs)” (Jean, February 27, 2008, #1).

Jean’s face lights up when sharing her social experience in secondary school. She draws attention to the fact that only about five percent of her peers in secondary school belonged to ethnic minorities, and she talks about how she made friends quickly and with
ease. Jean attributes this to being a person of mixed race, although she is mostly viewed as Black. She acknowledges:

I easily make friends...I don't think there was any sort of racial discrimination; I never noticed it anyways. Basically because within my family we are of mixed race, we are considered mixed race in Guyana. My grandfather was pure Portuguese, one was White and Indian and Black, so for me it was easy to mix and integrate, I went to their functions or we would hang out at school or during free periods we would go out to the restaurant [Caribbean cuisine]. (Jean, February 27, 2008, #1)

When asked what type of student she was in secondary school, Jean proudly but modestly states that she was an A student. She continues:

I was always a go-getter, even today in the corporate world. I like to get things done properly and that kind of stuff....more of a go-getter, always aspiring to do better and helping others. That would be what I think they [her secondary school teachers] would think of me. I was just a pleasant person easy to get along with; I was always very accommodating of people too. (Jean, February 27, 2008, #1)

While in secondary school, Jean aspired to be a flight attendant, but her eldest brother discouraged her from this path, Jean explains:

You see I wanted to become a stewardess...airline stewardess, because I love to travel...and then my eldest brother said that's like a flying waitress (smiles) and he end up pushing me into the lab science and so I ended up becoming a lab technician and then I did that for a while here for 10 years and then I moved around in other positions here. (Jean, February 27, 2008, #1)

She seems grateful that her brother discouraged her from that path, especially since she feels that she had so many opportunities to travel the world without having to be a flight attendant.

Jean did not have any role models in secondary school. She attributes this to never really connecting with anyone during her two and a half years there prior to graduation. She admits that she especially admired her eldest brother for his accomplishments, and was motivated by all of his ambitions—in her view, this helped form and nurture her own
ambition, she seems to psychologically dig deep in her memory and says, “I think my role models were primarily my eldest brother and my second and third brother. I think they were very inspiring and sort of drivers to what I became” (Jean, February 27, 2008, #1).

Decision-making Process about Postsecondary Education

Jean confesses to always wanting to pursue a postsecondary education. All of her siblings have undergraduate degrees, and she is no exception. Although Jean found full-time employment right after graduating six months early from secondary school at a well-recognized insurance company rating insurance policies, she was very much decided on the pursuit of a university education. Jean’s family has always been an advocate for postsecondary education, and it seemed only natural for her to follow suit.

Jean mentions that she was being raised by her single mother who could not financially afford to send all her children to postsecondary institutions, but nevertheless instilled the importance of postsecondary education in the minds of all her children at early stages in their lives. In an email to me, Jean notes:

Coming from a single (divorced) parent home whereby my mother was able to support my aspirations but not financially and the fact that I did not want to incur a large student loan, instigated the acceleration of secondary school. So I worked for eight months to offset the loan costs. (Jean, April 12, 2008, #2)

At an early age, Jean realized that she needed to work prior to attending university to offset tuition expenses and avoid applying for a student loan. She succeeded in avoiding these financial burdens. Soon after graduating from secondary school, Jean pursued an undergraduate degree in Business Administration at a University in Multicity. Ever since
graduating from university, she has obtained many certifications/designations in her field of Training and Development.

The majority of Jean’s peers in secondary school did not apply for college or university. She has since lost touch with all of them. She says that only about 30 percent of her present friends/acquaintances have attended university or college. She responds by saying:

Let me think. My close friends…um…I can count them on one hand…a lot are just acquaintances. A lot of them just fell into jobs. I was actually surprised that the girls that were brilliant when you were growing up haven't done anything of consequence. (Jean, February 27, 2008, #1)

According to Jean, her personal motivation was the driving force behind her decision to pursue her university degree. She explains that:

I'm a self-directed learner I think. Even today I think I brought programs in-house to improve their English. People are always consulting with me about any aspirations they may have. That's the role model I like to project with myself and others. (Jean, February 27, 2008, #1)

In her words, “it’s all about what you want” (Jean, February 27, 2008, #1). Jean is an advocate for pursuing postsecondary education immediately after secondary school; she states:

I personally believe that it [education] is important …it helps to succeed in the corporate world. Um…I don't know…I'm just a believer in it [education], and this is why I went back and did this degree and I also encourage people… you don't have the education as just a piece of paper but you're learning as you go along. (Jean, February 27, 2008, #1)

Subsequently, she continues:

It is good to keep the momentum going because it is challenging when you start to experience that "freedom" (fallacy, in my opinion) of no more school when you get a job because that brings new experiences and challenges which cannot compensate for the 'freedom" of school…it's different. With school, you are controlling oneself, your pace, movement...yes, there are deadlines like work that
has to be met but it is a different feeling, one cannot truly explain versus work life where the "freedom" is dictated whether you wish to admit it or not for most jobs. (Jean, May 2, 2008, #3)

Although Jean attributes her decision to pursue a university degree to her own personal drive to be successful, she acknowledges that she is attentive to other people’s opinions and so it makes her a great decision-maker: “I’m fairly um, good with decision-making, I tend to listen um, try to not rush the decisions, and then voice my opinion...being open-minded” (Jean, February 27, 2008, #1).

Jean also mentions the importance of surrounding one’s self with positive people at all stages of life. Being around people who want the best for you should be a priority. According to Jean, positive people create positive environments that everyone is able to thrive in. So, when having to make the important decision of whether or not to pursue postsecondary education, she believes being in a positive environment often plays a role in the decision-making process and outcome.

Knowledge of Feminist Organizations

Jean carefully and confidently explains what her understanding of a feminist organization is, “A feminist organization is an association that fights for women's rights and to demonstrate our equality in achieving what our male counterpart is able to attain through effort and ability” (Jean, May 2, 2008, #3).

In response to my question about the roles of feminist organizations in decision-making processes about postsecondary studies, she advocates the notion that knowledge is empowering, and believes that feminist organizations can play a role in helping young Black Guyanese immigrant women with their decision-making processes. She, however, admits that “they [feminist organizations] can [play vital roles] if their directives are
enablers and not selfish” (Jean, May 2, 2008, #3). Moreover, Jean indicates that women need to be proactive when seeking success; she says, “knowledge is power, and without it, don't bicker [fight among themselves]! It's out there waiting for you to grasp it and run” (Jean, May 2, 2008, #3).

Although Jean first learned about feminist organizations in the 1980s, she does not recall the circumstances that led her to learning about such organization. She was never a member of a feminist organization or group, but she considers herself to be a feminist with respect to being a successful individual who conquered the challenges of single-parenthood, and still maintains the ability to speak openly about issues important to her. She also considers herself to be a feminist because she advocates women’s rights and freedoms. According to Jean, prime examples of her advocacy are the ongoing supportive conversations she has with her teenage daughter, her willingness to help with this research study, and the career development workshops she led in Guyana as a visitor and those she has also done at her daughter’s secondary school.

*Notion of Success*

According to Jean, success is “something you really have to want—breathe it, live it, eat it every day...anything is possible” (Jean, February 27, 2008, #1). Prior to achieving her undergraduate degree, Jean was married and became pregnant; she took some time off from school, but subsequently returned after almost a three-year break. She explains the challenges of being a wife and mother while working in a full-time position and attending university as a period where she persevered and was successful by attaining her degree. Coupled with her perseverance, was her mother’s helping hands that was the recipe for her successfully attaining her university degree. She explains:
My degree came later in life and the challenges were managing a home, work and children. My son was a teenager and my daughter was one year old. [I was] also working a full-time job. However, my mother was my rock and helped me tremendously; so I honoured my degree to my Mom on graduation day because without her, it [my success] was not possible. (Jean, April 12, 2008, #2)

Jean views the outcome of her professional life as a success. She sees the attainment of a university degree as one of the main things responsible for her professional success and empowerment, as she notes:

It's a totally different appreciation for who you are perceived to be and not only for immigrant women but for everyone. A skill or achievement puts you in a different playing field...so more knowledge whether through formal education or by association aids your ability to articulate oneself and this brings respect which is the ultimate demonstration of knowledge. (Jean, May 2, 2008, #3)

Jean also recognizes that, to maintain her professional success, she needs to stay abreast with new developments in her field by obtaining more certifications and pursuing a graduate degree. Additionally, she recognizes that her recent promotion in the presidential role at a Canadian community organization largely had to do with her ability to vocalize her opinions and stand by what she believed. Her involvement in various capacities at a large number of Guyanese and community organizations also gives Jean the satisfaction of her personal success.

Furthermore, being able to share her “success story” with youth especially helps Jean to maintain her sense of personal success. Her goal in the near future is not only to pursue her graduate degree in Education, but she also plans on going to volunteer centres to mentor Black youth in response to the increase of violent behaviour within this group. Jean makes clear that the role of a mentor is something that she truly aspires to “before I close my eyes” (Jean, February 27, 2008, #1).
When asked in our initial interview about a personal artifact that is representative of
her success, Jean could only think of persons who helped her along the way to
accomplish her personal success. She asked for some time to think about the question and
agreed to answer it on another day. So, she was presented with this question again during
the follow-up interview. She responded by saying, “The Pyramid [in Egypt]...it was built
by humans and despite, weather, raping of its treasures, it still stands tall for centuries and
will always mystify everyone who visits it...including myself.” In a follow-up email with
Jean, I asked her for some clarification about her response since I was looking for
something of a more personal nature. However, she reminded me that she had addressed
this question adequately.

Jean always ends our conversations with realism coupled with optimism. She
expresses that the reality is that there will be people that will want to stand in the way of
one’s success, but “just shrug off, shrug off...anything is possible” (Jean, February 27,
2008, #1).

Sarah’s Story—“If I ever feel like going back to school I can always go”

Background

Twenty-two year old Sarah was interviewed second. Sarah was eager to tell her
story but always seemed to have a scarcity of time because of her hectic work schedule.
Sarah, the eldest of three siblings, now resides in Multicity-West in a house with her
mother, grandmother, and two siblings. When asked about her father’s whereabouts,
Sarah explains that she never met her biological father, and did not want to share more
than that on tape. Sarah’s mother is divorced and single.
Sarah has been working long rotating shifts as a hairdresser at one hair salon for the past four years, and finds her daily commute to work excessive and tiresome. Each time I interviewed her it was after 10 o’clock at night, and she had just returned home tired from work, but in a pleasant mood. Both interviews with Sarah were conducted by telephone because of the time restraints she faces. She has a youthful and bubbly voice that truly demonstrates her positive attitude and hopefulness for a bright future.

Throughout my communications with Sarah, she never once complains about any circumstance in her past, present, or future. I admire her contagious optimism and dedication to returning my phone calls no matter her tired state.

Sarah is single and without children of her own. She says that she tries her best to set a good example for her younger siblings by living her life in the way that she does. The one sentiment that remained consistent throughout my communication with Sarah is her contentedness and optimism. Interviews with Sarah occurred over a span of four months. I have never met her in person, and so the Letter of Information, Consent Form, and her interview transcriptions were sent to her and returned to me through regular mail.

**Immigration Experience**

Because Sarah immigrated to Canada in 1988 at the young age of two, she does not recall her immigration experience firsthand. She, however, shared the experience that her family reminisces about from time to time. They told her that she lived with her aunt, mother, and brothers in a village just outside the capital city in Guyana before her emigration.

When she immigrated to Canada in 1988, she settled in Multicity-Central, a location that many Guyanese immigrants call their home outside of Guyana. Sarah’s
maternal grandmother immigrated to Canada and sponsored Sarah and her mother. Sarah has always lived with her mother. After immigrating to Canada, she lived with her grandmother, aunt, uncle, mother, and brothers. Thus far, they have been the constant in her life. Sarah now resides in Multicity-West with the same members of her family.

When asked about her family’s reason for immigrating to Canada, Sarah says, “It was just um...more opportunities here than there was back home and the education here is farther than the education back home” (Sarah, March 12, 2008, #1). In a later conversation with Sarah, she advises me that here she is referring to there being only one university in Guyana as opposed to having a variety of postsecondary institutions in Canada to choose from. Furthermore, she explains her family’s reasons for immigrating to Canada by saying, “I just know that the education level is more recognized and everything was here...I know it's easier to get a job here, the education here is good” (Sarah, March 12, 2008, #1).

Secondary School Experience

Sarah started secondary school in 1999 and graduated in 2002. Some of her secondary school courses were Advanced while others were General level. Her highest level of education is Grade 12. By this time, her family had relocated about four times within Multicity-Central. In secondary school, Sarah never aspired to pursue a postsecondary education because she was certain that working as a hairdresser would be the perfect job for her. Even today, she is quite contented with her choice to go straight into the workforce as a hairdresser after graduating from secondary school; here is what she says:
Ok, my goal was to...well, I always wanted to get into hairdressing...I wanted to do hair from the beginning and the fact that I have got into it, I have accomplished that...um, I didn't really have any other goals other than to finish secondary school...I never really thought of beyond secondary school. (Sarah, March 12, 2008, #1)

Sarah recalls her secondary school experience with fond memories. She comments on how easy it was for her to make friends and how much she enjoyed participating in extra-curricular activities such as track and field. She says that her peers would describe her as, “A nice student easy-going, don't get into trouble, friendly, just a nice person to be around...I'm very helpful. I’m a talkative cheerful person so I make friends easily” (Sarah, March 12, 2008, #1). Sarah is still in contact with about half of her secondary school peers, and she advises that the majority of them have not pursued postsecondary studies mainly because they are employed and/or have children of their own.

Considering that Sarah’s secondary school was located in the heart of a Black immigrant populated neighbourhood, I asked her about the ethnic make-up of her school, “Most [students] were Black followed behind um...Chinese, not much but most of the population was Black. Most of the teachers were Caucasian” (Sarah, March 12, 2008, #1).

Sarah did not have any roles models while in secondary school. She is not able to explain why this is. However, she highlights that she has always found motivation and inspiration from within herself as opposed to looking outside of herself for particular role models, as she explains: “I look at people and they do different things and I like what they do sometimes. Throughout my years I never had anyone as a role model; I mostly see it in myself” (Sarah, March 12, 2008, #1).
After sharing happy memories of the social aspect of her secondary school experience, Sarah shares the difficulties she experienced with reading, writing, and math. These difficulties were recognized by teachers in the classroom, and the school administration decided to place Sarah in what she referred to as an optional class for Special Needs students. Sarah explains the Special Needs class as a classroom with teachers who were available to her since she was having problems with the regular work in the regular classes. She recognized that she needed help, and so when her mother was notified about the school administration’s decision to have Sarah attend that class whenever she decided that she required extra help, her mother applauded the efforts of the school.

The administration did not force Sarah into the Special Needs class, but left the choice of attending the class solely up to her. No one ever recommended that Sarah visit a clinical psychologist for an assessment to understand why she was having academic difficulties in school, and so she was never formally diagnosed with a learning disability. Here is what Sarah has to say about her academic difficulty and how it was treated in secondary school:

The problem with my reading is that I would read and write the same. So, the way I am talking to you right now I can write down on a piece of paper and I would not put any punctuation [pause]. So over the years, that was my problem. So every time I took English class I needed help with that and that's why I was separated from my other class that I went to so that I can get help with that and reading every time I read something half way through I can tell you what happened but if you wait until the end of the book piece by piece..and not the full story you can get out of me...I'm not a reader. I mean they were taking care of special needs kids and everything. I'm not sure if they [school’s administration] changed. It [the optional Special Education class] was just for anything you need help with you come in...it was [pause] it was really a part of the school term...it was always open and there were always teachers in there, so if you are in a class [regular] and you can leave and go
on to that class [Special Education class] and they [teachers] can spend more one-on-one time with you. (Sarah, March 12, 2008, #1)

Considering her academic difficulties and the administration’s response of optional extra help for Sarah, it almost goes without saying that she was not an A student. Sarah claims that she was a C student. Both Sarah and her mother still applaud the school administration for their efforts in response to Sarah’s difficulties. Finally, when asked about the ethnic make-up in the Special Needs class, Sarah said that the majority of students were Black.

*Decision-making Process about Postsecondary Education*

Sarah’s decision to not pursue a postsecondary education after secondary school was based on her love for hairdressing and her secondary school Cosmetology teacher’s ability to find a hairdressing job for Sarah immediately after she graduated. Sarah told me that financing her postsecondary education was never a primary concern while she was in secondary school because she did not have the intention to pursue postsecondary studies. Consequently, Sarah never had relationships or conversations with guidance counsellors at her secondary school. So, her primary support system for making postsecondary plans was her Cosmetology teacher.

Sarah’s family did not encourage or discourage her from joining the workforce immediately after secondary school. Sarah and her mother briefly discussed her plan and Sarah remembers feeling very little pressure regarding her plans. She explains, “That conversation [with her mother] came up, but it was like I just wanted to work. It wasn't a situation where I have to go to work or I had to go to school” (Sarah, May 28, 2008, #2).
However, in our first interview, Sarah discloses how inspired she was by her mother’s decision to return to school in her adult years:

Cause the fact that she went back...she went back to school to pursue her dreams that means that it is still in her to do better than what she has done or it is still in her for her to pass it on to her kids so that they can do better so that they can accomplish what she wasn't able to accomplish at the time. (Sarah, March 12, 2008, #1)

In our follow-up interview, I ask Sarah about what would have encouraged her to pursue postsecondary studies right after secondary school. Filled with uncertainty she replies, “Well, if I knew about Cosmetology courses, I would have just stayed in school [applied for college] and work part-time...I would have taken courses [at college] that I need to go into hairdressing” (Sarah, May 28, 2008, #2). She hopes to start her own hairdressing business one day, but acknowledges that it is near impossible for her to do so without a diploma in Business or Cosmetology.

When I ask Sarah if anything had discouraged her from applying for college she positively said, “Nothing really discouraged me. I just found a job and didn't end up going back. I had a job lined up already” (Sarah, March 12, 2008, #1). I end our interview by asking whether her decision to go straight into the workforce after secondary school was the right one for her and she hesitantly responds, “Right now, I'm OK with it. If I ever feel like going back to school I can always go” (Sarah, May 28, 2008, #2).

Knowledge of Feminist Organizations

When I ask Sarah about her understanding of feminist organizations, she admits that she is not sure at all about what a feminist organization is. I explain how feminist organizations consist of groups of people who advocate for women’s rights and
freedoms. The I ask her if she thinks that such organizations could help young Black
Guyanese immigrant women in secondary school to make important decisions about their
futures, and again she responds by saying she is not at all sure about what role they could
play.

Notion of Success

Sarah explains that her understanding of success has changed over the years and
will continue to change as she grows personally and professionally. She defines success
as:

Basically your accomplishments once you can...look forward to what you are about
to do or what you have done and say that you are proud of that. I know what I have
done in the past and that I will still push myself to do better than what I have done
before... (Sarah, March 12, 2008, #1)

She goes on to say that when she has to define success for her future children, she would
say that “success is anything that you think of, dream of, or put your mind to...anything
could be success because in order for you to get what you want, you got to try anything”
(Sarah, March 12, 2008, #1).

So, Sarah advises that there are two main steps to accomplish success. The first
step entails dreaming it, and the second step entails “going for it.” She explains that in
many cases “going for it” means obtaining a postsecondary diploma or degree. When I
ask her if she believes that a person can be successful without a postsecondary education,
she states:

I would say yes and no because you can be successful. According to people, the
answer is no but to me I think I would say that you could [be successful] by
working in different jobs that you can do that doesn't require all of that education,
but it's nice to have that education to sit down on, but not all jobs require it...so you
can still be successful but not have an education. (Sarah, March 12, 2008, #1)
According to Sarah, the most successful person in her life is her mother. Her mother works in the childcare services field. Her mother has her Early Childhood Assistant certification, but since this certification is no longer recognized by the company at which her mother is employed, Sarah’s mother has to pursue a Community College Early Childhood Education diploma. She will need to have Grades 11 and 12 English credits to gain entrance to this program. Consequently, she is now enrolled in night secondary school to obtain these credits. Sarah admires her mother’s drive and stamina to pursue education at this stage of her life.

In our initial interview, when asked about an artifact that is representative of her personal success, Sarah admits to not being able to think of anything at the moment. So, I ask her this question again in our follow-up interview and she mentions that her personal representation of success is her cosmetology program completion award from secondary school that is currently mounted on her bedroom wall.

Maxine’s Story—“You don’t hear much about we in the classroom”

Background

Twenty-eight year old Maxine was the third participant to be interviewed. After seeing the recruitment poster on a bulletin board at a community centre in Multicity-East, Maxine contacted me by email. Although she was intrigued by the topic of this study, she was quite reluctant to participate in it. After I reiterated that our conversations would be recorded she became more reluctant to participate, so I advised her to think about it for a few days and I offered her my phone number to contact me further. I assured her that my Supervisory Committee and I would be the only ones who would be listening to the recordings and I discussed the matter of confidentiality.
Two weeks after our email conversation, Maxine telephoned me and agreed to participate in the study. I emailed her the research documents to obtain her written consent to participate in the study, and then offered to meet with her in Multicity so that she could return the Consent Form to me and participate in our first interview. Maxine responded in the negative to this plan. She offered to return the Consent Form to me by regular mail, and I agreed to that arrangement. With her permission to disclose the contents of an email, Maxine responds in the following way to my request to meet with her:

No way! I don’t think so. Dealing with you can’t be confidential if I have to meet you. I have a lot to lose. I know you don’t understand, but I have a lot on the line. Maybe you’re going to understand later on, but right now I have a lot to lose if we meet. Anyway, I think you would make me nervous if I have to meet. I never done this before. (Maxine, March 21, 2008, Email 2)

As reluctant as Maxine was to participate in this study, we had three interviews and several email correspondence. In our follow-up interview, she advises:

I would highly recommend this um…experience to everyone who immigrated to Canada and had a rough time. Talking to you really helped me um [pause] understand myself in a way that I feel good about myself. Thanks. (Maxine, May 19, 2008, #3)

Maxine has been working part-time at three locations of a large grocery store chain for the past six years. She considers her finances to be very “limited and limiting” (Maxine, April 4, 2008, #1). In our follow-up interview Maxine discloses that she is a single mother to an 8-year-old daughter. They both live with Maxine’s mother, grandmother, and uncle. In a painful confession, Maxine also discloses that she is a lesbian who was raped and became pregnant in the process even though, in our initial interview, Maxine claimed that she did not have children.
At a very early age, Maxine was told that her father and mother were never married, and her father abandoned them when she was two years old. She has never met her father and says that she has no interest in ever meeting him because, she believes, “he is one selfish son of a bitch” (Maxine, May 17, 2008, #2). Shortly after this comment about her father, I ask about the type of relationship she has with her mother, and Maxine almost regrettably admits that her relationship with her mother has been “stretched to the thinnest all my life, cause she left me when it mattered and [pause] she never ever believed me [pause] Sorry, I have to stop” (Maxine, May 17, 2008, #2).

Immigration Experience

Prior to emigration from Guyana, Maxine lived with her brother, maternal grandfather, two uncles, and aunts in a small village just outside of Guyana’s capital city. She explains that they lived in the capital city before her mother left Guyana, but were forced to live a more inexpensive lifestyle by moving to a poor village outside the capital city after her mother left. Her family simply could not afford to upkeep their lifestyle in the city without her mother’s financial contribution. Therefore, Maxine was forced to live in an environment that she viewed as less safe than the capital city in Guyana. She recalls a frightening experience while living in the village in Guyana:

I had chores to do almost every day at my home in Guyana, and one evening I was picking up the clothes, because they were dry, from the clothes line in my front yard and this man came out of nowhere and stole all the clothes from me. He told me that he had a gun and I could feel it sticking me in my back, so I gave him all the clothes and he didn’t shoot me or anything but, I was crying the whole entire time. I cried for days and weeks after that and I couldn’t sleep. My God! That was a really bad experience. I missed my mother then and I lost my favourite church dress [in a separate burglary incident] she sent me just a month before that story. (Maxine, April 4, 2008, #1)
Living without her mother for three years prior to immigration was difficult for Maxine; she angrily shares this perspective and wonders about the laws in Canada:

Funny how Canada stands up for the right of children, but when I was only three my mother left me in search of a better life over here and ended up having to stay and work underground for three years... I didn’t see her again until I was six... that was hard... really hard... really hard especially when my [close family member] started having his way with me... you, know sex... I really felt deserted. I needed her [mother], but Canada didn’t care. The immigration process was hard on me and my mother, yes. Now that I know more, I have more questions... like... how is it that Canada is against mothers abandoning children for a few hours, but when they abandon children for years, it’s OK? That doesn’t make sense. (Maxine, May 19, 2008, #3)

Maxine remembers when her mother sent her gifts in a barrel or box during Christmas seasons, and her grandfather often seized many of her gifts without explanation.

Apparently, her grandfather had a serious gambling problem that “encouraged him to beg, borrow, or steal to pay up his debts” (Maxine, May 19, 2008, #3).

Since the early 1970s, Maxine’s maternal grandmother worked as a domestic in Multicity-East for a wealthy couple. Her grandmother arranged for another wealthy Canadian couple to invite Maxine’s mother during the late 1970s to do domestic work in their home. However, this arrangement was not approved by immigration until 1983.

Maxine’s mother immigrated to Canada on a two-year contract, leaving 3-year-old Maxine behind with her younger brother, grandfather, uncles, and aunts.

After Maxine’s mother’s contract of employment ended, she did whatever it took to remain in Canada and eventually Maxine’s grandmother sponsored Maxine. According to Maxine:

Grandma-ma sponsored me and Derek, and said that we were in a bad situation and both parents abandoned us, so we had no food nor shelter because the caregiver [grandfather] was a gambler and drunk [alcoholic]. This is how we came
Maxine immigrated to Canada in 1986 at the age of six and resided in Multicity-East with her mother, brother, uncle, and maternal grandmother. She attended two elementary schools and two secondary schools in Multicity-East. She never attended a postsecondary institution.

In Maxine’s words, “coming to Canada was a rough transition because I had never met my grandmother before and my mother and I were not so close anymore, so I was scared to come but happy to leave Guyana behind” (Maxine, April 4, 2008, #1). Plus, she explains that it was comforting to know that her brother was also immigrating with her.

Maxine talks about the difficulties that her grandmother experienced in trying to sponsor Maxine’s mother. Then she recalls how hard it was for her mother to find employment since she was an illegal immigrant in Canada. Maxine couldn’t help but recall how, while living in Guyana, her mother would work hard to financially support her family:

My mother’s job in Guyana required that she was out of town for long periods of time. She worked hard always. Actually, she spent a lot of time in, um, Suriname...her job was to buy clothes at the black-market price and sell it back in Guyana to make a profit. So, she used to go away for maybe two or three weeks sometimes. I missed her as a child, but now I really admire what she did. She was a business woman and a mother at the same time. She paid for the bottom house that my family lived in when we were in Guyana. Even after me, my mother and one of my other brothers came to Canada, my mother still supported her rest of children back home...she still supporting them...now I help her out. (Maxine, May 17, 2008, #2)

She mentions how commendable it is that her mother still financially provides for her remaining family in Guyana and her family in Canada. Maxine admires her mother’s perseverance and independence; she says:
There was no man around to help her. It’s not like Canada where the government will take care of you, OK? It’s really not like that. In Guyana you have to fend for yourself or you’re in trouble. (Maxine, April 4, 2008, #1)

When asked why she thought that her family immigrated to Multicity in particular, and why it is that she has chosen to stay in Multicity with her daughter, Maxine shares her admiration and appreciation for the West-Indian grocery stores and “Caribbean cultural pockets” (Maxine, April 4, 2008, #1) that are found in Multicity. With a smile, she says:

We come here because, you know, we feel comfortable and, um, I have I mean there's a lot of West Indian shops. We can still eat the same kinds of food. We don't have to change our diets too much and also you know, um, my mother had family here and so we got cousins that we could grow up with and we lived close by to them, you know? (Maxine, April 4, 2008, #1)

*Secondary School Experience*

Considering that her mother moved around quite a bit to avoid being deported back to Guyana, Maxine moved to different areas within Multicity-East and so attended two elementary schools and two secondary schools. She changed secondary schools after completing Grade 10 because the secondary school administration placed her in General courses as opposed to Advanced courses for her Grade 11 year. With the permission of her mother, Maxine withdrew from that school and enrolled in another secondary school where after two months of attending Grade 11 Advanced courses, she was placed in Grade 11 General courses. Maxine dropped out and pretended to still be enrolled in school to ensure her mother would not be embarrassed.

Later, Maxine graduated from secondary school at the age of 23 after completing Grades 11 and 12 in night and summer school. Maxine did not succeed in these courses easily; she in fact, failed Grade 12 English once, withdrew from the course in another
instance, and finally passed it on her third attempt. Since she was having trouble with courses, she withdrew from school altogether again without graduating at the age of 19. Maxine then returned to complete her required Grade 12 English credit in night school while she was pregnant.

In a nutshell, Maxine explains her social experience in secondary school as, “everybody liked me and I liked everybody” (Maxine, April 4, 2008, #1). She enjoyed the social aspects of her secondary school experiences but complained about her teachers’ behaviour towards her. She claims that her teachers got upset with her when she spoke and then they got upset with her when she did not speak, and so this ambivalence caused great confusion for her. This encouraged a lack of communication between her and her teachers. This lack of communication, she says, led to an incident in her Canadian History class where her teacher gave an assignment to the class that Maxine did not complete, and so received a failing grade. Maxine admits that she did not explain her reason for not completing the assignment because she did not think that the teacher would “tolerate or even understand” (Maxine, April 4, 2008, #1) her explanation:

For the end of term assignment, the teacher told us that we were welcome to write a paper about a famous person of colour who played a significant role in Canadian history, and whom we identified with...that was cool, but then I realized that I only really ever heard about Juliette Powell who was the first Black Miss Canada in the 1980s and she was not even pure Black; she was mixed so I didn’t entirely identify with her. So, I moved on to famous Black men in Canada and all I could think of was athletes...I think I thought of Ben Johnson the Olympic guy, but I think he was homophobic and plus he was on drugs, so that left me with nobody really to identify with. I mean um [pause] I’m a Black lesbian and you don’t hear much about we in the classroom [chuckles]. (Maxine, April 4, 2008, #1)

Moreover, Maxine’s weaknesses were math and English. She wishes that her mother had more time to help her with homework in the past, as she explains, “If my
mother had some free time to help me with the homework, then it might have made a difference but truly we were always so busy packing up and moving and all that” (Maxine, April 4, 2008, #1). Additionally, Maxine mentions that there was a stigma attached to students who asked too many questions in the classroom. Such students were stigmatized as requiring Special Education. Consequently, Maxine avoided asking questions at all cost because she knew that “they [teachers] would throw them [students] into the Special Ed. class” (Maxine, April 4, 2008, #1). She expresses how embarrassing it would be for her mother to find out that her daughter was placed in a Special Education classroom in the following comment:

My mother would have been so upset and embarrassed. It was embarrassing, you know? She would have been embarrassed. So, that was my experience in secondary school. I was a weak student, but I got through it because I always knew that my mother wanted me to graduate and I think it's good, you know. I graduated and that's fine. Thank God I didn’t embarrass her. (Maxine, April 4, 2008, #1)

Instead of asking questions in class, Maxine chose to copy homework answers from friends. She explains that she befriended Chinese students so that they could help her academically since they were known to be smart:

Most of my friends were Black. A lot of my friends are Black, um [pause] but, um, you know I had a few Chinese friends too and you know it was good to stay close to them because they were SMART (giggles). (Maxine, April 4, 2008, #1)

It did not take Maxine a very long time to recognize that the majority of students in the Special Education classes were Black, while the majority of Grade A students was Chinese and White. Maxine views her teachers’ neglectful behaviour towards Black students and favouritism toward Chinese and White students as racism against her. She exclaims that her teachers were “a bunch of racist people...I couldn’t even talk to them.
They looked at Black people and expected them to amount to nothing. I thought it woulda been different in Canada though” (Maxine, April 4, 2008, #1).

Although Maxine experienced a difficult incident regarding her final assignment and her Grade 10 teacher, she differentiates her from all her other teachers:

Maxine: My social studies teacher...I think that's what they call it or history, I can't remember. Anyway, she was usually very nice to me and what I liked about her is that she didn’t treat people different. She was fair and wanted us all to be a success so she treated us the same. That’s what it’s all about.

Researcher: OK. So, did you do well in History then?

Maxine: No, I didn’t do well…I hated reading and that class…man, almost all the homework was reading and writing response essays…that was my weakness.

Researcher: So, maybe you needed some special attention from your teacher to address these difficulties you had with doing the homework, then?

Maxine: Well, this goes for all the teachers, they should have all given me a little extra attention in class because once your reading and writing is weak, it really slows you down in all the subjects, you know? (Maxine, April 4, 2008, #1)

Even though Maxine wanted to be treated fairly and not be stigmatized in her classrooms, she admits that she needed some special attention in order to improve her academic performance.

Maxine says that she was a friendly student with low grades, but advised that her grades were high enough to get her into a college program if she chose to pursue it. However, attending college was not in Maxine’s plan. We had the following conversation:

Maxine: Uni [university] and college was never really on my mind, I just knew that I wouldn’t find a place in dem places that would you know make me comfortable. I can’t tell you if it was only cause my family was so strapped for cash, but I always knew that uni and dem places was pricy and outta my league, girl (chuckles).

Researcher: Did your teachers ever talk to you about going to college or university?
Maxine: Nope! They couldn’t give two rats ass of what became of me. (Maxine, May 17, 2008, #2)

She recalls that although she was involved in extra-curricular activities including track and field and the vocal music choir, she was seldom involved in class discussions.

In our first interview, I ask Maxine if her life after secondary school turned out exactly as she had planned. She makes the following point:

I just wanted to be making money to be able to help my mom especially, you know? And um, I guess it is exactly as I planned it. I mean I didn't have any big plans because my marks weren't very high, so I couldn't plan to be a doctor, you know (smiles). I knew that that wasn't going to happen. Everything was as planned, I guess. (Maxine, April 4, 2008, #1)

In a similar question in our follow-up interview, I take the liberty of asking Maxine if her life after secondary school turned out exactly as she hoped, and here is what she says:

To tell you the truth, I’m so surprised that I did so well and I’m ‘holding my own’ money-wise because my marks was not the greatest and the thing about um [pause] finance at that time we didn’t –well we couldn’t afford school for me. The plan was for me to help my mother and that’s what I did. (Maxine, May 17, 2008, #2)

On a different note, Maxine did not have any role models while in secondary school, and indicates that the closest she came to having a role model was her mother. She has always held her mother high on a pedestal for being such a strong single-parent.

**Decision-making Process about Postsecondary Education**

While in secondary school, Maxine’s goal was to finish secondary school and move out of her current home. Although Maxine’s younger brother has an undergraduate degree, she still does not view postsecondary education as important unless a person needs to study to become a doctor or a lawyer. Otherwise, Maxine feels as if a postsecondary education is a waste of time. These negative thoughts about postsecondary education were born in secondary school as Maxine observed her realities of the
education system and they were reinforced when her brother graduated from university two years ago and is still unable to find a full-time job in his field today; she elaborates:

He only graduate two years ago. He hasn't found a job that he really likes yet...you know that's one of the reasons why I don't really know if college or university is for me because a lot of people they graduate and they can't find jobs. The job market is really tough I think, so you really need to be really certain of what you want to do and don't waste time in university or college if it's something that you can do without going because it's very expensive. It’s hopeless when you find out there’s no jobs. (Maxine, April 4, 2008, #1)

In secondary school, Maxine never visited a guidance counsellor or discussed her post graduation plans with teachers at school. She does not have many fond memories of guidance counsellors at her secondary school; she passionately explains it this way and describes an encounter she had with racism at school:

Girl, when your skin is Black like mine, the counsellors them [sic] automatically tell you that you won't make it. To me, it don’t really make a difference whether you’re scoring A’s, B’s or D’s, they will find some reason to bring you down. At least that’s how it was at my school. I really hope that they train them better by the time my kids get to secondary [pause]. I remember a time when I went to the guidance office to ask about dropping one of my course and there was a line up to see the counsellors. Three White kids were in the office with me, and there was one particular counsellor just in charge of discipline. He came out from his office and looked straight at me and said, “I guess you’re mine. Come with me.” I didn’t say anything and the secretary was not at the front, so I went with him. He started calling me by someone else name and I had to tell him it wasn’t me. So, he took me back in the um waiting area and asked if that person was there. One of the White girls went inside with him. That was crap. (Maxine, May 17, 2008, #2)

Together with the majority of her close secondary school friends Maxine decided not to pursue postsecondary studies; she explains:

Hardly any of them [her friends] applied. There was always five of us, you know? And, actually three of us were from Guyana and the other girl was from Jamaica and the other girl was from Grenada. So, only the girl from um, Grenada, she applied and she went to Centennial College and um, the other girl, one of the girls from Guyana she applied and she went to Seneca but you know what, she dropped out. She said the program was hard and, you know, the teachers there weren't really
supportive of her so she couldn't handle it. So, that's two. (Maxine, April 4, 2008, #1)

Maxine says that she found support from her friends as opposed to teachers and guidance counsellors. She did not attend her secondary school graduation because most of her friends had graduated one or two years prior to her graduation.

Maxine’s family did not agree with her decision to go straight into the workforce after secondary school. Her mother encouraged Maxine to apply for a student loan to help with tuition. However, Maxine told her mother that a loan would just mean incurring more expenses unnecessarily since she was not certain about what field she would be best suited for, as she notes:

My mother wanted me to go to college but I didn't want it. I knew that we didn't have much money and so I didn't really want to go to college if I didn't really, really know what I wanted to do. I really didn't know what I wanted to do, so I was working at, um, [a grocery store chain] at the time and then um, [the grocery store chain] had me working at three different locations, so when I put the hours together, it was full-time hours, you know (smiles). I was making more money than a lot of my friends. So then I stuck with it and so you know. That's what, you know, I'm still doing that. (Maxine, April 4, 2008, #1)

Coupled with this major decision that Maxine was making about what to do after secondary school, was the harsh cold reality of the sexual abuse she was still encountering at the hands of a close family member. Maxine and her younger brother were sexually abused by two close family members while living in Guyana. One of these perpetrators moved to Canada and continued sexually abusing Maxine. She was deeply hurt that, although her mother and grandmother knew about the abuse, they never reprimanded the perpetrator in Guyana or the one currently in Canada. In a difficult search for words, she explains:
I grew up in ways with [two close family members] troubling me in Guyana that [pause] that no child should um...have to live with. The only peace I got while I was living there was when I slept at my friend’s house, but when I went back home, Lord, they would make up for it. They use to have their way with me...have their way with me (long pause) together. It was sick and nasty and they never bat an eye-lash with regret or said sorry or anything. Them pigs have no conscience, none! Of course, my mother and grandmother knew, but they just turned a blind eye to it. Looking back at everything, I don’t know what was worse...all those horrible nasty episodes with those pigs or my mother not believing me in the beginning. So, when [the abuser who immigrated to Canada] came here and realized that nobody point any fingers at him or rough him up for what he did to me, of course, he just started it up again. This time he left my brother out of it, but [pause] that only meant that he had more time to fuck me up. (Maxine, May 17, 2008, #2)

Maxine saw secondary school graduation as a way to escape her crowded living arrangements; she planned on finding a full-time job to afford her own housing and also hoped to be able to financially assist her mother. Her sexually abusive relationship with the close family member in Canada was not the only thing that motivated her to find alternative housing; she was also motivated by her family’s constant verbal abuse about her sexual orientation as a lesbian. According to Maxine, the driving forces behind her decision not to pursue postsecondary studies were mostly her circumstances at home. She explains that “the taunting, jokes, and looks of um, I guess disgust was too much for me to handle” (Maxine, May 17, 2008, #2).

Furthermore, Maxine was convinced that she would not be able to handle postsecondary studies considering the academic difficulties she encountered in secondary school and the lack of respect that she received in secondary school and her home. When I ask her how she feels about her decision not to pursue postsecondary studies, she concludes our follow-up interview by saying, “It [decision] was fine, I suppose right, but
I don’t know if it will remain right in the long run. Time will tell, I guess” (Maxine, May 17, 2008, #2).

Knowledge of Feminist Organizations

With a bit of uncertainty, Maxine defines feminist organizations by saying, “I guess they are organizations that stand up for women. It’s a North American thing, I think” (Maxine, May 17, 2008, #2). I clarify what she meant by North American and she explains that she was referring to an organization operated by White people for White women; she notes, “It’s ran by Whites for White women, not for us. I mean you don’t hear too many Black people talking about feminist organizations, do you?” (Maxine, May 17, 2008, #2).

Maxine does not think that feminist organizations in Canada would be helpful in guiding young Black Guyanese immigrant women’s decisions about their future, since this particular demographic has either not heard about feminist organizations or do not identify with their directives. She tells me that she learned a bit about feminist organizations from her partner who sometimes read about the work of feminists. She makes clear that one of the reasons why her partner reads about feminist organizations is because she is able to identify with them since she is White. She notes this in the following statement:

Most of us barely understand what they [feminist organizations] stand for. People hardly talk about them. The only reason I kind of know a bit about them is because my partner is Canadian and she reads stuff about them sometimes, but I’ve never really had a big discussion about them, you know? I think she reads about them because she can um see eye-to-eye with them being White and all. I won’t feel like they would understand how Blacks think or feel. (Maxine, May 17, 2008, #2)
**Notion of Success**

Maxine’s definition of success is “something that you didn’t think you could do, but you did it.” She considers herself to be successful because she obtained her secondary school diploma against all the adversities she faced, and she is now employed and able to financially support herself, her daughter, her mother, and grandmother. However, she explains that, although she is a bit discouraged since she has still not been financially able to move out on her own with her daughter, she is confident that it will all happen in time. In our follow-up interview she explains that renting her own place coupled with paying for a babysitter for her daughter will cost her more, and rob her daughter the relationships she has with her great-grandmother and grandmother. At the moment, babysitting duties are shared between the great-grandmother and grandmother.

Since Maxine got pregnant, the close family member who is also the child’s father, stopped sexually abusing her; remaining in her current living conditions is easier than before. However, she worries about the well-being of her daughter since the perpetrator still lives with them. She said that she will consider herself completely successful when she takes her daughter out of those living conditions altogether. Maxine agrees that her meaning of personal success is changing as time goes by; her success is becoming more connected to ensuring her daughter’s well-being.

While Maxine does not view postsecondary education as a requirement for one’s personal success, she expresses great anger about not being able to afford a student loan to aid postsecondary studies in the following statement:

> Look at the government, they need to be held responsible for so many Black people who are impoverished in this place and can’t afford O.S.A.P. I am not lazy. I work hard for everything I have, but working hard will never be enough...this
government is screwed up...as long as the White people stay in the government seats, we will remain at the bottom of the barrel, just like back home. This ain’t no different; they just label it different over here, but it’s the same shit...it’s just undercover. (Maxine, April 4, 2008, #1)

When asked about an artifact that represents her personal notion of success, Maxine immediately mentions her secondary school diploma that can be found mounted on her bedroom wall. She explains that it was her mother who mounted it on the wall.

She elaborates by saying:

I STAYED in secondary school and even RETURNED to secondary school to achieve my diploma to make my mother and grandmother proud because they both sacrificed so much for me to get to live in Canada. It’s only a matter of time before things go my way and I find my piece of happiness. What’s meant for you girl, will always become yours. Patience, man, patience. (Maxine, April 4, 2008, #1).

As we converse about success, Maxine takes the opportunity to mention that although her family does not have a great deal of money or education, they have a lot of pride in whatever they have accomplished. She recalls, “my grandmother always says pride is not only for rich people” (Maxine, May 19, 2008, #3). This pride cost Maxine quite a bit physically and emotionally. With anguish in her voice, she explains how protecting her family’s pride meant enduring the torturous experience of continuous silence about the sexually abusive relationships she experienced within her family whilst living in Guyana and Canada at the hands of family members. Additionally, she tries hard to justify not reporting her two sexual perpetrators (family members in Guyana and Canada) because she says, “If I go [to the police], I will ruin my family more...I think me being a lesbian is about all that they can handle at this point” (Maxine, May 17, 2008, #2).
Moreover, Maxine protected her mother’s pride by remaining silent about her academic difficulties throughout elementary school and secondary school because she did not want to be placed in a Special Education class and embarrass her mother. Maxine attributes the pride that her family strives to maintain to their need to feel successful. Embarrassment is equivalent to failure. Maxine vows to not intentionally put these types of pressures on her daughter.

Sisi’s Story—“I wasn’t sick, just lonely like hell”

Background

Twenty-eight year old Sisi was the final participant to be interviewed. After learning about this study from another participant, Sisi established communication with me by electronic mail and requested that both our interviews be conducted in this form. Even though I explained the matter of confidentiality and her ability to decline answers to questions, stop telephone or in-person interviews, and withdraw from the study at any time without consequences, Sisi was very sceptical to participate in this study. However, after emailing her the Letter of Information and Consent Form, she reluctantly decided to participate. She explained that her scepticism and reluctance are based on her need to protect her children from whatever consequences her participation in this study might entail.

Considering her very hectic schedule that entails her singlehandedly caring for three young children and time spent at two part-time jobs, I offered to finance a babysitter of her choice for her three children on two days that were suitable for her, so that she would have some time to respond to my interview questions online. Our interviews were conducted using the MSN chat tool online. It was more interactive than writing emails
back and forth, and the only form of interactive communication that Sisi agreed to outside of our brief unrecorded telephone conversations.

Sisi is the youngest of three children, and she immigrated to Canada in 1996 at the age of 16, without her parents. She did not grow up with her older half-brother and half-sister and had not lived with them until she immigrated to Canada. Sisi does not share her biological father with her half-siblings.

Sisi’s biological father and mother married each other in 1978, and they were divorced by the time Sisi was four months old in 1980. Prior to Sisi’s parents’ relationship, her mother was married to a different man who eventually sponsored his biological children—Sisi’s half-siblings. Her half-siblings left Guyana when Sisi was two years old. Because she did not have a relationship with her half-siblings, she advises that living with them in Canada proved to be quite awkward at first.

Sisi never attended a postsecondary institution. She currently has two part-time jobs as a cashier at a large grocery store and a 24-hour Convenience Store at a gas station. She has worked in several part-time sales positions for the last eight years. When asked about her financial situation, she replies solemnly and says, “No comment” (Sisi, May 6, 2008, #1).

Immigration Experience

In the mid 1980s, Sisi’s eldest aunt (her mother’s sister) arranged for a wealthy family in Multicity to sponsor Sisi’s mother to come work for them on a two-year domestic contract. Sisi advises that “the only drawback was that Mommy had to tell immigration that she was single and didn’t have no kids” (Sisi, May 6, 2008, #1).
Sisi’s mother immigrated to Canada alone in 1987 leaving 7-year-old Sisi behind. Sisi lived with her grandmother in a poor neighbourhood within the capital city in Guyana from the age of 7 until she turned 15. Then her grandmother died. Sisi then lived with a friend of the family for one year. During that year the police in Guyana apprehended Sisi for selling illegal drugs to other under-aged youth. She disclosed the identity of the person who had provided her with illegal drugs for almost three years to the police, and was released from police custody without being charged. While the police were able to arrest the drug-dealer, Sisi suffered the consequence of a gunshot wound to her back from an unknown perpetrator, who she is convinced, was acting on behalf of the drug-dealer who was then imprisoned. She comments about her decision to disclose the identity of the drug-dealer in the following statement:

It was the best decision at that time for me. The police were not just going to let me go free without getting anything from me. My grandmother always told me to speak the truth and all I hoped that day was that it would set me free and it did. God rest her soul. I knew that something bad would happen to me for speaking the truth and I was prepare for it. I left it to God. I had no family in Guyana to worry about, so it was OK for me to put my own life in danger. I was prepare for what happen to me. I was in hospital for about two weeks and then it became too expensive to keep me there, so they sent me home to the lady that I was living with. I missed my grandma so much those days. I realize that I was what they call a product of my environment. That environment I was living was rough and people did mad things for money. In a way, I’m glad I got out. (Sisi, May 6, 2008, #1)

In 1996, Sisi’s immigrated to Canada at the age of 16, having had her mother officially sponsor her in 1993. Sisi notes that her sponsorship process took a very long time because, for many years, her mother was “hiding in Canada because she wasn’t legal” (Sisi, June 18, 2008, #3), and so her mother needed to be legal before sponsoring Sisi.

When Sisi arrived in Canada she resided with her mother and her two older half-siblings in Multicity-Central, but attended secondary school in Multicity-East because the
secondary schools in her neighbourhood were not accepting new students at the time.

This meant that she spent weekdays with her aunt, uncle, and cousins who lived closer to her secondary school. She went home to her mother’s place on weekends. This living arrangement lasted for about one year.

Sisi explains her immigration experience in 1996 as being a very challenging one. She did not want to leave Guyana. She had well-established friendships and the death of her grandmother one year before her emigration had really taken a toll on her. Sisi also mentions that she had a boyfriend in Guyana that she still considers her first and everlasting love. She shares a very heated conversation that she had with her mother about almost being an adult and wanting to remain in Guyana:

My mother was shocked and upset to hear me say that I didn’t want to come to Canada [pause]. She really didn’t understand where I was coming from. I mean I was going to the fourth best ranked secondary school in Guyana and I had really good friends there [pause]. Plus, my man was there too. He treated me like gold. But my mother didn’t get it. I was so mad with her. Sometimes I still think I’m mad with her for making me leave Guyana. [pause] Don’t get me wrong, life here is OK, but my life in Guyana was also OK. Over here people um don’t understand what true friendship and true love and loyalty is…this place is like a machine that brainwashes you to think it’s better than back home. (Sisi, May 6, 2008, #1)

Eventually, through lengthy letters and short phone calls, Sisi’s mother convinced her about the great financial and educational opportunities that could be found in Canada, and Sisi came to Canada in search of those opportunities:

Mommy pretty much begged me to come here. She told me about the universities that were here and how she was even able to envision me going to them and getting high grades. She even told me that she originally left Guyana and came here so that I could one day get all this fancy education [pause]. Guess she worked on my conscience [chuckles]. Anyway, I was truly looking forward to starting university or college here, but man, was I in for a rude awakening! [nods head] The other day I came across one of Mommy’s letters about how much opportunities were in Canada and I wonder if she just lied to me because she was missing me so much; because quite frankly I don’t see all these opportunities she was going on and on about.
Where the heck are they and why aren’t they mine? [long pause] Maybe there are going to be my children’s, but I won’t lie to them. (Sisi, May 6, 2008, #1)

In our first interview Sisi goes on to say that if she did not have her children, she would move back to Guyana in a heartbeat. So, in our follow-up interview I ask her why she would not take her children to Guyana to live, and she says:

Well, it’s safer here, or so they make you to believe. I just won’t take them [children] because if something went wrong, I would die of guilt…plus, he [father of her children] won’t give me child support if I take them. (Sisi, June 1, 2008, #2)

On a brighter note, Sisi says that she was pleased to see so many Black people from the Caribbean at her school and on the bus when she traveled. It certainly made her feel somewhat comfortable at times in her new country of residence. However, she did not appreciate how Black people from the Caribbean were treated or viewed at her school, which she explains in the following comment:

For International Night dance performance, my two friends [one Black-Trinidadian, and the other Black-Guyanese] took part in a Caribbean dance with two Black...Black-Canadian guys [also students], and it was pure wining up on the stage...they were sweating like mad and wining up in front of everybody parents...my mother didn’t go...nobody went for me. (Sisi, May 6, 2008, #1)

When asked about her understanding and opinions about immigration policies, Sisi comments that “well, everything is a set-up in Guyana” (Sisi, May 6, 2008, #1). In other words, the immigration system is corrupted in Guyana; she complains that “money is the official language in Guyana when we’re talking about government” (Sisi, May 6, 2008, #1). She says that Canadians believe that the Canadian immigration system is superior to other nations, but she disagrees with this viewpoint.

Sisi explains, that when her mother came to Canada to work in 1987 and tried to remain in the country after her contract as a domestic had ended, she was forced to do a
business marriage since Canada did not want “a poor uneducated Black immigrant from
the Third World…or is it the Fourth World now” (Sisi, June 18, 2008, #3). Furthermore,
when Sisi’s mother got married to stay in Canada, she was not immediately allowed to
sponsor her one remaining child who lived parentless in Guyana. Sisi remarks that,
according to her mother’s immigration experience and the effects it had on her own life,
the “Canadian immigration system is corrupted just like Guyana’s own” (Sisi, June 18,
2008, #3).

Secondary School Experience

Attending secondary school in Canada was a nightmare for Sisi. She said that it all
began with unscheduled placement tests that she did not have an opportunity to prepare
for. After completing Math and English placement tests during her first visit to her
secondary school, Sisi was placed in Grade 10. By this time, she had already completed
secondary school in Guyana and was anxious to pursue postsecondary studies in Canada,
but was told that she required an Ontario Secondary School Diploma to apply for
postsecondary programs. So, being placed in Grade 10 at the age of 16 while her peers
were either 14 or 15 was an unpleasant surprise for Sisi.

Academically, Sisi was also suffering because she was still not accustomed to
hearing her teachers speak with their Canadian accents and these accents made her feel
excluded from class discussions and activities.

The teacher had a strong French accent and I had my own accent, then we had to do
experiments…like dissections inside the class…I needed goggles and I looked so
disgusting in goggles…in Guyana I went through my whole schooling without
killing any animals. The other people [students] in my class would make fun of
how I would look and speak…they [students] made me cry so many
times…unbelievable…anyway, children are cruel…needless to say I didn’t really
have much friend [pause]. I was always considered the outsider. (Sisi, May 6, 2008, #1)

Furthermore, although she admits feeling alienated from the content of the curriculum, she believed that she had no one to turn to for help:

All of a sudden, the English I learned in school…no wait, the English I mastered in school in Guyana was not acceptable here, and the way of doing Maths was not the same…no, there was nobody to actually help me out [pause], my [half] sister and [half] brother couldn’t stand my guts and my mother couldn’t help me if she tried…poor thing didn’t have much school herself and plus, things so different in this system, it ain’t nothing like back home, that’s for sure. My uncle and aunty didn’t even know I exist, so they couldn’t help me either…them cousins of mine were too busy mocking me to be bothered. (Sisi, May 6, 2008, #1)

In addition, during the first three weeks of school, Sisi did not complete her homework very often because she was so frustrated by the negative atmosphere at school and her long daily commute to school from Multicity-Central to Multicity-East in the beginning. When her home-room teacher notified Sisi’s mother about Sisi’s incomplete homework, it started a week-long argument between Sisi and her mother. This argument resulted in Sisi’s relocation to her aunt and uncle’s home in Multicity-East that was closer to her school. She recalls wearing “hand-me-down out-of-fashion” winter clothing from her aunt, and pretending to be grateful while she says she was “pretty annoyed at Mommy for making me put up with that” (Sisi, May 6, 2008, #1). This living arrangement only lasted for a few months (the remainder of the school year) as Sisi’s isolation from not knowing and getting along with her aunt and uncle grew and affected her progress in school immensely. Her marks suffered. Looking back now, she explains that a large part of the problem between her and her aunt and uncle was her behaviour.
Honestly, I didn’t do my share of work in the house when I lived with them [aunt and uncle]. They were not bad people. I was just young [pause]. Now I have my own children I understand how important it is for everyone in the family to pull their weight. If I listened to my mother, I just might of learned to cook earlier. (Sisi, May 6, 2008, #1)

By the end of Grade 10, Sisi left school, packed her bags and moved to a women’s shelter. Her relationships with family members became more estranged. She recalls how the day that she moved out was a hot day in August, and yet she says, “although the heat was there, I felt crazy cold because I knew I was alone…I even thought I was sick at one point because I felt so cold, but [pause] I wasn’t sick, just lonely like hell [chuckles]” (Sisi, May 6, 2008, #1).

Sisi made friends easily at the women’s shelter that she stayed at until she turned 18 and became pregnant, at which time she returned home to live with her mother who by then was in a rekindled common-law relationship with Sisi’s stepfather, who is her half-siblings’ biological father. However, Sisi’s half siblings had moved out by that time. Sisi commented on how awkward her new living arrangements were at first, but she says that “everyone adjusted eventually” (Sisi, May 6, 2008, #1).

Sisi’s mother told her that she was welcome to live with them as long as she returned to secondary school. So, Sisi enrolled in night secondary school. She enjoyed school better because she was also able to work part-time, she did not have to travel too far for school, and she now had her own bedroom for the first time in her life. She studied hard and admits that, as much as she was looking forward to having a baby of her own, she was quite scared about not being a good mother.

At the age of 20 with her second child on its way, Sisi moved out of her mother’s home once more since their relationship became quite emotionally taxing on Sisi. After
her family doctor advised her to stay off her feet because “my baby was too low, too
soon,” she moved in with the father-to-be of her second unborn child, and lived with him
for about three years. She had two children with him and her first child is with another
man that she is unable to locate. Sisi is currently single and resides in a two-bedroom
apartment with three young children; her children are all under the age of 10. The one
sentiment that remains consistent throughout my communication with Sisi is the high
value she places on being a mother.

Decision-making Process about Postsecondary Education

While attending night secondary school, Sisi started re-exploring her options to
pursue postsecondary studies since this was her original plan when she immigrated to
Canada. However, Sisi admits that having a baby on the way “kinda changed my plans
and made my priorities [pause] different” (Sisi, May 6, 2008, #1). With great regret in her
voice, she says:

I don’t regret having my kids, so don’t misunderstand me. But I regret the timing
that they came…I mean I um was only 18…I went to church for most of my life
and I know that abortions are um evil, so I couldn’t even think about that. I was so
confused and I almost chucked school again. Mommy and Uncle Jake [stepfather]
really stood by me and um encouraged me to finish what I started. They said that I
need to at least show my child that I accomplished something. (Sisi, May 6, 2008,
#1)

Her parents’ support meant a great deal to Sisi, and she decided to stay in night school.

She graduated with her first baby in her arms. She says that, on that day of her
graduation, she could think of no regrets.

Her decision to not pursue postsecondary studies came as a surprise to her mother
especially, but Sisi decided that she needed to be a mother. In her opinion, being a mother
meant being around and trying your utmost best not to miss the important moments of
your child’s life. Sisi explained this to her mother and received overwhelming support from both her parents. She shares the following comment with me:

I’m a single-parent like my mother; wow…the tables are turn, and I’m hoping I can teach my girls how to fend for themselves and also be ‘ladies’…this is why I didn’t bother with going to college…it takes a good and smart woman to get her priorities straight…my children are number one. I always had a calling for working with children, maybe that calling was to work with my own children [chuckles]. (Sisi, May 6, 2008, #1)

Additionally, I ask Sisi what would have needed to be different for her to still consider pursuing postsecondary studies right after she graduated from secondary school, and she responds by saying:

Money incentive would have made me think twice. If the colleges gave me a money incentive I would have seriously looked into going for the ECE [Early Childhood Education] program. I didn’t have the money to feed my child and go after my dream in school. I just didn’t have it. (Sisi, June 1, 2008, #2)

When I ask Sisi if she had a guidance counsellor in secondary school that provided her with academic advice about her future, she tells me that she did not need one because she already knew that she was interested in working with children, and goes on to share her impression about guidance counsellors at her secondary school:

I didn’t go to any but it’s because I knew what I wanted. I didn’t need nobody who didn’t even know me to tell me what I want to be in life. It would be a waste of time. I already knew that I will work with kids because I love kids. Those counsellors were a waste of time. The majority of my girls didn’t go to them because they didn’t feel like they would know um…they wouldn’t know you enough to um give you any advice [pause]. I mean my Mom who barely know me would have given better advice, you know? (Sisi, May 6, 2008, #1)
Knowledge of Feminist Organizations

Sisi admits that she does not really understand what feminist organizations’ roles are. Behind a giggle, she mumbles something about bra-burning in the 70’s, and asks for more information about these organizations. After I tell her a bit about what these organizations are about, she seems quite interested in learning more. She says that she believes that she could even work for organizations as such because she has had so many experiences with women’s shelters and she is a single mother. She also asked me if I ever heard about OCAP, and tells me that her counsellor at the women’s shelter had many posters about OCAP on the wall in her office. Fortunately, I respond by telling her that OCAP stands for Ontario Coalition Against Poverty (www.ocap.ca), and it is a great organization to further inquire about working with because they work in the best interest of immigrant women of colour. Bursting with excitement, Sisi writes (on MSN Chat Messenger):

Oh God, I can’t believe you know about them...ha ha ha. I’ve been waiting to talk with somebody about OCAP man. So what I have to do to join it and what I need to know to help the cause? I would really love my kids to learn this stuff it would be so nice if I could (pause) encourage them to become active in these things when they grow. (Sisi, June 1, 2008, #2)

I invite her to speak with me after our interview about some other organizations she might be interested in becoming involved with.

When I asked Sisi if she believes that feminist organizations can help young Black Guyanese immigrant women make major decisions about their futures, Sisi says that it is quite possible that they can have a positive impact. She, however, admits that “nobody really educates secondary school students about these types of community resources” (Sisi, June 1, 2008, #2).
**Notion of Success**

Sisi notes that her biggest success is her three healthy and happy children. She has no idea about where her secondary school diploma is right now, but says that apart from her children, it represents her personal success. She defines success as:

> Having a purpose in life and defending that purpose to those that don’t agree with what you’re doing, and also achieving that purpose that you created in the first place…success I think is in the eye of the beholder (pause) just like beauty is. (Sisi, May 6, 2008, #1)

Sisi views her life as a success, and realizes that there is more success in store for her because she still has “a lot of purposes that needs achieving” (Sisi, May 6, 2008, #1). She intends on pursuing her college diploma in the next few years. Of course, she says that having her college diploma has been her dream, but it is even more important for her to have it now because her children are around to appreciate it with her. She insists on being a positive example for the sake of her children.

Sisi associates a postsecondary education with success to a small extent. In fact, she associates a postsecondary education with financial well-being to a large extent. She views success and finance as two independent variables, which are both somewhat dependent on postsecondary education.
CHAPTER SIX: FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

Introduction

Findings in this study are presented in (a) participant narratives in chapter five and (b) a comparison table (see Appendix F), which also includes researcher field notes. I presented the participants’ data in two different forms to provide as much insight as possible in keeping with the goal of qualitative research methods.

In search of answers to my research question: What influences young (secondary school) Black Guyanese immigrant women’s decision-making process about pursuing/not pursuing postsecondary education in Ontario, this chapter discusses the five major themes that emerged from a combination of data collected (interviews, researcher/elaboration journals, immigration and education policy documents, and existing theoretical frameworks).

To provide a structured understanding of the findings, I provide the following themes that emerged from the participants’ interviews: (1) family influence, (2) interactions with teachers and guidance counsellors, (3) social integration, (4) expectations about life in Canada, and (5) concepts of success. One must, however, keep in mind that these themes were often times interdependent. In other words, themes that deductively arise out of data, like the first three themes listed above, and those that inductively arise like the last two themes listed above, all contain both deductive and inductive sub-themes.

For instance, all the participants’ processes of decision-making about pursuing postsecondary studies are based on their expectations about life in Canada, which is quite
connected to their families’ influence in their lives. Moreover, their concepts of success are formed based on their level of social integration and their interactions in secondary schools. Together these factors determine how they spend their time after leaving secondary school.

I begin with a discussion of the factor of the participants’ family influence on their decision-making process about whether or not to pursue postsecondary studies. I connect my interview data findings with previous studies with similar findings to strengthen my argument. Additionally, I use Critical Race Theory to frame my argument.

Family Influence

All participants grew up in single-parent families with their mothers at the head of their households. The amount of time that each participant lived with her parent varies; while some lived with them in intervals, others lived with them all the time. All but one participant, Sarah, was separated from their parents prior to immigrating to Canada. Additionally, all participants lived with a maternal grandparent and other members of their extended families at some point. Although many variables shaped the level of family influence on the participants’ decision-making process about whether or not to pursue postsecondary studies, the invariable among them was the role of their mothers.

Researchers such as Clark (1983) and Henry (1994) have found that positive parental involvement in immigrant children’s education is vital to these children’s academic outcomes both in and after secondary school. Three of the four participants in this study appeared to have non-existent and/or weak relationships with their parents. Such relationships have not allowed the participants’ parents to become very much involved with their education. Coelho (1998) informs this dilemma with her claim that
parental involvement in children’s education largely depends on the nature of their relationships, which are usually formed prior to adolescence. The participants in my study report inconsistent relationships with their parents prior to becoming an adolescent and even during adolescence. For instance, three of four participants lived without either parent for years prior to immigration and immigrated to Canada without their parents. Furthermore, three of four participants do not have relationships with their fathers.

Although all participants spoke about the supportive “little talks” they had with their mothers about pursuing postsecondary education in Canada, only one participant (Jean) pursued it. Jean is also the only participant that still has a relationship with her father although her parents divorced before she immigrated to Canada. Added to this, Jean is the only participant whose mother has postsecondary education. All four of her siblings have also attained university degrees in Canada. Jean confirmed that her three older brothers were one of her main sources of support when making her decision about postsecondary education. The other three participants did not share this source of support in their families when making their decisions, although they were surrounded by very large extended families. Having taken these details into consideration, the two participants, Maxine and Sisi, who dropped out of secondary school returned to school largely because of their mother’s encouragement.

Secondary school drop-out rates for Black students from the Caribbean are increasingly high in Ontario’s schools (Henry, 1994). Both Maxine and Sisi dropped out of school because they had troubled relationships with their mothers, and they felt a sense of isolation and abandonment in all areas of their lives. I asked participants if they thought that their families could have helped them resolve negative feelings and help
prevent them from dropping out of school. Maxine said that if her mother spent some
time helping her with homework and probably not had her move so often across the city,
things might have been easier for her at school and she might not have prematurely left
school at one point. However, Maxine recalls her mother being constantly worried about
one day getting deported to Guyana since she was still not a legal Canadian immigrant.
Sisi, on the other hand, said that there was no way that her mother could have helped her
with her schoolwork because she was not familiar with the Canadian education system.
Sisi explained that her aunt, uncle, and cousins were unable to help her with schoolwork
because she felt so alienated from them altogether.

Maxine, Sisi, Sarah, and Jean attribute the push to go into the workforce
immediately after secondary school to the fact that their families simply could not afford
to send them to a postsecondary institution. At some point, the participants’ mothers were
all working in the informal economy in which many Black women are forced to
participate (Knight, 2004); they were oftentimes doing laborious jobs (Brand,
1999). While Henderson and Berla’s (1994) study identifies that whether or not students
enrolled in postsecondary institutions was not dependent on their family’s socio-
economic status, Maxine explained that her mother was very busy working three jobs in
order to “put food on the table” and so her mother had very little time to dedicate to
helping her with her schoolwork. This meant that Maxine’s mother was not very involved
at all with Maxine’s education, and, according to Coelho (1998), parental involvement is
of great importance in students deciding to pursue postsecondary studies.

When I asked participants about how their parents handled situations in which their
children approached them for advice about their education, participants generally said
that their parents were vague in the advice that they gave. Jean, for instance, claimed that her eldest brother was more helpful than her parents with regards to giving her career advice and guidance. As previously mentioned, the general sentiment shared by immigrant parents was to have their children pursue an education to achieve social mobility, as corroborated by Henry (1994). All participants confirmed this by admitting that their parents shared this sentiment, but to different degrees and they had different levels of education in mind. For instance, Sarah claimed that, while her mother did not force her to pursue postsecondary education, her mother’s return to the education system as a mature student sent an inspirational message to her.

More importantly, the majority of participants confessed that they did not seek much academic or professional advice from their parents as they did not believe that their parents were qualified to give such advice since they themselves did not have a postsecondary education and only held a blue-collar job. In fact, the majority of participants said that, as adolescents, they had lost much of the respect (one participant called it fear) they had had for their parents because in Canada parents were less demanding of respect from their children. Sisi admitted that she started to take her mother’s rules less seriously in Canada because the consequences of breaking the rules were not as serious as they would have been in Guyana.

Coelho (1998) corroborates this phenomenon of power shifts between immigrant parents and their children. She informs us about how Canadian laws, such as that enforced by the Criminal Code, protect the physical well-being of all children and while this is a good thing, it prevents some immigrant parents from physically reprimanding their children as they once did in their home country. This sends a message to immigrant
children about changes in authority in their household. Often times, these children take advantage of their new found freedom, as Maxine calls it, and documents like the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms enable children to take advantage of this power shift.

These power shifts sometimes result in changes in household responsibilities when moving to Canada. Sisi, for instance, said that when she immigrated to Canada at the age of 16 her responsibilities in the household lessened mainly because she was very unhappy with her mother for making her leave Guyana. So, Sisi just refused to do what was said to be her share of household duties, “…there was not much that my mother could do to make me do anything in that apartment” (Sisi, May 6, 2008, #1). Sisi’s actions were enabled and protected by Canadian laws.

Sisi’s relationship with her mother might have required some commitment from her to her mother, but this commitment was undermined by the residue of anger that was a direct result of their forced separation over the years. Looking back, Sisi regretted not doing her “share of work” in both her mother’s apartment and her uncle and aunt’s apartment where she lived temporarily. Now that she is an adult, she has a new perspective on the importance of doing one’s share of household duties. Now that she is also a single mother, she has a new perspective about the decisions her mother made for her as a child. Sisi appreciates how her mother put her child’s safety and education at the top of her list of priorities; it did not matter if her mother was jeopardizing her relationship with her. Sisi also now recognizes the importance of teaching her daughters to cook and behave in a lady-like manner. She certainly defines her role and responsibilities as a female parent and as a woman. In her view, learning to cook,
behaving lady-like, placing one’s children’s best interest at the top of her priority list, defined a smart and successful woman. Much like Jean and Maxine, Sisi does not view being a single mother as a problem; she views it as an empowering opportunity.

Judging from the participants’ experiences in this study, all their fathers excused themselves from being full-time parents to them, more or less, because mothers are more expected to care for their children than are fathers (Oakley, 1993). Pursuing a further discussion about power relations between men and women, Oakley notes that one’s sex is considered a norm from birth, and so sex is an ideal social construct that ultimately dominates one’s existence. These constructs of sex and empowerment or disempowerment materialized over time producing the realities of the fatherless participants from female-headed single-parent families in this study. While the world outside the home seems to be moving towards an idea of sex equality, inequality of the sexes flourishes within the walls of homes (see Oakley, 1993, p. 199). Of course, this author’s work is a bit dated, but it can be applied to the past experiences of many of the women in this study.

On a different note, it is not enough to attribute the participants’ academic and professional outcomes to the fact that they are all women who were raised by women. We must examine the uniqueness of these women. For instance, they are Black Guyanese immigrants, and therefore, they need to be studied in that context. Three of the four of them have experienced being single parents of Canadian-born children, and realize how very few educational opportunities there are for single mothers. Two of them recommend more community services and postsecondary program opportunities that are “family-friendly” and made known to them by popular media.
The next section of this chapter examines how the participants’ interactions with teachers and guidance counsellors influenced their decision-making process about the pursuit of postsecondary education. More specifically, I look at their level of engagement with teachers and guidance counsellors as relations with the school staff, teachers, and guidance counsellors often relate to students’ academic outcomes and career plans. To help elucidate my findings, I present relevant literature and show how CRT (Parker & Roberts, 2005) provides a framework for my argument.

Interactions with Teachers and Guidance Counsellors

All participants reported feelings of disengagement from conversations and curriculum in their secondary school classrooms. Several researchers have indicated that disengagement among Black immigrant youths in Ontario’s classrooms is overwhelmingly alarming, and the worst part is that disengaged students often drop-out of school (Carr & Klassen, 1996; Henry, 1994). Jean, for instance, was forced to abandon French in Grade 11 although she really wanted to learn the language. She abandoned it because all her peers in the French class had learned French previously in Grade 9, and it was her first time in a French class. So, without much discussion, her French teacher recommended that Jean enrol in a Grade 9 French class—Jean was too embarrassed to join the Grade 9 class. The teacher did not give Jean an alternative by trying to get her up to speed in the Grade 11 class; instead Jean’s disengagement in this class forced her to drop French altogether. Apart from getting accustomed to the distraction of new Canadian culture and language, Jean did not experience much disengagement, and she also achieved her secondary school diploma and, later on, an undergraduate degree.
Sarah’s disengagement in the classroom was more severe than Jean’s. Sarah’s poor performance in English and math automatically earned her a spot in the Special Education class at her school. Her teachers along with the school’s administration decided that she should attend the Special Education classes whenever she felt like attending; so it was optional. Consequently, Sarah went to the Special Education class during her regular classes. This means that she just left her regular classes whenever she felt like it, and headed to the Special Education class if she so chose. She was never formally diagnosed with a learning disability, nor was it ever recommended that she seek the help of a clinical psychologist to assist in identifying what the best ways were to help her succeed academically. Interestingly enough, Sarah’s mother applauded her daughter’s teachers and school’s administration for referring Sarah to the Special Education class. Her mother interpreted this as the school taking the initiative to help her daughter. After all, the outcome could be worse; for example, in contrast to Sarah, Maxine and Sisi were so disengaged in their classrooms that they dropped out of school at one point.

Although Sarah mother’s reaction might have seemed a bit naïve and dismissive, it is quite common that Black Guyanese women have such faith in the education system and teachers (Samaroo, 1991). This mentality is mainly attributed to Guyana’s colonial past. Once upon a time in Guyana, Black Guyanese people were not allowed to attend schools at any level. Then when they were finally permitted to attend school, they learned from a Eurocentric curriculum. Such a curriculum taught them that people of colour were unimportant, education was a privilege, and teachers (who were mainly White in the beginning) were the bearers of non-negotiable truth/knowledge. Curricula as such are
implemented to ensure that people of colour, women in particular, are constantly made aware of their social location (Henry, 1994).

Freire (2004) and Phillion (2003) explain the effects of teaching from Eurocentric curriculum as one of the greatest oppressive acts that exist. Freire refers to this act of holding teachers as sole knowledge bearers and students as knowledge seekers as the ‘banking education’ concept, in which education is not being shared and discussed, it is being preached, no questions asked (see Freire, 2004, p. 72). Phillion acknowledges that Black Guyanese women were often discouraged from learning from each other since this would increase the chances of them forming coalitions against oppression. Both Freire and Phillion explain the importance of learning from peers in order to receive all the amenities of the whole educational experience, and the danger that Eurocentric curriculum embodies since it creates an ‘us’/‘them’ binary.

This us/them binary is evident in the experiences of all of the participants in this study, some more so than others. According to all the participants, the majority of their teachers were mainstream White women (them), while the peers (us) to whom they mostly gravitated were by and large Black and were generally encountering problems in English and math but perceived not to be receiving adequate help from teachers. Furthermore, although Maxine was having a lot of difficulties with English and math, she decided to remain silent about it since she feared that her teachers would automatically place her in a Special Education class. Henry (1994) showed this to be a real concern for many students of color in Ontario. This, in fact, might have been Sarah’s reality in secondary school.
Additionally, the participants always felt that teachers knew what was best, and so when Sarah’s secondary school Cosmetology teacher advised her to go directly into the workforce, she excitedly followed through with that plan without exploring any other options. She did not even speak with a guidance counsellor at her school because she was so confident that her teacher knew what was best for her. Sarah told her mother about her plan to work as a hairdresser right after completing secondary school, and received no arguments there either. Her mother was also confident that Sarah’s teachers knew what was best for her daughter.

Interestingly enough, many students of colour believe that their teachers have their best interest at heart (Samaroo, 1991), but Sisi asked “how can teachers hold your best interest at heart when they don’t even know about or teach about my family’s history…they don’t let me know how important I am?” (Sisi, June 1, 2008, #2) Freire (2004) notes that knowledge outside formal curriculum is not welcomed in classrooms because it would contradict the banking education concept (see p. 72) that is employed through curriculum and teaching for the purpose of maintaining oppression.

Teachers who do not provide adequate opportunities for students to see themselves positively in curriculum are aiding students’ disengagement in classrooms (Carr & Klassen, 1996). As simplistic as this may sound this task can actually prove to be quite challenging for teachers since students come from various races, nationalities, cultures, sexual orientations, and speak various languages. For instance, while Maxine’s history teacher told the class that they were “welcome to write a paper about a famous person of colour who played a significant role in Canadian history, and whom we identified with” (Maxine, May 17, 2008, #2), Maxine had trouble choosing someone because she
identified with being Black, female, lesbian, and poor. She recognized the intersectionalities of her identity and so did not choose a certain Black historical figure because he was homophobic, and she did not choose a particular “Black” female figure because she was multiracial. Maxine made clear that teachers did not discuss Black historical figures enough in classrooms, and so her knowledge about these figures was limited. Maxine did not feel comfortable addressing this issue with her teacher, and so she did not complete the assignment—she received a failing grade in her history class that year.

Although Maxine’s teacher might have been good-intentioned, the outcome for Maxine was negative. Jean, on the other hand, felt that she could speak with her teachers more openly about issues as such and so her academic outcomes were a lot more positive than Maxine’s. Of all the participants, Jean experienced the least amount of difficulties interacting with teachers and guidance counsellors and this ease was reflected in her high grades. Ogbu (1993) discusses how immigrant students’ grades are a direct result of how successfully they assimilate into Canadian society, this assimilation would include interactions with their teachers and guidance counsellors. He communicates that not only are these students’ grades an indication of their level of assimilation into Canadian society, but ultimately their level of assimilation determines whether or not they pursue postsecondary studies.

This study certainly corroborates Ogbu’s (1993) claims in that Jean believed her positive interactions with teachers and guidance counsellors led her to obtaining high grades and relationships with guidance counsellors who somewhat encouraged her to pursue an undergraduate degree. Maxine, Sisi, and Sarah, on the other hand, had less than
positive interactions with teachers and guidance counsellors, poor grades, and less motivation inside and outside school to pursue postsecondary studies. Although these participants do not believe that they have been unsuccessful, their educational, professional, and financial outcomes so far are less than Jean’s. We should, however, note that Jean is the eldest of these four participants and this age difference may or may not account for her longer list of accomplishments so far. On the other hand, we should not forget that Jean was the only participant who attended a postsecondary institution.

The fact that Sarah, Maxine and Sisi graduated after Grade 12 in secondary school at their very first opportunity to do so; they did not go on to Grade 13\(^1\) or OAC\(^2\), is somewhat indicative of how engaged they were in school. Added to this, two of them had withdrawn completely from secondary school before subsequently returning to night school to complete the requirements for their diplomas.

Moreover, only one participant (Jean) had a relationship with her guidance counsellor. Sarah explained that she was receiving sufficient career guidance from her Cosmetology teacher, and in our first interview Maxine claimed that she heard racist stories about the guidance counsellors at her school and so was never inclined to visit them to discuss her future. She said it was clear that they would offer her poor advice.

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1 Before the 1984-1985 school year in Ontario, students chose to attain one of two types of secondary school diplomas. They had a choice between completing (obtain 30 credits in four years) their Grade 12 education and receiving a Secondary School Graduation Diploma (SSGD), or completing their Grade 13 education (27 credits, including 6 at the Grade 13 level) and receiving a Secondary School Honours Graduation Diploma (SSHGD). An SSHGD was required by all universities for program entrance.

2 Ontario Academic Courses (OAC) replaced Grade 13 from the 1984-1985 school year and were phased out in the 2002-2003 school year. OAC and Grade 13 coursework did not differ. They were both required for entrance into university. The only difference is that previously in some provinces an SSHGD permitted one into a second year university program. However, the introduction of OAC meant the modification of the secondary school diploma which is now called the Ontario Secondary School Diploma (OSSD), which all students (Grade 12 and OAC graduates) would receive. University entrance requirements changed with the introduction of OAC; six OAC credits with specific grade requirements were put in place by universities.
because she was a Black student with low grades. Sisi, on the other hand, explained that she did not need a guidance counsellor because she felt so disconnected from them and emphasized that they would not know her well enough to give her valuable advice.

Although the participants mainly looked to their teachers and family members for career guidance, they all recommended that the government and community organizations invest more time and money in educating students about community resources and feminist organizations that advocate for the academic and professional success of everyone, especially women. Jean believes that feminist organizations can positively influence young Black Guyanese women “if their directives are enablers and not selfish” (Jean, May 2, 2008, #3). With this in mind, Jean is the only participant who is involved in community organizations across Ontario—although not feminist organizations—and she is the only participant who was able to confidently provide a definition of what a feminist organization is.

On the note of participants making recommendations to improve Ontario’s secondary school system, Sisi mentioned that one of her new friends in secondary school transferred to a private school since her mother got a new job and told her that she received career counselling at her new school that was very helpful. Sisi, at that time, did not really know what “career counselling” entailed but her friend told her about something called an exit program in which she participated in the month of March, 1999 before graduating in June. Sisi’s friend said that the program was very beneficial to her, and that all schools should have that program. Sisi had no idea as to what the program entailed. Given that Sisi and her friend graduated in year 2000 from different schools, it was worthwhile to inquire about career guidance policies that were in place at schools in
Ontario at that time. According to the *Choices into Action: Guidance and Career Education Program Policy for Ontario Elementary and Secondary Schools, 1999* document, which replaces sections 1.8 and 2.3 of *Transition Years, Grades 7, 8, and 9: Policies and Program Requirements, 1992* and all sections of *Guidance, Intermediate and Senior Divisions, 1984*, teachers, guidance counsellors, and principals are expected to participate in implementing the exit program, which entails:

(a) a review of each student’s plans for postsecondary education, training, apprenticeship, independent living, or work

(b) information on university and college programs, application and admission procedures; visits to campuses, and so on

(d) information on apprenticeship programs

(e) information on procedures for applying for employment

(f) financial planning information

Source: *Choices into Action: Guidance and Career Education Program Policy for Ontario Elementary and Secondary Schools, 1999*, p. 15

When I asked each participant if they participated in this program, or a similar one, they all answered in the negative. Furthermore, the only minoritized groups of students that were mentioned in the *Choices into Action: Guidance and Career Education Program Policy for Ontario Elementary and Secondary Schools, 1999* document are those with exceptionalities so, the student had to have been clinically identified. We know that in Sarah’s case, she was not referred to a clinical psychologist but yet she was more or less placed into a Special Education classroom, and did not participate in an exit program.
This 33-page policy document also dedicates a very small paragraph to the importance of providing career guidance to Aboriginal students. It is commendable that another small section speaks to the necessity for schools to provide ongoing counselling for ESL students. It is, however, unfortunate that no part of this document is dedicated to providing career guidance to female students or Black students in particular.

Furthermore, since two of four participants in this study entered Ontario secondary schools after Grade 9, I asked them whether or not they participated in any orientation programs at their schools to help their transition. They both answered “no” to this question. Although Black students have the highest secondary school drop-out rates in Ontario (Dei et al., 1997), it is clear that some Ontario education policy documents do not adequately address the needs of Black students and are therefore part and parcel of this drop-out dilemma.

In the next section of this chapter, I discuss the participants’ experiences with social integration into Canadian society. I examine their social experiences with their peers, extra-curricular activities, and the larger society outside school, and compare it with policy documents that allowed for their experiences. Furthermore, I use Critical Race Theory (Parker & Roberts, 2005) to inform my analysis.

Social Integration

While one participant (Sarah) immigrated to Canada when she was a toddler and said that she did not have to face cultural transition, the other three participants uniquely experienced cultural transitions. Sarah said that she had integrated well into Canadian society because it was the only culture in which she remembers growing up. However, according to Ogbu (1993), although Canadian-born children of immigrant parents are not
required to culturally transition to the same extent as an immigrant child might, they still transition at some point from the culture in which they grew up within their households. So, although Sarah does not realize that she experienced cultural transition, it is safe to say that she may have well experienced it second-hand. I say this because she referred to Guyana as “back home” several times during our conversations although she immigrated to Canada as a toddler. Additionally, Sarah has spent the majority of her life living with her grandmother and mother who, according to Gilman (1914), are persons who are usually carriers and educators of culture. Ogbu and Gilman agree that children from immigrant parents often receive an education about their ancestral heritage from their parents and other family members, so much so that they eventually experience a cultural transition in their formal educational institutions. Gilman claims that, “The origin of education is maternal. The mother animal is seen to teach her young what she knows of life, its gains and losses; and, whether consciously done or not, this is education” (p. 143). While biological determinism is quite dated, it seems that the effects of biological deterministic research findings and implications spread through media and government have greatly affected personal and social expectations of my research participants. However, it is important to note that mothers are mothers and will have different relationships with their children than fathers but women’s responsibilities regarding childrearing practices are far more socially influenced that they are biologically determined.

Jean recalls “adjusting quickly to different cultures…[she] integrated easily” (Jean, February 27, 2008, #1). She attributes this easy process to her being of mixed race. Although she is considered Black, she is mixed with many other races found in Guyana.
Therefore, Jean has a very light complexion. In Guyana, as in many other nations, light-complexioned Black people are considered to be higher in social rank than dark Black people on the social hierarchy (Phillion, 2003; Reddock, 2004). They are therefore, treated with more respect, and there is an expectation that they are smarter, more educated, and richer than their darker Black counterparts. Consequently, dark Black people are marginalized within their race in Guyana and upon migration, and Guyanese people bring these experiences and sometimes negative expectations with them to North America (Reddock, 2004) where negative stereotypes about Black people are reinforced (Carr & Klassen, 1996; Henry, 1994). Jean’s light complexion may be one of the reasons that she did not experience first-hand racial discrimination and found that she integrated easily into Canadian society.

Ogbu (1993) relates successful social integration with academic success and career aspirations. The participants in this study corroborate the existence of such a relationship. While I have explained Jean’s successful integration and her academic achievements along with her professional accomplishments, Sisi’s story of failing to socially integrate into Canadian society until later on in life, is indeed a sad one. Sisi experienced overwhelming isolation from her peers and teachers in secondary school. She said, “I didn’t fit anywhere. I was missing back home so much that sometimes I just couldn’t breathe…nobody understand what I went through” (Sisi, May 6, 2008, #1). What was worse is that Sisi’s temporary living arrangement with her aunt and uncle was, as she said, “another pain in the ass” (Sisi, May 6, 2008, #1). She recalls not knowing them, but having to eat from them and sleep in their house with their “hoity-toity children”—here, she refers to her cousins being snobbish. As if this was not hard enough, Sisi was forced
to wear her cousins’ winter clothing. Now her cousins were older than her and so their clothing was either too large for her or quite old-fashioned. She recalls, “my pride was crushed…I wanted to go home so bad” (Sisi, May 6, 2008, #1). Whenever she wore the “hand-me-down clothes” to school, her peers would tease her and call her Raggedy-Ann.

Sisi reported that by the end of her first school year in Canada (Grade 10), she dropped out of school. She failed every single course, and she was miserable. Like Maxine, Sisi said that they only felt welcomed in certain groups of Black girls; otherwise, they were excluded. However, like Jean and Sarah, they have always considered themselves to be friendly. Although she tried to be friendly in secondary school, Sisi remembered how alienated she felt in her Grade 10 science class as a result of her strong Guyanese accent that frequently created communication difficulties for her, her teacher’s strong French accent that she seldom understood, her refusal to participate in animal dissection exercises, and the teasing that was brought on by her appearance when she wore goggles to participate in experiments.

While at some point during their earlier years in Canada the participants felt socially alienated to an extent, they all testified to the comfort they found in the Caribbean/West-Indian/Guyanese community Multicity has become famous for housing. They still find comfort in the West-Indian grocery stores that sell fruits, vegetables, and spices imported from Guyana and elsewhere in the Caribbean. Jean explained that the Caribbean community in Multicity was her way of hanging on to her culture that she really did not want to lose. She told me that the Caribbean community played an important role in helping her integrate successfully in Canadian society. Although this community was not really found within her secondary school, she took comfort in
knowing that it was not very far away. Maxine, on the other hand, was quite disappointed that the Caribbean community was not more prevalent in her secondary school. She explained that school is where she needed the community most since this was the place in which she spent most of her time. Maxine viewed the Caribbean community in Multicity as “Caribbean pockets...some of which are now being called the ghetto...you know, the ghetto of violence, man...it’s a shame” (Maxine, April 4, 2008, #1). Sisi added that a more positive Caribbean community presence was needed in her secondary school.

When asked to describe the Caribbean community that existed in her secondary school, Sisi gave an example of the inappropriate behaviour that the Black Caribbean students displayed at her school’s International Night event. She said that the Black Caribbean students were viewed as being vulgar and sexual. Sisi said that she was embarrassed to think that this type of performance was being viewed by peers and their parents from different cultures. She did not feel comfortable with the Caribbean identity that performances such as these produced. Furthermore, she said, “Black people from back home always struggled to not be seen as lawless or rowdy, but this was the only impression that we giving to people in Canada...I don’t understand that at all” (Sisi, May 6, 2008, #1). Peake and Trotz (1999) conducted two studies in Guyana and they compared their findings, which corroborates Sisi’s discussion about Black Guyanese women’s struggle for respectable identities, even prior to migration. These two academics discovered the intensity of how stereotypical Indian Guyanese women were about Black Guyanese women. They shared a response from one of their Indian Guyanese female research participants:
Black people, well duh’s the wild west, I don’t know if is dey culture or wha’, yuh see dey is a different race. If I was a man, I woulda seh why buy a pound of beef [get married in order to establish sexual relations] when I could catch a whole pound free [have sexual relations with no emotional or financial commitment]? (p. 95)

However, Peake and Trotz aptly note that conclusions about Black Guyanese women and Indian Guyanese women “were not only based on stereotypes about each other...they were located within representations of their own group experiences arising out of the specific histories of domination and struggle” (p. 96).

As a result of the International Night performance at Sisi’s school, she realized that it sent the message that Black people from the Caribbean are to be seen as very sexual and promiscuous beings. This became more than just a message and more of a reality for her when one week following the International Night event, one of the older White male students at her school approached her one day and proceeded to caress Sisi’s legs and private parts without ever once having a conversation with her. She was humiliated. It was apparent to her that he thought that since she was from the Caribbean, this was what she enjoyed. Many academics discuss how multiculturalism/international events at schools especially precipitate racism by not including mainstream culture(s) in these events; in this case, these events may as well be renamed Marginalized Cultures (e.g., Coelho, 1998, Dei et al., 1997, 2000).

Sisi, like many other Black Caribbean immigrant students struggled with identity formation quite a bit after immigrating to North America (Hall, 1996). While many such students are concerned with integrating themselves in their new homes, they at the same time wish to preserve their cultural identity. So while identifying similarities with their new neighbours to integrate themselves, they also look at the differences that are unique
to their cultures. Balancing their findings and observations often cause confusion. So, Derrida (1981) reminds us that:

> Identities are constructed through, not outside, difference. This entails the radically disturbing recognition that it is only through the relation to the Other, the relation to what it is not, to precisely what it lacks, to what has been called its *constitutive outside* that the `positive' meaning of any term -- and thus its `identity' -- can be constructed. (p. 5)

Ideally, it may be advisable that immigrants first identify their differences in order to positively distinguish themselves in their new home countries prior to trying to prematurely integrate into a society from which they (especially Black immigrants) were once excluded. However, Derrida (1981) suggests that doing this is problematic since we only figure out who we are by first figuring out who we are not. According to Henry (1994), this rings true for many Black immigrants to Canada who often fall into the trap of allowing society to define their social location by first academically and financially locating them. On the note of identity, it is important to pay attention to Hall (1996) who informs us that identity is not fixed; it is ever changing, and so this provides a certain degree of hope for minoritized people who have long been battling with negative stereotypes, which shape their identity process.

By employing stereotypes about Black people’s proneness to violence (Henry, 1994), White people and even other non-Black immigrants identify themselves as peacekeepers and law-abiding citizens. In our interview, Jean spoke about the importance for Black people to “educate themselves and help each other beat all these negative stereotypes of racialized violence” (Jean, February 27, 2008, #1). Like Dei, Mazzuca, McIsaac, and Zine (1997), Jean realizes the urgency for Black education and Black coalitions against discrimination. After listening to the participants in this study and
reading relevant literature, I agree that this urgency is valid, but it seems as though Black people are being called on to do all the work regarding the fight against discrimination, and in doing so, they are being called away from working towards personal success that other races, White in particular, are enjoying.

I will now move to a discussion about the expectations that Black Guyanese female immigrants have when immigrating to Canada. Using the research participants’ stories, Canadian governmental policy documents, and Critical Race Theory lens, I seek to provide a better understanding of barriers that influence the decision-making process of the four participants in this study.

Expectations about Life in Canada

The Canadian immigration process began for the research participants when Jean and Sisi were sponsored by their mothers, and Sarah and Maxine were sponsored by their maternal grandmothers. They all testified that their families immigrated to Canada most importantly to gain access to a better education and provide them with the professional opportunities to which this education would lead them. Education in Guyana has always been of utmost importance (Samaroo, 1991). Moreover, Jennings (2000) and Peake and Trotz (1999) agree that Guyana’s history of slavery and indentureship has instilled an understanding in Guyanese people about education being the only means to social mobility. Therefore, it comes as little surprise that Guyanese families move to Canada in search of better opportunities through education.

This ‘better education’ often proved to be problematic as it discouraged conversations about the Other in classrooms and when these conversations slipped out from the cracks, they were oppressive to the Other. Immigrants of colour did not see
themselves in the curriculum and this encouraged a sense of displacement (Lee, 1985). Making matters worse, these immigrants were previously taught that teachers are knowledge bearers and so this notion built a misplaced trust in the education system that excluded students like them (Freire, 2004). Furthermore, there are federal governmental policies in place in Canada that highlight great personal, academic, and professional opportunities for immigrants of colour, and these policies also attract immigrants of colour to Canada (Garcea, 2006). Such policies attract immigrant women especially who are in search of financial liberation from men (fathers, spouses, grandfathers, uncles). However, Ng (1993) explains that the “immigration process systemically structures sexual inequality within the family by rendering one spouse (usually the wife) legally dependent on the other” (p. 284). Furthermore, Arat-Koc (1999) addresses the sexism that infuses the criteria to become an independent immigrant. She notes that immigrant women experience more difficulty with immigration processes in Canada. These authors wrote about the immigration climate that existed in the 1990s and earlier years, and I am using their findings in my work to support the experiences that my participants’ mothers had during their challenging processes of immigration.

Policies and practices often times do not corroborate with each other (Garcea, 2006). Jean, Sisi, and Maxine addressed the outcomes of immigration policies regarding the prolonged parental separation they endured while their mothers participated in lengthy immigration processes to provide better lives for their families. Maxine explained how difficult it was to live in Guyana without her mother for three years due to the long wait caused by rigid immigration processes. She expressed her disappointment in the Canadian legal system by emphasizing how Canadian laws against the abandonment of
children sends a message of there being serious consequences, but Canadian immigration wait periods are so lengthy that they encourage the abandonment of immigrant children prior to them coming to Canada. Maxine questioned why under Canadian laws it is acceptable for mothers to leave children in another country for years, but it is unacceptable to leave children alone in a car for a few hours while doing grocery shopping. Three of four of the participants in this study discussed how parental separation greatly impacted their lives and forced them to endure the frequently challenging experience of rediscovering their parents. Henry (1994) supports this point of view:

Our interview data confirm that the problems associated with separation continue to be of concern to many Caribbean immigrants in Metro Toronto. Thus secondary school students interviewed spoke of the difficulties of having to ‘rediscover’ a parent who may be involved with a new spouse. (p. 123)

Maxine raises the important point about how Canadian governmental policies (e.g., education policies that influence curriculum and affect student outcomes) seem to indirectly differentiate between “children that matter” and “children that do not matter.” Henry (1994) corroborates this point when she refers to the treatment of Black Caribbean immigrant female students in Ontario’s secondary schools, and their poor academic outcomes; she says, “the number of [Caribbean] women with secondary school qualifications was lower than for other immigrant women” (p. 122).

Jean explains that although her divorced parents were living separately in Canada while she remained in Guyana for two years prior to immigration, her grandfather, aunt, and two brothers were great parental substitutes for her but she still missed her parents and experienced rediscovering them as separate entities since they were no longer living together in Canada when she arrived. After her parents immigrated to Canada, she was
able to maintain an upper middle-class lifestyle and had very minimal household chores to do. Maxine’s family (grandfather, two uncles, and aunt) in Guyana, however, was forced to move out of the main city and relocate to lower-class housing in a village. Socio-economic pressures most likely played an important role in determining how Maxine and Jean handled parental separation.

When asked about the worth of the difficult immigration processes that their families experienced, all participants thought that it was worthwhile for their children’s sake—even Sarah, who is not a mother, agreed with this sentiment as it pertains to her potential children’s future. Sisi highlighted that, although “Guyana is not the worst place to live,” she is thankful that she is now able to provide her three children with so many more educational and professional opportunities. As strained as her relationship is with her mother, she realizes that, “it is because of Mommy’s sacrifice and stamina that we are all here today...that’s the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth” (Sisi, May 6, 2008, #1).

Interestingly, while all the research participants were brought to Canada by their family members to pursue education, only Jean has done so. Prior to immigrating to Canada, Sisi had already completed secondary school in Guyana, and she recalled daydreaming about pursuing university in Canada. This dream was, according to Sisi, crushed upon realizing that she needed to return to secondary school for an additional four years in Canada before she was able to apply for university programs. Upon her return to secondary school, she was presented with a variety of challenges regarding her living arrangements, strained and unfamiliar relationships, alienation from curriculum
and peers, and overwhelming loneliness. Sisi became more and more discouraged from pursuing postsecondary studies, and has now abandoned that dream.

As an adult now, Sisi looks back at her experiences as character-building ones. She has remained focused on all the good things with which living in Canada has presented her. For example, she enjoys the multicultural population that defines Multicity and is happy that her children have a chance to experience the joys associated with learning about new cultures and languages. While the three other participants agreed with Sisi’s sentiment, Maxine encouraged me in a conversation about the drawbacks of Canada’s Multiculturalism Policy. She talked about the policy being a mere defence mechanism in the face of discrimination against minoritized groups of people.

The 1971 Multiculturalism Policy eventually informed future policies such as the 1982 Charter of Rights and Freedoms and the 1988 Multiculturalism Act. According to Gupta (1999) and Nugent (2006), the original policy in 1971 was said to be only devised to deflect attention away from Quebec’s plea for separation from the rest of Canada; therefore, the multiculturalism policy was not really taken seriously by many people.

Gupta further claims:

Multiculturalism policies and programs have limited anti-racist objectives by creating the conditions for co-opting ant-racism activism within state goals and discursively constructing particular notions of “immigrant women” and “Canadians” – gendered, raced, and classed – in line with dominant Canadian nationalism. (p. 187)

She advises that the multiculturalist discourse calls for mainly marginalized people to fight against racism and move towards national unity. Additionally, moving towards national unity, she says, is yet another disguised hegemonic discourse that favours the mainstream culture. Moreover, this policy, she says, is promoting a new brand of
“Canadian racism” which is polite, subtle, systemic, and democratic (see p. 187). She justifies her argument by explaining the White hegemonic forces that govern multiculturalism in Canada, and reiterates that “it is the belief of the dominant class” (p. 189) that produces the common acceptance of such ideology. Gupta reminds us that racism is not mentioned in the 1971 policy. She elucidates that:

Various multicultural policies have circumvented the issue of power relations. In practice, cultural and linguistic principles (principles 1, 3, and 4) have been emphasized. These principles focus on the attitudinal part of discrimination rather than on structural barriers. (p. 192)

Nugent (2006) also offers a critical perspective about multiculturalism policies and programs in Canada; she sees multiculturalism as, “essentializing and ghettoizing the individual who belongs to a minority culture and limiting the possibility of meaningful social exchange and integration in the public sphere” (p. 23).

When Sarah, Maxine, and Sisi were asked about why they have chosen not to pursue postsecondary studies although their parents have instilled the importance of it to them, their responses were different. Sarah implied that since she was not good at English and math, but she was good at hairdressing, going straight into hairdressing was the most natural thing for her to do. At the time, she felt that she did not have to worry about being presented with English and math problems ever again if she stuck with her hairdressing career. Maxine explained that, because of her weakness in English, she developed an inferiority complex that discouraged her a great deal from thinking about what career she wanted in the future. Sisi explained that her decision to become a mother without having completed secondary school impacted her decision about not pursuing postsecondary studies. She said that she chose to be a mother instead.
Although Sarah, Maxine, and Sisi offer different explanations for their decision not to attend a postsecondary institution, they share a sense of self-blame. Sarah and Maxine blame their academic inadequacies while Sisi blames her personal decision to become a mother. Mohanty (1991) explains this phenomenon of self-blame as the result of hegemonic forces that enable the victimization of ‘third world women’. According to Mohanty, European and North American literature is responsible for representing these women as victims in their homelands, and so it invites these women to see themselves as powerless even outside their homelands whenever they are faced with challenges. In Mohanty’s view, this makes way for “politically regressive racist, imperialist, sexist discourses of slavery, colonialism, and contemporary capitalism” (p. 3, italics added).

This brings us to the research participants’ shared expectations that Canada would provide a safer climate than Guyana’s with regards to there being fewer burglaries and violence caused by racism and class divisions in Guyana. Interestingly, the participants thought of different dangers when discussing safety. These differences can be attributed to generational differences, socio-economic differences in Guyana, and whether or not the participants attended school in Guyana. Fifty-three year old Jean, for instance, belonged to the upper middle-class society in Guyana and might not have experienced the terror that 28-year-old Maxine faced regarding having her family’s clothing stolen at gunpoint while she lived on the outskirts of the major city in Guyana. Sarah, on the other hand, only heard stories about crime in Guyana, while Sisi was a part of those stories since she was caught selling illegal drugs to under-aged youth and was held in custody at the police station for three days because her family had no money to pay for her bail. Sisi
snitched on the person who provided her with drugs to sell, and suffered the consequence of a gunshot wound to her back.

According to some participants, seeking safety in Canada simply meant increasing their family’s income to avoid succumbing to violent acts to merely feed one’s family. It also meant attending school without the fear that teachers would resort to physically harming students. In our first interview, Jean explains how teachers in Guyana physically disciplined students by, “whipping the girls in their hands and the boys on their butts with a wild-cane um whip or bamboo” (Jean, February 27, 2008, #1). Additionally, safety meant that one’s parents or other family members would restrain themselves from harming children or suffer the consequences at the hands of Canadian law. Maxine claims that the safety that she expected within her family was unrealistic because she was sexually abused, and felt like there was nothing she could have done to prevent it from happening. She felt powerless because when she communicated these horrible incidents to her mother and grandmother, she was ignored and so it normalized these incidents to an extent. Furthermore, her powerless position was kept in check by her inherent goal of not embarrassing her family by sharing her knowledge of these horrible incidents with police. This pressure ensured that the silent Maxine would remain oppressed.

Finally, coming out of a country where racism was weaved into its foundation, three of four participants expected that Canada would provide a more welcoming environment for them. Instead, they were faced with pressures to integrate into Canadian society and, more or less, become colour-blind regarding their racial differences. Participants mentioned that this notion of colour-blindness was fed to them in their classrooms and eventually in their professional lives. This came in the form of sentiments
about equal treatment and standardized testing for all. While in secondary school, Maxine recognized that the expectations that Black students would do poorly in schools was as evident in her Canadian classroom as it once was in her classrooms in Guyana. She expressed how disappointed she was upon realizing this.

Ontario education policy documents address zero tolerance for overt racist acts and other forms of discrimination, but they do not give much needed attention to systemic discrimination that Henry (1994) holds responsible for increasing drop-out rates of Black students in Ontario. Parker and Roberts (2005) discuss the use of Critical Race Theory to adequately address policy documents containing instances of systemic discrimination. They say that we need to examine who are making these documents and consider the impact that they have on the future success of all minoritized groups in Ontario.

Having attended secondary schools in Multicity-East in the Mike Harris government era (1995-2002), Maxine and Sisi especially experienced the poor outcomes of this government’s education reform and cutbacks as discussed in chapter two. Sarah was also subjected to these outcomes although she attended secondary school later (1999-2004). Similarly, these three participants had low grades in secondary school, experienced financial challenges as young adults, and did not pursue postsecondary studies. Having graduated in earlier years from a secondary school in Multicity-East, Jean on the other hand, did not experience the wrath of the Conservative government of Mike Harris’ government while she was in secondary school; she has always been financially stable, and has pursued postsecondary studies. It is at this point especially that it is important to note the generational differences of the participants in this study.

136
The subsequent section of this chapter will address the research participants’ concepts of success, examine how these concepts have evolved with immigration, and provide an understanding of how their concepts of success relate to their decision-making process about post-secondary outcomes.

**Concepts of ‘Success’**

It was apparent that during conversations about success, all participants in this study acknowledged that Black immigrant women whose ancestors were once enslaved have a unique understanding of success. They also share the same view about the struggles that being successful entails, and they identify themselves as successful. They frequently referred to such struggles as those involving others who at the time seemed more powerful than them, and communicated how they stood up to such power, struggled, and persevered for the most part. While Sisi and Maxine emphasize the importance of a strong support network in order to achieve success, Jean and Sarah talk more about the importance of self-motivation and desire to succeed.

Maxine defines success as “something that you didn’t think that you can have or do but you did it” (Maxine, April 4, 2008, #1). She places emphasis on breaking through barriers to obtain something that would be beneficial. Sarah says that “I know what I have done in the past and then I will still push myself to do better than what I have done before, then that's success” (Sarah, March 12, 2008, #1). So, Sarah relates success to past experiences (possibly doubts or failures) and looks to the future for possibilities. She explains her ongoing struggle with reading that plagued both her elementary school and secondary school experience in Multicity. In a conversation outside of our formal interview session, Sarah acknowledges that, although her friends and family still
encourage her to enrol in a Business program at college so that she could open her own hairdressing salon one day, she is quite discouraged from this idea because she lacks confidence in her ability to succeed in such a program. A part of this lack of confidence comes from insecurity about her reading and writing skills; skills she has always struggled with. While Sarah remains very positive about her future and considers that she has been so far successful, she entertains thoughts of her being able to do more with her professional life, but seems somewhat uncertain of whether or not she will be able to meet academic expectations at college since she had trouble meeting such expectations in secondary school.

Jean notes that Black immigrant women’s success is related to their ability to financially support themselves and instil ambition into the lives of Black youth. She says that in order to be successful “you have to want it, eat it, breathe it every day, and you will get it” (Jean, February 27, 2008, #1). In her definition, she emphasizes perseverance, individual desire, and carefully notes that her definition of success speaks to helping Black youth in particular. In our conversations, Jean continuously brings attention to how neglecting Black youth has led to their inability to pursue postsecondary studies that is the stepping stone to their success. She thinks that sometimes society sends the message that Black youth are doomed for failure based on the fact that they are Black.

Sisi believes that success means “to have a purpose in life and defending it to those that don’t agree with what you’re doing, and then achieving that purpose” [italics added] (Sisi, May 6, 2008, #1). Here she acknowledges that achieving success involves fighting against others who believe she should be doing something other than what she is doing. As a Guyanese immigrant woman, I acknowledge how my family members placed very
high expectations on me to attend university and realized that these same expectations were not placed on my older brother. In my experience, it is very important for women especially to pursue postsecondary studies in both the Guyanese and Canadian cultures. Growing up in my family gave me the impression that while men who did not pursue postsecondary studies would likely be successful in our world, this was not the case for women who did not have a postsecondary education. I must add that the pressures for Guyanese women to pursue postsecondary studies are more profound in Canada when compared to the pressures in Guyana. This difference is most likely so because the cost of postsecondary studies in Canada is more manageable for families since government student loans are available.

Participants in this study emphasize their fight against past systemic barriers, histories of failure, and negative stereotypes that paved their way to achieving their success. They mention feelings of marginalization along the way that sometimes discouraged them, but ultimately these feelings encouraged them to fight for what they wanted to achieve. As adults, they all realize how accepted their struggles are for so many Black Guyanese immigrant women living in their own unique circumstances in Canada; they see themselves as persons who have overcome struggles in the face of the adversities that Canada presented them with at one time or another. The participants’ forthright discussions about personal weaknesses in their secondary school environments provide a better understanding of how they see their personal success also as a success for society. Apparently, by conquering systems and/or people who were directly presenting challenges for them, the participants saw their achievements as being
important learning experiences for everyone involved—learning experiences that will most likely break down barriers for other minoritized groups in the future.

This fight against oppression that all participants speak about when defining success and sharing how they went about achieving it, is framed best by Freire (2004) who in his work highlights how hegemonic forces operate to create clear lines between oppressors and the oppressed. He however notes that oppressed people initially do not seek liberation; instead they often become oppressors. This initial reaction does not solve the problem. One of the reasons that three of the participants in this study did not pursue postsecondary education was because they felt a sense of alienation during their secondary school years; this alienation was reflected in their report cards. While Sisi and Maxine reacted to their poor academic performance by leaving school before graduating, Sarah immersed herself in the only thing she felt competent doing. Sarah based the rest of her professional life on becoming a hairdresser; she was doing poorly in Math and English and as a result became very discouraged from furthering her education. As soon as she obtained a cooperative education opportunity to be a hairdresser, she quickly made plans to obtain that job after completing secondary school. It does not seem as if these three participants became oppressors during their experiences, but it is possible that their strong will to graduate from secondary school has had positive impacts on the lives of those around them, including persons (e.g. teachers and guidance counsellors) who presented them with challenges. Similarly, Freire (2004) notes, “Only power that springs from the weakness of the oppressed will be sufficiently strong to free both” (p. 44). In other words, oppressed persons must play an active role in liberating themselves and their
oppressors; otherwise, false charity/generosity will result and social injustice prevails (see pp. 44-45).

On a different note, when asked if their notions of success had changed as a result of their migration to Canada, the majority of the participants answered in the negative. In Guyana, however, they were taught that success is equivalent to a postsecondary education and money. The two participants (Jean and Sisi) who immigrated to Canada as adolescents agree with having had set goals to pursue postsecondary studies. Based on what they were taught in Guyana, what Sisi has so far accomplished, and what she aspires to accomplish, her notion of success did indeed change overtime. If her goal had not changed and in turn changing her meaning of success, then she would either be attending postsecondary school or would now consider herself to be unsuccessful. This is surely not the case.

All participants agree that it is vital to set goals for one’s self. Sisi changed her educational goal mainly because of her pregnancy. In response to her situation, she set alternative goals. According to Ogbu (1993), in order to develop a sense of belonging, persons should not only be stable in their living arrangements, but they should also be mentally grounded goal-setting people. This claim implies that teaching students to set goals should be a very important part of education (Dei, James, James-Wilson Karumanchery, Zine, 2000).

It is important for educators, parents, communities, and children to understand that “Children have a right to a quality education that centres, engages and motivates them” (Dei et al., 2000, p. 141). Dei and colleagues note that marginalized student success requires that students receive (a) love and care, (b) security, (c) stability, and (d) positive
role models. Jean seems to be the only research participant who came closest to obtaining the ingredients for the recipe for student success, and coincidentally, she is the only participant who pursued postsecondary studies. So, it seems as if Dei and colleagues accurately listed the ingredients for student success. They agree that Ontario’s education system has treated student success as if it only involves grades and attendance. This is not the case, for even grades and attendance are affected by factors outside of school and even the social interactions at school.

Moreover, Dei and colleagues (2000) note that student success is defined as, “a sense of belonging that empowers students to make more effective contributions” (p. 145) in the classroom, in their communities, and in the society at large. Considering this understanding of student success, the majority of my participants felt displaced in schools and so they should have considered themselves academically unsuccessful. However, since they all graduated from secondary school, they considered that they were academically successful. There is an illusion that when one achieves a secondary school diploma, this means they are placed on a level playing field with others achieving the same credentials and qualifications. In other words, it is thought that student success is solely dependent on a secondary school diploma. The participants in this study see themselves as having achieved student success because they possess a diploma, without which they would have seen themselves to be an academic failure. Yet they realize now that because of their personal circumstances and their interactions at school, they are not on an equal playing field with everyone, but still refuse to accept that they have failed as students.
According to Maxine, students who fail to graduate from secondary school are a Guyanese family’s embarrassment for a lifetime until they redeem themselves by becoming rich or re-joining the education system and graduating. This is because education is held amongst the highest of regards in Guyana and as a matter of fact in most of the Caribbean, especially in Black families (Blair, 2007). In fact the majority of participants talked about the pressure that their parents placed on them to pursue postsecondary studies, although the majority of them did not succumb to this pressure. It is important to know that none of the participants felt that they needed a postsecondary education to be successful; however still, in the past, generally they intended to achieve a postsecondary education. So although they were driven to some extent to pursue postsecondary studies, Jean was the only one who did so, and coincidentally, she was the only one who felt a sense of belonging in her classrooms in secondary school and this was reflected in her high grades. Ogbu’s (1993) study corroborates this analytical perspective with regards to relating a sense of belonging to academic success and, in turn, motivation to pursue postsecondary education.

When participants were asked to identify an artifact that best represents their personal success in life, Maxine and Sisi said that their secondary school diplomas represented success for them and they emphasized their perseverance regarding dropping-out of school and returning. Maxine’s diploma is hanging on her bedroom wall; it was placed there by her mother. Sisi mentioned that she could not quite find her diploma at the moment, and her three children are her artifacts that symbolize her success. Jean told me that The Pyramids in Egypt are her representation of success because it was manmade and although weathered it still mystified her. She was aware that I was asking for a
personal artifact, and was unable to tell me about anything in her possession. Her idea of the ever mystifying weathered Egyptian Pyramids rings true to the importance she places on perseverance and stamina. Sarah’s Cosmetology Certificate of Completion from secondary school hangs on her bedroom wall and is representative of her personal success.

I found some of the participants’ responses to my question about the artifacts that represent their personal success somewhat contradictory in light of other questions they previously answered regarding what ‘success’ means to them, and so I contacted them to further clarify my understanding of their answers. While Jean, for instance, greatly attributes her personal success to her postsecondary education, she does not see her certificate(s) as her artifact of success. In fact, when I asked her later on if she perhaps considers her certificates as artifacts of her success, she implied that it was merely a piece of paper, a formality, and that her success is in the process of achieving her certificates. In contrast, the other three participants who do not consider that postsecondary education necessarily translates to success, actually claim that their secondary school diplomas (in Sarah’s case, her Cosmetology Certificate from secondary school) are representative of their personal success. From them I gather that a certificate that was granted to them after their challenging secondary school experiences is more representative of personal success because they persevered; therefore, perseverance is representative of personal success.

Although Jean chose a very different type of artifact from the other three participants, all artifacts chosen by participants were representative of strength, stamina, and perseverance.
On a final note, participants found it challenging to discuss their thoughts and feelings about success without talking about freedom. Granted that, most Guyanese people view education as a means to social mobility, a kind of freedom, if you will, then I wonder why it is that all participants did not insist on pursuing a postsecondary education. They implied that their families came to Canada to achieve the financial freedom that was unachievable for them in Guyana. So, while it is difficult to entirely understand why two of four of the participants have disclosed that they have received social welfare payments in the past, but yet they have little to no intentions of pursuing postsecondary education, they share similar experiences of unstable family situations. Both of them report the challenges of raising their children without the financial or emotional support from the fathers of their children. Additionally, Maxine’s explanation for not wanting to pursue a postsecondary education is rooted in her disappointment in the Canadian government that is made up of a White majority of members, and whom she holds responsible for the impoverishment of many Black people done in the name of furthering White people’s interests.

**Summary of Findings**

The research participants shared very unique life experiences with me about their decision-making processes regarding the pursuit of postsecondary education. These women confirm the importance of parental guidance and support when making their decisions. Unhealthy relationships with parents created communication barriers that they either remained trapped by or escaped from. Stable living arrangements and available finances during their teenage years also made a difference in their educational outcomes. Additionally, the support system that their extended family provided made a world of
difference since they all lived with extended family during their teenage years. Non-existent and broken relationships with their fathers, created a bridge that led them to stamina and perseverance, although this was not without their battles with low self-confidence. Finally, their mothers’ levels of education seem to correlate with their own.

Research participants’ relationships with their teachers and guidance counsellors seem to make a genuine difference in their academic outcomes in secondary school and postsecondary educational aspirations. Alienation from curriculum and class discussions resulted in two of the participants’ withdrawal from school without yet graduating, whereas ongoing positive communication with teachers especially allows for the development of a sense of belonging and thereby producing positive outcomes. Knowledgeable and available guidance counsellors’ ability to communicate effectively with students proved to be quite valuable in helping them make career decisions. Lastly, the participants emphasized how they had a great deal of respect for their teachers because their families had a great deal of respect for education; even when they were not able to support this aspiration materially.

Many obstacles can stand in the way of a young Black Guyanese immigrant woman’s social integration in Canadian secondary schools and society at large. The participants acknowledge that if they felt comfortable (sense of belonging) in their classrooms, then they would be more likely to participate in class discussions. However, when this sense of belonging is absent, they become disinterested in the whole schooling experience. In fact, one participant (Maxine) claimed that she was not “cut out” for school and so she did not think that she would succeed in a postsecondary institution. Furthermore, feelings of alienation within the walls of classrooms coupled with alienation
that one might be experiencing at home can create feelings of displacement from one’s new society altogether. Participants agree that failing to socially integrate greatly hinders success; one participant mentioned that this failure to integrate is especially so for Black immigrant females.

Moreover, the research participants’ expectations about life in Canada to some extent, governs their decision-making process about pursuing postsecondary education. All four participants agreed that, in Guyana, ‘Canadian society’ is synonymous with ‘land of opportunities’ and ‘safety’. According to the participants’ parents and grandparents, ‘land of opportunities’ meant the availability of quality education that was accessible to everyone; this education was almost guaranteed to increase one’s social mobility. Lengthy immigration processes and parental separation were viewed by all participants as being all worthwhile, and they commend their mothers for being such strong leaders in their families who endured this process for their children’s sake. These difficult challenges often made the notion of moving to Canada and/or living in Canada seem like the greatest privilege in the world.

Having such high expectations about the opportunities and safety that Canadian society offers, can absolutely turn out to be very disappointing for newcomers to Canada who belong to minoritized groups, such as the participants in this study. Some participants were quite discouraged by some harsh realities they experienced in secondary schools and in their households; these experiences, indeed, influenced the participants’ decision-making processes about pursuing postsecondary studies.

All participants in this study agree that, to various extents, their family’s influence, interactions with teachers and guidance counsellors, social integration at school and in
Canadian society, and their expectations about life in Canada certainly affected their
decision-making process about pursuing postsecondary education. Their responses to
interview questions imply that, while their understanding of ‘success’ is similar in nature,
it is fluid.
CHAPTER SEVEN: IMPLICATIONS AND POSSIBILITIES

This section aims to use the findings and analysis of this study to propose ideas for improving: (a) Canadian immigration policies and Ontario’s education policies, (b) teachers’ and school administrators’ training and practice, (c) Black Guyanese immigrant women’s decision-making processes about pursuing postsecondary education, and (d) future researchers’ approaches when examining experiences of immigrant women of colour.

Implications and Possibilities for Policy

At the hands of the provincial government of Ontario, Ontario’s public secondary school system underwent many changes that started from the 1970s onward, and many of these changes have resulted from changes in Canadian immigration legislation that has directly impacted Ontario’s schools that have experienced an increasing immigrant population (Coelho, 1998, see p. 14). Additionally, some of these changes were often prompted by the Ontario government’s need for reform in education to improve the province’s economy (as cited in Coelho, 1998, see p. 11). Coelho offers a great example of how the Canadian government views immigration in Canada; she quotes the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration in the House of Commons in Ottawa on November 1, 1995:

Canada needs immigrants. I can’t put it more simply than that. Our country needs workers and investors to maintain and improve our standard of living. We need them to help us keep sparking our economy – and to create jobs...maintaining and improving the standard of living of every Canadian relies, in part, on keeping a vibrant and dynamic immigration system...Immigrants and refugees become some sort of the best, brightest, most self-motivated, hardest-working Canadians. And that’s why we are actively promoting Canada as a place to come and settle. These are the people who will work with us to build a stronger, more economically
Like in Coelho’s (1998) research, the participants of this study imply that Ontario’s government has oftentimes made decisions about education reformation with insufficient input from Ontarians who belong to minoritized groups. Therefore, more effort needs to be made by Ontario’s government to encourage persons belonging to minoritized groups to participate in Ontario’s governmental organizations and Canadian politics in general. This should not be terribly challenging considering Ontario is home to diverse groups of people.

Additionally, findings of this study imply that Ontario’s education policymakers need to increase their awareness of the increasing immigrant population in Ontario and respond accordingly to this change in population. Mainstream curriculum inadequately addresses the needs of many minoritized groups of students. Although subtle changes have resulted from mostly community pressures, these policy changes only scratch the surface of what actually needs to be done to address inequalities.

Education policies need to reflect differences among students and work in the best interest of all students. One way for the government to identify differences among students is to communicate with them and their parents about their unique needs prior to policymaking. Moreover, the Ontario government’s investment in liaison counsellors in various boards of education in Ontario may greatly encourage community organizations’ involvement in the lives of students and their parents belonging to minoritized groups (Dei et al., 2000, see p. 11).
All the research participants in this study and the literature researched point to the need to empower minoritized groups like the young Black Guyanese immigrant women population. Critical theorists (e.g., Brand, 1999; Carty, 1999; Freire, 2004) agree that involving minoritized groups in the decisions (e.g., education policies) that ultimately impact their futures, is one of the best forms of empowerment.

Moreover, three of four research participants in this study share the experience of being separated from their parents for long periods of time as a result of Canada’s lengthy immigration process. Participants agree that their lives have been severely impacted by the absence of their parents, in particular their mothers. One participant endured years of countless instances of sexual abuse at the hands of close family members who were also the caregivers in whose care her mother left her. Another participant was forced to live with a friend of the family’s after her grandmother died while her mother was still in Canada. While participants realized that past policies about domestic labour have been somewhat improved, they still exist with much room for improvement. One participant suggests that the federal government assume some responsibility for the terrible way in which Black domestic labourers from the Caribbean have been treated. In order for these women to migrate, they were required to leave their children behind in their home countries while they came to Canada to care for other people’s children. The participant challenges the federal government to issue a public apology for this seldom talked about treatment in the past. Added to this, she urges the government to provide a reasonable monetary compensation or financial incentive when applying for postsecondary education for students who belong to families of Black domestic labourers.
Finally, the findings and analysis of this study implies that there is a need for school boards, educators, students, parents, and community groups to join together and discuss policies such as the Multiculturalism Policy in order to determine ways to make it a more worthwhile policy instead of the political lip-service mouthpiece it currently is.

Implications and Possibilities for Practice

The findings and analysis in this study bring a great deal of attention to teachers’ practice in classrooms and hallways. Participants were in consensus about the importance of teacher-student relationships in students’ decision-making process about pursuing postsecondary education. One participant admits that whenever her teacher praised her work in the classroom, it increased her self-confidence, which became the basis of all the successful outcomes in her life. Another participant explains that her teachers’ neglectful behaviour toward her made her feel unimportant, and so this negatively impacted the educational and career decisions she has made so far. Therefore, I am calling on all secondary school teachers to be more aware of how their behaviour impacts on their students, and realize that they are highly influential in the identity formation of students and their academic and professional outcomes.

Participants in this study experienced instances of overt and covert racial and cultural discrimination at the hands of their teachers in Ontario secondary schools. Although there are policies in place that prohibit this behaviour, apparently some teachers are not adhering to them. Teachers may be oblivious to the importance of such policies if these policies are not discussed in their teacher education. Therefore, the government should implement a more effective system that monitors the curriculum in higher educational institutions that offer teacher education. Not only should these policies be
discussed during teacher education programs, but they should also be common knowledge to school boards. Monitoring such programs should go beyond merely ensuring that curriculum content requirements are met. Teaching practice should also be monitored to ensure that important policy documents are discussed in classrooms and understood by teacher candidates.

Informational resources about discrimination and inclusive classrooms should also be made more available and accessible to secondary school teachers and students. The work of Critical theorists such as Paulo Freire (2004) suggests that students are capable of participating on a higher level in their own learning. Therefore, students should work together with teachers to bring about change. This is not to say that students are at fault for not responding adequately to issues of discrimination at the hands of their teachers, but instead I am suggesting that students be made to understand that they have the power to speak and the right to be heard.

On a different note, the findings and analysis of this study suggest that guidance counsellors in Ontario’s secondary schools have a great deal of government resources available to them to better help students with their decision-making process about pursuing postsecondary studies. However, the guidance counsellors with whom the participants in this study communicated appear not to have been using these resources. This is a good example of policies being in place, but not being practiced. One particular document recommends orientation sessions for new students, especially those who enter Ontario secondary schools from Grade 10 onwards. However, the two participants who started at new secondary schools in Grades 10 and 11 appear not to have been told about orientation sessions, nor did any of the four participants seem to know about exit
interviews upon graduating from secondary school. Exit interviews are meetings that
students have with guidance counsellors to discuss their career plans and possibilities.
None of the participants in this study recall ever participating in such meetings. Coehlo
(1998), and Dei and colleagues (1997) note that Black immigrant students in particular
require more career guidance in Ontario’s secondary schools in order to prevent the
secondary school dropout rate of Black immigrant students in Ontario from rising.

With hopes of remedying this increasing secondary school dropout rate in Ontario,
community advocates of Black education and antiracist education have recently proposed
opening Afro-Centric Schools in Multicity. When I say ‘recently’, I am not implying that
this is a new idea that community advocates in Ontario just had a few months ago; in fact,
this idea has been fought over for years (Dei et al, 2000). Finally, the proposal was
accepted and although Ontario’s current provincial government opposes the opening of
Afro-Centric schools because it is felt that it will cause segregation in Ontario, it is to
some degree, acknowledging that something needs to be done soon in order to remedy
the issue of increasing Black immigrant secondary school dropout rates (The National
Post, November 7, 2007). This, I believe, is a step in the right direction. Black students
need to feel like they are important contributing members in Canadian society, and our
current public secondary school system has certainly not been successful in sending this
message to these students. Furthermore, Nova Scotia’s Afro-Centric school is producing
greater numbers of Black secondary school graduates (Dei et al, 2000), so hopefully
Ontario is able to follow suit.

Finally, the findings, literature, and theories that are discussed in this study
confirms that parental involvement in children’s education is of great importance and can
often determine the career aspiration and concepts of success that children form. Blair (2007) acknowledges that parental involvement is not easily accomplished when dealing with students who belong to single-parent families and live in low income areas in Ontario. All of the participants in this study belong to single-parent families, and three of four of them lived in low income areas while in secondary school. Blair uncovers how some teachers of these students view them as being from “broken homes” with a “broke and uninterested parent”, and decide that they will lead a “broken life” regardless of how successful they are academically in secondary school. Teachers need to realize that when they give up on students, students often give up on themselves. Therefore, like Blair, I too call for teachers to become more involved in the academic lives of their students, and create opportunities to work with the parents of these students in order to work against the problem of increasing Black youth secondary school dropout rates in Ontario.

I acknowledge that such a partnership will require time from teachers and parents and money from government, but in the long-run, this partnership will lead to improved social and economic environments. Additionally, Ontario can serve as a good example to the rest of Canada, and possibly the world at large. On a more individual level, this investment in Black youth will inspire a deeper sense of independence, freedom, and self-worth in Black youth.

Implications for Young Black Guyanese Immigrant Women in Canada

I have received positive feedback from the participants in this study about how empowered they feel now that they have had an opportunity to share their stories. Three of four had a very limited understanding of what feminist organizations are, but after some discussion, she was inclined to learn more about how she could become involved
with such organizations. Some of them have bad impressions about what feminism is, and felt greatly excluded from that whole area of knowledge. Needless to say, according to the participants, the topic of feminist organizations was never discussed at their secondary schools. Their lack of knowledge about these organizations, or the work they do in communities is not surprising. The implications have point to the need for such organizations to attend more to connecting with young women, particularly those in racial minoritized groups. Teachers should become more informed about what feminist organizations are and learn about how such organizations can help their students aspire to be all they desire to be.

It is my hope that Black Guyanese immigrant women in Canada view the findings of this study as a resource that can help them make more informed choices about their careers and those of their children. By sharing the participants’ stories, I wish to inspire courage, stamina, and perseverance in young Black Guyanese immigrant women as they may face challenges similar to those of Jean, Sarah, Maxine, and Sisi. I understand that circumstances are unique to each individual, and I am in no way attempting to generalize the experiences of the four participants in this study to explain the experiences of all young Black Guyanese immigrant women in Canada. I am pointing toward some directions that might indicate changes that need to be made in order to improve the possibilities for access to postsecondary education for Black Guyanese women who are scarcely represented in Canadian postsecondary institutions.

Possibilities for Future Research

I invite future researchers to explore a similar study and include an examination of the experiences of the mothers of young Black Guyanese immigrant women in Canada.
who do not pursue postsecondary studies. I believe that mothers’ perspectives could certainly enrich my research findings by providing another way of seeing the primary participants’ experiences. Teachers who teach in schools that consist of a diverse population of students can also offer an excellent source of data, and enable the researcher to delve more into the topic of teachers’ practice and how teachers’ practice relates to curriculum.

I encourage Ontario’s provincial government to join together with teacher training institutions to conduct more research to inquire about the development of more effective monitoring programs, which ensure that certain policies about discrimination are being effectively taught and delivered.

Furthermore, I encourage universities and colleges across Ontario to conduct further research to uncover how they can reach out to Black youth and encourage this group’s postsecondary studies enrolment. Colleges Ontario (www.collegesontario.org) is currently conducting research to find out why the majority of students in college programs right now do not go directly to college after secondary school, but this study pays little attention to the students’ ethnicities and language. I believe the researchers might be neglecting a very important determinant of educational aspirations.

In Lieu of a Conclusion

I am reluctant to name this section ‘conclusion’ because there is no conclusion. This study challenged me too much for there to be any conclusion. Just when it was expected that I would lose faith and become discouraged from learning about the experiences of young Black Guyanese immigrant women, I in fact became more curious and interested in hearing their stories. I lost two potential participants during the process
of this study because I do not identify with being Black. I expected this sort of reception; although, I was not nearly as ready to deal with it once it happened. Thanks to my Supervisor, I accepted and understood it with time.

So, if I am absolutely required to provide a conclusion of some sort, my conclusion would be to not conclude research about this group of women and other minoritized groups until their experiences in Ontario’s secondary schools improve and are reflected in their final grades. This study is based on the experiences of four Black Guyanese immigrant women in Canada, and while their experiences are similar in some ways, they also significantly differ because of various positions in society that they have occupied over the years. Therefore, it is unacceptable to assume that the four research participants’ experiences are the equivalent to the experiences of all Black Guyanese immigrant women in Canada. Rather this work intends to open the conversation on the understandings we might bring to the experiences of these four young women as they negotiate their lives as immigrants in Canada.

Although my recommendations and concluding remarks are a tall order, I extend a special invitation to you, my reader, to think of ways in which you might be able to contribute to improving the circumstances and educational outcomes of Black immigrant Guyanese women and other groups of immigrant women in Canada.
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*Canadian Geographer, 44*(2), 135-147.


Ottawa, ON: Employment and Immigration
APPENDIX A: LETTER OF INFORMATION

TITLE: Conceptualizing Success: Aspirations of Four Young Black Guyanese Immigrant Women for Higher Education

Please accept my sincere gratitude for contacting me to inquire further about this study. I am doing this research to fulfill the requirements of my Master of Education program in Cultural and Policy Studies at the Faculty of Education, Queen’s University. This research has been cleared by the Queen’s University General Research Ethics Board.

The goal of this research is to give voice to young Black Guyanese immigrant women in ________ in particular in their decision as to whether or not to pursue postsecondary education immediately after graduating from a high school in ________. The aim of this research is to provide a clearer understanding of the immigrant experience of this group while examining their notions of success. It is with great optimism, that I believe that this study will help build the foundation for better understanding why young Black Guyanese immigrant women are so under-represented in colleges and universities.

This study will include individual face-to-face interviews with four participants in which their decision not to pursue college or university education will be discussed. The research will include an initial interview and a follow-up interview. Each interview will last approximately one hour. Both interviews will be audio taped. Approximately three weeks after each interview, each participant will be given her own interview transcript, and she will have the opportunity to add or remove any information. Finally, approximately six weeks after the follow-up interview, each participant will have the opportunity to read her final transcripts and contribute to the analysis of the research data. Participant analysis will take place in a neutral location with the participant and researcher present. This meeting will last approximately one hour.

The interviews will take place in a public place in which the participant will be comfortable, such as a library or a coffee shop.

This research will result in the formulation of a Master’s thesis and possible publications in scholarly and public documents.

Your confidentiality will be maintained to the extent possible. Your name, the names of any educational, professional, or community-based institutions, and the names of people that you mention will not be used in any part of the research analysis. A pseudonym will be used and institutions will be referred to in general terms with no identifying characteristics. Your identity will only be accessible to my two thesis Supervisory Committee members and me. After this research is complete I will keep all your correspondence and recordings in a locked cabinet for seven years and then I will destroy it all.
There are no anticipated risks to your participation in this research. Please be advised that you may choose not to answer any question that you find objectionable. If at any time during the interview you wish to stop the interview, I will abide with your request and turn the recording devices off. You may withdraw from the interview at any time without pressure or consequence.

If you have any questions about this study, please contact me at 5sak1@queensu.ca or (416) 628-1899. You may also contact my Supervisor Dr. Magda Lewis at (613) 533-6000 x 77277 or magda.lewis@queensu.ca. For questions, concerns or complaints about the research ethics of this study, please contact the Education Research Ethics Board at ereb@queensu.ca, or the chair of the General Research Ethics Board, Dr. Steve Leighton at (613) 533-6000 x 77034 or greb.chair@queensu.ca If you agree to participate in this research, please sign the accompanying Consent Forms, returning one copy to me on the day of the first interview and retaining the second copy for your records.

Sincerely,

Alicia Kelly
APPENDIX B: LETTER OF CONSENT

I, ______________________________ (print name) agree to the following:

• I have read and kept a copy of the letter of information concerning the study Conceptualizing Success: Aspirations of Four Young Black Guyanese Immigrant Women for Higher Education
  • I understand that I will be participating in (a) an initial interview, (b) a follow-up interview, and (c) a meeting where I will have an opportunity to contribute to the analysis in the study as it pertains to my own interview data
  • I understand that, prior to the data analysis process, I will be given the opportunity to read my own transcripts and make changes (add or omit information) as I deem fit
  • I have been informed that the initial and follow up interview will each last approximately one hour and they will both be audio taped
• I understand that the goal of this study is to give voice to young Black Guyanese immigrant women in ________, to document their decision-making processes as it pertains to not pursuing postsecondary education immediately after graduating from a high school in ________, to provide a clearer understanding of the immigrant experience of this group while examining their notions of success
  • I understand that there are no known risks for me in participating in this study
  • I understand that my participation in this study will be kept confidential and that confidentiality will be protected to the extent possible
  • I understand that I can refuse to answer any questions that I think are inappropriate and I can request that certain data collected about me be removed from the study
• I understand that I can withdraw from this study at any time without consequence
  • I am aware that should I have any questions or concerns, I can contact Alicia Kelly, the researcher at any time at (416) 628-1899 or 5sak1@queensu.ca, or Dr. Magda Lewis, the thesis supervisor at (613) 533-6000 x 77277 or magda.lewis@queensu.ca
  • If I have any concerns, questions, or complaints about the ethics of this study, I can contact the Education Research Ethics Board at ereb@queensu.ca or the chair of the General Research Ethics Board, Dr. Steve Leighton at (613) 533-6000 x 77034 or greb.chair@queensu.ca

Please sign both copies of this consent form and return one copy to Alicia Kelly. Retain the second copy for your records.

I HAVE READ AND UNDERSTOOD THIS CONSENT FORM AND I AGREE TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS STUDY.

___________________________________
Signature:                                                                                                  Date:
By initializing the statements below:

_______ I agree to be audio taped for both interviews.
_______ I grant permission to be quoted.
APPENDIX C: INTERVIEW GUIDE

PREAMBLE: As you know, I am a Master of Education student at Queen’s University, and I am grateful that you have decided to take some time to share your experience with me to help enrich this study.

Having had the experience of being a native of Guyana living in __________, I am well aware of the journey of many Indian Guyanese women in Guyana and Canada. Though I imagine that we share somewhat similar experiences as immigrants to Canada, I believe that some of our experiences may also differ. I am particularly interested in your decision not to pursue further education beyond high school.

As a student attending high school in Guyana, a great many of my colleagues were Black Guyanese young women. That number, however, became fewer when I attended high school in __________. Then it dramatically declined when I attended university in _________ between 1998 and 2003. As I was still surrounded by many Indian Guyanese immigrant young women in ________ educational institutions, I often wondered where the Black Guyanese immigrant women were.

I would now like for us to move forward with our interview and ask you to share with me your experience as a woman who belongs to the group being studied. Please remember that if you do not want to answer any question, simply say “No comment” and I will move to the next question. Also, if you would like to stop the interview and/or turn off the recorder at any time for any reason, please say so without hesitation. Do you have any questions for me? [I answer any questions, and move on with the interview]

This guide is divided into four Parts:
(1) Family of origin and immigration timelines.
(2) Personal experiences with the high school education system in ________.
(3) Alternative of pursuing postsecondary education.
(4) Discussion of personal notion of success as it may or may not relate to pursuing postsecondary education.

Part 1: Origin and Immigration
Family of Origin and Immigration Timelines
1. Tell me about your family.
   Probe: How many siblings? Nuclear family? Parents’ marital situation/status? Did you immigrate to ________ as a family (all at the same time)? Do you have your own (are you the mother) family now?
2. When did you immigrate to ________? How old were you then? Which part of Guyana were you living in prior to immigrating to ________?
   Probe: Do you know what the reasons were for your family’s decision to immigrate to Canada?
3. What was your last level of education you attained in Guyana?
   Probe: If any, which grade were you in when you left Guyana?
4. Describe encounters you or your family had with immigration policies or measures in either Guyana and/or Canada.  
Proto: Family sponsorships? Immigration related fees, etc.? Refugee status?  
5. Why did you and your family immigrate to _______ in particular?  
6. Describe your living arrangements from the time you immigrated to _______ to present.  
7. Who has the highest level of education in your family? What level? In what sector are they currently working and which other sector have they worked before, if applicable?  

Part 2: High School Education in _______  
1. How soon after immigrating to _______, did you begin school? What year? Which school? When did you graduate? What was your GPA (if you remember).  
2. Which grade were you placed in? Did you complete a placement test before you were placed in a grade? If so, describe it. Did you think that the test results accurately demonstrated your capabilities—how so?  
3. What was the general ethnic make up in your school?  
Proto: Were you a minority group?  
4. Tell me about your social experience at school.  
Proto: Did you make friends easily and quickly? Why or why not? Did you have experiences that you considered to be discriminatory in your relations with peers, administrators, or teachers?  
Proto: Elaborate. What happened? What was the outcome? Were you pleased with the outcome?  
5. Did you have any role models at your school? For instance, was there a friend, teacher, principal, or guidance counselor?  
Proto: If you did not have a role model at your school, why do you think not?  
6. Describe what type of high school student you were?  
Proto: If I were your high school teacher or your friend, how would I describe you? Did you consider yourself to be positive and motivated to study? Did you encounter any academic (reading, writing, studying) difficulties? If so, explain. Did you have any experiences that resulted in your scolding in the principal’s office? If so, explain.  
7. What were your goals in high school?  
Proto: When you were still in high school, did you have intention of pursuing college or university studies? Why or why not? Did your goals (as it pertains to this pursuit) change over time? Why or why not?  
8. Why didn’t you attend a postsecondary institution right after graduating from high school?  
9. Do you think that you made the right decision? Explain.  
10. Were you involved in extra curricular activities during high school? Why or why not? Were you involved in extra curricular activities in high school Guyana? Explain why or why not.
11. Looking back at your high school experience in ________, do you recommend any changes to the curriculum or system that would improve the experiences of other immigrants or people specific to your group? In any, please explain.

Part 3: Alternative to Postsecondary Education
1. After graduating from high school, how did you spend your time?
   Probe: Did you find employment. If so, what kind and how did you find it? Was it exactly as you had planned it? Explain.
2. Did your living arrangements change when you graduated from high school? Describe your living arrangements now, if different from when you graduated.
3. Do you plan on ever applying for postsecondary studies? Why or why not, and when of applicable.
4. How many of your colleagues in high school applied for postsecondary studies? An approximate percentage would be sufficient.
   Probe: How many of your close friends attended or are attending postsecondary institutions? Is the majority attending school in ________?

Part 4: Notion of Success
1. Describe an artifact which represents your notion of success.
   Probe: When and where did you obtain it? Where do you usually store it, and why?
2. How would you define success? Has your understanding of success changed as a result of immigration?
   Probe: Define it for me and then define it for your [future] children. Has the definition changed? Explain.
3. Do you associate success with postsecondary education? Explain.
4. Do you consider yourself to be successful? Explain.
5. In your immediate and extended family who lives in ________, who is the most successful person in terms of your own definition of success. Explain.
6. As a Black-Guyanese immigrant woman in ________, what advice would you give to others like yourself with regards to being successful?
7. Was there anything that I did not ask you, but you wish I did?
APPENDIX D: SAMPLE FOLLOW-UP INTERVIEW GUIDE

PREAMBLE: Thank you for taking time to participate in this follow-up interview. You will now have had the opportunity to read the transcript of our first interview, and should be prepared to share with me your retractions or clarifications that need to be made to it.

Do you have any questions for me about your transcript? [Answer questions, if any]
Would you like to make any changes to your transcript? [Take note of any changes]

Part 1: Questions Raised in First Interview [this section will be developed after gathering and interacting with data from the first interview]

Part 2: Participant Reflection

1. Have you given any thought to your previous interview experience with me since I last met with you? What are your feelings surrounding the information that you shared with me?

2. Has our communication encouraged you to develop or change your perspective about any past or future issues and/or events in your life? If any, explain.

Part 3: Knowledge of Feminist Organizations

1. What is your understanding of a feminist organization? Please note that there is no right or wrong answer here.

2. Were you or any of your family members involved in activities with feminist organizations or other community organizations? If yes, describe these activities. If no, why do you think their community involvement was non-existent?

3. What roles do you think these types of organizations could possibly play in helping young Black Guyanese immigrant women make decisions about pursuing postsecondary education?
Research Study Poster: Call for participants

Are you a Guyanese female between the ages of 18 and 55?  
Do you identify as being Black?  
Did you immigrate to Canada as an infant, toddler, or adolescent?  
Have you completed your high school education but have not pursued college or university studies?  
Are you interested in participating in a research study about the aspirations for higher education?

I am an Indian Guyanese immigrant woman completing a postgraduate degree in Education at Queen’s University. I am interested in documenting how Black Guyanese immigrant women in _______ make the decision as to whether or not to pursue postsecondary education immediately after graduating from high school. The title of the study is, Conceptualizing Success: Aspirations of Young Black Guyanese Immigrant Women for Higher Education. The goal of this research is to give voice to young Black Guyanese immigrant women in _______ in order to document their decision-making processes as it pertains to not pursuing postsecondary education immediately after graduating from high school. This research aims at providing a clearer understanding of the immigrant experience and notions of success of this group.

I am interested in interviewing you if you:

(a) identify yourself as a Black Guyanese immigrant woman who immigrated to Canada from Guyana  
(b) are between 18 and 55 years old  
(c) immigrated to _______ as an infant, toddler, or adolescent  
(d) did not attend a postsecondary (college or university) institution in Canada  
(e) are able to volunteer three hours of your time to participate in two confidential face-to-face interviews and a meeting involving your analysis of your interview data  
(f) are comfortable with being audio taped during interviews

Please be advised that your participation in this study is completely voluntary and your confidentiality will be amongst my top priorities. You may withdraw from this study at any time for any reason without any consequences. Ethics clearance from Queen’s University General Research Ethics Board has been received for this research. If you wish further details of this research, please don’t hesitate to contact me at the email address or phone number listed below.

PLEASE CONTACT: Alicia Kelly at 5sak1@queensu.ca or 416-628-1899
### APPENDIX F: PARTICIPANTS’ RESPONSES AND RESEARCHER FIELD NOTES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Jean</th>
<th>Sarah</th>
<th>Maxine</th>
<th>Sisi</th>
<th>Researcher Notes</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>F1</strong></td>
<td>- raised by her mother; her parents divorced before she immigr. to Cda.</td>
<td>- raised by her mother; her parents divorced before she immigr. to Cda.</td>
<td>- raised by her mother until she was 3 yrs. old and then lived with her mother again at the age of 6</td>
<td>J: independent; easy-going with having divorced parents with their own families</td>
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<td>- both parents live in Cda., but they immigr. separately</td>
<td>- both parents live in Cda., but they immigr. separately</td>
<td>- her parents were never married</td>
<td>M: strained relationship with mom throughout life</td>
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<td>- immig. without her parents</td>
<td>- immig. without her parents</td>
<td>- mother does not have postsec. educ.</td>
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<td>- mother has postsec. Education</td>
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<td><strong>F2</strong></td>
<td>- she has a relationship with her father and his new family and her mother and her new family</td>
<td>- she never knew her father nor his whereabouts</td>
<td>- father abandoned her mother and her when she was a baby; felt “lost”</td>
<td>Sa: went quiet when speaking about her father; few words</td>
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<td>- she does not have a relationship with her father</td>
<td>Si: parental abandonment and neglect; also sibling jealousy &amp; isolation</td>
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<td><strong>F3</strong></td>
<td>- lived with her grandfather, aunt and 2 brothers for 2 years in Guyana before immigr. to Cda.</td>
<td>-in Guyana she lived with her mother, aunt, and brothers</td>
<td>-in Guyana she lived with her grandmother, uncle, and brothers</td>
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<td>J: remarkably understanding about the situation regarding her absent mom &amp; dad</td>
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<td>Sa: always had a full house of people</td>
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<td>M: sexual abuse in both households</td>
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<td>Si: she was ambivalent about living with the family-friend</td>
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<td><strong>IM4</strong></td>
<td>-adjusted quickly to diff. cultures</td>
<td>-did not have to culturally transition because she came to Cda. as an infant, so had been integrated well</td>
<td>-appreciates West-Indian grocery stores across Multicity; said that her family chose Multicity b/c they feel comfortable here in the Caribbean cultural pockets</td>
<td>J: ‘too good to be true story’—makes it seem so easy</td>
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<td>-integrated easily because she is of ‘mixed races’, but identifies with being Black</td>
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<td>-the biggest thing she had to adjust to was her teachers’ and peers’ Canadian accent</td>
<td>Sa: sort of oblivious to how different her culture was compared to Cdn. Culture</td>
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<td>-hangs on to her own culture through food and community voluntarism</td>
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<td>-speaks of the comfort of knowing that her Guyanese culture is alive in Multicity</td>
<td>M: funny she should say “pockets” (think of multiculturalism vs. Inter-culturalism)</td>
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<td>-took a very long time to adjust to cultural differences esp. In school (e.g. junk food in the cafeteria and the accent)</td>
<td>Si: speaks of comfort. Why was she uncomfortable?</td>
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<td><strong>IM5</strong></td>
<td>-at the time, she was excited to be reunited with her mother and eldest brother; also wanted to exper. life in Canada</td>
<td>-was too young to remember how she felt at the time of emigration; thankful that she is here now</td>
<td>-at 6, she was happy to see her mom again -happy to leave Guyana behind...but still refer to Guyana as “back home”</td>
<td>J: positive</td>
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<td>-reminisces about “back home” (int. 1)</td>
<td>-references to Guyana as “back home”</td>
<td>-did not want to leave Guyana, referred to it as “back home”</td>
<td>Sa: ambivalent, positive</td>
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<td>-strained relationship with mom and step-siblings</td>
<td>M: positive (running from abusive uncles in Guyana)</td>
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<td>Si: Sad</td>
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<td>All: “back home”</td>
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<td>IM6</td>
<td>-dad (divorced and remarried) → spons. Eldest son → spons. Mom: 16 (1971) &amp; little brother → dad spons. Other 2 bros</td>
<td>-grandmother spons. Sarah’s mom and her at the same time (1988) age: 2</td>
<td>-grandmother sponsored her (1986) age: 6 and her brother, her mother was already living illegally in Cda.</td>
<td>-mother’s sister in Canada arranged for rich fam. to spons. Sisi’s mom (domestic) → spons. Sisi (1996) age: 16 after grandma died in Guyana</td>
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<td>HS7</td>
<td>-gravitated towards peers of similar culture -social butterfly, friendly -no extra-curric. Activities b/c too demanding on the body (flexibility) -didn’t stay in touch with any friends -comfortable</td>
<td>-close friends were mostly Black -very friendly, made friends easy -particip. In extra-curric. activies (track and field) Stayed in touch with half of friends -comfortable</td>
<td>-&quot;everybody liked me and I liked everybody&quot; -friendly, easygoing -social life was affected because she was frustrated w/teacher -stayed in touch with a few friends -extra curric. activ. -comfortable</td>
<td>-started in Grade 10 and peers had already formed cleeks since Grade 9, so she was a loaner -trouble making friends Did not stay in touch with friends -uncomfortable</td>
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<td>HS8</td>
<td>-no placement test (Grade 11) -comfortable with peers and teachers for the most part but recognized few peers and teachers of colour -forced to abandon French (no foundation) -A student -go-getter, pleasant student -comfortable mostly</td>
<td>-most peers were Black -most teachers were White -weak in English and Math and so was placed in a Special Ed. Class (optional to her) -never diagnosed with LD -C student -friendly student -comfortable</td>
<td>-no placement tests -attended 2 high schools b/c of mother’s ‘running’ from immigration; -weak in English esp. failed Grade 12 Eng. Once and dropped it in summer school (age 19) -scared to ask teachers for help b/c of stigma of belonging to a Special Ed. Class = mother’s embarrassment -D/C student -teachers neglected her; unhappy -uncomfortable</td>
<td>-placement test (Grade 10-one grade behind for her age) -attended 3 high schools b/c of long commute and she dropped out after Grade 10 -returned at 18 years old (night school) -graduated at the age of 20 -lonely -teachers neglected her -D/C student -unhappy -uncomfortable</td>
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<td>HS9</td>
<td>-up to Grade 13 - accelerated high school and graduated 6 months earlier -applied for univ. Programs -stayed in the workforce for 8 months and then went to univ.</td>
<td>-up to Grade 12 -struggled to complete credits for graduation -took Cosmetology high school program/co-op -straight to the workforce (works full-time as a hairdresser)</td>
<td>-up to Grade 12 -graduated at the age of 23 (night school) with a toddler -straight to the workforce (works part-time at a large grocery store chain in 3 locations)</td>
<td>-up to Grade 12 Graduated at 20 (night school) with a young infant -straight to the workforce (works part-time at a grocery store and a gas station)</td>
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D10 -did not experience any forms of disc. b/c she is of mixed race and knows how to integrate -important for Black people to educate themselves and help each other beat negative stereotypes of racialized violence -need to teach more about Black women’s success in schools

- Special Education class mainly consisted of Black students; she was one of them -said she did not experience any type of racial discrimination in high school or elsewhere

- struggled with being a Black lesbian student...the lesbian community that she found was mostly White -no room for Black lesbians in schools or society for that matter...or even her home -teachers paid more attention to the needs of Chinese students...who were the smart ones that she had to copy off of...her teachers were “racist people”

- talks about how according to Canadian immig. Policies, Cda. Does not want any poor uneducated Black women from the Third World moving here—it just does not complement Canada’s economic interest - noticed that all the Black students in her Grade 12 English class in night school were doing terrible, and wondered what was wrong with Black people and their poor English skills

J: she is all about revamping the curriculum Sa: oblivious to racism M: outcast & silenced Si: angry at corrupted government policies

D11 -women are largely responsible for inspiring youths, esp. to deter violence and encourage success -more conversations about feminism required in schools

- encourages immigrant women to “go for it”...don’t second guess themselves -no idea about what feminist organizations are...more education about women in schools

- admires single mothers who work hard to support their family -explains how Guyanese gov’t will not provide any type of financial support for single mothers but Canadian women are lucky to have gov’t support -I don’t think that being a lesbian is a bad thing. To me, it’s a shame that my mother only sees the abuse as such a terrible thing now that I’m a lesbian. She never noticed how bad it was before because she never even once asked me if I wanted to report it to the police -more educ. About feminism. Org. in schools

- male and female classmates had a baby and received differential treatment from teachers: girl was treated disrespectfully and called ‘loose’; guy was not treated differently; girl dropped out -more educ. About feminism. Org. in schools to help with DM and prevent unfair treatment of women

J: lots of responsibilities on women Sa: insufficient exposure to other options M: diff. between Cda. And Guyana re: women; sexual abuse (at the hands of men) ignored; lesbianism (seen as against men) highlighted (binaries) Si: binaries (academic expectations and outcomes) between men and women were clear

D12 -her family remained in the middle-class after immigration -had a maid in Guyana to help with chores -no maid in Cda -very educ. Fam.

- always (Guyana and Canada) lived in a large extended family; sometimes shared bedrooms -middle class -very unedu. Fam.

- after her mother left Guyana, the family had to move outside of the main city because it was cheaper in the village (lower-class) -middle-class in Cda. -very unedu. Fam.

- receives child support payments -$ is official language in Guyana -mother was a poor uneducated Black immigrant -hand-me-down out-of-fashion clothes -very unedu. Fam.

J: stable class...might be underscoring which class she was/is in Sa: simplicity in thinking M: mother’s financial contrib. always important Si: feels inferior
S13 -you have to want it, eat it, breathe it every day and you will get it -The Pyramid in Egypt: manmade, weathered, and still mystifying -more to come

S14 -at school, at work, at home, personal -no roles models in school…just family members

DM 15 -always set goals and dreams; also encourage others -always wanted to attain postsec. Educ. But it was costly, so she got a job before starting her program to offset costs. Plan.

DM 16 -spoke to guidance counsellor but her family played a larger role in guiding her -suggests that feminist organizations could also provide good guidance if their directives are not selfish -it was the right decision: keep the momentum going—distinguishes between “freedom” at school and work...you actually get more freedom at school

Note. Each number in this table is representative of a theme. Themes are listed on page 56.