

**Exploring the Narrative Experience of Somali-Djiboutian
Youth In and About Ottawa Public Schools**

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January 2011

A thesis submitted to Ottawa University
in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this study to the Somali-Djiboutian students who have struggled, and those who continue to struggle for equality and equity within Ottawa's educational system. Through pain, frustration and tears, you have entrusted me with your most painful and humiliating educational experiences. Or have asked me to break the silence of your continued struggle to be afforded a basic right – a right to be educated equally as other Canadians. And while I could not undo what you have endured, I have nonetheless attempted to capture your voices and break your silence. I have attempted to bring into the public domain your pain and your suffering caused by the pervasiveness of racism and class discrimination in an unjust educational system. I respectfully salute your courage and the spirit with which you continue to fight for the right to be educated equally as other Canadians.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

BISMILLAAHI RAHMANI RAHIIM - In the name of Allah, **Most Gracious, Most Merciful**. I wish to thank, first and foremost, Allah for all his blessings.

I would like to thank my beloved parents and the whole of my family for all their unconditional support who modeled and instilled within me the value of hard work and perseverance. Their prayers and guidance have driven me to go the distance. I will be forever indebted to all of you.

I wish to express my appreciation to my supervisor, Dr. Awad Ibrahim, for his professional guidance in the preparation and completion of this project. His student-centered supervision and whole-hearted support let me implement my research ideas and complete work on schedule.

Very warm thanks to my thesis Examining Committee, Drs. Timothy J. Stanley, Natalie Bélanger and Joel Westheimer for their on-going support. It was a great pleasure to share my work with you and receive such valuable feedback.

Thanks to the Somali-Djiboutian community family services for supporting in this research.

Last but not least I would like to express my sincere appreciation to my daughter, sons, and also to my editors Elizabeth R. and Abdelaziz, Y.G.; the time they made available contributed greatly to my timely completion of this project.

ABSTRACT

This study is an examination into the schooling experiences of an immigrant group of students of Somali-Djiboutian origin who graduated from public schools in Northeastern Ontario over the last two to three years. I show that racialized, visible minority young people face unique barriers and struggles as the intersecting effects of race and class influence their experiences (see also, Desai and Subramanian, 2000; Ibrahim, 2005; Kilbride, Anisef, Baichman-Anisef & Khattar, 2000; Rummens, 2003). Their racialized experiences are central to this study, with special emphasis on how this experience either opens or closes social, material or academic possibilities. Through qualitative research based on interviews, the study explores how young people are able to articulate and negotiate their identities while going through the schooling process. To further investigate this process, I have used an antiracist framework that employs a structural analysis of racism and recognize the contradictory consciousness and consequences that are often involved in the struggle for justice in an inherently competitive and unjust educational system (Henry et al., 2000; Bannerji, 2000; Dei, 2006, 2005). Through their narratives, participants are able to break the silence and speak out with the aim of illuminating the tensions and contradictions between their experiences in relation to educational policy and actual school practices. The use of interviews reveals perspectives of the participants' dilemmas that have taken place within the formal and informal educational setting. The research participants were limited to eight graduates from high school in the last two to three years. It is hoped that the completed project may be used by members of the Somali-Djiboutian community to lobby for educational change.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION, BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

1.1 IN THE BEGINNING WAS...: AN OVERVIEW

The main purpose of this qualitative research project is to explore the educational experience of students of Somali-Djiboutian origin who are integrating in Canadian society and are also being integrated into Ontario's educational system at the high school level. According to Frances Henry and her colleagues, when it comes to visible minority students (Somali-Djiboutian students in this case), integration can be viewed as a process that allows them to become full participants in the social, educational and cultural life of Canadian society (Henry, Tator, Mattis & Rees, 2000, p. 408). While integration has been operationalized in terms of social, educational and cultural indicators, some authors argue that the full integration of immigrants would manifest itself in the representation of that population in educational institutions and societies (Anisef & Kilbride, 2000). However, minority young people face problems of a racialized nature, especially in the context of Canadian of Somali-Djiboutian background (see also, Ochocka, 2006). An attempt is made in this study to understand how such educational experiences could occur in the first place, and to see what the province of Ontario is doing to address them. Given the potentially detrimental effects of the processes and practices associated with racialization, it was imperative to examine the impact of race and class as central components of the integration process for the Somali-Djiboutian students under study. According to Galabuzi (2006), the process of racialization

involves the construction of racial categories as real, but also unequal, for the purposes that impact the economic, social, and political composition of a society...Racialization translates into actions and decisions within a system that lead to differential and unequal outcomes, and the entrenchment of structures of oppression (p. 34).

Based on my readings and research, I would further add to and enrich Galabuzi's definition of racialization. To be precise, the process of racialization includes negative elements of an enduring racial hierarchy which serve as the background for continued oppression. During the process of racialization, this perspective is made concrete in the classification of people by their skin color. The product of racialization is unfair treatment and it is associated with unequal outcomes, with wide-reaching effects in all spheres of life on a daily basis. Combining Galabuzi's definition with the observations above, my working definition in this thesis for racialization is as follows:

The process of racialization emerges in the context of a racial hierarchy, which serves as the background for continued oppression. This perspective is made concrete through the construction of racial categories as real, but also unequal, for purposes that impact all spheres of life. Unfair treatment is the direct product of racialization, leading to differential and unequal outcomes.

This creation of difference or 'othering' can, whether actual or perceived, itself form targets for racially motivated activity (Mason, 2005, p. 587). First impressions of racially motivated activity are considered rare and atypical in the opinions of mainstream Canadians (Bissoondath, 2002). However, Perry (2001) argues that negative racially motivated activities (like hate crimes for example) are "not an aberration associated with a lunatic or extremist fringe, but a normative means of asserting racial identity relative to the victimized 'Other' or an enactment of the racism that allocates privilege along racial lines" (p. 89).

Racialization encourages negative difference recognition and it perpetuates the existing racial hierarchy and hegemony that we as a society have created collectively. Racialization stresses the importance of power within any societal and institutional structure (as education) and it makes apparent the many barriers and disadvantages that the marginalized are forced to mediate and negotiate. Francis Henry and Carol Tator (2007) also contend that racialization in Canadian society prevails today, insofar as individuals of African ancestry, for example, continue to be seen as “low educational achievers...and potential criminals, despite their long history in Canada and their high professional qualifications and ambitions” (cited in Taylor, James & Saul, 2007, pp. 159 -160).

According to Kailin (2002), we must analyze how race intersects with other aspects of our being, such as gender and class, in the formation of racist assumptions, attitudes and behavior (p. 22). In this study, participants’ narratives form the basis upon which greater understanding and knowledge are developed in regard to the various ways in which racial differences and economic factors may affect educational opportunities and outcomes. Furthermore, an attempt is made to examine the degree to which racial differences may mediate the relationships between teachers and administrators and Somali-Djiboutian parents and students, particularly those who are economically disadvantaged.

Working with community groups, namely students in this research, my hope was (and still is) to enable members of the community to get involved in the project and, upon its completion, to use it as a tool to lobby for educational change on behalf of Canadian students of Somali-Djiboutian origin in Ontario

public schools. Most importantly, I hope to enable members of the community to engage educators in discussions or debates on racism and its egregious effects and other educational issues facing visible minority students. In this light, understanding the integration struggles of visible minority youth in schooling is important in identifying and addressing their needs (Anisef, Baichman-Anisef & Siemiatycki, 2004; Kilbrides, Anisef, Baichman-Anisef & Khattar, 2000; Tonks & Paranjpe, 1999). The overall objective of this study is to look closely into the educational inequality facing ‘Black’ students of Somali-Djiboutian origin in Ontario’s educational system. One of the study’s main benefits will be the question of voice: Those whose stories might have otherwise remained silent are told here; hence, helping in the deconstruction of their educational reality as experienced in the Ontario school system. As Nagle (2001) puts it, “Voice is the tool by which we make ourselves known, name our experience, and participate in decisions that affect our lives” (p. 10).

1.2 DESCRIPTION OF THE PROBLEM AND RATIONALE FOR THE STUDY

It is impossible to reflect on Canadian principles of civil society without taking into consideration the growing diversity of Canada triggered by immigration. Recent statistics indicate that approximately 16.2% of Canadians classified themselves as members of a visible minority group (Statistics Canada, 2009). The educational system appears to have been ill-prepared to receive such large numbers of new arrivals from overwhelmingly diverse and primarily so-called Third World backgrounds, including Africa, South Asia, the

Caribbean and Latin America.

Today the Somali-Djiboutian population is one of the largest and newest visible minority ethnic groups in Ontario. As a Black immigrant population, they are socially, politically, and economically challenged (not to say excluded) and racialized from ever becoming full citizens of this land, because they are marked as ‘others’ by mainstream Canadian society (Brown, 2006; Dei, 2008). This revelation has impacted the necessity for me to look at Somali-Djiboutian students’ experiences and their journey of survival. Phinney and Rotheram-Borus (1987) define “ethnic group” in broader terms to refer to “any collection of people who share attributes” (cited in Gordon-Popatia, 1994. p. 37). This new ethnic community, building on my personal experience as a Somali-Canadian, continues to face settlement issues resulting from differences in culture, religion, family values and traditions (see also Ighodaro, 1997). Young people within this ethnic group have joined the ranks of other Black youths who are over-represented in the justice system and who are also experiencing high rates of educational inequalities which result in their being pushed out of the school system altogether (Ibid.). Despite the ethnic differences between Somali-Djiboutian youth and other minority youth in the wider Black community, these ethnic differences appear to melt away in public schools, because the issues being identified by ‘the Black community’ as a whole are seen as being solely due to race and class differences rather than ethnic differences (Dei & al., 2000; Ibrahim, 2008). Berry and Laponce (1994) argued that the terms ethnicity, race and religion are sometimes interchangeable and sometimes not (p. 5). In fact, Ibrahim (1998) asserted that the

visible minority of African origin was seeking space, representation and identities and that they integrated well with identifiable Black youth. The individual who is identified because of his/her skin color is not given much choice to break loose from such barriers of social mobility placed upon his/her identity. As Ibrahim (2003) noted, we live in a society that is highly race conscious. It seems likely that this preoccupation with race is to the detriment of our ability to recognize consequences arising from ethnic differences.

One obstacle to any attempt to investigate racial inequality in public schools is that it is often denied and rarely acknowledged by education officials. According to Niemi (2005), “De facto separation of students by economic class and race continues unchallenged in what is supposed to be an equal opportunity school system” (p. 484). This project will be an attempt to vigorously challenge this “culture of silence” (Delpit, 1988). In this respect, it will follow in the footsteps of other scholarly endeavors - both Canadian and otherwise - which have sought to expose the reality of educational disenfranchisement of Black youth (Wortley, 2003; Dei, 1995, 1996; Ibrahim, 2003; Ruck & Wortley, 2002; Giroux, 2000; Kailin, 2002; Nieto, 2004; Quirouette, 1990; McLaren, 2000; among many others) in the face of official and bureaucratic denial.

According to Young & Levin (2002), “Public schooling, especially through the mechanism of streaming, creates social class inequalities” (p. 254). These unequal educational opportunities and outcomes may be the result of unequal educational practices. Such practices, they argue, have not been acknowledged or legitimized in most public schools. Incidents that expose such a

culture of silence are often seen as isolated rather than systemic, and the problem is minimized. Therefore many parents think that the education system is failing their children. As Ighodaro (1997) has asserted, some parents who have attempted to participate in school affairs felt unwelcomed and ignored by school administrators and this corroborated their children's complaints of racism and discrimination (p. 51). It is worthwhile therefore to investigate how, if at all, this alienation from the school system contributes to the socioeconomic marginalization of the Somali-Djiboutian community. According to Berry (1992), marginalization results when visible minorities fail to maintain the culture and psychological connection with their indigenous culture or with that of the host society, especially within educational institutions. Other studies on Somali-Djiboutian students in education reached similar conclusions (Ighodaro, 1997). Effective integration of Somali-Djiboutian students in the school system requires that school authorities take into consideration the educational concerns and needs of the Somali-Djiboutian parents and youth, and widely confer with their community representatives "in a determined search for solutions" (Opoku-Dapaah, 1995, p. 65).

A false perception of educational equality has been created and vigorously defended in the current educational system. As Magnusson (2001) has argued, "We do not really 'buy into' the discourse of educational equality; yet we continue to maneuver through social reality as if, for example, racial discrimination did not exist" (p. 99). In order to develop a responsible discussion of the problems experienced by visible minority students, it is necessary to begin

with a thorough understanding of the source of inequality in educational performance. Furthermore, this requires a culturally responsive pedagogy to deal with “difference” in public schools.

To understand this dilemma facing the Somali-Djiboutian youth, I took as an example a closer look at the Quality Assurance Office located within one of the School Boards in Ottawa, where all my research participants frequented school. When asked to elaborate on the role of the Quality Assurance Office, the officer reported that the Board ensures that all public schools deliver equal quality education to all students through the national testing program, which measures the achievement levels amongst the student population on a national level. When asked how non-White groups can ascertain how well their students are doing nationally in comparison to students from the dominant group, the official responded that those statistics are simply not available. When asked how then can the Black community prove that a disparity exists in relation to the high suspension, expulsion, and drop out rate of young Black people particularly males, the officer responded that while it is factual that the majority of students who get suspended or expelled are males, there are no data that establishes a disparity in the application of the Boards’ disciplinary practices towards Black males.

The official stated that if school administrators were concerned about any existing disparity it is up to that administrator to request such data, which would then enable the Board to address the issue. According to the official, to date no such disparities have been reported by school administrators. If school

administrators do not report disparities in their public schools, educational inequality does not exist; therefore, quality assurance has been achieved (personal communication, 2008). In short, no solutions are being sought because the official position is that there are no inequalities facing Black students in Ottawa's public schools.

Despite the role of the Quality Assurance Office, and despite the claim that educational equality exists in Ottawa's public schools, my aim in this research is to see the veracity of this claim in the Somali-Djibouti communities. Building on my own observation, however, Somali-Djiboutian youths of school age and males in particular are often seen during school hours hanging out on the streets, in the malls, in arcades or just hanging around each other's neighborhoods. The question then becomes, why are they not in school? and what future do they have without an education? Consequently, while educators in Ottawa are evading the questions of racism and classism inequality and the high dropout rates amongst Somali-Djiboutian youth in their public schools, the Somali-Djiboutian communities are struggling for answers and solutions to the miseducation of their youth, particularly males. To this end, this study aims to examine the educational experiences of Somali-Djiboutian youth with the hope of engaging the various educational stakeholders in honest and open dialog regarding the educational plight of young Black people who are economically disadvantaged.

Public schools can do a lot more, Dei (1996) argues, to improve the environment for all students by avoiding prejudice of students based on their set

of circumstances. The literature supports and reveals a disparity in the school system which not only maintains the status quo but also aims to promote monoculturalism and White dominance (Nieto, 2004; Giroux, 2000; Dei, 2000). With an increasingly multiracial, multi-faith, multilingual and multicultural student population in Canadian education system, school personnel within the field and entering the field do not reflect this dynamic: the demographic composition of the majority of teachers and teacher candidates are White, middle class and female (James, 2007; Solomon, Portelli, Daniel & Campbell, 2005). Education is a political act and the role of the teacher, at least as far as antiracism is concerned, should be that of consciousness raising and an activist for democratic reforms in the school setting (Alladin, 1996, p.16). If Eurocentric schooling is not to blame, and had education been more multi-centric and equitable, then this gap might be greatest when the student first enters school but it might gradually narrow over time. However, it seems the contrary holds true, and these differences appear to widen with time (Dei, 2000). As Stanley (2002) has argued, “School is about and for White people” (p. 13). By blaming the students for their own problems, deficit explanations seem to accomplish nothing except to minimize the responsibility of public schools with respect to the role they play in the construction of “difference” and failure in public education.

1.3 BLACK VS. SOMALI-DJIBOUTIAN

The Somali-Djiboutian Community is one of the newest communities in Canada, arriving in the 1990s. It is also the largest racialized/Black community in Ontario. As a “Black” immigrant population and first generation Canadians, they

have many social, political, educational and economic barriers, similar to previous generations of African-Canadians who have been racialized.

Somali-Canadian young people are suffering from marginalization and social exclusion because they are marked as the racialized other by mainstream Canadian society. Somali-Djiboutian youth constitutes the first generation of ethnic Somalis to be raised in Canada and they are often faced with the challenge of having to negotiate their identity in a social environment that has systematically racialized them (Ibrahim, 2008). In light of this, the media has depicted Somali-Djiboutian as uncivilized, undeserving, and problematic members of a tribal community, notably in a *Toronto Life* article, “Dispatch from Dixon” written in the summer of 1995, during the height of the influx of Somali refugees. My analysis in this article indicates how the Somali-Djiboutian identity was socially constructed through a colonial lens. Somali-Djiboutian youths are being deprived of achieving any meaningful success in their lives as a result of their racialized status. As such, there are no existing constructive and systemic voice recovery mechanisms in which Somali-Canadian youth can express themselves. These circumstances forced Somali-Djiboutian young people to associate themselves with other Black communities in Ontario, even though in fact they do not have anything in common with them (such as cultural, language, ethnicity, and religion) other than the color or their skin. Hence, they enter the process of ‘becoming Black’ (Ibrahim, 1998, 2008). Somali-Djiboutian youths believe that by engaging in the politics of cultural resistance they can recognize and resist all the ways in which misrepresentation has framed them.

I believe that by engaging in cultural struggle, a powerful libratory tool of de-colonization/de-racialization, Somali-Djiboutian youth may be allowed to regain their humanity, as this process may permit them to see themselves outside the Eurocentric discourse and imagery that is ascribed to their identity by others. The process of cultural resistance and cultural rediscovery may allow Somali-Djiboutian youth to collect themselves from the margin, regroup, and collectively stand together at the trajectory of change. Graveline (1998) reminds us that “for every act of authority...is resistance...in some form embodied...enacted. Our lived experience... How we resist is culture... is context bound as is how we exert authority” (33). At present Somali-Djiboutian young people are socialized through their culture and in their homes to be Somali-Djiboutian and African, while they are simultaneously marked as racialized Black youth by the greater Canadian society (Ibrahim, 2008; Brown, 2006; Dei, 2008).

1.4 RESEARCHING THE RESEARCHER

In times of great struggles, I often reflect on my parents’ narratives, with their determination to survive and their desire both for themselves and their children to have a higher education. I use these moments of remembrance as a source of strength to enable me to endure and persevere through my own struggles. It has also helped to shape my passion for equal education, because although education was a privilege for which my Somali parents had no entitlement in their homeland, today education is a right for all Canadian children.

My experiences of being a new Canadian of African origin have also played an instrumental role in helping to shape my reality and ‘hyphenated-identity’ as a Somali-Canadian. The problem with the practice of hyphenation, according to Mahtani (2002a, 2002b), is that it produces alienation from the rest of the Canadian population based on ethnicity (p. 78). By the same token, Stanley (1998) argued, “In Canada, the visible choices are belonging or exclusion, Canadianness or alienness” (p. 48). At the center of racist discourse, one discovers the contested presumption of who is defined as ‘Canadian.’ For the dominant group this involves whiteness, while racial stereotypes distinguish the ‘other’ as identifying features with associations suggesting inferiority. Consequently, the motive and rationale for alienation of minority groups allows the dominant groups to re-create whiteness as superiority, while castigating the ‘other’ for their presumed being. The following testimony of two groups (Somalis and Whites) of Ottawa public high school students in a study mentioned by Stanley (1996) reinforces and demonstrates this dilemma:

.....The report conflates ‘racism’ and ‘violence’ and implies that Somalis differences - Blackness, newness in Canada, ESL - is the root cause of this racism. According to this reading, the report, for all of its antiracist intent, ends up acting out the racist exclusion of Somalis and the meanings they make of their circumstances, while perpetuating racialisation and at the same time ascribing racial identities that many Somalis may not accept.

From this perspective, the schooling environment provides visible minority students with an inappropriate experience of the ‘real world’ of learning. It is through racializing experience in the ‘real world’ that Somali-Djiboutian students will acquire skills for the learning process. Such negative experience will not enable Somali-Djiboutian students to acquire and possess valuable personal

skills, habits and attitudes in our multicultural society. Positive experience, then, is an important commodity for visible minority students who desire success in schooling. Like many “Black” immigrants, I have also faced - and continue to face - varying degrees of inequality in all aspects of Canadian society, e.g. employment, education, etc. In a social class-based society, ethnic and racial differences are used as convenient grounds for justifying the marginalization of the visible minority by dominant groups (Li, 1998, 2001; Pendukar, 2000; Galabuzi, 2001). In addition, Li (2001) asserted that blocked social mobility pushes many immigrants towards employment in the ethnic enclaves. Thus, the following discussion will focus on the educational challenges and struggles faced by my family and our community, which form part of the broader group known as ‘Canadians of Somali-Djiboutian origin’.

Like many newly arrived immigrant families, we received subsidized housing. My daughter began kindergarten at the age of three. Families residing in privately owned, middle-class homes which were located around our housing complex did not send their children to the neighborhood public school. Their children were often sent to either French immersion or to the Catholic separate schools.

These, I learnt after years of being in Canada, were my middle-class neighbors’ strategies to avoid sending their children to the neighborhood public high school which had a reputation of streaming its largely working-class student population primarily into vocational study. The story is long, but this was my initiation into an unequal education system which appeared to be stratified

primarily by race and social class. Also, many immigrant parents feared sending their children to French-language public schools because they could not speak the language and their children could not access Catholic schools unless they could prove that their children were Catholic, or so they thought. That is, newly arrived immigrants are usually not informed about the Catholic school policy with regard to the eligibility of students to transfer from the public to the Catholic system. My reading of this as a newly arrived immigrant was that this was a means of excluding visible minority families from accessing a Catholic education.

Today however we see a shift whereby many visible minority students are attending Catholic schools, although they or their families are not Catholic (Statcan, 2006). Students wishing to transfer from the public system to the Catholic system are now armed with the correct information for a smooth transition from the Catholic to the public school system. However, whenever possible some Catholic schools continue to resist the flow of visible minority students coming from the public into the Catholic schools. I recognize that the personal cannot be the final judgment, nor can it be generalized, but I have personally experienced administrators and their staff from the Catholic system attempting to mislead and/or misinform parents about transferring from the public system. For example, I last encountered a school's attempt to deny access to a Somali student in 2002 on the grounds that she was not Catholic. Had I not been present, the staff, under the direction of the administrator, would have succeeded in misinforming the parent. However, after informing the staff that I was aware of the transfer policy, and reminding the staff that a student did not have to be

Catholic to attend the school, only then did the staff inform the parent that the school was filled to capacity and could not accept more students.

Such experiences made it difficult to trust teachers and staff. Once this trust was lost, I felt compelled to carefully monitor my children's involvement with their school, and in this way came to a most disappointing realization – incidents due to social class and race differences were pervasive throughout the educational system. The only apparent way to guarantee equal access, opportunity and outcome, was to personally police the system. In order to ensure that there were no surprises at the end of the school term, I developed a rudimentary routine of debriefing my children after school each day. Through this practice, my children were able to reconstruct their daily school experiences including the level of work they were being assigned. If I thought that the level of work being assigned was not adequately preparing them for advanced university preparatory studies, I would supplement with additional assignments at home. Whenever I noticed an issue that needed immediate attention, I would address it at the school level.

This daily rigorous exercise meant regular meetings with teachers, and even more frequent visits to the principal's office. One such visit was prompted by my son's teacher telling the students in her grade three class that all immigrants will have to return to their country because Canada is not their permanent home. My young son came home distraught wanting to know when we would be leaving and why we have to leave. I had a very difficult time convincing him that Canada is his home and we were not leaving. The teacher's response to

my query was that she was not aware that Canada issued permanent resident visas and she thought that immigrants were here temporarily despite my child being born in Canada. At a very early age Black students were being told that they did not belong in Canada; that they were not Canadians.

Another example of unfairness and discrimination occurred to my son in June 2008. On the morning school bus, some White boys were throwing a water balloon around. It landed on my son who instinctively pushed it away. At this moment it burst. The driver reported the incident to the vice-principal who subsequently interviewed my son in his office and bullied him into leaving a message on my voice mail saying that he had burst the balloon on the bus. From my voice mail, I could hear the vice- principal's voice dictating to my son what to say and my son was repeating it word for word. There was no explanation given by my son nor was he allowed to defend himself. Later, the vice-principal suspended my son that same day without speaking to me at all. My son was the only person to be punished even though the balloon did not belong to him and as the bus driver had reported to the vice-principal, the other boys were involved. The punishment, one may argue, was excessive and beyond any normal sense of justice, and furthermore no one spoke to me, his father.

These are the kind of incidents that deserve further investigation. Whether intended or not, they are read as a form of what Philomena Essed (1991) calls "everyday racism." They are very hard to investigate and exceptionally difficult to justify. In his schooling on racism up until this point, my son had only been shown half the picture of racism by solely focusing on those who are targeted by

it. To look at racism in this manner is dangerous because it conveys the idea that racism is a racially motivated activity against the people of color. For one, the criterion of *racially* motivated activity – refers to an unjust action in which the victim is representative of a presumed racial classification in a racial group. Such activity is one example of the paradox of multiculturalism, where ‘other,’ due to their supposed differences are neither tolerated nor accepted, as Canadian. This emerges in the context of a racial hierarchy, which serves as the background for continued oppression. This perspective is made concrete through the construction of racial categories as real, but also unequal, for purposes that impact all spheres of life. Similarly, Levin (2002) explains that, “the seeds for recognizing and eventually protecting [race, class, ethnicity, gender and religion] on the basis of status are found in history, that often and conversely, used status as a pretext for unfair treatment and the deprivation of rights” (p. 230). Through this lens, one can examine and pity the ‘victim’ and note the injustices present in our public educational institutions without acknowledging the cause of this ‘*crime*’ which is racially motivated activity.

It is in this regard that Kelly Welch (2007) noted that, “talking about crime is talking about race” (p. 276). That White people benefit from racist institutions raises the question: if someone recognizes that a group of people are benefiting from a system that oppresses others and then does nothing about it, are they not then complicit in furthering the system? In resistance, some scholars (Perry, 2001; Mason, 2005) argue that what is conventionally defined as hate crime needs to be expanded to include subtle and structural forms of discrimination (racism) by

linking larger accounts of bigotry that lend themselves to various forms of hate motivated activity in society. Yet, as Ibrahim (2004) has shown, they form a central basis for the schooling experience of a large part of minoritized students', especially Black students' schooling experiences. This situation posed many problems for me and had shattered my sense of security and confidence in school administrations. It also raised a number of questions that ruminated in my mind months later: Does this happens to others? How can something like this happen in our multicultural society? I was overcome with a mix of emotions: I did not know what to do and I did not know who could support me and help me through this difficult time. I was unsure of how to handle this event having led a sheltered existence; it was one of the first times that my son was made to feel different because of the color of his skin. As a defense, I tried to diminish the significance of this incident and I tried to overlook the ugliness, but as time passed, I found it increasingly hard to ignore. Talking about her feelings as a Black woman, the renowned law scholar Patricia J. Williams (1991) best articulates the feelings I had at the time when she explains:

There are moments in my life when I feel as though a part of me is missing. There are days when I feel so invisible that I can't remember what day of the week it is, when I feel so manipulated that I can't remember my own name, when I feel so lost and angry that I can't speak a civil word to the people who love me best (p. 228).

I felt so embarrassed as ashamed I did not know what to do. Eventually, this confusion and anger transformed into action and determination. Seeing his racialized body appeared to give school administration a sense of entitlement to a power that he (my son) will never have or ever be able to possess. It was these

and many other incidents in tandem that forced me to stop and examine my role as a parent and, more specifically my role as a racially minoritized teacher. These two racial-related incidents had an immeasurable effect on my conceptualization of race, class, power; they propelled me to examine how race and class in all forms impact the Canadian education system. While these acts of racial discrimination may have been open acts of ignorance, racism has evolved to take a subtle form that continues to be present in social and educational institutions. In the past, racism was mostly expressed in overt forms of discrimination that were based solely on biological physical features. We now understand race to be a social construction of categories: not of scientific biological differences. George Dei (1996) explains that:

Notwithstanding the fact that there are still important forces in society who argue for biological differences and intelligence, the current strength of the social meaning of race rests on the understanding that the concept cannot be defined biologically. Rather as many have pointed out, race is a product of specific socio-historical and political contexts (p. 42).

Thus began my personal challenges and struggles within the educational system. However, over the years, I have discovered that my various struggles were not unique because they were the same as those of many other visible minority families of lower socio-economic class. Therefore, as I learned about the education system, its policies and practices and discovered the many ways in which public schools structured inequalities, such as streaming, suspension, misguidance etc., I became active in educational advocacy for economically disadvantaged families. Years of educational advocacy have now led me to this study.

My perspective in doing this research can be understood from three angles: as a Canadian of Somali-Djiboutian origin, as a parent of ethnic minority children in the Ontario public school system, and as a community advocate for parents and children of Somali-Djiboutian origin in the Ontario public school system. As a Canadian of Somali origin, I was aware that the situation in our community in the mid- to late 1990s was especially difficult. This period coincided with the high point of the Somali civil war. As Somali-Djiboutians began to settle in Canada, this community's identity was constructed through the colonial gaze of the media. My aim is to show how the categorization of Somalis as 'Other' continues to marginalize the community. Clearly understanding this process is essential, because it has had, and continues to have, profound implications on how Somalis-Djiboutian youths are viewed today in the Canadian landscape. This forms a part of my perspective in my effort to show Somali-Djiboutian youth striving to succeed in education without losing their identity and hope. On the other hand, as a father, I wish my children to succeed and contribute in our society.

1.5 CULTURAL RESILIENCY AND HOPE

The participants belong to a new generation in Canadian society with either a very limited notion or notion at all of the main stream majority and of how the Canadian educational system works. In addition, they face many barriers in their bid to integrate into the Canadian educational system - barriers such as language, race, religion, culture, ethnicity and class. These difficulties forced this ethnic group to associate with others in the Black community with whom they

have not much in common other than skin color. Despite all these challenges my participants were convinced that in order to get through high school, they had to use their ancestral culture, because not graduating from high school was just not an option for them. They knew that they were facing racism and classism and that, if they did not overcome the challenges, these challenges would socially deform them, and ultimately even break them. This was a profound realization, and it allowed them to understand the negative power of racism and classism. As the Somali proverb goes, “*a large body of water, as well as a people of majority, will drown you*”.

1.6 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The previous section is best described as the “Purpose of the Study.” In it, I gave not only my own investment into this research project, but an overview of why it is urgently needed. This is the first study I know of that is dealing with the ever-growing Somali-Djiboutian population in Northeastern Ontario. The study acts as a follow up to Ibrahim’s study in the late 1990s, which was conducted in Southwestern Ontario. The similarities are striking, as we shall see. Ibrahim’s study is ethnographic in nature, while mine is based on interviews and personal narratives and experiences. My study is guided by the following questions:

1. How are these educational experiences constructed? And By whom? How do young people construct them themselves, how do their parents or their teachers construct them?
2. To what degree do racializing differences affect the relationships between school administrators, parents and students, particularly those who are economically

disadvantaged? This assumes racial difference with administrators. Unless a specific context is identified, this likely cannot be assumed. What if the study is in the school with the one Black principal in this city? Also, is the interest here Blackness or Somali-Djiboutian? These are very different categories, even if one is likely to map onto the other.

3. How can barriers to the integration of visible minority (Somali-Djiboutian) youths in public schools be eliminated?

1.7 MAPPING THE CHAPTERS

To conclude this introduction, I offer a chapter-by-chapter outline of the project that follows. Chapter Two serves as a critical review of the scholarly literature surrounding debates over the issue of educational equality. Specifically, I have focused on describing and evaluating the various and competing scholarly attempts to clarify the ideological foundations according to which we should understand the school as either an agency for, or an obstacle to, achieving equal educational opportunity and/or outcomes.

Chapter three serves as a bridge between literature review and theoretical framework. I outline the debate by comparing four ideological frameworks - Conservative, Liberal, Critical Multicultural, and Antiracist. I then assess each of these models by determining the possibilities for educational transformation that exist within each framework, within the context of a democratic and pluralistic society. In addition, recognizing that no theoretical framework is without critique, I juxtapose each framework against the arguments of its critics in relation to inclusive education. For example, I wanted to know from American and Canadian

perspectives how scholars within each framework viewed white dominance in the school structure and its impact on the education of minorities.

A review of the literature, and also an understanding of the main philosophical thoughts behind the powers that have the greatest influence on our school system, enabled me to situate my study within a framework that I believe offers the best opportunity for educational transformation within a multicultural society. The study was conducted within a framework whose tenets are oppositional and which offers the possibility of rupturing existing educational arrangements that preserve the status quo.

Having reviewed and evaluated the various ideological perspectives in Chapter Three, I was able to settle on a theoretical framework for the study. Chapter Four provides the rationale for the selection of the chosen framework, and it further expands on the ways in which I believe this framework provides the best opportunity for me to write in a critical and oppositional manner aimed at challenging existing tensions and contradictions within the dominant framework. In addition, I justify my position that a discourse that employs an oppositional and critical pedagogy is essential in challenging white dominance.

Chapter Four is used to explain the rejection of any discourse that has historically denied or perpetuated racial inequality, whether intentionally or unintentionally, and which continues to do so.

Chapter Five discusses the purpose, goals and objective of the study. It also specifies the issues that were identified by members of the Black community in Ottawa that motivated me to conduct this study. I later identify and justify my

decision to employ a qualitative research method based on interviews designed to investigate the educational problems facing Somali-Djiboutian youth. In summary, the research process described in Chapter Five sets the stage for Chapter Six.

Chapters Six and Seven are devoted exclusively to the narratives of the participants and subsequent discussion as they reconstructed their educational journeys. Due to the silencing of the students, particularly economically disadvantaged Somali-Djiboutian youth, within the educational system, I felt it was critical that they be given the opportunity to tell their stories using their own voice in order to break the existing silence within Ottawa public schools. These narratives encompass the overt and covert racism due to stereotyping, zero tolerance, school as a hostile environment, racial profiling, criminalization of Black youth, and the role of class in education and differential treatment. They further represent the various ways in which racism manifests itself in school practices or impacts the learning experiences of marginalized students. As a result, in some cases Chapters Six and Seven contain lengthy quotes where I allowed the participants to narrate their educational experiences at the hands of teachers, compared to the treatment their white peers received.

Chapter Eight discusses the issues of contradiction between policy and practice, systemic streaming, school as a hostile environment, low teacher expectation, zero tolerance, the reality of Somali-Djiboutian students' experiences, racial profiling, suspension and criminalization of Somali-Djiboutian youth in the school system. This Chapter begins with a review of the policies of

the Ottawa-District School Board and the Ottawa-Catholic School Board on equality and diversity, which are aimed at promoting a learning environment that is welcoming, safe and inclusive. These policies are later interwoven throughout the discussion of the various issues that illuminate the tensions and contradictions between the Boards' policies and actual school practices that yield unequal outcomes for some students. In addition, efforts are also made to develop and expand knowledge around some of the themes that emerged from the narratives of the participants. I felt it was critical to deconstruct as well as reconstruct some issues that were raised which contribute to the alienation of certain students within Ottawa public schools. Also, the in-depth discussion of certain issues was aimed at highlighting assumptions that were made by participants which have contributed to even more inter-cultural misunderstanding between teachers, administrators and students.

Consequently, Chapter Nine serves two purposes: First, it builds on previous chapters (Five, Six, Seven and Eight) and elaborates on ethnic, premature grading practices due to negative race attitudes. In addition, it identifies the roots of what I am calling *ethnic grading* practices and the effect of ethnic grading practices (shaming and doubting), the need for more racially diverse educators in Ottawa public schools and the lack of diversity towards an inclusive curriculum. I demonstrate that white dominance is firmly rooted in the educational system, which has resulted in a correlation between the educational experiences of the participants and my own experiences. Secondly, I offer suggestions on ways in which many of the issues highlighted by the participants

could be addressed by connecting the Boards' policies with actual school practices for the benefit of all students. Chapter Nine concludes with a brief summary of the overall dissertation.

Chapter Ten reviews the lack of accountability and the obstruction of personal liberty and social equality; it also offers recommendations relating to the educational experiences of Somali-Djiboutian youth in Ottawa public schools.

Finally, Chapter Eleven reflects on the findings of this project, and will provide a summary of the major findings of the study.

1.8 CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

While educators in Ottawa continue to make claims of equal educational opportunity, access and outcome, members of the Black community are making counter claims that refute this notion that Ottawa public schools offer a safe, nurturing learning environment where all students are equal regardless of race, religion, culture, etc. It is the tension and contradictions between the educational policies of the Boards, school practices and the actual educational experiences of the students that this study seeks to address. In addition, this Chapter highlights my historical journey as well as my earlier educational struggles that have shaped my identity and continue to fuel my passion for educational equality. As such, my personal and professional experiences together with the continued struggles of many Somali-Djiboutian families, particularly those who are economically disadvantaged, have motivated and impacted my decision to conduct this study. The following chapter provides an examination of the literature related to this

study which draws from Canada and the United States, as well as a reference to a few British scholars.

CHAPTER TWO

DISCUSSION AND LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 INTRODUCTION

This literature review intends to familiarize the reader with relevant research studies and provide a background to the main social settings pertinent to this study: visible minorities (Black) and racialization in schooling, cultural identity which is shaped within the settings of community, effects of race and established practices in education and socioeconomic status (SES). Specifically, this study will focus on determining whether, and in what way, the aspects of race and class affect the integration of visible minority youth in their schooling. Concerning concepts of race and social class, Stephen Gould (1996) notes the impact of the concept of race and its use as a basis for the oppression of others:

We pass through this world but once. Few tragedies can be more extensive than the stunting of life, few injustices deeper than the denial of an opportunity to strive or even to hope, by a limit imposed from without, but falsely identified as lying within (p. 61).

Thus, when the categories of race and social class are used as markers of inherent difference, they have a profound impact on the intersubjective experiences of visible minority students and teachers in their daily interactions. The dynamics of race and social class, as Banks (2010) has shown, have played an important role in structuring the educational system. Issues of race and social class have implications for the ways in which our public schools are organized, the explicit goals that are embodied in our curricula, the ways in which we teach and the ways in which we strive to improve our role as educators.

Empirical research on the experience of visible minority groups examines

factors such as race (Phinney et al., 1997), physical appearance and peer social acceptance (Harter, 1990), school transitions (Vega & Rumbaut, 1991), academic achievement (Markstrom-Adams & Adams, 1995), and acculturation (Gil, Vega & Dimas, 1994). These studies found that, when it comes to discrimination, it is a “race related” factor that predicted these students' experiences such as underachievement, failure, streaming, suspension, low grading and criminalization of Black youth, classism, racism, and alienation from schooling (Quirouette, 1990; Dei, 1995, 1996; RCOL, 1994).

Quirouette (1990) conducted an empirical research study to identify “probable school leavers” in Ontario public schools. The study was carried out in forty English language schools in Ontario. 6,832 grade nine students in total participated in the “School and Me” questionnaire. The findings of the study revealed that 39% of the boys and 36% of the girls were identified as "at risk" (p. 9). The study reported that the highest number of "at risk" students were dealing with feelings of isolation. By the same token, the Royal Commission on Learning (RCOL) (1994) reported the presence of a crisis among visible minority students in education and explicitly noted "a crisis among Black youth" with respect to "education and achievement" (cited in Smith et al., 2005, p.349). This revelation is compelling, yet what it means and whose responsibility it is, is a question that is quite frequently silenced.

George Dei's (1995a) study, *Drop Out or Push Out? The Dynamics of Black Students' Disengagement in School*, is of critical importance to my research. This was a three-year study, working with Ontario Institute for Studies

in Education (OISE)/ University of Toronto graduate students who examined the dropping out of school by Black students. In total, 150 Black students from 4 metro public schools and over 24 other students were selected at random from metro high public schools. Also, 21 school "dropouts," 7 "at risk" students, 41 teachers, 55 Black parents and 59 non-Black students were interviewed to cross-reference narratives of Black students about their experiences with public schooling in Ontario. Findings of Dei's study illustrate how the politics of differences in Eurocentric schooling serve to benefit White students at the expense of Black students. Because of this perceived lack of caring, some minority students may develop an internalized tendency to alienate themselves from learning which could lead to their dropping out (Dei, 1995). In response to these findings of resistance to learning, my project will contribute to the understanding of how race, class and gender intersect to produce injustice and discrimination in education.

Solorzano and Yosso (2001) argue that race and racism intersect with other forms of subordination, such as social class and gender, in the formation of identity and experience. Intersectionality is a useful concept to identify how race and class interact with each other (and with other categories such as ability, gender, national origin, etc.), and how their combination can lay out in various settings such as public schools. This is further supported by Sherene Razack (2002) who writes that "race, gender, and class hierarchies structure (rather than simply complicate) each other" (p.15). These are a few of the many barriers facing visible minorities in schooling due to the profound changes in our

communities socially, economically and culturally. Recent statistics indicate that approximately 16.2% of Canadians are visible minorities (Statistics Canada, 2006). In Canada, visible minorities continue to be disadvantaged in employment status, socioeconomic status (SES), education, and judicial fairness (Ornstein, 2000, 2006; Williams, 1997). The role of race is highly relevant for understanding visible minority integration in the Canadian educational system (Thoits, 1995). Integration depends upon the degree of trust that students have in teachers and school administrators. Statistic Canada's Ethnic Diversity Survey (EDS) (2002) provides some insights regarding the lack of trust students have in school professionals. Analysis of this survey shows that the level of mistrust ranges from 4.5 percent for Chinese youth to 24 percent for Black students. The salience of this construct is highlighted in theoretical and empirical studies specifying how visible minority students derive a sense of meaning and purpose in life (Cross et al., 2001), a sense of community belongingness (Isajiw, 1990, 1999), and of personal well-being (Reitz, 2001a, 2001b).

Despite the denial of racism as a problem in education, Jeffrey (1999) found: "repeated references students and parents make to racism and discrimination in public schools... [And therefore suggests that] we must be honest about the issue of racism and work in partnership to eliminate it from individual, institutional and systemic practices" (cited in BC Human Rights Commission Report, 2001, p. 5). "...Race has become an effective tool for the distribution of rewards and punishments" (Castagna & Dei, 2000, p. 21). This is further supported by Joshi, Baker and Tanaka (2004) who find that color-

blindness and Whiteness are further maintained through the disciplinary actions taken against racial minority students in a Canadian school system where the administration and teaching staff are predominantly White. As a result of the administration's inability to recognize the cumulative impact of racism, the racial minority students received harsh punishments when they responded to racial taunts and threats that were minimized or dismissed as other incidents which did not name race as the key factor. The issues that face the visible minority are very complex and demand closer examination of how systemic racism has been instrumental in marginalizing the visible minority. Henry and Tator (2006) explain systemic racism as referring to the:

Laws, rules, and norms woven into the social system that results in an unequal distribution of economic, political, and social resources and rewards among various racial groups....systemic racism is manifested in the media by, for example, the negative representation of people of color, the erasure of their voices and experiences, and the repetition of racist images and discourse (p. 55).

Consequently, one important strategy suggested for challenging racism and social injustice in schooling is to unmask the existence of racism in all its forms (Ladson-Billings, 2003). Here, researchers have contended and shown that many White educators have low expectations of Black students (see especially Dei, 1995; Brathwaite & James, 1996). Such educational practices are partially responsible for creating inequalities and different structural power relationships in school systems.

In their study, Ruck and Wortley (2002) examine perceptions of differential treatment relating to school disciplinary practices in a racially and

ethnically diverse sample of high school students. Students completed detailed individual questionnaires assessing general perceptions of school disciplinary practices and various aspects of the school environment. Results indicated that the racial minority students believe they are often punished more harshly than their White peers. Interestingly, to further support the notion that a racial hierarchy is exemplified in the education system, the authors also found that students who were Black were more likely to perceive that they had received biased treatment. This perception of bias is next highest amongst South Asians, followed in gradually diminishing amounts by “other” races and ethnicities, Asian students, and then finally White students. The authors thus contend: “These findings are consistent with the view that the darker the skin colour, the greater the social penalties that exist” (p. 194). Other studies have reached the same conclusion that visible minority students encounter discrimination in different contexts, including public schools (Alladin, 1996; Landrine and Klonoff, 1996; Thomas and Willinsky, 1997) and legal systems (Wortley, 1996), and through a variety of sources including peer groups (J. Kelly, 1998a, 1998b), police (Wortley, 1996), and teachers (Ogbu, 1991; Solomon and Levine-Rasky, 1996). Recent empirical research appears to point to rigid school discipline, codes of conduct, expulsion and a zero tolerance “get-tough” policy that discriminates against Black students more than any other racial groups. While the politics around the policy of “zero tolerance” (Daniel, 2006; Verdugo, 2002) reduce open displays of such behavior in public schools, the strategy and design of tolerance as a means of promoting

safe schools has created a subtle form of racism (Ruck & Wortley, 2002). Jull (2000) argues:

School discipline policies based on the principles of zero tolerance reinforce Anglo-Eurocentric sensibilities of right and wrong and the authoritative structures within public education. To claim that social justice can be achieved through the implementation of a so-called unbiased zero tolerance school discipline policy is to believe that discriminatory practice can be eradicated by implementing policies that are blind to personal or individual social and/or cultural contexts....Equal treatment in an unequal social and academic environment is discriminatory (p. 4).

Introduction of such measures often reveals effects of the policing of Black youth in public schools and the policies which help perpetuate racial structural power (Ruck & Wortley, 2002; Henay, 2005). The experiences of Black youth, particularly males, is one of discipline and punishment, which leaves them with the idea that Black males are less academically inclined, untrustworthy, and lacking in discipline. The negative image that is portrayed in school and society, alas, is often internalized by the Black youth (Wortley, 1996).

Consequently, such differential treatment may lead to the funneling of racial and ethnic minority students, especially Black, into the criminal justice system. Here the subtle messages sent to Black students result in unfair treatment at school due to the lack of understanding of race and cultural identities. These messages, misperceptions if you like, according to Smith, Schneider and Ruck (2005), block their educational achievement. In the same vein, Dei (2008) notes that: "June 2003 Toronto school board report of student success indicators in 2001- 2002, revealing that 54% of students born in the English-speaking Caribbean had 14 credits or fewer at the end of Grade 10, rather than the 16

credits they were supposed to have accumulated at this level of schooling” (p. 352). A more recent report by Centre of Excellence for Research on Immigration and Settlement (CERIS), the Ontario Metropolis Centre, showed similar figures: a 42% drop out rate for Black students compared to 31% for White students and 18% for Asian students (Anisef et al., 2008). More specifically, the authors of the report argue that “students from the Caribbean were found to be most likely to drop out of school, while students from Eastern Asia were the least likely to leave school early” (Anisef et al., 2008, p. 20).

On the other hand, Ruck & Wortley (2002) note in their findings that Black students are more likely to be discriminated against and subjected to unfair treatment by police and differential treatment (suspension) by school authorities because of the students’ socioeconomic status (SES). Therefore, socioeconomic status is significant in that our access to material wealth, and our access to, and influence on, institutions of power (such as education and justice) have a major impact on Somali-Djiboutian students’ day to day lives. In the same vein, Anne Bishop (2002) argues, this may be a bit too radically, that “class is both the result and the foundation of all other forms of oppression” (p. 47). In discussing the complexity of class, Bishop describes the manner in which racism and other forms of oppression cut across economic lines. While these forms of oppression are present across all economic levels, their impact is much more profound for Black low income students. Bishop goes on to say that socioeconomic class is different from other forms of oppression on a structural level because “class is not just a factor in inequalities of wealth, privilege, and power; it is that inequality”

(Bishop, 2002, p. 82). Based on my readings and research, this inequality emerges in the context of a racial hierarchy, which serves as the background for continued oppression and unequal treatment for the purposes that impact all spheres of life. In the same vein, Ornstein (2006) noted in his data analysis that of Ethno-Racial Inequality in Toronto was based on race and those most disadvantaged were Somalis and other people from the African nations. Statistic Canada's Youth Survey (2003) revealed that high-school dropout rates have been found to vary by family income. These rates are three times higher for low-income youth than high-income youth.

So in order to come to grips with the theoretical issues and provide a basis for my analysis, it is necessary to review the main findings and ideas that one presently finds in the chosen area: the intersection of race and social class. In my research, therefore, it becomes necessary to pay closer attention to that intersectionality. So far however the literature has enabled me to understand the ways in which school fosters and structures inequality along the lines of race and class, where these systemic inequalities are maintained to the disadvantage of mainly non-White, working-class students (Castagna & Dei, 2000, p. 21; Ferguson et al., 2005; among others).

Mayor (2002) and Condrón and Roscigno (2003) suggest that socioeconomic segregation (namely, the impact of school funding on scholastic performance) between rich and poor neighborhoods contributes to inequality in educational attainment between affluent and impoverished students. For instance, affluent neighborhoods are able to provide more funding to certain public schools

through local property taxes that may influence performance by spending more per pupil (Mayer, 2002; Condon & Roscigno, 2003). Condon and Roscigno (2003) state that the “most important function of spending is instructional” because it involves teacher salaries (p.21). Therefore, public schools which receive more funding from local tax dollars are able to provide more qualified teachers by luring them from other districts with higher salaries (Figlio, 2001, 2005). However, Condon and Roscigno (2003) add that instruction also includes materials and supplies for students that can enhance learning. Moreover, “[these] nested inequalities’ mean poor children are far more likely than others to have inexperienced or uncertified teachers, teachers without a background in the subject matter, or teachers with relatively low academic skills” (Books, 2004, p. 106).

It is worth noting, finally, my analysis of the literature on race and socioeconomic class in relation to education of visible minority relies, among others, upon the pioneering work of Howe (1997), who argued that educational opportunities have to be meaningful to be worth wanting. Consequently, an educational opportunity worth wanting should be defined in terms of the interaction between individuals and educational institutions and not only in terms of the features of educational institutions. On the other hand, focusing primarily on the various ideological underpinnings of schooling, and given the long-standing political debate on equal educational opportunities (EEO) and equal educational results (EER) (Nieto, 2004; May, 1999; Howe, 1997), it will become imperative in my study to understand the main tenets of the four perspectives

discussed below. Examining various ideological arenas of multiculturalism in education amongst the conservative, liberal, critical and anti-racism will determine which perspective supports the status quo and which one offers the greatest possibility for educational transformation within a multicultural society. Through focusing on structural power relations, fairness and equity in Canadian education, the objective is to eliminate discrimination in order to achieve equality and equity in both educational opportunity and experience.

2.2 THE SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF DIFFERENCE

Taking a step towards fairness in education and making education reforms more effective require formulating a basis from which we can understand how the construction of *race and class* discrimination intersect in public schools. We need to examine how these differences are constructed and perpetuated; the problem is how they are interpreted, not just recognition of the differences (Dei and Calliste, 2000). The people who are considered “different” are referred to as “they”, or the “other”, as defined by the dominant group - that is “we”, the norm. Both “we” and “they” are socially constructed generalizations designed by the dominant group to categorize individuals they consider inferior. These generalizations serve to perpetuate the physical and economic differences that stratify people and continue to produce inequalities between “us” and “them” (Dei and Calliste, 2000; Ogbu, 2003). These stratified differences are responsible, at present, for minority students' mis-education and their view of themselves. Therefore, there is a need to define the key terms used in this thesis: race, racism and racialization. Social class

is as significant as ethnicity, so terse definitions will also be necessary. These definitions will be brief and will only capture how the terms will be used.

2.3 RACE, RACISM, RACIALIZATION AND SOCIAL CLASS

2.3.1 RACE

Our race influences our identities about who we are, where we come from and where we are going, in our social, political, and economic areas of life such as school and work. Some of our value and power is influenced by whether our race is in the majority or in the minority (Ibrahim, 2004). *Race* has been described as referring to a group of people who share biological and phenotypic characteristics that signify group membership, but also the social meaning of such membership in the larger society (Jones, 1997). More recently, it has been argued that race is a social construction typically used to create and justify social and political hierarchies that maintain the *status quo* for the dominant race (Smedly and Smedly, 2005).

The conception of race as a marker of difference can be traced back to the eighteenth century, when in some cases evidence suggests, that early notions of such categorization based on race were used to justify the slave trade in the West Indies (Banton, 2001). However, such categorization of race has largely been challenged by critics who hold that racial difference using different justification, other than socially constructed, is the underlying basis of racism (Henry, Tator, Mattis & Rees, 1999, p. 36). When understood this way, it becomes apparent that race is socially constructed in order to preserve a racial hierarchy that was

essential in order to protect the power of the racial majority and to enforce and reinforce their dominance in society.

Race is such an integral part to a person's identity that discussions about race highlight the importance it plays in society. Our society has been created in such a way that the colour of one's skin has different effects on one's experience, for example, being White can produce significantly different experiences than being black. To highlight this importance, Michael Omi and Howard Winant (1993) assert that:

At the level of experience, of everyday life, race is an almost indissoluble part of our identities. Our society is so thoroughly racialized that to be without racial identity is to be in danger of having no identity. To be raceless is akin to being genderless (p. 5).

Race can affect the ways a person is perceived by others, the ways they interact with others and the ways they interact with and within institutions.

2.3.2 RACISM

Racism, a hotly contested term, has a lengthy history that continues to change its meaning (Agnew, 2007, p. 11). Today, we understand that racism entails the attitudes, beliefs, thoughts, ideas, actions, and philosophies that continue to place racialized minority populations at a disadvantage. Miles (1989) explains:

Racism is therefore a representational form which, by designating discrete human collectivities, necessarily functions as an ideology of inclusion and exclusion: for example, the signification of skin colour both includes and excludes in the process of sorting people into the resulting categories. However, unlike the process of racialisation, the negative characteristics of the Other mirror the positive characteristics of Self. Racism therefore presupposes a process of racialisation but is differentiated from that process by its explicitly negative evaluative component. (p. 79).

This negative racial disadvantage serves to sustain the existence of the racial hegemony that is engrained into the daily lives, experiences, and interactions of each person. It reinforces racial opposition and the racial “other” through the inclusion and exclusion of certain groups. Himani Bannerji (1987) adds that “racism is not simply a set of attitudes and practices that they level towards us, their socially constructed “other”, but it is the very principle of self-definition of European/Western societies” (p. 11). Building on the notion of Orientalism, Bannerji strengthens the argument that white racial identity is created in relation to the non-white racial identity: that is, the “white norm” will always be asserted in relation to the non-white racial “other”.

2.3.3 RACIALIZATION

Racialization refers to the process of associating certain biological, social, physical, and intellectual features to certain races. These associations are often in addition to meanings (Henry et al., 1999). Robert Miles (1989) explains that racialization refers to:

Those instances where social relations between people have been structured by the signification of human biological characteristics in such a way as to define and construct differentiated social collectivities. The characteristics signified vary historically and, although they have usually been visible somatic features, other non-visible (alleged and real) biological features have also been signified. The concept therefore refers to a process of categorisation, a representational process of defining an Other (usually but not exclusively) somatically. (p. 75)

The process of racialization emerges in the context of a racial hierarchy, which serves as the background for continued oppression. This perspective is made concrete through the construction of racial categories as real, but also unequal, for purposes that impact all spheres of life.

Racialization encourages negative difference recognition and it perpetuates the existing racial hierarchy and hegemony that we as a society have collectively created. This is not to say that whenever difference is recognized a negative attitude is taken; however I am suggesting that racialization can encourage a negative recognition that does not celebrate difference, but rather problematizes it; within the context of racialization, difference is seen as abnormal and unacceptable. Vijay Agnew (2007) expands this notion of racialization to suggest that “The use of the term racialization, as opposed to race and racism, emphasizes that the definitions of white and black are inherently unstable, changing in different historical contexts and open to several meanings” (p. 10). This emphasizes the multiple meanings that racialization can imply or suggest, as well as the fluidity of the term “race”. In referring to the fluidity of identity, Homi Bhabha (1994) writes, “the social articulation of difference from the minority perspective, is a complex, on-going negotiation that seeks to authorize cultural hybridities that emerge in moments of historical transformation” (p. 2). She adds that “racialization is a process that occurs in the context of power relations, whether this process takes place in discourses, is systemic to structures and institutions, or is merely a matter of everyday encounters” (p. 10). Racialization stresses the importance of power within any societal and institutional structure (such as education) and it makes apparent the many barriers and disadvantages that the marginalized are forced to mediate and negotiate. At a deeper level, the process of racialization displays power relations in the daily lived experiences of each person, regardless of colour, race or

ethnicity, it highlights the role that race continues to play in society, and also, the inequality that still exists.

2.3.4 A SOCIO - ECONOMICAL PERSPECTIVE

The socio-economic framework demonstrates the connection between social class, economic status, and deficit thinking. This section is based on the work of Anyon (1980, 2008), Gaab (1993), Cuban (2004) and Fleras (2001). ‘Social Class’ is defined as groups of individuals who can be categorized by their relationship to scarce and valued resources such as wealth, power, status - a category of persons who occupy a similar rank with respect to their standing in the economy (Fleras, 2001). In the same vein, Anyon (2008) defines social class as an outcome of three relationships namely: (i) the way a person relates to the process of producing goods, services, and culture in society; (ii) how one relates to the aspects of the production process through one’s own work; and (iii) the relations one has to the system of ownership towards other people and themselves at work in society. To put it more blatantly, “[s]chools in complex industrial societies like our own make available different types of educational experience and curriculum knowledge to students in different social classes” in order to maintain the status quo (Anyon, 1980, p.67). The classroom practices in “inner city” public schools (i.e. public schools highly populated by low socio-economic status “minority students”) are rooted in deficit thinking attitudes and pedagogies which reinforce the status quo (Apple, 1979). Books (2004) also supports Apple’s conclusion: she claims,

[i]nequalities in family wealth are a major cause of inequalities in schooling [e.g. the physical conditions of the school, the unqualified

teachers, the biased standardized tests, the streaming of classes], and inequalities in schooling do much to reinforce inequalities of wealth among family in the next generation (Hoschschild and Scovronick as cited in Books, 2004, p. 106).

In other words, according to Books (2004) the deficit teaching approach in public schools helps reinforce economic inequities amongst the working-class. Gaab (1993) explains that working-class children were treated with a deficit approach because they were incapable of “success” due to their low economic status. “The early seeds of deficit thinking were being sown with the common belief that poor children were less “innocent” and thus had a natural disposition towards “inherent misbehaviour” (Gaab, 1993, p.178). Moreover, Gaab claims working-class students are targeted by “...social policies and the ideology of the social economists [that] are driven by the belief that the poor and uneducated are responsible for all the social pathology that exists in society” (Gaab, 1993, p.179). In response to these deficit-based social policies and ideologies aimed at working-class students, neoliberalism advises to “fix” the students by creating programs such as behavioural classes, special education classes, and home school programs (Gaab, 1993). Proponents [in positions of power] believed that by turning these [poor] children into useful, productive citizens they could eliminate the social ills of society. Unfortunately, these social programs were initiated with much indifference to the lives of the poor (Gaab, 1993, p.179).

2.3.5 Ethnicity and Ethnic Affiliations

Ethnicity refers to an embodiment of values, institutions, and patterns of behavior which incorporate a group’s historical experience and worldview (Deng, 1997, as cited in Chang and Dodd, 2001). Today scholars subscribe to numerous

understandings of ethnicity. While some consider ethnicity to be inherited, consisting of comparatively permanent traits, others view it as a categorization based on shared language, culture, traditions, values or sense of belonging. Over the last half century, however, a general consensus has emerged that recognizes ethnic affiliations as fluid constructs that change according to sociopolitical contexts (Henry and Tator, 2000, 2006, 2009).

2.4 THE SOMALI-DJIBOUTIAN COMMUNITY

This section provides an overview of the Somali-Djiboutian community and discusses their migration experiences in the early 1990's, including the challenges they faced in the educational system in Ontario.

Due to internal political unrest in their homeland, a wave of Somali-Djiboutian refugees came to Canada in the period of 1989- 1995 (Scott, 2001). Many Somali-Djiboutian children joined the Canadian school system in Ontario. Somali-Djiboutians are linguistically, religiously, ethnically and racially homogeneous. Arguing within the Somali-Djiboutian context, Samater (1994) and Lewis (1980, p. 5) made the point that Somali-Djiboutians are homogeneous and they enjoy a rich cultural heritage. The Somali-Djiboutian sense of self incorporates family, community, ancestors and religion and emphasizes interdependence rather than independence, and interrelatedness rather than separateness. This is captured in the Somali-Djiboutian saying "I am because we are and because we are therefore I am". People within a community are accountable to one another and individuals share in group accomplishments and failures. This is a relatively new community in Canada and their population is estimated at between 120,000 and

150,000 according to the 411 Initiative for Change (411: Somalia, 2007). Their socio-cultural practices and religious affiliations are not aligned with those of mainstream Canadians which may have created many problems and challenges for the Somali-Djiboutian community trying to integrate into the Canadian educational system and mainstream culture. Somali-Djiboutian youth faced further barriers as they were considered “Black youth” by the majority. In addition, there was further prejudice because they were Muslims and Islamphobia is prevalent, especially following 9/11.

CHAPTER THREE

3.1 BETWEEN LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORY

I have chosen this chapter as a bridge which coupled with the literature review, focuses primarily on the theories and studies underpinning most of the literature discussed in Chapter Two; it also paves the way as an introduction to Chapter Four, where my theoretical framework is discussed. It discusses multiculturalism, critical multiculturalism and anti-racism. I shall discuss them in this order.

3.1.1 MULTICULTURALISM IN CANADA (AND THE UNITED STATES)

Multiculturalism is, in many ways, a catchphrase used by diverse groups for a variety of reasons and interests, resulting in an array of conflicting and contradictory meanings. Similar to what has been happening in the United States and Britain, among many others, Canada has been engaged in much heated multicultural debate. Following this debate, and unlike Britain, the United States or Australia, for example, Canada was the first country to adopt an official multicultural policy, and this was done in 1971. Kymlicka (2002) noted that Canada's multicultural policy had four aims: to support the cultural development of ethnocultural groups; to help members of ethnocultural groups overcome barriers to full participation in Canadian society; to promote creative encounters and interchange among all ethnocultural groups; and to assist new Canadians in acquiring at least one of Canada's official languages (p. 15). Proponents of multiculturalism consider Canada a land of ethnic diversity where people are

encouraged to retain ties with their past, rather than forfeit their traditions to a cultural melting pot (Kymlicka, 2004, p. xv). However, Canadian critics such as Neil Bissondath (1994) and Richard Gwyn (1995) argue that multiculturalism impedes the integration of non-white groups into Canadian mainstream society (Kymlicka, 2004, p. xiv). Other critics argue that despite the official multicultural policies of Canada, as long as a celebratory multiculturalism is given preference over a race relations philosophy, questions will remain as to whether or not a policy rooted in celebrating our heritage can also cope with the challenges of managing diversity in a racially mixed society, including its ability to deal with concerns about discrimination and equality (Fleras and Elliott, 2002, 2003). Thus, the outlook for multicultural education that would facilitate the development of the qualities and skills necessary for social justice-oriented citizens seems therefore bleak. In addition, the shift of multicultural education towards the use of diversity as a tool for global economic advantage hinders the development of multicultural education in Canada. As well, multiculturalism has been critiqued for its close, but less obvious, connection with the logic of liberalism, particularly as it relates to the free movement of capital. Mitchell (1993) points this out very effectively, in her analysis of a 1988 speech by Prime Minister Brian Mulroney, who is “unambiguous and unapologetic” in his message, in that:

[W]e as a nation to grasp the opportunity afforded to us by our multicultural identity, to cement our prosperity with trade and investment links the world over....Canadians, who have cultural links to other parts of the globe, who have business contacts everywhere are of the utmost importance to our trade and investment strategy.

It presumes that Canadian society is generally a level playing field and that people have equal access to social goods. Certainly “[m]ulticulturalism’s silence on the issue of class” (Warburton, 2007, pp. 275-290) is highly problematic, especially as it relates to labour market inequalities. Trudeau's vision in Article 15 of the Charter of Rights is arguably still the dominant mainstream vision of multiculturalism in Canada. Addressing the rights of the individual, it states that every individual is equal before and under the law and has the right to equal protection and equal benefits of the law without discrimination, particularly in relation to race, national or ethnic origin, color, religion, sex, age or mental or physical disability (see Driedger, 2003 for full citation and discussion).

Within Canada, Kymlicka (1998) argues, the multicultural debate has resulted in misinformed critics and inarticulate defenders simply exchanging unfounded accusations. He argued that we need a new debate where participants are assumed to be reasonable and share a basic commitment to social integration (p. 122). Nonetheless, opponents of multiculturalism in Canada (and the United States) continue to argue vehemently that multiculturalism is responsible for existing cultural tensions and they view multiculturalism as promoting conflict rather than harmony between ethnic groups (Howe, 1997).

In the U.S., for example, Sleeter (2000) noted that multiculturalism grew out of the civil rights movement of the 1960's and was centered on racial inequality and oppression (p. 19). However, despite racism and the unequal distribution of power between the dominant group and non-white groups in the United States, the approach to pluralism was one of total assimilation in the name

of national unity. Critics of multiculturalism such as E.D. Hirsch (1988) and Arthur Schlesinger (1992), argued in favor of promoting a monocultural society, similar to the views expressed by Canada's Bissondath (1994) and Gwyn (1995). Arthur Schlesinger is one of the most prominent and vocal critics of a Canadian-style policy of multiculturalism. Arguing within the U.S. context, Schlesinger (1992) made the point that the melting pot interpretation has “thus far managed to keep American society whole” (p. 16). However this is now being challenged by what he called the “ethnic interpretation,” which may be taken, for our purposes here, as a synonym for Canadian style multiculturalism - the key feature of which is the allowability of public recognition of ethnic, cultural, racial, religious and minority national differences. Notably, in attempting to validate and justify his arguments, Schlesinger (1992) pointed to Canada as an example of why the recognition of multiple cultures cannot create a unified national identity. He further pointed out that despite all its advantages, Canada is vulnerable to division due to the fact Canadians have never developed a strong sense of what it is to be a Canadian. Schlesinger (1992) went on to say that the consequent increase in ethnic and racial conflict lies behind the “hullabaloo” over multiculturalism (p. 13).

However Kymlicka (1998) refuted the claims by opponents of multiculturalism that Canada is at risk of disintegration and he pointed out that there is positive evidence that ethnic groups are more thoroughly integrated into Canadian society. He also argued that the level of participation applies more to common political values of democracy and individual rights than prior to the

adoption of multiculturalism. In opposition to Schlesinger's position, Kymlicka (1998) argued that a policy of multiculturalism which allows the recognition of public cultural differences need not conflict with, or undermine, common political values of democracy and individual rights (p. 132). In the same token, finding a balance between policies and practices of multiculturalism, Kymlicka adds, it allows for the recognition of ethnic diversity, while at the same time providing a basis for common political values, trust and solidarity (see also Bank, 2004b). Nonetheless, proponents of monoculturalism continue to view multiculturalism as creating conflict between groups; as such the United States adopted and fostered a melting pot approach towards ethnic groups, which required the melting of non-white minority cultures into the largely assumed European-based culture. These differences in the approach to multiculturalism are also reflected in the various ideological views of education. In examining the various ideological views of education, I will begin with the conservative view of multicultural education.

3.1.2. CONSERVATIVE VIEW OF EDUCATION IN A MULTICULTURAL SOCIETY

My objective here is not to adjudicate the multicultural debate, but rather to outline the main features of conservative ideology as it applies to the issue of multiculturalism, and in particular multicultural education. Within a conservative framework, E.D. Hirsch (1988) warned that multicultural education is inherently fragmentary, therefore public schools should foster a uniform cultural literacy by choosing and promoting what he calls “our best tradition/culture” in order to equalize educational opportunity. In his analysis Hirsch stated that students fail

not because of the way public schools teach pedagogically, but rather because of a lack of “cultural literacy”, which occurs when students from minority racial backgrounds lack so-called mainstream knowledge. He charged that public schools today teach a fragmented curriculum in which true knowledge is lacking, and that unequal education can only be eliminated in one way - each child is to be taught what he or she needs to know (Hirsch, 1999; as discussed in Dunn, 2005). Thus, educators have a duty to supply children with what they “sorely need” (see Howe, 1997, p. # 64). Hirsch then warned that we either inculcate a shared language and culture, or disintegrate as a nation (Hirsch, 1988). Based on Hirsch's argument, that shared language and culture to which he referred is Euro-American or Euro-Canadian. However, Nieto (2000) made a persuasive argument that disrupted Hirsch's vision of an inclusive education. Hirsch's vision not only creates a second-class citizen but also calls for a Euro-supremacist curriculum. As Nieto (2000) put it:

Through this kind of curriculum, students from dominant groups learn that they are the norm; consequently they often assume that any one different from them is culturally or intellectually disadvantaged. On the other hand, students from subordinated cultures may internalize the message that their cultures, families, languages, and experiences have low status, and they learn to feel inferior (p. 64).

Within this framework, racialized minority students lack 'White' knowledge, which is required to advance in the dominant society. The general point I wish to stress here is that within a multicultural framework, conservative views national unity as dependent on cultural uniformity. Thus a shared cultural identity is essential in promoting national unity. As such,

multiculturalism is seen as promoting fragments within society and among groups; furthermore, education within such arrangements is also fragmentary and results in unequal education of non-White minority children.

Conservatives are not without their critics, and one of the most perceptive critics is Kenneth Howe (1997). Howe's criticism draws on the Philosopher Charles Taylor's idea of the fusion of horizons to illuminate one major difficulty with Hirsch's version of the conservative rejection of multiculturalism: The assumption that we can already identify what constitutes 'mainstream' knowledge that all kids need to know. The problem is, what now counts as 'mainstream' knowledge has been, and is highly likely to continue to be, determined on the basis of a long and terrible history of oppression and inequality with respect to non-White minority groups in both Canada and the US. In other words, what appears as 'mainstream' knowledge to members of the majority culture will most likely (and if history is our guide, it is inevitably) be marginalizing and exclusionary toward minorities. Why do intelligent conservatives fail to see this obvious problem?

As Howe (1997) pointed out, the explicit purpose of conservative theorists like Hirsch is not to exploit children of minority groups, but to provide equal opportunity by exposing all children to the same quality of education. The content of this 'quality' education - Hirsch's 'mainstream knowledge' - is capable of being somewhat inclusive with respect to minority groups. However, despite Hirsch's good intention, this type of educational arrangement, as Nieto (2000) argued, promotes a false sense of superiority for white students while devaluing non-

white students' cultures, values and identities by making the dominant culture supreme over all others (Giroux, 2000; McLaren, 2000).

As Howe (1997) pointed out, this interpretation of Hirsch's argument entails a kind of Utopian-communitarianism in which group distinctiveness vanishes as horizons fuse. The assumption, however, seems to be that the process of epistemological 'fusion' is morally, politically and culturally equitable. I will argue, following Howe, that not all processes of cultural fusion are equitable and some are the result of oppression and dominance, as was the case with the First Nations people. What Hirsch failed to provide, it seems to me, is any evidence that a common curriculum based on the existing conception of "cultural literacy" would provide fusions of the equitable kind rather than of the oppressive kind, especially since the process of fusion would be conducted in a context of unequal power relations. On his part, Howe (1997) emphasized that historically marginalized groups would be those most saddled with the burden to fuse (assimilate), and most vulnerable to continued oppression (Taylor 1995 in Howe, 1977). Other critics have helped us to see that race and ethnicity have been mechanically interpreted in the dominant discourse (Li, 1990), therefore non-White culture is used to make the other (Abu-Lughod, 1991). Critics further argued that people of color were not welcomed into this possibility of assimilation as equals (Perry, 2002, 2003). Under the existing social arrangement fusion is not possible. One of the most important critiques came from critical multiculturalist Peter McLaren in his statement that conservative multiculturalism refuses to treat whiteness as a form of ethnicity and in doing so posits whiteness as an invisible

norm by which other ethnicities are judged. He further added that conservative multiculturalism wants to assimilate students to an unjust social order by arguing that members of minority groups can reap the economic benefits of neocolonialist ideologies, but that such benefits can only be derived by becoming deracinated and culturally stripped (McLaren, 2000).

In this light, the process of seemingly equitable and progressive educational 'fusion' looks much more like a systematically predatory and exploitative process of cultural plundering. Those elements of minority cultural knowledge that are deemed valuable and useful are essentially stripped from their native context and 'assimilated' into the dominant ideology, while the rest is essentially disposed of and left for the minority groups to gather up and cobble together for use as best they can. McLaren (2000) charged conservatives such as Ravitch (1990), Schlesinger and others for using the term "diversity" to cover up their assimilation ideology (p. 217). He further argued that many conservative multiculturalists have scarcely removed themselves from the colonialist legacy of White supremacy and charged unsuccessful minorities with having "culturally deprived backgrounds" and a "lack of strong family-oriented values" (McLaren, 2000, p. 165; see also in Duarte and Smith, 2000).

In a similar vein, and within a Canadian context, Fleras (2001) noted that the educational system has for the most part reflected a fundamental commitment to monoculturalism, and that this conformist ideology sought to absorb immigrant children directly into Canadian society by performing some form of melting pot, which led to some loss of language and culture despite the official multicultural

policy (see especially Cummins, 2008). Fleras (2001) argued that all aspects of schooling, from teachers and textbooks to policy and curriculum, were (and still are) aligned with the principles of Anglo-conformity and that although the explicit assimilationist model that once prevailed within educational circles is no longer officially endorsed, assimilation has remained an unspoken yet powerful ethos at all schooling levels (p. 255).

The continued quest to promote and justify monoculturalism has led Hirsch and like-minded thinkers to give an account of history in which multiculturalism and multilingualism can serve only to tear nations apart while ignoring the different historical condition from which they generalize (Cummins & Hornberger, 2008; Howe, 1997). McLaren (2000) charged that within a conservative framework, history in relation to Blacks has been distorted and can be traced to colonial views of African Americans as slaves, servants, and entertainers - views which were embedded in the self-serving, congratulatory, and profoundly imperialist attitude of Europe and North America. Banks and Banks (2004) also argued that history has been distorted to suggest that the Americas were discovered by Europeans and suggested that Indian cultures did not exist until they were 'discovered' by Europeans and that the lands occupied by the American Indians were rightfully owned by Europeans after they settled on and claimed them. By continuing to ignore the historical relations between the dominant group and subjugated groups like Black and First Nations people in history, education has primarily attempted to reconstruct the identity of non-white minority students as defined by Europe.

As we saw in the previous chapter, this distorted history often results in the alienation and disengagement of many racialized minority students. One such example lies in the statement of a First Nation student: “ I think white people think education is good, but Indian people often have a different view ... they see it as something that draws students away from who they are. I would like to tell them that education shouldn't try and make me into something I'm not” (Tierney, 1993; cited in Howe 1997, p. 205). I believe that employing an understanding of cultural and ethnic difference in a manner whereby 'difference' becomes a significant and valued factor in not only recognizing and affirming our varied history, individual identity and collective strengths also enables us to build an understanding of how “recognizing our difference can help us to learn from each other” (Dei, 1996, p. # 30).

Most relevant to the discussion and essential to the multicultural debate is the notion of equal educational opportunity and equal educational results (EEO and EER respectively). Given the focus and emphasis on monoculturalism, it is also critical to understand how the conservative framework views educational opportunity and outcome within pluralistic societies.

In his classic argument, the conservative critic of multiculturalism Onora O'Neill (1976) contended, that EEO and EER are fundamentally different, and cannot be entangled. Here, O'Neill continues, the received view of education is founded on the belief that individuals are fundamentally autonomous choosers, therefore their lives and activities should reflect their choices. It is O'Neill's understanding that to attempt to equalize results is to deny the autonomous

individual the right to choose. To this end, she argued that EER cannot be fairly equalized due to the differing choices of individuals. Therefore, the autonomous chooser freely determines his/her educational attainment/outcome, and education that seeks to promote EEO cannot also simultaneously provide EER. O'Neill further argued that there can only be a commitment to equality of opportunity but not results. She explained that while one can ensure EEO by removing external impediments that create barriers and limit access to opportunities, educational results/outcome cannot be equalized because results reflect the free choice of the individual.

Howe's (1997) response to O'Neill was that EEO and EER should not and cannot be disentangled because although EEO may exist, a student may lack the basic preparedness to maximize the opportunity available to him/her. In solidifying this point, Howe (1997) explained that a student placed in a vocational track who, along with his or her parents did not know the consequences of this placement, would only have a "bare" as compared to a "real" opportunity to attend university. He used Daniel Dennett's (1984) argument to solidify the notion that in certain instances, equal opportunity has the possibility of offering only a "bare opportunity" as opposed to a "real opportunity" to maximize educational opportunity (p. 18).

In my personal response to O'Neill's argument, I agree that EEO and EER cannot and should not be disentangled, which is similar to Howe's (1997) point of view. In applying Dennett's (1984) concept of a *bare opportunity* to my study, a reasonable argument can be made that the working- class student participants in

my study do not have a *real* opportunity of attending university compared to their middle-class peers. Neither could these students be considered “autonomous choosers”, because contrary to O'Neill's arguments, although there are no observable external impediments present, they are nonetheless covertly and systematically streamed out of the university track without their knowledge, understanding or input due to the combined and compounded negative effects of race and class. Howe (1997) argued that educational opportunities have to be meaningful to be worth wanting. Consequently, an educational opportunity worth wanting should be defined in terms of the interaction between individuals and educational institutions, and not only in terms of the features of educational institutions (Howe, 1997). However, as we shall see, the students in my study were only offered a “bare” opportunity to receive an education that was not worth wanting because the actual education they received was insufficient to enable them to realize their full academic potential and advance to university studies as was their original plan.

Despite O'Neill's position, some students were disadvantaged and thus denied EEO, which in turn yields an 'unequal' educational outcome. Solomon (2002), Dei (1995, 1996), Alladin (1996), Oakes (1994b), Nieto (2004) and Brathwaite & James (1996) all substantiated the fact that streaming of poor Black youth occurs not because they are unable to perform within the scope of a regular academic program, but because of racial/cultural and class discrimination, among others, within education. In addition, Curtis, Livingstone and Smaller (1992) also noted that students are not streamed in any random way; rather, children of

working-class, ethnic/racial-minority and single-parent families end up in the lower streams in highly disproportionate numbers. Consequently, O'Neill failed in her analysis to recognize that one's ability to exercise his/her rights as an autonomous chooser is often impacted by factors such as race, culture, and/or class position in society. Therefore O'Neill's conservative argument that simply removing external impediments to educational opportunity will somehow equalize educational results is naïve and lacks race/class/cultural analysis. Unlike the conservative view of multicultural education, the liberal multiculturalists offer several different perspectives.

3.1.3 LIBERAL VIEW OF MULTICULTURAL EDUCATION

The liberal view of education appears to be the most dominant ideological framework in Canada (and the United States). There has been a recent onslaught of scholarly writing on multicultural education from a liberal perspective by such people as Fields & Feinberg (2001), Reich (2002) and Kymlicka (1998), to name a few. However, my aim here is not to provide a comprehensive view of what liberal educational scholars have recently written about multicultural education. Rather, as a link between my literature review and my theoretical framework, I wish to clarify the main features of a liberal approach to educational equality, and particularly racial equality, in multicultural societies. Fortunately the liberal philosopher of education Kenneth Howe (1997) has written clearly and with sophistication on this topic. In addition, Howe's (1997) work is closely informed by the scholarship of other liberal educational and political theorists. I choose here to focus primarily on Howe's (1997) work in order to provide a sketch of the

broader outlines of the liberal perspective on multicultural education, especially the liberal perspective of educational equality. According to Howe (1997) there is not one single liberal position, but several. Accordingly, Howe (1997) helpfully distinguished between what he called Formal, Compensatory, and Participatory liberal perspectives, given their significance of this study, they are worth discussing at length.

Similar to the Conservative view discussed above, Howe (1997) identified the *Formal* interpretation of educational equality as requiring only the absence of formal barriers to participation on morally irrelevant criteria such as race, disability or gender, as well as equalizing resources among public schools to some level. Many critics, left and right, (including Howe himself) have rejected the formal liberal views of education, and scholars such as McLaren (2000); hooks (2000, 2003); Fleras (2001); Kymlicka (1995, 1998); Fields & Feinberg (2001); Grinter (2000) and Nieto (1999, 2004) have illuminated areas of inadequacy within this framework.

Howe (1997) argued that despite the progressiveness of these formal liberal views in recognizing and removing formal barriers based on race, disability and gender, they are nonetheless often insensitive to the profound influence social factors have on educational opportunity. For education to be meaningful or worth wanting, inequalities cannot be construed only in terms of the formal feature of educational institutions, but rather inequalities must also be viewed in terms of the interaction between institutions and individuals/groups (p. 28). To demonstrate Howe's (1997) point, and more relevant to my study, he

concluded in his study that while there were no formal racial barriers almost in all public schools that denied visible minority students access to equal participation in school activities, nonetheless minoritized students complained that , when it comes to sports, intramural sports for example were exclusionary. They argued that because their teachers were all White and they were also the ones volunteering to coach intramural sports, they were often left with little choice but to play sports such as hockey or volley ball, sports which are considered as mainly “White sport.”

Therefore, many young Black people were excluded from engaging in intramural activities and were often left with no lunch-time activities. In a case like this, focusing only on the formal barriers to education the ‘formal’ liberal view fails to see the ways in which white dominance is inherent in schooling arrangement to the exclusion of minoritized groups. Despite the absence of formal racial barriers in public schools, the promotion of monoculturalism has resulted in the exclusion of visible minority students, while promoting and reinforcing the cultural aspect of the White culture among White students. Black students either assimilate or become alienated. From daily routines to decision-making at the top, education is organized to facilitate cultural indoctrination and social control of visible minority students (Fleras, 2001). Indeed, the greater the difference between the cultures of minority students and the host society, the greater the acculturation experiences and stress. The stresses and pain can be mediated by the receptivity and sensitivity of the educational institutions to the needs of visible minority students in a multicultural society like

Canada.

In cementing his argument, Howe noted that removing formal barriers that were legally sanctioned in the past improved educational opportunities for some ethnic groups, but did not do so for many others. Howe specifically referenced the removal of legally sanctioned barriers to education for Jewish people, which resulted in their improved educational opportunities. On the other hand, while removing legally sanctioned barriers may have worked for Jewish students, Kozol (1991) highlighted the reality that 56 years after racial barriers were removed due to the decision of *Brown vs. Board of Education* in 1954, for example, educational opportunities for Black students in the United States did not improve (pp. 6-28).

In contrast to the formal view of education, the *Compensatory* view recognizes the importance of how interactions between the characteristics of individuals and the features of educational institutions can function to either increase or decrease the worth of educational opportunity. The goal of this framework, Howe (1997) explains, is to compensate for characteristics of individuals that disadvantage them in educational institution (p. 29). In reference to the student participants in Howe's research who were excluded from intramural sports in their schools, within this framework one response to the alienation of Black students would be for the school to compensate by making a special effort to appeal to White teachers to volunteer to coach intramural basketball, considered a 'Black sport,' in addition to hockey and volleyball, since there are either very few or no Black teachers to coach the sports that are of interest to

Black youth. Howe (1997) further noted that the general objective is to provide children with special or missing educational opportunities that will expand and enhance the worth of their educational careers.

Though an improvement over the Formal interpretation, Howe (1997) concluded that Compensatory view fails to recognize the ways in which the underlying structural sources of inequality can and do preserve the status quo and instead, implicitly adopts the status quo in determining what is of educational worth, which is based on mainstream customs and values. It therefore fails to afford educational opportunities of equal worth to non-white individuals who have had no part in shaping, ironically, their own education.

The third form of liberalism is what Howe (1997) calls *Participatory interpretation*. This form of educational opportunity is Howe's (1997) preferred interpretation of liberalism. His interpretation of liberalism moves beyond the formal and compensatory view by emphasizing the connection between equal opportunity and participatory democracy. It provides a potential means of responding to some of the fundamental challenges of equality of educational opportunity, particularly since the previous frameworks, in their attempts to equalize educational opportunity, have legitimated and perpetuated inequality by diverting attention away from the underlying structural sources of inequality. As its name implies, the 'participatory' ideal operates on the premise that an educational system that makes claims of democracy must then include groups' participation, regardless of their varied race, gender, disability and cultural identities. Being his preferred framework, Howe (1997) argued that genuine

equality of educational opportunity cannot be achieved unless the voices of disadvantaged groups, who have been historically excluded, have a say and ‘participate’ in deciding which educational opportunities have worth (p. 29), a view supported by Kymlicka and Norman (2000). Fields and Feinberg (2001) made the point that the obverse of representation is direct participation, and that a group or movement can attempt to give everyone who cares to participate relatively equal weight in determining goals and strategies designed to force a change in policies or systems of decision-making. They further argued that the other option is to have a centralized system that serves to isolate marginalized groups and inhibits them from gaining a voice in the public schools, resulting in increased alienation and inequality within and between segments of the community.

According to the participatory ideal, the first responsibility of public schooling is to educate its students for democratic participation, and that mere compensation for disadvantages is insufficient or objectionable if it is not rooted in equal respect for different views, especially when self-identity and self-respect are at stake. This is exceptionally significant for my study; thus, the participatory view of education provides a framework with which to respond to some fundamental challenges to the ideals of equality of educational opportunity or EEO (pp. 32-33).

Liberalism, as I emphasized earlier, advocates not only the removal of formal barriers to EEO but also offering the means necessary for enabling minority students to take advantage of the opportunities available to them.

Participatory liberalism further emphasizes that decisions about (1) what opportunities public schools should provide for children, and (2) what substantive measures should be taken to ensure that all opportunities are genuinely 'equally available' to all, must be determined by and implemented with the democratic participation of members of all groups within the school, not merely members of the dominant group. Thus it is not enough for White teachers and administrators, for example, as we shall also see in students' narratives, to decide that institutional mechanisms are needed in order to equalize racial participation in school sports. Such decisions, and the measures to correct them, also require the democratic participation of minority students and parents.

Up to this point I have been comparing and contrasting the conservative and liberal approaches to education. Before moving on to discuss the critical multiculturalist standpoint, I would first like to review the main points that have emerged from the discussion so far. First, the main aim of the conservative approach is to assimilate all children within the dominant cultural framework in order to enable all children to compete equally. However, as liberals and I personally stress, the conservative framework ignores the enduring and deep structural inequalities that exist within contemporary multicultural societies. As such, the educational aim of equal opportunity becomes a cover for cultural domination. Second, liberalism rejects the Formal framework and instead proposes specialized, Compensatory measures designed to equalize opportunities for minority students. But even this compensatory feature of liberalism does not go far enough according to some liberals, such as Howe (1997) who offered a

new reconstructionist liberal framework aimed at addressing the shortcomings of the previous ones discussed earlier. Howe's (1997) approach called for the recognition of not only the historical nature of educational inequality, but also of the ways in which the status quo is maintained within social institutions and in relation to subordinate groups. He especially emphasized the point that subordinate groups have been, and continue to be, excluded from decisions that affect their lives. He argued for major renegotiations of the aims and practices of schooling, and asserted that the first responsibility of public schooling is to educate its students for democratic participation.

While Howe (1997) offered the best of the perspectives reviewed thus far, it nonetheless falls short. Negotiating within a system that is inherently unequal without challenging the foundation upon which such inequality is built will result in the preservation of such a system. Also, recognizing that the voices of minoritized groups, namely Black youth in my study are missing from the decision-making process is good - however we must go beyond recognizing and acknowledging the absences of those voices. Rather we must begin to challenge and disrupt the hegemonic nature of those absences, because inviting subordinate groups into the decision- and policy-making process without their having the power to be heard results in a similar outcome - dominance. Thus the white supremacy nature of schooling and the power imbalance between groups must first be acknowledged, then challenged. To this end I will examine the critical multiculturalists' view of schooling within pluralistic societies.

3.1.4 CRITICAL MULTICULTURALISM - A DEBATE

In reviewing the literature on critical multiculturalism, it becomes apparent that there are marked differences depending on the national context to which they orient their research i.e., Canada vs. United States. Specifically, the discourse of critical multicultural education in the U.S. tends to be very similar to the antiracism scholarship in Canada. For example, McMahon (2003) noted that US scholars such as McLaren (1995), and Gay (2004), use the term multiculturalism to express ideologies that could be termed antiracist. According to Sleeter (2000), multicultural education in the US grew out of the civil rights movement of the 1960s and educators with roots in African American studies have been among the most active conceptualizers of multicultural education as a discourse aimed at advancing power-sharing and uplifting communities of colour. Having its roots in minority discourses about oppression, multicultural education was part of a larger quest for redistribution of power and economic resources (p. 119).

Similarly, Banks (2004) noted that the development of American multiculturalism in the 1960s happened at a time of major movements for Constitutional civil rights for Black citizens, who had been first enslaved and then exploited throughout American history, and this had significant impact on multicultural education (see also Gay, 2004; Nieto & Bode, 2008). Multicultural education in the US, from its inception, had education against racism as its basis; as such it was part of a larger antiracist reform movement in both Europe and North America. Banks further noted that the multicultural approach to education

took on a wide range of strategies by teachers in the United States. Teachers who were considered radical approached education from an antiracist stance; others employed a more superficial approach based on their situation and personal philosophies. Different strands of multiculturalism emerged, ranging from the right wing approach of celebrating festivals associated with 'other' cultures, to the left wing antiracist strategies of tackling racism by attacking stereotypical and ethnocentric images head-on in the curriculum. Thus the celebratory form of multiculturalism was preferred and it became the more influential approach due to its non-political stance.

For Foner (1999, p. 12), racial inequality was the foundation upon which multiculturalism and multicultural educational scholarship was established in the US. However, within a Canadian context, and similar to the UK, multicultural education was never equipped to effectively challenge the racial inequality facing non-white students in Canadian public schools. Rather, with the adoption of an official multiculturalism policy, multicultural education was used as a cover to disguise the monocultural nature of schooling, thus making it possible for the continued assimilation of non-white students into the dominant culture while supposedly celebrating their heritage. This created an impression of racial harmony/tolerance within Canadian public schools because issues of racism and systemic inequality were reduced to cultural maladaptation, or they were denied outright, as will be later discussed. Gosh and Abdi (2004) noted that multicultural education began in Canada with an emphasis on culture as exotic and as artifact. They argued that the song and dance routine completely depoliticized culture, and

avoided issues of discrimination and race relations. They further argued that this form of multicultural education also absolved educators from responsibility for neglecting other cultures as long as they were willing to observe psychologically soothing but otherwise ineffective multicultural days and festivities (p. 48; see also Dei, 1996).

Much of the existing debate on multiculturalism, especially in the US, centers on the possibilities of merging the antiracist and critical multicultural frameworks, and as advocated by many left critical multiculturalist opponents these two perspectives are seen as different, and therefore cannot be merged (Ibrahim, 2003). However, critical multicultural scholars such as Nieto, McLaren, Banks, Short and Sleeter have begun to incorporate an antiracist perspective within their critical multicultural framework, thus creating a bridge between the two perspectives. In addition, the self-declared antiracist scholar bell hooks is also calling for a scholarship capable of generating collective political action. She argues that while individual action to end White dominance is important, for it to be truly effective individual struggle must also be linked to collective effort to transform structures that reinforce white dominance. In expressing her commitment for a collective effort to end white dominance, hooks noted “I am not making a commitment to working only for and with Black people, I must engage in struggle with all willing comrades to strengthen our awareness and our resistance” (hooks, 2000; cited in Duarte & Smith, 2000, p. 205).

In a similar struggle to merge the two perspectives, Sonia Nieto (1999) who considers herself a critical multiculturalist, argued that an antiracist and anti-

bias perspective must be at the core of multicultural education, due to the general belief that multicultural education automatically takes care of racism (Nieto, 1999). She further argued that public schools that are committed to multicultural education with an antiracist focus would need to closely examine both school policies and the attitudes and behaviors of their staff to determine how these might be complicit in causing academic failure. In addition, she argued that public schools would also have to pay attention to the kind of expectations that teachers and public schools have for students, whether native-language use is permitted or punished, how sorting takes place, and how classroom organization, pedagogy, and curriculum may influence student learning each factor, she argues, needs to be considered (Nieto, 1999). Most critically, Nieto argued that such a perspective places power at the very centre of the concept because it concerns issues such as structural inequality and stratification due to social class, gender, ethnicity and other differences, as well as the relative respect or disrespect accorded to particular cultures, languages, and dialects (p. 405) (see hooks, 2003 and McLaren, 2000). For Nieto, this is, or should be, the underpinning philosophy of critical multiculturalism.

On the other hand, scholars such as the late Barry Tronya and Robin Grinter argued that these two frameworks are separate and cannot be integrated. Grinter (2000) argued that multicultural and antiracist education are incompatible philosophies between which a choice has to be made to ensure effective education against racism. They made the point that these two perspectives work from different philosophical bases and towards different purposes, therefore they

cannot be run in harness because they pull against one another (p. 135).

Grinter (2000) argued that multicultural education believes in the perfectibility of the existing social structure, and assimilation of its component cultures into a social consensus with shared values, and that underachievement is seen in terms of cultural interference. On the other hand, antiracist education, which I will discuss next, believes in the reality and significance of conflict in a social system that concentrates power in White, middle-class and male hands, which discriminates against other groups on the grounds of their 'inadequacy' or 'incompetence.' Within this framework society is not seen as a neutral area for sharing values, but an arena in which dominant values impose themselves on cultures that are not equal in power or value (p. 142).

3.1.5 CRITICAL MULTICULTURALIST VIEW OF EDUCATION

Multiculturalism has become a central discourse in the struggle over issues regarding national identity, the construction of historical memory, the purpose of schooling and the meaning of democracy (Giroux, 2000). Duarte & Smith (2000) noted that multiculturalists are identified in large measure by their rejection of, and resistance to, assimilation and that for critical multiculturalists the rejection of assimilation compels one to identify the potentially undemocratic nature of public schools with respect to cultural diversity. Similar to antiracist pedagogy, critical multiculturalism argues that monocultural hegemony within public schools undermines the democratic commitment to the creation of learning environments in which all students are provided the resources and liberties needed for the

practice of freedom (p. 173).

In an effort to challenge the pervasiveness of racism and structural oppression, researchers (Jennings & Smith, 2002; Schick, 2002; Weisman & Garza, 2002) had begun preparing students for cultural diversity and teaching them to challenge structural inequality in society in an approach Sleeter and Grant (1999) labeled “Education that is Multicultural and Social Reconstructionist” (p. 196). La Belle described this phrase as an approach to education that deals directly with society's structural inequality based on race, social class, gender and disability, and a means of preparing students to change society to better serve all people, particularly members of oppressed groups. Young people will thus understand the nature of oppression and develop the skills needed to work for constructive social change (Sleeter & Grant 1999). By choosing to name their approach as “Education that is Multicultural and Social Reconstructionist,” Sleeter and Grant ground this approach in the Reconstructionist philosophy of education which is rooted in critical theory and emphasizes notions such as democracy and social justice (p.188-189). Critical theory has been defined “as a legitimate response to domination, used to help individuals or groups deal with oppression...part of a larger political project that is working towards change” (Leistyna, Woodrum, & Sherbolm, 1995, p. 343). Giroux (2010) noted that academic culture has become a contested space primarily because groups that have been traditionally excluded from the public school curriculum and from the ranks of higher education are now becoming more

politicized and are attending higher education institutions in increasing numbers (p.195), (see also Fleras and Elliott, 2002 and Dei, 1996).

Accordingly, a key tenet of critical multiculturalists as explained by Duarte & Smith (2000) is its dedication to exposing the specific administrative, curricular, and instructional practices, as well as the organizational policies within public schools that cause cultural alienation for students of colour. Within this strand of multiculturalism, that is the US version being described here, students are encouraged to reject racism both within the learning environment and the larger society in general. According to Kailin (2002), Nieto's conception of multicultural education is more explicitly antiracist and calls for a commitment to activism. Within this framework students are being prepared to become activists and take a stand against racism and other forms of social injustice. In relation to my study, as we shall see, and in reference to an incident where a teacher made racial comments about his students bringing AIDS back from Africa, and another incident where a teacher stated that the next world war should take place in Asia, the students - regardless of race - would be encouraged to challenge both teachers without fear of reprisal. Most importantly, rather than experiencing feelings of isolation, alienation, silence, humiliation and helplessness as described by one of my research participant, the students could unite collectively to resist racism within their learning environment.

Duarte & Smith (2000) defined “cultural alienation” as the experience of feeling that one's culture is unwelcome, one's ethnicity unacknowledged, and one's tradition unimportant, all of which occur within school settings that are

inhospitable to cultural diversity. Critical multiculturalists are intent on identifying and explaining the multiple and often overlapping sources for those policies and practices which produce monoculturalism and institutional racism within public schools (p. 173). Giroux (2008) argued that critical multiculturalism is not a multiculturalism that is limited to a fascination with the construction of identities, communicative competence, and the celebration of tolerance. Instead, there is a shift in the discussion of multiculturalism to a pedagogical terrain in which relations of power and racialized identities become paramount as part of a language of critique and possibility, which also included the historical nature of inequality and unequal power relations (see Gosh and Abdi, 2004; Nieto, 1999 and McLaren, 2000).

In conclusion, despite the more left-wing approach being employed by many US critical multicultural scholars, both Canadian and US critical multiculturalists such as Gosh and Abdi (2004); Nieto, (2000, 2004); McLaren, (2000), agreed that traditional multicultural education is ineffective in addressing the education of non-white minority youth. May (1999) noted that the antiracist critique has led to the development of a more critical conception of multicultural education theory and practice. Historically, a key weakness of multicultural education theory and practice, he contends, has been its failure to recognize the structural impact of racism on student lives (p. 2). The critical multicultural framework acknowledges the reality of White dominance, illuminates its impact on visible minority students, and demonstrates the continued existence of a barrier within the Canadian context. In fact, some scholars have argued that

critical multiculturalism and anti-racism, which I will discuss next, are the same (see especially May, 1999; Ibrahim, 2003). However, I see critical multiculturalism as essentially a critique of “traditional multiculturalism” (Kymlicka, 1995) and a transitional framework into anti-racism. The current study is thus a primary step in developing a framework that challenges the depersonalization of visible minority students in the school system and ruptures the institutional processes that disengage some visible minority students while engaging others (Dei, 1998). Most importantly, this framework must have the ability not only to challenge those relationships of power that racialize the school social order, but to also invoke direct actions for dismantling the structural roots of educational inequality (Giroux, 1994 in Fleras, 2001, see Thomas & Collier, 2004; Kailin, 1999; Nieto, 1999; Dei, 1996, 1998). Consequently, I turn my attention to the antiracist framework.

3.1.6. THINKING STRUCTURALLY: ANTIRACIST VIEW OF EDUCATION

An antiracist education is defined as an integrative educational and political, action-oriented strategy for institutional and systemic change for addressing issues of racism and other interlocking systems of social oppression related to sexism and classism (Dua and Robertson, 1999; Dei, 1998). Antiracism education emerges from an understanding that racism exists in society; therefore, the school, as an institution of society, is influenced by racism (Steinberg, 2009). Dei (1996) noted that antiracism education is egalitarian in outlook insofar as it seeks equality, not in the liberal sense of everyone being equal in the same way,

but through structural changes that foster power sharing, in an attempt to challenge historically constituted relations of domination that are embedded within societal structures (see also Fleras, 2001; Bishop, 2005). In addition, Dei (1998) adds, antiracism strategies consist of measures and mechanisms aimed at dismantling the structural basis of institutional racism as such, and removing discriminatory barriers becomes central to the framework. Also while the concepts of equity, social justice and educational democracy are fundamental to antiracism analysis, the framework also recognizes that at both theoretical and practical levels, the concepts of 'justice,' 'equity' and 'democracy' are not only value-laden but are also subject to different interpretations depending on racial, ethnic, class and gender positions. Thus social justice and equity are defined in terms of how a society treats the most disadvantaged or least privileged in its midst (p. 302). The current situation facing these progressive educational theories and anti-racism education in Canada is that they simply have not been developed or implemented at the practical level to an effective degree (Bruno-Jofre' & Henley, 2000; Westheimer, 2008; James, 2004).

As already referenced, and built as a response to it, proponents of antiracist education also argue that it differs sharply from multicultural education (see Dei, 1998; Kailin, 1999; Giroux, 1994; James, 2001; McMahon, 2003; Fleras, 2001). For example, in defining the areas of distinction Giroux (1994) argued that multicultural education is about learning, whereas antiracist education is about doing; multicultural education is about diversity, but antiracist education is about disadvantage; multicultural education is about cultural diversity, and

antiracist education is about social relations. To complement Giroux, Fleras (2001) also noted that sharp differences occur in terms of focus, objective, concern and outcome. He pointed out that antiracist education focuses on structure, while multicultural education focuses on culture; the objective of antiracist education is the removal of discriminatory barriers, whereas the objective of multicultural education is sensitivity; antiracist education is concerned with racism, whereas multicultural education is concerned with ethnocentrism; and most importantly, antiracist education expects equality as its outcome, while multicultural education works towards understanding (p. 244). Underpinning Fleras' summary is the notion that instead of antiracists self-righteously demonizing racism, the widespread need for such a mentality has to be understood (p. 145). According to Grinter (2000), multicultural education is based on the belief that racism is founded on misunderstanding and ignorance that leave individuals open to racist misrepresentation of non-White ways of life and value systems. He rejected this and argued instead that antiracist education as a philosophy maintains that education based on individual cultural understanding will not eradicate racism, because racism is not rooted in cultural understanding and negative images (p. 136). Simply put, it is not the stereotype that is of concern to anti-racism (even though the struggle is against it), but more significantly the historical structure that allows that stereotype to perpetuate; and that is a question of power.

The analysis of power, therefore, is central to the antiracist framework. Dei, 1998 argued that antiracist education takes a critical view of power relations

in society, and directs its attention to how the dominant sector exercises power over subordinate groups, including stereotyping them. Historic relations of domination are analyzed and assessed at the level of individuals and institutions, thus exposing both minorities and the mainstream to the structural sources of oppression in society. In short, antiracist education privileges power at the centre of any reconstruction; it acknowledges institutionalized power to establish hegemonic dominance; it provides a discursive framework for analyzing how different oppressions intersect and overlap, and it challenges the notion of what is valid and legitimate knowledge, and how other forms of knowledge can be incorporated, given the racialized practices in public schools that have the intent or effect of erasing others (p. 101).

Equally important to the antiracist framework is the way in which Whiteness is questioned and centralized within the antiracist framework. As such, antiracist education is also about investigating and changing how public schools deal with issues of White privilege and power sharing (Gilborn, 2006). Therefore educators are considered key players. Kailin (2002) noted that the consideration of teachers as raced, classed and gendered actors must be critically examined and incorporated into an antiracist multicultural strategy for teachers (p. 64). It then becomes critical, according to Rezai-Rashti (2005), that antiracism recognizes that race classification is a potent act or weapon in the distribution of rewards, privileges, penalties and punishment in a highly stratified, racialized society. As such, antiracism sees race identification as a fundamental organizing principle and tool which profoundly mediates the concrete realities of our lives in conjunction

with other socially constructed, and empirically significant, locations of gender, ability and class. This intersectionality, as we shall see, is of utmost importance in my study. Antiracism then seeks to subvert the institutional processes that reproduce the dominance and normalcy of Whiteness and White culture in the public schools and in society because Whiteness has historically bestowed unquestioned privilege and power on its members (McIntosh, 2003). Therefore, the significance of Whiteness cannot be fully questioned within the existing educational arrangement because such examination must take place within critical pedagogy which is not a part of the present arrangement, and which also forms another central tenet of the antiracist framework.

Within a Canadian context, McMahon (2003) argued that multiculturalism is often used in a manner that is sometimes used to highlight cross-cultural similarities and is often intended to portray something that is quite superficial - the dances, dress, dialect and dinners. However, within the antiracist framework, the intent and the outcome is to teach students how to read social and political situations, familiarize them with power interests, and connect ethical values with political actions in order to bring about change. She further argued that the use of a singular focus or master narrative to represent a group is bound to provide a very narrow depiction of what it means to be non-White, Black in my study, just as it would be for one description to capture the essence of what it means to be White. The same can be said for other racial groups or identifiers. Her conclusion is that we need to be cognizant of differences within as well as across groups (p. 265; Ibrahim, 2010).

A version of anti-racism, Nieto (2004) discusses the importance of critical pedagogy (see also, Darder, Baltodano & Torres, 2009; McLaren & Kincheloe, 2003; Burbles & Berk, 1999). Nieto argued that critical pedagogy is an approach through which students and teachers are encouraged to view what they learn in a critical light, thus it values diverse viewpoints and encourages critical thinking, reflection and action. Within an antiracist framework, using critical pedagogy students are empowered as learners because they are expected to become problem solvers. Then the knowledge they learn can be used to explore the reasons for certain conditions in their lives and to design strategies for changing them. Therefore, critical pedagogy is based on using students' present reality as a foundation for their further learning, rather than on doing away with or belittling what they know and who they are. As a result, critical pedagogy acknowledges diversity of all kinds instead of suppressing or supplanting it. Without a critical perspective, Nieto adds, reality is often presented to students as if it were static, finished and flat; underlying conflicts, problems and inherent contradictions are omitted. She noted that according to Freire, a prominent figure in anti-racism and critical pedagogy, among other fields, the opposite of a critical or empowering approach is “banking education” where students learn to regurgitate and passively accept the knowledge they are given (see also Freire, 2005; Banks and Banks 2004). On the other hand, a critical education expects students to seek their own answers, to be curious and to question (Banks & Banks, 2004, p. 404). Most importantly, Nieto contends, critical pedagogy has inspired the inclusion of student voices that had previously been missing from most treatments of

multicultural education (see also May, 1999).

As noted by Dei (1998), the antiracism challenge has provided a critique of dominant hegemonic discourse about race relations and multiculturalism in White-dominated societies in the following six ways: (1) antiracism workers and educators challenge conventional discourse and praxis of race relations that simply imply ‘let us all get along’ without any serious interrogation of the power dimensions embedded in social relations and education (for example, classroom teaching); (2) the discourse exposes the need to recognize institutionalized power and its discretionary use to establish dominance and unearned privilege in society; (3) antiracism critiques the valorization of diversity and the failure to consider seriously the pointed notion of ‘difference’ (for example, how difference is named, recognized, interpreted, acted upon in social/race relations); (4) the discourse offers a model to interrogate the failure to see difference as a site of power imbalance and to deal with the intersection of oppressions, as well as the relational aspects of difference; (5) the traditional emphasis within multicultural education on ‘culture’ is in need of reprioritizing; and (6) while not negating the relevance of the concept of “culture”, politicized notions of race, culture and history are relevant for progressive politics of transformative change in public schools and other institutional settings. (p. 303). However, similar to the previous theoretical frameworks, the antiracist framework has also been subjected to critique. No framework, of course, is without its critics and antiracism is no exception.

Here, similar to criticism that multicultural education has failed to address

issues of racial inequality in schooling which resulted in unequal educational outcome and failure for many non-white minority students, antiracist education has also come under sharp criticism. According to May (1999), and critics such as Gilroy (2000); Hall (2000); Modood (2005, 2006, 2007) antiracist education has privileged racism over other forms of inequality in its early articulation, which has resulted in a preoccupation with “colour racism” and the black-white dichotomy. Consequently antiracism has attributed racism to be the primary modality in intercultural relations (May, 1999; James, 2004). In response to these critics, Dei (1998) noted that although skin-colour racism is only one of many forms of race and racialized practices, the recognition of new and multiple forms of racisms should not deny the saliency of skin-colour racism (304). Nieto furthered the argument in that antiracist education seeks to engage the energies of both those who experience racism and those who are members of the dominant culture in the challenge to racism. It also recognizes that there are some who will resist such engagement because of fear, or because they are doing just fine in their current situation. People who have power or who benefit from current power relations are not likely to be in the forefront of changing those power relations. Thus, the fight against racism has been led by those who suffer most from its effects. It is difficult for those who are hurting from racism to put racism “in a positive light” so as not to offend or “turn off” those who do not want to see it (Nieto, 2006; Razack, 2004).

It is also important to note that, as an explanation and not a justification, the historical significance of slavery in the US has meant that the racialization of

black-white relations has remained a prominent, perhaps defining feature, of discussions around racism, disadvantage and minority rights (Kymlicka, 2004, p.xiv). The process of racialization emerges in the context of a racial hierarchy, which serves as the background for continued oppression. This perspective is made concrete through the construction of racial categories as real, but also unequal, for purposes that impact all spheres of life. Given the fact that race was the primary basis upon which inequality was, and continues to be, structured within North American white patriarchal societies, the issues and nature of racism must also be at the forefront of any discourse that addresses social/racial inequality. To support this point, Parekh (2002) and Goldberg and Essed (2002) argue that the more demanding forms of inclusiveness are expressed in an antiracist education that not only challenges those relationships of power that racialize the school social order, but also invokes direct actions for dismantling the structural roots of educational inequality (see also Kailin, 1999; Nieto, 1999; Dei, 1996, 1998; Steinberg, 2009; Fleras, 2001). Thus, the very term 'antiracist' presumes the existence and extent of racism, and the need to confront and stamp it out because racism is deeply entrenched in Canadian history and everyday understandings of ourselves, of others and of the world around us (Stanley, 2001).

In addition, as a point of critique: according to proponents of critical multiculturalism, the unwillingness of antiracists to incorporate a culturalist approach - a legacy of their rejection of all things multicultural - has also meant that they have been unable to address the impact of 'new racist' discourses and their largely culturalist and nationalist emphases (May, 1999). However, in *Racial*

State, Theo Goldberg (2002) offered the rebuttal, in that antiracism education shifts attention away from minority cultures as timeless or exotic and instead approaches racism as something that is historically created, symbolically expressed, and institutionally embedded at various levels in society. Within this antiracist framework students and teachers are offered an opportunity to see how culture is organized, how some people become authorized to speak about different forms of culture, and how some cultures come to be seen as 'worthy' of public esteem. The emphasis here is on understanding how power operates in the interests of the socially dominant, and how existing relations can be challenged and transformed, as I shall explore all through this thesis.

In addition, since whiteness is used to largely define culture in North America, Paul Carr (2009) argued that unless we give White students a sense of their own identity as an emergent ethnicity, we naturalize Whiteness as a cultural marker against which 'otherness' is defined. So as long as European culture is used as the defining cultural frame for White-ethnic transactions, and defines and sets the limits on all thought about human relations, there can be no prospect for human equality (McLaren, 2007). It is in this quest for equality that McMahon (2003) advanced her claim that White educators need to be aware of what they bring to classrooms and public schools. She argues that a part of gaining that understanding comes through the need for them to examine their Whiteness and to locate themselves consciously within the curriculum. She gave two reasons for this: first, she argued that in order to understand issues of race and culture for ourselves and for our students, educators need to understand themselves as raced

participants, not as removed from issues of race and culture. She further argues that because public schools in North America are composed of multiracial student populations and predominantly mono racial teaching staffs, educators need to acknowledge the significance of race and privilege as they impact on all aspects of educational experience (p. 266).

3.1.7 CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

Having reviewed the literature on the various philosophical frameworks regarding schooling in a multicultural/multiracial society, the goal is to gain an understanding of the basic tenets of these frameworks which is necessary in order to develop an understanding of the study participants' experiences with schooling. The literature enabled me to develop an understanding as to why school and school board administrators have not challenged the status quo and in many cases denied the existence of racism despite, as we shall see in this thesis, continued complaints from students, parents and community members with no sense of responsibility and/or accountability. Most importantly, I am able to understand the ways in which public schools foster and structure inequality along race, class, disability, and gender lines, among others of course, and how these systemic inequalities are maintained to the disadvantage of mainly non-white, working-class students.

Combined, Chapter 2 and Chapter 3 have enabled me to develop a fuller understanding of the ways in which the very educational system that promotes issues of diversity and equality can also simultaneously maintain the status quo. The literature is clear in that the issues identified by the visible minority and

'Blacks' students and which centered around racism, streaming, differential treatment, criminalization and the unequal application of zero tolerance among others, are themselves symptomatic causes of an educational system that is inherently unjust. Gaining this understanding of the various philosophical foundations of schooling and their possibilities has prepared the foundation upon which I can begin to adequately examine the inequality facing Somali-Djiboutian youth in Ontario's educational system and the various transformational possibilities that exist to facilitate equal opportunity and equal outcome for all students. Consequently the following Chapter will examine the theoretical framework I have chosen in which to examine the educational experiences of the research participants.

CHAPTER FOUR

4.1 TALKING FROM THE MARGIN: ANTIRACISM AS A THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The previous Chapter examined various philosophical debates around schooling with regards to minority education in Canada and the United States. In reviewing the literature, I was able to settle on a theoretical foundation upon which to anchor my study. This research draws from two bodies of literature which will incorporate an antiracist framework to analyze the research findings; it will also frame my understanding of equal educational opportunities (EEO) and equal educational results (EER), with regards to the educational issues facing Somali-Djiboutian youth in Ottawa. As a researcher writing from what bell hooks (1990) calls the “creative margin,” the very act of writing this thesis is oppositional and a critical stance.

An antiracist perspective necessitates the use of a critical and oppositional pedagogy within which to seriously question the ways in which multiple interlocking barriers impact educational experiences and outcome for the research participants. In describing oppositional pedagogy, Brandt (1986) noted that:

Oppositional pedagogy is a theory and practice that premises itself on the notion of schooling as repressive and as serving to maintain the power structure vis-à-vis the social and racial status quo of schooling as well as in the wider social structure. Schooling, therefore, is seen as principally serving the ends of the powerful in society by maintaining their position of power through ideological induction into dominant norms and values of society, thus helping to maintain the social/racial status quo (p. 56).

In addition, one of the central tenets of antiracism is that it places the students, especially working-class students, at the heart of its politics. Antiracism

aims to address not only issues of racism but also other forms of oppression. Simply put, antiracism is by definition “an action-oriented, educational and political strategy for institutional and systemic change that addresses the issues of racism and the interlocking systems of social oppressions (sexism, classism, heterosexism and ableism)” (Dei & Calliste, 2000a, p. 13). It critically examines the ways in which power inequities affect the daily experiences, interactions, actions, words and lives of all people. Antiracism provides a solid framework from which we can begin to examine not only societal conditions that silence racially marginalized populations, but also the power relations that lead to these conditions. Thus it recognizes the socio-economic arrangement of Canadian society as well as the existence of class, race and gender inequalities in education (Wotherspoon, 2002). Inequalities such as racializing, streaming, stereotyping, excessive/severe disciplinary measures and the criminalization of Black youth emerge in the context of a racial hierarchy, which serves as the background for continued oppression. This perspective is made concrete through the construction of racial categories as real, but also unequal, for purposes that impact all spheres of life. This can be illuminated and questioned within a framework that is counter-hegemonic and capable of rupturing the silence around the existing status quo. Antiracist scholarship asserts that “[d]enying race is both theoretically and politically suspect” (Dei, 2007, p. 203). Dei says that there is discomfort surrounding naming and speaking race “but this must not be confused with the urgency of addressing racial problems” (p. 203). Anti-racism is based on the assumption that racial inequalities are a result of power imbalances embedded in

institutions and practices (Srivastava, 2007). Furthermore, Enid Lee (1995), a leading Canadian educator, stated that antiracism education is about “equipping students, parents and teachers with the tools needed to combat racism and ethnic discrimination and to find ways to build a society that includes all people on an equal footing” (p. 19). Through antiracism education we can teach students, teachers and parents various ways to resist the hegemonic power that adds to the continued subordination of marginalized groups. We can begin to de-center Eurocentric discourse and begin exposing our students to information that is often forgotten or unmentioned. Most importantly, employing a critical/oppositional pedagogy within an antiracist framework will enable me to freely speak on my own terms within an environment that is hostile, restrictive and strongly resistant to voices from the margins. This is especially so of the voices of Black scholars who seek to highlight the tensions and contradictions in educational policies and practices that are aimed at maintaining the existing status quo. Dei (1998) argued that self-criticism is crucial to antiracism politics and that education within this framework seeks to rupture racist projects in public schools, and to question White dominance and pathological views of marginalized groups that result in the production and reproduction of racialized practices (p. 302).

4.2 EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES AND RESULTS:

EXAMINING THE ISSUES

By 2020, 50% of the students in Canadian public schools will be minorities and 85% of our teachers will be white females, who differ from their

students racially, culturally, and in social status (Salas, Lucido & Canales, 2002). Students need to be able to make connections between what they learn, that is their curriculum and their everyday lives. This can provide students with a sense of affirmation about themselves and their culture (Nelson & Nelson, 2004; Colby & Lyon, 2004).

Although these areas of tension and contradictions within education have been illuminated by many Black scholars, reforms have largely been superficial with major changes occurring only at the political level in terms of mission statements aimed at sending messages about the commitment by institutions to embrace diversity (see especially Dei, 2008). Minor changes have been made in terms of mainstream courses which generally reflect the occasional tinkering of the curriculum in an added-on manner, or a few non-White references have been added to suggest reading lists without altering the substantive course material - thus preserving the status quo. In addition, despite a sprinkling of non-White teachers, Black and First Nations teachers are usually under-represented at all levels within the field of education, regardless of educational mission statements making claims of equal access, equality, diversity and equity. When I was teaching at the post-secondary (college) level my students always pointed out that it was their first time having a Black lecturer. The tension that is clearly highlighted here begs the question that if one is to believe in this notion of equality in education, how do we explain this racialized gap amongst mainstream and minority youth in our educational system? The reports regarding under-representation of Black teachers are consistent with the literature (see Dei, 2008,

1996, 1995; McMahon, 2003; Nieto, 2004). In deconstructing the status quo, Ghosh and Abdi (2004) argued that one major way in which racism and ethnocentrism are reinforced and perpetuated in public schools, colleges, universities and society at large is through a Eurocentric curriculum that centralizes the experiences of the mainstream and largely ignores the experiences, cultures and histories of other groups. Colby & Lyon (2004) argued that when people of color do not find themselves reflected in the curriculum, they are less likely to be engaged in the schooling process and they receive the subtle message that school is not for people like them. Nieto (2000) maintained that this has negative consequences for both White and Black students because while it denies the experiences and histories of non-White students, it reinforces White students' false sense of superiority, and therefore denies them the opportunity to benefit from the knowledge, perspectives and frames of reference that can be gained from studying and experiencing other cultures and groups (p. 65). Also, if the White students never see children of colour in the curriculum, will they not develop negative attitudes about children who do not look like them (Steinberg, 2009; Joshua, 2002)? The lack of awareness that there is a certain privilege that skin colour can grant you continues to be a problem with both adults and children. Thus Eurocentric textbooks and educational materials seem to present monolithic, distorted and erroneous information about certain groups, or to omit their contribution altogether. Portraying minority groups in a negative light, such books give a Eurocentric view of the world while simultaneously resisting and denying other cultures what they need to know and what they are capable of.

Rodriguez (2002) categorizes resistance to multiple minority group representations in the curriculum as either resistance to pedagogical change or resistance to ideological change. Pedagogical resistance is opposition to student-centered, inquiry-based, social constructivist teaching strategies. Teachers may view these approaches as unrealistic or risky and therefore revert to strategies that afford them more control. Ideological resistance on the other hand is opposition to the idea of using education as a means of creating social justice, “to use knowledge for self-empowerment and transformative action” (Rodriguez, 2002, p. 1018). Denial of deeply entrenched inequality is documented as another form of resistance. The following testimony of one black student in Dei’s (1995) study illustrates this dilemma.

The main stream kids... they may not think of it, but when they look through all those books, they see a representation of themselves. And somewhere in their little heads is “well, I don’t see someone who looks like so and so”.... The ridicule starts then, you know (Dei, 1995, File F03; Lines 568-584).

...So really the curriculum, it is geared to Europeans... the way they think, the way they go about their lives (Dei, 1995, File 19: Lines 1561-1562).

An antiracist framework of broad discussion, reflection and action assists in gaining an understanding of equal educational opportunities and results, and what identifying and removing barriers means in practice. Freire (2005) argued for dialogue, reflection and action as a process of education for social change. Our education system, like our communities, exists in an increasingly diverse environment and we are slowly coming to realize the resonance and value of alternative cultures as a nation. Even with this new awareness, the process of transforming our educational system to accommodate, respect and value

difference may be arduous due to the fact that the majority of teachers continue to be a homogeneous group of White, female, middle-class adults (Johnson, 2006; Chizhik, 2003; Brown, 2004; Chizhik & Chizhik, 2005). To ensure a social transformation and an educationally inclusive classroom, educators must learn to create an environment where reflection and risk-taking are encouraged. A number of researchers do advocate that teachers needed to “develop critical understanding of systemic issues of power, bias, and privilege in order to work effectively in diverse settings” (Weisman & Garza, 2002, p. 33). Their attitude toward providing for the learning needs of all students can help them to achieve this.

According to Kailin (2002) the cultivation of antiracist oppositional consciousness which goes against the grain of the dominant institutions often leads to labeling the advocates of such an antiracist strategy as outcasts or enemies of the system (p.50). This is generally where the notion of educational equality falls apart. Thus, the non-White minority is quickly reminded that this notion of equal educational opportunity and outcome exists only on paper. The height of the barriers and the breadth of the obstacles we have faced and overcome have been influenced by broader agendas of race, class and gender within education and within our society. Furthermore, this disparity is highlighted when the non-White challenges the status quo within an environment of resistance as this act often earns him or her the label of ‘trouble maker’ within the educational institution, especially if the conflict relates to race or class inequality. It is important to remember that racial conflict occurring in an educational environment is rooted in inequality, as was acknowledged by the Ontario Ministry

Education's (OMoE) statement below:

There is evidence that many Aboriginal and other racial and ethno-cultural minority students have been inappropriately streamed into programs with low expectations. The programs in which students are placed may have a significant impact on students' future career aspirations and their long-term quality of life (Ontario Ministry of Education, 1993, P. 14; see also OMoE, 2009: Equity and Inclusive Education in Ontario public schools).

Stratification in public schools occurs as a result of the way in which schools function. Public schools select and certify the workforce, and through streaming of classes prepare students from the disadvantaged classes and minority cultures to assume working-class attitudes and labor through a skill-oriented, non-academic curriculum. On the other hand, public schools prepare the dominant middle-upper class students in upper-class intellectual thinking to maintain the stratification of society. This indicates that public schools maintain privilege by passing on the norms of the mainstream culture and defining them as the legitimate knowledge, and dominant values of society are the mainstream values of the public schools and as such are defended by elected governments. Hence, I feel the urgency of this thesis, of the need to talk from the margin, and of the need for a rainbow coalition, where the burden of fighting injustice is not placed a few but a collective responsibility

CHAPTER FIVE

5.1. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Despite claims that every child has the opportunity to achieve his or her full academic potential, and despite claims of equal educational opportunity in Ottawa's public schools, the educational experiences of Somali-Djiboutian - particularly males from a working-class background - appear to be in contention with the board's claims. The primary area of contention lies around the school board's discomfort (not to say denial) with discussion on racism, classism and their various manifestations of a culture of Whiteness in the education system. As Bedard (2000) put it:

Since White teachers continue to perpetuate power and privilege and still represent non-White bodies in racialized ways, there needs to be a move towards examining Whiteness and its implication in public education (p. 56).

In addition, that problem is further complicated by the fact that neither the School Board in question nor its Catholic counterpart compiles statistics based on race, which are necessary to either validate or refute the non - White community's claims of racial inequality. James (2007) explained that:

A key component to racism is power-structural and institutional power. This power is more than the 'ordinary' influence an individual might have over another; it is the support of that influence by economic, political and ideological conditions. Often this power is an 'invisible' regular and continuous part of everyday human existence, sustained by established law, regulations and/or policies or by accepted conventions and customs (p. 357).

Therefore, the outlined problems and areas of contention form the basis upon which this research seeks to question the existing contradiction between policy and practice in Ottawa public schools.

5.2 THE PROBLEM

Although there have been several educational research projects regarding the issue of racism and its various manifestations such as streaming (Books, 2004), expulsions and suspensions (Pieters, 2003; Ontario Human Rights Commission, 2003) and social and cultural integration (Ibrahim, 1998), in Ontario, particularly as it pertains to Somali-Djiboutian youth, there has never been a specific project that addresses the various concerns of Somali-Djiboutian students in this Northeastern Ontario city.

The main ‘problems’- things to investigate - that this research would look at are:

1. Somali-Djiboutian youth and their academic streaming (mostly, as we shall see, into low-level academic programs).
2. Somali-Djiboutian youth and school drop out (whether voluntarily or involuntarily).
3. Somali-Djiboutian youth and school expelling; and the resultant effect of this in introducing them to the criminal justice system.
4. Somali-Djiboutian youth, particularly males, and the persistent stereotype of being aggressive, violent, low achiever, and lacking respect for authority, which this research shows result in harsher disciplinary actions.
5. The persistent pattern of suspensions and expulsions and Somali-Djiboutian youth disengagement from the educational system.

6. The existence of racism, and its various manifestations in Ottawa public schools.

When a disproportionate rate of Somali-Djiboutian working-class youth prematurely exit the educational system, whether voluntarily or involuntarily, due to low-level academic streaming, placement, suspensions and/or expulsions, it raises serious questions as to the process used to determine whether or not local School Boards are living up to their claims of 'educational equality' for all students (see Appendix I for a sample of a school board's claim to educational equality). According to Bireda (2000), students who are sitting in the office with nothing to do, in in-school suspension, out of school without the benefit of instruction, or placed in inadequate alternative educational settings cannot and will not experience academic success (xiii).

5.3 PURPOSE OF STUDY

The purpose of this study therefore is to analyze and bring to light the educational inequalities (such as racialization) Somali-Djiboutian youths feel and live on a daily basis in Ottawa's educational system. The process of racialization emerges in the context of a racial hierarchy, which serves as the background for continued oppression. This perspective is made concrete through the construction of racial categories as real, but also unequal, for purposes that impact all spheres of life. It is also my intention to make the margin talk and desilence the uncomfortable silence that marginalized young people feel. According to Kailin (2002) we must invest in analysis that considers how race intersects with other aspects of our being, such as class, culture and gender, in the formation of racist

assumptions, attitudes and behavior (p. 22). Further, I chose to conduct this research in this city for personal and professional reasons. On a personal level, I came to develop a deep-rooted passion for educational advocacy due to the educational inequalities and challenges my own children encountered in the educational system. Over the years, I discovered that many of the educational inequalities were not only systemic but that they fell along race and class lines. As a result, just like my own children, many Somali-Djiboutian working-class students were subjected to unequal educational treatment due to racism. Therefore, I felt that the power of resisting fragmentation is important to the recovery of the Somali-Djiboutians' communal voice by underlining the significances of narratives and reflective analyses as a key aspect of de-racialization of the young minds of our first generation Canadians. This is a way of collective healing and coming to terms with the brutalities of racism and classism in schooling.

Consequently, I spent many years looking into the overall educational structure, specifically the policies and procedures that govern public schools in this city. It then became clear that the educational system was structured in a manner that divided students along class lines, by imposing a boundary system that determines which school a child may attend based on her or his place of residence. My knowledge and awareness then led me to a life of advocacy in defense of many working-class students whose parents lacked the understanding of how the system worked to disadvantage their children. Gay (2004) stated that a major goal of critical education is to:

Change the structure of educational institutions so that male and female students, exceptional students, and students who are members of diverse racial, ethnic, language and cultural groups will have an equal chance to achieve academically in school (p. 32).

Also, as Gloria Ladson-Billings (1998) emphasizes, “the voice of people of colour is required for a deep understanding of the educational system” (p. 14).

5.4 STUDY GOALS

The goal of the study is not to generalize the findings, but to develop an understanding around the impact of multiple intersecting barriers on the educational achievement of the students. Within this project the role of class is considered a significant factor, because within the Somali-Djiboutian community, while all agree that racism is pervasive within this city’s public schools, there appears to be a dichotomized view about addressing the inequality inherent in the educational system. For example, depending on where one falls along the socioeconomic ladder, either privilege or marginalization will inform one’s frame of reference with regards to the educational plight of Somali-Djiboutian youth. This seems to confirm the view that the most important correlates of educational achievement are individual biography and the collective history of the social groups within which students are identified (according to their social status). In other words, students from a more relatively upper socioeconomic status know that they can easily go to university, while students from a lower socioeconomic status (of which a large number happen to be students of colour) know that they likely cannot. Therefore it is necessary to develop an understanding of the interlocking and simultaneous effects of race and socio-economic class in

education and their impact on the educational experiences of Somali-Djiboutian youth. The reality is that the class system in Canada is real in terms of its impact, and is a key determinant of work, wealth, income, and education; it also adds key variables for explaining inequality, whether people are aware of it or not, and it helps to shape individual outcomes (Fleras, 2001).

In exploring the interrelatedness of race and class, I think it is important for the reader to understand the meaning of the term ‘class’ as I understand it. ‘Class’ is defined as groups of individuals who can be categorized by their relationship to scarce and valued resources such as wealth, power, status - a category of persons who occupy a similar rank with respect to their standing in the economy (Fleras, 2001). This definition forms the intellectual foundation upon which I launched my exploration into the experiences of Somali-Djiboutian youth in Ottawa’s educational system.

5.5 STUDY OBJECTIVE(S)

The overall objective of the study is to break the silence around the educational inequality facing Somali-Djiboutian youth in Ottawa’s education system. Central to this study is the process of enabling participants who have been previously rendered silent within their school to now have a voice in the deconstruction of their educational reality as they experienced it in Ottawa public schools. Through their narratives, participants will be able to break the silence and speak out (or talk back) in relation to the Board’s policy and actual school practices. This research is especially needed given the facts that 1) educators consistently dismiss claims of racism and educational inequality within this city’s

public schools (as either non-existent or sporadic and individual incident), 2) school has become a site that reproduces social inequality, 3) public schools foster educational outcomes which are at odds with the concerns and aspirations of minority students (see especially Dei, 1996).

5.6 TALKING UNCOMFORTABLY: FINDING DIRECTION THROUGH QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

As in most qualitative research, the challenge here is to provide a research approach capable of providing a better understanding of what is going on in public schools with visible minority (Black) students; as well as finding participants, conducting interviews, and interpreting the interview data that will be used, and goals and significance of the study.

In this research, in addition to the above research ‘problem,’ I want to accomplish two objectives:

- to propose that, in order to understand what is happening in Ontario’s public schools, we need a socially critical approach capable of unmasking the inequalities and inequities of how public schools treat ‘Black’ students;
- to argue that, when dealing with the silence(d) and the uncomfortable, we need imagination more than method. That is, we need a conception of a qualitative approach that emphasizes different ways of thinking and conducting research as opposed to following prescribed methods (i.e., techniques). And in pursuit of such a robust perspective we want to revisit some of the key ideas in this field, which I do all through this thesis.

Accordingly, the complexity of the environments in which I wish to conduct this investigation, and the kind and quality of data which I hope to collect and the description which I hope to generate all need an open-ended and flexible methodology. Looking for a research approach capable of providing a better understanding of what is going on in students' life experiences in "...exceptionally challenging contexts" (Harris & al., 2006, p.121), I chose to identify my study as qualitative research, based on interviews and focusing on the experiences of Somali-Djiboutian participants who graduated from public schools within the last two to three years.

Using narrative, the study was designed to explore the stories and the chances of Somali-Djiboutian students, male and female, rich and poor (with special emphasis on the working-class experience) with equal educational opportunities to achieve their full potential. Individuality and the variety of issues facing many Somali-Djiboutian families with students in the educational system required a process that would allow them to identify the issues that they feel is relevant and important to them. In other words, I wanted to create a platform where uncomfortable stories are told to and about educators, among others. With this aim in mind, the student participants generally determined what aspect of their educational experiences they wanted to share with me.

Jody Miller and Barry Glassner (2004) suggest that "strength of qualitative interviewing is the opportunity it provides to collect and rigorously examine narrative accounts of social worlds" (p.137). Being an insider to the community and a student of qualitative methodology afforded participants a safe zone where

they were able to share with me the ways in which they constructed their worlds, their lives and their contexts. According to Rosaline Barbour and John Schostak (2005):

Clearly the interview is much more than just a tool, like a drill to screw deeper into the discursive structures that frame the worlds of 'subjects'. It is as much a way of steering, or rather a condition for seeing anything at all (p. 43).

A qualitative approach allowed me to see their worlds through the eyes of the students; it allowed me to get to know participants better and also to gain a better understanding of the challenges that faced them while completing high school. David Gillborn (1998) supports this notion since he maintained that "some writers have suggested that qualitative research, with its attention to multiple participant perspectives, social interaction and power within institutions, is more suited to the exploration of 'race' and racism in public schools" (p. 52). Considering that race is socially constructed, it is subjected to individual interpretation (Okolie, 2005, p. 248). Interviewing thus provides the flexibility needed to convey the many possible different meanings that race can embody or signify.

Furthermore by engaging issues of race, class, power and identity, the emerging literature in qualitative research based on interviews allowed me to understand how research became inseparable from what was being researched and the knowledge being produced. Making that connection between the 'what' and the 'how' explicit in my own research, and highlighting the ways in which the one derives from and generates the other in the production of knowledge will

reconcile methodology with its own name. A research methodology, as Smith (1999, using Harding, 1987, p. 2) explained:

Is a theory and analysis of how research does or should proceed... Methodology is important because it frames the questions being asked, determines the set of instruments and methods to be employed and shapes the analyses (p. 143).

In addition, according to Denzin (1997), a method is a technique, a way of knowing about the world and what can be gained through life stories: A way of knowing can proceed from subjective or objective grounds. Subjective knowing involves drawing on personal experiences, or the personal experiences of others, in an effort to form an understanding and interpretation of a particular phenomenon. *Objective knowing* assumes that an individual can stand outside an experience and understand it, independent of the person experiencing the phenomenon in question (p. 283). (Denzin adds a third way of knowing, Intersubjective knowing, which rests on shared experiences and the knowledge gained from having participated in a common experience with another person

In this research, I am collecting and analyzing “primarily unstructured data that ... have not been coded at the point of data collection in terms of a closed set of analytic categories”; data “that involves explicit interpretation of the meanings and functions of human actions” (Atkinson & Hammersley, 1994, p. 248). Here, primarily, my research has focused on the participants' thoughts and meanings. As we did that, the students were able to deconstruct and re-think the research context itself and critically and reflectively question what in the educational environment generates those particular thoughts, meanings, feelings, beliefs and actions (King, 2004). Qualitative research, as Denzin (2001) contends,

disrupts the status quo by bringing to light underlying and obscure operations of power and control resisting oppression and moves from ‘what is’ to ‘what could be’ (see also Noblit, Flores & Murillo, 2004).

5.7 CONTACTS WITH THE COMMUNITY

In winter 2010, I established contact with the Somali-Djiboutian Centre for Family Services in this city’s downtown, introducing myself and providing clear and detailed information about the research. This contact assisted me in the beginning to set a schedule that facilitated the conducting of the study at this community center. In addition, and very significantly, the contact helped me to build a good working relationship of trust with the Somali-Djiboutian Centre for Family Services. Since one of the primary functions of the centre is to offer educational or otherwise resources to Somali-Djiboutian youth, I was able to recruit and get in touch with potential participants. Here, I emphasized my need to talk with Somali-Djiboutian students who had graduated from high school in the last two or three years; and explained how circulating news of the research through their organization would be necessary in order to obtain participants for this project. For my research, the role of this organization was limited to disseminating information to the larger Somali-Djiboutian community in an effort to obtain a wide selection of participants. The target population was composed of:

- a) students who identified their ethnicity as of Somali-Djiboutian origin,
- b) graduated in the last two or three years from this city’s high schools
- c) may currently be working,
- d) still attending high school to accumulate better credits courses to go to universities and colleges, or
- e) studying full time or part-time in

universities and colleges in this city. In addition, with the permission of this organization I distributed flyers in their offices showing my telephone and email information that allowed interested participants to communicate with me directly (see Appendix E). Given my familiarity with the center, they were a great help in recruiting participants.

5.8 ACCESS AND ENTRY

While I did not encounter any difficulty establishing a trusting and effective interviewing relationship with the participants due to my background, there was, however, mixed reaction for the project, positive and negative and it was, very significant to note, along class line. The positive reaction for the project came from the working-class segment of the Somali-Djiboutian community. For them, the project was as a platform to air their troubled experience with this city's educational system, and they lacked a voice due to their marginalization. They wanted their voices to be heard and to trust that their stories would not be distorted. It was clear that, Somali-Djiboutian, working-class youth were not ashamed or afraid to talk about class oppression; they simply have little or no public venues in which to air their views (hooks, 2003).

On the other hand, there is the negative reaction, which came unexpectedly. As the researcher, I assumed that due to my racial and ethnical connection with the community, my work would be embraced by all. To some degree it turned out to be a wrong assumption. There were two types of negative reaction. First, participants acknowledged that they were aware of the problems within the system but felt there was nothing they could do on a personal level to effect

change, so they hesitated to participate. There was a sense that the fight is an individual one and as such, parents must take on the individual responsibility of fighting for their children's educational right.

Secondly, some participants expressed the sentiments that their siblings were doing well in school and to become involved in this type of project would jeopardize their educational well-being. They felt that this research had the potential to 'rock the boat', as one participant put it, and make life more difficult for Somali-Djiboutian students. In short, these participants did not see how this project could help to improve the educational reality of Somali-Djiboutian students in this city, given the fact that we do not have a voice or representation in either school board. The majority of community members (formally or informally) told me that regardless of the outcome of this research, it is a first step at the right time and a wake-up call for our community that may have an impact on our children's education, and assuming it would be taken seriously by the educational system or policy makers, something would be done to help Somali-Djiboutian students.

If one is to freely read into some participants' resistance, one is left with the uncomfortable feeling that a) this research has no power to effect educational change and b) to talk back or critically about the authorized system is to jeopardize basically, one's own educational opportunities or those around them.

While I disagreed with the argument that this research has no power to effect educational change, I did not attempt to influence their opinion and decision to participate; and although the participants raising this concern were few in number,

I felt their position was critical and worthy of mention.

5.9 RESEARCH SETTING

Barbara Sherman Heyl (1997) highlighted what she call the *politics of interview talk* and how an interview is about what is happening between the researcher and informant:

The interview can then be experienced as an opportunity to reflect on oneself with another. Even without the reflexivity that Fine (1994) urges, the interview is often presented as a time when someone else will give you, the interviewee, their undivided attention while you reflect on some issue or some aspect of your life. That in itself can have unanticipated consequences – a moment that can make all the difference (p. 5).

The approach here was to be structured, formal, one-on-one interviews consisting of open - and closed-ended questions (Appendix-D) (King, 2004). One of the primary benefits provided by the one-on-one interview method is that the researcher poses open-ended questions and allows the “participants to best voice their experiences unconstrained by any perspectives of the researcher or past research findings” (Creswell, 2005, p. 214). Therefore, students were asked to take me on a mental tour of their school, and it did not matter through which door they chose to begin their journey. The aim was to make them my tour guide, thus each participant was able to walk me through the various stages of their ‘real world’ school life by determining what they considered to be important in their school experience. This preserves the perspective and voice of the participants, which is a critical component of qualitative research design.

Prior to beginning interviews with participants, interview questions were reviewed with a few students in order to test the clarity and applicability of each question. Each participant in the study was interviewed twice for a minimum of

60 to 120 minutes each time. Questions were provided to participants prior to their interviews so they could choose to review the content of the conversation ahead of time if they wished. At the beginning of the interview, participants were asked to complete the Informed Consent Document (Appendix-C), to complete a brief demographic questionnaire (Appendix-D) and to provide me with basic data that might not emerge naturally during the interview. Each interview was recorded with two digital audio recorders, with permission from the participant in advance, in case of a potential malfunction of either device. Detailed field notes of interviews were hand-written and kept in a locked cabinet for the entire process of data collection, with the agreement of the thesis supervisor. Interviews took place in private or semi-private locations as mutually agreed upon by the participant and myself (in Libraries and coffee shop). Although a consistent set of questions was developed to guide the interviews, there was some flexibility to allow for exploration of emerging themes and topics that relate to the research questions. Follow-up questions were also chosen along with additional topics that were relevant to the research when participants have alluded to important topics. Further descriptions of their experiences and perceptions were asked for when appropriate.

5.10 PARTICIPANTS' VOICES AND DATA GATHERING

In the end, the number of participants that were selected for the study totaled eight. The participants were between the age of 18 and 22. Four of the participants were born in Canada and the rest were born outside of Canada and still they identified themselves as Canadian (see Table-A). The response to my

call for participation was overwhelming; so many wanted to tell their stories. For this research participants (and those who ended up not being part of the research), racism was so pervasive that they felt silent. By exposing their experiences with the education system, in the end, they had all hoped that some action would be taken.

The research participants were at varying stages in the educational process at college and university. The student group consisted of an equal number of females and males. Of the eight participants, two females and two males were from working-class backgrounds, while two females and two males were from middle class backgrounds. The study focused on graduates from Ottawa's public schools from the last two or three years.

I believe that in order for me to develop an understanding of their educational experiences using their lenses, it was essential that they be allowed to lead the tour, in whatever language they chose. All interviews, significant to note, were conducted in English. Since each tour is different, my interview guide contained a list of questions designed to build on the issues being discussed that they may or may not have included in reconstruction of their educational experiences (Appendix-D). As the interviewer, I was then able to listen actively and to move the interview forward as much as possible by building on what the participant has begun to share. Therefore the focus was on understanding "how human beings make sense of experience and transform experience into consciousness" (Patton, 2002, p.104).

This understanding comes from gathering participants' reflections on their experiences and the process of making meaning in which they engage. In listening to the participants describing their various educational experiences, I was able to personally relate and connect their pain, frustrations and struggles. Participants described the difficulties in which they went through and not understanding how the system works, how the teachers talked down to their parents because they spoke with an accent, and their inability to advocate successfully for their children due to the lack of voice and power. I also connected participants in terms of their power to negotiate and influence a desired educational outcome. 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 school board policies were also raised. All interviews were 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, 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 remove or add any information they wished to contribute to the data.

Official documents: I used qualitative analysis to provide an understanding of how public education policy documents have contributed to the participants' experiences. This analysis suggested new questions and corroborated qualitative data (Stake, 2005). These types of resources were helpful in determining if and how public school educational process over the years impacted the Somali-Djiboutian students' experiences in this study. These documents were the *Education Act, Education Amendment Act, Ontario Regulation 472/07 Suspension and Expulsion of Students, Protocol to Accompany Safe schools Policies in the Ottawa-Region, 1998, An Operational Guide for the Creation and Maintenance of a Safe School (as amended) Board Policy (P.043.SCO), and Police Involvement in schools.*

Interview elaboration document: 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 the participants after interviews as they played a crucial role in early stages of the analysis.

5.11 ETHICAL CONSIDERATION

Prior to the commencement of each interview with students, I met personally with each individual student, with the aim of providing information about the research. As well, participants were given information about me, the researcher, and participants were encouraged to ask me questions. In addition to verbal information regarding the research which was provided to participants, an information sheet was given describing the research project, including the address of the University under which the study was carried out and telephone number as well as my supervisor's name and telephone number (Appendix F). After this information session, participants were advised that their participation in the research was strictly voluntary and that they reserved the right to withdraw at any time throughout the process (Patton, 2002). No institutional or social pressure was used to influence or encourage the participation of subjects. Participants were requested to sign a consent form prior to the interviewing process. As all the participants were 18 or older, each one was required to sign the consent form her/himself. Prior to the actual interviewing, participants were informed that the interviews would be audio taped and that I would be the only person with access to the tapes, securing them in a locked file cabinet. In addition, of vital importance, participants were informed that the possibility existed whereby they might experience some level of distress after recalling incidents that were painful for them in the past. I also followed up with telephone calls after initial interviews to ensure the well-being of the participants.

In cases where I was contacted by telephone by students wishing to participate in the study, I briefly described the project over the phone with individual participants and gave them the opportunity to determine if they wished to continue with their participation in the project. If they chose not to participate in the research at that stage, no further contact was made with those individuals. However if they decided to participate, arrangements were made to meet with the participant personally at a time that was convenient to them.

5.12 DATA ANALYSIS: INTERVIEWS AND PUBLIC SCHOOL POLICY

The aim of my analysis was to try and understand the content and complexity of the meanings provided by the person being interviewed, rather than by measuring simple frequency of occurrence for example. Initially I struggled with the decision as to whether or not to transcribe the interviews myself due to the level of emotions that were expressed by the student participants. I worried about my own emotional stability in re-experiencing the pain associated with the interviews. However, I decided in the end that, despite the personal pain I experienced while interviewing the students, I nonetheless wanted to transcribe the interviews myself. In my quest to represent them to the best of my ability, I wanted to reacquaint myself with their pain. I believed that if they were able to live and endure the painful experiences they had previously described, then I should also be able to suffer the discomfort of listening to their pain.

5.12.1 INTERVIEWS

The following steps were taken to transcribe the interviews: STEP1: The interviews were audio taped, transcribed for analysis by the researcher and

checked by the participants. The structured interviews allowed the exploration of the codes and themes derived from the participants' narratives. However, the downside to personally transcribing the tapes was that it resulted in bouts of depressed feelings, particularly since I was personally experiencing many of the systemic inequalities along with my participants. Nonetheless, as I coded the written transcripts, I became intimately familiar with the data which enabled me to connect and thread the themes together as I wove my way through the process of analysis.

STEP 2: I coded the transcripts to identify the themes, patterns and discrepancies regarding the experiences of the participants and subsequently grouped the codes thematically. The main themes were derived based on the frequency with which they came up in the interviews according to what the Somali-Djiboutian students reported. The most salient and emerging themes and events were noted. Once the data were transcribed and checked by the participants, I felt as though I had achieved a close level of familiarity with the data. In the analysis, I did not merely attempt to establish accounts of frequency of occurrence, but rather I looked for examples and illustrations of the indicators and processes. The participants' collective narratives formed and supported the themes that emerged, and I was often surprised by the ways in which their stories connected and revealed the systemic nature of the problems being described. As such, the themes reflected the collective reality of the participants.

STEP 3: After the coding was completed, the transcripts were then reviewed for a second time and the data was thoroughly examined and recorded. I

then began to write the analysis chapters by choosing excerpts from the interviews that I felt were representative of the themes that emerged.

In the contextualizing phase of the process, I read and reread the transcripts in order to conduct an in-depth analysis. Thus this research is not an attempt to valorize the schooling experiences of the participants, but rather to use their experiences as a way to examine the larger discourses in which experience operates and is given meaning. I coded the transcripts and subsequently grouped the codes thematically. The most salient and emerging themes and events were noted.

One goal I struggled to maintain throughout the research process was to let the data speak for itself. Participants were clear about the issues they were experiencing. Therefore I, as the researcher, did not want to rename my participants' issues or reconstruct their experiences by taking their terms and categorizing them to mean something else. Madill, Jordan and Shirley (2000) discussed the meaning of objectivity and reliability and what they mean in qualitative analysis from three different epistemological perspectives. According to them:

Qualitative researchers have a responsibility to make their epistemological position clear, conduct their research in a manner consistent with that position, and present their findings in a way that allows them to be evaluated appropriately (p. 17).

For example, in conceptualizing the codes that emerged from the data, I remained mindful of the fact that different terms represent different things to different people, and therefore they should not be regarded as static. The various perspectives through which the codes emerged emanated from specific ideologies and world views - some of which challenge the dominant way of knowing (Dei, 1995). Therefore, I struggled to resist the dominant way of conducting research and labeled the participant's views as 'perceived', so as not to essentialize their ideas or language. Thus the terms in their simplest forms created the codes for the analysis, hence creating the space within which their voice can be heard.

By dealing in voices, we are affecting power relations. To listen to people is to empower them. Before you can expect to hear anything worth hearing, you have to examine the power dynamics of the space and the social actors. You have to be the person someone else can talk to, and you have to be able to create a context where the person can speak and you can listen. That means we have to study who we are and who we are in relation to those we study. If you want someone to tell it like it is, you have to hear it like it is (Reinharz, 1988).

After the coding was completed, I read the data thoroughly and recorded and recoded any instance where I felt certain academics or writings would support the themes. Similar to Solomon, Portelli, Daniel and Campbell (2005), I decided the analysis chapters would be thematically organized and direct quotations from the interview transcripts would be used in order for the reader to hear the voices of the participants. I then began to write the analysis chapters by choosing excerpts from the interviews that I felt were representative of the themes that emerged.

As a researcher who is mindful of the power of language, I allowed and enabled participants to tell their own stories, name their own issues, and

determine their own solutions. In addition to this, I hold an emic position in this research. This sentiment of being on the inside is echoed by Dei (2000) and Young (2004). Being an insider researcher gives a different perspective; we are able to understand the situation to a degree unlike others who have not experienced these phenomena. Young (2004) observed that “Being on the inside means that the researcher can maintain a shared sense of comfort and ease in interacting in the field, and that the researcher is sensitive and responsive to the cultural and social distinctiveness of the people under study” (p.198). Solomon et al. (2005) noted that as a team of minority researchers, “ this served to provide a unique standpoint to not only the data analysis but also to interrogating the latent ideas and knowledge contained within the statements provided by the participants” (p.152). This accentuates the value of minority researchers in research about minority groups; we can provide a distinct outlook. This is made possible by transforming my participants from being labeled 'objects' to making them 'subjects' of my research project. Generally, those who dominate are seen as 'subjects' and those who are dominated 'objects.' As subjects, people have the right to define their own reality, establish their own identities, and name their history. As an object, one's reality is defined by others, one's identity is created by others (hooks, 1989).

To ensure that the findings authentically represent the experiences of the participants, “A member check...whereby data, analytic categories, interpretations, and conclusions are tested with members of those stake-holding participants from where the data were originally collected will be conducted”

(Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 314). Participants therefore were consulted in order to get feedback and ensure that their experiences have been correctly represented. In so doing, credibility of the interpretation of the findings, I hoped, was demonstrated.

5.12.2 OTTAWA PUBLIC SCHOOL POLICY

Having discussed and formulated my theoretical framework in the previous chapter, I will now employ an antiracist perspective to examine the various themes that emerged from the educational experiences of Somali-Djiboutian youth within Ottawa's educational system and the boards' antiracist ethno-cultural equity policies. The organization of this section is as follows: an examination of the boards' mission statements, guiding principles, and the Boards' antiracist ethno-cultural equity policies; an examination and discussion of the participants' narratives that illuminate the grievous ways in which racism in this city's public schools nullify and denigrate the basic principles of equal educational opportunities upon which Ottawa-Carleton District School Board (OCDSB) and Ottawa-Carleton Catholic School Board (OCCSB) anchor their educational policies; a discussion on the subtle ways in which racism juxtaposed to class can either negatively or positively impact equal educational opportunity and outcome for many Somali-Djiboutian students in Ottawa's public schools. In addition, I present a dichotomized view of the nature of educational inequalities due to class differences from the perspectives of participants; and finally, an examination of the existing tension and contradiction between the Boards' policies and school practices and the multiple ways in which they result in unequal educational

opportunities and outcome for many Somali-Djiboutian students, particularly working-class youth.

Participants shared with me their personal educational experiences within Ottawa's public schools. In describing their educational experiences, the participants were able to reveal and highlight various contradictions and tensions existing between current educational policies and actual school practices. Gosh and Abdi (2004) argued that public schools give mixed messages, because stated policies may show objective standards, whereas individual experiences may be those of discrimination (p. 86). In highlighting these contradictions and tensions, the participants' narratives not only reflected their personal experiences, but also represented similar experiences of their peers and colleagues in Ottawa's educational system. More specifically, the participants' narratives highlighted tensions and contradictions between school policies and practices that often resulted in negative school experiences for Somali-Djiboutian youth. Most importantly, issues around race and class inequalities in schooling were also a central theme of the participants.

While participants agreed that the unequal educational practices affecting Somali-Djiboutian youth were due primarily to racism, both subtle and overt, the data also revealed that despite racism, middle-class students were able to some degree to achieve their educational goals due to the privilege afforded by their family's class status. For example, the narratives indicate that middle-class parents, compared to working-class parents, had the knowledge, resources and power to effectively navigate their children around many of the educational

inequalities facing working-class students.

My primary aim in this section is to elaborate on a number of key themes that emerged from my data. The purpose is to illuminate the myriad ways in which the explicit principles of equal educational opportunity, (EEO), upon which existing educational policies and school practices are founded, become grievously distorted and inverted by the racism that inflects the policies and school practices themselves. Needless to say, an understanding of these contradictions is a necessary prerequisite to any educational and/or political intervention that aims to redress policies and practices that negatively impact educational opportunities and outcomes for Somali-Djiboutian youth, particularly working-class youth.

Throughout the following chapters, I juxtapose my discussion of the data from participants with salient excerpts from relevant policy documents, which articulate in various ways the principles of equal educational opportunity upon which school policies are supposed to guide and shape school practices in Ottawa, but which in fact, they fail miserably to do.

Finally, central to the discussion is the close examination of the ways in which both groups of students, working-class and middle-class, lack trust within the educational system, share a similar ideology regarding the role of school teachers and administration, and understand that the educational system in Ottawa disadvantages them. And yet, based on the participants' narratives class status ultimately determines influences of educational opportunities, access and outcome for Somali-Djiboutian students.

5.12.3 OCDSB & OCCSB BOARD POLICIES ON EQUAL EDUCATION

The mission statements and guiding principles outlined by the School Boards in this city convey a philosophy in favor of and commitment to the equal educational opportunity and equal educational outcome for 'all' their students. These core values and beliefs are deeply rooted and reflected throughout the educational policies of the boards. One therefore cannot enter into a discussion of the various educational issues in this study without taking a closer look at the educational system of the boards (OCDSB & OCCSB) in the image in which it has chosen to portray itself. According to the mission statements of the boards:

- The Ottawa-Carleton District School Board challenges all the students to achieve personal excellence in learning and responsible citizenship within a safe, equitable, diverse and caring environment (<http://www.ocdsb.edu.on.ca>).
- In partnership with home, parish and community, the School Board ensures that the teachings and values of Jesus Christ are integrated in all aspects of school life. By providing the necessary resources for quality Catholic education, the Board supports the development of lifelong learners striving for academic excellence in a nurturing, safe and vibrant community. All individuals are challenged to become responsible and contributing citizens in an increasingly complex and diverse world (<http://www2.ocdsb.on.ca>).

It is critical to note that the School Boards emphasized and centered their mission statement on promoting academic excellence and developing responsible citizens in a caring/nurturing environment, while recognizing the diverse nature of the community they are serving. However, based on the participants' narratives, there is a striking divergence between the Boards' mission statements and the

actual educational experiences/reality of many Somali-Djiboutian youth, particularly working-class youth in Ottawa public schools.

Consequently, the mission statements have become a crucial factor in developing an understanding about the existing tensions and contradictions between the policies of Ottawa's School Boards, existing school practices, and the actual educational reality of many Black youth in Ottawa schools. As a means of putting into practice the school boards' mission statements, the Boards have also identified strategies that are in keeping with the guiding principles of equal educational opportunities. These strategies form the basis upon which public schools are supposed to anchor their practices in order to facilitate and achieve the Boards' commitment to equal educational opportunity and equal educational outcome for 'all' its students. For example, OCDSB notes that all decisions made by the board should:

- Support programs and services which challenge all students to achieve their personal best;
- Consider the input of students, parents, staff and the wider community as appropriate through a meaningful consultation process;
- Foster vital and mutually beneficial relationships between schools, the populations they serve and the communities in which they are situated; and
- Be professional, transparent, made with integrity and with respect for all (p. 048, S4.2, 1998).

Some of the OCCSB guiding principles state:

- Our Catholic educational communities provide a welcoming, caring, safe and nurturing Christian environment that respects and celebrates the uniqueness of all persons.

- Our Catholic schools in partnership with home, parish and community, contribute to the development of individual abilities for the service of the community, the Catholic Church, Canada and the world.
- Our Catholic schools promote the dignity and value of the whole person and the sacredness of life.
- The Board develops policies to direct human and financial resources at achieving responsible, accountable and equitable education for the well-being of all students (Mission Statement? board - 19990823 I Web Master).

Here, the guiding principles as outlined by both Boards again center on developing and encouraging students to achieve their personal best through academic excellence. Their philosophy is rooted in the guiding principles of EEO, which center the student in a learning environment that is caring, safe, respectful, welcoming, and nurturing. The OCCSB has added a Christian focus to the delivery of its programs in a Christian environment that respects and celebrates the uniqueness of all persons, while promoting the dignity and value of the whole person and the sacredness of life (OCCSB, 1999). Naturally, the value and belief system that is intricately enmeshed within these principles are also reflected throughout the two school boards' policies that govern and guide the delivery of the educational programs in Ottawa. As such, I will identify the relative policies that address or apply to the specific issues that were identified by the participants.

Since the issues around racism were the predominant themes throughout the entire research, I believe it is fitting to begin with an examination of the two Boards' policies regarding racial equality in schools under their jurisdiction. The objective of the existing anti-racist and ethno-cultural equity policy in OCDSB is aimed at promoting equity of access, treatment and outcome for all learners,

regardless of racial and/or ethno-cultural background (p. 098, 2001).

As mentioned before, similar to the mission statements and guiding principles, of both School Boards, the objectives of their antiracist policies are also clearly defined along the lines of equality and equity in terms of opportunity, access, treatment, and outcome. Implicit in their message is their position and commitment to social justice along the lines recognized by the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedom, pertaining to discrimination on the basis of ability, culture, ethnicity, gender, race, religion and class. They have laid out a plan that clearly establishes the guidelines and procedures to facilitate the achievement of such goals. For instance OCDSB school board states:

- In order for all students to have an equitable opportunity to maximize their learning potential, student evaluation, assessment and program placement decisions shall be bias-free, and parents/guardians shall be involved throughout the process.
- The Board is committed to providing guidance and counseling that fosters and promotes equity for all students, is sensitive to the needs of all students, and is free of racial and ethno-cultural bias.
- The Board is committed to providing an educational environment and a school system free of racial and ethno-cultural harassment and discrimination. No expressions of racial or ethno-cultural harassment by staff, students, trustees, parents and visitors shall be tolerated.
- The Board is committed to working in partnership with all racial, ethno-cultural and Aboriginal groups to provide curricula which reflect, in an equitable way, the experiences, perspectives, values and achievements of Canada's diverse society. In addition, the Board shall promote educational practices that provide students with the knowledge and skills needed to appreciate our common humanity and reject prejudicial and discriminatory attitudes and behaviors.
- The Board...is committed to fostering an environment that will enhance learners' intellectual functioning, and their ability to communicate in a diverse society by providing appropriate and effective support programs and resources for language learning, cross-cultural awareness and understanding (p. 098, 2001).

These sections of the Ottawa-Carleton District School Board's antiracist and ethno-cultural equity policy form the core of their directives, thus creating the framework in which an equal and quality education within Ottawa's diverse community is to be provided for all students.

In a similar vein, the Ottawa-Carleton Catholic School Board (OCCSB) seeks to protect individuals against any form of discrimination that contravenes the Ontario Human Rights code through similar antiracist and ethno-cultural equity policies. It states:

1. The Board shall recognize that all people are created in the image and likeness of God and, as such, all people have the right to be treated with dignity, respect and fairness
2. The Board shall refuse to tolerate all manifestations of discrimination on the basis of ability, culture, ethnicity, gender, race, religion and sexual orientation
3. The Board, in co-operation with other groups, shall facilitate the development of mutual awareness, understanding and appreciation among all diverse groups.
4. The Board shall commit to the development, implementation and review of practices designed to eliminate and/or prevent discriminatory barriers in the day-to-day operation of its schools and in the various workplaces it provides.
5. The Board shall recognize that, in order to ensure equal access and opportunity for the achievement of their full potential, students from cultural and linguistic minority groups may require special consideration with respect to: a) reception, b) assessment, c) placement, d) programming, evaluation, e) monitoring, f) meaningful communications with parent/guardians
6. The Board shall recognize the rights accorded to the individual by the Constitution of Canada, the Charter of Rights, and the Ontario Human Rights Code, and shall commit itself to the belief that all doctrines and practices of racial superiority are morally reprehensible and socially destructive. Such practices are unacceptable to the Board
7. The Board reaffirms its commitment to develop and promote racial harmony among its students, staff and the community, and shall provide education that is antiracist and multicultural and promotes ethno-cultural

equity (OCCSB, 2004).

As shown by the policies mentioned above, both School Boards have developed clear guidelines which form the basis for creating the practices and policies within the school environment to ensure equality for all. Importantly, the mission statement, the guiding principles, and the antiracism and ethno-cultural equity policies existing in Ottawa's School Boards are grounded in the rights of individuals as enshrined in the Canadian Constitution and protected by the Ontario Human Rights Code. Critically, their goal of developing good citizenship and active participation in a diverse and democratic society is modeled through their policies which have at the core a safe, nurturing, welcoming learning environment where respect, equal treatment, human dignity and positive guidance abound. My aim is to expose the contradictions between the actual school experiences of the participants and the practices of an educational system whose ideology recognizes the equality of all its students and encourages them to strive towards attaining their full potential through academic excellence.

5.13 LIMITATIONS

As a member of the Somali-Djiboutian community, I am connected with the Somali Community Family Services, but I had no prior knowledge of any of the participants due to my age. Despite that, I did have an existing acquaintance with the parent of one of the participants, which may have made it more difficult for that student to refuse to participate in the study. The following is no limitation, but a point worth raising: my participants were homogeneous in terms of language, ethnic/racial and educational background. This was both strength and a

limitation to the topics and issues addressed in my research. Moreover, the participants' relationship with me might have made them too comfortable during the interviews. Again, this had its own processes and limitation, but also had meant they were in a safe zone, in a space of comfort.

5.14 CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

This Chapter described the various stages that were used to gather and analyze the data, and the challenges that were present in the field. Most importantly, using the qualitative research based on interviews, I described the benefit of this project as a tool to lobby for educational change for Somali-Djiboutian students who are being marginalized within the system. Thus the research is enabling community members to take action aimed at correcting the problems affecting their youth in school. In the process of transforming my participants from being labeled 'objects' to making them 'subjects' of my research project, the following Chapter is dedicated to the student participants. In this Chapter, they will be provided with the space to deconstruct and reconstruct, if necessary, their educational experiences in Ottawa's public schools.

CHAPTER SIX

THE YOUTH AREN'T ALRIGHT:

RACISM, POWER AND IMAGINATION

Taylor (1989) posits that, “We must inescapably understand our lives in narrative form, as a ‘quest’” (P. 52). I embarked on this particular quest in the hope of improving the educational experiences of Somali-Djiboutian students, with a desire to help create a more humane and liberating public school environment. Reflecting on the painful memories of the participants, I believe there are better ways of teaching and better experiences for the students. I hoped to speak in the language of experience, a language that is not coded or exclusive, a language that may address a wider and more eclectic audience. Language discloses the human world; it is “what allows us to have the world we have” (Taylor, cited in Schwandt, 2000, p. 198). As a researcher I developed a study based on the narratives of the Somali-Djiboutian participants which call readers to think more deeply about issues that concern the Somali-Djiboutian community. As I engage in narrative and storytelling as a way of knowing (Bruner, 2002; Spring, 2001), my hope is that the story I tell will move readers to think about the impact of race and class on integration of Somali-Djiboutian students in the matter of classroom identities, as well as the identities that students create within their public school environment. I hope I will move readers to join my mission to help students of color (specifically Somali-Djiboutian youth) rise above the

limitations imposed on them. I write to inform and inspire readers. I write to inspire in-depth conversation.

Qualitative analysis of the interviews exposed numerous themes that the Somali-Djiboutian participants identified regarding the process of the impact of race and class in schooling. The analytical categories of the students' narratives were grouped as follows:

The themes contained in the following chapters attempt to represent the voices of eight Somali-Djiboutian students who consented to participate in this research project. Following the main themes that emerged from their narratives, I will highlight the various sub-themes that will be discussed in each chapter. It is essential that my participants' opinions and concerns on this project be heard as they were communicated. Furthermore, I have constructed several separate chapters in order to give more presence to their voices and because of my commitment to allow the voices of the student participants to become the central focus of this study. Accordingly, I anchored these several chapters around the narratives of the participants in a manner that illuminates their educational experiences while enabling them to speak directly to the reader. Clearly, it is important to include the transcripts for each participant in this research. Therefore, these chapters provide summative accounts of my research participants' responses in order to document their narratives as they were shared with me. I am aware that this documentation is not completely free of my interpretation. Interpretation was involved when I made decisions about what to include summative reports; however, when compiling this

summative accounting of my participants' voices I did not apply my theoretical lens.

In an attempt to protect the anonymity and confidentiality of the participants, fictitious names have been assigned to each participant. Despite what is considered among the Somali-Djiboutian community to be a pervasive silence around various forms of educational inequality in Ottawa, the majority of the participants expressed the need to be heard and to have the silence around their educational struggles broken.

To begin, a short biography of the students is presented (see Table- A) aimed at providing the reader with a sense of the speakers' identities in relation to their social location. Also, in attempting to examine the various educational experiences of the participants, given their commonality of race it was also essential to know the participants - their socioeconomic background, gender, their current level within the educational process, place of birth and point of entry into the school system.

Based on the data collected, it appears that whether Somali-Djibouti students were born in Africa or Canada, they shared similar educational experiences. The participants identified issues of racism and stereotyping, racial profiling and the criminalization of Somali-Djibouti males within Ottawa public schools, the unequal application of zero tolerance policies resulting in systematic suspensions and expulsions, low teacher expectation and ethnic grading. The first barrier to be examined is racism.

6.2 RACISM –‘IT IS HERE, WE SEE IT, AND WE FEEL IT’

I can hear your low whispers
I have seen that silent gaze so many times
I can read your mind
What am I supposed to do?
Scream at the top of my voice to let the world know,
Know that I am a poor and marginalized student at risk?
I know the pressure is mounting for me to leave.
I do not want to leave
I want to make something out of myself
But I guess I have to leave because I have been failing all my courses
Why can't any one see my bleeding heart? My broken dreams? My dried
up tears?
I thought the schools were for all of us
I thought there was something like, yes, like equal opportunity for all
Mrs. T sent me out of class the other day because I was sleeping during
her history class
How could I tell her T slept because my history was excluded from her
teaching and that my years of waiting weighted heavily on me?

by Njoki Nathani Wane, (Iseke-Barnes & Wade, 2000).

This powerful poem written by Njoki Nathani Wane has successfully captured the sentiments of the majority of the Somali-Djiboutian working-class participants in this research project. It mirrored their educational experiences that convey pain, shame, exclusion, hopelessness, silencing, degradation, alienation, broken spirits and most of all the slow erosion of their dignity by an educational system that continually makes claims of equality for ‘*all*’ students. In my attempt to gain entry into their world of schooling, I asked each participant to take hold of my hand and walk me through a typical day of their schooling as they experience it. I did not expect or anticipate the level of overt racism that marred these journeys. Based on the data collected, it appears that whether Somali-Djibouti students were born in Africa or Canada, they shared similar educational experiences. The participants identified issues of racism, stereotyping and

differential treatment, the unequal application of zero tolerance policies resulting in systematic suspensions and expulsions, low teacher expectation, ethnic grading, racial profiling and the criminalization of Somali-Djibouti males within Ottawa public schools. The first barrier to be examined is overt racism.

6.3 SCHOOLS WHERE TEACHERS MAKE OVERT RACIST

REMARKS?

Racism having manifested itself is the major issue surrounding Somali-Djiboutian student disengagement from schooling. This implies the physical presence of Somali-Djiboutian youth in public schools with low self-esteem compounded with barriers of dropping out or pushing out of the school system. The topics that I have listed below encapsulate the most striking themes that emerged from the students' narratives and represent the various ways in which racism manifests itself in school practices or impacts the learning experiences of marginalized Somali-Djiboutian students. The major topics that emerged from the narrative were:

- Overt racism
- Stereotyping
- Differential treatment
- Religious discrimination

The participants' responses revealed some familiar themes, themes that authors dealing with at-risk students had illustrated as being important to students. Students' sense of overt and covert racism, differential treatment in the regular classroom, their distant and even restraining relationships with classroom teachers and administrations, religious discrimination, their feelings of powerlessness and lack of freedom regarding choices on what to learn and how to learn it, the public

schools' demands that they conform to rules which the students may considered to be meaningless, their struggles with personal problems, negative stereotyping and their feelings of perceived inferiority were all familiar.

Participants often described abusive acts committed against them like name calling, discriminating, and criminalizing that are perpetuated based on racial differences particular to Somali-Djiboutian males. Here is how one participant elaborates by saying:

At first I did not understand why, and by the time I graduated from high school, I could count the kids on one hand - those who graduated. I noticed that there was a problem particularly with the Somali-Djibouti males compared to white males. They just seemed to disappear after grade 11. I am not sure if they dropped out of school voluntarily, or if they were expelled. They just did not graduate with me. I don't know where they are now, or even if they went back to school. Some of them were so smart (Anbaro, F, 20)

Anbaro is not aware of the real situation of the Somali-Djiboutian males in her school but is seeking answers as to what happened to them. There is no doubt in her mind however that racism exists in their school. Racism is essentially about power (Haynes, 2003, p. 66) and how it can be wielded against those who are disadvantaged by its use. This authority of discriminating treatment may leads to Somali-Djiboutian students' severe disengagement and alienation that eventually pushes them out of the education system prematurely or poisons any kind of aspirations that they have for postsecondary education. One participant described how a teacher related Black students with criminality, openly articulating discriminatory language in class:

A student came late to class while the teacher was writing something on the blackboard. The teacher turned back and saw a Black student standing at the door waiting for permission to take a seat. The teacher said, 'you

frightened me, I thought that you are doing something to me because I am afraid of Black people.' Then, one of the students shouted and asked the teacher, 'why are you saying racist remarks?' This student added that he will go to the office to report that. The teacher responded, 'No, No! I don't mean it like that, but I was just frightened (Qawdan, M, 20).

These are all explicit and overt examples of racism and its ugliness but these images and words neglect the insidious form that racism has taken, the covert forms of racism that Somali-Djiboutian students encounter daily. Here is how another participant responded with feelings of exclusion in the following way:

Racism and stereotyping are going across schools all the time. Stereotypical people are everywhere and some teachers are not exempt, because they have this outlook on Somali-Djibouti people that they are revengeful, they are angry, they are angry at life. If a Somali-Djibouti student approaches a teacher or makes a stupid joke or whatever - the teacher will take that personally right away and say that they are threatened - their livelihood is threatened, their job is threatened. Some teacher believes that Somali-Djibouti people are different than white people - they're angry people, violent people, people who are up to no good (Siidow, M, 20).

As participants voiced, racism is embedded in the foundation upon which we have built our society; it is engrained in the social institutions that we must encounter on a daily basis. Even though these participants articulated well and knew what they wanted to say, several times they were frustrated and unable to find the right words to explain their thoughts. One participant begins with a discussion of racial activity on school campus in the following way:

Most of the teachers at my school say racist remarks. The following incident occurred during the viewing of a film. Some students were talking during the film. The teacher became extremely angry and lost his temper and ordered a student to go out. Then, the teacher told the student: you are a "racist pig" as he walked out the door. In a separate incident, another teacher also said to a couple of kids that came in late because they had just got back from Africa, and he asked them if they had brought back AIDS from Africa and thought it was funny but no

one laughed. I was mad, but I did not say anything (Ajabo).

Despite the policies that explicitly denounce and discourage racism within the two School Boards in Ottawa, many of the participants have observed various forms of subtle as well as overt racism in their classrooms and the wider school community in general. One such student is Ajabo, whose Catholic school experiences conflict sharply with the core values of her school. Garcea (2006) argued that policies and practices often times do not corroborate with each other. For example, Ajabo noted that her teachers make overtly racist comments with no considerations for the students and provided examples of the level of racism they are being subjected to in their every day experiences in school. In her experience with overt racism, Ajabo (F, 20) stated that, “one of her teachers, in front of the entire class, told a Somali-Djiboutian student: you are a “racist pig”. The student went to the office and reported the incident to the administration. The student came back to the class with the vice principal. The teacher admitted in front of the class to the vice-principal that he did use those words and continued to argue that the expression does not have the same cultural significance to him. The teacher added that he understood that the student was more upset about the term "pig" than about the term "racist". The participant described the incident as horrible and unacceptable. The majority of the class were Black and felt shame and unworthy as the administration didn't take any action against this teacher. The teacher continued to teach at the same school, class and subject till end of the academic year.

In another incident with overt racism, Ajabo (F, 20) described that, “one

of her teachers, in front of the entire class, asked two Black African students after their recent visit to Africa if they had brought back AIDS to Canada with them". This perspective nominates carnal Africa as the origin of Aids. Watney (1989) argued that the way in which the discourse on the AIDS virus in Africa has been developed by Western commentators is infused with odd misconceptions and fears that are in line with the recurring theme of us vs. the other. Moreover, the spread of the disease has been viewed from the typical Western position of power, a perspective that tends to plague discourses on Africa or other formerly colonized areas. This deep-rooted and entrenched racist discourse acts to preserve a "capitalistic and highly stratified social" hierarchy (Henry & Tator, 2007, p. 117), with Black people at or near the bottom of this social and economic class hierarchy. Ajabo was not expressing doubt as to whether or not racism existed, because there are no gray areas in Ajabo's mind. She was extremely clear about the overt nature of the racism she and her peers were experiencing in their school life on a daily basis.

On the same note, police-reported data show that the vast majority of hate crimes were motivated by racism and ethnicity (61 percent), and religion (27 percent) (Dauvergne *et al.*, 2008). Kelly Welch (2007) noted, that "talking about crime is talking about race" (p. 276). In addition, among census metropolitan areas, namely Toronto and Ottawa, one of the highest rates of police reported racially motivated criminal activity was in Ottawa and half of all racially motivated crimes reported by police in 2006, targeted Blacks. Furthermore, Gosh and Abdi (2004) noted that the process of education forms identities and positive-

self-concept in some and negative in others. It empowers some through affirmation, and disenfranchises others through experiences of racism and sexism, or both (p. 173), as well as class differences. Ajabo described her outrage at having to be exposed to such overt expressions of racism from a teacher in front of her White peers, she said that she thanked God that her classmates did not find it as funny as the teacher taught it to be. Ajabo and her Black peers were not only 'shamed' as individuals, the racial group to which they belonged, was also under attack and its members linked directly to AIDS. Ajabo (F, 20) noted, "I was mad, but I did not say anything. It happens all the time and the Principal is saying that you can't talk back to the teachers, so we must just sit and take it". Hall (1997) would argue that her inability to process the situation was as a result of unfamiliarity with "[a] system and conventions of representation, the code of their [White] language and culture, which equips the White students, and not the Black students with cultural know-how, enabling them to function [in a society]" (p. 22).

Although Ajabo experienced an attack on her sense of dignity and group pride, she was unable to address or challenge it within the school due to the existing code of silence. Mark Proudfoot (1996) also shares Ajabo's experience with silencing and stated:

We feel silenced because of the negative responses we receive when we threaten the complacency of those who usually do not look like us. We are silenced by the contradictory messages we get, when we are told out of one side of the mouth that we belong, while the other side of the mouth tells us "to be quiet." No person is your friend who demands your silence, or denies your right to grow (P.254).

As noted previously in Chapter 5, Catholic education is guided by

Christian values which are at the core of its existence and commitment to teaching: “Our Catholic schools promote social and moral responsibility as a response to the call of Jesus Christ and the Catholic Church for justice and peace...Our Catholic schools promote the ‘**dignity**’ and value of the whole person and the sacredness of life” [emphasis added], (ACCSB, 1990). Yet the teaching practices of Ajabo’s teachers did not reflect or demonstrate a commitment to the core Catholic Christian values underpinning the schools in which they teach, rather they illuminated the existing contradiction between policy and practice. In light of this, Nieto (2004) suggests that, because most of us have experienced monocultural education, the process of adopting a multicultural education and worldview takes time and effort:

Becoming a multicultural teacher... means first becoming a multicultural person. Without this transformation of ourselves, any attempts at developing a multicultural perspective will be shallow and superficial ...First, we simply need to learn more. We need to be involved in activities that emphasize pluralism. We also need to look for books and other materials that inform us about people and events we may know little about...Second, we need to confront our own racism and biases. It is impossible to be a teacher with a multicultural perspective without going through this process...Third, becoming a multicultural person means learning to see reality from a variety of perspectives. Because we have often learned that there is only one “right answer,” we have also developed only one way of seeing things. A multicultural perspective demands just the opposite” (pp. 383 - 384).

In another example, another participant (Siidow, M, 20) noted that although his basketball team only has two White players, each year one is consistently awarded player of the week and ultimately most valuable player. Siidow noted that they ignore the fact that the White players rarely play and that it is the Black players who take them to the championship and win the games. In

Siidow's view, the most glaring aspect of this racism can be discerned from the fact that the school has won the championship year after year because of the Black players, yet the Black players are not considered valuable players. Siidow also explains that year after year the Somali-Djiboutian players stand in shame as they watch one of the two White players get the award and recognition instead of the Somali-Djiboutian players. Perry (2003), writing about the stereotype of the intellectual inferiority of Black people, said that, despite the illusion of an open and accepting society, there continued to be a "pervasive, persistent, well-articulated, and unabated assumption of mental incompetence" directed at Black students (p. B10). So while Black students possess the physical strength to win the game, they appear to lack the mental skills required to develop the strategies necessary for winning the game. Similar to Ajabo, the overt racism Siidow experience in his school is also clear and leaves no question about the interpretation in his mind.

It was obvious that these participants do have great dreams of how their best days ahead will look like after successfully completing their high school education. However, issues of racism seemed to be an obstacle on the way to achieving their academic goals and thus it becomes necessary to examine those issues.

These participants' narratives and realities are a first step in understanding the complexities of racism facing Somali-Djiboutian youth in public schools. By telling their stories and experiences, we aim to create rich and deep descriptions of situations and events that document overt and covert forms of racism (Parker &

Lynn, 2002). In addition, Somali-Djiboutian students are further subjugated and restricted by negative stereotypes that have constantly strengthened the racial opposition and division that lead to misconceptions about race and racial groups. It is the Somali-Djiboutian students, who are labeled often incorrectly, that suffer the deepest points of hopelessness, because a big part of their identity in the public lens has already been constructed by their schooling experience (Hudak & Kihn, 2001). In reaction to this, Outiya (F, 20) claims:

Yes, racism was a problem at my school because of the negative stereotypes the students had of the Somali-Djiboutian students at our school. It definitely did affect my self confidence. I felt out of place and not accepted. I felt that the only way to overcome it was to ignore it. The school was socially divided between the Whites and the Blacks, whom ... were mostly Somalis. Some teachers also displayed the negative stereotypes they had towards us Black students.

“To label others according to stereotype is to deny one’s own humanity, one’s own historical place within the world,” (Hudak and Kihn, 2001, p. 63). In other words, when a person’s humanity is denied their social identity is no longer in their control. As a result, the labeled person lives to fit (or is always controlled by) the preconceived labeled identity that is stamped upon them through social and cultural stereotypes (Smith as cited in Portelli, Shields, and Vibert, 2007). The assertion of White racial identity through negative stereotypes of Somali-Djiboutian youth reinforces the notion of the racial other. By playing the role of the racial other, always the submissive, inferior individual and the inequity of racial hegemony is enforced and solidified. Here is how one participant eloquently articulated the stigmatization of Somali-Djiboutian students arising from the subtle messages in public schools:

Even though teachers say it is not there, there is racism in the schools. The way they look at you compared to the way they look at other students. The teachers expect you not to do good just by the way you dress they look down on you as if you don't belong there. Then when you work hard and show them that they were wrong, they act surprised as if they did not think that you could do it. I would love to change that (Jeeh, M, 20).

Given the denial of racism and other forms of educational inequality in Ottawa schools, these passages were able to rupture the Board's claims of equality and racial harmony. For example, students were impacted due to shaming, negative stereotyping and low teacher expectation. Also, based on the participant's argument, students were able to identify the differential treatment directed at Somali-Djiboutian students. The following passage also describes the religious discrimination students faced:

While I was in Gr. 11 and 12, I become devoted to my religious belief and grew a beard, dressed in Muslim garments, but teachers, school administration and some of the White students perceived me differently. The administration did not want me to put '*my religious head covering*' and I used to hide it from them. They did not let us pray in school or provide a place to pray and when we pray under the stairs even that place was denied because they say it is an emergency exit. They told us to find someone to supervise us while praying. The school administration sent us to the school board to complain and nothing has been changed as the board referred us back to the school Administration (Jeeh, M, 20).

The following information describes the incidents in which the participant alleged that the school administrators denied students their right to practice their religion under the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. According to Jeeh, although he had attended this school since grade 9 and the administration knew him by name, that was not enough to trust him to pray

without supervision. The administration told them that they must have a supervisor present while they are praying. The students tried to, but none were available for the 5 to 7 minute prayer times. They were also told that they could not even pray under the stairs, so they had to abandon this religious practice. The students took their case to the school board but they were referred back to the school administrator. In addition, the principal told him not wear his religious head covering, which is a sign of humility and obedience under Allah. Jeeh continued to argue that the Christian practice of wearing crucifix necklaces, the same Jewish practice of wearing their Yarmulka head coverings and Sikhs wearing turbans are allowed. We must be treated the same; without discrimination. There was no doubt in the participant's interpretation that there was religious discrimination in the school system. It is in this regard that Younge (2001) contended that, since 11 September 2001 to be a Muslim is to be under suspicion, under threat and...under attack." In addition, Mason (2005) argues the "fear of difference, sense of one's own inadequacies, disgust at the other's desires, envy of the other's lifestyle, love for one's own privilege, belief in the other's inferiority, conflict with the others' values, and so on" fuel hatred along ethnic, religious, racial and gendered lines (p. 588).

6.4 COVERT RACISM: STEREOTYPING AND DIFFERENTIAL TREATMENT

In addition to the overt form of racism experienced by some students, the

majority of the students reported a more covert form of racism that sends a clear message that they are not equal. There is a prevailing belief that our official multicultural policy proves public education is populated by ‘tolerant’ teachers and administrators who value multiculturalism and, therefore, it is not contaminated by racism. The themes that emerge from the participants and from literature contradict this image and reveal that this is a myth. According to Barthes (1984):

Myth does not deny things, on the contrary, its function is to talk about them; simply, it purifies them, it makes them innocent, it gives them a natural and eternal justification, it gives them a clarity which is not that of an explanation but that of a statement of fact (p. 142).

For example one participant spoke about his negative schooling experiences:

Teachers and administrators preach against racism but they do not live up to what they preach. There was racism in our school. We had a lot of challenges while in school with teachers and administrators. I overcome these challenges with the support of my parents and community (Jeeh, M, 20).

The participant (Jeeh) identified that the experience of covert racism against young Black people indicate the persistence of significant discriminatory attitudes within public school educators and administrators. In addition, the participant emphasized that it was precisely because of the pervasiveness of racism, and the fact that the consequences of racism, being highly important, had not been addressed. As well, participants’ stories unmask the façade of this myth and reveal the underbelly of public education, with its deeply embedded racialized social and institutional underpinning (Kobayashi & Johnson, 2007). I use the term ‘underbelly’ intentionally to emphasize not only the notion of weakness or

vulnerability, particularly to exposure, but also the notion of concealment and, therefore, dishonesty. To my personal assumption, based on participants' narratives, the educational, social and cultural forces at play must first be acknowledged and understood in order to attempt to make any improvements to the Somali-Djiboutian student experiences. Once the existence and impact of these forces are accepted, the contradictions in the public school discourse about the Black 'Somali-Djiboutian' students can surface. For example, according to the article written by James R. in the star.com on June 24, 2010, there is an indication that the Toronto public school board discriminated against and imposed economic and educational apartheid on Somali immigrant students in North Etobicoke for the last 10 years. Executive superintendent Donna Quan acknowledged students face a less-than-ideal school experience and added that to repair the damage is complicated. This subtle form of racism, participants report, is very prevalent in Ottawa's schools and can be directly linked to the dropout rates of Somali-Djiboutian students. For example, a first year university student noted:

Racism played a role in our education. If it was not for that type of discrimination, my friends would have made it to college or university. But they gave up as a result of the racism that they encountered in school. I remember being told that I had to speak only the official languages in order to increase my chances of 'making it' in Canada. Each day I was forced to leave my mother tongue and my 'Somali- identity' was therefore forbidden in school, even when I was addressing other fellow Somali-Djiboutian students. As such, my cultural knowledge was always devalued in the school system (Qawdan, M, 20)

Wane (2006) says, "This has been done through a system of education, text, and literature. [Education] not only facilitated [colonization], but actively left deep spiritual and mental scars, causing mental and physical enslavement." (p.

88). Qawdan (participant) added that Somali-Djiboutian students collectively decided to become one student body and took up their ethnic identity against the covert racism from the administration and teachers in order to survive in the school community. This new mode of resistance made school a little more tolerable and infuses indigenous ways of knowing to counter racial oppression and contest cultural domination in public schools. Trueba (1994) wrote that there is “a profound link between ethnic identity and the student’s ability to participate fully in academia” (p. 380, as cited in Codjoe, 2006, p. 46). Furthermore, as a Dei et al. (1997) in their ethnographic study offer an explanation:

Students gave the impression that [there is a] sense of validation which is derived from having Black students... Black friends made school a more tolerable experience and, literally, helped them get through the day. This aspect of ‘surviving the system’ pervades their school experiences. Indeed, Black students share strategies of coping with each other which can be instrumental to their school success. (p. 155).

We, as young Somali-Djiboutian students, knew that we were against a system that was designed solely to deprive us from achieving any meaningful endeavour in our lives. Somali culture made it easier for Qawdan (M, 20) to function in school with a complete self. One of the striking themes that emerge from this research about the educational experience of Somali-Djiboutian students is finding that “knowledge and pride and affirmation in Black cultural and racial identity” is perhaps one of the most important contributors to academic achievement and success (Codjoe, 2006, p. 39). Arawelo (F, 21) explained that while racism sometimes affects her ability to learn she often tries to ignore it and talks to her parents about it when it gets to a point where she is unable to ignore it anymore. Through the parental support system, Arawelo was able to go to school

and hold her head up high and to the best of her ability completely separate herself from White school power. On the other hand, Jeeh described the subtleness of the racism that he and his peers experience as Black males. He argues that teachers expect the worst from them and are generally surprised when they do well. The participant, Jeeh, remembered overhearing the principal Mrs. XXX, telling a group of Somali-Djiboutian male students during lunchtime to “stay out of trouble... this is a country of peace.”

Dei et al (1997), in their ethnographic study of Black youth, captured this reality by stating that “[Black] students... complained about the social stereotyping of Black males as ‘violent,’ as ‘troublemakers’ and even as ‘criminals’” (p. 116). Jeeh continued to argue that just by the way teachers look at them compared to how they look at other students, one is able to tell how they are viewed by these teachers and so racism is the usual topic of break time discussion among his peers. There is no doubt in the participant’s mind that there was an obvious discrimination in the school. Arat-Koc (2006) contented that many Canadian Muslims feel that they live in a hostile and threatening society in which they are viewed as threat to the security of Canadian society. In addition, after conducting a classroom study on the interactions between teachers and students Kailin (2004) reported:

I saw how Black students were often marginalized, ignored, feared or stereotyped in school. As I began to talk to other children of color and their families, I was disturbed by what they have to endure to get an education ... I saw the covert or subtle manifestations of racism that subverted their education, much of it coming from the very adults who were entrusted with their education and enlightenment”- their administrators, counselors, and teachers (p. 3).

The *'overt'* and *'covert'* forms of racism being experienced by the Somali-Djiboutian and their peers have also been confirmed by the parents, educators, and community leaders through their direct experience with the public schools or through their involvement with the community. For instance, many of the participants described a system where Black students are consistently labeled and stereotyped, creating a hostile environment in which to learn. Qawdan (M, 20) noted:

This school system has started to look like a prison sentence because teachers are just waiting for a reason to disregard us - they are waiting for a reason to get us out of the system. We notice it, we see it, and we feel it.

By the same token, there is in Canadian society and by extension in its institutions such as education, a dominant racist discourse constructed regarding those of us belonging to the African Diaspora (Kobayashi & Johnson, 2007). There have been long-standing community complaints that these policies unfairly target 'Black' youth (Brown, 2006; Ontario Human Rights Commission, 2003, 2004, 2007; Kalinowski, 2003; Morrison, 2002). One of the most common complaints of the parents, educators and community leaders is that when Somali-Djibouti children are being bullied at school by their White peers, there was no action on the part of the teachers. However, when the Somali-Djiboutian student eventually reacts, due to the consistent assault, then the student is severely disciplined, while his/her White peer goes unpunished. As Dei (2008) argues, "the issue of race and the stigmatization of students arising from their differential treatment by race...cannot be underestimated" (p. 350). Qawdan expressed his frustration with consistently having to battle racism in school where all aspects of

their Somali-Djiboutian identity within the school community are being viewed negatively. He added:

We see ourselves coming to school with a hat - we would see another student, maybe of the Caucasian persuasions, maybe of another race, coming to school with the same thing and they just get talked to while the Somali-Djibouti students get suspended or expelled. And we notice all of these things and it just get embedded in our brain that 'hey maybe this is how life is, this is how life is going to be'. So we can't win, there is no hope. So we start doing other things, trying to find other routes in life. I have experienced that also and I know the feeling (Qawdan, M, 20).

This differential treatment being described by the participant is apparently not new; rather it represents the existing status quo as Dei et al (1997) offers an explanation:

[There is an] unwritten code that might be understood as part of the 'hidden curriculum' of schooling through which attitudes and behaviours of teachers and other school agents convey specific messages to students... many Black students feel that these messages are often conveyed through a climate of preconceptions which are fuelled by racial stereotypes. (p. 72).

These exclusionary school policies, procedures and practices are referred to as the 'hidden curriculum' because they are implicitly informed by stereotyped and prejudicial views, which in turn, perpetuate the myth of the academic inferiority of Black 'Somali-Djiboutian' youth, particularly from low-income and single parent families. Consequently, many in the community believe that 'dressing Black' has now become another reason by which Somali-Djiboutian youth, particularly working-class males, are targeted, labeled, and stereotyped despite antiracist and ethno-cultural equity policies within the two School Boards in Ottawa.

6.5 'DRESSING BLACK' - IMAGINATION DEVIANCE, DRUGS AND GANGS

We received criticism and negative stereotyping while wearing head bands, baggy jeans, oversize shirts and timberland boots from many White educators. Somali-Djiboutian youths choosing to dress in this 'Black' fashion are being labeled drug dealers, or gangsters. On contrary, White teachers viewed White kids with tattoos, wearing long Black trench coats, long Black boots, and punk hair styles as Canadian kids going through a developmental phase (Jeeh, M, 20).

Due to racism, the devaluation, and the degradation of Somali-Djiboutian youth within the educational system, many Somali-Djiboutian young people feel rejected and alienated within the White school culture, and have begun to embrace a style of dress that they believe represents and positively affirms Blackness. However, similar to the negative stereotyping attached to the verbal and non-verbal behavior of many Somali-Djiboutian youths, the wearing of head bands, baggy jeans, oversized shirts, timberland boots and Muslim garments has also been met with severe criticism and negative stereotyping by many White educators. One participant, Jeeh, argues convincingly that in his experience White students are allowed to wear long trench coats and long hair and they are not subjected to negative stereotyping or labeled as being involved in a gang. Jeeh further argued that he may consider White kids with tattoos and body piercings, wearing long Black trench coats, long Black boots, and punk hair styles as racist, but White teachers may view them as Canadian kids going through a developmental phase. Somali-Djiboutian kids, on the other hand, wearing head bands, baggy pants, Muslim garments and religious head coverings may be viewed as gangsters and extremists (fundamentalist) by the same White teachers,

administrators and police.

In addition, due to the negative perceptions of Somali-Djiboutian youth held by many educators, attempts may have been made to prevent White students from mingling with Somali-Djiboutian students. One student noted that a White teacher noticed a White student socializing with a group of Somali-Djiboutian 'Black' students. She told the student not to mingle with the Black kids because they were bad. The teacher later made a follow-up call to the student's home informing the parent that her daughter was associating with a group of 'bad kids'. What the teacher did not know was that the girl's parents knew the kids being labeled as 'bad', but that they were not in reality 'bad' kids, they were just labeled as such. Community leaders, parents and students complain about the 'bad kids' label that is often attached to Black youth without any justification. For instance, Siidow described a school community where he believed there was no tolerance for Somali-Djiboutian students. He noted that:

The school has some hidden book, this is my theory! They have a hidden book of what they call 'bad kids' and what they call 'good kids'. Now when you are a Black kid, you come in and they watch you closely, but after the first incident, the first thing wrong they put you in that 'bad' book - just because you done something wrong, you just made a name for yourself. Because it happened to me in grade 9 - it stuck with me. But maybe if it would have happened to me this year then my past years would not have been that bad (Siidow, M, 20).

Based on Siidow's school experiences and his peers, Siidow has developed a theory about the existence of a 'hidden book' that targets and labels students as either 'good or bad'. According to Siidow's theory, depending on the label that has been affixed to you, it will determine which book you are placed in, which in turn determines what treatment and opportunities you receive in school.

Unfortunately, Siidow, and his peers believe that the White kids generally go into the ‘good’ book while working-class Somali-Djiboutian students like himself are often recorded in the ‘bad’ book.

The educational experiences of Somali-Djiboutian youths as described by the participants show a real contradiction between the existing policies, guiding principles and mission statements of the two school Boards, and the actual educational practices of teachers and administrators in Ottawa public schools. Educators have used these policies and principles as the basis for rejecting and denying claims of racism and discrimination made by Somali-Djiboutian students in Ottawa schools. There is a false sense of protection and fairness that has been created by the Boards’ existing educational ideal, which is supposed to be rooted in equality, equity, and antiracist practice. A disparity exists between theory and practice, as far as the realities of the Somali-Djiboutian students are concerned. In personal communication, an educator stated that there are regularly scheduled meetings on a weekly basis so-called ‘Multi-D Department meetings’ in Ottawa high schools chaired by the school principals or school counselors regarding the students who are at risk, under suspension, have a bad attitude, or are under suspicion concerning drugs and violence. The agenda of these meetings seems to be based on information collected from class attendance records, teachers’ observations, expectations about the students and recommendations. Although these types of meetings have to do with all the school departments, science and math department representatives are believed to not attend and have no input whatsoever. In addition, there seems to be no discussion regarding good students

who are performing well in their education and have good behavior. This would seem to support Siidow's theory concerning the hidden book.

6.6 RACISM AND DIFFERENTIAL TREATMENT IN PUBLIC SCHOOLS – FACT OR FICTION?

Although Ottawa, like many Canadian cities, has become very multicultural and multiracial, and despite existing educational policies championing claims of diversity and equality, there seems to continue to be resistance in acknowledging the presence of racism within the educational system.

For example: Ajabo (F, 20) noted,

We go into class and take our seats and the teachers explains stuff to us and as soon as we ask questions he gets mad and asks how come you don't understand this and it is easy. And this one white kid use to tell the teacher off but the teacher never said anything to him, but if one of us talks he would kick us out of the class and it was like that for the whole class. We are always the ones being kicked out of the class.

This culture of resistance can be understood in relation to the power imbalance between the dominant and visible minority groups. Thus, the perception that racism does not exist in this city school as Dei (2000) argues, is a failure to see and recognize 'difference' as a site of power imbalance (p. 302). Rather than focusing on Whiteness as a site of dominance, the gaze appears turned to the racialized 'other', as a site of deficiency, thus the need to assimilate non-White minority students (Giroux, 2004; Neito, 2004; and McLaren, 2000). Accordingly, the power inherent in White dominance is made invisible within the field of education. As a result, the impact of racism on minority students' education

appears to remain unacknowledged by individuals who benefit from the existing status quo. Neito (1996) argues that:

People who have power or who benefit from current power relations are not likely to be in the forefront of changing those power relations. The fight against racism has been led by those who suffer most from their effects. It is difficult for those who are hurting from racism to put racism “in a positive light” so as not to offend or “turn off” those who do not want to see it (p. 203).

Even when the evidence of racism appears to be pervasive throughout the system, explicit in nature and indefensible by any means, it would seem nonetheless to be downplayed and minimized as isolated. This consistent denial serves to not only undermine the claims of racism and differential treatment that are being made by students in Ottawa, but also seems to be aimed at nullifying such complaints. A participant, Jeeh (M, 20), described that:

[racism] is a very difficult subject to talk about with teachers. There seems to be a denial around racism. So many teachers feel reluctant to go forward and address this issue. We decided not to prolong the discussion any further and kept quiet.

With their silence, they are resisting “cultural hegemony of [White] society, which maintains legitimacy by reproducing a silent discourse, based on the negative construction of otherness” (Dei et al., 1997, p. 231). In addition, a number of researchers do advocate that teachers needed to “develop critical understanding of systematic issues of power, bias, and privilege in order to work effectively in diverse settings” (Weisman & Garza, 2002, p.33). However, researchers have also found that teachers are resistant to this type of multicultural education (Brown, 2004; Chizhik, 2003; Chizhik & Chizhik, 2005; Gay & Kirkland, 2003; Mujawamariya & Mahrouse, 2004; Rodriguez et al., 2002;

Greenman & Dieckmann, 2004).

In another example, after reporting an incident involving racism in a local school to the media, the reporter investigated the allegation and was informed by a representative from the Board involved that, “**If such a situation happened, it is isolated**” [Emphasis added], (Ottawa Citizen, 2003). Either way based on this administrator’s response, no corrective measure was deemed necessary. By his/her rationale, ‘if’ it did happen, which is questionable in his/her mind, it was isolated, thus, no action is required. The question is then, when do we as a society and as responsible educators stop labeling problems of ‘systemic racism’ as ‘isolated incidents’? For instance, as in the case in Ottawa, according to Henry *et al*, when racism is shown to exist, it tends to be identified as an isolated phenomenon relating to a limited number of social deviants, economic instability, or the consequence of ‘undemocratic’ traditions that are disappearing from the Canadian scene. This discourse resists the notion that racism is systemic and inherently embedded in Canada’s cultural values and educational democratic institutions (Henry Tator, Mattis & Rees, 1998).

Due to this consistent denial of racism by educators and administrators in Ottawa public schools, many students have become silenced and are reluctant to raise issues pertaining to racism in schools, particularly when they result in differential treatment and the marginalization of Somali-Djiboutian youths. This denial of racism is so pervasive that one educator noted that in her school the teaching staff was instructed by the administrator that if any Black student alleges racism at any White teacher, it is cause for suspension. She noted that although it

was unwritten and not an official school policy, it was nonetheless in full force within the school. This unofficial policy appears to be intended as a means of deterring students from raising issues of racism within the school. This type of racism is difficult to address because it is built into the policies and practices of institutions and often is applied unconsciously, filtered through ideological practice. Institutional racism encompasses individual acts (teachers and administrations) of racism as well as those organizational (Boards) structures that disadvantage racialized students of color. It refers more broadly to the “laws, rules, and norms woven into the social system that result in an unequal distribution of economic, political, and social resources and rewards among various racial groups” (Henry and Tator, 2006, p. 53). In such instances, the individual advancing such claims is made to believe that they are the problem and labeled as such. Either way it could result in the silencing of students who are already facing multiple interlocking barriers.

In the same vein, Murray (2005) shares a piece of advice that her teacher friend received while practice teaching in one of Toronto's inner-city public schools:

"Not to waste too much time on the Jamaican kids because they'd never amount to anything and most would likely end up in jail anyways ... as for ***Somali students***, she was told, it was likely 'inbreeding' that accounted for their total lack of intelligence" (Murray, 2005, p. 2 - 3).

Murray goes on to say that her friend had hoped that these views were only of this particular teacher, however she came to realize that there was a pervasive climate within the school that had branded these children as losers. She grew tired of seeing the long line of black boys in the hallway outside one particular classroom

where the teacher kicked them out for infractions such as showing up without a pencil (4). In Murray's friend's opinion nothing is expected of these children so they are unlikely to succeed (Murray, 2005). Her friend believes that if these students are treated as dumb and lazy this is how they will act (Murray, 2005). Another participant, Outiya (F, 20), described how the teachers' differential treatment affected her self confidence:

You could see that there was a huge difference in the way the teachers treated the White students and the way they treated the Somali-Djiboutian 'Black' students. Whenever there was a good Black student, they would always call or label him smart, implying that the other Blacks were not or 'dumb'. But this did not occur when there were good White student. The administration made us feel that they were not helping us thrive but rather that they were against us by setting us for a goal that was too short from where we wanted.

Thus, often "... teacher referrals [or deficit attitudes] serve as an effective gatekeeper hindering minority students from beginning the process of screening and assessment" (Ford and Grantham, 2003, p.221). The question that remains is "... who labels whom and for what larger, political purpose?" (Hudak and Kihn, 2001, p. 15). Reflecting upon the participant's argument about the labeling (stereotyping) process, it can be observed that "[l]abeling is about politics, power, and representation. This raises the questions of: "Who has the power to define whom, when [does this happen] and how" (Hudak and Kihn, 2001, p.22).

Furthermore, According to Fine (1991),

Silencing signifies a terror of words, a fear of talk ...Those students, particularly low-income students.... Typically pay a price. They may be sent off to a psychologist for assistance, classified as insubordinate, seen as cause for suspension, or labeled. It is critical to remember that the official Board policies provides the framework within which its member schools are to provide a safe, nurturing, and welcoming learning environment to 'all' students, and where such students are encouraged to excel academically.

However, this presumed ‘unofficial internal’ policy contravenes as well as contradicts the Board’s existing policies. In opposition to the existing educational arrangement, and in arguing in favor of an antiracist framework in education, Dei (1998) noted that antiracist work implies a commitment to helping children identify the symptoms and causes of racism and supporting their efforts to challenge it. Most importantly, he pointed out that it must be recognized that such efforts will be met with resistance, but that children must be equipped to deal with that resistance (p. 202). This resistance against racism in public schools is essential because within the antiracist framework education presumes that racism is not an individual struggle, but that it can only be challenged effectively through informed, collective action (hooks, 2003; Giroux, 2000; McLaren, 1995; Neito, 2004; and Sleeter, 2000, 2001). Anti-racism framework is a sophisticated educational tool one can employ to challenge the status quo and question the dominant group that maintains a social, political, and economical hierarchy. As such, “[the] impetus for anti- racism change comes from local communities’ political struggles which challenge the Canadian state to live up to the true meaning of democratic citizenship, social justice, equity, and fairness “(Dei, 1996, p. 25).

Most relevant to the discussion is the reality that the racism Somali-Djiboutian youths are experiencing in public schools are being manifested in various forms. One such form is made visible through the application of zero tolerance policies in Ottawa public schools as participant, Qawdan (M, 20), earlier elaborated. The research participants have all identified zero tolerance as not only

targeting Somali-Djiboutian working-class males, but these youths are being subjected to a high rate of suspensions and expulsions under the guise of zero tolerance policies with the aim of providing 'safe' schools. Henry and Tator (2006) explain systemic racism as referring to the:

Laws, rules, and norms woven into the social system that results in an unequal distribution of economic, political, and social resources and rewards among various racial groups...systemic racism is manifested in the media by, for example, the negative representation of people of colour, the erasure of their voices and experiences, and the repetition of racist images and discourse (p.55).

Casella (2003) emphasized that “zero tolerance strengthens the link between public schools and prisons that began a century ago with the development of truant officers” (p. 884). Other studies (Hoffman, 2005; Cooper, 2000; Henault, 2001) reached similar conclusions. In fact, these measures had negative effects on the emotional health of students, their graduation rates and their life chances. Sughrue (2003) commented upon the Harvard project to state that when public schools enforced severe disciplinary consequences for minor infractions, students felt isolated and abandoned at a time in their developmental continuum when they most needed support. The Harvard report discussed the disastrous impact of zero tolerance policies, especially for children from the people of color and low socioeconomic status backgrounds.

6.7 GENDER AND SOCIAL CLASS EXPERIENCE

Gloria Ladson-Billings and William Tate (1995) argue that in the context of education, gender and class are the main areas of explanation that are used to account for discrimination but these two social constructs are inadequate to fully

explain students' experiences. In this study, with respect to gender experience, the issue of racism has a direct and profound impact on male participants in comparison with the female participants. For example, in one of the participant's statement (Anbaro, F, 20, see p. 135) indicates that she did not know why Black male students were disappearing. Based on her interpretation, Anbaro (F, 20) understood only that there was a problem but did not say whether it related to race or class. We can infer from her statement that racism and classism had a lesser or different impact on her educational experience and achievement.

By the same token, when I asked question # 22 (see Appendix D on my interview guide): Have you ever been suspended? How many times? Why and for how long?) to the participants, all female students responded negatively, while three of the male participants were suspended and one of them had a warning in his record. However, Arawelo (F, 21) added that her younger brother was suspended from school, and she felt that his punishment was unduly harsh and unfair. The participant continued to argue that if her brother was from the mainstream group he would never have been suspended in the first place, and would probably have received a light punishment inside the school. Moreover, Arawelo adds, a friend of hers and many other young students she knew from the Somali-Djiboutian community were suspended, sometimes for a month. Of course, this writer cannot confirm or deny Arawelo's assertion, but can confirm one thing: perception is reality!

The frustration of this female participant may be indicative of a person who is, to some degree, losing the trusting relationship and the concept of justice

and fairness of the school system. Two things to note here, therefore: First, it is very important not to dismiss neither her frustration nor her affirmation of the situation as she sees it; second, in the interviews, all male and female participants indicated that they have either siblings or friends who were suspended. It is not surprising then that female participants (like Arawelo) sounded exactly like their male counterparts in talking about what they saw as a miscarriage of justice happening to their siblings and friends. It seems that their responses may to some degree stem from emotions which cannot be interpreted solely as a bias, but a human reaction to such situations.

For Qawdan (M, 20), among many others, whether it is a reaction to an actual injustice or simply a perception, this is a lose-lose situation (see my discussion under the subheading, “Covert Racism” in Chapter 6). I saw this notion more prominently in the male participants’ discourse; or at least they had affirmed it more forcefully. This may mean that, more so than their female counterparts, discrimination and injustice are either experienced more often by the male participants or that they are at the forefront of their consciousness. Nonetheless, we know in the literature that male students are suspended more often than female students (see especially Siegel et al., 2003, p. 169).

With resilience and a lot of hope, it is noteworthy that, though male students had more challenges than female participants while in school, they all graduated from high school. On the other hand, however, the fact that four participants (three males and a female) took different educational streams at the university level which were not their primary choices raises troubling questions

around academic counselling and expectations. Except for the school counsellor, these four students, for example, had no one to guide them to select their desired courses. Furthermore, some of the participants, especially those from low-income families (Arawelo, for instance), relied solely on the school counsellor as their parents spoke none of the official languages nor had any knowledge of the Ontario education system. Is it any surprise then, as Alladin (1996) put it, that minoritized students, especially those of lower socioeconomic background, particularly males, are over-represented in the lower academic streams? In addition, finally, as immigrants with limited financial resources, parents of some participants could not afford to hire tutors at home (e.g., Anbaro: F, 20), which may have improved their children's educational achievements. On the other hand, some participants who were of a middle class background (e.g., Jeeh: M, 20) explained that their parents were quite helpful at home and their presence at school was noticeable.

Clearly, when intersecting racialization and social class with gender, the end result is as diverse as the participants in this study. Even though male and female participants expressed their disgust with injustices, when it came to been suspended from school, they both noted that male students experience it more often. Second, despite the fact that racialization is experienced by both male and female participants, social class seems to play as a big role. Here, it crosses both genders. Third, and finally, both male and female participants noted that academic counselling has turned into what might be called 'hidden racism.' Given parents'

lack of understanding of the school system, these students were totally at the mercy of school academic counsellors.

6.8 CHAPTER SUMMARY

The tendency to minimize the existence and consequences of racism towards Somali-Djiboutian students is what Henry & Tator (2006) and Li (2003) argue - that despite Canada's commitment to the principles of equality and non-discrimination, race remains embedded in Canadian institutions such as education, racial differences articulated in the normative order, public discourse and economic relations. They refer to this contradiction between a commitment to liberal values and the attitudes and behaviours that lead to intolerance and discrimination as "new racism". "New racism" stresses the oblique and covert nature of racism, as distinct from its conventional blatant manifestation.

Participants referred to this concept when they spoke about the fact that the Somali-Djiboutian students' experiences has been denied and in their opinion not acknowledged by the School Boards, despite the existing statistical data and physical presence of many Somali-Djiboutian students in the streets. The connection between the acknowledgment for wrongdoings by School Boards and the process of healing for the "victimized" Black students is something that is mentioned in the report *Towards a New Beginning* (1992) as a necessary step towards resolving the issues within the Toronto Black community:

The wider society might prefer to doubt the validity of these perceptions [of discrimination by Black Canadians]...Nevertheless, the perception and realities of unfair treatment persist in all areas of Black society... The inescapable conclusion is this: unless these perceptions

and realities are addressed in some meaningful way, unless African Canadians can be made to feel that they play a vital role in today's society and are not outcasts as a result of the color of their skin...Metroplitan Toronto [and indeed, Canada] may find itself headed for major social unrest. The first step to healing and rehabilitation is acknowledgement. To this end the Working Group's first Action Step is that of a joint declaration to be delivered in the political meeting places of all four levels of government (*Towards a New Beginning, 1992, p. 136*)

To date, no such declaration has been issued in the Ottawa board. The continued resistance towards acknowledging the past and the current implications of racism result in "collective denial, defensiveness, and a determination to maintain the status quo" (Henry et al., 1995, p. 308) on the part of the School Boards 'dominant power'. It is this view that antiracists seek to dismantle in their quest to eradicate racism. The issues that face the Somali-Djiboutian youths in Ottawa public schools are very complex and demand closer examination of how systemic racism has been instrumental in marginalizing the Somali-Djiboutian students. Students appeared to be saying that having a good relationship with administrations and teachers is of paramount importance to them. They need administrations and teachers who listen to students and who understand the students' point of view. They need administrations and teachers who treat students with respect, who will take the time to sit with students and help them with classroom assignments or with personal problems. They want administrations and teachers who are fair and flexible about the rules without racism, prejudice, stereotyping and differential treatments towards a specific group. However, most of the participants argued that no matter what they did, they could not escape feeling

unwanted and unworthy, as all the White authority figures were using language that demarcated Somali-Djiboutian students as violent and even, in some cases, pressuring the Somali-Djiboutian students to take cultural sensitivity classes, which seemed meaningless to the students. Those students thus become victims of the school system as a result of being constantly pushed aside and disciplined for “breaking the rules.”

CHAPTER SEVEN

DISCIPLINE AND PUNISHMENT: ZERO TOLERANCE, THREATENED IDENTITIES AND THE QUESTION OF POLICY APPLICATION

7.1 ZERO TOLERANCE FOR WHOM?

According to Helen Keller (2004), a woman as well as a victim of racism, “The highest result of education is tolerance.” Throughout their narratives, the students recalled various ways in which zero tolerance had affected their schooling. The participants such as: Qawdan, Siidow and Arawelo described not only their personal experiences but also their observance of the unequal application of zero tolerance policies in their schools. The importance of this chapter was heightened by the reasons for their experiences as well as the manner in which the suspensions were carried out.

In addition to the main topic, the following strong sub-themes such as: exclusion of parents during the process, targeting and labeling, and discrepancies between punishments given to Black students and those given to White students, will be addressed. These issues, which have emerged from the narratives of the participants, appear to indicate a pattern of systematic extraction of Black youths and specifically Somali-Djiboutian youths from the educational system. This pattern of repeated suspensions appears to resonate around zero tolerance, exclusion and unequal treatment of Somali-Djiboutian youths. This is how one participant reacted to this policy:

My brother got suspended for a week when he was in grade one. How can you get suspended for so long in grade one? I mean, come on, he is coming out of kindergarten and basically it remained on his record. Most of the Somali-Djiboutian kids would get suspended, sometimes for no reason. The white kids would be

assigned to punishment inside the school after school duties, but the Somali-Djiboutian kids would be kicked out of the school. I know many Somali-Djiboutian kids that have been suspended and got sent to vocational type schools or they get expelled. There was another case where my friend got suspended in high school for a month after being involved in a conflict with another white student. By the time he comes back to school, after a month in a semester system, it is almost impossible to make it up (Arawelo, F, 21).

Skiba and Peterson (1999) argue that zero-tolerance policies may also be doing increased harm. In fact, at times these policies have the potential to exacerbate existing problems by further isolating Black youths at a time when they most need support (Lawson, 2003). One participant noted:

Yes, I was suspended while in school for a short period because of a fight. I felt [that] suspension [was] unfair because I did not start the fight and my parent did not speak well in English and that may [have been] the reason. Administration labeled me as trouble maker. I was young at the time and I did not make any judgment about it. The administration did not suspend the other guy who started the fight because he was from different race and may be his parents knew English and can talk to the administration (Qawdan, M, 20).

By suspending or expelling students from school, the development of trusting relationships with especially those students and their parents, and the movement toward justice and fairness in society are all at risk (Henault, 2001). It has been argued that zero tolerance policies related to suspension can lead to dropping out, which can lead to delinquency, which can then lead to an increased risk of violence. Hence, one might discern that the tactics employed by zero tolerance policies in schools may result in increased youth violence (Juvonen, 2002). Yet another alarming fact related to zero-tolerance is the complete

disregard of a student's personal history, circumstance, or emotional state. In an attempt at fairness, zero-tolerance policies hand out consequences equally across the board. This "one-size-fits-all mentality" (Henault, 2001, p. 548) has led to very controversial realities. Here is how one participant described it:

I see a lot of kids getting involved with police because of school. A student will get into a situation at school, maybe a fight or so, right away the police are there, right away they are putting cuffs on, put in the back of the car and questioned for an hour or taken to the station, right away they are charged, especially if it is against a white student or a student who is not of color. Once you are in the system the cops never leave you alone - you now become targeted even more. Because the Somali-Djiboutian male is viewed as an animal, viewed as someone who can't make a critical decision, and the only way he can react is through violence. That's how we are seen by society and teachers. The Somali-Djiboutian males are violent and have to be controlled, tamed, put into the system, taught a hard lesson, and maybe they will come out better in life - that's not the case but that's what has been going on (Qawdan, M, 20).

7.2 SCHOOLING AND SAFETY RESOURCES POLICE OFFICERS (SRPO) ON 'ZERO TOLERANCE'

The participant described the activity in their school environment between the so-called safety resources police officers (SRPO) and Black students. A strong connection between school and police has become a stark reality for the Somali Djiboutian students. School has thus turned into a place of policing for these students, often ending in the Black students being charged with offences. In light of this, a school board trustee once witnessed such an incident where a police officer handcuffed a student in front of his peers prior to any investigation (see Ontario Safe schools Act: School Discipline and Discrimination p. 58). At one of

the few community forums that were organized for parents and students to discuss this initiative, a resource police officer described his job as follows: “we will survey kids at the local malls during lunch time or at local community centres to get to know the characters and make sure there are no incidents” (quoted in Joshi-Vijayan, 2008, p. 3). Police presence in public schools appears to have increased the interracial disputes and criminalization of the Black students. In addition, the *Globe and Mail* (2009) describes a campaign organized by visible minority parents against the school resource police officers (SRPO) to protect their children against the police harassment and further scrutiny in their article titled “Teen’s arrest in Toronto high-school hallway sparks debate police program”, 2009. The participant illustrated that discipline policies in their schools system have shifted towards treating Somali-Djiboutian youths in ways that increasingly resemble the adult criminal system. These environments often reveal the effects of policing on Somali-Djiboutian youths in public schools. The issues raised by the participants bring the educational policy of race and racism to new audiences and under new light. The ways in which public schools and law enforcement entities interact, the zero tolerance policy, diversity, and equality are all pressing issues that are often left out or not addressed by school administrations and community leaders, and in the meanwhile these issues are a cause of anxiety for students of colour. One of the most obvious manifestations of anxiety stems from police involvement in public schools which can oftentimes be rewarding, however, it could be seen as suspicious by Black students who feel they are under siege. Arguably this raises questions about what is the school’s primary responsibility in

this setting. According to the participant's argument, in some ways, students had fears about what will happen to them as they struggle to finish high school and felt foreign in their school environment though they are Canadian citizens.

Zero-tolerance measures, it can be contended, work with a racist ideology of safety, and the policies in particular help perpetuate racial hierarchies (Henay, 2005). This shift is exemplified in 'zero tolerance' policies built upon the premise that a coherent set of guidelines must be designed to determine what constitutes unacceptable behavior. In particular, most rules refer to suspensions, notification to police or expulsion of the so-called troublesome student. However, the participants vividly argued that the zero tolerance policy has dealt a blow to issues of justice, fairness and equity in Ontario public schools especially for students of color. In the same vein, the Henry and Tator (2000) study also found pervasive denial by dominant and more privileged social groups, of the existence of racism, despite the research and testimonials of scholars and those victimized by racism within the context and supporting literature of this study. This denial comes in the form of overtly and implicitly distrusting, disbelieving, doubting and denying Black people and their experiences. This deep-rooted racist discourse acts to preserve a "capitalistic and highly stratified social system" (Henry & Tator, 2007, P. 117).

7.3 CONTRADICTIONS OF SCHOOL POLICIES AND PARTICIPANTS ACCOUNTS ON ZERO TOLERANCE

The narratives of the participants identified systemic racism experienced throughout their schooling process and pointed to contradictions between school

policies and students' reality. Despite claims of educational equality by the two School Boards in Ottawa, zero tolerance appears to be a major concern for the majority of the research participants. Based on the narratives, Somali-Djiboutian youths appear to be bearing the brunt of zero tolerance policies in Ottawa's educational systems. The claims being advanced by the research participants are extremely serious in nature and must be examined in relation to the existing policies of the two School Boards in Ottawa. This city's school board policy on safe schools states:

- The Board believes in ***positive, constructive discipline*** intended to create and maintain an orderly, co-operative learning atmosphere in all schools. Disciplinary practices shall be fair and consistent with the basic assumptions underlying a democratic society. It is also the Board's objective to teach self-control, self-respect, self-discipline and respect for others and for property, to help prepare every young person for a satisfying and productive adult life.
- The Board believes that ***there should be continuing communication, consultation and co-operation among students, parents, staff and community***. Behavioural expectations and the consequences of inappropriate behaviour should be clearly enunciated in a positive manner to everyone in the school community. Principals shall review at least annually school safety and school climate with the school council, [emphasis added] (OCDSB, 3.3, 2004).

According to these policies, discipline is to be positive and constructive. Maintaining a continuous channel of communication between students, parents, staff and community also appears to be an important aspect of the Board's philosophy towards achieving a safe school environment. In addition to the policy mentioned above, the Board has also developed specific directives from which I present a few lines as follows:

- Our teachers and school staff maintain order in the school and ***hold everyone to the highest standard of respectful and responsible behavior***;
- Our schools work to maintain and strengthen relationships with the school community and our community partners
- The Board does not tolerate physical, verbal (oral or written), sexual, or psychological abuse; bullying; or discrimination on the basis of race, culture, religion, gender, language, disability, sexual orientation or other attribute.
- The Board ***encourages schools to use conflict resolution programs and other preventive programs and intervention measures*** to develop positive attitudes and acceptable behaviour.

The statements above represent a few directives provided by this city's Board aimed at maintaining a safe and effective learning environment for all its students. Similar to the antiracist ethno-cultural equity policies, these policies represent an educational ideal that has remained at the theory level for many Somali-Djiboutian students. At least, it has not yet been achieved with the participants of this study. Their testimonies show major gaps between the written policies and their educational experiences in schools that fall under the jurisdiction of the Board. On the other hand, the Board states in its policies that:

- The Board recognizes that all members of the school community enjoy rights under the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. In recognition of this fact, ***the Board shall treat all with justice and maintain an environment where conflict and differences can be addressed with respect and civility.***
- It is the Board's aim to encourage a "safe schools environment" through the provision of ***appropriate early and ongoing intervention measures*** and, when deemed necessary, the administration of disciplinary action in accordance with The Education Act.
- The Board shall Endeavour to ***assist students through curricula and skills-based training to handle conflict and/or anger*** in an effective and non-aggressive manner (OCCSB, 2001).

In similar ways, Board's school policy call for early and ongoing intervention aimed at correcting student's behavior prior to disciplinary action. This and their commitment to be '*fair*' to '*all*' students, forms the background against which the implementation of public schools' policies and practices, as reflected in the experiences of the participants, must be investigated. As a starting point in this discussion, I begin with the most recurrent issue that has been raised in the interviews - that is the concern that Somali-Djiboutian (Black) youths are guilty until they prove themselves innocent within their schools.

7.4 SCHOOL - A HOSTILE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT FOR SOMALI-DJIBOUTI YOUTHS?

The general consensus is that Somali-Djiboutian students are in a hostile learning environment due to the existing status quo. One of the participants compared their school environment to a prison system, which contradicts the policies and mission statements of both school Boards.

In light of this, Casella (2003) emphasized that "zero tolerance strengthens the link between public schools and prisons that began a century ago with the development of truant officers" (p. 884). Based on participants' reports, students have neither faith nor trust even to visit their old school after graduating to provide support to the younger Somali-Djiboutian students. This clearly expresses the impact of burden of guilt that is placed on them. Another participant noted:

I know that we are supposed to go back and help our younger

youths in school, but after we get out of school we just don't want to go back, the memories are so bad. I just couldn't wait to get out. High school is supposed to be the best years of your life but I couldn't wait to get out (Siidow, M, 20).

In addition, the relationship between the teaching staff, administration and the students was contaminated and the teachers were not helpful to them to achieve their educational goals. Here is how two participants, Ajabo (F, 20) and Outiya (F, 20), eloquently described:

Our teachers don't care about us, and they even tell us. They say we don't care. We are here to teach because we get paid. We are here to teach, if you guys don't want to learn you don't have to, you guys don't have to come to the class (Ajabo).

Teachers tried to have us speak on behalf of all immigrants or of a certain racial type or group, but it made us uncomfortable because we were seen as different in the eyes of everyone else in the school if we expressed the way we truly were. Most of my teachers let me know that I was strange and they did not understand me. I felt like I could not participate in the classroom discussions because they simply would not understand and that I would be left feeling different (Outiya).

There have been many other reports that Somali-Djiboutian students are being suspended at the allegation stage, prior to investigation and without proof of wrong doing, while their White peers suffer less consequences, if any at all. The research participants confirmed these earlier reports. The consensus within the community is that Somali-Djiboutian youths are in an educational system which views and considers them guilty unless they are able to prove their innocence. Despite the well-known principle of law, “innocent until proven guilty”, and despite the Boards’ claims to be fair and just to all their students, participants consistently reported that Somali-Djiboutian students are first considered guilty,

which is not the case for their White peers.

The voices of the participants were loud and clear on the subject of targeting Somali-Djiboutian youths, particularly working-class males, in Ottawa's public schools:

- Somali-Djiboutian students are guilty but White students are innocent until proven guilty;
- Every time a Somali-Djiboutian student and a White student get into a fight it is always the Somali-Djiboutian student getting suspended;
- Even before they start their so-called investigation, they will suspend the Somali-Djiboutian student; the White student is innocent until proven guilty. According to the participants of my research, the overwhelming impression is that is how it works both in school and in the justice system;
- The White student would be assigned to punishment inside the school - after school duties, but the Somali-Djiboutian students would be kicked out of the school (Arawelo, F, 21).

From the narratives, it appears that the Boards' ideal of maintaining a learning environment where conflict will be addressed in a manner that respects the rights and dignity of students while being equitable in their corrective actions contradicts the actual experiences of the participants and the larger community's view of the status quo in school. Participants consistently argued that the burden of proof lies with Somali-Djiboutian students and their ability to prove their innocence. In sharing their school experiences, participants also identified and established a comparative link between the existing status quo in public schools and that within the larger Canadian society. For example it was noted by participants that in conflicts between Somali-Djiboutian individuals (Blacks) and White individuals in Canadian society, Blacks are generally viewed as the

aggressor or guilty party. This sense of inequality is a result of the continued societal stereotype that Blacks are dishonest, aggressive, and untrustworthy, thus less credible. The participants further argued that similar to the status quo in public schools, an automatic presumption of guilt is generally applied to the Somali-Djiboutian students within the larger community, which then places the burden on him/her to establish his/her innocence against their White counterparts.

According to Outiya (F, 20):

Somali-Djiboutian youths are judged to be more violent and aggressive than other people so schools will not second guess before they call the police on them, then the Somali-Djiboutian person become known to the police and gets a criminal record, but white students don't have to worry about this. Thus the 'innocent until proven guilty' rule is generally not applied to Somali-Djiboutian students. Instead "guilty, until proven innocent" appears to be the order of the day for Somali-Djiboutian students.

Also another participant stated:

Now they 'Somali-Djiboutian students' are victims of the system. I see that a lot and that is how many students get thrown out from the school system - it happens all the time. I have never seen this where police is called for every little matter at school (Qawdan, M, 20)

Today, this sense of societal inequality may be rooted in the race and class stratification of society and the power imbalance inherent in such arrangements, which may also be reflected in education. Most importantly, it is essential that the history of group relations be considered in relation to the power afforded to people of color within the dominant society. Kailin (2002) argues that one must critically analyze the role of class, capitalism and the relationships of domination to the social construction of difference along race, class, and gender (p. 56). Therefore we ignore the historical nature of relations between Blacks, as a

subordinate group, and Whites, as the dominant group. Similar to other studies conducted in the United States, (Johnson, Boyden, & Pittz, 2001; Gordon, Piana, & Keleher, 2000), the participants also report that when zero tolerance is applied as a means to addressing Black/White conflict in school, the end result is that Blacks receive more frequent suspensions or expulsions than their White peers. Participants report that even when the White student is found to be guilty, the guilt is excused or denied by teachers because the White student is perceived to be a good child. The black student is required to play investigator in order to exonerate himself or herself because the Black student is perceived to be a bad child. However, despite the success of clearing the child's name, the student has already been stigmatized and has suffered the hurt and humiliation of serving an unfair suspension. He/she was initially presumed to be guilty and disciplinary actions had been prematurely invoked or applied.

The establishment of innocence after Black students have suffered wrongful suspensions is of little significance or of little comfort to them, as was the case involving a male Somali-Djiboutian student who got suspended after playing with a White female peer. The teacher, after observing the frown on the female student's face, inquired as to what was wrong. The student responded that it was Siidow without providing any further details. The teacher, without seeking further information regarding the situation from either student, reported what she perceived to be an unwanted and aggressive incident to the office, unbeknownst to the female student.

This administrator, without any investigation and without speaking to either

student suspended Siidow. The participant noted, “My question to this principal is - why did you not get all the facts together before you sent me home?” (Siidow, M, 20). Only after Siidow got suspended and his father got involved was an investigation conducted. The investigation revealed that they were only playing with each other, and that the White female student was completely unaware that the teacher had reported the incident which resulted in Siidow’s suspension.

Contrary to the Boards policy, the treatment or application of zero tolerance toward this student cannot be considered equitable, either in principle or practice, given that he was never questioned. He had no voice in the matter. He was presumed guilty of some infraction and thus automatically suspended. A report by Ralph Martin of the American Bar Association revealed that “Unfortunately, zero tolerance, as practiced today, is not rooted in theories of pedagogy or child or adolescent development. It teaches children nothing about fairness, and often creates injustice” (Ralph C. Martin, II, 2001). The message being sent by public schools to Somali-Djiboutian students’ youths is that they are aggressive and innately violent, therefore they must be disciplined. Often, due to racism and the unequal application of zero tolerance, this disciplinary measure involves the police. Solomon (1992, 2002) argues that the school’s top-down imposition of control, bolstered by external forces such as the police, demanded student conformity but got instead student resistance, alienation, and distance (p. 92).

7.5 THREATENED IDENTITIES DUE TO ZERO TOLERANCE - RACIAL PROFILING

Through their narratives, participants described their presence in school as unwelcomed where they work against the clock not knowing when their time will

come. They were aware of the zero tolerance policy and its consequences. Participants noted that the seriousness of this policy reflected negatively on their learning process. It is because of this same problem that a complaint by the Ontario Human Rights Commission (OHRC) was filed against the Ministry of Education in July 2005, on the basis of students' racial profiling, alleging that the application of school discipline legislation and policies were resulting in a discriminatory impact on racialized students. In the OHRC (2007, 2008) annual report, the Ministry acknowledged the widespread perception that the *Education Act* has a disproportionate impact on students from racialized communities and confirmed the concept of 'zero tolerance' has no place in the legislation, regulations or policies. Also, the Ministry supported the importance of collection of data on suspensions and expulsions, and the making of this information available to the communities. However, both School Boards in Ottawa denied either having or collecting any data of suspension and expulsion of students. This is contrary to the agreement made between the Ministry and the OHRC on racial profiling. In the same token, the research participants expressed their belief that the unequal application of zero tolerance is intricately linked to and intertwined with racism in that White youths do not bear the same burden of proof that is required of Somali-Djiboutian youths, nor does zero tolerance affect White youths in the same ways it affects Somali-Djiboutian youths. Henay (2005) argued that zero tolerance measures can be contended to work with racist and racialized ideology of safety, and the policies help perpetuate racial hierarchies in public schools. These policies enforce rigid school discipline and codes of conduct in a

one-size-fits-all approach. As participants noted, the White student may not be required to prove his innocence because he is considered a 'good' kid. This notion that 'Whiteness' equates *goodness* and 'Blackness' equates '*badness*' is a value-laden label that is subtly and continually reinforced in society through the use of generally accepted symbolic language.

The research participants' narratives reflected an awareness of the 'good/bad' label that is assigned to students in their schools by teachers and administrators. Teachers' and administrators' discretions therefore represent problematic variables that can affect a student's desire for academic and economical advancement as well as their self-image as either an academically adequate or deficient student. It appears that greater tolerance is shown to students who are considered 'good' while zero tolerance is swiftly applied to students who are considered to be 'bad'. Somali-Djiboutian youths understand that the negative image associated with their ethnicity significantly influences the differential treatment they receive. For example, participant noted:

I noticed that if my shirt is not tucked in - they send me home. I bumped into a teacher - they sent me home. There were so many suspensions that I could not have prevented. I honestly believe I could not have prevented them. Stupidness like I got suspended because a teacher said I gave her a 'look'. A look! A look that she did not like. A look, that she found threatening. And the thing that was crazy about it is that I did not even know this had happened. It's not like the teacher said okay lets go to the office. I did not even know what was going on. She was talking to the principal while I was in a different class and I got called down to the office. Okay, I go down to the office - I get suspended. The teacher said it was a threatening look. And they are saying they are only going to suspend me and they are not going to get the police involved. I got suspended over 'a look' (Siidow, M, 20).

The student noted that he was being suspended for trivial incidents for which their

White peers would not have been suspended. Such incidents included not having a shirt tucked in their pants, speaking out about issues pertaining to racism, or looking at a teacher in a way that she perceived to be ‘threatening’. The participant’s claims regarding the excessive nature of his suspensions are not a unique problem facing the Black community in Ottawa, rather a pattern of excessive disciplinary actions towards Black youths has also been established across Canada (Dei, 1995; Solomon, 1992, 2002; Brathwaite, 1996). Given the Boards’ antiracist and ethno-cultural equity policy, it is difficult to understand how the subjective interpretation of a Somali-Djiboutian student’s look, a student with no established violent pattern of behavior, can be deemed threatening to the degree that the student has to leave the school in order for a White teacher to feel safe. What message is this sending to this participant, and other Black male students? That any White person can propagate claims of fear and immediate harsh disciplinary action will be taken against the Black student? What defense did this Black male working-class student have against this White teacher and administrator within an educational system rooted in White supremacy? In questioning the power imbalance existing within the relationship between this Somali-Djiboutian male working-class student and his White female teacher, it is critical to then highlight the tension and contradiction in an unequal power relationship such as this one in order to understand the dilemma facing Somali-Djiboutian youths in Ottawa public schools. This incident was heightened by the reasons for, and circumstances around, the participants’ negative experiences as well as the manner in which the suspension was carried out.

Based on the teacher's 'perceived' fear of this Somali-Djiboutian male student, she had the power to have him suspended from school. He on the other hand, lacked the power to argue successfully in his defense, due to his gender, race and class marginalization within the teacher/student relationship, although Siidow made a persuasive argument during the interview that "his look" is part of his usual appearance and therefore it should not have warranted suspicion on this occasion, because otherwise, everyone at school would feel threatened everyday by his "look". Besides, given the historical negative imagery attached to Blackness, should this imagery that is rooted in racism allow discrimination and further marginalization of non-White students within public schools?

Despite the antiracist and ethno-cultural equity policy adopted by the Board, the school appears to be adhering to the principles of assimilation and conformity rather than anti racism. McMahon (2003) noted that an approach to teaching that incorporates critical pedagogy and anti racist multicultural strategies provides opportunities for all students to feel engaged within schools. He further argued that one aspect that is often overlooked, while focusing on the 'other' is the role that 'Whiteness--as a descriptor, group identifier, and symbol of power and privilege--plays within our schools (p. 269). As a result, based on my understanding of antiracist education, there can be no reasonable justification for suspensions based on the negative perceptions and subjective interpretations by White teachers and administrators of Somali-Djiboutian students' verbal/non-verbal behavior, and body language, particularly working-class males. According to Gordon et al,

When a discipline code defines punishable behaviour in subjective terms, such as ‘disrespect’ or ‘defiance of authority’ how the code is applied often depends on how individual teachers and administrators interpret students’ behaviour. Too often that interpretation is affected not only by a student’s objective behaviour but also by differences of race and ethnicity (Gordon, Piana, and Keleher, 2000).

Despite the repeated suspension suffered by many Somali-Djiboutian students, zero tolerance appears to have advanced to a new level. Under the guise of ‘zero tolerance’ Somali-Djiboutian working-class youths are being expelled when they least expected it - on or just after their sixteenth birthday.

7.6 THE SYSTEMATIC EXTRACTION OF SOMALI-DJIBOUTIAN YOUTHS THROUGH ZERO TOLERANCE POLICIES

The importance of this section was heightened by the reasons behind the participants’ negative experiences as well as the manner in which the suspensions were carried out. For example, Qawdan (M, 20) noted:

I actually have a friend and he has a problem with tardiness ... But all it took was a little bit of buckling down, a little bit of talking to his mother anyone who could probably have an influence on him - explain the staying in school system. But no, they deemed it fit to just expel him on his sixteenth birthday and they had a sarcastic way about it. Because his sixteenth birthday came about and they said ‘happy birthday, “Kusow” (not student’s real name), we have a present for you’ - it was a letter of expulsion. That was his gift. They said it with a laugh, patting him on his back as they escorted him out of school. So that's to the point where it has gotten. The school did not call the house, they did not try to talk to his parent, only at the last minute when they were calling to say we are expelling “Kusow” only then did they contact his parent.

In the same vein, another participant urges:

If you are to go to an adult high school it’s mostly Somali-Djiboutian kids there. Even graduation is being denied to us. White kids can graduate from high school but we must graduate from an

adult high school. But I will not go to adult high school, I will stay in this school, I will graduate from this school and not an adult high school (Siidow, M, 20).

In many working-class, immigrant communities in Ottawa, there is a significant visible population of Somali-Djiboutian youths within the community who are sixteen years of age or older but who are not in regular attendance at school. According to the Social Planning Council of this city, in 2006, there is great diversity among Black students aged 15 to 19 in which 10% are Somali who left school before completion and among the age of 20 to 24, 9% are of Somali origin. Community leaders are reporting that based on reports gained through continuous meetings within their respective communities, Somali-Djiboutian males are being expelled on their sixteenth birthday or just after without any warnings, and often after only one incident within Ottawa's public schools. One reported incident took place about a month prior to the sixteenth birthday of one Somali-Djiboutian student, who later got expelled from school after he had served his suspension and returned to school. He was therefore in school during the period before his birthday, but as soon as his sixteenth birthday came he was expelled right away.

In another example of the same situation, for instance, an educator told a student "we have a present for you" on his sixteenth birthday, and an expulsion letter was handed to the student as the school's "present" to him. The student received a pat on the back as the administrator escorted him out of the school. In a similar situation, a grade 11 student who had celebrated his sixteenth birthday over the summer holidays showed up for school at the beginning of the school

year and was told “you are no longer a student in this school, you have been expelled.” Why were all these students being expelled at the age of sixteen? The fact that they were being expelled after the age of sixteen was not a mere coincidence and that the reason for doing so appears to be to send them off to adult high schools, because in Ontario, high school education for children who have turned sixteen no longer becomes a legal obligation. So, rather than being in a regular school program where they will be able to graduate with their peers, these students are being forced, at the age of sixteen, to choose between an adult education program or no education at all. The students are saying “We are sixteen, we are not adults. Why should we go to adult high school?” Vavrus and Cole’s (2002) study of the discursive construction of school suspension demonstrated that removing a student from class/school for disrespectful or disruptive behavior was a highly subjective and contextualized decision based upon subtle race and gender relations that were not adequately addressed in discipline policies.

It is critical at this point that we remember the Boards’ policy on treating everyone with ‘respect and dignity’. What about the rights of these students to be educated? If the presence of these students in the school community posed serious safety concerns to the general school community, what intervention was taken by the public schools to address safety issues yet avoid the expulsion of these students? More importantly, why wait until their sixteenth birthday before action could be taken to supposedly protect the staff and students? Many students look forward to their ‘sweet sixteenth birthday’, however, for many Somali-Djiboutian

working-class male students, their sixteenth birthday means the day their education ended. The extraction of sixteen-year-old Somali-Djiboutian working-class males from the regular high school system also coincides with the age at which mandatory education ends as defined by the Ontario Ministry of Education guidelines. It seems unlikely that it is a coincidence that public schools expel Black students after they turn sixteen. Most importantly, under the existing educational arrangement, the funneling of working-class Somali-Djiboutian male students out of the regular high school system by administrators indicates a serious systemic problem that will ultimately lead to the under-education of a significant cross-segment of Ottawa's Somali-Djiboutian community. Neito (1999) argued that educational failure does not develop out of the blue, but is created partly through school policies and practices that in a very real way illustrate what a society believes its young people deserve (p. 201).

The critical point here is that the under-education of Somali-Djiboutian working-class youths will also have considerable social and economic impact on their future ability to become self-sufficient and economically stable which are also necessary conditions for breaking the cycle of poverty and achieving upward social mobility. Despite claims of valuing diversity, educational equality and equity by the Boards of Education in Ottawa, Somali-Djiboutian working-class students are being denied their rights to self actualize within an educational system that has no accountability.

7.7 UNEQUAL APPLICATION AND ERODING FAIRNESS BY APPLYING ZERO TOLERANCE

Important to this discussion is the lack of educational statistics along racial lines to support my participants' claims regarding educational inequality and the harsher disciplinary actions that were being leveled at them. As such, there is no evidence in Canada, unlike the United States, to show that African students are over-represented in the use of corporal punishment and expulsion, and they are underrepresented in the use of milder disciplinary alternatives (Roman, 2004; see also Skiba & Peterson, 1999). The research findings of Roman (2004) (see also Skiba and Peterson, 1999) were also consistent with my own findings in that the working-class participants complained more frequently about the unequal suspensions and expulsions between them and their White peers. The seriousness of this claim by the participants means that not only are Somali-Djiboutian students suffering from more frequent suspensions, but that these frequent suspensions are taking place out of school rather than in school. Therefore Somali-Djiboutian students are more frequently removed from the learning environment including classroom instructions compared to their White peers. In corroborating the students' observations, one participant noted that:

Most of the Somali-Djiboutian students would get suspended, sometimes for no reason. The white students would be assigned to punishment inside the school after school duties, but the Somali-Djiboutian students would be kicked out of the school (Arawelo, F, 21).

The lack of statistics in the education sphere has made it possible for the preservation of the status quo, while avoiding any level of accountability when it

comes to racial disparity in school discipline. So while School Boards advocate an equal educational system, they have not been pressured to account for the existing claims of disparity in school discipline along racial, gender and economic lines. The ability to examine the existing level of equality, or the lack thereof within Ottawa public schools, is currently not possible. Paulo Friere (Friere & Macedo, 2000) emphasizes the importance of personal responsibility in the struggle against the oppressor (meaning the teacher and other empowered adults within the school realm) (p. 65). Despite the extreme importance of struggling against oppression in public schools, members and leaders of the Somali-Djiboutian community are unable to establish the impact and application of zero tolerance from an official statistical base, whether through the Ontario Ministry of Education, individual Boards in Ottawa, or through Statistics Canada.

It is my position that such statistics about the education system are necessary to show the extent of the racial disparity in school disciplinary measures against Somali-Djiboutian youths, and the impact of such disparity on the future economic prosperity of these youths versus members of the dominant group. Despite the lack of racial statistics, members of the Somali-Djiboutian community are seeing the physical evidence of Black school-aged youths hanging out on the streets and in public instead of being in school. Whether or not the statistics exist to confirm the existence of a systemic problem, the community to whom these children belong lives with constant visual reminders regarding the educational plight of their youths. Another concern expressed by the Somali-Djiboutian community is that not only are the expelled youths not being educated,

but they are also at increased risk of getting into delinquent activities that can negatively impact their future. As such the existing status quo within the current education system has resulted in Somali-Djiboutian parents, community leaders, and students with the feeling that they are being silenced, alienated and left to establish and prove their claims of educational inequality without statistical data.

According to the Social Profile of this city on the 2006 Census (Social Planning Council of this city, 2008), Somalis are Ottawa's largest visible minority group. Based on the 2006 Census, 8400 young adults aged between 15 and 24 left their public schools before completion. 60% (5,055) were aged 15 to 19 and 40% (3345) were aged 20 to 24. There is great diversity among the people of color aged 15 to 19 in which 10% are Somali and among the age of 20 to 24, 9% are of Somali origin who left school before completion. Moreover, despite the following, the Ottawa public schools Boards are still in denial of educational inequality existing in Ottawa public schools:

- Acknowledgement by the Ministry of Education, in July 2005, that the *Education Act* has a disproportionate impact on students from racialized communities and confirming the concept of zero tolerance has no place in the legislation and school policies
- The Ministry of Education supported the importance of collection of data on suspensions and expulsions and making this information available.
- The Ministry of Education supported producing the numbers to establish, legitimize and prove Somali-Djiboutian community claims of racism and unequal treatment to either of the Boards

Furthermore, it would appear that the Boards are not being held accountable for the miseducation of many Somali-Djiboutian working-class students, despite

the availability of statistical data and physical evidence that indicate there might be disparities existing within the school boards. Poirier (2005) argued that despite several suggestions made by the Ontario Human Rights Commission (OHRC) for the School Boards in Ontario to collect data on suspensions and expulsions, unfortunately, this has not been implemented. Subsequently, the OHRC issued complaints in protest of the School Boards failing to provide equal rights and fair trials for all students and for punishing students of color more severely (Bhattacharjee, 2003). However, due to the White dominance inherent within the school system and the power associated with it, school officials in Ottawa do not feel the need to establish proof negating claims of racism and educational inequality towards Somali-Djiboutian students. Yet, one educator noted that based on the unwritten and unofficial policy, school administrators are able to instruct White teachers to suspend Somali-Djiboutian students who raise issues of racism against them. This places Somali-Djiboutian students, particularly working-class males, in the path of increased targeting, labeling and harsher disciplinary actions.

One of the more troubling characteristics of the zero tolerance approach to discipline is that a disproportionate number of the students at risk for a range of school punishments are poor and Black (Roman, 2004; see also Skiba and Peterson, 1999). The at-risk label comprises students who are doing poorly in school and on a deeper level that these students are incapable of doing well (Martell, 2005). In the same token, according to the Toronto Board of Education (TDSB), the majority of the students who are classified as at-risk are students from Black immigrant communities where Somali and Caribbean students

comprise over 35% of the drop out rate (Brown, 2006).

Contrary to the Boards' policies that encourage intervention measures, open communication with parents, students, and community, Somali-Djiboutian youths are silenced, suspended/expelled, and their issues nullified. As Arawelo (F, 21) noted "*we have no one in the system, we have no voice, and we are at their mercy*". Another student states, "This school system has started *to look like a prison sentence* because teachers are just waiting for a reason to disregard us" (Qawdan, M, 20). In the same vein, Jeeh complained to the board of education about this incident of religious discrimination and requested a common room where all students of different faiths could pray, but nothing has been done. These students' analysis of schooling is one whereby they are restricted from full participation due to their subordinate position within the larger school community, hence they have feelings of isolation and exclusion from the dominant structure of schooling. Though the participant, Jeeh, argued his religious rights as a Canadian citizen, the reaction on the part of school administrators and teachers shows they had no religious tolerance while knowingly denying him the right to practice his religious rights and freedom. Equally as important to the discussion around harsher and more frequent disciplinary measures, reports are also pointing to a possible pattern whereby Somali-Djiboutian working-class males are being criminalized due to zero tolerance policies.

7.8 THE COLOR OF DISCIPLINE AND CRIMINALIZATION OF BLACK YOUTHS...: REDIRECTING A SCHOOL-TO-PRISON PIPELINE

This discussion around the criminalization of Somali-Djiboutian youths can be considered an expansion of suspensions or expulsions in that the participants reported that the decision to suspend and/or expel Somali-Djiboutian youths, especially working-class males, is often accompanied by police involvement. Such disciplinary actions do not address the root cause of students' misbehavior, and may be related to higher rates of juvenile incarceration and lower rates of academic achievement. Through the numerous narratives generated by this research and through my professional involvement at the community level, there appears to be a high incidence of police involvement in public schools, and it also appears that Somali-Djiboutian males from working-class backgrounds are the primary targets of such police involvement. Here is how one participant explained what happened to him while he was in an Ottawa public high school:

“My gym class was predominantly white students. One day, something was stolen in the changing room and the gym teacher came to me alone and asked me- did you see such item? I really felt out of place and asked him, what made you think that I have stolen it? He smiled and left” (Siidow, M, 20).

In reference to the participant's argument, the teacher believed that the Somali-Djiboutian student was the only one who could have stolen this item and approached him. The participant was ashamed, shocked and felt out of place. The participant was in his last grade in school and was supposed to graduate that same year. The gym teacher targeted this particular student alone because of his skin colour and treated him as a suspect though there was no evidence and he had no

prior infractions against the law. This is the way that some school educators may treat and racialize Somali-Djiboutian youth. This can be described as a stereotype because he was Black. The teacher felt free to commit an unlawful act, criminalizing the process of dealing with this Somali-Djiboutian student in the school environment. In my opinion, the assumption of this teacher has a high degree of similarity with how the police of this city conduct what they call ‘the street check’, as explained by a police officer from the city police during the Community Policing Action Group (COMPAC) meeting in June 2010. This means that a law enforcement officer, in or out of uniform, can approach, stop and search any person they want and ask any questions they wish at any time and location. The street check really means the old ‘random police check’ or ‘random spying’. This can and has already ended up as ‘in-school checks’ without reasonable suspicions for questioning and without evidence. In the same token, some authors even concluded that police officers in public schools, rather than promoting a sense of safety by preventing unacceptable behaviour, may instead pose a psychological threat to students by restricting their freedom and fostering a climate of intimidation and fear (Jackson, 2002, p. 631).

For instance, it is argued that school staffs are more frequently utilizing police intervention to deal with issues such as fighting, petty theft, or other minor issues, yet common problem behaviors that would have been previously considered “routine” internal disciplinary matters had been dealt with by the school administrators (Hyman and Perone, 1998, p. 11). This has also been the case in several Toronto public schools where police have been called by school

staff “with the ulterior motive of having a student criminally charged and placed under a condition not to communicate with a student victim or student co-accused [thus requiring] a transfer” (Falconer, 2008, p. 485). In addition, according to Dei (in press-a), the most contentious issue in education is the suspension and expulsion of students of color following the zero-tolerance policy. Furthermore, Casella (2003) argued that in order to be successful, a school discipline policy must not criminalize students. It should provide positive social models and engage students in the problem-solving process. By working with the student, positive relationships could be fostered between the administration and the students, making them less likely to feel criminalized and more engaged in the school community. Komives et al., (2005, 2006), highlighted the importance of close adult mentors for all students, and in particular the researchers emphasize the impact mentors have on students of colour. This will increase the retention and academic success of students of colour by creating positive connections with the school community (Smith, 2007; Strayhorn & Terrell, 2007).

Here is the question, what is the school’s primary responsibility to youth and to education? Are public schools to enforce law and order, yet neglect the proper education of our youth? One participant, Qawdan (M, 20), stated that his school began feeling like a psychological prison in which the Somali-Djiboutian students’ were being constantly subjugated. No matter what the Somali-Djiboutians did, they could not escape feeling unwanted and unworthy. All the White authority figures were using language that demarcated Somali-Djiboutian students as violent and constantly told them, “This is Canada. Now you can’t be

violent.” The process of simultaneous hypervisibility (Dei, 2008) of Somali-Djiboutian bodies was inescapable: a process that encoded them as criminal and violent. This refers to the additional scrutiny and magnification a student of colour receives in the sight of others because of his/her skin colour, socio-economic class, gender and behaviors. Similar to my research findings, the literature also supports the claims of increased police involvement with Black youths in public schools. In his study, Solomon (1992) found that suspensions of Black youths often involved the police. For example, one of his participants noted: “For every little thing the V.P. calls the police ... Say he tells you to leave the school building on suspension and you try to talk to him, he threatens to call the police to remove you. He doesn’t even want to hear what you want to say” (p. 89). The concerns expressed by community members are that increased police involvement with Black youths leads to their racial profiling and criminalization within the existing educational/social arrangement. It is important to note that the Youth Criminal Justice Act applies to young persons between the ages of 12 and 17. The Police Deputy Chief Larry Hill acknowledged at the national policing forum that this city police officers are not immune to stereotyping youth with respect to their skin colour. In the same vein, one participant noted:

The police know all the Black kids in my school because they come into our schools and go through our year book. So when they see us on the streets they know who we are, they call us by our names (Outiya, F, 20).

In a personal conversation, one educator also confirmed Outiya’s claim in that through police/school joint intervention to promote safe public schools, the police

have access to their year book and student information but it may be the Black students that they generally target. The educator further argued that this arrangement makes it easier for the police to profile Black kids within the community. In addition, Solomon (1992) also found similar findings in his Toronto study and noted that:

The construction of the 'fear' of crime by black youth is used as a justification to police them in schools. Policing them in the classroom also aids with identifying and monitoring black youths on the streets (p. 90).

The unanimous consensus of participants is that due to negative stereotyping and unequal treatment, the educational system has become a vehicle through which many poor Somali-Djiboutian males are entering the criminal justice system. For example, students are reporting that as Somali-Djiboutian males they are viewed as violent and have to be controlled, tamed, put into the system, and taught a hard lesson (Qawdan, M, 20). But this participant is not alone in his analysis of how public schools have constructed and reinforced negative images of Blackness. The literature also supports his analysis. According to Hopkins (1997), many Black males are required to enroll in school and participate in a school culture that deems them invisible except in negative terms. He further noted that Black males are not oblivious to the pervasiveness of negative imaging and stereotyping placed on them by society at large and in turn by the public school (p. 64), (see also, James, 1998; Neito, 2004; McLaren, 2000; Kailin, 2004).

However, the negative imagery associated with Blackness is not a current phenomenon and must be located within a historical context. For instance, the 1810 version of the Encyclopedia Britannica referred to Blacks in the following

terms:

Vices the most notorious seem to be the portion of this unhappy race [people of African descent]; idleness, treachery, revenge, cruelty, impudence, stealing, lying, profanity, debauchery, nastiness, and intemperance, are said to have extinguished the principles of natural law, and to have silenced the reproofs of conscience. They are strangers to every sentiment of compassion, and are an awful example of the corruption of man left to himself (Encyclopedia Britannica, 1810 edition, vol. XIV, p.750, in Jordon & Weedon, 1995).

According to the Encyclopedia Britannica, the negative image of Blacks is a remnant of historical attempts to justify Black slavery. This negative is perpetuated especially among working-class Black males. McLaren similarly argued that just as the term 'negro' became an immutable mark of difference and naturalized the political arrangements of racism in the 1960's so too is the term Black being refigured in the White dominant culture to mean criminality, violence, and social degeneracy (McLaren, 1989). Over three centuries of the entire propaganda machinery of North American society being employed in the establishment and propagation of this aggressive image of the Black male, is difficult to correct, especially when individuals with this mindset from the past continuously reinforce this image through an educational and justice system that is rooted in White dominance.

Today, the educational experiences of Somali-Djiboutian youths, particularly males, in Ottawa's public schools are burdened with the negative images associated with Black maleness and the unearned consequences of such imagery. For example, a five-year-old Somali-Djiboutian male child took a candy from a teacher's desk without the teacher's permission. In an attempt to discipline

the child, the teacher not only brought the child to the principal's office but the school administrator called the police. Here you have a five- year-old child like many five-year-old children who have succumbed to the temptation of taking a candy without permission. But in this case, this young Somali-Djiboutian male needed a '*hard*' lesson. Although he did not commit a violent or vicious crime, this young child was made to come face-to-face with a White male police officer - over a candy. What impact will this experience have on the development of his self-esteem as a Black male, especially, when the majority of reports about low self-esteem of African-Canadian children come from the school environment where their primary experiences are those of marginalization (Roberts-Faiti, 1996)? The question that comes to my mind is - would this White teacher and administrator have taken the same action had it been a White male child? Would the police have even responded? These are very relevant questions, in my opinion.

In another example, two youths, one Black, and the other White, went to Kentucky Fried Chicken (KFC) and both committed an infraction; the Somali-Djiboutian male was charged \$100.00 for littering by dropping his fork on the ground, and the White police officer justified not charging the White male for discarding his 'entire empty meal package' on the ground by saying that the White youth's package fell on school property and not on public property. How can we as a society justify, condone, sanction or validate, in a manner that makes sense, the action of these police officers who found it fitting to ignore the fact that these two youths contravened the civil code equally. What message does this unequal application of the law send to both youths, and youths in general - that in

this society, each law has two versions, one for Blacks and another for Whites?

Students in the study were able to link the imbalance of power inherent in White dominance within the school and the larger society. For example, one student noted,

I lived in a housing project for thirteen years where there were a lot of poor immigrants and each time two people got into a fight or conflict, the Black man would always be the one to get arrested, and sent to court. It is the same thing I now see in school (Outiya, F, 20).

Again, this student's analysis of the criminalization of Somali-Djiboutian working-class males in public schools is correct and was corroborated by a police officer.

In personal conversation, an officer noted that the inaction of teachers and administrators in public schools are resulting in Somali-Djiboutian youths being charged with criminal assault charges. He further noted that each time they were called to a school due to a fight, they engaged in a practice of flipping a coin before responding to the call, and officers would place bets as to whether it was a Black or White student being charged. He informed me that there was an established pattern whereby the Somali-Djiboutian students were generally the initial victims of abuse but because of the school's inaction towards protecting Somali-Djiboutian students, especially males, the situation would escalate to the point where the Somali-Djiboutian youth was forced to defend himself, generally against a White male student. Once the Black student responds physically, and the White student reports it, the police are automatically called. The officer explained that once they arrive at the school and an assault has taken place, regardless of

how long the abuse by the White student went unchecked, the Black student has to be charged. In closing, he noted that due to the frequency of the calls, officers no longer wanted to bet because they were losing their money - they knew each time they responded it was a Black student being charged.

So the criminalization of Somali-Djiboutian youths by the justice system is no longer situated at the community level, but it has now advanced within the educational domain with the blessing and support of school teachers and administrators under the guise of zero tolerance aimed at promoting 'safe schools'. Today, many Somali-Djiboutian community leaders argue that despite tense relations with the police, many more young Blacks are injured in the classroom now than on the streets (Henry, Tator, Mattis, Reeves, 1998). It is critical to also note that while race is the primary factor by which various manifestation of educational inequality takes place, class status appears to have become a factor that mitigates the impact of such inequalities.

As a result, 'class' has become the primary factor that determines the level and degree of racism and its various manifestations to which students are subjected. Thus working-class students, particularly males, bear the brunt of the unequal educational treatment, compared to their middle-class peers.

7.9 SOCIO-ECONOMIC ISSUES IN SCHOOLING

In analyzing the narratives around the educational experiences of the participants, issues involving class differences were among the more dominant themes that emerged out of the data. It became very apparent that issues around class have a tremendous impact on not only the relationships between Somali-

Djiboutian students, their peers, and educators, but it also impacts the relationship between parents and teachers and administrators. The narratives of the working-class and middle-class student participants accentuate the educational reality that despite the commonality of race, differences along class lines predetermine one's educational experiences within Ottawa's public schools. As such, schools seem to assist in reproducing and maintaining class distinctions, because most working-class youths, as a result of their educational and social experiences, tend to remain in their class of origin (Curtis *et al.*, 1992). Overall, as Fine and Burns (2003) states, "The higher the social class of youth and community is, the higher the quality of education; the lower the social class is, the lower the quality of education" (p. 843). Although students reported various forms of inequalities within their schools, whether through direct personal experience or through observation, the greatest impact of such inequalities was on students who were economically disadvantaged and male. In the same token, Books (2004) claims,

[i]nequalities in family wealth are a major cause of inequalities in schooling [e.g. the physical conditions of the school, the unqualified teachers, the bias standardized tests, the streaming of classes], and inequalities in schooling do much to reinforce inequalities of wealth among family in the next generation (Hoschschild and Scovronick as cited in Books, 2004, p. 106).

Similar class differences were also observed amongst the two groups of participants (see Table A). While both groups of students had similar educational aspirations, the working-class students experienced greater struggles surmounting the educational barriers facing them in school. For example, the participants reported that they were experiencing racism and differential treatment on two

levels. Firstly, Somali-Djiboutian students, both male and female, were experiencing multiple interlocking barriers due to racial, class and ethnic stereotyping. They argued that if one is Black one is presumed to be poor and treated in an undignified manner and this sentiment was echoed by both middle/working-class students.

For example, one participant noted,

I feel that social class is a major problem. Most of the kids don't want to be on social assistance because kids make fun of you if you are on welfare. If they are on it, they don't say and they go around and listen to the jokes, but deep down in side they are hurting. They want to be in the 'cool' group where the parents have money and educated and nice house (Outiya).

Stereotyping regarding class stratification is also experienced in public schools much like in the larger society. Another participant noted that:

In every high school situation every body wants to be a part of the in-crowd. My family's financial situation played a big part in preventing me from being in the in-crowd. You could see who the teacher would run jokes with or hold conversations with - they would be the people who are a part of the 'in-crowd'. That is the worst of my school experience, being poor and going to a middle-class high school. Had it not been for the class distinctions in school, I definitely would have been more open to joining certain clubs and participating more in sports and other extra-curricular activities (Anbaro, F, 20).

These social class groupings combined with racial differences have in turn resulted in the alienation and exclusion of many working-class Somali-Djiboutian students from social activities and clubs at school. The student participants pointed to expensive clothing as an indicator of middle-class status and that it was one factor responsible for the creation of class categories that divided students into social class groupings at school. Both participants, Anbaro and Outiya, noted that clothing considerations among teens during school life had begun to occupy

too much of their time, time that should be allocated to school-related activities. For example, Anbaro argued that her class status was a contributing factor and an inhibitor to her involvement in school sporting activities and social clubs in the middle-class high school that she attended. Based on the students' narratives, students do not want to be labelled as poor or portrayed as kids living on welfare. Students are not just concerned with their image amongst peers; they are also concerned with how they are being perceived by teachers and administrators because of the differential treatment and stigmatization.

Secondly, in addition to classism, participants were very concerned about the everyday racism, perception, ethnic stereotyping and the differential treatment that school administration and teachers subjected their parents to, specifically their mothers due to moral judgment, race, gender and social status. For example, White teachers consistently stereotyped and viewed Black single mothers as promiscuous and always assumed that there were no fathers in the homes of Somali-Djiboutian students, especially if they were economically disadvantaged.

One participant stated that:

Mothers are trying to raise their kids, trying to make money to provide shelter for the kids. It's harder on them and when the teachers or whoever sees this they predetermine that this kid is not going to make it. They say why not put more effort in a kid that I see hopes for than someone I don't. I see it in their eyes, I see it in their actions and it just makes me want to leave (Qawdan, M, 20).

On the other hand, one participant noted that the negative treatment of her mother received as a poor single mother improved after the teachers became aware that she had a husband. Participant stated: "They will ask where is the father, is he in the picture, and you say no. So they just automatically cut you short right there

because it is not a two-parent family anymore” (Anbaro, F, 20). In the same token, Dei and Asgharadeh (2001) described this type of interrogation process as the “‘shark phenomenon’ which is a practice that see[s] subjects merely as object and subjects’...This practice is seeking only to (re)produce colonial relations and power relations” (p. 70). This participant is not alone in her analysis of the differential treatment that her mother received because of her misunderstood status. Rather, her experience is also reflected in other participants. One community leader contended that White teachers tend to be judgmental towards Black women. So, when a single mother goes to a parent-teacher interview she is treated in a condescending way and looked down upon - because she is present without the father of her child. In the situations being described by the participants, Somali-Djiboutian mothers are made to feel devalued and of low morals. In attempting to develop an understanding around this phenomenon, one has to examine this imagery of Black women within its historical context. For example, the oppression of Black women together with the imagery of Black women being manual laborers and nurturers has its historical roots in slavery - a history that the dominant group wants to forget and a history that Blacks are often afraid to talk about within a dominant discourse.

In a recent conversation with a small group of graduate students and one pre-service teacher, we were discussing the lack of Black Canadian men and women in the doctoral program. In response to our observation, the pre-service teacher stated that Black women are not in the doctoral program because they are at home having babies. While the impact of the comment sent shock waves

through our bodies, we welcomed the comment itself. This pre-service teacher lacked the savvy of knowing that is politically incorrect to voice such a belief, while we were eager to engage in dialog because we knew that her comment was not isolated. The participants' narratives was also reflective of the general attitude and belief many educators held towards Somali-Djiboutian women. Thus the imagery of Black women's promiscuity has remained in popular culture today and continues to permeate all facets of society including the field of education.

The Black woman's existence in North America and Europe was economically based. Her role was to do manual labor, mate, breed and replenish the slave stock. It is this historical aspect of Black women's existence that creates discomfort when we begin to deconstruct the negative imagery of Black women and men. We must begin to ask – on what basis do we assume that a White woman with children is married, but a Black woman with children is single, and that her children are a result of multiple partners? But before we can attempt to answer this and other questions, we must be prepared to revisit history in an honest way despite all its discomfort (Giroux, 2004; hooks, 2004).

Regardless of the basis for the differential treatment of Somali-Djiboutian students in the educational system, be it Somali-Djiboutian women's marital status, racism, classism and/or ethnic differences, discrimination based on these grounds contravene the Boards' policies which are grounded in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedom. Despite these various policies aimed at protecting individuals' rights in public schools, the stigma created by the differential treatment in Ottawa's schools has resulted in many Somali-Djiboutian working-

class families trying to escape the label of 'working-class, or worse - project/welfare' labels. The topics below were derived from the narratives:

- Students do not want to be associated with being on welfare
- Single mothers have multiple jobs
- The impact of classism produces alienation and disengagement
- Working-class parents struggle to equalize the playing field
- Uniforms as a solution to break the class barrier in public schools

One means of deflecting this image of being poor is by wearing expensive clothing.

7.10 CLOTHING - A MEANS OF AVOIDING 'CLASS DISTINCTION' IN PUBLIC SCHOOLS

The research participants consistently articulated differing views around the issue of clothing. This divergence around clothing not only exists along class lines but also remains a concern for both working-class and middle-class participants. On one hand, middle-class participants argued that working-class students are putting too much emphasis on expensive clothing, and not enough time is being invested in school related activities. On the other hand, working-class students are responding to the class pressure they are feeling at school and are attempting to minimize the stigmatization due to their class status. For example, participants who are struggling economically argue that they do not want to be isolated, or labeled as welfare children. One participant noted that, "kids make fun of you if you are on welfare; students who are on welfare do not admit it; they listen to the jokes, but deep down in side they are hurt" (Outiya). Therefore, the struggle of working-class students' is one of attempting to create a

level playing field whereby they can feel as equal as the next person and thus not become singled out, labelled, alienated or develop low self-esteem.

As a solution to avoiding the stigma attached to working-class status, both students have identified school uniforms as a possible contributing solution to the problem. In light of this, Edward Morris (2005) and Rebecca Raby (2005) describe how uniform attire helps to demarcate childhood, adolescence, and school life as a protected space that is different and separate from the dangers of the street: “school [is framed] as a place of business...links between the school and preparation for work are secured through what the school is defined against, specifically the street... [The] street is constructed as rule-less, casual and from a place of business” (Raby, 2005, p. 78). Furthermore, participants argue that uniforms would reduce the pressure on economically disadvantaged parents who feel the need to purchase expensive clothing and shoes aimed at minimizing the alienation and exclusion their children are experiencing due to the stigmatization of being project or welfare kids. It stands to reason that often times the poor are more addicted to excessive consumerism because the powerful messages in media and in our lives in general suggest that the only way out of class shame is conspicuous consumption (hooks, 2000). Thus, buying expensive clothing is one means of deflecting the stigma and shame associated with being poor.

The use of uniforms would enable working-class parents to re-allocate resources that would normally be spent on clothing to other areas of education such as tutors or other learning aids/support. More importantly, disadvantaged Somali-Djiboutian participants would not be as readily identified along class

lines, which would greatly reduce the stigmatization and, suffering that many students endure because of their working-class status. The reality is, that while in school every student, Black or White, wants to feel equal. The working-class student is no exception. As one participant stated:

To tell the truth, its really hard for us to cope, because you see your mother working hard, you want to make her proud but then the system is bringing you down, your surroundings are bringing you down, you are trapped in two worlds, you are trying to find your own path. (Qawdan, M, 20).

On the other hand, middle-class participants feel the emphasis should not be on clothing. Despite the class distinctions in public schools, and the various barriers around race, students have also identified parental support as critical to their survival in school. The complexity of the multiple interlocking barriers facing working-class students does not appear to be fully understood by school administrations and teachers. Also, participants did not appear to have an awareness of the ways in which the invisibility of their class privileges were being taken for granted. Most importantly, they did not understand how, in large and small ways middle-class, upper-class, and wealthy black people can create lifestyles that enable them to minimize contact with harsh racism (hooks, 2000).

Thus their analysis, while well intended, reflected a *privileged* perspective on the educational challenges facing working-class families, especially those headed by single parents. Nor did they fully understand the stigma attached to working-class students, and how these students were subjected to more frequent bouts of racism due to their class position in an educational system rooted in White dominance. For example, a middle-class student living in a middle-class

neighborhood whose parents are professionals may enjoy shopping in thrift shops and going to school wearing second hand clothing and not feel labelled or stigmatized by his peers. His peers and teachers know his/her class status, so what he/she chooses to wear is a matter of choice, a matter of being 'cool'. She/he has nothing to prove because she/he will also be able to join the ski club, golf club, and travel club, etc. While the working-class student knows that her/his parent is not able to meet the expenses associated with such school activities and thus will not be able to participate. Therefore clothing becomes a means of maintaining a positive self image. Outiya (F, 20) noted that:

If I had the power I would make sure that we had the connection that we had in elementary school, so you don't have to go to school and feel that you have to impress people with clothes. You could think these are all my friends and be comfortable with them.

As stated above, despite financial constraints, working-class students feel a greater pressure to fit in and be accepted among their middle-class peers as well as within the larger school population. This need to feel equal often translates into dressing in a manner aimed at mitigating class differences in order to fit in and avoid being labelled as a working-class/project kid. So, Somali-Djiboutian parents are working hard and often required to employ multiple jobs to facilitate their children's attempts to avoid marginalization in schools, combined with the other multiple interlocking barriers existing in Ottawa public schools. Hooks (2003) noted that although all Black people know that regardless of your class status, you will suffer wounds inflicted by racism, relatively fewer Black people know intimately the concrete everyday ways class, power and privilege mitigate this

pain, allowing some Black folks to live luxuriously despite racism (p. 98). Similar to the diverging views on clothing, a dichotomy also exist between Somali middle-class and working-class views of parents having multiple jobs.

7.11 MULTIPLE JOBS: INTEGRATING HOME, CLASS IMPACT AND SCHOOL CULTURE

Similar to the divergent views of clothing, a dichotomy exists between the views of middle-class and working-class participants in relation to multiple jobs. Lareau (2003) posits that working-class and poor parents in general have much more distance or separation from the school than middle-class parents. “Working-class and poor parents appeared baffled, intimidated, and subdued in parent-teacher conferences,” Lareau (2003) observes (p. 243). For example, the views of some middle-class participants toward working-class mothers working multiple jobs were to some degree rigid and one dimensional, depending on the individual’s level of class consciousness. Class consciousness is defined as an individual’s awareness of the various ways one’s social position in a society stratified by race and class gives privileges to the haves versus the have-nots. In other words, those who have adopted the mainstream view that the economic plight of the Black masses is caused by a lack of skills, will, and know-how and not by systemic exploitation and oppression are the ones who lack class consciousness (hooks, 2003).

In many instances, some participants were unable to see the ways in which their own class privileges afforded them opportunities which they took for granted, for example a parent staying home and giving up many of his or her

material comforts as the price to ensure that their children will succeed academically. As one participant stated, “once a student feels like their parents are not there for them they say hey what's the point - why am I doing this - it's not for my mom or my father doesn't care, I am just going to do whatever” (Qawdan, M, 20). Despite these feelings, Lareau (2003) notes that across all social classes parents pay close attention to their children’s education. “Working-class and poor parents are no less eager than middle-class parents to see their children succeed in school. They take a different approach, ‘*multiple jobs,*’ to help them reach that goal, however” (Lareau, 2003, p. 198). Qawdan (M, 20) described how working-class parents’ struggle to equalize the playing field:

Where I am from a lot of my friends are from single homes, single mothers are working on multiple jobs. The mothers are trying to raise their kids, trying to make money to provide shelter for the kids. It's harder on them and when the teachers or whoever sees this they predetermine that this kid is not going to make it. They say why not put more effort in a kid that I see hopes for than someone I don't. I see it in their eyes, I see it in their actions and it just makes me want to leave. Some kids - they find it and say - let me finish school - let me do this for my parent. Some kids just say - what can I do, the system already has all strikes against me, why not just fall into the system - that's what is going to happen to me anyway - predetermined future.

Arawelo (F, 21) explained by saying

Most parents, although they can't afford it, try to make their kids look good by buying them expensive shoes and clothing and so on, and most kids want their parents to buy expensive stuff because they want to cover it up because they see white kids, or other friends that have the same shoes, but it is mostly a cover-up because it does not matter what you wear.

Lareau (2003) discovered that working-class and poor parents often fear doing “the wrong thing” in school-related matters and tend to be much more respectful

of educators' professional expertise than are their middle-class counterparts (Lareau, 2003). According to Lareau (2003), "Working-class and poor parents view education as the job of educators and thus they expect teachers and school staff to be the ones primarily responsible for seeing that their children learn all that they should learn" (p. 199). Both groups were against the practice of working-class parents working multiple jobs; some said parents should work less and stay home to help and supervise their children with school work.

I labeled as 'privileged' these middle-class views regarding the economic plight facing working-class mothers because they represent a viewpoint of the privileged class, a class that is able to transcend racial boundaries, despite White dominance. For instance, living in a two-parent family home where both parents are professionals and educated is markedly different from a home that is headed by a single female who is working in the service industry due to her limited education. So while two professional parents may decide to forfeit one job in order to facilitate the other parent remaining in the home, one cannot and should not equate that privileged position with the position of a working-class mother whose labor is being exploited, thus requiring her to work '*multiple jobs*' in order to meet her family's daily needs. The fact that a parent is uneducated and economically disadvantaged should not be the reason for a child not achieving his or her full academic potential. While educated parents are able to provide a one-on-one tutor for their children, many working-class parents, given their struggles and limitation with resources, are not able to access or provide such a service to their children. Although parent involvement is positively linked to school success,

many parents are not as involved as public schools would like (Lareau, 2000). “This lack of involvement is not random: social class has a powerful influence on parent involvement patterns. For example, between forty and sixty percent of working-class and poor parents fail to attend parent-teacher conferences” (Lareau, 2000, p. 3). But a study concluded that teacher quality, not parent involvement, is the single most important school factor that affects children’s learning (Hanushek, Kain & Rivkin 2002). Other research found that children who have deficient teachers (i.e., teachers with no certification from the College of Teachers and less academic potential) three years in a row sustain lasting academic damage (Viadero, 2000). In the same vein, Books (2004) states that the deficit teaching approach in public schools helps reinforce economic inequities amongst the working-class and poor children.

This is particularly true for working-class and poor children, whose families often lack the resources to buffer school-based deficiencies (Lareau, 2000). As a result, parents rely primarily on the school to provide the remedial help their children require. However, due to class inequalities, their children are often negatively streamed in lower level academics. Although we cannot change a student’s previous experiences, we can affect his or her future. Understanding diversity and individual differences paves the way for positive feelings associated with public schools on the part of minority groups.

CHAPTER EIGHT

CONTRADICTIONS BETWEEN POLICY AND PRACTICE

8.0 EQUALITY ON PAPER

Education and educational policy changes are often influenced by the political powers that are in charge at any given moment and even within the classroom, politics play a large role in the ways that students, teachers, and student teachers interact. The Ontario Ministry of Education (1999) noted that:

The Ontario secondary school program is designed to equip students with the knowledge and skills they will need to lead satisfying and productive lives in the twenty-first century. The program will prepare students for further education and work, and will help them to become independent, productive, and responsible members of society.

In addition, the notion of public education aiming to serve students and help them achieve success is also reflected in not only the Ministry's mission statement but also in the Ottawa School Boards mission statements and guiding principles. The participants' narratives, however, contradict the school policies in that the students believe they are being treated with inequality, and thus do not receive the same preparation that will facilitate their "future education and work." The participant equates his schooling experiences to that of being in a prison. For many students school has become a place where their presence is unwelcome, and they are aware of it. Through their narratives, they describe an environment where they work against the clock, fully aware of the lack of tolerance or leniency towards them, not knowing when they will be pressured to leave, or get expelled from school. School is therefore being compared to prison and the need to escape the negativity is great. Having reflected upon the words of these participants, I

started to imagine the classroom and the school environment as something very different from the relatively ideal concept envisioned by the Ministry of Education. School educators and administrators seemed to be ignoring students' needs for a culturally-friendly environment that would create a caring, respectful, and empathetic climate for learning and teaching. Educators and administrators are also not engaging in effective communication with the students by respecting students' ideas and giving their voices sincere consideration. In addition, students were also not given the care they needed that would promote the growth of students as healthy, competent, moral, and happy people.

The major question we must ask ourselves as teachers and school administrators is – how do we envision nurturing, developing, and preparing our youths for tomorrow in the kind of educational system being described by these participants? In another example, one participant argued:

All odds are stacked against you once they see the color of your skin - more or less they have a predetermined judgment of what is going to happen to you right now and some teachers show more hope or interest in a student that they think is going to make it than someone that they just prejudge who they think is not going to make it. So if they assumed that okay - he is Somali-Djiboutian, he is from this sort of neighborhood, this sort of upbringing, this sort of ethnicity, they are not going to put as much effort. Teachers, I guess, they put effort into where they see effort will go to work, but you can't do that. You have to treat all the kids with the same sort of respect, the same sort of effort, or else you are just basically showing them who you favor (Jafar, M, 21).

This participant rationalizes this form of educational inequality as being rooted in racism because of a negative value placed on being Somali-Djiboutian that is based on the perception that these students are less academically inclined. He further argues that predictions are made based on factors such as social class and

ethnicity, rather than on students' academic performance. Jafar's belief was also expressed in the narratives of the other participants. In the same token, Dei's (1997) argued:

...teachers and administrators take up school policies in ways which appear counterproductive to keeping students in schools [or engaged]. The practice of being sent to the office for being late and then being kept for anywhere from ten to thirty minutes with other latecomers...students suggested that this practice only exacerbates the situation by forcing students to miss a greater amount of class time than if they had been allowed to stay in class. Similarly, the practice of suspension for skipping class...helped them 'out the door' (p. 68).

In other words, students are frustrated by always being pulled out of class, and then not knowing how to re-enter class because they have missed so much information/instruction. As a result they disengage themselves from schoolwork altogether (Dei et al., 1997). Unfortunately, it is possible that administrators and teachers reinforce these late/suspension policies in ways that are harmful to Somali-Djiboutian students (i.e. because they miss the opportunity to learn critically and exercise their right to democratic education). Thus, the disengagement which results because of the implementation of aforementioned policies creates unethical implications for the future possibilities of Somali-Djiboutian students' education. A more recent report by Centre of Excellence for Research on Immigration and Settlement (CERIS) identified the underachievement and disengagement from schooling "which implies the physical presence of Black bodies in schools but an absence in mind and soul" (Dei, 2008, p. 349).

Despite the previously mentioned school board policies and the ministry's statement, Dei et al. (1997), James (2001), and Tyson (2003) indicate that most

teachers do not perform in the classroom in racially equitable ways. Dei et al. (1997) found that student comments indicate that teachers are not doing enough to encourage Black students. While, James (2001) suggests that racial stereotypes have been passed on and down to teachers over the years and as a result, “low teacher expectations continue to contribute to the streaming of minority students into low-level educational programs, resulting in alienation and high dropout rates” (p. 182). This is consistent with Dei et al. (1997) who indicate that this lack of encouragement from teachers, “confirmed long histories of school experiences which served to undermine [minority groups’] self-esteem and self-confidence” (p. 67). Thus, teachers are involved in the ‘school practice of streaming’.

In the same vein, here is how one participant described school practice of streaming:

I would change the guidance counselors. The guidance counselors don't really guide you. In grade 9 they don't tell you what courses are important for you to take, so kids end up taking general level courses that they believe they can later change to advance level courses, only to find out that they are not able to change to advance level courses. Sometimes in the washroom I would hear conversations of kids taking general level courses, kids that were very, very bright. Kids that I went into junior high with and kids that were even brighter than I was, but they were taking general level courses. They were told by guidance counselors that they could change the courses later on. They were made to believe that they could take the easier courses now and then change to the more difficult advance level courses later on, but later on they find out that that is not the case, like my friend. Many students are deliberately misguided. I never really needed a guidance counselor because I knew what level courses I had to take and the prerequisite because of my parents' background, they were my counselors (Anbaro, F, 20).

The participant, a first year university student, noted that her parents were her ‘guidance counselors’ and they guided her through high school. However, she

observed how her peers were disadvantaged because, in her opinion, guidance counselors deliberately misled them and streamed them into low-level academic courses. Anbaro's peers were made to believe that they could begin with the easier courses in grades nine and ten, then advance to the more academic courses later on in grade 11. However, many middle-class parents are able to pre-select the courses their children will require in order to successfully advance to university, therefore administrators, teachers or guidance counselors are not given the opportunity to negatively stream the children. Issues around streaming have been one of the dominant themes that emerged in this research.

In analyzing the narratives around the educational experiences of my eight Somali-Djiboutian participants, it appears that there is usually an initial attempt by educators to negatively stream Somali-Djiboutian students into low level academics. Streaming has become a systematic process that is made possible by withholding information regarding course selection, and/or the level of study required to successfully advance to the post-secondary level. Therefore, unless they have attended a post-secondary institution in Canada, many parents may not understand that students must select courses at the advanced level in high school if they plan on accessing post-secondary studies. Unfortunately, many Somali-Djiboutian parents, particularly those who are recent immigrants often lack understanding about the process of streaming and believe that once their children enter high school they automatically have access to post secondary studies. Here is how another participant eloquently

articulated what happened to him:

We don't have guidance at school. When I was in the regular high school I did not get the guidance and so they kept me into the general stream. It wasn't until grade 11, when I found out that I could not go to university with general level courses. I always wanted to go to university, but the fact is, my parents were new immigrants and did not understand how streaming works. You are in the dark and what keeps you going is the dream that you have - of what you want to become, right! But as you go on, there is going to be bumps, and there will be downfall, but you pick yourself up again. But when kids don't have the energy to keep getting up, they begin to give up because there is no one there for them. That's when a wrong path doesn't seem wrong anymore. That's when you know this is wrong but given the lack of choices it just don't seem wrong anymore. then ... that's why some people - they snap, and some people give up. So the kids have to find their own way and make their own mistakes. But schools don't allow mistakes for Somali-Djiboutian students and that is why we get kick out of school and into the justice system, that's how it is for us (Jafar, M, 21).

Most importantly, while I was personally affected by the narratives of the participants, the educational experiences of the student we chose to call Jafar were exceptional and warranted telling his story, so I gave him the space to have his voice heard. I felt that Jafar personifies strength, determination, resilience, and above all leadership, all admirable and desirable qualities that are necessary to overcome the educational barriers which many students have had to overcome.

Moreover, “[these] nested inequalities mean poor children are far more likely than others to have inexperienced or uncertified teachers, teachers without a background in the subject matter, or teachers with relatively low academic skills” (Books, 2004, p. 106). Books (2004) claims,

[i]nequalities in family wealth are a major cause of inequalities in schooling [e.g. the physical conditions of the school, the unqualified teachers, the bias standardized tests, the streaming of classes], and inequalities in schooling do much to reinforce inequalities of wealth

among family in the next generation (Hoschschild and Scovronick as cited in Books, 2004, p. 106).

In other words, Books (2004) states that the deficit teaching approach in schools helps reinforce economic inequities amongst the working-class . Important to parents is the reality that their children will have the opportunity to break the cycle of poverty by achieving higher education. One student noted that his parents gave up everything they had to immigrate to Canada in order to give their children a chance at a better life, but it did not work out that way because they did not understand the school system in Canada; consequently their children were streamed in low level academics (Jafar). Bairu Sium, a teacher who has been involved in public education for more than 40 years believes that whether it is intentional or not, students are streamed by color, and Black students in particular are steered away from more ambitious scholarly paths (Shanoff, 2005).

Consequently this systematic process of streaming has a tendency to feed on the ignorance of Somali-Djiboutian students and their families which, in turn, makes them a prime target for negative streaming. As a result, the Somali-Djiboutian students are often streamed into low-level academic programs based on the recommendation of their elementary school without their parents' full knowledge, or without their understanding of the impact such a placement can have on the future career aspirations of their children (Dei, 1995; Neito, 2004). According to the participants' narratives, the actions of the Ottawa public schools do not reflect to the school board's core values, beliefs and policies of what they preach which are clearly indicated in their mission statements and guiding

principles. So there appears to be a dichotomy between the policies of the two School Boards in Ottawa, the Ontario Ministry's statement and the actual educational reality of many Somali-Djiboutian students in Ottawa area public schools.

8.1 THE SYSTEMATIC STREAMING OF BLACK YOUTHS - KILLING OF DREAMS

Many Somali-Djiboutian youths enter high school with dreams of attending university or college. However, by the time they reach grade eleven, those dreams would have been 'stolen'. Anbaro's peers realized in grade 11, like many other Somali-Djiboutian students who were streamed in low-level academics, that they needed to have taken advanced courses at the grades 9 and 10 level in order to automatically advance to the grade 11 academic courses. Instead they were misled into believing that they were able to study at the general level during grades 9 and 10 and later switch to the advance level in grade 11 without repeating the courses. Thus, for many Somali-Djiboutian students, grade 11 is the first point of realization that higher learning is no longer an option for them - their dreams of attending university have been, in their words '*stolen*' - not because these Somali-Djiboutian students were academically inferior, but because they were never given the real opportunity to achieve those dreams; instead they believe the decision was made for them. This idea and notion of stolen dreams was exemplified by Jafar as he recalled his painful memories of the ways in which he believed his dreams were stolen while also reflecting on the stolen dreams of his peers. He noted:

[Y]ou start from grade 8 and there is a big window, with so many choices,

careers, dreams and hope for you. But as you go on, certain things would happen to you, and you go down and then certain dreams and careers start disappearing. So that vision that you started out with - gets smaller and smaller. By the time you know, there is nothing for you (Jafar, M, 21).

Similar to Jafar and many other Somali-Djiboutian students, the stories of stolen dreams have become common place in Ottawa's Somali-Djiboutian community. Stories of the systematic streaming, ethnic grading, denial of relevant courses, the deliberate misguidance and/or the withholding of relevant course information from Black youths have become a common educational practice in many public schools despite claims of equality. For example, Siidow dreamed of attending medical school, and worked hard through to grade 11 maintaining mostly a grade 'A' average. However, his family relocated to another area of Ottawa and although he was given permission to remain in the high school where he was enrolled, he was no longer eligible for a bus supplement because he was not within the school's boundary. Due to his family's financial situation, Siidow, was force to attend his new area high school; a high school he described as having a sizable non-White immigrant student population and a school with a reputation within the Black community of being overtly racist towards Black students. Siidow noted that he was forced to transfer in his senior year to his new high school against the strong advice of a teacher who had previously taught at his new high school. Throughout the interview he kept repeating that at first he did not understand why the teacher did not want him to go there. Once Siidow transferred, he noted that he quickly found out why his previous teacher did not want him to attend his new high school, however, he kept hoping things would change and told himself he just had to work even harder. But, no

matter how hard Siidow worked, this once high - achieving student was never able to achieve a grade past 60%. Within the two year period of grade 11-12, Siidow made an attempt to drop out of the school three times. As Siidow reconstructed his educational journey, occasionally fighting away tears, he noted that of the group of students belonging to his ethnic group in his previous high school, he was the only one not to have advanced to university, although he was originally considered one of the most promising students.

Like that of Siidow, Arawelo's dream was almost stolen during her last semester of high school, Arawelo, was denied a compulsory course that happened to have been her last credit to complete her graduation requirement, and most importantly, the course that was also a prerequisite for the university program for which she was seeking acceptance. Yet she was denied access to the course by her guidance counselor who was fully aware that if Arawelo did not have access to this required course, it would result in her not graduating, and gaining access to university. Arawelo only accessed the course after she brought her parent in to see the vice- principal who immediately registered her into the course. More troubling is the fact that Arawelo was a senior graduating student who was missing one credit for her application to university, yet she did not have the voice or power to access this course on her own. The question one must ask is why was it necessary for Arawelo, and other Black students to bring their parents into school in order to access courses and streams that can alter their dreams and future career aspirations? One participant also noted,

Some of my friends that are in university, that's how they are there, they had to bring their parents to say I want my son to go in the advance

stream. Otherwise they would not have had it. That's how I found out that, that's how you have to do it, I did not know (Jafar, M, 21).

Why should Jafar, Arawelo or any other student be denied access by guidance counselors to an education that the student is requesting and that the student determines is necessary for him/her to achieve his/her full academic potential and advance to university? It appears that these 'independent' actions of school guidance counselors have contravened the educational rights of these students as stated by the ministry's guideline, which states the responsibilities of guidance counselors:

Guidance counselors play a central role in the assessment and placement of students, and in helping them to enhance their self-esteem and relationships with others. They assist students in developing high expectations for themselves and appropriate educational plans, and provide support with life-skills training, pre-employment skills development, career orientation, exploration, and planning (Ontario Ministry of Education, 3.7 Guidance and Counseling).

In addition to the ministry's guidelines, the ACDSB noted that all school decisions are to "make students the primary focus and recognize and value the diversity of its community by ensuring equity, accessibility and fairness of learning opportunities" (p.048, S4.2, 1998). In keeping with the spirit of equal educational opportunity, the ACCDSB also noted that "Our Catholic schools encourage academic excellence for all students while recognizing individual capabilities, personalities and needs" (Mission Statement / ACCSB - 19990823 / Web Master).

Despite the spirit in which the Boards' and the Ontario Ministry's guidelines are written, the educational experiences and reality of these and other Black students seem to run contrary to the notion of equality, equity, access and

fairness being declared by these policies. For instance, it is very difficult to understand how the systematic streaming and inhibiting of academic advancement of Black students by guidance counselors could be interpreted as being promoting academic excellence, being fair, or helping to promote and enhance positive self-esteem in Black students, as stated in the above guidelines by the School Boards and the Ministry. Can these guidance counselors' actions help Black students to develop 'high levels of expectation' within themselves, when the underlying message in the actions of guidance counselors is, in the minds of the students, 'I don't think you are able to achieve success at the academic level'? According to the participants, they believe the actions of many school guidance counselors are motivated by racial stereotyping that views Black students as academically inferior, therefore their actions are demonstrative of the 'low level expectations' they themselves harbor towards Black students, which was acknowledged by the Ministry's statement below:

There is evidence that many Aboriginal and other racial and ethno-cultural minority students have been inappropriately streamed into programs with low expectations. The programs in which students are placed may have a significant impact on students' future career aspirations and their long-term quality of life (Ontario Ministry of Education, 3.6 Student Evaluation).

In addition, regardless of the low expectation educators have of Black students, social class was the factor that determined which student was successfully targeted and streamed in non-academic programs. As a result, students from middle-class family backgrounds who were of university age had a smooth and successful transition towards beginning their post-secondary journey. On the other hand, their working-class peers suffered tremendous barriers during

the process, or were continuing their struggle to complete the high school requirements in order to qualify for university/college entrance. In addition, the research also revealed an important difference between middle class and working-class parents with regards to streaming. Many middle-class parents have attended university either here or abroad. Consequently, they have a fairly good grasp of the process involved in advancing from high school to post-secondary study. In contrast, many working-class parents may not have achieved a level of education comparable to their middle-class counterparts, while expressing similar educational and career dreams and aspirations for their children to those of middle-class parents. However, their strategies for ensuring that their children have similar access to the type of education that can lead to the fulfillment of their dream is by working hard, often multiple jobs, to provide for their family's economic needs. Many working-class parents assume that if they take care of the finances, that this will create the conditions and personal motivation necessary for learning. Their children are expected to work hard in school to succeed academically, with an aim to achieving upward social mobility. The goal of working-class parents is that their children will have access to an education that will enable them to break the cycle of poverty. Once working-class parents have met what they believe is their parental responsibilities, and their children are motivated to learn, the strategy then places enormous trust in the school system and relies heavily on the integrity and fairness of teachers, similar to the educational system in their homeland, often referred to as 'back home'.

It is critical to note that in deconstructing the educational realities of many

new immigrants, community leaders as well as several parents have identified a ‘back home’ reference used by these immigrants in the way they relate to and interact with the Canadian educational system. Consequently, it is essential to also deconstruct this notion of ‘back home’ as it relates to the streaming of Somali-Djiboutian working-class youths. It is relevant to show the intersecting relationship of that ‘back home’ mentality and the negative streaming of many working-class Somali-Djiboutian youths in Ottawa’s educational system; a systematic process of streaming that is aided by the lack of understanding of the school system among many working-class parents.

8.2 STREAMING MADE POSSIBLE DUE TO PARENTS’ LACK OF UNDERSTANDING

A consistent theme emerged from the narratives which identified that many parents lacked an understanding of how the Canadian educational system is structured and operates, particularly at the high school level. In particular, the results of the findings show the parents’ lack of knowledge about their children’s education programming. Here is how two participants explain that lack of knowledge:

Parents need to go into the school and find out what courses they need to have, or to find other resources in the community that will help them to understand. It is important that parents get educated about the system in order to understand the system because the information that students need are not provided to them in the schools (Anbaro, F, 20).

Parent is the main idea of the school. If parents don't stand up, get together and say this is what we need to do - there is no point. Most of the Somali-Djibouti parents in my school don't speak English, and others can't take a day off work to go deal with school, they have to work. They have to be out there working, sometimes more than one job, or long hours. But if they don't speak the language, they should get somebody to go in with them,

usually there is somebody out there (Arawelo, F, 21).

The students identified a number of areas that they feel need to be improved where parental involvement at school is concerned. Students are very much aware of the multiple barriers facing working-class parents but nonetheless they argued that parental support is critical to their academic success. They also noted that if parents are limited by language barriers, then they should seek community help and become educated about the system. So, although the student participants insisted on greater parental involvement, they were very cognizant of the multiple intersecting barriers facing many working-class parents. Listed below are the themes that emerged:

- Multiple jobs, and therefore, no flexibility with time
- Parents don't follow-up as a result of the 'back-home' attitude
- The need for parents to be re-educated
- The need for parents to stand up, and speak up for their children

According to a study that explored Somali and Eritrean settlement experience in Toronto, 76 percent [of Somali parents] indicated that they were uncomfortable or very uncomfortable in English (Scott, 2001, p. 32) and were still in the early stages of the acquisition of the English language. Most importantly, Arawelo notes that many Somali-Djiboutian working-class parents do not have the flexibility to take a day off work to attend school. The findings in this study are confirmed by the research on the Settlement Experience of Eritrean and Somalis in Toronto (1999) which finds that "the lack of understanding of the Canadian education system makes parenting more challenging and frustrating for both parent and the child" (Scott, 2001, p. 41). Hence, parents' lack of knowledge constitutes to what is referred to in the study as 'personal cultural capital' which is

particularly critical in the process leading to lower level or special education placement for any parent's child. In this study, cultural capital is defined as the "proficiency in, and familiarity with, dominant cultural codes and practices: for example, linguistic style, aesthetic preferences, styles of interactions" (Kilbridge, 2000, p. 8). Participants highlighted the difficulties for Somali parents in navigating and recognizing the gap in the schooling system to address Somali-Djiboutian parents' cultural capital during the process of referral, assessment and placement of their children into lower grades or special education. The participants voiced that the Somali-Djiboutian parents' cultural capital can influence their ability to make informed and/or appropriate placement decisions for their children and in turn their ability to negotiate/advocate on behalf of their children during the process of referral, assessment and placement into lower level or special education. One participant explains as follows:

You try to speak for yourself, because you know exactly what you want but one voice does not make a difference, you need more voices (Jafar, M, 21).

This indicates that if the parent will not stand for their children before it is too late, then Somali-Djiboutian youths will face chronic academic limitations and barriers such as streaming that simply undermine their children's future endeavours.

In addition, participants identified that the school system has failed to provide Somali-Djiboutian parents with the appropriate accommodations needed to navigate the lower grade or special education system and to make informed decisions regarding their children's educational programming. As articulated by the participants, the difficulties faced by Somali-Djiboutian parents begin with

lack of familiarity with the school system itself. This is compounded by the linguistic challenges they face in their dealings with the School Boards officials, and, even when these can be managed, there are still intercultural communication problems that are not immediately evident either to them or the board officials. In light of this, studies conducted by the Community Social Planning Group (2005) suggest that the barriers that face people of color, low income individuals, and immigrant parents are not only due to a lack of English proficiency but arise from a lack of confidence caused by these language barriers. However, despite all these challenges we discovered that parents were becoming increasingly aware of the nature of the problems they faced and were responding in some cases with resistance. It became clear during the interviews with participants that there is a very serious gap between what their parents perceived to be the role and responsibility of teachers in Canada compared to their understanding of the role and responsibility of teachers in their traditional homeland. Parents' perception is that if a child is not learning then the responsibility lies with the teacher and school administration. Based on the findings from the participants, it is recognized that parents should and can play a role to educate their children and parents themselves need to acquire knowledge of how the educational system works in order to dispel common misconceptions of how the educational system operates in the Canadian context.

On other hand, the findings show that most of the participants under study recognized that their parents have a limited proficiency in English. These linguistic differences impact the parents' decisions and their ability to

communicate with school personnel, and this in turn influences their children's integration into the school system. It was also very clear that parents' understanding of the role of educators as referenced to 'back home' was intricately linked to the conservative view of education. For example, Hirsch argues that each child is to be taught what he or she needs to know therefore educators have a duty to supply children with what they 'sorely need' (Hirsch, 1999). Thus, the role of education within this framework is removed from the parents and their cultural communities, and placed in the hands of specialized educators who know what knowledge is recognized, valued and is to be taught to children. This view of education does not value indigenous knowledge. Education is organized around the colonizer's knowledge and language and superimposed on colonized groups by devaluing and replacing their indigenous ways of knowing. One such example of this type of educational arrangement that comes to mind is the history of Canada's First Nations people and residential schooling. In attempting to 'civilize' the 'natives', First Nations children were forcibly removed from their homes and placed in residential schools with the aim of teaching them what they 'sorely need' to know. Thus, the role of the teacher was clearly defined and distinct from the role of the parent, and the duty of each was clearly understood by the children, teachers and parents. Most importantly, the students within this schooling arrangement were expected to honor, respect and obey the teacher like a parent.

Similar to the colonization of Canada's First People, the colonization of Black Africans by Europeans and North Americans resulted in the role of

education being assigned exclusively to the teacher, with no parental involvement. Within the African context, a tremendous degree of trust evolved between the community and the schools, because although the curriculum and schooling were organized around European standards, the teachers were Black. Therefore teachers were respected and trusted and high expectations became the norm. Only when a break within the teacher/child relationship occurred would the parent be contacted. In such cases, the teacher would often consult with the parent on the appropriate corrective action to be taken with the student. Due to the level of trust invested in the parent/teacher relationship in their traditional homelands, many parents entrusted the well-being of their children entirely to the schools.

In many third world countries, or '*back home*' as it was often referred to by participants, it was quite possible for a working-class parent to hope and expect that through education their children would attain a level of education that far exceeded their own. Within this tradition, it was believed that if you worked hard you could be whatever you wanted to be. Therefore, working-class parents could envision 'my little doctor, my little lawyer' etc., and as parents, they often labored twice as hard to ensure that their children had the economic means to achieve an education that could ensure the actualization of their dreams. I can say in an informal context, one community member told me that 'back home' he trusted his child's teachers implicitly. Teachers there played two roles, that of teacher and parent, and they would discipline students, teach them and counsel them when necessary. In Canada he had the same blind faith in the school system to produce a professional.

On the contrary, as one participant explained earlier (see p. 168), this sense of feeling unwelcome is quite explicit in that participants report the teachers actually say they do not care. In an informal context, the mother of a student told me of the difficulties as a new immigrant of not knowing how the system works in Canada. In Africa parents entrusted their children to the teacher, knowing there was nothing to worry about. In Canada the only time a teacher contacts us is if there is a major problem with the student.

Again, through colonization, people of African descent were trained to believe in the knowledge and superiority of teachers. They were trained to believe that the teacher, and not the parent, knows what is best for your child, thus this relationship demanded total trust and loyalty on the part of the parent. Many parents continue to believe in the colonial mentality that once children's essential needs are met, then the conditions for learning have been created, thus the parent has fulfilled his/her role and the education of the child is to be left to the teacher. Whether one is from the Caribbean or Africa, this colonial mentality around the role of the teacher/parent relationship was transported to Canada and applied to the role of Canadian teachers. As a result, immigrants tend to continue to entrust the educating/teaching of their children to the teachers, as they did in their previously colonized homelands.

This notion of blind faith and trust is critical to understanding the plight facing many Somali-Djiboutian families, because parents, particularly working-class parents, continue to lack understanding within the Canadian system. Their approach to the Canadian educational system is similar to their approach 'back

home'. They have unquestioningly entrusted the role of educating their children to the teachers. Not understanding the implication of various educational streams, generally, they unquestioningly accept suggestions and recommendations that often place their children in low-level academic streams; streams that deny them access to an education that would enable them to achieve their full academic potential.

Today, Somali-Djiboutian parents are invited to participate in an educational system where parental input and involvement is essential to students' growth. Parents are expected to be visible by spending time in the classroom, helping children with homework, serving on school committees, attending school trips and various other activities. However, Somali-Djiboutian parents coming from former colonized cultures are not prepared or informed on what their new educational responsibility entails, particularly if they are facing multiple interlocking barriers such as language, class, and race. Studies conducted by the Community Social Planning Group (2005) suggested that the barriers that face people of color, low income individuals, and immigrant parents are not only due to a lack of English proficiency but also arise from a lack of confidence caused and intensified by these linguistic barriers. Indeed, parents are being left behind with no training on what 'an inclusive' educational system looks like, how it differs from their previous system and their role in the new structure.

For instance, if parents do not receive phone calls from their children's teacher, then they assume that their children are doing well in school and there are no scholastic concerns. Remember, this was how it worked 'back home'. So when

they receive their children's term report and the child is failing a subject, they become outraged because they were unaware that there was a problem at school. In an attempt to show their displeasure, they often refuse to sign the report card. In turn, a parent not signing a report card is interpreted by the teacher as the parent lacking interest in the child's schooling. The relationship between the parent and the teacher is further strained and the child is caught in the middle. This is consistent with the literature, for example, US studies conducted by Lareau and Horbat (1999) found that Black parents have mistrust and are hesitant to interact with school personnel as a result of their knowledge of history of racial discrimination by public schools. This study suggests that parental mistrust of a school's procedures can be a contributory cause of a lack of parental involvement in schools. This may affect their children's education since the communication with the school is missing and thus there is no opportunity to understand the expectations placed upon them. It would appear that some teachers do not understand the multiple barriers faced by working class parents and as such they often wrongly interpret the lack of involvement in the school on the part of these parents as a lack of interest.

The Somali-Djiboutian community in Ottawa is now faced with an educational system where the relationship between teachers/administrators and parents is tainted with distrust and misunderstanding to the detriment of many Somali-Djiboutian youths. Given the racial and class inequalities inherent in Ottawa schools, many parents now understand that the blind faith and trust that they had within their educational system 'back home' is not applicable to the

Canadian educational system, but they are in a quandary as to what measures are needed to correct the situation facing Somali-Djiboutian youths, particularly working-class males. Somali-Djiboutian youths are bearing the brunt of unequal educational policies and practices such as zero tolerance. Brathwaite noted, “we need to serve as ‘guardian angels’ for our children and to keep watch over them. Who is better placed than parents (in a moral sense) to assume this role?” (Brathwaite, 1996). The participants have spoken and they have identified Ottawa schools as a hostile learning environment as such, they have begun to ‘keep watch’ over the Somali-Djiboutian youths in Ottawa.

8.3 SCHOOL AS A HOSTILE ENVIRONMENT

Many Black students, especially students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds, enter high school with the hopes and dreams that they will be able to achieve an educational level that will enable them to achieve upward social mobility, and thus break their family’s cycle of poverty. Instead, for many of them, school has become a place of miseducation, pain, abuse, stolen dreams, disillusionment and bad memories. There is no misunderstanding around the students’ feelings in regard to the education they are receiving in Ottawa high schools, or the prevailing attitudes their teachers harbor towards them. The overwhelming consensus among students is that their teachers do not care about them and that they are often subjected to differential treatment along racial and class lines. One participant noted that her greatest desire was to be a lawyer, but expressed sincere doubt that the education and her learning environment did not enable her to actualize her dream. She noted “our teachers did not care about us and they even tell us” (Ajabo, participant). Having reflected upon the words of

this student, the major question we must ask ourselves as educators is - have we stopped caring about our students? How do we envision nurturing, developing, and preparing our youths for democratic citizenship in the educational system being described by these participants? A citizenship that entitles them to full and equal participation in society's social, political, and economic structures despite race, gender, class, religion etc. More importantly, should teachers be allowed to tell their students that they 'don't care' if they learn? Is that not the role of a teacher - to educate all students equally and to care if the students are learning? Hooks argues that caring teachers are always enlightened witnesses for our students. Since our task as teachers is to nurture their academic growth, we are called to serve them (hooks, 2003).

"We are called to serve them", is also reflected in not only the Ministry's mission statement but also in the school boards' mission statements and guiding principles. It is my position that in serving our students we are called to prepare a nurturing, caring, safe, welcoming, and friendly learning environment in order to promote academic excellence. Consequently, there is a real dilemma when students enter Canadian classrooms and are being told 'I don't care if you learn', I am here because I am getting paid."

Critical to the discussion is this notion of 'enlightened witnesses' to which Hooks referred. I will argue that teachers such as the ones being described by the participants are rather 'unenlightened' witnesses. The interpretation of 'enlightened witnesses' that I will embrace is one whereby teachers understand the inherent stratification of social groups along racial, economic, religious, and

cultural lines and the ways such stratification works to either privilege or disadvantage certain groups. Enlightened teachers have developed awareness and maintain a critical consciousness of the many ways in which ‘Whiteness’ favors and privileges members of the dominant group. ‘Enlightened’ educators have a critical awareness and understanding of the significant impact multiple barriers have on non-White individuals when interlocking barriers such as class, race, gender, and disability operate simultaneously to further marginalize students who have been historically disadvantaged.

Having this awareness enables educators to intervene on behalf of students to attempt to equalize a system that often operates to further marginalize them. It is my humble opinion that when a student misbehaves in school, rather than sending him or her to the office, knowing that they would be suspended, the teacher should instead make a call to the parent for assistance. This strategy is one that engages the parent, while developing and modeling a caring and nurturing relationship with the student. This will be a way to build trust between the teachers, parents and create a welcoming environment for the student to learn. On the other hand an unenlightened teacher would have discarded them by sending them to the office for suspension. One of the most difficult aspects of this project was enduring the transference of pain as the participants expressed and described their school experiences:

[H]igh school is supposed to be the best years of your life but I can’t wait to get out (Siidow, M, 20).

This school system has started to look like a prison sentence, they are waiting for a reason to get us out of the system (Qawdan, M, 20).

[H]ow can we fight such a system we are at their mercy (Arawelo, F, 21).

For these students, school has come to represent a place of struggle, an unsafe learning environment where they are not welcome, just waiting to be discarded. The dream of using education as a tool in breaking the cycle of poverty by attaining a level of education that surpasses that of their parents is becoming doubtful for those in school and a lost and stolen dream for those that have already been pushed out. Students like Arawelo and Jafar were explicit in their statements and beliefs that they were rejected by their educational system because of racism and negative stereotyping. Unfortunately, Arawelo gave up the battle and continues to struggle with the lost of dignity, shame, and humiliation that she suffered during her last two years in high school. On the other hand, despite his pain and continued struggles to deal with the educational injustices that he was also made to endure, Jafar continues to struggle to achieve his parents' dream, which has also now become his dream, of attending university. Like all members of subordinated groups who must cope with the negative stereotypes imposed upon them in practically all circumstances where dominators rule, African Americans have suffered and continue to suffer trauma, much of it the re-enactment of shaming (hooks, 2003). Hooks has successfully captured the essence of the continued suffering Somali-Djiboutian working-class students endure when they experience the kind of educational experiences that the participants have continually described throughout this research project.

In conclusion, according to the participants' narratives, there is no nurturing within the school system; on the contrary school feels like a prison and

students are at the mercy of the schools with no one to speak to or advocate on their behalf. Another area of intense frustration that the participants expressed was in relation to the view that they are academically inferior, thus they are required to consistently work twice as hard to be equal with their White peers.

8.4 WORKING TWICE AS HARD - DUE TO LOW TEACHER

EXPECTATION

Low expectation by White teachers of Somali-Djiboutian students was a common experience that was shared amongst the participants. The participants made an impressive argument against an unequal educational system that not only challenges them to consistently prove that they are academically and intellectually equal to White students but forces them to work twice as hard as their White peers in order to maintain academic recognition. They also argued that even when they do demonstrate their intellectual and academic abilities, rather than being encouraged to improve on their achievements they are frequently viewed with suspicion and continue to be treated as academically and intellectually inferior students by teachers, guidance counselors and administrators. Such unfair treatment is the direct product of racialization. The literature also supports the claims being made by participants that many White educators have low expectation of Black students because of racism (Solomon, 1992, Dei, 1995; Brathwaite & James, 1996).

According to the Ontario Ministry of Education:

It is important that teachers have high expectations of all students. Racial and ethno-cultural biases and stereotyping may influence teacher

perceptions and expectations of what students are capable of achieving. In turn, such expectations may influence students' expectations of themselves (Ontario Ministry of Education, 1992).

However, despite the Ministry's ideals, low teacher expectation towards Somali-Djiboutian students remains a problem, especially for students from working-class families. One participant provided a perfect example of the inequality existing in Ottawa's high schools. He noted that after receiving a math grade of 75% the teacher congratulated him on his wonderful achievement. However, his White friend who also received the same grade in the course was told by the same teacher that his grade was not good enough to compete at the university level and was counseled on how to improve it in order to increase his chance of gaining access to university. The student questioned why his White teacher considered his grade of 75% to be good enough for him, a Black student, but the same grade was not good enough for the White student. It appeared that the possibility of this student advancing to post-secondary studies at the university level was not an expectation of this teacher. As a result, attaining a grade of 75% in his course far exceeded the low expectation his teacher held of him, therefore no further encouragement was necessary. However, given that post-secondary studies was a natural and expected progression for the White student, it was necessary to counsel him in a manner that would increase his chances of gaining acceptance to the University of his choice, which meant improving his grade of 75%. Here is how the participant reflected about the teacher's motive:

Teachers don't expect much from us, for sure. My friends talk about it, we are always talking about it. They are always saying that we have to work so much harder just so we can shine and be noticed. White kids are always

noticed, even if they are not doing as good as you, so we have to do double what they are doing, just to be equal with them. I just take the opportunity and show them that they are wrong about who they think I am, and that I am just as smart as the other white kids (Jehe, M, 20).

The Black student realized that he had to work twice as hard as his White friend because they were not equal, based on the message that was conveyed to him by his math teacher.

It is important to note that despite class differences, both groups of students felt they were being subjected to low teacher expectation. Anbaro is a middle-class, first year university student who noted that teachers assume Black students are not bright, so they have to work hard from the first day they enter the classroom. Her voice reflected the voices of several other participants:

When you work hard and show them that they were wrong, they act surprised as if they did not think that you could do it. You walk to the class, the first day you always have to prove yourself before teachers can accept the fact that you are a good student. Work hard no matter what and don't let other people put you down (Anbaro, F, 20).

This need to consistently prove their academic worth has been a recurring theme that has emerged throughout the narratives of both groups of student participants, although working-class students suffered the greatest impact. Consequently, Somali-Djiboutian students report that they were saddled with the burden of achieving their academic goal in an environment of low teacher expectation. Class status was a significant factor in determining the ability of students to successfully withstand low teacher expectation. Middle-class students were less affected by low teacher expectation and were able to deflect such attempts to undermine their intellectual abilities. Participants reported that they understand and are aware of the destructive ways in which the educational system attempts to erode Somali-

Djiboutian students' self-esteem and academic worth. To some degree the middle-class participants received the necessary external support that reinforced and reaffirmed their confidence and academic worth. One participant noted that:

I knew where to turn and seek help when I got frustrated... my parent. It is very clear that parent is the main idea of the school. If parents don't stand up, get together and say this is what we need to do - there is no point. (Arawelo, F, 21).

On the other hand, working-class parents lack the voice and power to provide a similar support base for their children. This is not because working-class parents are less attentive to the educational needs or struggles of their children. Rather it is due to the fact that working-class parents, particularly those who are facing multiple barriers, are often disempowered, lack understanding of the educational system, and often lack the skills necessary to effectively negotiate on behalf of their children within the school system. In contrast, middle-class parents have the knowledge, power and resources to advocate successfully and/or take any action they deem necessary to achieve their desired outcome. One participant suggested:

It is important that parents get educated about the system in order to understand the system because the information that students need is not provided to them in the schools (Anbaro, F, 20).

The words of these participants who are economically disadvantaged represent their strategy to combat the destructive effects of racism, classism and low teacher expectation in their education. Somali-Djiboutian students often feel overwhelmed, alienated and powerless because they are unable to successfully challenge and/or influence the educational system. In addition to low teacher expectation, Black students also reported unfair grading and evaluation by White

teachers.

CHAPTER NINE

PUSHING OUT BY APPLYING ETHNIC GRADING

9.1 ETHNIC AND PREMATURE GRADING PRACTICES DUE TO NEGATIVE RACE ATTITUDE

The term ‘ethnic grading’ was developed when all the Black students received the same grade. Ethnic grading is used here to explain the process whereby teachers assign grades based on one’s race and/or ethnicity rather than on the quality and content of the paper. It is also important to note that English and French writing assignments appear to be used as the tool by which teachers are able to erode the confidence and self esteem of the Black students. Throughout this research project, participants consistently complained about the unfair grading practices of teachers aimed at undermining their intellectual abilities and requiring them to consistently prove themselves. Several participants noted that teachers have a tendency to assign a mental grade to Black students on the first day of class by just looking at them and not expecting much from them. Allen (2005) states that:

Because grading is something that has been done to each of us during our many years as students, it is hard to change invalid “grading” schema that has become embedded in our minds. Now, as educators often required to grade students, and because of this embedded schema, we often grade students in invalid ways similar to how we were graded (Allen, 2005, p. 218).

Despite the official view of the existence of caring, nurturing and equality in public school policies, Outiya (F, 20) felt uncomfortable to express herself freely in front of everyone in the class and felt alienated. This potential hostile

environment of schooling appears to have mostly impacted her performance and self-esteem.

The premature evaluation and negative attitude towards Somali-Djiboutian students' academic abilities are rooted in racism and negative stereotyping, which in turn results in low teacher expectation. The belief that Somali-Djiboutian students are academically inferior is later transformed into action through ethnic grading, which of course produces a student with academically inferior grades thereby continuing to propagate the view held by some, that Black students are academically and intellectually inferior.

Canadian studies conducted by Community Social Planning Council (2005) provide an explanation for placement based on parental income and educational level. The findings in this study suggest that one of the barriers that face people of color among low income parents is the lack of confidence amongst these parents due to language barriers and the inability to communicate with school personnel on behalf of their child. In addition, findings reveal that these parents tend to lack an understanding of how the educational system works in order to advocate for their children (Community Social Planning Council, 2005). Students, particularly Somali-Djiboutian working-class students, learn very early in their school life that they have little chance of successfully overturning the lowered grades and so, more often than not, they do not seek re-evaluation of their work. One participant stated that, "if [she] had the power to change things it would be the way ...the administration made [them] feel and setting [them] for goals that were too short from where [they] wanted to go" (Outiya, participant).

In Brown (2005a) and Shanoff (2005), Bairu Sium, a teacher for more than 40 years, also agrees that students are underestimated and respond by performing according to those lower expectations. He informed the Toronto Star that Black students are not often asked intellectually stimulating questions in class and that they are streamed away from academic paths as early as kindergarten. He said that Black children are seldom identified for early gifted programs. Instead, they are identified for special education or behavioral classes (Brown, 2005a). By the same token, the participants noted that many Somali-Djiboutian students remain over-represented in the bottom Special Education streams of the system. This is especially true in courses where subjective interpretation provides room for teachers to be able to use differences in styles, values, and voice to legitimize and justify the lowered grades they assign. Given the subjective nature of English and French related courses, teachers are able to use their personal values/views, style and differences in expressing ideas to lower minority students' marks.

Furthermore, Ontario studies conducted by George Martell illustrated that the cultural bias of teachers based on racial, cultural and socioeconomic differences resulted in these students being viewed as incapable or incompetent (Martell, 2006). It is important to note that we all view the world through different lenses due to our differing experiences, and as such, we also often express our view of the world differently. Many Somali-Djiboutian students, elementary to post-graduate, are expected to not only share the world view of the dominant group but also express those views in similar terms and language, otherwise it is considered sub-standard. As a result, there is a constant revision of the expressed

written work of minority students, and in cases where no revision is necessary, the student is suspected of not being the original author. Either way, it results in lowered grades.

Although many working-class students are aware of ethnic grading, they lack the voice and power to challenge such grading. Consequently, this strategy of breaking students' confidence and self-esteem is generally effective. For many middle-class students, their parents are able to deflect such attempts to devalue their academic abilities. For example, the middle-class participants did not report incidents of ethnic grading to the same degree as the working-class participants. However, this is not to say that ethnic grading was not directed at middle-class students but rather that given the lack of voice on the part of the student and parents who are economically disadvantaged, challenging ethnic grading is generally difficult. Some studies conducted on the settlement experiences of Somali-Djiboutian parents in Toronto finds that Somali parents have challenges communicating with school personnel due to their own cultural attitudes and beliefs that are different from those of the school and this leads them to have no voice in their child's placement (Oswald et al., 1999; Scott, 2001).

9.2 TRUTH'S VEIL – UNDERSTANDING THE ROOT OF ETHNIC GRADING PRACTICES

Based on the narratives, many Black working-class students are often left with no option but to devise a means of attempting to validate their suspicion that teachers are subjecting them to unfair grading practices. One such means was explained by Outiya (participant) who allowed a White friend to copy her

assignment because this friend had not done the assignment on schedule. The two identical assignments that were written by Outiya, a Black student, received two very different grades. The lowered grade was assigned to Outiya, the Black student who authored the papers, while the White student who duplicated the assignment received the higher grade. Outiya confirmed at that point that ‘it is the student being marked and not the paper’ (Outiya).

Previously, Outiya could not understand how she dropped from being an ‘A’ student to a student who could not earn a grade past 65%. After Outiya’s experience with her peer, she then realized that no matter what the quality of the assignment she produced, it would not receive a fair assessment because she was a Black student. She did not understand how two identical assignments could have received such different grades. The most painful aspect of her ordeal, was that her White peer walked away with a top grade while, she had to accept the low mark. Outiya’s case is not isolated. In a similar example, another student noted that after one of her classmates was repeatedly getting low marks from her English teacher and after repeated failed attempts to have the teacher clarify how she could improve future assignments, the frustrated student turned in an assignment without her name affixed to it in an effort to see what mark she would receive. Like Outiya, this student also noted that she was unable to receive a mark past 65% until she handed in an unnamed assignment. The assignment received a mark over 90%, at which point the teacher would not return the assignment to the student claiming that she had not handed one in. The student was forced to describe the assignment in detail in order to convince the teacher that it belonged

to her. Ethnic grading is a serious educational problem at all levels of the Canadian educational system. Whether an elementary student or a higher education, ethnic grading has substantial emotional and psychological impact on the student.

9.3 THE EFFECTS OF ETHNIC GRADING PRACTICES - SHAMING AND DOUBTING

Ethnic grading is a very powerful and effective strategy for breaking a student's confidence and lowering his or her self-esteem. Sato et al. (2006) found that grades affect student self-esteem and self-image so some teachers will not give marks below a certain level in order to protect students. Whether a student is in an elementary, high school, bachelor or doctoral program, assigning them the lowest grades reinforces the stereotypical notion of Black inferiority. A vital construct of the self is self-esteem, defined as "the positivity of the person's evaluation of self." (Gilbert et. al, 1998, p. 694). According to recent research, teachers' grading practices have sometimes lacked meaning because they were not always based on information that was indicative of achievement (Allen, 2005; Jordan, 2005; O'Connor, 2001, 2002). Specifically, many teachers' grading practices tend to be unreliable, inconsistent, and often based on non-achievement factors (Allen, 2005; Tomlinson, 2005). This poses many challenges, frustrations, and dilemmas for the students. The importance of grading techniques that are meaningful, appropriate, and useful is crucial in enhancing learning for all students. Unless students have external support from parents and/or family, community members, or peers who can counter and rebuff such negative

messages of low ethnic grading, the tendency is to succumb to the messages that they are academically inferior. In addition, they often experience shame and eventually become de-motivated and disengaged from the educational process. Having been personally subjected to this type of grading system, I was able to not only connect to the words of the participants, but also to the personal ‘shaming’ one experiences when one is the recipient of such grading. ‘Shame’ is a term I encountered while reading bell hooks’ book titled Teaching Community: A Pedagogy of Hope, in which she states that “One of the ways racism colonizes the minds and imaginations of Black people is through systematic shaming” (hooks, 2003). In analyzing the narratives of the participants, many of the students had begun to internalize the process of ethnic grading and to some extent began to self-blame. For example, here is how one participant noted his school experience:

I went from a supportive system to a system where what you get is what you get. You can complain and do this and that but the matter is you are still that person. And that broke my confidence, and I withdrew eventually. My last two years of high school were very destructive for me. My spirit was broken and I was stuck. I was in a whirlpool taking courses [and] dropping courses and [eventually] withdrew from high school. This happened at the end of grade 12 - that was the changing period of my life. I was no longer motivated and so basically it was hard to concentrate. I would take 60% of the blame for failing because I was not motivated anymore and I experienced problems concentrating. To go from being an ‘A’ student to not getting what you expect to get, it breaks your encouragement, it breaks your confidence, and self-esteem (Siidow, M, 20).

Siidow exemplifies bell hooks’ notion of shaming in that he goes from being an ‘A’ student for three years in a middle-class high school to becoming a failing student in the first term of his new high school that had a reputation of being racially intolerant. Siidow entered his new high school in grade 12 and dropped

out three times before finally graduating. He described being left behind and feeling ashamed. 'I was looking to get 80% and not 50's and that was really hard since I was used to getting good grades. When you almost withdraw the first time from the last year of high school it is really disheartening'.

The greatest shaming occurred for Siidow when his peers from the same ethnic background at his previous school advanced to university and he was the only one who did not advance because of the racism he encountered in his new school. The fact that he came from a system where he received support to a system where he was encouraged to drop out had a profound effect on him, from which he was unable to recover. Although he initially began to blame himself for his academic demise, as he began to reflect and deconstruct the differences in his school experiences between the two public schools, he realized that despite his hard work he was unable to break the ethnic grade barrier that was laid out for him. According to hooks, "When educators evaluate reasons some students fail while others succeed they rarely talk about the role of shame as a barrier to learning" (hooks, 2003).

Eventually, the effects of ethnic grading got to this once high achieving student; he felt ashamed and isolated with no where to turn. He felt he was letting his parents down. Siidow had worked hard over his high school years to become a role model to his younger siblings, but most of all because he wanted to become a medical doctor- but that dream was stolen from him. After almost dropping out three times, he finally accepted that his dream was gone and he could no longer attend medical school, so he changed his field of study for the last time.

9.4 PUSHING OUT BY APPLYING ETHNIC GRADING

While gathering the data, this concept of ‘shaming’ became clearly evident as many of the other working-class students described their educational experiences through lowered voices, often shaking their hung heads. Like many of the participants, Qawdan was also subjected to ethnic grading through his schooling. Qawdan’s teacher knew that he needed a minimum of 60% in his English course, and although he worked hard to surpass his already 78% average, he nonetheless completed his final course examination and earned a 59%. Qawdan also encountered multiple levels of shaming due to the fact he came originally from Africa. When he first entered his high school, an immediate assumption was made that he was unable to speak English. So rather than being placed in grade 11, he was placed in grade 9. Today, Qawdan feels that because he was Black and came from a ‘third world country’, he was viewed as academically inferior, which motivated the decision to place him in grade 9 instead of grade 11. Qawdan had a community resource person who understood the system and was able to guide him, despite the multiple barriers he faced. Because of this guidance he successfully advanced through the system and eventually gained access to university. Nonetheless, Qawdan remained very angry at his educational experiences and fully understands why his Black peers did not survive. Qawdan attributed part of his success to the fact that he arrived in Canada as a senior student.

When I came here to this country I was matured, I had a strong sense of identity, compared to my friends in a lot of ways. So being put down all the time,

I sort of accepted it as a way of how this system works. It's a reality, that's how it is going to be. I told myself I don't care. I am just going to go through it, just like that. When I saw the situation, I just started working twice as hard, just to move on (Qawdan, M, 20).

As a new immigrant, Qawdan accepted being continually put down because he recognized that the problem of racialization was systemic. So unlike his peers, he did not internalize the problem since his sense of self had already been developed further than most of his peers. Qawdan's self-esteem did not become eroded, because he was exposed to this inequality and differential treatment for only two years, compared to his peers and many other Black working-class students who have had to live their entire educational experiences being devalued and constantly branded as intellectually inferior. According to hooks (2003) and also existing in Ottawa's educational system is the concept that, equality is achieved because Black children go to the same schools as their White peers, therefore they have access to all that is needed to be equal and free. Such thinking denies the role that devaluation and degradation, or all strategies of shaming, play in maintaining racial subordination in education (hooks, 2003).

Although both middle-class and working-class participants do have access to education, their access is not equal since the treatment they receive differs along race, gender, and class lines. Despite the fact both groups of participants were Black, the working-class student participants, especially the males, were more greatly impacted by the various forms of educational inequality existing in Ottawa's school system. According to Grant and Sleeter, as teachers, we can guarantee that all students will have their identities shaped partly by their race,

social class and gender; and all of them will grow up in a society that is still in many ways racist, and classist. The teachers are the only ones who can guarantee what they will do about that (Grant & Sleeter, 2003). Many of the racist, sexist, and classist ideologies that Grant and Sleeter talk about is often reproduced, perpetuated, and reinforced in Canadian classrooms through ethnic grading and other forms of educational inequality that are designed to send a message of academic inferiority to the minority student. Thornhill (1984) noted that “visible minority students are exposed to discriminatory educational practices which, like a multitude of timeless voices, tells them loudly or softly that they are intellectually, emotionally, physically and morally inferior” (p. 205). It is these educational practices that the community must begin to address. Parents, students, community leaders and educators are calling for better teacher training and preparation for pre- and in-service teachers.

9.5 THE NEED FOR RACIALLY DIVERSE EDUCATORS IN THE CITY’S PUBLIC SCHOOLS

The overwhelming plea from participants was one for greater racial diversity amongst teaching and administrative staff within Ottawa public schools. Given the racially diverse student population in Ottawa schools, it does not appear to be an unreasonable demand that public schools also begin to reflect the diversity of the students that they serve. Enlightened Black teachers are needed who will care, nurture, and serve as role models and who can relate to the struggles being experienced by Black youths, especially students from working-class background. Using hooks (2004) and Thomas (1993), I frame my meaning of ‘enlightened’ Black teachers to mean those:

- who will feel the need to humanely confront and challenge conservative peers
- who will have the skills necessary to forge a vision of solidarity in ending domination and who do not act in collusion with the status quo
- who do not betray their people in order to maintain their status and public image or pretend that they know best and are best positioned to protect the collective public good of all Black people irrespective of class (hooks, 2004).
- who will not need proof that the problems of racism and unequal power are present in schools
- who understand and acknowledge the persistence of stereotypes and prejudices (Thomas, 1993).

It is felt that with more enlightened Black teachers, particularly Black males, there will be greater empathy for the negative stereotyping and labeling being suffered by Black students, especially economically disadvantaged students. For example here is how Outiya (F, 20) described the White teachers' attitudes toward Black students:

You could see that there was a huge difference in the way the teachers treated the White students and the way they treated the Somali-Djiboutian 'Black' students. Whenever there was a good Black student, they would always call or label him smart, implying that the other Blacks were not or 'dumb'. But this did not occur when there were good White student. The administration made us feel that they were not helping us thrive but rather that they were against us by setting us for a goal that was too short from where we wanted to go.

Based on the narratives of the participants, differential treatment is impacted largely by issues around race and class differences. A significant view is clearly expressed by participant that a greater value is placed on White students than on Black students as illustrated in their actions and attitudes. As such, the impact of

differential treatment is severe and has contributed to the silencing and shaming of many Somali-Djiboutian students. Dei argues that in an environment of resistance, teachers, administrators and students must critically discuss race and oppression, and link theory to lived experience (Dei, 1998). This is not to say that White teachers lack the ability to critically discuss race and oppression, but I am arguing that the current 'Whiteness' in Ottawa public schools reinforces White dominance in education and thus preserves the status quo. This is an understanding that service providers (teachers and administrators) are a rather homogeneous group, which to a great extent shares experiences acquired in the same social and cultural setting, and which are taken for granted and regarded as '*normal*'. The educational institutions are essential agents in organizing the diversity within the population and maintaining and producing cultural hegemony. Comaroff and Comaroff (1991) described:

Hegemony as signs and practices, relations and distinctions, images and epistemologies - drawn from a historically situated cultural field - that come to be taken for granted as the natural and received shape of the world. The Comaroffs argue further that hegemonic conventions and constructs are shared and naturalized throughout a political community and they become 'nonnegotiable' and therefore beyond direct argument (pp. 23 24).

The legitimized view of the instructions of education, demonstrated in the substance, norms, values, practices and expectations in schools, reflects the assumption that, to a certain degree, students share experiences which they adopt from events that occur in the world around them during their schooling years. Public schools represent one of the most important places where visible minority students with experiences acquired in other social and cultural settings- confront

‘mainstream’ expectations. Most critically, it is also this hegemony that must be disrupted in order to break down the level of denial within Ottawa public schools. This denial prevents teachers from acknowledging racism as part of the lived experiences of Black and other minority students which then limits the ability of White teachers to relate to Black students and make the learning materials relevant to their lives (Dei et al, 2000). While there are of course White teachers who are not prejudiced and who encourage Black students to excel, this does not preclude the need for Black teachers. Black teachers serve as important role models for Black students and provide a social perspective that Black youth can identify with on the basis of common historical experiences and cultural experiences (Dei, 2008).

Another reality facing the Somali-Djiboutian community in Ottawa is that currently there is not one Somali-Djiboutian social worker located in either of the two School Boards to address the growing racial concerns of Black students despite their increasing numbers in the public schools. Noguera (2001b) suggested developing a partnership with counselling support services, advocated the use of mentors for students who need positive role models, and called for creating a climate of respect by responding quickly to minor infractions. This gap in cultural services deprives Somali-Djiboutian students of an avenue for voicing their grievances of educational inequality within their schools.

Early intervention measures are seriously limited and/or hampered when public schools do not make non-White health and social services workers available to their Somali-Djiboutian students. Since racism is being denied by

White educators in the educational system, how can Somali-Djiboutian students who are experiencing issues around racism be expected to confide in and disclose racial incidents to these same White educators who deny its very existence? If teachers or health professionals are unable to connect to marginalized students, then students who are already isolated and alienated will become further marginalized, despite the Boards policies that are aimed at providing an open and welcoming learning environment. Equally important to the discussion is the participants' concern that, similar to having access to Black teachers and staff, there is also a need for diversity within the school curriculum.

9.6 LACK OF DIVERSITY - TOWARDS AN INCLUSIVE CURRICULUM

The cry for an inclusive curriculum is born out of the need for Blacks and other visible minority students to be reflected in the curriculum. A European focused curriculum, whether at the elementary or post-graduate level, in the face of a diverse student body, is a means of validating, recognizing, and affirming the contribution of Europe to the exclusion of other non-White, non-European groups to the building of our great Canadian nation. According to Henry et al, educational practices that maintain Eurocentric biases and ignore the histories and contributions of racial-minority groups are maintained by a value system that allegedly emphasizes fairness and equality for all students (Henry, Tator, Mattis, and Rees, 1998).

The maintenance of a White focused curriculum has resulted in Somali-

Djiboutian students' alienation, exclusion, and devaluation. One participant, Siidow (M, 20), noted, "[T]hey will teach us about Hitler, but they won't teach us about Martin Luther King. We are not reflected in the curriculum at all, we are not anywhere close" (Siidow, M, 20). Mark Seupersaud, a Black teacher from a public high school in Kitchener, Ontario argued that the current school curriculum ignores the history of Black people (Monteiro, 2005). Seupersaud said that he used to teach Black history until the former Conservative government dropped it from the curriculum (Monteiro, 2005). This fact is disturbing that in our so-called multicultural curriculum the state is excluding the history of our citizens. Seupersaud further makes a strong point with which I agree. He argues that, "What we have now is segregation... our system is Eurocentric" (Monteiro, 2005). There is an attempt to discard any aspect of Canadian history that threatens to unveil this 'false' untarnished image being portrayed by Canada both nationally and internationally. Siidow, like many other Canadian students, did not know about Canada's involvement in the slave trade of Black Africans; they do not know about the plight of the First Nations people and the residential school system; they do not know about the abuse suffered by many Asian Canadians despite their contribution to Canadian railways and mines; nor were they taught that the South African apartheid system was modeled after Canada's policies for Canada's First Nations People (see Fleras, 2000; Frideres, 1990 in Li, 1990; Henry, Tator, Mattis, and Rees 1998). These form only a snapshot of a wealth of information about our great country that our students are being denied. Rather, they are made to feel that Europeans were the only significant contributors to the

creation and building of our great nation. One participant argued:

It is only now that I am into university that I know about the contribution of many non-White people not just in Canada, but all over the world. If students know that Blacks have made great contribution to the development of North America and Europe they would have a better sense of who they are. They would have a sense that they are valued and are important to the development of Canada (Anbaro, F, 20).

Anbaro's statement reflects the voice of the participants in that they do not see themselves reflected in the curriculum. Denying the history of many non-White, non-European groups is to deprive these groups of their rightful place in Canadian history and ultimately deny their future generation/children the pride, dignity, sense of belonging and most of all deny their sense of Canadian identity. The educational system has maintained and perpetuated the common perception that Black people were either non-existent in the development of Canada, or only arrived in Canada through recent migration from the Caribbean and Africa (Bristow et al., 1994, in Brathwaite & James, 1996).

9.7 CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

The issues discussed in this chapter represent the various themes that emerged from the narratives of students. The themes identified the various manifestation of racism and its pervasiveness throughout the educational system and also the subtle and not so subtle ways in which racism works to negatively impact Black students, particularly working-class males. Issues of class differences also represented another dominant theme that surfaced to form a key component of the many interlocking barriers facing working-class youths. In various ways, these themes identified concrete contradictions between the policies of the Ontario Ministry of Education, the Ottawa District School Board, and the

Ottawa Catholic School Board and the students' direct educational experiences.

The participants, in describing their educational experiences, provided both overt and covert examples of incidents involving racism, differential treatment, ethnic grading, and the unequal application of zero tolerance. They were also able to establish convincing arguments about the ways in which the educational inequality that they were facing in schools resulted in their shaming, alienation, isolation, criminalization, and their systematic withdrawal from public schools while they are of less than mature or legal age. Most importantly, students were able to establish similar patterns of unequal power inherent in the dominant/minority relationship, which resulted in the differential treatment of both Black parents and students, particularly families from economically disadvantaged backgrounds. For example, participants overwhelmingly argued that much of the negative stereotyping they received was connected to their class status. Despite the Boards' claims, the parents were not treated equally, with respect, nor were they given a voice in decisions affecting their children's wellbeing. It is my intention to use the information provided by the participants to support recommendations and future directions for Ottawa public schools which will follow in the next chapter on personal reflections and recommendations.

CHAPTER TEN

REFLECTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

10.1 REFLECTING BACK - MOVING FORWARD

Having examined the educational experiences of Somali-Djiboutian participants within the educational system in Ottawa, I derived a clearly expressed view that Somali-Djiboutian youths are facing educational inequalities on multiple levels. Many of the areas identified by the research participants mirrored my own experiences at different levels of involvement within the field of education - as a parent, a student, and as a community activist. I believe I was even more privileged having experienced both the working-class and middle-class realities. This was at once intriguing yet disheartening. On one hand, I was privileged to be able to connect to the working-class because of my history and the similarity in our struggles to overcome educational barriers aimed at denying our children access to an equal, quality education. On the other hand, having achieved upward social mobility, I also connected with the middle-class parents in that we share the knowledge, power, and privilege that is associated with middle-class status, which is often necessary when negotiating within the educational system.

In addition, being a community member, I have also served as a race and cultural member of Ottawa's school board involving unequal educational practices and/or policies. As such, an important aspect was that I was able to relate to the views being expressed by participants and connected with them, since the educational barriers/struggles they and their peers faced were identical to

some of the educational experiences of my own children and those of Somali-Djiboutian students in the public school system. In other words, the participants in public schools were also experiencing issues around access, isolation, alienation, ethnic grading, unequal/ differential treatment, the devaluation of work and academic abilities, hostility in the learning environment, streaming, shaming, negative stereotyping and, most importantly, the sense of not being wanted. Having personally experienced many of the educational barriers the participants described, the interviews were emotionally and mentally trying for me. Coupled with my knowledge and experiences, these revelations brought about the realization that the educational inequalities being experienced by Somali-Djiboutian high school students were not only limited to the elementary and high school levels, but they were also part of a cycle of educational inequality that extended through tertiary level educational institutions. Most Canadian educational institutions of higher learning do not need a sign in front of their buildings to indicate that they are Eurocentric, patriarchal and, thus, systematically oppressive institutions. The environment, culture and organizational life in many western institutions provide enough experiences to allow non-western individuals to reach such a conclusion (Dei, 1996).

Thus the struggle to succeed at the graduate and postgraduate level was not an individual struggle, but rather a group struggle that was similar to the struggles being described by the high school students which served to illuminate the pervasive and systemic nature of racial inequality within the field of education, from elementary to tertiary. Coming face to face with the realization

that many of the educational struggles that I had experienced with my own children still existed was very depressing to me. In fact, in many cases, schooling has deteriorated for many working - class Somali-Djiboutian students. In personal conversation, an educator noted that in her days, the police were never as involved in public schools as they are now and it is not that kids have gotten worse, but there is a funneling of Somali-Djiboutian youths males into the justice system by schools.

My struggle to accomplish the very difficult task of breaking the Somali-Djiboutian youths' silence at public school level is somewhat ironic because at the same time there are many other students who struggled with silence around similar issues at the higher educational levels. However, the recommendations being brought forward are in response to the major concerns highlighted by the participants, which include:

- frequent suspensions and expulsions of Somali-Djiboutian youths
- racism
- streaming
- the hostile nature of schooling
- Somali-Djiboutian youths students having to work twice as hard and being subjected to ethnic grading
- lack of diversity
- classism
- re-education of Somali-Djiboutian youths parents
- establishing an organization for disadvantaged youths and their

parents

My first recommendation will focus on the need for greater accountability within the educational system. The lack of statistical data will be the primary focal point at which I will begin.

10.2 ZERO TOLERANCE AND THE LACK OF ACCOUNTABILITY

The students have identified frequent suspensions and expulsions as one of the major educational inequalities facing Somali-Djiboutian youths in Ottawa public schools. The participants claim that the unequal application of zero tolerance policies often results in unequal educational outcomes because of the criminalization and/or frequent suspensions and expulsions of Somali-Djiboutian youths, especially working-class males. Participants assert that there is clear, observable, physical evidence of school-aged Somali-Djiboutian youths, who ought to be in school, loitering during in-school periods of the day in small isolated areas of the community.

Despite the statistical data, physical evidence and despite complaints from the Somali-Djiboutian youth community, the two School Boards in Ottawa continue to deny claims of racism and differential treatment that are manifested by the frequent suspensions and expulsions of Somali-Djiboutian students. The problem is twofold. First, the School Boards argue that there is no statistical data and that there is a lack of empirical research around zero tolerance and the application of such policies along racial lines within a Canadian context. The Somali-Djiboutian community's claims of racial disparity in school discipline are also being dismissed by educators precisely because the empirical data needed to

support such claims has not been collected. On the contrary, according to the Social Planning Council of this city, in 2006, 8400 young adults aged between 15 and 24 left school before completion. 60% (5, 055) were 15 to 19 and 40% (3345) were aged 20 to 24. There is great diversity among people of color aged 15 to 19 of which 10% are Somali; among the 20 to 24 age group, 9% are of Somali origin. Despite providing the Ottawa School Boards the numbers to establish, legitimize and prove claims by the Somali-Djiboutian community of racism and unequal treatment, the Boards still remain in denial of the educational inequality existing in Ottawa's public schools. This may be interpreted as just a denial of reality to avoid a public outrage of their actions since it contradicts their mission statements, or perhaps there are other justifications or agendas of which we are not aware. However, I would argue that even an absence of collected data does not, and should not, negate the existence of racism or other educational inequalities, nor should it justify the fact that such claims are being dismissed.

Although Somali-Djiboutian youths do not have access to the data with which to compile the necessary comparative statistics, nonetheless the evidence is visible within the community for all to see. Despite the availability of demographical data, the Ontario Ministry of Education, the two School Boards in Ottawa and Statistics Canada have all opted to gather statistics around gender but not around race/ethnicity.

Secondly, the omission of such data from routine statistical data collection, be it a deliberate ploy or a misguided decision, has to this point provided the Ontario Ministry of Education and the Boards in Ottawa with a

certain legitimacy/boldness to deny claims of racially motivated mistreatment of Somali-Djiboutian youths and the protection from accountability for practices associated with differential treatment, the unequal application of zero tolerance policies and the resulting suspensions or expulsions.

In my judgment, at the very least, the qualitative evidence about racism I have presented in this dissertation demonstrates the political need, and the ethical justification, for collecting the appropriate statistics. The continued failure to do so represents a political failure since the Somali-Djiboutian students, parents and educators are unlikely to establish democratic legitimacy of their grievances without access to relevant statistical evidence. It represents an ethical failure because the lack of statistical evidence obstructs the achievement of fundamental values such as personal liberty and social equality. Therefore, my recommendations are as follows:

10.3 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACCOUNTABILITY

1. Establish a provincial and/or national reporting system whereby each school Board is responsible for gathering statistics on the number and frequency of in-school/out-of-school suspensions or expulsions, by a number of factors. Annual and quarterly reports must be produced.
 - Annual suspension and expulsion reports should contain the student's race, gender, and disability, if applicable. Although Table A below examines only race, it can be constructed to include the above mentioned factors similar to Table B. See tables A & B below.
 - Quarterly reports should include a supplementary table for each school showing students who have suffered multiple suspensions, their age, in/out of school suspensions and grade level of students. See Table B below.
2. For each incident requiring the police involvement at school, a report should be constructed with data such as the student's grade, age, race,

gender, and reason for police involvement, e.g. weapons, drugs, threats etc.

3. For each expulsion report, the student's race, gender, age, grade, and reason for expulsion should be provided.
 - A supplementary report should also be available for students who have suffered previous multiple suspensions. This report should list intervention measures taken to retain students prior to expulsion.
 - For students being expelled from the regular program and being transferred to adult education programs, add an additional column reporting the reason for the transfer.

In addition, several alternatives to zero tolerance, expulsions and suspensions policies should make their way into our school systems.

- Alternative programs often involve a contrasting philosophy, which is based on support rather than control and focuses on early intervention as opposed to reactive response (Sautner, 2001).
- Offer sincere mutual respect while holding individuals (teachers and administrators) accountable (Morrison, 2002); and provide equal opportunities for insight and learning for students (Cameron & Thorsborne, 2001).
- Restorative justice is a new concept within school systems and endorsed in homes, schools and institutions (Hopkins, 2002). Many advantages to the implementation of restorative justice, specifically community conferencing, exist. Some of the arguments in support of '*community conferences*' indicate that conferences teach students, teachers and school administrators alternative ways to communicate, resolve conflict, and problem solve (Hopkins, 2002).

10.4 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ETHNIC GRADING

4. Establish a standing committee at the Board level, whose sole responsibility is to reassess/re-evaluate assignments that are in contention, particularly when those assignments are subjective, and employ a cultural analysis.

- Each review team should consist of three members of the larger community and one employee of the Board. However, the Board representative should not be allowed to vote on the decision regarding the re-evaluation of the assignment.
 - Committee members should be racially and culturally diverse and be allowed to operate independently and without influence from the Board.
 - Information regarding this committee, and the process and procedures in accessing this service must be made available to students during the information session at the beginning of grade 9. This information should also be contained in each school agenda.
 - The committee's activities are to be recorded in relation to the number of reviews and decisions taken after each review. The data can then be used to measure the quality of teacher evaluation, especially when teaching students with diverse views due to differences in race and culture.
 - Recommendations for lack of guidance negative streaming
5. Establish a formal investigative and review committee at the Board level whereby guidance counselors can be held accountable for actions that run counter to the Ontario Ministry of Education and School Boards' goals of providing all students with an equal educational opportunity to achieve their full academic potential. This body should have the power and authority to correct the action of guidance counselors by changing the educational plan of students who have been negatively streamed or who have been unfairly denied required courses for accessing university/college study. The ultimate aim is to retain economically disadvantaged/ marginalized students desiring to attend university or college by providing them with equal educational opportunity and the access to actualize their academic aspirations. Consequently, the immediate goal of this process is to ensure that:
- At the start of their high school program students, particularly working-class non-white students clearly understand the implications and impact on future career choices of not taking advance level courses.
 - Somali-Djiboutian youths/non-white students must be provided with every opportunity to take university bound courses starting in grade 9.

- Non-white students in the academic stream who are experiencing difficulties should be given added support where necessary to achieve their academic aspiration.
 - Somali-Djiboutian youths/non-white working-class students are not being streamed against their wishes into low level academics due to lack of information or by having received incorrect information.
6. It is recommended that Board representatives of this committee be diversified along racial, cultural, and gender lines.
7. It is recommended that Board representatives of this review committee hold scheduled information sessions in each high school during the second term of grade 9 and midway through the first term of grade 10.
- The aim of these two sessions is to inject an intervention strategy by offering students, prior to grade 11, the opportunity to alter and/or change their educational stream from non-academic to academic which will enable them to advance towards university/college study.
 - Most importantly, newly arrived Canadian students who may have made an incorrect program choice will have an opportunity to alter their career decision during the second stage of the information session and prior to grade 11.
8. Students or their parents who feel that they are not being serviced by their guidance counselor in a manner that will enable them to reach their full academic potential due to issues of racism or other forms of educational inequalities, will have the option to schedule an appointment with one of the Boards' representative/career specialists.
- Appointments for students to meet with the school/Board's representative/career specialist should be made in the school's main office.
 - Students/parents will also have the opportunity to file an official complaint against the school guidance counselor with the representative/career specialist.
 - After meeting with the student and/or parent, the representative will be able to either adjust the student's educational plan based on her/his career goal or refer the case to the review committee for investigation and decision.

9. I recommend that the review committee be responsible for compiling the frequency of complaints and decisions taken in resolving complaints, including those that remain unresolved. The goal is to assess the effectiveness of guidance counselors and the nature of complaints being leveled against individual guidance counselors. Guidance counselors will be held accountable for actions contrary to Ministry/Board's policy.
10. I recommend that a special task force be set up at both School Boards in Ottawa to examine:
- Possibilities of working collectively with University Faculties of Education in developing strategies to attract and increase the number of non-white students to teacher education programs, which is aimed at increasing the pool of pre-service non-white teachers. The goal here is to increase racial diversity at all levels in Ottawa public schools.
 - Possibilities of working collectively with faculties/ public schools of Social Work and Faculties of Education to develop a specialization for social work students interested in working in the educational system.
 - The aim here is to adequately prepare social work students who are planning to practice social work in schools. Students would be required to take courses in education, e.g., issues in multicultural/multiracial classroom, educational research, educational policy etc. The ultimate goal is to infuse the educational system with highly trained specialized educational social workers.
 - The nature and prevalence of differential treatment due to racism in Ottawa's high schools.
 - Existing mechanisms allowing Somali-Djiboutian youths/non-white students to address racism in their schools without reprisals or negative labels
 - The need for diversity amongst teaching/non-teaching, professional social workers, nurses, psychologists, etc., and administrative staff.
 - The degree to which Somali-Djiboutian youths are being expelled on or just after their 16th birthday due to incidents for which they have already served suspensions.

- Committee members should be racially diverse and have no personal or professional connection to either the school board administrators or its member schools.
- Given the lack of trust towards teachers and administrators by Somali-Djiboutian youths, it is critical that, where possible, minority students communicate with members/representatives of their own cultural or racial background. In other words, trust must be gained if students are expected to break the silence and have a sense of safety to speak freely and honestly without fear of reprisals.

10.5. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ADDRESSING RACISM

The study has not only established the presence of racial inequality and class discrimination in Ottawa public schools, it has also illuminated the need for racialized statistics that will demand corrective actions on the part of school boards. To reiterate, the response of the school boards, whether it is fact or denial that evidence in the form of race/ethnicity statistics does not exist in Ottawa, does not mean that no evidence of racism exists. Rather, the lack of data as claimed by the School Boards represents a serious political problem in that politicians, the judicial system and citizen groups can and do use statistics in order to 'legitimize' claims about issues such as the ones highlighted in this study. As a result, marginalized communities, such as Somali-Djiboutian youths in Ottawa, who wish to politicize the educational plight of Somali-Djiboutian youths, are at a disadvantage due to the so-called absence of School Board racial statistics along ethical lines (such as expulsion, suspension and zero tolerance). While such statistics can be useful to track systemic inequalities and become a critical tool in designing useful and detailed responses to these inequalities, the lack of statistical

data collected by School Boards should not be required in order to establish the existence of racism, because of the availability of other empirical data supporting our findings produced by the Social Planning Council of Ottawa, in 2006.

Racism in Canada is subtle, and the subtleness of racism in Ottawa's public schools is veiled with antiracist educational policies. Nonetheless, despite these antiracist policies the educational system is rooted in white dominance, which is reflected in its educational arrangements and practices. Despite claims of systemic racism in Ottawa's schools by members of the Somali-Djiboutian community, board administrators maintain claims of racial harmony and tolerance. Nonetheless, the issues of racism that were identified by participants are troubling and must be taken seriously. The research revealed that Somali-Djiboutian students, particularly working-class students, are often forced to learn in hostile and unsafe learning environments due to racism and its various forms of manifestations. Students are also complaining that they are not allowed to speak out about the racism they face. This creates a culture of silence and fear amongst Somali-Djiboutian youths. In addition to establishing the nature and prevalence of racism in Ottawa's public schools, it is also essential for students and parents to have external support and means of addressing racism at school. Participants have identified one means of achieving such a goal and that is through the establishment of an advocacy organization

10.6 OBSTRUCTING PERSONAL LIBERTY AND SOCIAL EQUALITY

Although it is recommended that School Boards report annual statistics for all public schools within their jurisdiction, quarterly and supplementary reports

should contain statistical data for individual schools. Trends will thus be easily detected and educators will be able to apply early intervention and/or corrective measures. Table B below was extracted from a research project that was conducted in 2000, by Expose Racism & Advance School Excellence (ERASE) which showed the school suspension and expulsion rate by race in several cities in the United States.

10.7 SUSPENSION & EXPULSION DATA BY SKIN COLOR

The report revealed that Black and Latino students were more likely to be suspended or expelled from school than their white peers. In addition, according to the report, Blacks were also suspended or expelled in numbers disproportionately greater than any other group (Gordon, Piana & Kekeher, 2000); see also Nieto, 2004; McLaren, 1994 & Fine, 1998. If adapted to the Canadian context, Table C above would enable Canadian educators and/or stakeholders to evaluate developing trends or disparities in the application of school discipline, similar to the United States. It will also enable educators to further examine the nature and degree of the problems that are contributing to these disparities. Based on the Boards' policies, intervention measures could then be employed in an effort to assist at risk students or groups who have been identified through the process.

In addition, this report would also become an internal check to ensure that teachers and administrators do not apply zero tolerance policies with partiality or unequally based on racial profiling or negative stereotyping. In other words, educators will be held accountable for continued racial disparity in school

discipline because comparative suspension statistics from each School Board in each city would be available to educators and stakeholders alike and would be open to public scrutiny. For example, in my attempts to envision how Table B could be adapted in a manner that could expose any trends of racial disparity in school discipline, I redesigned Table C. Table D below represents the supplementary suspension report for the Windsor School Board and includes factors such as total student population, total suspension, race, grade, gender, in-school versus out-of-school suspensions and most importantly, the percentages of students in each group that have served multiple suspensions.

ABC High School (see Table C), Windsor Board of Education Supplementary Suspension Report, Fall 2004 This supplementary report uses the total number of students and total suspensions by group per term and provides additional information not contained in the annual report. In other words, the supplementary report provides additional group by group data such as the percentage of students who have suffered multiple in/out-of-school suspensions, their grade level, their gender and most importantly their racial background. A similar table can also be used to track trends in expulsion patterns as well as the rate of students being criminally processed due to school related incidents. The statistics provided by these tables will enable educators to identify:

- Gender and/or racial disparity amongst groups in regards to school discipline
- Existing racial and/or gender disparity in the introduction of students to the justice system, via public schools

- Ethno-cultural/racial group that appears to be at-risk
- Existing racial and/or gender disparity in regards to the degree of instructional time being missed due to out-of-school suspensions
- Racial and/or gender disparity in the expulsion of students from the regular school program and into adult education
- Individual public schools and school districts with the highest disparity in the application of school discipline
- Grade levels where the greatest impact of the unequal application of zero tolerance policies are felt
- Indirect identification of teachers or administrators who pose the greatest risk to students with regards to the partial administration of discipline

In addition to the suspensions, expulsions, and criminalization of Somali-Djiboutian youths, the research evidence also suggests that racially motivated differential treatment is a major area of educational inequality affecting the educational outcome of many Somali-Djiboutian youths. It is essential that educators and/or stakeholders be able to track trends and patterns of racial inequality in Ottawa public schools, given claims of educational and racial equality by the Ontario Ministry of Education and the various School Boards. Ethnic grading was another theme that was identified by the participants. Ethnic grading, together with the lack of effective educational guidance, has resulted in negative streaming and differential treatment due to overt/covert racism. The

proposed recommendations are aimed at responding to the individual problems identified.

10.8 ESTABLISHING AN EDUCATIONAL ADVOCACY CENTRE

Throughout the research participants have described an educational system where Somali-Djiboutian working-class students and parents have no voice, and are therefore often subjected to differential treatment due to racism. I deem essential to establish a centre with the following purposes:

- To provide training and information workshops for parents who do not understand the educational system in Ottawa
- Advocate on behalf of parents and students who lack a voice within the educational system on issues such as suspensions, expulsions, racism, differential treatment etc.
- Provide guidance and career counseling for high school students
- Become a link between the school, home, police and community
- Develop and maintain a data base tracking suspensions/expulsions, police involvement at school, and issues of racism and educational inequality
- Represent community interest on School Boards and committees
- Provide workshops aimed at developing positive relationships between educators and Somali-Djiboutian parents/students. Address cultural issues/misunderstandings between public schools and the community.

Establishing an organization as per my recommendations above is aimed at:

- I) Providing a voice for disadvantaged students and parents

- 2) Educating parents and students who do not understand the educational system and
- 3) Supporting parents and students who need assistance to negotiate the educational system in which they are participating. In addition, such an organization has the potential to create a bridge between the Somali-Djiboutian community and public schools, in that educators and community members can address issues affecting the educational experiences of Somali-Djiboutian youths in Ottawa schools.

10.9 CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

The recommendations presented in this Chapter address the concerns that were highlighted by the research participants and reflected some of their suggestions with regard to racism, lack of educational statistics, lack of guidance, establishing an advocacy organization for Somali-Djiboutian youths and parents and ethnic grading. One of the major concerns is the lack of educational statistics along racial lines. As a result, racism, negative stereotyping and differential treatment often resulted in frequent suspensions, expulsions and unequal educational outcomes. Despite the evidence, educators continue to dismiss and/or deny educational inequalities and inequities in Ottawa's public schools.

The need to begin tracking trends and patterns in school discipline and practices that negatively affect the quality of education for Somali-Djiboutian students has been established by this research and must be addressed. The call for more empirical research is a necessary and essential one, given the lack of educational statistics along racial/ethnic lines and given the claims of educational

equality by both the Ontario Ministry of Education and the two School Boards in Ottawa. I maintain my position that before we can establish claims of educational equality we must first attempt to create an educational system where students are able to be heard - a system that is safe, diverse, equal, equitable and caring to all students. Most importantly, we must ensure that our educational system is held accountable to the community it serves. To preserve the existing educational arrangement is to support the subtleness and pervasiveness of racism within Ottawa public schools. It also sends a clear message that the educational experiences described by the participants are frivolous and lack credibility. Accepting the status quo is to render silent those who are disempowered by the impact of racism.

CHAPTER ELEVEN:

TOWARD A CONCLUSION: RACE, CLASS AND THE POLITICS OF HONEST DIALOGUE

As Arawelo (F, 21) noted *“we have no one in the system, we have no voice, and we are at their mercy”*.

This study investigated the educational experiences of Somali-Djiboutian youths in Ottawa public schools. The goal was to investigate the impact of intersecting factors such as race and class on the educational experiences of both working-class and middle-class Somali-Djiboutian youths in Ottawa's educational system, using an antiracist perspective. In addition, I sought to develop an understanding of the ways in which issues such as race and class impact the relationships between the students and educators and administrators. It was also essential to gain the views and perspectives of voiceless and disadvantaged youths who graduated from Ottawa public schools in the last two to three years. The contributions of these participants were especially significant and became a central part of the study due to their direct experiences in the public schools.

During the data collection stage of the research, many of the participants asked me to break the silence and expose what was happening to them in Ottawa's educational system. So in addition to my primary goal of developing an understanding of the educational experiences of Somali-Djiboutian youths, a secondary goal was to break the existing silence around their educational reality. With this secondary goal in mind, the last several chapters were used to give voice to the students in a bid to expose the racism and unequal educational

practices to which they have been subjected in Ottawa's public schools.

Fleras and Elliott (2002) noted that education has three explicit functions: to impart knowledge and skills; to prepare individuals for citizenship and employment; and to foster intellectual development (p. 200). If these three functions form the basis upon which the policies of the various School Boards are built, then the practices based upon these policies need investigation, since participants were able to expose and highlight various contradictions and tensions existing between current educational policies and actual school practices. Their narratives reflected personal experiences and accounted for the experiences of their peers, colleagues and parents in Ottawa's educational system. Many negative experiences highlighted tensions and contradictions between school policies and practices that exposed the ways in which unequal practices resulted in an unequal educational outcome for Somali-Djiboutian youths, particularly youths from working-class backgrounds. The narratives show that because of unequal school practices, the working-class participants' educational reality was one that resulted in underdeveloped skills and stunted intellectual development/growth, neither of which prepared them for higher learning, good citizenship and employment aimed at achieving upward mobility.

These unequal practices were illuminated by examples of exclusion, negative stereotyping, streaming, ethnic grading, the unequal application of zero tolerance policies that resulted in frequent suspensions and expulsions, and the criminalization of working-class youths. Dei (1996) finds that “perceived biases in the curriculum, intermeshed with an educational environment characterized by

pervasive stereotyping, prejudice, and the devaluation of Black/African students' worldviews" contribute to the exclusion of racialized students (Hier and Walby, 2006, p. 91). Stereotypes function in order to distinguish the racialized 'Other' and help distance the White from the non-White (Perry, 2002). Racialized groups are systematically feared and loathed for their differences in mainstream discourses, with stereotypes loaded with disparaging associations, suggesting inferiority (Perry, 2002). As a result, these messages provide both the motive and rationale for unequal access to opportunities and privilege in Canada, while legitimating racially motivated activity towards racialized groups (Perry, 2002). Thus, it appears that by nature, public schools support democratic values in theory even as they oppose them in everyday practice; there were explicit references to instances where unequal and racist school practices came in direct contravention to, and/or inverted, school boards' policies that are aimed at fostering a learning environment which is nurturing, safe, caring and welcoming to all students in order to promote academic excellence.

My reflective interpretation of the data revealed an educational system which requires Somali-Djiboutian students, especially working-class students, to learn in an unsafe, unfriendly, uncaring, unwelcoming, and often hostile learning environment that is neither equal nor just. I can say in an informal context, one educator stated that because of the perception of Somali-Djiboutian youths as violent, they are shown no tolerance in school, especially if they are male and under-privileged. These students are often kicked out of school and some schools even involve the police.

Despite claims of equality in educational opportunity, access and outcome by the school boards, the data shows a dichotomy between the boards' educational ideal and the actual unequal and differential school practices Somali-Djiboutian youths are often subjected to because of race and class differences. Issues around race and class inequalities in schooling became a central thread throughout the data. Clarity was given to the ways in which differences in class status were used to silence one group of participants but with less effect on the other group. I was able to develop an understanding of how racism was often mitigated by middle-class status. In other words class and race differences, when intertwined, can create a positive shift for middle-class Somali-Djiboutian students, which serve to lessen the impact of differential treatment due to racism in public schools. On the other hand, I was also able to understand how the working-class status of marginalized Somali-Djiboutian youths often provided the conditions upon which racism flourished in Ottawa's public schools. For example, research revealed (Gaab, 1993, p. 183) that working-class participants often lacked resources, knowledge and power to negotiate within the system due to the fact that the ideological and social order is reproduced in public schools almost without the public being aware of it, let alone debating the results. As such, power and culture are linked, so the very inequities that education promises to purge are in fact perpetuated through schooling (Fleras and Elliott, 2002). Consequently, the students were repeatedly exposed and subjected to differential and unequal treatments in public schools, with no effective recourse. This resulted in the

forfeiting of rights by many students, who became passive participants in the educational system. The outcome for them, or for those who refuse to accept the status quo by becoming vocal, is an unjust one, because vocalizing creates an opportunity for the school to ignore or discard them. Fleras and Elliott (2002) argue that anything in education that veers outside this Anglo-centric framework is dismissed as irrelevant or inferior, and punished accordingly (p. 196).

Thus middle-class students, unlike their working-class peers, were afforded a more equalized version of educational opportunity and access, which provided to some degree the educational opportunities necessary to achieve equal educational outcome. So although both groups of Somali-Djiboutian students reported experiencing racism initially upon entering high school, the middle-class student participants appeared to have deflected any further attempts to subject them to differential treatment, while working-class student participants reported more frequent and consistent differential/unequal treatment, due to both overt and covert forms of racism.

In a similar vein, I also interrogated the degree to which the school experiences of students varied due to patterns of differential treatment that can be directly or indirectly attributed and/or associated to class differences. For example, the narratives indicated that middle-class parents, unlike working-class parents, had the knowledge, resources and power to effectively navigate their middle-class children around many of the educational barriers facing Somali-Djiboutian students. However, despite the ability of the middle-class participants to navigate the school system on behalf of their children, they also reported

having first-hand experience of the pervasiveness of racism and unequal school practices which exist in Ottawa public schools.

Although there were many similarities between middle-class and working-class participants with regard to the inequalities faced by Somali-Djiboutian students in Ottawa public schools, the privilege resulting from middle-class status often played a significant role in relation to their ability to help their children to achieve academic success despite systemic racism. Their awareness of the educational system and their knowledge of their rights within the system seem to afford middle-class parents a reduced chance of being disregarded by school authorities.

Finally, with the available educational statistics along racial/ethnic lines, the School Boards are still in denial, which is a serious educational challenge facing the Somali-Djiboutian community in Ottawa. The availability of such statistical evidence favors the Somali-Djiboutian community's claims against the two School Boards in Ottawa while the two School Boards consistently deny the existence of racism within their schools, and rather refer to explicit examples of overt racism as 'isolated' incidents. On the other hand, school board officials will not accept claims of systemic discrimination coming from the Somali-Djiboutian community, despite the physical presence on Ottawa streets of school-aged students who were extracted from public schools and/or became criminalized through public schools, especially youths from working-class backgrounds. This leaves the community in a no-win situation. Furthermore, the Somali-Djiboutian community is facing another serious educational challenge to establish the

pervasive nature of racism and/or the degree to which school practices invert the policies of the Ministry of Education and school boards.

It is my reflective interpretation of the data that, despite the principles of equal educational opportunity underlining existing educational policies at both the Ministry and board level of the educational system, the conditions necessary to achieve equality in educational opportunity, access and outcome do not presently exist in Ottawa public schools. Based on the research data, there are students who are being consciously and maliciously denied the equal educational opportunity that is necessary to achieve their full academic potential or equal educational outcome. Consequently, education has become a vehicle for reinforcing social inequality and cultural uniformity (Dei, 2000, and Fleras, 2000). In this way equal opportunity is denied for some Canadians (Fleras and Elliott, 2002). For example, throughout the chapters I juxtapose my discussion of the data from my participants with salient excerpts from relevant policy documents, which articulate in various ways the principles of equal educational opportunity upon which school policies and practices are supposed to be based, aimed at producing equal educational outcomes but at which in fact they fail miserably.

It is important to note that due to the denial of existing educational statistics on their part along racial lines, both of this city's boards have been able to continue chanting rhetoric of educational equality and equity for all students while turning a blind eye to the racism existing within their schools. In doing so, they have chosen to ignore the voices of Somali-Djiboutian students and the claims of the community that the boards serve. Let me bring to the attention of the

school boards, and to all those who are quick to turn a blind eye, the reality facing Somali-Djiboutian youth and the existing educational statistics. They dismiss or deny claims of inequalities in public schools - and their argument begs the question: *Where is the proof that all is well?* The boards have so far avoided any attempt at being held accountable for the unfulfilled educational needs of Somali-Djiboutian youth.

The education system in Ottawa can no longer simply continue to chant claims of equality and equity while ignoring racism in public schools. The educational system must come to grips with the fact that racism is something that is historically created, symbolically expressed, and institutionally embedded at various levels in society (Giroux, 1994), including education. As such, public schools need to recognize that racism is not an individual problem - it is lodged squarely in the policies, structures, practices, and beliefs of everyday life. Therefore, public schools need to examine closely both school policies and the attitudes and behaviors of their staff to determine how these might be complicit in causing academic failure (Nieto, 2002). Only then will public schools be able to not only equip both teachers and students with the analytic tools to critically examine the origins of racist ideas and practices, (Fleras and Elliott, 2002), but will also create a safe learning environment whereby all students can challenge and resist the structural forces that continually reproduce social oppression and inequality (Dei, 2000).

Ottawa's educational system, as it currently stands, does not have the necessary conditions upon which to mount claims of equal educational

opportunity, access and outcome for *all* students. It is my position that the necessary conditions that must be present in order to achieve equal education require that 'differences' along the various lines must be recognized and acknowledged within the context of their relation to power and domination as they exist in schools and in society (Dei, 2001). As such, 'difference' as it relates to the racially different 'other' must not be relegated to the role of romanticizing the 'other' by the dominant group, as seen in the various forms of multicultural education that is celebratory in nature. Instead, education should move beyond the material aspects of culture - the foods, the festivals - to examine the more controversial dimensions of culture (Gosh & Abdi, 2004). However, it appears that regrettably, education and schooling seem incapable of taking 'differences' seriously, and instead are designed to perpetuate existing power structures by securing a docile and stratified workforce (Fleras and Elliott, 2000).

Therefore in order to disrupt the existing status quo in schools, collective action is crucial to the development of an educational system - where racism can be discussed frankly, and where it can be resisted effectively (Thomas, 2000, cited in Iseke-Barnes, & Wane, 2000). Only then can honest and genuine efforts be made to begin examining the ways in which school practices disadvantage some students while advantaging others. Given that the location of centre/margin is a power relation Dei (2000), if such an investigation is to be based on equality and equity, then it is important that community participation be at the heart of such an investigation. Such examination will create an environment where honest and open dialog can begin to take place with groups who have historically been

located on the margins and excluded from active participation in the schooling process. In other words, parent and local community knowledge of what works are a valuable yet untapped resource for improving public schools (Dei, 2000). Therefore it stands to reason that the communities being affected the most and who also lack power can now make a valuable contribution to the solution-finding process.

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Appendix A:

INFORMED LETTER OF CONSENT

Researcher: Hassan K. Farah, Ph.D. Candidate

Graduate Student, Ottawa University

Faculty of Education

Lamoureux Building,

145, Rue Jean –Jacques-Lussier St

Ottawa, Ontario K1N 6N5

Dear Sir/Madam:

I am a Ph.D. Candidate in the Faculty of Education at University of Ottawa. I am currently conducting a research project, titled: *Exploring the Impact of Race and Social Class on the Integration of Somali-Djiboutian Students in Ontario's Educational System*. My research seeks to determine if social difference, especially culture, race, and/or social class of visible minority students of Somali-Djiboutian origin impacts the quality of the education they receive. If so, how and to what degree?

I plan to interview high school graduates from Ontario public schools for the last two to three years between the ages of 18 and 22. The project is aimed at providing you with the opportunity to discuss your educational experiences in a manner that is safe and confidential. The information that is collected will be compiled in a final report and community members, including participants, will have access to this report.

Each interview will be tape-recorded and will take minimum of 60 to 120 minutes per participant each time. The location and time of interviews will be arranged at the convenience of the participants. Upon the completion of each interview, the audiotapes will be secured in a locked cabinet and no person, other than myself, will have access to them. In addition, I will also be the only person analyzing the tapes for results. Data will be conserved for 5 years. Furthermore, the identity of all participants will remain confidential. Names will be removed and replaced with codes. Each participant may withdraw from the research project at any time during the process. Should a participant withdraw from the study, his/her data will be destroyed

and will not be included in the study. No risk associated with participating in the study. If you have any concerns about the interview, before or after it is conducted, please do not hesitate to contact me.

This will encourage and enable participants to get involved and make a difference in such project that may signal as an investment tool to lobby for educational change on behalf of next Somali-Djiboutian generation in Ottawa public schools. Struggle against barriers and difficulties facing people of color and ‘visible minority’ (Somali-Djiboutian participants) in education will contribute equality, justice and rights for all Canadians as a society.

This research project has received ethics approval from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Ethics Board of the University of Ottawa. Any information requests or complaints about the ethical conduct of the project may be addressed to the Protocol Officer for Ethics in Research at the University of Ottawa or my thesis supervisor, Dr. Awad Ibrahim. Dr. Awad is an Associate Professor in the Faculty of Education at the University of Ottawa.

Thank you for considering my request for your participation in this research project. For further information regarding this study please contact me. To indicate your decision to participate in this study, please sign the consent form. There are two copies of the consent form one of which I may keep.

Sincerely,

Hassan K. Farah Ph.D. Candidate

Appendix B:

CONSENT FORM TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

**Exploring the Impact of Race and Social Class on the
Integration of Somali-Djiboutian
Students in Ontario’s Educational System**

Dear Hassan K. Farah,

I, _____, have read the attached letter of consent or the attached letter of consent was read to me and I understand the risk, the nature and purpose of my/our participation in this research project to be undertaken by you. It is my understanding that I/we are free to withdraw from this project at any time during this research process without any penalty or prejudice. I also understand that confidentiality will be maintained throughout this research project.

Please check one:

- Being of legal age, I freely give my permission to participate in this study.
- Being of legal age, I will not give my permission to participate in this research project.

[Please Print]

Name of Participant-----

[Please Print]

Date -----

Signature of Participant-----

Appendix C:
REFERRAL CONSENT FORM

Researcher: Hassan K. Farah, Ph.D. Candidate

Graduate Student, Ottawa University

Faculty of Education

Lamoureux Building,

145, Rue Jean–Jacques-Lussier St

Ottawa, Ontario K1N 6N5

Name of Student Participant _____

[Please Print]

Name of Parent(s)/Legal Guardian(s) _____

[Please Print]

I, _____, have participated in the research project titled:
Exploring the Impact of Race and Social Class on the Integration of Somali-
Djiboutian Students in Ontario’s Educational System, and freely give the researcher,
Hassan K. Farah, permission to release/refer my name to:

_____ for the purpose of securing educational
services for my children and/or myself.

Date _____

Signature of Student or Parent(s)/Guardian(s) _____

Appendix D

INTERVIEW GUIDE

1. How old are you?
2. So where are you from originally?
3. Were you born in Canada?
4. Describe in general terms your geographical location of residence (Neighbourhood) while you were in high school? Would you say it was multicultural community?
5. Based on your school experience, take me on a mental tour of your world in school - What was it like?
6. Describe in general terms the area where your school was located?
7. How would you describe the population of the school? What about the teaching population? What about the administration? How were they like?
8. Would you say that it was racially mixed?
9. Do you feel the teachers perceived you as being different? Why or why not?
10. Was this because of race/social class/gender/ ethnicity/religion?
11. Did your racial identity affect your self confidence when you were in school?
12. Did diversity issues surface in the classroom?
13. What were some of the best things (approximately 10) about your school?
14. What were some of the worst things (approximately 10) about your school?
15. What were your best and worst subjects?
16. Any particular teacher you really liked (or disliked)? Why?
17. If you had had the power to make changes within your school - what would you have changed? Why?
18. Do you feel your race and/or culture had an effect on your experience in school? If so - how and why?
19. What career had you intended to pursue while in high school?
20. Did you feel your past education enabled you to achieve your goal? Why or Why not?
21. While in high school, what role did you feel parents should have played in their children's education?
22. Have you ever been suspended? How many times? Why and for how long?
23. What educational stream level were you in? Did you choose that stream? Did you understand why you were in that stream? Did you know that you were streamed? What program were you in and why you were in it? Did you understand the different streams in your school?
24. Describe any situations or experiences that you had while you were in high school where you made to feel different or out of place?
25. Do you feel that your social class affected your education?
26. What were some of the challenges that you faced in regard to the school environment? Did you believe racism was a problem in your school? If so, explain? How did you overcome those challenges? Did anyone help you or give you advice on how to overcome those obstacles? If yes, who?
27. During your time in high school, had you ever been involved with the police?
28. What role did your parents play in school?
29. If you had to give parents advice on helping their children in school - what would it be?
30. If you had to give other students advice on school - what would you tell them?

Appendix-E

RECRUITMENT NOTICE

Researcher: Hassan k. Farah, Ph.D. Candidate
Graduate Student, Ottawa University
Faculty of Education
Lamoureux Building,
145, Rue Jean-Jacques-Lussier St.
Ottawa, Ontario K1N 6N5
Dear Sir/Madam:

I am a graduate student who is conducting a research project, titled: *Exploring the Impact of Race and Social Class on the Integration of Somali-Djiboutian Students in Ontario's Educational System*. I am currently seeking students who are Somali-Djiboutian origin who completed their high school for the last two to three years in Ontario's education system. In this study, I am hoping to record the experience of Somali-Djiboutian youth so that a voice can be given to this segment of population.

In order to participate in this study, you must:

- a) self-identity as a Somali-Djiboutian origin
- b) have graduated from Ontario education system for the last two to three years
- c) feels that you may have experience overt or covert racial/class/gender/cultural/religious discrimination while in schooling
- d) be able to volunteer your time to complete interviews
- e) be comfortable in discussing your experience in depth on audiotape.

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary and it will be kept confidential. You may withdraw from this research at anytime for any reason without consequence. To maintain confidentiality, your name will not be used in this study, a pseudonym will be used.

If you are interested in participating, please contact Hassan

Appendix F

Exploring the Impact of Race and Social Class on the Integration
of Somali-Djiboutian Students in Ontario's Educational System

Title:

PhD Thesis

Type of Project:

(Ia: Approval, Ib: Approval for initial stage only)

Special Conditions / Comments:

N/A

550, rue Cumberland 550 Cumberland Street

Ottawa (Ontario) K1N 6N5 Canada Ottawa, Ontario K1N 6N5 Canada

(613) 562-5841 • Téléc./Fax (613) 562-5338

<http://www.rges.uottawa.ca> <http://www.ssr.uottawa.ca>

Université d'Ottawa University of Ottawa

Service de subventions de recherche et déontologie Research Grants and Ethics Services

Date (mm/dd/yyyy):

03/04/2010

File Number:

10-09-08

This is to confirm that the University of Ottawa Research Ethics Board identified above, which operates in accordance with the Tri-Council Policy Statement and other applicable laws and regulations in Ontario, has examined and approved the application for ethical approval for the above named research project as of the Ethics Approval Date indicated for the period above and subject to the conditions listed the section above entitled "Special Conditions / Comments".

During the course of the study the protocol may not be modified without prior written approval from the REB except when necessary to remove subjects from immediate endangerment or when the modification(s) pertain to only administrative or logistical components of the study (e.g. change of telephone number). Investigators must also promptly alert the REB of any changes which increase the risk to participant(s), any changes which considerably affect the conduct of the project, all unanticipated and harmful events that occur, and new information that may negatively affect the conduct of the project and safety of the participant(s). Modifications to the project, information/consent documentation, and/or recruitment documentation, should be submitted to this office for approval using the "Modification to research project" form available at:

http://www.rges.uottawa.ca/ethics/application_dwn.asp

Please submit an annual status report to the Protocol Officer 4 weeks before the above-referenced expiry date to either close the file or request a renewal of ethics approval. This document can be found at: http://www.rges.uottawa.ca/ethics/application_dwn.asp

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact the Ethics Office at extension 5841 or by e-mail at: ethics@uOttawa.ca.

Signature:

Leslie-Anne Barber

Protocol Officer for Ethics in Research

For Barbara Graves, President of the Social Sciences and Humanities REB

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<http://www.rges.uottawa.ca> <http://www.ssr.uottawa.ca>

Table -A

PARTICIPANTS' BIOGRAPHY

Name Class Gender Age Education Place of Birth Started school

Outiya	M	F	20	University	Canada	Kindergarten
Ajabo	W	F	20	University	Canada	Kindergarten
Arawelo	M	F	21	college	Africa	Kindergarten
Anbaro	M	F	20	University	Africa	Grade 9
Jeeh	M	M	20	College	Canada	Kindergarten
Jafar	W	M	21	University	Canada	Kindergarten
Siidow	W	M	20	college	Africa	Grade 2
Qawdan	W	M	20	University	Africa	Grade 9

M - MIDDLE; W - WORKING; F- FEMALE; M - MALE

Table -B

SUSPENSION AND EXPULSION DATA BY RACE

	African American	Latino	Asian/PI	Native American	Other	White
Austin, TX All Students	18%	43%	2%	0%	0%	37%
Susp/Exp	36%	45%	0%	0%	0%	18%
Boston, MA	55%	23%	8%	0%	0%	13%
	70%	19%	2%	1%	0%	9%
Chicago, IL	53%	33%	3%	0%	0%	10%
	63%	27%	1%	0%	0%	8%
Columbia, SC	78%	0%	0%	0%	2%	20%
	90%	0%	0%	0%	1%	9%
Denver, CO	21%	50%	3%	1%	0%	24%
	36%	45%	2%	1%	0%	16%
Durham, NC	58%	4%	2%	0%	0%	36%
	79%	2%	0%	0%	0%	18%
Los Angeles, CA	14%	69%	7%	0%	0%	11%
	30%	58%	3%	0%	0%	8%
Miami-Dade, County, FL	33%	53%	1%	0%	0%	12%
	48%	43%	0%	0%	0%	8%
Missoula, MT	0%	1%	2%	3%	0%	94%
	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
Providence, RI	23%	46%	1%	1%	0%	21%
	39%	45%	3%	0%	0%	13%
Salem, OR	1%	10%	3%	1%	0%	84%
	4%	22%	3%	2%	0%	69%
San Francisco, CA	18%	24%	43%	1%	0%	14%
	56%	19%	13%	1%	0%	11%

http://www.thepraxisproject.org/tools/White_Privilege.pdf ERASE,
2000

Table -C

**ABC HIGH SCHOOL, WINDSOR BOARD
OF EDUCATION SUPPLEMENTARY
SUSPENSION REPORT, FALL 2004**

Students		Suspensions			Suspensions by						
Group	Total	Total	In	Out	Gender		Grade				Multiple
					M	F	9	10	11	12	
African Canadian	9%	35%	0%	100%	80%	20	26%	30%	34%	10%	35%
Asian	10%	2%	50%	50%	100%	-	100%				0%
First Nation	9%	22%	10%	90%	70%	30	25%	40%	25%	10%	10%
Spanish	6%	20%	25%	75%	85%	15	30%	45%	20%	5	50%
White	66%	21%	85%	15%	95%	5%	45%	50%	5%	0	20%
Other	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-

Table C above have been adapted and expanded from the ERASE, 2000 table. It offers the possibilities of the ways in which statistics can be gathered in a manner that is inclusive and at the same time transcends the bounds of race. I felt it was important to show the possibilities of detecting disparities across intersecting lines such as race, gender, disability, grade levels etc. Most importantly, the goal is to detect at an early stage trends of repeated in/out school suspensions and the grade level of students. The possibilities offers a means by which to identify students who are at 'at risk' of dropping out of the system. The ultimate goal is - retention through early intervention.